

September 4, 2012



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just our condolences to the Vincent family. I know he was a tremendous football player and really a great period for Iowa football, so our condolences to his family.

Moving forward, injury-wise we are in pretty good shape. Came out of the game pretty healthy. Captain-wise, we have the same four players: James Vandenberg, James Ferentz offensively, and Micah Hyde and James Morris on defense will lead the team.

Certainly want to congratulate Mike Meyer for being a co-MVP, Big Ten special teams, certainly a nice award, something he earned and did a great job at there. As I said the other day, just really happy to get the win, and safe trip home, all that type of thing.

We turn on to our next opponent, play Iowa State this Saturday and it's obviously a big game for our football team, and I think a big game for everybody involved in this state, which is an outstanding thing for everybody. They have got an excellent football team, had a very impressive win Saturday against a Tulsa football team and do a nice job year-in and year-out with what they are doing over there.

We have a big job on our hands and a lot of work to do and we'll begin that this afternoon.

Q. Going back, what is the biggest key to turning around the passing game?

COACH FERENTZ: I think a lot of things. It's like everything, it's a team thing, and we can do a better job protecting. Certainly that stood out at times in a not so good way. Route running, throwing, all those things. It's just something that we'll continue to work out.

Q. Is Lowery doing okay after Saturday's game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's fine. He'll be fine.

Q. As you grade out your offensive line, does it feel more like the group that helped spring Bullock for 150 yards or the group that gave up six sacks or a mix of both?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a mix of both. I think our whole team is like that. We did a lot of good things Saturday, certainly good enough to win, against a good team, but there are a lot of things we can improve on, some very obvious and some more subtle. But the good news I feel like we have a team that is capable of improving. I felt like that coming out of spring ball. I felt like that coming out of the preseason and feel like that even more so now.

Q. What stands out about Iowa State's linebackers?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, they are veteran and they are extremely productive. They play extremely hard and don't come off the field. They are out there, all downs, regardless of the situation, they are playing all the time. They play with great effort and that's what linebackers are supposed to do, play with energy and effort.

And if you look at, there was a play, and speaking of Knott, that play he made the other day, failed to complete the ball down the field, fairly far down the field, and he hustled down there and knocked the ball loose. That to me is kind of representative of the way he plays. He's going to be, till the whistle blows, he's going to be involved. That's Knott; plays like that are to me representative of what good players do.

Q. Last year at this time, you didn't have a lot of tape on Steele Jantz and now that you do, is it easier to game plan for some of the

things that he does, making plays that have broken down, scrambling, getting outside the pocket?

COACH FERENTZ: Plenty of tape from our game to start with; it was like his highlight reel. But he had a really good game Saturday.

I now think the difference now is he's a year older. That was his second ballgame last year, and then he got injured further shortly thereafter. He's an experienced player, a lot more confident and had a tremendous game on Saturday against Tulsa, running the ball and throwing the ball.

Q. What is it you've seen in Bullock that made you confident that you could give him the ball 30 times?

COACH FERENTZ: You said I was confident? Those are your words, not mine. You know, we didn't know. I think I said that going into the game; we didn't know what to expect. And not in a negative way, but the facts are the facts. He had 10 carries last year -- I wasn't counting it. I just read it several times.

We didn't know what to expect, and that's really true of a lot of our players. He made a lot of plays where he probably could have done better. And I think he saw that on Sunday. I think he knew that probably Saturday.

But on the positive side, he did a lot of good things, certainly. But I think the most positive thing for me, he finished the ballgame with carrying a heavy load and secondly, finished strong. I think our whole team did that. He, in particular, obviously made the touchdown run. But I think maybe what's impressive to me is getting the first down with the next two runs on that last possession.

So those are tough yards and he did a good job there. So that was a huge step for him. Hopefully that will do a lot for his confidence. But all that being said, you know, he's still a young player.

Q. Do you feel like that will be the distribution running back-wise going forward or too early to tell?

COACH FERENTZ: We wouldn't have predicted that certainly. I didn't know we would run the ball 30 times, let alone give it to one guy 30 times. My guess is we'll spread it around. I still think Mike Malloy is going to be playing here, I don't know how soon. Greg got his feet wet, try to asked and answered that. Think he's a good

player, too. My guess is all three guys will do it and it's a matter of how much Damon can handle. We'll see.

Q. When did pooch punters start being vogue?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. We have had guys, I'm not going to go back to the 80s, I think when Roby was out there -- yeah. You know if you've got Reggie Roby, you probably don't take him off the field or if you have a Reggie Roby running back, you don't take those guys off the field.

Real common sense for us. First of all John's done a good job, he's done a good job in practice. And secondly Connor is another guy that's never played in college football. Just kind of felt like if we could divide the labor a little bit, that might be better for Connor, certainly, and it gives John one more thing to have ownership in; with him, it's a positive thing; he's our holder. He's just a great attitude guy, and he's a good football player. Got beat out by a better player, quite frankly.

He's carved out a role to help the team and I thought that was a real -- you know, if nothing else happens this year, if we don't have the plus 50 punt again, that's not going to happen but if we didn't -- he did a great job, Saturday and was a big part of the win, certainly.

Q. Do you plan to change the way you scheme against Steele Jantz?

COACH FERENTZ: Might be a good idea if we try to keep him contained a little bit. You know, looking the other day -- I think my first game, when I was in third or fourth grade, I forgot to take my helmet. The good news, bad news was I didn't play anyway. My dad had time to go home and get it and bring it back and Coach Whiten (ph) really didn't miss me.

Even then when I was that young, you learn in football, somebody has to contain and we kind of forgot that last year. And it's easier said than done. Also struggled a little bit at times, a little bit at times. He's a very good athlete and with their scheme it makes it tough. It's easier to say that than do it.

Q. Where does that fall? The outside linebackers?

COACH FERENTZ: Everybody. It

depends on the call and the formation, all that. Somebody always has containment. It's part of defense and if it breaks down you really run the risk of being in trouble and we found out the hard way last year to the tune of, whatever it was, 44 points, 48 points, not that that was all, but boy, it makes it tough to play defense.

Q. And in theory how big of a deal has home-field advantage been for you guys and what kind of advantage is this playing against Iowa State?

COACH FERENTZ: Didn't help us in 2002. Helped us in the first half but didn't in the second half. It's really what you make of it. We have won up there; we have won here. They have won here and they have won at home obviously. It really comes down to which team plays the best.

Q. Do you see a lot of correctible plays from Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's a statement I would say about our home team. I think a lot of things are correctible; that's the good news. The challenge is how quickly can you correct things and how quickly will that show up on the game field.

You know, the better you run that race, the better chance you have of winning. And you factor in the team that you're playing; so there's always challenges in hand and there will be in November, too. But that's a race that we are running right now.

Q. How would you assess the defensive line's performance?

COACH FERENTZ: It was a good start. Most pleasing part was Elvis really had a good game, and I don't want to say he's been struggling but he's been laboring in camp. I may have said that a week or two ago in that he's coming back from an injury and you don't just get out there and ride full speed. You don't get on that bike and go full speed. You're trying, but you don't.

So it's probably quite frankly his best day, I think that was our 30th time with a helmet on since we started and luckily for us, 30 was his best one. I think that will give us some confidence now and he's really our only experienced guy up there, so it was good for everybody else to have him playing well the way he did.

Q. Seemed like they made a huge improvement from the first half, technique was much tighter in the second half.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we played overall better defense in the second half. I think that's been overlooked. As I've said in a million meetings, where I've heard people say, if you took this play, this play away, that would be a good game and you can't really do that, you can't play good defense giving up big plays and that's what we did in the second half.

We improved. That's a young group of guys but that's a big step for us hopefully.

Q. What's the status with Melvin Spears?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's working back from injury. He'll practice at least half today. I think we are getting closer. He had a step back about 10 days ago. Hopefully we'll get him back here again soon.

Q. How would you assess the progression of Iowa State's program under Coach Rhoads?

COACH FERENTZ: I just got on a teleconference, again I'm hardly an expert on him but the one thing that's clear to me several years later now, and everybody has I think a plan or a vision when they come to a place. Certainly if you don't, you probably shouldn't get hired. But the biggest thing is they have stuck to their plan from my vantage point. I'm just one person speaking.

But when I watch their tape, that's what I see. They have a pretty good idea of what they want to be offensively, defensively, special teams and it has not changed a lot I don't think since he's been there other than they are playing better. Their players are better, they are more experienced and they are experienced in their system they really do a good job and that's what good teams do. I think whatever your style of play may be, whatever you choose it to be, it's having an identity and then really working to be good in that identity.

They have really done a good job of that, including special teams. Most important ingredient are the players playing hard and playing really sound and then their guys do a great job of that.

Q. What's their plan in your eyes?

COACH FERENTZ: Offensively, they are

what you guys love. They throw the ball all over the place, left, right, down the field and they have got a little option, keep it, a quarterback can throw it and keep it. He's a dangerous runner and dangerous thrower. Three backs that are very, very effective, and their line has done a nice job, too. So to me they are a lot more proficient doing it now than they were a couple years back.

Q. Do you think this is the best Iowa State team that's come in here in a while?

COACH FERENTZ: We have one game to judge it all. They had a very good game Saturday against a very impressive Tulsa team, who won eight games last year, I believe. Just an impressive outing, especially for first time out.

Q. Off of last year's game, now it seems to have become a rivalry again?

COACH FERENTZ: Unfortunately, it's been one ever since I got here. We were on the short end for a while. It's going back and forth and last year's game, to me, is probably pretty simple. I like the way this thing should be and is. Both teams are playing well and it's going to go right down to the wire. It went down to the wire last year and then some.

Q. What areas of improvement do you emphasize with James Vandenberg this week?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. Again I think when I look at our offense, it's really a team thing, I really do. And we have to protect him better.

But he did a good job of running the offense, running our team. I just thought he did a good job overall.

Our passing game wasn't what we wanted it to be, but we'll get better. We just have to keep working.

Q. How concerned are you about the separation the receivers were or were not able to get?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we just didn't look overall in great sync, passing game-wise. So it's a concern, but it's going to improve. It has to improve.

Q. Does the yards per attempt concern you? What does it say about the game?

COACH FERENTZ: I know it's harder to have more than less. I know that much. It was a tough game. They have a good defensive football

team. We thought they were good going in, and leaving the game, we still think they are pretty good. They can rush the passer, they cover well.

So they are a good defensive football team. We are going to play -- you know, they are representative of the kind of teams we play. It was a challenge and we have to get better.

Q. Is there a benefit to having a close first game? Do you have the players' attention more?

COACH FERENTZ: We have had both. Most games are games you could have lost. We have a lot of games historically that are like that. So that's one more in that pile, if you will.

The good thing is that we persevered and won the game. It could have gone either way. We knew that going up there. Maybe other people didn't. We have a lot of respect for those guys. They have won a few games over the last couple years. Good football team. It's well coached.

So you know, we have a lot of respect for them. We are happy to get the win and as I said the other day, I'm happy with the other guys' effort and the way they finished the game up. That's why you play 60.

Q. Do you get the sense that a game like that could serve as a wake-up call?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about a wake-up call. I don't know if somebody was sleeping going into it. I think we'll know more about it probably in January. We'll know more about the whole thing once it's over.

Q. What do wins and losses in a series mean to the players?

COACH FERENTZ: Just in general, I don't think I've been involved in an undefeated season, so I don't know what that feels like. You play sports, you're going to win, you're going to lose. You're going to have easy games that turnout to be relatively easy, very infrequently.

Most games end up being pretty tough. Whatever the outcome is, you have to be able to deal with that, particularly when you have a game in less than seven days and you really don't have time to mull over it too much, good, bad or indifferent once the day after is over.

So you've got to turn your sights to the next game and the teams that can handle those circumstances, whether they are good or bad; the

teams that handle those the best tend to do the best. You just take it whatever it is and move on to the next opponent.

Q. But this game in particular doesn't feel different than games against Iowa State in the past?

COACH FERENTZ: Maybe I'm not following you on that one.

Q. Just like that game last year, really tough in-state game like that, does Iowa State, in a momentum sense, do you come back from that?

COACH FERENTZ: I can't remember who we played last year. That was a tough bus ride home if that's what you're asking. That was a tough one home, after 2007, too. I remember those distinctly.

I remember coming out of Chicago in 2005. You have to get on a bus and travel anyway, never good -- when you lose, it's just not good. But you can't sit around and mourn for too long or you're going to lose the next one, too. It's a little different when the season is over and then you can mope or a week or so, but at some point you have to get going.

Q. What's the vibe like around campus and the team this week as the game approaches?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm the worst to ask, because we're in this building and it will be tomorrow night when I get to go do something out in public. The coaches are the worst guys to know, but clearly it started Sunday night. I made an appearance on a radio show, Jim and Jim, just had his 91st birthday, that's great thing.

That's a unique thing in itself. But it's kind of a kickoff, if you will, of what's going on. And none of us are oblivious to what's going on. Obviously it's big. I think it's great for the entire state. Especially we don't have any pro football teams in our state -- not minimizing the other teams in the state, there are some great programs but it's a big game for everybody I think border to border.

Q. How do you feel you guys did, just the coaches, as far as communication?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we have worked at that. But I don't think most teams do that -- especially when they have changes.

I was asked that on a teleconference, and I think going back to the start of spring practice, I have been happy with every step of the way. Things went very smoothly. Communication was good. I don't think the players had any issues at all and we have not made a big deal of it because I don't think it is a big deal. I think everybody has worked hard at it and I think it's worked well that way.

Q. What can you say about the number of young players you used in the first week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, time will tell how that works out; but in a perfect world, if we could keep it where it's at, we would be fine with that, and that may change as we move forward.

Certainly guys that can't play, injury-wise -- but in perfect world I would still prefer to red-shirt players but the world is not perfect. We'll see how it goes. But the guys that played, got their feet wet, and that was good. We'll have some ups and downs with them, I'm sure. If we can keep it there, that's great. If not, we have a couple other guys we are looking at and see how the next several weeks go.

Q. Do your paths for recruiting cross with Iowa State at all, other than the state of Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: In the Midwest a little bit. I think after you leave the Midwest, they tend to go more west, although they go to Florida and we don't go to Florida an awful lot. So not too much once you leave the Midwest, but there are players in the Midwest we bump heads with.

Q. Is it a situation that Coach Davis has carte blanche with the play calling?

COACH FERENTZ: Basically both he and Phil are the coordinators, and we have our discussions during the course of the week that those guys call the game. I have got veto power at any time, and I don't exercise it a lot and I really haven't in 13 years. But there are times I'll make suggestions.

Q. How would you assess the wide receivers to react after this game?

COACH FERENTZ: I think like I said earlier all of us want to be better than what we saw Saturday and I expect that we will be. That's one area we have made improvement in. We were

nothing to write home about in the course of spring, and I said that after spring practice and I said also after the preseason that we have made improvement there and I think it will show up. We'll just keep working.

Q. What do you make about the outpouring of emotion you see from Paul Rhoads?

COACH FERENTZ: Not sure I understand the question.

Q. You have a certain personality and so does he, and it works for you, seems to be working for him. What do you think of the way that he exudes passion, fire on the sidelines before and after games?

COACH FERENTZ: I think no matter what your profession is, you probably ought to do it within the framework of your personality. If I was giving advice, which I'm not, but I think that's what most effective people that I've witnessed in any profession do, so that's what you do.

Q. How would you assess the development of Mike Meyer?

COACH FERENTZ: He didn't have a perfect game the other day and he wishes he had, and we all do, because that made it a little bit more interesting.

But the thing about what happened on Saturday, my mind and the highlight of the whole thing was the way he bounced back from that. Because you know, it's easy to go in the tank when you miss some and feel like you can make -- I think that's probably representative of the kind of -- to me, he's a much more mature player than he was a year ago or two years ago. Saw that confidence probably in the spring.

Just the confidence is a result of practicing well and then performing well at some point. But he's really prepared well and he's worked hard and he's gotten better each and every segment if you will, and had an excellent preseason, too.

So we are not only confident he's going to be a good player this year, we are counting on that. I loved him. We have a bunch of guys in that junior class that I think are like that and ready to play good football and Mike is certainly in that group. It was great to see him do what he did.

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