

**November 13, 2012**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** We're probably about where we were at on Saturday coming out of the game, so we'll see how the week plays out. Needless to say, we're playing a very good Michigan football team, which seems to be the case any time you play them. They've got a very good football team, had an excellent team last year, and I think this team is every bit as good certainly if not better. It'll be a big challenge. They're a veteran football team, strong in a lot of areas and we have to travel to Ann Arbor. We'll get back to work together, eager to get back on the field and be ready to play.

**Q. You said that you're the same as you were on Saturday. Does that mean you don't expect Weisman or Rogers to be able to go then?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** You know, Brad might be able to do something on special teams, might. If we could get that we'd be really happy with that. And then Weisman is going to do some work. He's improving, but I don't know if it's enough. It's one of those things where we're day by day, and even if it looks like he's going to play, you can't count on him, I guess, is where I'm putting it. But he is improving.

**Q. Which quarterback do you think will play for Michigan?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** You've got to be ready for both. Coach Hoke said it was a day-to-day thing, which we understand totally, and it probably is, and I'm sure it is. But from our standpoint I'm not sure -- it does matter because they're obviously -- 16 is a heck of a football player, and beyond that, I mean, just read the accounts. You

can see it on film, but they all say he's a heck of a team leader and just a great young man, did a great job at the banquet back in August, end of July.

He's a really dynamic football player, great team leader. But the other guy has really jumped in there and done a great job, too, and you can see him improving with each time out. It's a little bit tricky because you have two preparations. They're not that much different but they're not the same, either, so it's two different preparations, and both of them are tough preparations.

**Q. What are the differences between the two quarterbacks?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Robinson is just so quick and elusive, so there will be a more designed runs with him in there. It's like trying to play a guy who's a good running back who also can throw it back there. And then Gardner is a little bigger guy but he can run it, too, and when he gets outside he's dangerous, and he throws the ball well, too. It's a little bit different.

The thing that doesn't change is they've got a really good line, those guys are big, physical guys, veteran guys up front, and the tight ends do a nice job. They've got a couple of receivers they can really go to.

It's a big challenge for you.

**Q. Kind of like the last time you went to Ann Arbor where you had Robinson but also Tate Forcier who was a completely different type of quarterback?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** You could say that. We played Minnesota earlier this year, and we didn't know who was going to play quarterback that day for sure. Although that was kind of like two separate scenarios. So this one is a little closer to being -- these guys are a little closer to being alike, yet it will change how they choose to attack you, depending on who's in there.

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You could see both of them during the game, too. It wouldn't shock me if that happened.

**Q. On the final drive last game you're going against the wind. At what point would you have sensed like an ideal range for putting Mike Meyer out there to attempt the field goal if you weren't able to get that 4th down?**

KIRK FERENTZ: The clock was an issue, but at that point, if we had moved the ball a few more yards, I think that would have been a little bit more realistic. You would have liked to have converted the 1st and then hopefully gained a couple more yards on the next play and then had a chance at it.

Where we were, as I said Saturday, to me going for a 4th and 3 was a better gamble. It's not a knock on Mike Meyer. He's a great kicker. We're really happy with him.

**Q. Four-game losing streak, two rated teams coming up. Is there a fear about things getting worse?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Worse how?

**Q. Six-game losing streak.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that could happen. We could win two, we could split them or we could lose two. Those are the only three possibilities right now. There's no fear of it, but that's a reality of it. So it's the reality of every game you play.

**Q. Do you worry about what that does to the program as a whole? Will one year have a lasting impact?**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, I can't answer that right now. I'll worry about that stuff, if that's the right word, worry about it, but I'll think about that stuff after the season. Right now we're just trying to beat Michigan.

**Q. You've been in this situation --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Which one is that?

**Q. A couple times before where the program was struggling and then you built it back up. Did you expect at all that you might be in this position again right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, we've lost four straight games, and we're 4 and 6 right now, and that's where we're at. That's what I'm worried about right now.

Really the only thing I can worry about right now or be concerned with is beating Michigan. I'm getting our team ready to play their best against Michigan. That's really what I'm worried about right now, or focused on. That's probably a better word choice.

You know, you worry about health, you worry about life-and-death circumstances, but we are focused on getting better, and that's where our energy and attention is right now.

**Q. What impact have the injured, out-for-the-season offensive linemen had in the last -- I guess it's been three games.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, those are things we'll ponder in the out-of-season, but injuries are part of football. They affect teams. Sometimes great stories come out of that. It's happened before. You know, sometimes a guy that comes in is better than the guy who got hurt. But those are things that are kind of philosophical. I know really the nutshell is that we were never in contention four games ago, and then the last three have all been close games where we had our opportunities and we came up short. What we need to do is first of all make sure we're in contention and secondly find out a way to come out on top in a close game, and there are a lot of different factors there.

**Q. Did Conor Boffeli hold up well?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I thought he did a good job. It's his first really significant playing time, first start, and then first significant playing time. I thought there were a lot of positives there. There were some plays that weren't so good, as and told him, look at any of our players, any one of them the last 14 years in their first game that didn't have some bad plays. Flush those down, but really build off the good ones. He had some really good plays. He's a fourth-year guy who to me I hope he walked away with some confidence out of that performance. I thought he did a lot of good things.

**Q. How did you arrive at him? I know Nolan is basically two years out and Jordan is a brand-new player. Did he just raise his hand in practice one day and move from center to guard?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, he's worked at both positions. I remember him blocking Karl Klug at times going back a couple years and he did a pretty good job as a young player. It's been a

transition for him, but he's played guard and center. You know, guys have setbacks during the week, things like that, which that's not uncommon. He was the best choice and did a really good job.

**Q. When you lose four games by three points or less, at some point there's got to be an element of bad luck there. How do you keep from getting overly frustrated?**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, if you're hanging around waiting for luck, you probably should get in a different profession or do something else. We're trying to focus on the things that we need to do better, and every game is a different circumstance. It's true of seasons, too.

That's for future thought and consideration. But what we can do, we've got the same amount of time to get ready for this game as Michigan does, and we have to utilize our time as well as we possibly can and try to be smart as is possible about the decisions we try to make going into the game and during the game and then execute better, especially in critical areas. That's the key.

**Q. Did losing the combination of basically the same time, almost the same time, Weisman, Brandon and Donnal, did that take away some of the power that this offense was showing early, because you guys were averaging 4.7 yards a carry or something like that.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't mean this to have a negative connotation, but you guys cover the team. That's what you guys do is make those kind of conclusions, summations. We just have to deal with what's out there, so that's it. I guess two of those injuries occurred in the Penn State game, so I don't think it impacted that game. We were never in that game. I've said that before, I'll say it today and I'll say it five years from now or ten years from now; we just were never in that game so it didn't impact that game. But injuries impact every team, but as I said, good stories can come out of that, too. Sometimes the next guy in is even better, and you just never know.

**Q. How about your linebackers? Were they a little nicked up last week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're at that point of the year where guys -- you just have to be really smart during the week and during practice. Guys that play a lot tend to be a little bit worn down or run down. I think we have that case right now. But there's no reason to think that they don't have a

chance to be ready Saturday, so that's what we have to do, get them ready to go.

**Q. Is Joe Gaglione doing better?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so. They said this morning the vomiting has stopped, so that's obviously a good thing, just one of those deals. Hopefully it doesn't come back and hopefully he didn't spread it to somebody else.

**Q. You guys play a pretty simple defense and you like to let guys play. I think the philosophy is you like to have your guys play faster because of that. Is there any temptation to try to scheme a little bit now that health has become a little bit of an issue, or is that just not you guys, not Iowa?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just the way that's worded, I don't know if I can agree totally. We do scheme some things and we do -- but it's just all down to, I know this gets old for everybody, but execution of what you do. We probably do more than maybe you think, and historically we've probably done that. But it gets down to the execution. One thing for sure about defense down there, what you're doing, you've got to contain the ball and you have to tackle well and you have to play off blocks, assuming the other team is blocking, and you've got to get to the football and tackle, and we didn't do that well enough Saturday.

Whether you're -- and it was both when we're playing base defense and also when we had some calls on, just didn't do it consistently enough. That's not a good thing.

**Q. I know you can't speak for what the Michigan players are thinking, but it's senior day, they haven't beaten Iowa, their seniors, ever. Does it become an extra emotional factor for this game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Typically you play in at least one senior day every year, and I'm sure it's a special thing, just like it will be here the week after. But I think that wears off pretty quickly once the game gets going, and as far as year to year, week to week, all that stuff, we're not the same team we were a year ago and they're not, either. We're hardly -- there's no tie-in to years before that.

I don't think it really plays into it. I think it's just kind of their team this year against our team this year and see how we go against each other.

**Q. What makes Michigan so good**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's a total team effort. They're not the same as they were in the '80s, but similar, or even 10 years ago where their scheme is really good, and it's not the same as, but it's certainly different the last two years, and their players are really confident playing it.

Then they give you some things to keep you up late at night, especially on 3rd down. They do some things that are very, very challenging. The biggest thing is they really play hard. They really play hard, they're very sound fundamentally. I think back when I was coaching here in the '80s, it seemed like every year faces would always be changing but it was the same routine, and that '85 team I can't remember how many touchdowns they had given up, and that was fairly late in the season and it was a ridiculous amount of touchdowns that they had allowed.

Their secondary is playing well; I'm not minimizing that. But the guys up front and their linebackers do a great job, and they mix things up so you really can't get comfortable against them.

**Q. Are college football and NFL drifting further apart as far as styles and whatnot?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. But I would suggest, too, I think fairly historically there's always been a bunch of teams in college that don't look at all like a pro outfit, and back when I was a kid, the wishbone, nobody was doing that in the NFL, run-and-shoot, which is -- it's not the run-and-shoot anymore, and a couple teams try that up above. But there's always been some distinction there for sure. But you throw on a game like Alabama against Michigan, Alabama, their quarterback, their whole operation looks like an NFL outfit the way they operate, and we have teams in our conference that do the same thing.

One thing about college, it's been fairly consistent through the years. There's a real diversity in terms of what you see offensively, defensively, special teams for sure, the punting formations and all that, you couldn't do that in the NFL because the rules won't allow it. So there's a lot of variance there.

**Q. Would you call your program a classic NFL style?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I don't think necessarily. Not necessarily. But we're probably closer in that direction. We do use tight ends and fullbacks at times if we have them, whereas some teams just don't do that. It's hard to do everything.

You can't -- you've got to kind of go down one path, I think, for the most part and stay with it.

**Q. You don't think the movement is away from that right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I mean, you just look at our conference last year, the two teams that played for the championship would fit probably more towards that side than the other side, and Alabama has done pretty well nationally, and they're not that -- but there's a lot of ways to skin a cat, a lot of different ways to be successful. I think turn the tables and say Oregon against Auburn a couple years ago, I think it was two years ago or three, whatever it's been, two, now you have two teams that look nothing like Alabama really. It's really about what you think is going to best serve your team and program.

**Q. Bigger picture, is it what you feel like you can sustain with players you feel like you can get?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, again, I would say it's worked pretty good for the teams that played in the championship game last year. But everybody has got to make that decision, but the one thing, it's not like you can't put one hat on and take it off and put another hat on. If you do that, I think it's really hard to sustain anything at that point. It doesn't mean you don't do something at some given point or what have you.

**Q. What is your message to fans who think the program is on the way down or are frustrated with the mediocrity the last few seasons?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I would just say this: We've lost four straight games. I think everybody is probably frustrated and disappointed. I know we are. I know our players are probably more disappointed and frustrated than anybody, and I would also say our fans are as good as they come, and they're human. So that's a human response, and I know how we feel, so I know how they feel, too, at least. I don't want to speak for them, but I think when you lose four straight, there's not much fun there.

That's how it goes sometimes, and all I can tell our fans is we're working as hard as we possibly can. I can't make any guarantees; we didn't 13 and a half years ago, and one thing I promised back then is we'd work hard to be



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successful, and that's what we're doing.

**Q. You've been pretty consistent saying you try to block those type of things out. Does it get harder on a year like this where there are marquees on hotels that say things now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you'd have to show me some pictures because I don't get out a lot. At least my wife is still talking to me last time I saw her, and I saw her last night. I'm trying to remember if she was awake. Yeah, she was.

She's still talking to me. Life goes on. You have to push through it. As I said, it's more fun when you're riding in a parade, but we're not right now, and that's the way it goes. But you just keep -- whether you're doing well or bad, you have to try to keep your focus where it needs to be, things you can really do something about.

**Q. Can you talk about the pair of senior -- I hesitate to call Bigach at defensive end because he plays so much for you in other spots, but talk about Bigach and Gaglione and what you've been able to squeeze out of them this year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's two different stories. Joe has really had so many injury issues. He's been pretty consistent; we fooled around with him inside a little bit earlier, but for the most part he's been an end who -- even representative last week, he got sick I don't know when it was Thursday, Friday, thought he could go, couldn't go. So he's just had a lot of things get -- roadblocks that have slowed down his progress, but when he's played, he's played well.

And then Steve is kind of the different side of the deal. He was an undersized D-lineman, he really played more linebacker, played some end in high school. We thought he had a chance to grow into kind of the King-Kroll kind of mold. So that took some time for him to get there, but he's worked extremely hard. Obviously he's a very smart guy. He's such a great team guy, so it's -- he's doing a lot of good things on the field, but I really appreciate and value his leadership as much as anything. He's just really done a great job that way and great attitude and -- he's going through his tough times, too. You know, is this ever going to work out, all those things that most players ask themselves. He's stayed the course. He's been injured like happens to a lot of guys, and then -- but he's persevered and he's really done a great job out there. Really proud of him.



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**Q. How much reassurance do you get knowing that you always have an answer for these things since you got here? It was doom and gloom back in '06 and '07.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's no guarantee that anything is going to get better. There's no guarantees in sports for sure. But when you're -- earlier in your career you really probably tend to worry more, or not worry, but I guess you just learn you do what you can do, and if that's not good enough, then it's just not good enough. But that's all you can do is you try to be as smart as you can, as prepared as you can and all that, but you also have to know you're not going to be perfect, and it's the same as being a player. They're not going to be perfect out there.

But at the end of the day, you help yourself more by putting your efforts on the solution part of things than -- and you have to be aware where the issues are. I'm not minimizing that. You have to do that. So then really the key is -- because everybody is good at pointing out what's wrong, but the key is to try to find solutions that are workable and realistic and short-term and long-term and those are things that you really try to focus on. That's been the approach, and we'll just go from there.

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