

February 22, 2013



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Good to be back here, obviously, back on campus. Just start off with the staff, probably yesterday's news now, but we have hired three new people. We're really excited about the way the entire process went, and really happy about where we've ended up.

We've added Bobby Kennedy coming in, Jim Reid, and most recently Chris White, so we're really pleased that all three of those guys accepted our offer and invitation. Just, again, very, very enthused about all three guys. I think they'll really complement our staff really well. I think they're also going to add to our staff based on their backgrounds and their experiences. So we're really happy about that.

The way things will shake out right now, offensively, Greg will continue to be our offensive coordinator, obviously. He'll be our quarterback coach as well. Brian Ferentz will stay with the offensive line. D.J. Hernandez who joined us right after the new year, comes in to take Dave's spot, and D.J. will work with the tight ends.

The two newest guys, Bobby will work with the wide receivers, and Chris will handle the running backs and special teams. I'll get to that in a second.

Defensively, Phil Parker will remain coordinator and become the defensive backfield coach. He will have both. Reese Morgan will stay at the defensive line, needless to say. Both LeVar Woods and Jim Reid will work with the linebackers. We'll pair those guys up together, and Eric Johnson will continue as recruiting coordinator and work with the defensive line as well.

Special-teams wise, Chris will coordinate that effort, and then LeVar will be assistant special

teams, and Kelvin Bell will continue on as a GA, and work special teams as well. That will be his primary focus there.

So, all in all, I think we're just really happy with the way things have gone certainly. We've been through a period of transition, but really enthused about the direction of things and really enthused about the group of guys that we have here.

So, that being said, now we turn our attention to our team, it's been good to have guys back on campus. The staff has been back now for a couple of weeks, and now we've got everybody where they need to be able to focus on that a little bit.

Chris and his staff have done a great job with the guys throughout the winter months. Still have a couple more weeks to go before spring break, and then we'll come back and get into spring ball after that.

Really just encouraged by the way the guys are working. Their attitudes have been good. The effort has been good going back to December, and we'll get on the field at the end of March and be excited about that. Certainly have a little bit more experienced football team than we had a year ago. But I think also we have a lot of young guys that haven't been seen yet that we're eager to see and how they've progressed. See what kind of contributions they can make as well.

The last thing too, I'll add real quick. The last thing, just medically we have two players that won't be out there this spring. You probably know at least one of them, Louis Trinca-Pasat had surgery after New Year's, and he'll be out for the spring and Nolan MacMillan also had surgery. So both those guys will miss spring. We expect both of them to be back. The rehabs are going well, and they should be back full speed in June.

On the other side, and this is kind of a down note, certainly. Brad Rogers and Jim Poggi have taken medical red shirts, so they'll not be able

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to continue on with their careers. They've both had some persistent injury issues that just, I think, they both decided it's best right now that they put the brakes on things.

So that's always a tough thing, because as I say every time, anybody gets hurt, they come here with high aspirations and high hopes and wanting to be part of the team certainly. It's just not an easy transition for guys. So that's disappointing. But, you know, it's part of the deal too.

With that being said, I'll throw it out for some questions.

Q. What is the impetus behind all the coaching changes?

COACH FERENTZ: I think probably every one's a different story. It goes back really to last December when Norm retired. But I think it's been six new coaches now. You know, I guess the only thing I would say is it's probably not uncommon in football, college football certainly, football in general.

I know Alabama's lost two guys in the last probably ten days. And everyone's a different story. It's part of it, and you consider the fact that we've been here now, going into our 15th year. It's probably reasonable to think that there is going to be some transition. But the most important thing, I think is we've been able to track people that have come to work here, and really enthused about the guys that joined us last year, and I feel the same way as we start a new chapter, if you will.

Q. Talk about the coaching staff that have been around for a while. Was it difficult to make the changes at first? You mentioned maybe you thought it is time to change. But was it hard to let some of the coaches go and get in that transition?

COACH FERENTZ: As I said, I think every one's a different story. Everyone is an individual. It's kind of like players. Their stories are all different too. The conversations you have are conversations that are private and that's probably the best place to keep them.

It's part of what we do, certainly. The thing I would tell you is I'm appreciative of everybody's efforts. Again, Norm, I said that a year ago, everything he did and then right on through. Every guy that's been here has done a great job and given their all for the program, and that's something I'm very appreciative of.

Q. As far as the special teams go, I know in the past, you've split the duties. How will that work now?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably the same. Chris will be in charge of the entire package, and certainly Levar's got experience there. He's done a great job. He did a great job last year with a segment.

So I don't want to leave that to Chris. We've had discussion on that. We'll continue to have discussion. Want him to take some time and think about it. He has obviously worked with the Vikings the last four years. That's a little different realm and different way of coaching, but he's got great collegiate experience too.

So he's familiar with all the work schedules and what the constrictions are on time and all those things. But at the end of the day I see he, and LeVar and then Kelvin all having a real big role, major role, with special teams. They'll be supported by every coach on this staff outside of the D-line coach. Traditionally the offensive and defensive line coaches aren't too involved outside of field goal, field goal, block. And Greg Davis, the quarterback coach, isn't usually too involved either. But outside of that, the other guys have been really good about chipping in, and I think that will remain the same.

Q. A year ago you talked about how with all the changes, six new guys in two years? Is this an extension of that?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if you can put it into one category. Because, again, you're looking at probably six different stories and six different things that have happened. But, again, I think the bottom line is when you're doing something for a long time, it's just going to happen. Things are going to happen.

Obviously, going back to Norm, it's not unnatural that he retired. He's at that age, and he's had some health challenges and what have you. It's just part of what happens in college football and football in general. I think the important thing is what do you do with what's in front of you and what steps do you take to move forward?

Q. Did Phil ask to coach the secondary?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had conversation. We've talked about everything

during the course of the year, certainly, and it seemed like the best thing to do. I've been evaluating this thing for a couple of months now. And with the way things just worked out it, seemed like the natural place for him to be and he's got obviously great experience and expertise in that area, so I don't think that will be a big change there.

One of the things that's attractive about Jim Reid is Jim has great experiences. He's done a lot of different things during his career. He was actually a head coach at Massachusetts when I was at Maine going back 20 years ago. So he's been a head coach. He's been a coordinator at the collegiate level, coached at the NFL level, and I think the expertise and the wisdom that he brings to the room will be good for everybody in the room. And, hopefully, make those jobs that much easier.

It's not easy to be a position coach and a coordinator, but I think that will be an assistance too.

Q. Have you figured out the recruiting responsibilities and areas for these guys yet?

COACH FERENTZ: I think for the most part and that's something that we've spent a lot of time on too. It looks like right now we're probably going to split Chicago up. We'll keep Iowa as Reese's area. He has worked that area and those are areas that are pretty much in place and I think there's no sense to change those. Those guys have great relationships. I think he's started with a lot of people in those areas.

Really vision splitting Chicago right now. We'll continue to recruit in Michigan and Ohio, and Phil will handle that. Phil's recruited Michigan before. We'll probably have three guys pick a section of Ohio. Last year we had just one guy in that area.

We'll probably have a couple of guys down in Texas. Bobby's had a lot of experience down in the Texas area, and we've gotten off to a good start down there. We may look into some other areas as well. And then Chris has experience out east, so I kind of envisioned him going out that way and working the east coast a little bit.

Q. Will he be further south?

COACH FERENTZ: He'll be further south than what Darrell had. Been kind of gravitating that way anyway the last couple of years. That's one thing about recruiting. You're always evaluating and looking at where the best place to invest your time and energy is.

We've kind of gravitated in that direction a little bit. Though the guy this year is from North Jersey, but if we have a reason to hit somewhere else, then we'll do that.

Q. Speaking of Florida, I know you gradually changed down there?

COACH FERENTZ: We're not going to shut the door in any area. We've got four young guys out of that state right now in our program. And we have hope that all four of those guys will continue to grow and do a good job and make an impact. We've definitely cut back our efforts down there the last six, seven years.

It's like anything. It's where you invest. And typically, if you get to know coaches a little bit better, your chances are better. And some of our Florida recruiting, I go back to our first year, we got two guys, Colin Cole and Fred Barr, two captains out of that first class. And I'm not sure how we got them, but that was great.

Brad, we stumbled into in Mississippi. It was a good story. When he left my house on Sunday after we offered him a scholarship, he said you might want to look into my cousin. I said, who is that? He said C.J. Jones. So the art of recruiting, right? We've got two pretty good players pretty much by accident.

But we'll keep a line open, definitely. If there is a reason to go there. We'll go there. If it looks like there is an interest on the prospects, but we'll go anywhere.

Q. Did you say who will do Chicago?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't. I think Brian and Jim will probably split it a little bit and get the two guys in there. That's been a big area for us, obviously. And it continues to be, but because of the geographic's, it makes sense to spend time there.

Q. Will Jim also recruit out east?

COACH FERENTZ: It may a little bit. Kind of envisioning it right now being in Chicago, part of Ohio, another section there. And if he has ties that take him back, we're certainly not against it.

The big challenge is it depends on how these roles shake out. When you have seven guys on the road, and I know this, we've got 28 weeks in the spring to work with. It seems like a lot, sounds like a lot, but when you start having position

coaches overlap to get a better grip on prospects and all that, boy, it shrinks what you can do and the ground you can cover and cover well.

We try to be as thorough as we possibly can, and we like -- at least I think it's important that the coaches in the Midwest and Big Ten areas have a comfort level with who we are and what we are, and the people that come into our schools. So I just don't think that -- it becomes a challenge. It gets a little tougher when you start putting it on the board. It's a little tougher to make the puzzle work.

Q. Teams are now hiring recruiting staffs, recruiting coordinators. I know those rules are still hanging out there. Mar 20th is when they get voted out or voted in.

COACH FERENTZ: It sounds like -- if I've had any good news over the last couple of days -- not a lot of good news, but it sounds like this things slowing down a little bit on the total free-for-all that was being proposed. At least, hopefully, whenever this clears up a little bit, there will be some good guidelines.

I know that's an issue that the NCAA's been looking at for quite a while. How do you define who is who, and what is what? I think we have to be really careful and make sure they work under the constraints and regulations. So if that door opens up, we'd have to be open to it. We'd be foolish not to be. But I do think that train slowed down a little bit, it sounds like at least.

Q. Are you expecting new ideas?

COACH FERENTZ: We're open to anything. And that's true every year, new coaches or not. You just have to hope you're looking at what people are doing in all areas of football, and that includes recruiting as well. So that's part of growing and getting better.

Then the other part of it is whatever you see and whatever you like, can you transition that into what you're doing? Can you make it fit? Does it work? Is it going to throw your whole system out of whack? I don't think we need to throw our whole system out, that's for sure. But fresh ideas are good, certainly, and if there's someone that can do something to supplement what we're already doing, that's a great thing. Those are things we talk about in meetings and that's how we grow. Getting people to throw ideas out is a good and healthy thing.

Q. (No microphone)?



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COACH FERENTZ: It depends on what position you're looking at. But I talked about Jim a little bit. I think his depth of experience he's had as a head coach and coordinator, and NFL coach are going to be beneficial to us defensively. And the scheme he's familiar with is not exactly identical to what we have, and that's okay. That wasn't a requisite in my mind.

I think his experiences and some of the things that translate will be really good. Bottom line is whether you're an under-team or over-team defensively, the fundamentals are the same.

On the offensive side, I think both Chris and Bobby are going to be great fits with what we do. Bobby has a familiarity level with Greg, certainly, and I think that's going to be an easy transition for him. And Chris has, I think he's an excellent football coach.

He was here this week, and I was extremely impressed with what he presented to us and some of the drills that he showed us, what have you, both special teams-wise, and offensively, so I think he'll be a great fit as well. The big thing is we all share common values and have diverse ideas that are going to be hopefully something we can integrate.

Q. Do you recall your results against UMass?

COACH FERENTZ: I was thinking about that early year, because I figured somebody would ask that. I think we did beat them our second year, and as I recall, it was a miracle play that we won on. I remember getting thumped by them pretty good. That's what I remember.

Q. Did you have a prior relationship with Chris at all? Was there a link to the staff?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't really. His brother Brian coached, he was on staff at Wisconsin with Coach Alvarez when we got here. And I knew Brian through -- I hadn't thought about it until now -- some guys from Massachusetts are on the staff.

So Chris's dad is a high school coach, long-time legendary high school coach. Both he and his brother have gone that route as coaches. Just after being with him, the first time I met him was this past Tuesday, I guess it was, and I was just really impressed with him. I thought he'd be a great fit here.

The question was, was he anxious or

eager about getting back into a college situation? I didn't know what the answer to be, but I was really happy to hear that he accepted it. I think he's really excited about getting his family down here. He's got two young girls, and coming to a college town and having a great education available. Not that you don't have that in Minnesota. But I think he's excited and excited to have ownership in this thing.

Q. With D.J., was it primarily the connection with Brian coaching or is there more to it than that?

COACH FERENTZ: It probably goes well beyond that. Back when I played college football, we had freshman football. It was the last year, like 1973. And the guy coached the freshman team was a long time staff member and still there. Kind of the John Streif of Connecticut, if you will, Andy Baylock. And Andy was also the head baseball coach at UCONN for quite some time, and Andy's been there a long time, a guy I trust so deeply.

I've been following D.J.'s career. D.J. was a quarterback that got beat up, moved to receiver and ended up being the two-time captain. So you know what kind of attitude he has. And he coached high school football in Connecticut. Coached at Brown a year ago so he's got a good background that way. Picked up and left and went to Miami, which impressed me a little bit too.

And I think the fact that we offered a chance for him to coach a position was exciting to him. I've been really impressed with him. He's got a great personality, strong worker, and seems to be a good learner too. So I'm excited to have him here too.

Q. How jarring is it for you to have this much change in the span of 14 months?

COACH FERENTZ: The way I look at it again, we're going into 15 years. And I guess maybe I should go around and look at the other coaches that have made it that long. Probably more 20 years ago than there are now, but I would assume it just happens.

It probably happens at the other places. Bob Stoops comes to mind right now. I think we're the only two survivors from our class that are still at the same schools. I don't know if it's a five-year span or ten-year span. Probably at the end of the day if you look at it over the last 15 years we've probably had less transition than most schools in that same time period.

I know we've seen a lot of head coaches come and go in our conference, so it's just part of the deal. But it's not a big deal to me. We change players all the time. Every year we graduate a new group. With it, comes opportunity.

So when you have an opening, an opportunity comes, it's a chance for people to join. It's a chance for people to grow internally, and to me, it's really an opportunity for good things to happen. Just like you hate to see a senior graduate, but it gives an opportunity for a young guy to get on the field and maybe be the next great player.

Q. What position do you think you are for the program to return to the level that it's been at for much of your time here?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had our ups and downs like most teams. Again, if you look at things in five-year blocks, teams go up a little bit and they go down. Certainly our goal every year is to get in contention for the Big Ten championship when November comes around and that's our goal. What you do with that opportunity makes or breaks you. We've had some really fulfilling years.

I go back to '08 coming off that '07 season when we didn't go to a bowl. We weren't in contention for a league championship necessarily in November. But we were really hitting the gas and playing our best football. So, you know, you evaluate every season on a different basis. That's what I think the bottom line is. Are you getting better and maximizing what you have given your circumstances?

Last year was really disappointing. It's amazing how close things are, and it's usually not as bad as you think or not as good as you think. In 2009, we were more than fortunate to get out of our first game, you know. And it's just a fine line what you do with each opportunity.

But I think all of us are excited about what's in front of us. I'm excited about the team. We have a chance to coach here in the next couple of weeks, and just excited to get back to work. I don't have any reason why we can't be successful, but we have to go out and do it. That's been the one common denominator. We've had success, and we've earned it, and that's what we've got to do.

Q. You had offensive lineman that had some bad injuries during the season. How are

their recoveries come ago long?

COACH FERENTZ: Brandon (Scherff) and Andrew (Donnal) are both doing good. Brandon's 100 percent, and Andrew's close. He will be when we start practice. Both those guys, Brandon was pretty much ready to go when we got back in January after that 10-week break. It's been like two plus months it wasn't. And Andrew is still working for it at that point. But I think they're both doing really well.

Q. You've changed the coaching staff. I know you've kind of touched on this. I know last year when you brought Greg on, there was a dissection of the playbook and what you guys were doing. You talked about that. Did you have the same thing this year? Did you see schematic changes?

COACH FERENTZ: I think two things. I think Greg and I sat down, we have a lot of time on our hands obviously before the holidays. I sat down with Greg right after the season after everybody had a chance to digest some things. I think the one thing that was really clear, Greg has a much better feel for where we're at and who we are right now. So that's one thing.

The second thing is I think he's enthused and encouraged about where we can go. I think all of us share that feeling. There are some things we have to do to supplement and give ourselves a little bit better chance, and I think we all feel good about that. And I think we've had a chance in the last week and a half to go through cut ups and going through our tapes. I think it's that way on both sides of the ball right now.

We see a lot of room for potential for improvement. To Mike's point earlier, a lot of this is just stuff that we can be better. That's what we need to do. It's worth the challenge. But we're still very much open to delivering some new things and trying some new things as we do over the year.

But when you win four games, there is ownership there. We can't say a play here, play there. It's not like two plays were the big difference, now you're 6-6, and that's what we're striving for.

It does cause you to look at things and be introspective a little bit. But the big thing is to come up with a good plan and really work that plan well, and hopefully we can be a little bit better this time around.

Q. Still the 4-3?



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COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, staying 4-3, exactly.

Q. Any position changes?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll move a couple things around, but nothing major right now. We'll get together before spring ball and talk about that a little bit.

Q. Coach, how do you feel about these changes rejuvenating the team or getting a fresh start in a sense?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I can just tell you my sense was back in December -- when things are pretty quiet back in December, I thought our guys had a great attitude. Bottom line is nobody's happy and nobody's pleased about the way last year went. It's just part of football. Unfortunately, sometimes things don't go the way you hope or planned, and that's just what happens.

I think everybody's been motivated by the fact that we didn't play as well as we want, didn't have the record we wanted, didn't go to a bowl game.

If there is a positive in that, sometimes it's a good reminder. You're sitting at home watching everybody else play and you're not. So I think the energy and the vibe I've sensed from our players and leaders has been really good. Had a chance to meet with the leaders mid-week this week, and they're a positive group. I think they've all taken ownership, and they're doing a great job of sharing their vision with their teammates too, which is really encouraging.

So it's how you deal with things. You can sit around and make excuses, or you can sit around and think of reasons why things didn't go well or you can do something about it. I think everybody's attitude right now is let's move forward here, push ahead and see what we can do with this next opportunity.

Q. Any thoughts on the Big Ten's schedule?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if that's in ink right now. But that's a decision that got made above our heads. And if that's the way it ends up coming down, that's the way it ends up coming down. There is not much I can say about that. But it does sound like we're going to nine games. It sounds like that train's going down the track right now too.

Those are probably the two big things that came out of the meetings a week or so ago. So whatever we decide there, we'll adjust it, and live with it. Certainly nine games would be a new experience for us. But as long as everybody's playing by the same rules and principles, that's the way it is.

Q. Nine or 10 Big Ten games?

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say nine. That would be my first instinct, and kind of go from there. Then obviously the five and four thing is a tough equation. I don't know if we're ready for ten yet or not. Lot of people weren't ready for 12, and we got that too.

Q. Are the coaching changes done now?

COACH FERENTZ: As far as I know we're locked in. Chris was the last piece of the puzzle, and he'll actually be down here next week starting work. We'll all be here working together a week from Monday.

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