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An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Our captains will be James Vandenberg, James Ferentz offensively, James Morris offensively with Micah Hyde. Injury right now, Weisman and Rogers, we'll see how the week goes, but at this point it looks doubtful. We had a meeting this morning, and they both have ground to cover, but I think it's doubtful.

Then we take on Purdue, who is coming into town here with a team that's a very veteran team, probably the most veteran team there is in the Big Ten right now.

They've had some disappointment as well. A couple of weeks ago, they played an excellent game in Columbus against Ohio State. Had a very realistic chance to win that football game, and it's just kind of how football is. It's that close.

We're playing a very veteran team that's got a lot of very dynamic players on it, and we'll get ready for them today. We're getting ready physically this afternoon with the team and get ready to play a good ballgame. It will certainly be good to be back.

Q. What was Purdue able to do against Ohio State that they haven't been able to do in other weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: They came out and got off to a great start, certainly. Just I think played very aggressively. Played with confidence, and didn't make errors that keep you from winning, I guess, up until the end. They had a really good opportunity. They got a pick right there at the end with under 4:00 left just couldn't quite finish the game.

But give Ohio State credit too. There is a reason they're undefeated. They're playing well.

But Purdue certainly battled them, and they've got a lot of good players.

Q. How would you categorize Mark Weisman for the rest of the season?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he had a possibility and still has a possibility of playing this week. I don't know how good a possibility right now. But I'm hopeful he'll be back next week. Hopefully, Brad Rogers is the same way. We'll just have to wait and see. But I think he's got a chance.

Q. Is it the ankle or something different?

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a sprain right now, and they just have to respond. Mother Nature's got a role in this whole thing. I think he's got a shot this week, but probably not a good shot. We're not going to put him out there until he can function the way he needs to.

Q. The offensive line, do you think that a couple of games they're coming on a little better, getting more in sync?

COACH FERENTZ: Had some issues last week, the last few weeks. It's not the same. That happens when you lose players, but I think the guys have made the transition. Certainly discussed it a week ago. We felt like the best thing to do is move Matt Tobin out to the left tackle position. Matt Tobin has done a great job here the last two years playing for us, and I think he's doing a good job. So we're a little more veteran on the edges then with James in the center.

The big thing now is moving the guards along. They had a tough challenge. We said a week ago going into it, they had two excellent inside players, and they do. They're both excellent football players. It's interesting. We match up against a team right now that's got two excellent inside guys. Both those guys have played very

well for a long time. They're a little different style of player, but they're both good players and they're huge. Both of those guys are huge.

Purdue has probably got one of the bigger fronts you're going to play against defensively, including their outside linebacker. He's a big guy. So they have five big bodies up front.

Q. You mentioned on the teleconference the lack of execution. Is that from everybody? Is it from the new guys that you put in there? Can you go into that a little more?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, everybody's got a hand in it. As you might imagine typically newer players tend to make more mistakes, and I think that's how it works. That's probably not unusual, and it's certainly the case here. Just one thing affects the other.

We've got to get in better sync. We've got to execute better in the critical situations, especially. But yeah, it's a team thing. We win as a team typically and lose as a team. We're not quite there. Then the other part of that discussion is consistency.

Q. Does that surprise you?

COACH FERENTZ: Nothing surprises me. Every game is different, and every team is different week to week, I think. I think that's not the word choice I would use. But that's football too.

Q. You're two years through with your recruiting class --

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say at least, yeah.

Q. Will the way you close the season impact the way you complete the class?

COACH FERENTZ: I've never said we wouldn't look at a JUCO. Eric Simmons came from Iowa last year. So we've had several. The reality of it is, and I'm going off my history at this school, junior college players don't, as a rule, always transition in as well. That hasn't been our mode. But there are some schools where it's probably more workable.

But to answer the question, I mean, it's a very dynamic process. We're always evaluating and looking. If you've got X-amount of scholarships left, what are our best options? Where do we need to use them the most? That's a fluid process.

That's always, you know, if we were 9-0 right now, we'd be having the same discussions.



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What is the best way to fill out this class? It's not always as easy as that, because some things are out of your control in terms of making decisions and that type of thing too. So it's something you're always measuring. But it certainly is different to your first point about just the early commitments. It changes things a little bit.

Q. The big plays on both sides of the ball haven't been there like they've been in the past. Is there anything you can pinpoint as to why that might be the case?

COACH FERENTZ: Personnel and execution, typically. It's probably about as simple as that.

Q. What did Micah do to earn his captaincy back?

COACH FERENTZ: The question is what did he do to lose it? I think we all know what that is, so that is one of the penalties he faced. He had several. So that part has been paid, now he's eligible again. It's kind of a no-brainer. Micah is a tremendous young guy, a tremendous football player. That's not taking anything away from Chris Kirksey. I say the same thing about Chris.

Q. What did Nico Law do to get moved into the starting lineup?

COACH FERENTZ: We have a lot of positions that are competitive. You like that at every position. It doesn't always work that way. But he's been gaining ground and doing some things. He plays with a lot of energy, but he hasn't played that much. So Tommy certainly hasn't experienced edge that way. And it's not like there is a right answer, typically.

But I thought Nico did a good job. First time he played a significant amount of time, and it's something he can build off of certainly. I think moving forward, one thing about playing, I think it makes you smarter if you let it during practice and as you get ready for the next game. As soon as you start to garner some experience, it can help you if you'll let it and make it. That is a player's job to take that experience and make it work to their advantage.

Q. Your concepts in the passing game, is that something Greg Davis is arguing for, because in the beginning you said you'll do what your players do best?

COACH FERENTZ: What concept are we talking about specifically?

Q. The short, quick passing game?

COACH FERENTZ: I know the question came up, catches and out routes, and I wasn't thinking quickly enough. The touchdown came and scored against Penn State. It was just a quick hitch out there. One guy beat one guy, and that's talking about explosiveness. Coincidentally, the play that Michigan State beat Indiana at the end of the game, is the same play to the left side. They threw a quick ball out to, I believe, it was their freshman receiver. He beat the DB and scored a touchdown.

I kind of get this concept stuff for short throws, long throws all that stuff. But it's really a little bit more intricate than that. I'm not trying to give a lecture or anything like that.

But passing games tend to, the stereotype of the old Oakland Raiders, Al Davis, John Madden, throw the ball down there 400 yards and had Olympic sprinters on the outside. That wasn't far from the truth. But you try to do what's best for your players, and you also try to do what's best for the situation. There is a lot of thought that goes into that. Doesn't always work out, but that's what we try to do for 14 years.

Q. The current situation though, is it more what Greg wants for his offense, or is it what your personnel are capable of executing, giving them the best chance to execute?

COACH FERENTZ: I think first of all, I'll say this: Greg is a tremendous coach, tremendous person, really an outstanding coach. Most coaches I've been around that are really good -- and I've been really lucky in my career to be around a lot of good ones -- everything starts with what can your players do? That's where it always starts. No matter where you are, what you're doing. If you're coaching well, you have to do that. So I think that's usually the goal we have at the beginning of every week.

Like recruiting, it's a very fluid discussion. Who is doing what, and what is the injury situation and all those different types of things. But there is a lot of thought that goes into it.

Q. Do you try to find the answer for that week? I mean, the target moves every week with every team.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you don't change your wardrobe every week, at least good

teams don't. You can't. Not unless guys just get wiped out, then that's a different discussion. But to think that you're going to go from being a two tight end, two back team to a four wideout team, that's probably not realistic.

So, yeah, you go with what you have. A lot of things play into it - your opponent, injuries, all those types of things.

Q. Kirk, you could argue that James, your son, is playing as well as anybody on this team. Were you tempted to give Vandenberg the ball on Saturday and have him run behind him?

COACH FERENTZ: That was our plan until the clock got stopped. They called for a review. It would have been a dead play had we, based on what I saw, it would have probably been a dead play. Anyway, but, yeah.

Q. The fact that James moved to center and is playing so well, did that...

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily. You don't want to run sneak with a bad center. But you don't want to play with a bad center, if you can avoid it. They can take the sneak away too. It's like anything in defense, if you can take something away. It's one of those deals.

Q. Fourth-down decisions, you'll have them again. Is it a card deal or what goes into your decision making?

COACH FERENTZ: I got to get one of those cards. You go on what you think is best. Like every decision you try to make is what do you think is best for your team at that given moment. I don't think I have to explain what the thought process would have been Saturday. Based on the clock, timeouts, all those types of thing, I think you can figure that out, connect the dots.

You could argue I made an irrational decision at Michigan State, because we had gotten stuffed on some short yardage stuff at Michigan State. We went for it on 4th and 1, converted, and ended up scoring. Every situation is different. It's kind of like we were talking about earlier about your game planning and the way you do things. It's week to week. How is the team playing? How are they executing? Who is in the lineup? Those types of things. You're probably going to be right half the time.

Q. Are you talking to anybody? Is there dialogue going in at that point?

COACH FERENTZ: At that point, Saturday wasn't a lot of time for discussion. Michigan State decision, there wasn't much time there. Just kind of made up my mind earlier on that one given the situation.

Q. Once there was a review, there was no discussion... it was just punt on your mind?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, at that point I had made up my mind. Just like I told Greg let's go for it on the quick snap and then we got stopped. Yeah, that's my call. Don't be mad at Greg on that one. I mean, not you, but if anyone is mad at Greg, be mad at me. Just to clear that air.

Q. Has Brandon Scherff's absence effected the pass protection as much as the running game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's a good player, but he's not coming back. I love Brandon, believe me. He's walking in a boot right now. You wouldn't even know it. I joked with him this morning. He was coming in for treatment, and you wouldn't even know he's in a boot. He's moving pretty good. I'm not sure he couldn't play in that boot right now, but he's not going to. We'll be smart. We'll go with the guys we've got, but we'll be fine.

Q. Given the last three weeks, do you expect Purdue to play a no-huddle?

COACH FERENTZ: No, they're in their own echelon tempo-wise. Doesn't mean Purdue won't and couldn't, but we don't expect it.

Q. When you look at the amount of yardage you gave up, is that a common theme?

COACH FERENTZ: Common theme in terms of?

Q. Until the last three weeks, the defense has been playing well.

COACH FERENTZ: I think all three attacks are really different. Other than the common denominator is the tempo. The way they do things is three very different attacks. Again, the common denominator is they're really fast. That does affect you. That's why people do it. That's pretty prominent. Coach was making commentary on it a couple weeks ago. But they've been pretty successful. All those teams have been successful against other folks as well.

We're doing a lot of good things. But to the point you made earlier, I always tend to focus on execution and things that we can do better, and that's what we're trying to work on right now is how can we play better? I thought we did a lot of things better last Saturday, but not good enough, clearly, to win.

Q. Are you seeing any regression from the defensive groups, the defensive line maybe, pressure?

COACH FERENTZ: No, we talked over the weekend about the fact we played more guys, it was a good move, and I think we helped ourselves that way. There was a fatigue factor, if you will. Some of those guys jumped in and did a good job. I thought Hardy hadn't played much, he did a nice job in there. Carl Davis did better. We'll keep bringing those guys along. We've given up some plays, I'd like to see that change and get corrected a little bit. But I give the other guy credit too. Gave up some plays on offense.

Q. Christian Kirksey is really coming along. Has he progressed the way you've wanted him to?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's making -- doing a lot of good things. First of all, he's a great young guy. Asking about Kevonte Martin-Manley, they're the same age. One guy red shirted, one didn't. They're very similar, great personalities and great work ethic. They bring a lot of positive energy to the team. So that's the first thing you appreciate.

They've both improved quite a bit. I mentioned earlier, Morris is our most experienced guy, then Chris is the next guy, and then Hitchens has come along third. But I thought he did a lot of good things Saturday too. They put pressure on you. Chris has come up with some big plays, and gave us a real spark Saturday.

Q. His athletic ability, his size, is that what you expect from him?

COACH FERENTZ: He's not Greenway, but he's probably -- he's not Greenway, but they're about the same size. So was Howard Hodges who ended up playing defensive end for us. To get to that point, he's a pretty athletic guy. He can run well and uses that to his advantage.

Q. How much faith do you have in on

your linebacker in coverage? It seems like you're leaving them in even on obvious passing downs?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think all three of those guys run well and they're athletic. But we also played nickel and dime packages, so again, it just kind of depends on the match-ups and the situation of down and distance and where you're at on the field. But we think all three of those guys have pretty good cover ability.

Q. You guys took the red shirt quarterbacks up Saturday. I think you've said in the past you'd like to give those guys a taste. Is that the thinking there?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm sorry?

Q. You guys often take red shirts on road trips to give them a taste, correct?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they've been in the hotel every week this year, home and away. So, yeah, they were in the room. They're seeing things, processing things and going through the experience. One thing for sure when James graduates, somebody's going to win that job. Just trying to prepare them.

Q. Question every week, do you see, barring injury, do you see Ruddock playing a competitive down this season?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not smart enough to predict the next three games. But Vandenberg is our starter. And the reason he's been playing is I think he gives us our best chance to win. That's my sole motivation. I don't see that changing, but that's the thought process.

Q. Coach, you're worried about Iowa. But do you see Purdue as needing to win to be bowl eligible?

COACH FERENTZ: Regardless of the situation, I thought they were a dangerous team in the summertime. That was one team I really kind of -- not that I'm jumping in on the prognosticator derby, but yeah, it's a good team. It's a team that could emerge. With their veteran players, yeah, I certainly thought that was a possibility.

There are a lot of dynamics that happen during the course of the season internally and all that type of thing. But all you have to do is go back to that Ohio State tape, and it happened to be our next game, so we got to watch a lot of it on the TV. And we played these guys last year. That was a tough game, hard-fought game. They got most of

the same guys back. All that other stuff is irrelevant. But they've got a lot of guys that can make plays and hurt you.

You're right, but the starting point and most of my focus is on what we can do to get better and play better Saturday. That is our goal to win this game Saturday.

Q. They're strong inside, how do the compare to Indiana's inside tackles?

COACH FERENTZ: As I said earlier, they're big, and physical, just as the guys from Indiana. It's ironic. You go from one set of really good senior veteran tackles, to another set of veteran tackles that are really disruptive and a tough match-up for anybody. So for us to move the ball successfully, that will be a starting point today.

We talked to our guys about it. We'll have to hold up inside and do a heck of a job against those guys. You're trying to -- it's a matter of delay and not domination. You just want to try to delay their effectiveness, if you can, because they're good players.

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