

**October 9, 2012**



An Interview With:

## **KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: First I'll make a few comments.

Sorry to hear about the Karras family, Alex's condition, and certainly our thoughts are with the Karras family. Moving forward this week, our captains offensively, James Vandenberg, James Ferentz, and then defensively we'll have James Morris and Chris Kirksey representing the defense.

I think we had a productive bye week, a chance to practice, work on some things that needed addressing and then also give our younger guys a chance to work a little bit as well. I think it was a productive period for us. Certainly today we turn our sights completely to our challenge coming up here, traveling up to East Lansing. It will be a really challenging ball game for us.

We're playing a team that's had 22 wins the last two years, last two seasons combined, which puts them about as high as anybody nationally. They're playing really good football. This is a very talented football team right now, coming off, I think, a very impressive win, falling behind and then coming back the way they did in that second half, really dominating the second half.

To me, if you look at that half in itself, it gives you an indication of the kind of football team they have, the talent and potential they have. Playing up there is always a challenge, and playing a team that's well-coached and talented is a challenge equally as steep. We'll get back to work today and try to see what we can do this week moving forward.

**Q. Michigan State traditionally is a hard hitting, physical football game. Two games decided by five points the last two times. Is that kind of a mentality you've got to alert**

**people to, this is what you're facing from a toughness perspective?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's how they've been built since Coach Dantonio got there. I would suggest they were the same way back in the '80s When coach Perles went there. Mark went in there with a staff that worked with him at Cincinnati. They had a clear idea what they wanted to be and how they wanted to play, and I think they've done a great job.

I think, incorporating their systems, no matter what you look at, offense or defense, they really do a great job. Their players understand what's being asked of them. They've got great players, and they are a physical football team. If you look at the team that played in the championship game last year, that's a big part of it.

That's why they've had 22 wins the past two years. If you're not ready for that, it could be a long day.

**Q. Why is Le'Veon Bell, I don't want to say so good, but above average?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's a very big guy and a powerful guy. Yet he's mentally talented. You've seen him hurdle guys, pretty impressive for any back. But you think about a guy with his size, to have that athleticism, so he's a real challenge. If you break down at all and somebody misses a gap to break down that kind of thing, he can really hurt you, and he can run with some speed too. It's a real challenge for us.

**Q. I wonder if you can elaborate further on the arrest this weekend of Hyde, Hamilton, Clark, and what appears to be the decision that they're eligible this week, I assume.**

COACH FERENTZ: I made a comment after the -- I think I released something that basically in effect said that all three guys have been exemplary students or team members. None of them had any problems at all during their

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careers. So the Student Code of Conduct will handle it.

Also, on top of that, we have in-house things, we have a protocol for violations. So they'll serve those also over the next couple of weeks and months here.

But all three guys have done a good job here, and I expect that moving forward.

**Q. Did it cost Hyde his captainship, though?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it did.

**Q. So to be clear, they can play? Or they are eligible for certain?**

COACH FERENTZ: If they practice well this week, we expect them all to play.

**Q. Clearly, you haven't denied your players all the liberties of a regular college student. Do you ever second guess yourself about all of that? What's your approach to that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Selfishly, I'd give them all 8:00 curfews and tell them to have a glass of milk and some graham crackers and go to bed at 10:00, in a perfect world, but that, I think, would be selfish. I think part of going to college is being part of the student body.

I would suggest what happened to those three individuals this weekend is not unique to anybody in the student body, yet obviously they drew attention to themselves in a negative way. So that's not acceptable. And it wouldn't be acceptable if they were just nonparticipating athletes.

But it's a fine line. We have curfews, we have things like that in place. As you might expect to happen, those are going to get adjusted here a little bit for the near future. My past inclination has been try to treat a team based on their maturity level and then kind of go from there, either with incentives or disincentives.

It's a tricky balance. It's just part of college life. It's not unique to Iowa City.

**Q. I'm sorry. Do you have your own set -- for lack of a better word, protocol for -- or is it truly each case is weighed on its individual merits?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there are certain categories. All you have to do is look backward over the last 10 years. There are certain

categories that just are clearly not acceptable. I'm not saying these are, that would merit further action. So there are levels of.

And the other part of it is, in my mind at least, in fairness, discipline, to me, is subjective, first and foremost, in a lot of cases, not all. And then secondly, I think you have to consider the resume of people you're involved with. But everything a player does is part of their resume, their academic performance, lack thereof, citizenship, and football. Football's probably third on that list. So what they're doing academically and socially.

In Micah's case, Micah might have jaywalked sometime during his 3 years here, 3 1/2 years, but I'm not aware of it. We haven't had a better guy come through here. He had a bad weekend, no question about that, and he feels terrible about it.

**Q. This isn't your first rodeo, obviously, and anybody who's ever had a felony has never played another down for you. But the Code of Conduct is very ambiguous and wide ranging from don't do this again to you're off the team, basically. Is there past history -- Micah, as you mentioned, Drew -- how much did that play into whether or not they're able to play?**

COACH FERENTZ: We had a veteran player serve a two-game suspension right off the bat this year. Again, it's just part of the whole package. It's not just -- there are certain offenses, and I think, if you look back, certain offenses, if guys are guilty of those, then it's a suspension immediately.

You can say that's subjective too, but those things are all communicated with the team, and they know what's in store should they be guilty of those things. I don't think anybody has a perfect system in that regards. I think ours is fair, and fairness is really important.

Any time you deal with things like discipline, playing time, et cetera, if you're fair and you communicate, then I think everything is -- you have a chance of being successful with it at least.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that -- I think this is how you said it. You may look at your curfew down the road. Is that something you might do during the off-season?**

COACH FERENTZ: We already

addressed that. We addressed that on Sunday with the team. It's been adjusted.

**Q. Different curfew?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, it got adjusted.

**Q. Can you tell us what it is?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, that's really our business, not yours, but it's been adjusted. It's not permanent. We've addressed this whole thing and moved on, as long as people take the proper steps moving forward.

**Q. Was mainly the disappointing part that it was during the off weekend?**

COACH FERENTZ: There's no optimal time for anything, I don't think. It's happened. Chances are things like this are going to happen again. If I can hang in there 13 more years, we'll go through more of them, and we'll deal with them. Who knows, it might be one of my kids. You never know.

That's part of life. Part of life as a college coach or a college student.

**Q. 13 more years you're coaching, you said?**

COACH FERENTZ: I did. Not that old yet, even though I might look it. So back to Michigan State.

**Q. You also said in the Big Ten radio, Bullock is cleared playing this week.**

COACH FERENTZ: Exactly. As long as he practices well this week, which I expect. He's been doing fine.

**Q. And the other, Blythe, Lowery, should practice?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how the week goes. It's touch and go with Blythe and B.J.

**Q. Did he have a setback? You said you felt like after the Minnesota game he could have played?**

COACH FERENTZ: Who was that actually?

**Q. B.J.**

COACH FERENTZ: He did last week. When you have an injury, there's no way to predict. We'll see what happens this week. I'm not optimistic.

**Q. You were here in '84 when Owen Gill and Ronnie were both in the backfield. Could you see Mark and Damon possibly doing that?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's possible. Boy, you're going way back too. I was here. That's probably maybe the closest thing. Mention Norm Granger to you. Norm was a fullback who had running skills. It's certainly unusual, and Mark has demonstrated that.

**Q. What dynamic do they give you when they're both in at the same time?**

COACH FERENTZ: They both, in a limited amount, have shown they're both capable players, two different types of players certainly, but they both have done a good job this year. We're going to need them both moving forward certainly. If we end up playing them at the same time, that's great. They're clearly different types of players. Just, knock on wood, hopefully, they keep improving.

**Q. In the instances that you have them both on the field at the same time, do you look at having Bullock playing receiver again, like he had on and off last year, Mark in the backfield?**

COACH FERENTZ: I guess that's a possibility. The biggest thing with Damon right now, he moved around so much last year, he never really developed an identity as a player. Our goal this year was to try to get him ingrained at the running back position and let him really learn that. Again, we're all doing it, but we're talking about him like he's a grizzled veteran player.

He's played like 2 1/2 games here, not even, maybe 3 1/2, I lost track. They're both guys who have promise and have potential to be good players. Biggest thing we don't want to do is screw one of them up and have them do too much. If they can both focus on playing that running back position, I think -- if we can get that established, we'd be well ahead of the game from where we were six weeks ago.

**Q. Related to the passing game, was much of the work simplification, or was it ironing out a few issues? Was it expanding the playbook?**

COACH FERENTZ: You're inferring that the passing game has improved? I'm reading into

your question. I don't want to put words into your mouth.

Yeah, the last three games, we've thrown the ball better. One thing I think we're all excited about, I feel like we can throw it better than we have so far, including the last three games. I think there's clearly a tale of two cities if you look at our offense.

The last couple of games we've looked a little more representative of what we hope to be, and that's good. The level of challenge is going to become increasingly tougher. We're playing a team this week that's very veteran on defense, very talented, very aggressive. We're going to need to keep improving. I think we're making strides, but we're not there yet. At least we're growing.

**Q. What about during the bye week? Was the goal to simplify it, perfect it, or was their expansion kind of vulnerable?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think we've been in simplification mode in any regard. If anything, we've been trying to expand a little with each week. You've seen we've had miscommunications at times. Two guys maybe not on the same page totally or protection breakdown or things like that.

So it's a process, but I think we're gaining ground. Probably the biggest thing is we wanted to make sure last week that we kept the arrow going the right direction and not back the other way. It's a process certainly.

**Q. With this passing game and with having the old playbook still in the minds of players at least -- they probably haven't forgotten it -- is there any temptation to maybe revisit and junk what you're trying to do?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'll tell you a quick story. In '95, when I left Cleveland, to '96, went to Baltimore, and coach Marchibroda came in with a very different way of calling our protections, our offensive line formations and protections.

So our offensive line, I'd been with those guys for three years. When he was explaining it, it made sense to me, but I'm thinking, oh, boy, this is going to be tough. And it was tough as snot for me, not the players, because, quite frankly, the players forget in January what they've been banged with for about eight months prior to that.

And when we got together in the mini camp, they picked it up like that. They had no

problem with it and weren't looking back. I think it's the same thing here. I think we're grinding more coffee, we being the adults, not our players. I think the guys have moved on, and the guy with the most on his plate is James, and I think he's done a great job with it, but nobody's worked harder at it either.

**Q. Beyond what we've all seen from Weisman, what convinced you these last few weeks to say, okay, running back, starter, go. That's where his path is.**

COACH FERENTZ: With all due respect, my sister would have figured that out. I'd like to take credit for it. I love my sister. I've said that before on record, and I do. She's a great person. She's not an expert in football. She knows what looks good and what looks bad.

Mark's performance has spoken for itself. He's a high energy player. He works hard. He's just totally invested. We have a lot of guys like that, but not all stories turn out to be so positive. It's nice when a guy has really worked, and he's earned every bit of respect that he's already got, and he's kind of earned it through his work ethic.

So it's neat when a guy works hard and sees some rewards on the field, and all his teammates are really happy for him as a result of that.

**Q. Does this opportunity come out of the self-scouting you do, the film watching, and out of practices, that kind of thing?**

COACH FERENTZ: It was really kind of just a shot in the dark. Whatever week that was, week three or so, we're sitting there on a Sunday. Looked like Bullock was getting better. Garmon was doing okay, a couple other guys in the discussion. But the what if came, all that kind of stuff. We just decided to look at him that week, not really knowing the answer. We knew what he looked like from the fullback position and just ended up being the door opened up that Saturday.

He did all the work ahead of time. That's why it had a positive outcome. All that being said, we've still got seven really tough games ahead.

That being said too, Mark's not a guy who's going to back down from a challenge. He hasn't so far. I'm talking about practice as well or being on the scout team and all that stuff.

One thing for sure, I know the attitude he'll have, and I know he'll be totally invested. If you

look historically, a lot of our good players have had those attributes. He certainly seems to share those.

**Q. Does this bring the redshirt back into play for Canzeri?**

COACH FERENTZ: Possibly. It's so early in the game. You guys know better than I do the history of playing football in the Big Ten. So you just never know what's going to happen.

**Q. What did you take away from Michigan State's game at Indiana?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think it says a lot about their team because typically, in the course of the season and with your best teams, you're going to go through games like that.

Coincidentally, we go back to 2002. We had a really tough game at Indiana. That might have been our toughest game of the year. Grant Steen picks off three passes. I think all three were in the red zone. We were lucky to get out of there.

If you have a good team, sometimes you're going to have outings where, holy smokes, how did this happen? What are we going to do? And they showed in the second half, I think, the kind of football team they have because they thoroughly outplayed -- just like they got outplayed in the first half, they flipped it around in the second half and did what they needed to do to be successful.

And the other scary element of the deal is they had a freshman receiver step up and do some good things. Got to be a good feeling for them, I think.

**Q. Coach Davis said last week that you guys would be spending the bye week watching film and putting together a game plan and introducing the concepts to the players about Michigan State. Is there anything you saw this past Saturday in their game against Indiana that made you go back and revisit things?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. What Indiana has success with, we really don't do. So congratulations to them, but it didn't help us an awful lot. They're very different in terms of their structure. But they did a nice job.

Bottom line is, if you execute well and play really well, you'll have a chance to be successful, but if you're not doing that, you're going to get the

door shut on you. That's really what happened in the second half.

So every film you look at, you try to get a better piece of it. For me it showed what kind of football team they have. They really answered the bell when they had to do.

**Q. Michigan State this year seems like they start really slow. Is there any advantage or thought process, hey, let's make sure and jump on them early and take that crowd out of it?**

COACH FERENTZ: Any time you go on the road, you love to do that. Only challenge here is they've got a really good defensive team, eight or nine guys back. And flipping it around, you can't minimize they had three outstanding receivers that seemed like they were there for five years, but they weren't. Three receivers that graduated that were really good players.

If Kirk Cousins isn't the most productive quarterback that's ever played at Michigan State, he's certainly in that top three. And from a win standpoint, I doubt anybody's been the quarterback during a 22-game win stretch. When you lose guys like that, it doesn't just keep on going.

But also, the quarterback who -- this guy's been around. He's been in the system. He's learned from a guy who really knows the game. It's a matter of evolution for them offensively. They still look like they always do. They're big, physical, and good football team.

**Q. What do you do this week to get your team ready for their first true road game, first hostile environment?**

COACH FERENTZ: The trip to Chicago is a good exercise. Certainly the environment in the stadium was not like what we'll face on our next four away games. Yet at least we went through the process of being on the road. I thought certainly the young team that was a positive. But nothing like what we'll see this week.

At the end of the day, we just have to try to block that out and be a little more focused than you would be at home. I just realized it's going to be a pretty tough environment from that standpoint. The biggest thing is still the team on the field. That's more of a concern to us than maybe the stadium.

**Q. You look mostly at the -- you barely look at the big picture. You look mostly at what's straight ahead. But when you look at the Big Ten as a whole, it's maybe the balance, maybe not that superstar type team there has been in the past. Do you see a lot of opportunity there for this team or for any team in thing league right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: I would say for any team certainly, but basically every year, maybe with the exception of late 2002 -- we had it going pretty good that year where maybe the last four or five games I would have said we're going to be tough to beat, privately.

Otherwise, I can't remember either looking at a lot of games where, hey, we could lose this game, or if we really play, we'll have a chance to win it. That's kind of the nature of our conference.

The only thing about the overall league, I would say at this given point, it's kind of like preseason polls and statistics. They're going to mean a lot more at the end of the month. Right now it's still pretty early to say I got this team figured out or that team figured out.

That's just me. The picture will become more clear as we go along. Especially getting in conference play, you learn a lot more about everybody, but most importantly, yourselves.

**Q. Have you guys toyed anymore -- I'm not going to get an answer here, but I'll ask it anyway. The no huddle hurry up. There's different tempos there. The Patriots ran, I think, 89 plays last week. Have you guys started to delve into that a little more?**

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, not really, to answer the question. We're not the Patriots, and we're really not Indiana. They were up tempo. So if you get the effectiveness -- again, we don't play the way they play. What they did in the first half was awfully good, but in the second half they didn't have the ball very much.

So there's pluses and minuses to everything, but we have to be who we are.

**Q. Would you say that Weisman, what he does, more fits what you guys have done? At least tempo-wise.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I guess. You know, I don't know. He could be a pretty good player no matter what you do.

**Q. How important is Micah Hyde to this defense?**

COACH FERENTZ: To our defense? He's really our most veteran guy, certainly our most experienced player. I think, if not our best leader, certainly one of them on our football team.

That's the way it was coming into the season, and it hasn't changed. He's the guy that everybody respects and looks up to. That hasn't changed. He's a tremendous young man.

**Q. What made him a good football player? What made Andrew Donnal the next man on the offensive line? Is there a minus to having two guards that are so tall?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. Flashback again. We drafted Ogden, the Ravens drafted Ogden in their first draft. Ray Lewis was the second pick. We played him at left guard the whole season, and the outcry was you can't play a guy 6'7" or 6'8", whatever Jonathan was, plus another couple with his haircut on top of it, at guard. Jonathan probably could have played quarterback.

I think good players can play -- to me, it's a myth. It's next man in, and Andrew just happened to be that guy and did a pretty good job his first start. That was good.

Thank you.

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