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An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome to everybody. Certainly congratulations to Jared DeVries. It's a really nice honor, one he certainly is very deserving of. A lot of great candidates, Desmond King as well. So happy for him.

Tough loss over the weekend certainly. Came back here Sunday, looked at the film. Got started on Northwestern today. Got another big challenge on our hands. Anxious to get going.

Q. What stands out to you about that Northwestern game last year?

COACH FERENTZ: It was a Kodak moment in that there were a lot of things that took place in the game that we didn't execute well enough. They had something to do with that obviously. Last year they had a very good football team, as they do this year.

As a coach you focus on the things that keep you from having a chance to have success. There were a lot of visuals in that game that really jumped out. Next thing you know, we're up there looking at a 28-3 score which is not a good position to be in.

The whole point of that was to just show our players if we're going to move forward, we have to do a better job of executing things that we're capable of executing because there's always plays in every game where that happens. Then there are going to be some other plays, too, where you might not have the opportunity. But if you have an opportunity to do something about it, you have to do that.

Q. Was a lot of it the defensive line getting out of position?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, I mean, it was both sides of the ball, and special teams as well.

Yes, it starts with that. Anytime you give up that kind of yardage, obviously you got some problems just in terms of guys being in the right positions, keeping leverage, missed tackles, those types of things. Again, the guys they had involved certainly had something to do with that.

But, you know, you focus on the things that you can control, and there were just an awful lot of pictures in that tape.

Q. What were some of the positives that came out of the OSU film?

COACH FERENTZ: At times our execution was really good. Certainly we played a really good first half. We were even at the three-quarter mark. I thought our effort was good. I thought our preparation was good last week.

The point there is we have to carry that forward. Can't be a once-in-a-while thing if you're in conference play. You have to be that way every week. It's a different challenge this weekend, but an equally big challenge for us.

Q. How do you address being able to finish? Every game so far this season you've had a lead going into halftime.

COACH FERENTZ: I wasn't aware of that. So we finished in four, I guess, maybe not in the other three.

I don't think there's any magical thing about it. You play the full 60 minutes, realize it's going to take 60. Typically in a game it does. I think there was one case this year where that wasn't. Those don't happen by plan. I know the next five games are all going to be 60-minute games.

Q. The image always is that Northwestern is supposed to be this finesse type team. They've done a good job of

defending your run game. Is that unfair to categorize them that way?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not going to rate fairness of people's perceptions. But there are a lot of perceptions out there about a lot of things.

The one thing you can say about them is since the mid '90s they do what it takes to win. They've done a good job of that. They've done it several different ways actually.

But there are certain common dominators for being successful. For the most part they've had a pretty good formula. They won 10 games last year. That doesn't happen by accident. You go back to when they went to the Rose Bowl. Same thing, they played good defense, did the things you have to do that fit your players, then you have to execute well. They've done a good job of that historically.

Q. When you look at the last two Big Ten games, the lead you've had at halftime, the team has struggled to move the ball in the second half, is that the other team making adjustments?

COACH FERENTZ: I think both games were very different just in terms of the way the first halves went. Every game is kind of its own individual situation.

I don't think our team has a problem finishing. It's not like that's the issue here. We played a pretty good team the other day. They had a lot to do with it, too.

We didn't finish it up. We didn't get it done. We couldn't finish the game, and they did. That's why they won. So we have to move on, see what we can do this week to be prepared to play 60 good minutes.

Q. What has happened in the second half of the last two games? Has your team had a hard time responding to adjustments?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a team game. If we could have sustained a couple drives there, maybe that would have made a difference. You know, you do what you have to do in every game to be successful, and we didn't get it done.

Q. A lot of signs to this program moving in the right direction. How important is it to get a victory?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not big on those signs. Basically, it's all week-to-week. A couple weeks ago the signs were going the other

direction. The arrow was going way down. This week maybe it's going up.

But it's week-to-week. You have to prepare and you have to go play for 60 minutes. Teams that do that the best are the teams that are successful. That will be our goal.

Q. How did the team come out health-wise Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: I think all in all pretty good. Again, I mentioned a week ago we were fortunate to have that bye week. Had we played two Saturdays ago, that would have been a challenge for us.

All in all, we're in pretty good shape right now. Dom came off the two-deep, we'll rest that for a week and see where we're going.

Q. Is Weisman limited at all?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. He's good.

Q. Fair amount of success running your offense with three tight end sets. Do you envision that's something you'll try to continue to pursue?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll keep it certainly in our repertoire. You can only practice so much. But, it's a group that we feel comfortable with. It was no big secret. Again, I said last spring, I felt pretty good about our tight ends. They continue to work hard and improve. We'll utilize that group if it fits the team we're playing. Utilize the other ones we've utilized too. I think it's part of what we do.

Q. What changes about Northwestern's offense without guys like Colter and Mark on the field?

COACH FERENTZ: They're different style players than the players that replaced them. This is one of the rare teams, unusual to see a team function really well with two quarterbacks, and they've done that all season long. They've functioned pretty well with one quarterback, too, regardless of who is in there. It's a real compliment to them what they do. That's an unusual combination.

They're different kinds of quarterbacks. Doesn't seem to matter who is in there, they really are a very, very dangerous football team. Certainly caught my attention. Gosh, we were riding back from somewhere, I think the Western Michigan

game was on. 22 was running through them like there's no tomorrow. We were coming back from Ames, I believe. It was a game on the bus, just watching TV.

They've done a great job recruiting there. They've got a lot of guys that really fit well with what they do. They do a really nice job when they get an opportunity to get out there on the field.

Q. What advantages do you think that three tight end set gives you?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's like any personnel group, it just gives people one more thing to maybe prepare for, think about. I mean, you only have so many personnel groups you can put out there. There's only so many options. Doesn't make sense to do it unless it fits with your players. Right now we happen to have a couple guys we're comfortable playing out there.

It fit what we were doing. It doesn't alter us dramatically, but it gave us maybe just one more package to go to a little bit without radically changing what we're doing.

Q. You used also sort of an empty backfield spread thing. Is it simply big guy against little guy coverage?

COACH FERENTZ: It's just trying to be multiple. We try to do the same thing. Any team does this. It's not like we're inventing anything new here. You try to give people a couple things to defend from whatever group you have out there on the field.

Wasn't anything overly sophisticated, just something more for them to defend, have to talk about.

Q. The change from heavy formation?

COACH FERENTZ: Potentially, yes. It helps if you got a guy that can run a little bit, and Duzey can. We saw that. So that helps a little bit. At least they have to maybe practice for a little bit.

Q. Speaking of Duzey, he had more yards receiving for a tight end under you than any tight end you'd ever had. Is he a guy that you see being an impact guy pretty soon?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a guy that's done a lot of good things in practice. Like a lot of guys on our team, he's improving on a weekly basis.

It wasn't shocking he had that kind of day. I wasn't aware of that stat. That might be a little bit alarming. Best part about it, hopefully that will give

him more confidence. Usually that's what younger guys tend to lack. I hope that's a good by-product for him.

Q. LeShun got back in the running back routine. How is his progress the last few weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm laughing about both those guys. Duzey, I hope he doesn't become a big shot now that he's got significant yardage in one game. Then LeShun, commented about him this morning. It's not like he's on a field trip, but he kind of looks like that all the time. Doesn't matter where he's at, he's not overwhelmed by things or impressed. Just in a very low-key, humble way.

I know he's been in that stadium before. But it was no big deal for him. He just went in and played like he practices. That's a good trait for a young player, any player. He's done a good job.

We've got four backs that we feel good with. You can only get so many carries per guy. We like him. Like to get Jordan in the mix at some point, too. It's hard to do.

Q. Would you say one of Jake's strength as a quarterback is to get you out of bad plays and into good plays?

COACH FERENTZ: That's fair. That was his third away game, the largest venue he's been in. A little bit like LeShun, he seems to handle things pretty well. That's a really good sign.

Again, any mistakes he might make or whatever, he just keeps moving. He learns from them, keeps moving. It's real encouraging.

Q. Will you look to expand your rotation a little bit with Dom out this week?

COACH FERENTZ: We have to. We basically have had four guys involved. So now we're down to three. We'll try to figure out who number four is. We'll take this week to sort that out in practice.

But Mike Hardy has really done a good job. He's been playing on a regular basis. Played a lot in the Michigan State state game, this game as well. He's done a good job of stepping in there and competing. We'll have to get Nate Meier a little bit more involved, too. I think he's like some of the younger guys we've been talking about, he's been growing. We'll keep pushing him along, get him a little bit more of a role in there.

Q. Would you look to expand DE rotation with Dominic Alvis out?

COACH FERENTZ: He's in the mix of next guys in. We'll just see who has the best week in practice.

Q. Some of the breakdowns were defensive ends Saturday. Is it bad timing with that with Northwestern?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. There's never a good time. We really did a poor job with leverage last year in this game. They're a good offensive team. They test you in every possible way. We need to get that straightened out.

But I think, especially a couple that I'm thinking about, they're uncorrectable. It's inexperience. Good guys trying hard, but just kind of losing track of where we were, where the ball was. But you pay for those things. We did pay.

Q. What is the status of Riley McMinn and Michael Malloy?

COACH FERENTZ: Mike is still on hold right now. Riley is working his way back. He's been practicing the last couple weeks. He's just coming off an injury. He's also in that mix for that four spot. We'll see how he practices this week.

It's been a week-by-week process for him.

Q. Cole Croston moved up to second team. What is going on with that?

COACH FERENTZ: That might be an oversight on my part. Cole is doing a good job. Ryan was on the trip, Cole wasn't. That's probably me not paying attention to detail. I tell my players I'm guilty of that because I get on them about it.

Q. What makes Northwestern's defense so good at taking the ball away?

COACH FERENTZ: I read an article, they put a tape together of the Bears, pretty good hometown team to draw upon. They're just doing a good job ball-hawking. They've been aggressive to it. They're checking you out at every turn. If you don't have good ball security, you pay for it. That's the sign of a good defensive football team. That's a big part of football.

Q. Anything you do this week to reinforce the idea of ball security?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I mean, that's one of the things on our wish list, just the turnover.

I think we're plus-one right now. We'd like to see that number start moving north a little bit.

It's okay, but it's been read and reported by everybody. When we're ahead of the turnover takeover deal, we're in the win column. All our losses are 0-3 for that. Ball security is a big thing.

Q. Each tight end seems to have a little bit different spin to what he can do.

COACH FERENTZ: Sure.

Q. Is part of that package just taking advantage of them? I think Ray and C.J. are your blocker guys.

COACH FERENTZ: That's fair. Just like we talked about Jake, Jake is climbing the ladder step-by-step. I think George is a little bit behind him being younger, what have you. I think he's got that potential. Did a lot of really good things on the scout team last year as a redshirt player. We've seen him do good things in practice.

We'll just keep pushing him along. Hopefully he'll get more and more involved as we go along. He's a young guy we think has a good future. But it's a process.

Q. Mike could become the second all-time leading scorer with five more points.

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, Mike's like a lot of our seniors, he's just a tremendous young guy. Very steady in everything he does. You don't worry about him in the classroom. You don't worry about him basically in any regards. He's a really hard worker. Like most of our guys, he's had his ups and downs. He's had some low moments, like most players do. It's a process for him.

He's playing with a lot of confidence right now. That's something he's earned the right to. It's just another good story. Walked on here and did a great job with his opportunity.

Q. Do you think defense has pieces in place to bounce back from Ohio State?

COACH FERENTZ: They'll bounce back. It's our choice. You have to, because we have five tough games in front of us. So you have to. You've got to get ready for the next challenge. They will. We got quality guys.

Q. Three senior linebackers, it comes in handy?

COACH FERENTZ: It helps. Those three

guys, Tanner has done a good job in the back end, B.J., two more seniors there. Dom, when he's been able to go, has been a good leader as well.

One of the things as well, every team, we have some juniors, too. A guy like Louis, who played almost every snap. He's a veteran guy now and he's leading. Scherff is doing the same thing offensively. We have a lot of guys that are in that junior class that got beat up last year, and they're giving us great leadership, as well.

Q. Is Nate Meier's timetable accelerating?

COACH FERENTZ: It's accelerating daily, hourly. He's doing a really good job. He's really worked hard. I go back to the spring. He had a good spring, has worked hard throughout every phase. He really likes football. He's a tough guy. We're excited. I'm excited to see him play more.

Q. There were one of those Miller scrambles when Nate almost got him on the right end, then the left end. He was 0-2.

COACH FERENTZ: It's not surprising. He plays hard. He did that in eight-man football. Looked like John Riggins out there with a bunch of guys that didn't look like John Riggins. But he's a very aggressive guy. Like I say, I'm excited to see him play more. Might be exciting to see him play, some of the things he might do.

That's okay. We can coach that.

Q. Concern with the secondary, big plays. A concern?

COACH FERENTZ: It goes back to one of the first points I made earlier about any game. It's the ones that you can correct, those are the ones we have to really address, the ones where maybe we're not reading the right progression. I'm having a Kodak moment here going back to 2000, playing up in Minnesota, where Bob Sanders got hurt. Somebody came in for him and took a false step at safety, just a play-action fake. Took a bad step on it, like he's going to make the tackle. He's 20 yards from the ball. Ended up costing us a touchdown the other way.

Those are the things that as a coach concern you more than anything. Those are the things, if you're just not having your reads in the right priority, that's a big thing. We just got to keep working to get those things ironed out. We will.

Q. What about the other day with the 58-yard touchdown?



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COACH FERENTZ: That's kind of what I'm referring to. We took a false step that we shouldn't have taken. We paid for it. Those are just the things that we have got to get better at. It's a continual process. Every week's a different challenge.

The challenges this week will be a little different, but they're still there. You just have to be disciplined in what your roles and responsibilities are, read in the proper progression.

Q. When you look back and watch the tape, you saw the hit that was laid on C.J., did that validate your thoughts that you had at the time?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, my opinion really doesn't matter. I'm not an official. Like a lot of calls, my opinion has no bearing on the outcome of it.

But, you know, like the rule, don't like the rule. It was clearly stated what the rule is. I think they gave us a tape that really illustrated very clearly what the violations are and what they aren't.

I think the biggest concern I had was the attitude that was going to be taken towards the rule, then the process, which has been handled as well as it can. It's all reviewable. They either uphold it or don't uphold it.

I think the process is good. What I thought I saw Saturday is what I think I saw on Sunday. There's really not a lot of discussion on it.

Q. When you hear Coach Meyer's comments about it, speaking out against the rule, do you think that's a matter of him sticking up for his player in that instance?

COACH FERENTZ: I have no idea. The rules are the rules. Every rule is open for interpretation. It's all about player safety. That's why they pushed it. That was the rule of emphasis in August. Every one of us showed that tape to our players in August. It's a bang-bang thing. It's a hard rule to officiate. That's why I think the process, everything I know about it, is the way it should be. You just go from there.

Q. The stopgap, it's automatically reviewed.

COACH FERENTZ: That was my only concern in the whole thing. It was very clear in February when we met as a conference, that was the big thing coming down the tracks. It's all driven

by concussions, which I think all of us can appreciate and understand. Things just trickle right down the tracks.

So I think I had some real concerns in February. Where it's gone since then, I don't know how many we've had in our conference. Not many. We didn't have many last year. It's not like it's been a huge, epidemic problem, but apparently it has been in college football. I don't think they'd address it if it wasn't. It's kind of the way it is.

It's hard to be an official, I can tell you that. It's a tough job.

Q. In your previous Iowa lifetime, Northwestern was everyone's homecoming opponent. When you came back were you surprised at how Northwestern went from doormat to very competitive?

COACH FERENTZ: Ancient history there. Wisconsin was, too, late '80s. Boy, we couldn't wait to go. Three of them right there (laughter). Things have changed.

My six years in the NFL, the teams I really kind of followed, I followed Iowa for obvious reasons, being here nine years, then I followed Wisconsin and Kansas State a little bit only because I worked with Bill and Barry and had great respect for those guys. I kind of watched what was going on. Whenever my mentor, Joe Moore, coached, I was following that team as well.

But long story short, if you follow college football, one of the great stories that happened in the mid '90s, Gary Barnett did an outstanding job with the program, building it. Purple Rain, a book I read maybe a decade or so ago. Not even night and day. Not even a discussion.

I think anybody associated with the program would tell you things have changed so much. They've done a wonderful job. They've done it in multifaceted ways, whether you think about how different they were in 2000 from '99.

But it's a real credit. They've done a wonderful job with the program. Obviously the same thing has happened at Wisconsin.

Q. When you look at the way they modeled the program after Iowa, then you look at what Dantonio said a couple weeks ago when he came in the league, he looked at the way you built your program, do you take any kind of pride that your competitors are looking at what you helped to build, modeling their programs after yours?

COACH FERENTZ: Those are nice words. But I would just say anything we've done here we've tried to model after what Coach Fry did. The nine years I was away, I thought, How did that happen? I had no idea what I was walking into in 1981. Talk about being clueless. I just kind of got on the boat at the right time, and things really started taking off.

Not overly reflective during that nine-year period. After I left here, I thought a lot about why things happened. Again, I referenced Barry and Bill. You watch what they did at their given destinations.

Where they go from maybe losing some games to winning some games, there's some fundamental things you have to do well. Barry did that. Bill did that. Obviously Coach Fry did that coming here. You look anywhere in the country, that's usually what happens. We just lost a coaching giant in Coach James, who I never met. I remember we played him in '81. Boy, you learned about what a great program they had, what a great job he did up there. To me he's one of the great all-time college coaches.

Those are things I guess coaches look at.

Q. Still working Alston at defensive end?

COACH FERENTZ: Sure. He's a rush guy. I don't foresee us putting him down there, no.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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