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An Interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: It's good to see you. And probably like most coaches, certainly excited about the class and excited to be back on campus as well.

I think most of us are looking forward to getting reacquainted with our teams and our families and all that kind of thing. And the first thing I'd like to do is just thank our staff. I think they did a great job throughout the recruiting process, not only in terms of evaluation, but also the actual recruitment, all the work that goes into that, it's pretty involved and I think the guys really did a tremendous job there.

Also once the prospects come to campus, which used to be in the wintertime, now it's pretty much year-round, our faculty has been outstanding, helping us out. Our support staff and maybe as important as anything, is our players, our players do a great job of really making themselves available and just talking really candidly about the prospects, with the prospects that come on campus.

So I think that might be as important as anything that happens in the recruiting process, and we're very appreciative of everybody's efforts, especially our players. That's certainly important.

The other thing, obviously, recruiting continues to change and evolve, and it's a long process. It always has been. It's probably longer than that. Just because of the rapidity of the process, maybe. And seemed like there's two stages. We had a large number of commitments around end of July, early August, that was kind of phase one. Then we pulled back a little bit and just took some time to really try to re-evaluate players that were playing out their senior years. And we had more time in December than we normally did.

That gave us a chance to make sure we did a thorough job of going back and looking at players that maybe hadn't drawn attention prior to their senior years. And I think that paid off for us. We're really happy about that.

We're obviously really pleased with the class. I think for the most part we fit most of the needs that we felt were important. And most importantly I think we found players that we feel are going to fit our program. And that's probably the secret of anything.

When recruiting, you look for requisite skill levels and different things that are pretty tangible. But at the end of the day I think it really comes down to the work ethic, the character and the attitude that players possess. And based on the work we've done we feel really good about this class.

We're happy about that. It's an exciting day certainly for the prospects, their parents, their families, coaches, anybody that has helped support those players along the way.

So it's a great opportunity for them just to celebrate great achievement and to earn a scholarship that is a heck of an achievement. So it's a great day that way.

And obviously we're eager to start a new chapter when the players get to campus and that will be the next phase for us. So all in all we feel good about things, and I'll open it up for questions.

Q. How much did the struggles at the end of the last season how much did it affect that final push of this year's class?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure -- again, that first phase is pretty much done before we even played a game or even started practice. And it's funny, I think players tend to look broader than one season or one game, typically.

And I think we have an awful lot to sell. We felt very confident about selling a lot of positive things about this program and the university. And

I'm not sure it really impacted us that much.

So it's hard to quantify that, but we feel pretty good about it.

Q. How about Erik's situation, when you're trying to go for so many receivers, did that throw a wrench in it at the end at all?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think it did. Change is part of college football, and that happens. It's part of football in general. And I think again the players looked at what we're trying to do, what we're trying to accomplish, and probably saw opportunity. And I think at least the guys that signed with us felt really good about the opportunities that they're going to find here both on the field and also academically and just in general.

Q. You signed five wide receivers, what were you looking for, definitely that was the position that you guys needed to fill?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it showed up last year, it's an area we needed to fortify a little bit and improve upon. So it was something we were intent on. And there's a little bit of a variety in the group certainly. Some of the guys are bigger. Some of the guys are on the smaller side.

But guys that we felt could get open to not only get open but catch the ball, and then hopefully do something with it afterwards. So we're excited about those five guys and then Jonathan Parker too is a running back, but he's a guy we envisioned using outside a little bit, too. He's got great speed and he gives us a chance for some big plays not only on offense but also special teams.

Q. Fit the new style in a sense for you guys on offense?

COACH FERENTZ: I've read about that. I'm not so sure. Our style is getting guys that can get open. And we've had all kinds. And it's not always based on a guy's speed or size. There's a lot of things that go into being a good receiver.

And you see at all levels guys of different body types that are successful. And sometimes they get these tags put on them. But I think Marvin was kind of looked at as a possession guy. Nobody had more big plays than him. So there's a lot of -- there's not a stereotypical guy, I don't think, but we're looking for guys that were productive and really feel could fit in with what we're trying to do.

Q. Is defensive end maybe the position where you maybe missed?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, if there's one thing I wish maybe we could have done I would have loved to have signed another guy we felt could play outside, like an Ott, or Daumantas, from last year. That didn't work out. And one thing we didn't want to do was try to fabricate players or create players based on needs. And it would be great in January if we found somebody, we were looking but we didn't find anybody that really struck a cord with us, and it's a two-way interest.

So we just moved on to a different position and tried to get the best players we felt we could add to the class.

Q. Talk about the other players you've got. Josey Jewell and Wisnieski, what do you guys like about some of the home state talent you have coming?

COACH FERENTZ: They're all kind of different stories. Jon was a guy we were focused on right from day one. He impressed us not only on film but just everything about him. And that to me is the big part about recruiting. The more we got to know him and his family, the more we felt he would fit well in our program. I have high hopes for him as a player. I think he'll be a leader on our football team. And he does things really well and it appealed to us and he's a really serious young man.

That's kind of one story. Ike Boettger is a guy who came to camp, he's a junior. What would you think about catching a few balls? He did that. He did it pretty well. Really intrigued us. I believe it was on a Friday or Thursday, I'm not sure which.

And then he really impressed us because we asked him, would you mind bringing your shoulder pads with you next Monday and we'll let you block a little bit. He got slaughtered. First time he had ever done it. He did it with great effort and great intensity.

We're not worried about that. He did a good job this year when he actually practiced it. That makes a big difference. We're great about that. Josey is a guy we've been watching closely especially as the season went on and led his team to a state championship. I'm not saying he was the most valuable player on the team but you could probably argue that.

Just the way he competed in all regards, it really impressed us. So we're just really excited to get him as well.

Q. The quarterback, Shimonek, is he more of a dual threat guy than you've had in recent years?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. He's a good athlete. Playing well in basketball and he's a good baseball player. He's also got good height and size. First thing that comes to mind when I think of him he's a thrower.

So we're excited about him. Greg got to see him practice last spring. They practice spring football in Texas. Impressed from the start. We had seen his film but watching him throw live. He's led them to two very successful seasons now. Great production on the field but more importantly his team's winning.

So everything about him, that was the starting point. Then everything we've learned since then has really impressed us.

Q. When you come down the line a little bit and you've had success with guys that don't get a lot of stars, maybe the two star recruits, what are you looking for? What is the thing you say, okay, I'll take that two star over this two star?

COACH FERENTZ: Gary and I were talking upstairs just a few minutes ago. And I think last year we were third, fourth or fifth on one of the services in the conference.

And I remember a year ago thinking, boy, that's a surprise. I was glad we weren't last. Because I thought I was watching and thinking we might be. And then this year we're down at the other end.

I'm not sure I can tell you the difference, we felt good about last year's class. We feel good about this one. To put it in perspective, 13 years ago, 14 years ago, I don't know if they had a star system there. But we weren't racking up a lot of big numbers there either.

So I think it's just -- there's a fine line. It's a lot of teams. There's a fine line between teams on the field, typically, not always. And then it's all those little things that add up. And I think it's true with recruits, too.

There are a lot of guys with requisite ability. But it's what they do once they take that next step and if you look at the history of our wrestling program here, it's probably a good example.

I go back to the '80s there, just watching how they did things. So it's really how the guys meet the challenge once they get to college and how they embrace all the hard work that's going to

be involved and that's something we talk very openly about with recruits.

But there's a lot of different stories. Akrum Wadley is a good story. We didn't really -- that thing didn't I don't think become real public until recently.

But we've known about him since December. It's like the Mike Daniels. And Frank Verducci, the long-time coach, Andre Tippett's coach. Frank had four guys come out here from high school that ended up being captains here. When he called, that kind of got our attention because I think he really understands what it takes to leave home and be successful. He didn't call us about his ability or anything like that, he called us about the kind of young man he was and that got our interest going there.

So each recruit is a different story, I guess. Some are more obvious than others. And you just hope you're right.

Q. Parker a late addition, or take me through the running back?

COACH FERENTZ: He's another guy we was watching closely probably since December, that week we had before the holidays. And so he's been on our radar and just kind of waited a little bit to get involved.

Q. Not your prototypical running back. Not Mark Weisman, do you see an evolution there in your offense, I know you were talking about --

COACH FERENTZ: Just flip it around. Recently you've got Weisman, who is a big guy. Shonn Greene. Certainly Marcus was, and 10 years ago we had a lot of success with a guy that wasn't very big, Fred Russell. Probably 180 when we recruited him.

And I would argue that or suggest, I won't argue, I'd suggest that Jonathan's got a lot better ball skills, no offense to Fred, but his best thing was running the football.

So we feel like we have some strong physical backs and LeShun Daniels certainly fits that bill. And Jonathan and Akrum are both a little bit different type backs.

And I think more the Damon Bullock type guys, so we feel like one of our issues last year we had a hard time having two backs healthy in any game, certainly and we never got to play with Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock for a full game.

Sometimes that's the way it goes. We had plays designed for them but we never got to use them.

Q. In your opinion is there a lot that separates a three, four, and a five star recruit?

COACH FERENTZ: I would suggest this, I think evaluations are really subjective. And I don't want to say we're professionals at it, but we spent a fair amount of time at it.

I just cite you, every time I watch NFL games I'm fascinated because they're professionals, that's what they do. They have a lot more access than any of us have to prospects when it comes to drafting. It's really amazing, if you look at it, Kaepernick who played on Sunday, had one offer I think he was 180-pound quarterback when he went to Nevada.

As far as I know that was the only Division I offer he had. He's pretty good. RG3 had no Big 12 offers. And then Coach Briles took a job from Houston to go to Baylor. A lot of experts missed that one. Ended up being a pretty good player, and J.J. Watts was the defensive player of the year. We know his story, started at Central Michigan and transferred over. It wasn't like it was an instant success story. You look at the playoffs and Jonathan Babineaux we got because Carl Jackson had him in high school. He wasn't very heralded. His brother played in the NFL.

He wasn't very heralded. In the Super Bowl the other day you have Yanda who recruited us basically. Considine walked on here. And, by the way, just really happy for those two guys, and Jim Caldwell. That's a great deal.

But there's just, I'm not saying they make mistakes in the NFL, but Kaepernick went in the second round so a lot of teams passed one up there.

And, again, it's nobody's fault. It's just the way it is. And there's those players, I'll never forget watching Jonathan Ogden on film when we didn't think we were going to get him. We had the fourth pick.

Those are no brainers. It's not like you've got to really be a sharp football guy to figure that out.

There's a lot of players like that but we don't get access to as many of those. It's nice when you do but we don't get as much access to those guys.

Q. In a bigger picture way, if anything is changed, maybe it hasn't, but over the last couple of years, are any of these areas more

challenging than they've been before either recruiting and landing the guys you want or developing them while they're here or retaining them through their senior -- have any of those things been a bigger challenge than another?

COACH FERENTZ: Retention is always the biggest thing. I think once we get players here, it's hard to develop. It's hard to maximize your potential, if you're not here for the whole four or five years, depending on what your career path is.

So you got a guy like Micah Hyde, you like to think he's better now than he was four years ago. I think he certainly worked hard and did all the things he'll graduate here this spring, 12 hours right now. And that's what you're looking for.

And I think most of our guys, the idea is for them to be playing their best in their third, fourth, fifth year in some cases on campus. The other thing is distance is always a factor. I think with the new rules and speed of recruiting, the way it is now, official visits are almost -- it's kind of like today's signing days. Not the most dramatic day in the world for everybody. Just because a lot of the news has already been out. And official visits really, that was a relevant thing 10 years ago.

But we have 56 visits we're allowed right now. It would be hard to fill 56 official visits mainly because so much of the recruiting is done by the summertime.

At some point imagine the NCAA might adjust that a little bit and adjust their thinking just based on what's going on. But to that point, for a guy to travel distance to a place like this, it makes it a little bit more challenging.

Q. You're pretty pumped for the new recruiting rules, total open --

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure I understand them totally. In fact, I'll get educated -- we have a meeting on Monday. I'll get educated at the Big Ten meetings.

But there's some curious things in there. We'll just have to see how they all go. How it all shakes out. I'm not sure it's the final edition but we'll see.

Q. Do you see yourself offering sophomores? You're going to have to communicate with them?

COACH FERENTZ: I can see that happening. To the point early like Ogden I probably would have offered him as a sophomore,

I'm guessing. I didn't see his high school film but he's the kind of guy you would probably offer and watch him go somewhere else.

Again, the obvious guys, they always wonder, too, about like some guys hit puberty a little sooner than others, those kinds of things. In the perfect world I'd like to evaluate guys after they've played an entire high school career. But that's not going to happen anymore.

Q. Can you talk about the recruitment of Reggie Spearman and kind of the twist and turns and you end up with him?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know how many twists and turns there were. But we got on him kind of late. He came out here I believe in November. I think it was November -- you know the stuff better than I do -- and Eric Johnson had gone in on a Friday. I can't remember where we were traveling. But he went in, did some research on Reggie and the school.

And found out more information. We liked him on film. So after that I mean we were intent on trying to recruit him at that point. And the whole process, I think, went pretty well.

And we had a pretty good feel about things. You're never quite sure until signing day but we had a good feel about things for a while with him. And we're excited to get him.

Q. You pulled from 10 to 12 different states, is that just coincidence or is that something that you guys try to expand the map in a sense?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. We pretty much recruit Big Ten areas. And then we hit Texas, which is no longer a Big Ten area necessarily. But players will leave there.

So it's pretty much Big Ten-related I guess. And with the Big Ten expansion, the areas expand a little bit, too. But predominantly it's interesting. I guess the closest recruit, Derrick Willies, actually lives in Illinois. That's kind of ironic, that's one fun fact that was interesting.

I don't think things are dramatically different. And we'll talk about that next week as a staff and just see if we want to reshape things. But I think we're pretty comfortable where we're at right now.

Q. Realizing it's only February 6, how much do you feel like you'll lean on this class to help you in the fall?

COACH FERENTZ: Time will tell. Certainly Damond Powell is a guy that we recruited, junior college player, we don't do a lot of that. So we hope he'll be able to come in and help us. And I think he's excited about that opportunity certainly.

The fact that we hit the receiver and running back position, that's an area where we were short this year. We could have used more help. So I think there's an opportunity there. And then after that, you never know on defense, not so much in line, I don't think, the linebacker. And secondary positions, we'll have some competition going there. Those are positions where guys have played and our linebacker situation is unique, we have three senior starters next year.

So we have to get some guys ready. We have to have the next wave ready. So I think that opens the door for those guys as well.

Q. I imagine you don't take too much into the star rankings. So do you take pride in taking those lower star groups and turning them into good players?

COACH FERENTZ: It's fun to see any guy do well during his career. No matter how he comes in. And when you talk about stars, I don't know how many stars Tony Moeaki had, but nobody came in, I don't think -- how many? Seven. He might have. I'd give him seven.

When he came in, again put it in NFL terms, if you get the right number one draft pick, when they come to the mini camp, it's like I think we got that one right.

And some guys are just they do things with a lot of ease. I don't mean to minimize the effort they're putting in there, or downplay it. But Tony ascended to whatever level of group he was working with.

That's rare. But nobody worked harder than Tony. Nobody had a better attitude. All those things are important to a good football team. Tony embodied those.

So that's why he was such a good player here. But he's one of those guys that came in and Bryan Bulaga might be a tad below that or in that category. The guy played the offensive line as a true freshman, that's pretty unusual, too. Those guys were kind of like in a different realm.

But you like to watch anybody have success. And I was really happy for those guys that did, and then conversely I mentioned Micah.

Micah was not a big recruit but ends up being the defensive back of the year in the Big Ten. Real tribute to his hard work, and just all the things he's done throughout his career and again that's the neat thing about coaching. Be it recruiting once the players get here every guy is a different story and the fun part about recruiting is learning more about those stories, having a chance to meet their families, going to their schools and just learning a bit more about the background and a lot of different lifestyles and what have you. It's kind of fun to watch it all come together.

Q. In a typical recruit, let's say he's maybe the average two, three star, how many conversations do you all get to have with them in the typical process? And what can you glean from that? How much can you judge about a kid's character?

COACH FERENTZ: That's the hardest part about the early committing and not having official contact with guys. I don't know how you slow it down. But the analogy I make it's like mail order recruiting, or where Internet recruiting, I guess where you order something, you open the box later on and geez I thought it looked different on that picture.

So that's the downside and again going back to the distance, the challenge is most of the guys are committed by August. I would estimate they've been here at least three times. I think that's a fair number. So I think they got to know us and we got to know them. And it's really important they get to know us. I think that's really important. It's great when they can watch us practice so they have an idea, sit in the meeting rooms with our guys and learn how we coach, how we do things, and just really know the ins and outs, and again as I started out, spending the time with our players.

Our players are pretty candid with them. You want it to be a good fit for everybody. It's not a good deal if somebody shows up and they're here for two weeks and they're just not happy. Hey, this isn't what I thought I was getting. It's a two-way street. I think both of us want that. That's what you hope. You just hope nobody makes a decision on a 30-minute visit or call at home or something like that. That happens occasionally. That's a little scary.

Q. Willies is a kid that committed early. What did you folks see in him?

COACH FERENTZ: His story is a pretty good one or interesting one. He's been traveled

and well traveled and all that. I had an image of him before I met him, boy this guy has been here and here. And I'll never forget the first time he came to our offices how impressed all of us were with him.

To watch him interact with Nick and Cassie and his family, it's very impressive. He's a really humble young guy. He's got a great attitude. He came to camp after that. We had already made our minds up but he came to camp and did a nice job there, too, and had a good demeanor out there on the field.

So he's a tremendous young guy. And our home visit, you know, I thought maybe he was trying to fake me out but he was looking at some of his class work stuff during the visit. That's how exciting our talks are, when we talk to these guys, he turned out a nice grade point average this last semester. Great attitude, tremendous young guy. I think he's really appreciative of the opportunities he's been presented with and I think what's in front of him.

Q. Expenses in the last year, did you budget for an increase or is that how it worked out?

COACH FERENTZ: I have no idea about any of that, quite frankly. And we tried to do what we have to do. I don't know where it ranks with other teams, but it's not getting any cheaper, obviously. And I would imagine it's a big expense for everybody right now. And it's probably a bigger challenge when you have to travel more to get to prospects.

Q. I think with the new rules, you're already going to have to have, I think the rules have changed where you can have sort of a recruiting staff. Is that something you kick around or is that something you have considered yet?

COACH FERENTZ: Again we'll probably learn a little more at the Big Ten meetings. I think I have a sense. I've kind of heard some of the whispers about what was going on with all this stuff. I understand some things are hard to regulate and some things are really hard to police. So I guess that's probably the intent there.

My fear in simplistic terms would be that I hate to see college football or college athletics become Major League Baseball, with all respect to Major League Baseball, but the Yankees, they

start in the inside lane every year.

They've got the biggest payroll. And so they get to start on the inside lane. There are a couple other teams that have that luxury. And I grew up in Pittsburgh where the Pirates haven't been to the playoffs, haven't had a winning season since '92, I think. But it almost seems like maybe we're trying to force that.

The best pro league going is the National Football League, from my seat. And there is parity in that league. There's competitive balance, and I think that's important. I think that's one of the great things about the Big Ten. Everybody lines up in August with a chance to win it. History has proven that. Going back to 1981. It's been proven. So to me that's good for fan interest. That's good for the league. I think it's good for everybody.

How you get your hands around that, that's a little tougher equation. I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about it. But to me in the ideal world that's what you want. And you want all teams participating to be governed by the same body, I think.

So there's a level field as much as you can. I'm not sure that's exactly the way it is right now in college football. But at least it's not like we may be heading that way. I'm not worldly enough to know that. But I think the potential for that is certainly there.

Q. Timeframe for receivers coach to be in place?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm hoping somewhere here in the next 10 to 14 days we'll be able to talk about that and also just talk about spring football. Get back to that and we're anxious to get back with our players here and get face to face with them a little bit.

Q. Roster changes or anything?

COACH FERENTZ: Nothing major right now. We've kicked a couple things around. But I think another 10 days, 14 days we'll get together and talk about all that stuff and give you an update on that.

Q. Any other coaching --

COACH FERENTZ: Not now. We're just moving forward here and we'll see what the next couple of weeks bring.

Q. New receiver coach in-house or looking elsewhere?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll do what's best for the team. And I've given it a lot of thought, certainly. And we've been busy with recruiting. Now we'll return our attention to that. Hopefully 10, 14 days we'll be able to have everybody in the right seats and go forward.

Q. On a day like this, there's a lot of talk about a group of people who have a lot of unknowns. But looking back maybe one class, you know a lot more about them. You've been around them now. What can you expect in terms of contributions a class ago that maybe you didn't know on signing day a year ago?

COACH FERENTZ: I think collectively, two things have happened. We've had a full fall to watch them practice. Unfortunately, I guess, we always take a couple of days and go through our entire roster as a staff and just talk about everybody.

Typically we'd be doing that next week. We got to do that before the holidays. We got a little jump on that. I think we feel good about just the way those guys embraced the challenge. This is a second year in a row that our first-year guys have really performed well academically.

And last year's group did it two semesters, not just one, but this group did a really nice job in their first semester. So those are a little indicators. You watch them practice. The attitude they bring there, just, are they on time for everything, all those little things that you hope to see and a lot of times that might take a little training or reinforcement.

But they came out of the gate pretty well and did a pretty nice job in the classroom collectively. So it's going to be fun to get out there on the field with them in March and mainly April and watch how they can fill in there.

And we certainly have some needs. And I think it's going to be fun to see what happens with some of these guys.

Q. Bumped into Brandon coming in. He looked okay. Is everybody okay to go for spring?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the two major things we had to deal with certainly were Brandon and Andrew. And Andrew's probably a little bit behind from what I'm hearing, behind Brandon. But both of them had significant injuries. But we

have no reason to think they won't be full speed. I tease about it but I think Scherff, he probably would have played the last couple of games if they could have put some cleats on his boot because he's getting around pretty good in that thing. Great attitude. And Andrew the same way.

So it's a tough thing, obviously. But we're going well there. Louis Trinca-Pasat did have a surgery, a repair they had to do on his shoulder. He'll miss this spring but he'll be fine. Outside of that I think we're in pretty good shape. And that's again kind of I don't want to minimize it, but he'll be back 100 percent when that's over.

Q. Coach, you haven't had a ton of coaching staff turnovers, was there kind of a -- can you enlighten us as to Coach Campbell, did he just want to go somewhere else?

COACH FERENTZ: I made a statement the other day. I'll leave it at that right now and maybe 10 days, 14 days from now we can talk about that. But let's leave it at that at this point.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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