

September 24, 2013



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Obviously look forward to getting going this week. Our captains again are the same four guys. We've got James Morris, Chris Kirksey on the defensive side, Brett Van Sloten and Mark Weisman offensively. Certainly pleased for both Kevonte and B.J. being recognized this past weekend. That was a nice feat for those guys. Obviously happy with the win.

That's all behind us now and we open up Big Ten play, travel up to play Minnesota who's got a very good football team and do it on the road, so we'll get to work this afternoon and see if we can get ready for it.

Q. Maybe some people were wondering about this team going into the season where the big players are going to come from. It seems like when you look back to Kevonte last week and what B.J. has done and certainly Damon Powell has made a few plays like that, it seems like you do have some big play capability. (Luke Meredith, AP)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Damon kind of the exception, but I'd add Tanner Miller with a couple interceptions, Chris Kirksey that first game. For us to have a good football team, our best guys have to step forward, our most experienced guys, and outside of Damon I think those other guys certainly fit that bill. And for us to move forward we're going to need that same kind of production from our veteran guys.

Q. In some ways does Saturday's game feel like an old-school football game? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's probably a fair way to describe it. They're really a physical

football team, similar to last year, but they're a little bit different obviously with the quarterback situation now, and then they are running the ball really well.

It's amazing in some ways because their starting quarterback, at least the guy they started the season with, didn't play the last game and a half, and their best running back, a guy that we had a lot of respect for a year ago, hasn't played very much, either. They've got two other guys that have stepped up and done a great job. They're playing really well. They're playing well on defense, too, so it should be interesting that way.

Q. Do you like where your lines are going into this game? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We're gaining ground, but this will be a big test for us. They're big and physical offensively. I think they're over 310 average, and we're hardly that kind of size, so it's going to be a real test for us.

Q. Do you ever have a vibe or a feel for how your team is coming along at this point or do you need Big Ten competition to know? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: It's week to week. It's week to week, and you never know what the Big Ten is going to be like, either. That's something I tried to emphasize to our team in August, the way things look in August or July or June, and everybody is prognosticating and guessing. You just never know what it's going to look like when you get to September, October, November.

It's all week to week, and I just know this: Minnesota looks like they have a really good football team. They've been playing well all four of their games. Yeah, they've got some real strengths.

Q. When you look back to your two games in TCF Bank stadium, the team hasn't

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played exceptionally well in either one. Any reason for that? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, part of that is a credit to them, but part of the blame lies at our feet, too. If we play like we did the last two times, we're not going to win the game. I'll make that prediction right now. I don't know where they're going to be. My guess is they're going to be ready to go and they've playing well, and my guess is they'll be ready to go doing the same thing this week.

Certainly we're going to have to be a lot more ready than we were the last two trips up there.

Q. Are they different with Leidner at quarterback? (Tom Kakert, Hawkeye Report)

COACH FERENTZ: Not dramatically. They're a little different. No. 9 is not as big as Leidner, but he might be a hair quicker. I don't know, but they're both very similar. They're both very capable passers and they're good runners and tough runners. You have to respect both with both guys.

Q. Kill and his staff have been together since the dawn of time. They can draw on a huge batch of experience. (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, to me it's a little bit like when Randy Walker went to Northwestern; pretty much his staff went with him, and when I came here, our staff came from nine different places. I think it makes the transition and just the whole transition a lot faster and smoother. There's some real advantages to that. We didn't have that luxury when we came here 15 years ago. But he certainly has, and the other -- most important part about it is they've been successful everywhere they've been. Every stop they've made they've been well coached, and you can see that in their football team right now. The record is the same as last year, but they're a much different team. They're much better.

Q. Going into league play it looks like anybody could come out of this division. Do you like where your team sits going in? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and I'd agree, and I'd take it a step further. That's what it looks like right now, but things are going to look different in November. The key is to take care of business week to week. You know, it's so early to try to

predict, so you just -- that's the thing about college football and we talked about that a couple weeks ago, every game is so important because you only get 12 cracks, and now certainly being in conference play/divisional play, that amps it up even more.

Every game really is important on your résumé, unlike some other sports. It's the nature of the beast when you only play 12.

Q. When you come into a season, do you think some teams are above the others? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: No, you guys do that. I don't do that, other than Ohio State. Ohio State, I'm 24 years in the league, they've been pretty good, and the nine I was away they were pretty good. You go back to Paul Brown, so pre-Paul Brown they've been pretty good. Outside of that, there's always obvious suspects, but that's the fun part about football and sports, you just never know who's going to do well.

Q. Everyone has growth. Do you ever remember a time when there was such balance?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, yeah, generally since '81 the league has been that way. I think our conference has, the Big Ten conference. Some years it goes very predictably, other years not so predictably, but it was predictable -- I know this, the 13 years prior to '81 it was very predictable who was going to win, and since that time you've never known. At least there's been some mystery involved in it.

Whether or not this year turns out that way or not, we'll see. We've got a lot of games to play.

Q. What are your feelings about your team's special teams play so far? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we're moving forward, and that was one of the good things about Saturday beyond the returns. That's obvious, that part. But the best part about the returns, Kevonte's effort was good, but the best part to me was the 10 guys away from the ball were doing a good job. And then there were a lot of the things I think subtly that took place on special teams that were encouraging. We're not there yet, but at least we're I think starting to make some strides. That was a concern a couple weeks

ago, a big concern.

Q. Is there some ownership being taken by younger players on special teams? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: If we're going to be good, we need that. We need guys embracing that, otherwise we're going to wear our other guys out. If we have to do that, we'll do that. Minnesota does a really nice job on special teams to that point, too. But yeah, you like to get other guys involved, and guys have to embrace that and then they've got to go out and do the job with it.

Q. You've changed special teams coaches. Has there been any significant change to the way you go about coaching them? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a different approach, different -- it's kind of like offense and defense. For the most part I try to let the coordinators coordinate, and it's pretty much been that way for 14 years prior.

That part is the same. Yeah, Chris has a little different approach to things, but we're in a developmental stage, kind of the whole football team.

Q. The design that you had on punt returner with Riley in the back. Is that something you plan to use going forward? (Brendan Stile, Hawkeyedrive.com)

COACH FERENTZ: It depends on who we're playing, if we're worried about the ball hitting the ground we'll implement that. So it might be a situation or it might be if you play a rugby punt type team, that type of deal, but yeah, the whole idea is to keep the ball from hitting the ground.

Q. Coach Kill said it's an old-fashioned game this Saturday. He thinks that's good for football. Just from a personal standpoint how do you feel about playing a game like this?

COACH FERENTZ: Just depends on the week. Different games come up, different styles of play. In some ways it's interesting there's more -- I don't know, I haven't done a study on it, but it seems like you're seeing more teams using the quarterback as a runner, at least we're seeing that. I'm thinking about the Northwestern-Western Michigan film we had a couple weeks ago.

You know, it's like anything how things rotate and cycle around. But the great thing about college football I think is you kind of face

everything as coaches. You face everything. And for fans, they see a little bit of everything during the course of a season. This week it's a different style.

Q. Coach Kill talked about how his staff is a support group, including some of his health issues. How important is that for a staff to pick up the slack for another guy? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we've been down a similar path maybe with you think about Norm's health issues over the years. But when you work in close quarters, I think that's one of the things about athletics, most of us involved in it probably enjoy, be it coaches, players. There's a bond that goes beyond like what you do, just what you do. There has to be because you spend so many hours together, especially with the coaching staff.

I think most of us probably spend a lot more time together than we do with our wives or our families, which is probably true in a lot of professions, but this might go a couple notches beyond. And you go through the highs and lows. I'm not surprised they have great camaraderie, especially his staff has been together for so long, I would think that would be a real natural thing. I guess they all do a great job when something happens to anybody involved.

Q. What kind of personality does B.J. have? (KCCI-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: B.J. Lowery? Interesting, actually. He's a really delightful young guy.

Q. What about him is so interesting? (KCCI-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: He plays Monopoly. How's that? Every now and then you know some trivia, right? He's got his own little Monopoly set. Put that one in the Hawkeye trivia bank. That's a good one. I was shocked. Nobody plays Monopoly. Nobody plays board games anymore. He does. Makes him a dinosaur, doesn't it?

Q. How well has he played for you so far this season? (KCCI-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: He's done a really good job. He's one of the guys that comes to mind, for me, of guys that really had outstanding springs. Boffeli is another guy. Connor did a really

good job last spring. I think our linebackers really practiced well. I've said that before, but I thought BJ really was just going hard on defense and then going really hard, and we spent a lot of time on that special teams work, and he's truly a leader there and does a great job on our special teams.

You know, he's really embraced being an older guy.

Q. I think he's one and only from Cincinnati. How did that happen? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I'm not sure, other than Phil gets his eye on a guy, and when he does, it seems to be the guy he ends up with. That's always kind of a strange convoluted path it seems like. But Micah Hyde was the year before, and then B.J. was the next year. So he just kind of identified B.J., and next thing you know B.J. was here. That was it.

Q. What do you think will help from last Saturday when you could use the second stringers, the third stringers to get them playing time? (Luke Meredith, AP)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't see any downside in it. I don't know what the upside is other than it's always good when you get people into games, guys that have worked hard and practiced hard. I don't know if reward is the right word for it, but it's a nice opportunity for them to go out there and play, and I thought for the most part they made a pretty good account of themselves.

Q. Talk about how Jacob Hillyer is kind of emerging. (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, good to see him coming alive a little bit, not just catching the football but doing something with it afterwards. That's a real positive, and he's a young player, so he's still climbing the ladder. But it's always good when guys can make some plays.

Q. You have a bunch of those guys in that receiving corps? (Marc Morehouse)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it seems like they're getting more involved. We knew coming into the season we were going to have to get a lot of people involved to have a chance. I hope that continues.

Q. How close is Lomax to returning? (Brendan Stiles, Hawkeyedrive.com)

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COACH FERENTZ: It's getting a little frustrating for everybody, especially for him, mostly for him. But I was really optimistic Sunday. I'm not so optimistic today. It may be after a couple weeks here. I don't know. We'll keep playing it day by day. Just seems like we're still out on that right now.

Q. Anything new with Malloy's status? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: No.

Q. Can you compare just the general morale around the program after the NIU loss to where you are now? (KCCI-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it's never much fun losing, but no matter what happens, you play 12 games and you have just got to flip the page and go. We have to do the same thing this week. So it's just always more enjoyable on Sunday after a win. I mean, that's obvious. But you go through the tape, you try to make the corrections and then you try to move on and keep climbing the ladder. That's really kind of what the story is.

Q. The past few years when you haven't had the trophy you've moved the empty case down into the locker room. Do you do anything after you win the trophy? (Jared Aarons, KGAN-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we have it, or had it, but right now it's up for grabs. To me that's kind of old news, too. Not old news, but yesterday's news. We have it in possession until Saturday, but it's anybody's on Saturday. There's no sense looking at it right now. We need to look at our game plan and make sure we're preparing. That's what we need to do.

Q. What encourages you most about the progress of LeShun Daniels? (Darren Miller, hawkeyesports.com)

COACH FERENTZ: He's just handled things pretty well and unfortunately had a turnover the other day. He wasn't being sloppy with the football. It was one of those things, and maybe in some ways it's a blessing that it happened and we didn't have to pay a price for it, because those things are going to happen. Jordan had one, too, and those are probably two of the biggest negatives or down spots on Saturday.

But it didn't cost us, so that's a positive,

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and hopefully that'll help those guys in their development because we're really happy with both those guys. LeShun is a guy that's been very attentive, grabs concepts really well. He's really picked up things very quickly, amazingly quickly. He just doesn't seem to be overwhelmed with anything, whether it was on the practice field in August, and now that the games have begun, he just seems really comfortable doing what he does. He always kind of looks the same, which is good. That's a positive.

Q. Are there any more freshmen who are going to play? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're pretty close to being -- barring injury, I think we're pretty close to being where we want to be or need to be right now. Knock on wood, hopefully we're done.

Q. How would you say Minnesota is now as opposed to when Jerry Kill took over? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, clearly he had work to do when he got there. It's just one of those situations. Although I think they won their last game prior to him getting there. We helped in that one.

But to me if you look at the film from two years ago compared to now, it's a totally different team. They've come in, they've gone to work, they've recruited well, and you can tell their players are totally bought into what it is they're doing. So they look like a well-coached football team right now, and that's a real credit to him and his staff.

Q. You talk like they've implemented a systems, with similar traits to Iowa. (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it looks not the same as or exactly like, but I think about the team we saw, he took over to Ames. I can't tell you what year that was. Oh, gosh, I don't even know, '08, '09, whatever it would have been, '10. I remember watching that film and seeing a very impressive Northern Illinois team and then X amount of years later, whatever it's been, four or five, it looks like the same thing. Different uniforms obviously but they look like a good football team.

Q. You talked before about the difference for punt returns in the NFL and college. Can you elaborate? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the biggest thing, it's just a free-for-all. When the ball is snapped, everybody runs down the field. So that's why you're seeing all these -- trying to think of the right word here, such a wide variety of punting styles, whereas it's more uniform, but it's all because of the rules.

People have taken advantage of those rules, and it's just -- I'm not sure it's great for the game, but that one is not gaining a lot of traction, either. I'm not spending much time on it.

Q. How much does that shape your strategy? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: You just have to be ready to change every week. It's something different every week, so that's just the way it is.

Q. Have television time-outs changed the game much? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they're not a lot of fun. I don't think anybody on the field enjoys those, unless it just comes at one of those rare, opportune moments, but it's probably like everybody else, here we go, one of those deals.

Q. You had Eddie Phillips as your honorary captain the other day, very interesting man. What was his message? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: He talked to the players about just being focused on the right things, football but everything, total life experience. Eddie is a great guy. I thought he was an excellent player on one of the best teams that I've ever been associated with as a coach here.

It was great to get him back, and he's a great guy.

Q. Do you think that his accomplishments were a little overshadowed because he didn't go to the Rose Bowl?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the seniors on that football team, that was just a very, very talented and very strong team. I think it did -- sometimes I'm not sure they get all the credit they deserve. It was a really outstanding football team. A lot of strengths.

Q. How has Minnesota's line play

evolved over the years? (Steve Batterson, Quad-City Times)

COACH FERENTZ: They just look stronger and more physical. They were playing some guys a couple years ago, and I think they identified some guys in their program, maybe not unlike a guy like Bruce Nelson in 1999 that wasn't quite ready, but they identified guys that probably had the traits that they were looking for. They've turned into a really good outfit now. They're reaping the benefits.

Q. What's the challenge for you to try to get those true freshmen that have played, keeping them on the field and getting them some valuable time now that you're in Big 10 season? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: If we made that commitment, we made the commitment thinking that we're going to need them, so everybody has got a little different roles, but some guys will be playing on special teams. A guy like LeShun Daniels we talked about, he doesn't have a big role on special teams but my guess is he'll get his share of snaps over the next eight, nine weeks. We just made the decision it's going to be better for them and for the football team, usually a two-way street.

Q. How do you show some of those younger guys the difference between how tough conference games are versus non-conference games? (Jared Aarons, KGAN-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: It's just part of what they're going to have to experience, not any different than the first week going from practice to that first game. It's a little different for them, and this is just another step in the process. Again, the hopes are that that'll benefit them a year from now. When they're here next year they'll be a little bit more the wiser for it.

Q. In general do you lean on some of the older guys to impress that stuff on them? (Jared Aarons, KGAN-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: We do that all year long, really. Our older guys have really done a good job, I think, mentoring the younger guys.

Q. What are your thoughts on the Penn State decision today? (Rob Howe, Hawkeye Insider)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I just heard a little bit about it this morning. I think anything that happened sounds like it was favorable for them. I'm in favor of that. I think that was a bad deal personally.

Q. Why? (Rob Howe, Hawkeye Insider)

COACH FERENTZ: It just seems like the target got missed. That's just my opinion. One person's opinion. But it seemed like the people that paid the price -- seems like a lot of people that shouldn't have paid a price, paid a price. That's just my outsider looking in. I'm looking at the players and coaches, I guess. I've got a pretty narrow scope on that one.

Q. Did you think the initial penalties were a little harsh? (Rob Howe, Hawkeye Insider)

COACH FERENTZ: I just don't think the guys that played football for that team last year are the guys coaching the team. I thought that was a tough hand to get dealt.

Q. Kind of got lost in the shuffle, but your punter got a national award this week. Has that been a steady progression with him, too? (Mike Hlas, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's making progress. We talked about special teams earlier. We were all curious to see how Connor would perform being in his second year, and for punters it's not easy. Again, I go back to Jason Baker being a junior here our first year and had some ups and downs, and then his senior year really playing well. Yeah, I think Connor is on the right path. He's practicing better. He's gaining more confidence. I think the experience factor is starting to kick in for him a little bit. He's done some really nice things.

When he just relaxes and uses his tools, he does a pretty good job.

Q. Do you remember anything sticking out from Kevonte's recruitment? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Other than he's got a pretty funny uncle. I can throw that in there. But great family and all that. But it was just one of those things where it worked out he came here, and we're really thrilled he's here. He's doing a good job.

Q. Can you imagine being 17 years old playing Division I football? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I was 17 when I went to college, but I was far from playing Division I football, and when I ended college I was far from playing Division I football. That's just the way it goes.

It's amazing. Young people today, just in general, I think, are a lot more unfazed by things. That's just my impression. Just watching in general, I think they're a lot smarter in a lot of ways, a lot more exposed. You think about Bulaga, too; that may be even more impressive because he was pretty much the same age, but he was starting as a lineman, and that's unusual. But some guys, they don't seem to be fazed by it. Moeaki was the same way when he came in. It was like another day in the park for him.

Q. Ra'Shede Hagemen comes from a long line of Big Ten defensive tackles that go on to the next level. What kind of challenges does he present? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, a lot. He's a tough match-up. He's a tough match-up. He's a big guy, very explosive, very powerful and very active and one of the leaders of their defense. I think their interior players are good, all of their guys are good, and they play several of them, but he's certainly the leader of the group, so it's going to be a key match-up for us. Big challenge.

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