

September 17, 2013



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just welcome, everybody. Captains this week are the same four guys, James Morris, Christian Kirksey defensively, Brett Van Sloten, Mark Weisman on the offensive side. Happy to get the win and do it on the road. So a couple good things there. And moving into this game, I think we're pretty healthy and look forward to another challenge.

It's good to be back, certainly, and we have a lot of things to work on, so we'll start that off today.

Q. Any update on what happened after the game? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. Other than sounds like everything's being worked on right now. And things will be replaced, but it's, as you might imagine.

Q. Did you have anything like that happen in your career before? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: Not on away trips that I'm aware of. But if we have, I've forgotten about it, and I'm not aware of that.

Q. What does Iowa do to make sure this doesn't happen at home? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I'm not exactly sure. I think we have really good security, and we were told that was the case there. So it's just one of those unfortunate things. I don't think it's anything. It's just one of those things that happens occasionally.

Q. I wonder if you could talk a little about what you're seeing? (Luke Meredith, Associated Press)

COACH FERENTZ: I've said the last couple of weeks. I think they're growing every week. Alvis has given us good leadership up there as a senior. I think the whole group is working hard and doing some good things. But, overall, we played really good defense with the exception of one play. Three and a half quarters and then just fell apart there. So got to regroup and see if we can't do that for 60 minutes.

But the guys are doing some good things. Along with that, we're getting good linebacker play, and our safeties are supporting well too when they're called upon.

Q. Watching the tape of that game and watching Mark, he got hit two, three, four times. When you watch that film do you wince a little bit or is that just power football and you appreciate what he does? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: That's just his style. That's the kind of back he is. Not the same as Sean Green, but probably similar. They're both physical players. So he's going to get hit, and I think he knows that. But, fortunately, for us he really takes pretty good care of himself and that helps at least.

Q. Bullock seemed to have his best game of the year so far. Is that a change of pace or is that a way of giving him a blow? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We still feel that Damon's the starter for us, I would agree with your assessment. I think that was his best performance this year. That was encouraging. I thought he practiced well last week and picked it up a step. So we view Damon as a starter as well. He's a good football player.

Then Jordan, as I've said, I thought he really came back quicker than we anticipated last fall. Really had a good spring and a good camp. I think it will help us to get him more involved. The question is where do you define those times and all that type of thing? So we'll have that discussion probably every week.

But all three of those guys, I think, have earned our trust. And we feel good about LeShun as well. As the season goes, we've got a lot of football left, so we'll need all four of those guys.

Q. Where is Weisman now as opposed to when he broke in as a running back about this time last year? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: He's just a better football player. As you might imagine, more in tune with everything, better feel. I think he has improved as a runner, and that is something that he worked hard on in the spring also during the camp portion of things. He's still a physical, fullback type runner, if you will. He's just got better feel back there. It's part of that experience.

Kind of flip it around, it's a little like Hitchens. Hitchens is making, I assume, about the same amount of tackles per game, but he's making them in a better way, closer to the line, that type of thing.

So that comes with playing, and Mark last year just kind of an experiment whatever week that was, week three or four. I can't remember what it was. But it just kind of blossomed into something good for us. You see it further down the road. But he works extremely hard. Same thing about Hitch on defense, same thing.

Q. Is Tevaun Smith making the strides you hoped, and what has he shown here in these first games? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

COACH FERENTZ: He's done a good job. He's practicing well. He's not there yet, but he's a young guy that works hard. We felt good about him last year, so some really good things. It's a matter of becoming more consistent and we saw him do some really good things. It's a matter of him becoming more consistent and just growing.

Q. Martin-Manley has become a very reliable receiver. How has he developed and gotten to that point? Seems like he's comfortable with Jake Rudock? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)



visit our archives at asapsports.com

COACH FERENTZ: It's kind of the same discussion as we're having with Mark and Hitch. We needed Kevonte to be the leader of that group because we're so inexperienced out there. I think he's grabbed that. You know, a big part of being a good player is knowing who you are and what you are and playing to that end. I think he's doing a good job of that. It's good to see some runs after that catch the other day. That was a real positive, be it him or Jake Hillyer same way. Those kind of things are good for us. But Kevonte works hard every day. He does a good job with the younger group and he's been a good role model for them.

Q. Nine passing plays of 20-plus yards in the first three games, is there a common element to that? Is it communication, technique? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: I just think we're probably a little further down the road. I felt like that coming into this season. But you never know until you're still playing. The good news is I think we can get a lot better. But be it design, be it the execution, all those things kind of go into it. You know, we had a new quarterback, so you didn't know how that was going to go either, but I think he's doing a lot of good things for us. So hopefully we'll keep improving. The thing I'm probably most excited about is we can still play a lot better. We're going to have to. We understand that. It's a process, too. We're not a team that can waste a day. If we do, it's going to probably show up.

Q. With the blitz on the last touchdown that Iowa State threw, B.J. Lowery not securing the tackle. It's all individual mistakes. Nothing you could say that's a common element to it? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think so. Each one is an individual story, if you will. Sometimes it's a team thing, sometimes an individual breakdown, what have you. But those are the things we'll have to get better at. We did a lot of good things too.

Q. You mentioned in the beginning there was a lot to work on. This week when you guys practiced, what is at the top of that list in your mind? What are the things moving ahead? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: First thing that comes

to mind for me would be practicing cleaner. I think we're practicing hard. I think we're doing that. Last week it felt like we were in Phoenix on Tuesday and started out that way. Wednesday was more like the Midwest or the Gulf. It was kind of humid. Then all of a sudden, we had a shower, so we got to do a wet-ball drill finally, which was good, because it was a distraction.

But, overall, I thought the effort was there and the guys were trying. It's not that they weren't trying. We just have to practice a little bit cleaner and then hopefully our execution will show up a little better on Saturdays. Saturday is, I think, a little bit cleaner play, practice, I mean.

Q. You weren't talking about specific units? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: No, just in general, as a team in general.

Q. I know you guys probably ask yourselves or the question has been asked about how much or how long can Mark keep this up, the whole 30 carries a game type of thing. How did he answer that? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know the answer, and I haven't taken time to look. John McKay's quote comes to mind, "The ball's not that heavy." Or Cappelletti, you go back to those days. But the bottom line is, and I haven't gone back to look, maybe you have, how many Sean Green had per game average. It was probably pretty significant. But the thing, again, and I said this a couple weeks ago, I think we have four backs -- three at least that we felt pretty good about. Canzeri proved he was tough in the Bowl game a couple years ago. Now, I think we all feel better about LeShun after seeing him out there in a game.

So I think it's really important that we utilize the whole group and really bring them along so Mark can be at his best the whole season. I think Mark has proven himself to be a really good player. He brings a real energy to our football team, but I think the other guys are good players too. We've just got to get them integrated in there a little bit.

Q. Do you have a sense that the offensive line really loves the fact that you're giving them these opportunities running 6 times a game, 20 times with Mark. (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: Traditionally lines tend to like that. They like the challenge of running the football. They like that a little bit. I think they like going forward. So that's a good thing. We're not letting them coach the team either, you know, but if it works -- anything that works, we're going to keep doing it. I think you know that.

Q. As Kevonte settles in and being Mr. Reliable, how do you go about developing that second guy? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We're working on that. That's if the other guys are -- the tight end position is involved in that. So for us to be good offensively, we need everybody kind of being involved and being dependable when the ball comes their way type of thing. It starts with getting open. They've got to be able to get open and what have you. So it's all important.

Q. Going back to the way last season ended and then this year, your first win this year was a little disappointing in some regards. How much of a bounce do you think you feel you get from that win Saturday? You've got another trophy upstairs. Maybe everybody has a bounce in their step again for the first time in a while. (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We've pretty much put that one behind us. Some sooner than others. But not that -- you know, John Fox I think said it pretty well that there's a scar there but the wound is healed. I think he made that comment somewhere in the summer about their ending to their season. That's probably a pretty good way to put it. So you're aware of what happens. You certainly try to learn from it.

But this is a whole different team. You know, we all felt like we have a chance to have a good team. We still feel that way. We're not there yet. Right now, no matter how you look at it, you can say, hey, we have a lot to work on, which we do. The other side of the coin too is we're three points away from being -- or four points away from being undefeated right now.

So there are a lot of positives going on, we've just got to keep working on the things that are holding us back. Then there are some things we have to push forward here a little bit more.

But the guys are working hard and winning on the road in a tough environment, which we all

knew it was going to be tough. We knew winning on the road is tough. History has proven that. Those are positive things that we can grab on to and feel good about. There are certain parts about the game, like every game, we can do a little better in the future in this situation that situation. So the real challenge is going to be what do we learn from those situations and point to the good ones. Hey, we did some really good things here, and those things will help us win in the future if we can keep an edge there.

But a big part of Sunday is, hey, what are these three or four things that we could have done better that might have made it an even better game for us?

Q. Do you take a breath and say it's good to win a game like that again? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I enjoy winning any game. I think I speak for a everybody on our staff and everybody on our team. It's just a good feeling. The flip is true too. I guess those are the highs and lows of what we do. They're pretty intense for coaches and players. I can tell you from experience, that bus ride is either really good or really bad. There is no in-betweens, really no in-betweens.

Q. Speaking of highs and lows for coaches, what do you think about the situation with Bo Pelini, and how do you personally handle that? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I'm on the periphery of that one. I got asked on the teleconference was that a place I've been to? And it's pretty much what I tell our players and explain to them. They really need to assume they're being recorded or taped or both pretty much any time they're anywhere other than a closet maybe. So that's kind of the deal there.

My wife probably gets my vents. She's the recipient, and that is probably risky too because that's about a 50-50 shot of me being in good standing there, and I'm exaggerating the 50 part for me. Usually I'm way behind in the count there.

Q. I know you strive for balance on offense and you had to improvise in '04, but it seems like mostly power running has been the main staple throughout your run here. How much of that is you and how much is the

personnel you bring in here? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I just think historically, and I know there are exceptions to this, BYU comes to mind. I'm going back to the '80s, they had some great teams. But, historically, if you can't run the ball pretty much at any level at some point it's going to catch up to you. I know that's changed a little bit. But I think conversely, too, if you can't pass it effectively, you're going to be in trouble too, unless you're an option team.

Some actions are true, it helps if you can run, and if you can't stop the run, it's going to be a tough game and a tough season. It's just really hard to play football if you can't do both of those things, run it and stop the run. I think over the long haul, that really proves to be true. That is kind of a starting point. But '04 being a great example. We couldn't move the ball ten yards in the course of the game. So when that happens, you've just got to find other ways. Or, if you just want to go wholesale and flip it every play, there are people that do that.

Q. Is it hard to resist all of these things that you see going on around you or do you just stick to what you believe in? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: I think you try to be open to as many things as possible that are good for where you're at and you go from there. But I've said this many times, we've only had two championship games in our conference. And a quote unquote "conventional" running team. And I think I'm correct in saying Oregon lost one game last year. And ironically they lost to a team that played good defense and ran the ball and was patient enough.

It really comes down to what fits where you're at and what you believe in and trying to be as good at that as possible. Sometimes you get caught in a season like '04 where they're good at plan B and C. But it still goes down to the players did a great job that year of taking what we had in our hand and doing a good job with it.

Q. What are the actions you made to the tempo? In the first couple of games you went really fast, snapping the ball with 19, 18 seconds left on the play clock. Then last week you went back to taking most of the time off. Do you like the fact that right now you're able

to do both? Will you apply it in the future depending on the situation? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: I think the staff sold me on that last year during the winter time, the value of it. Like I said before, I think I questioned it after four days of spring ball. It was hard to watch. I think the upside, and the benefit there is it's been good for our defense because they see so much of it. So to practice against it, I think that's helpful. The other thing I liked about the fact that if we could do it with some fair level of execution, at least we'd have an option of playing the way we want to play during the course of the game.

It's tough to decide you want to go fast if you haven't been working on it. You can always slow things down. So I think there are some real positives there.

Q. What have you seen on tape from Western Michigan that's made them so susceptible to the run this year? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's a little skewed. Their middle game was just kind of one of those games where I don't know if there's an explanation for it. They probably burned that tape and kept moving on as one of those deals. But they made it tough for their first opponent to run the football. Then last week you're playing an option team that is so dissimilar, their style of attack is so dissimilar to ours that it's kind of a little bit of a tough preparation for us right now. We're looking at the tapes trying to measure up with what they'll do against us because we look a little different than the teams they've played.

Q. When you see Akron and they almost beat Michigan and Northern Illinois, how did the MAC start closing that gap? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Believe it or not, they played really good football. I've been saying that for a while. There are a lot of really good players in the MAC. I'll go back to when I got here. If you compared the quarterbacks from '99 to 2005, if you compared their quarterbacks to ours, I think you'd find out they had better pro guys than we did, which is at least my observation without doing a study on it. But they've had some really good players, Super Bowl a couple years ago when Green Bay played Pittsburgh I think it was. I can't remember how many MAC players were in that Super Bowl. So they played great football.

...when all is said, we're done.®

ASAPsports

visit our archives at asapsports.com

I still think Northern Illinois is a really good football team. We said that a year ago and still say it. It's just kind of the nature of that conference. They've had a lot of good guys. I think that when these guys beat us in 2000, I think that good rush defensive end linebacker guy, I think he's still playing. So there are a lot of good football players out there.

Q. Lomax going to be back? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

COACH FERENTZ: We think he's got a shot. Hopefully he can practice. It sounds like it's good. Hopefully, we get Fleming back full speed today. So we're planning on them being full speed.

Q. You've played your fullbacks probably more Saturday night than you have maybe in a long time. Is it odd putting a fullback out there who is smaller than your running back? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: I'm glad you brought that up, because I tell you, both those guys are quietly doing a really good job. Adam Cox, it's not the Mark Weisman story, but it's kind of like that. He's some guy that walked on here from Chicago. Really a great kid, young guy. We were never sure he'd be big enough. Talked about trying to plug him in at linebacker or something like that.

But last spring, I mentioned Boffeli and Lowery a lot, but I tell you, he impressed me as much as anybody in the spring just what he did. Whatever he weighs at that given point, he uses it. He's a really great young guy. And Macon's the same way. Macon went from linebacker over to fullback and picked it up, I think, amazingly well.

So very quietly those guys are both doing a good job. We used them more Saturday than we have. But they've earned our confidence.

You know, back in the spring I felt really good about both guys and they're doing a nice job. Macon's doing a little bit more on special teams than Adam. But it gives us a really nice one-two punch, and we know we can count on them.

Q. Do you want them to be fullbacks? Doesn't look like they're involved in that sort of game plan? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Adam's not bad. He ran with the running backs in the spring, and he did

a pretty good job running the ball. Listen, I'm not saying it's the next Mark Weisman story. I'm not going down that street, but he's not bad back there around the football. He's just a great young guy.

Q. I know it's your old territory now, but was Weisman an afterthought when he came to you guys? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's kind of a long story, but Bill Mitz, his high school coach and there is another coach there who knows Chris Doyle really well. But we've had a good relationship with Bill. Bill played at Drake. His daughter worked in our offices, so we had a little bit.

But none of us knew he was going to leave Air Force. It wasn't like there was any master plan. We were just lucky he was interested in coming here. But when he got here, there was no parade or anything like that. He was on the scout team, and guys kind of -- they can lose. He was doing a good job and all that.

But a year ago spring we were wondering if he would really block, would he fit in for what we were trying to get a fullback to do, and we learned really quickly that he would. Fortunately, we kept probing here a little bit. But he's very quiet, as you know. Very quiet, kind of just goes about his business. He's in and out and no fanfare or anything like that. He plays the same way, but, boy, he's all business when he does stuff.

Q. What was the process? Did he go straight to the top? Did he contact you? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: No, it was through Lester. Lester recruits that area, and through Coach Mitz, they talked, and he ended up coming here and he ended up getting noticed. It's funny how good players get noticed. Sometimes it takes a while, but we figure it out.

Q. P.J. Fleck, your first win at Iowa he played for Northern Illinois, was a true freshman. What's it like to coach against the next generation? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, Dave Croston's son is on our team, right? Chuck Hartlieb's son was with us last year. (No Audio) living with my youngest son, so it puts it all in perspective really fast for you. And his best friend was Duane Banks'

grandson, so, yeah. Doesn't mean I'm getting younger, right?

Q. Does that make you the dean of the Big Ten coaches? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't use that word. That's not an appropriate address for a coach. Unless his first name is Dean, and mine's not.

Q. How would you rate Jake's execution of the read option? (Ben Ross, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: Okay. I mean, we're not doing it a lot, so it's okay. It's okay.

Q. Do you think he's a bit more timid to take the ball himself? He seems to be handing it off every time? (Ben Ross, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: There's only one or two where you would say, hey, you could have taken it out here, but that's really not a huge part of who we are or what we are.

Q. Is he still using it though? (Ben Ross, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think he's proven to be pretty nifty with his feet. We feel good about the other two guys too. So we're not going to take it out. Maybe down the road it will blossom a little bit more, but I think it helps us.

Q. Jake has a nose for the end zone when you guys get down in goal and go situations. Are those planned for him to run? Is that an option that he has when he gets down there or is that just how it works? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: It's just how it works. I like the fact that he'll pull the ball down and run with it and make yards. He seems to be aware of where he's at. Got to protect the ball a little bit better and he'll learn that. One thing about him, he's not timid out there. He makes good decisions, I think, for the most part. He's just trying to help us win.

He's not exactly like Mark Weisman, but there are parallels there in terms of the way he does things. He's pretty quiet and very businesslike. But he does it in a way where everybody, I think, especially in his case, he hasn't

played. Whereas, Mark, I think earned that respect last year as soon as he started playing.

I think Jake's very quickly -- not that our guys didn't respect him, I'm not inferring that. But it's hard to really be a leader of a team or one of the leaders if you're not playing. I think after three games right now I think our guys all know what he's about and they really appreciate that he's shown a lot of toughness out there.

Q. I know Damond Powell is still doing some stuff for you. He's running them out there and taking defenders with him. If had you to gauge where he's at and the knowledge of what you guys want to do out there, what would you say? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: He's improving. I don't know what percentage I would put on it, but he's improving. We'll keep working with him. First thing I think about, outside of him being fast, he's a positive energy player. And that is a good thing when guys bring that positive energy out there.

Q. What separates Hitch from Kirksey and Morris? (Cody Goodwin, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: I'm assuming he's made more tackles than the other guys. I'm just guessing. I don't know. I'm not trying to be a smart aleck here.

Q. I mean as a player? (Cody Goodwin, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: The position he plays, and the only reason I'm asking -- or I'm guessing he has made more tackles. I'm just assuming. I know last year he made a million of them. So that position in our defense makes a lot of plays traditionally. I like all three of our backers a lot. I like all of our players, don't get me wrong. All three of those guys are really playing well and giving us leadership. A lot of it is where Hitch is playing. If Kirksey were back there or Morris in that same spot, they'd probably have a lot too.

The thing I'll say about Hitch is he's playing at a lot faster tempo right now than he was a year ago and that's experience. That's where experience can be a good thing for a player. He's got a great attitude. You know, doesn't come off the field. He's just really -- all three of those guys are a delight to have on the team.

Q. James mentioned Saturday night that he was beating himself up a little bit for not

calling or opting out of some blitzes. Is that a new responsibility you've given linebackers? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. James is easily his own worst critic, or maybe not, because I guess I read an article where he gets guff from the fans which I'm glad they're not coaching our team. I can tell you that. But James is really hard on himself, probably too hard. I mean, he's a coach's dream. Great guy.

Q. He has a lot of responsibility? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, what he does is similar to being a quarterback or a center, and our safeties, Tanner has brought us a lot of stuff back there too. But I'd say quarterback, middle linebacker has as much on his plate as anybody.

I don't mean this in disrespect to anybody on our staff, including myself, but he's like way smarter than any of us, I know that. Other than Jim Reid, Jim was a Rhodes Scholar at Maine. I'm joking, he did go to Maine.

Q. He can wave it off if he feels like it? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: No, not wave it off, but there are options. They've got to be able to process what's in front of them and make it fit. So it's not always just, you know, not as simple as Norm made it sound.

Q. Do you have any thoughts on, it looks like A.J. Derby might start at Arkansas, just that he's created kind of a second football life for himself there? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know what's going on down there, but I'm happy that he's doing well. They're a great family. It didn't work out here. We're all sorry about that, but I hope he does well. If he gets in there, I hope it goes well for him.

Q. You got a lot of yards up the middle. Is that a testimony that maybe Austin Blythe's playing some good football right now? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: They're gaining ground. We're not there yet, but we're doing some good things. Blythe played last year, but he missed a lot last year too. So he's still pretty

young. This is Jordan Walsh's first time to really be in there and he got thrown in a little bit last year and same thing with Connor. So those three guys are making progress.

Andrew Donnal is rotating in there as well. And we were cutting on Scherff and Van Sloten to be the guys holding the Fort there. Both those guys are good leaders, different personalities but really good leaders. So I think Brett and Brandon are doing a nice job. It's coming together, but we still have a lot of things we can get better at there too.

Q. Did you anticipate that Jake could play with this kind of efficiency and poise? He threw away a couple of balls. (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: We were hopeful, and as I said back in August, you just never know until the games start actually getting underway. You don't know what a guy's going to do. He hasn't been perfect by any stretch, but he's really doing a lot of good things. His poise and just awareness, I think, is really pretty good. He kind of gets it. He was slowing down the clock himself the other night without us really on that one drive.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports