

August 8, 2015



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome. Good to see everybody. It's good for us to be out there and get started again. We're excited to be back on the field.

A couple announcements, and I'm sure not if I gave you this update or not, but just one personnel move. Jameer Outsey has moved from the linebacker position over to the tight end, so he's been working there. Three practices into it now.

And then the only other real announcement to give you right now regarding today, LeShun Daniels got nicked up this morning in practice, so he will not participate during the media day. He will do a team picture later on, and we'll make sure to make him available a week from Saturday for Kids' Day. We'll have him out there for any questions at that time and kind of go from there.

Just a couple comments to start out with, first and foremost, I just wanted to restate that we're totally committed to being a Big Ten Championship caliber football team. That's been our goal since 1999 when we got started, and things haven't changed on that front. I believe we have a strong foundation in place right now, and I feel very good about the adjustments that we've made since January. Some things that we had talked about a couple times during the off-season, just things regarding our facilities, obviously moving into a brand-new facility. I'll address that later. The staff changes that we made, and certainly some decisions we made regarding our players and recruiting. I think things are really on a positive mode that way, and we're excited about pushing forward there.

You know, in football and in life, anything you do, all you can do is ask for opportunities, and when the calendar changed over in January, the

thing we tried to communicate to our players was it's a new opportunity. We've all been very excited about that and the work that's gone into it, and I think most importantly we're eager to continue that work, that important work, as we try to prepare for the season.

Things really haven't changed. Our focus remains on the fundamentals, the basics, the things that make teams successful, whether it's on the football field, in the classroom, or their citizenship, those things really haven't changed an awful lot over the years and we'll stay focused on those.

Regarding our fans, they've long been the best I've ever been around, I can say that. Getting here in 1981, I've said it many times, how memorable it was for me to walk into Kinnick after 19 straight losing seasons and being just a great, great environment. In my 25-year association with this program, our fans have been just absolutely fantastic.

They deserve a good football team. That's always been the goal. I'm fully aware of that. I understand that, our staff understands and our players do, too. We're working hard to provide them what they deserve from our perspective.

Next up on the list is the Hansen Performance Center. I've talked about that before, but as you go along, you just realize how important it is and was to have that project completed. It's really injected a lot of enthusiasm in our program on a bunch of different levels, whether it be the recruiting, obviously, the strength and conditioning work that's gone on, the development that our players go through, and for our staff to work in just a great, great environment. We're awfully excited about that.

I think it's easily one of the best in the country, pro or college, and I think it's something everybody can be very, very proud of. Our staff, our players and our fans can all take pride in that thing.

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Saturdays in Kinnick have always been very special things, and the news that came through this week that we'll continue to look to improve Kinnick stadium, to me that's an exciting news point. To me that's just going to help us to continue to provide a great environment for our fans. It's going to be a great from a revenue standpoint, certainly for recruiting, but I think most of all, the fan experience is going to continue to improve, and that's something we're really thrilled about.

Last but not least, basically we're heading into camp now. We're three practices into it. Today is the first day with shoulder pads so we really got to practice the way we want to. Bottom line, it's always been a very, very important phase of a team's development. Everything we've done up until now has been critical. This is a really important two-week window, and then school starts. We still have another week of camp mode, so a three-week window where our team has a chance to really develop. Our goal continues to be preparing our players to do a good job out there on the field, academically and citizenship-wise. Going back to 1999, our No. 1 goal was always to have well-rounded players. So our goal is to have them excel on game days, have them excel in the classroom and graduate, and then be prepared for a great life beyond.

That's the work that we're doing right now. It's been great to get back at it working with our players and the staff. I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Jordan Lomax, when you look at his development and maturity, is he like a perfect example of what you're trying to bring to the table with every player you bring in?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's interesting even going back to his recruiting; he wasn't first and foremost on our radar when I went into the school, whatever year that would have been. I just happened to meet him. The coach introduced me to him, and he was just such an impressive guy from meeting him in a brief visit there, we came back and reevaluated him, and fortunately in our case he was interested in coming here.

He's just been a phenomenal young guy in our program. Like a lot of our guys, he's got some great stories. He's gone through hardship and disappointment. You know, he looked like he was going to be a starter a couple years ago and had an injury off the bat which was disappointing and lost his starting position. Battled through that, and I didn't know until I read a report coming out of

Chicago he thought about leaving. He never shared that with me. But that's really something most of our players go through, and he's persevered. He's worked hard, and he's done an exemplary job in the classroom.

His last spring here he spoke in front of our entire athletic department. Gary invited him over. There's a student-athlete speaker at every athletic department meeting and just did a phenomenal job. We're extremely proud of him, and I think he's primed to have a really good senior year.

Q. You said in the spring a lot of our twos are threes were developing right now. Do you feel like in the last few months you've improved in those areas?

KIRK FERENTZ: We do feel better right now. I feel better after watching one practice in pads. The retention was impressive the first two workouts, but one practice in pads, I think we're a little bit more mature than we were in April, and that's a key thing in college football. If you're not improving weekly and daily, you're going to be in trouble, especially in our program.

We need guys to be climbing the ladder. I think it's a reflection of what they've done over the last couple months, the hard work they've put in with the strength and conditioning part of things, and they've been in tune football-wise, too. Yeah, everybody has got to continue to move forward. It's too early to have good stories at this point, but hopefully by the end of August we'll have some to share with you.

Q. When you look at the three eight-man players and your defensive front, it's kind of an oddity that it works. Do you find those guys maybe are different than other recruits, or are they all the same?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it would be a great trivia question if it holds up this way, where we do have three eight-man guys playing. First experience I had with a player like that was Chad Greenway, and it's kind of like Jordan Lomax, met Chad Greenway in the locker room after the Northwestern game in 2000, and I had never seen him play, but I just knew he had the kind of energy and personality that would help our football team. Turns out he was a pretty good player on top of that.

It's like all things in life: Good people, exceptional people come from all backgrounds, all

places. There's no limit on that. You look at a guy like Zach Johnson, what he's done in the golf world, and look at his story. So I think that's the neat thing about it. It's not by intent necessarily, but it's a good story for sure that we have three guys that are playing pretty hard out there.

Q. Are you looking forward to morning practices? I know you're going to have morning practices. How does your team feel about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: The team, based on the feedback I've gotten, they're excited about the morning practices. We spent a lot of time thinking about it, and not just this off-season but probably a year or two ago. It's kind of something I've been noodling around a little bit. We went and researched it hard this off season. I told Gary Barta this morning, the confirmation for me, I got a nice note from David Mitchell from Mason City, a 91-year-old Hawkeye fan. He confirmed, and said that it's a winner. What he told me was he exercises on a regular basis. He's discovered working out in the morning is a lot better than in the afternoon. I may have to follow his advice a little bit.

But the team is very excited about it, and I think there are going to be a lot of advantages for us.

Q. How do you feel about the quarterback situation right now? Has CJ progressed where you want him to be and what do you think about the backups?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I kind of made reference to that a little bit about some of the decisions we made back in January, and CJ is just taking it and running with it. I'm really proud of what he's done, unrelated to his haircut. That's got nothing to do with it. That was his decision all the way.

But the way he's grown, the way he's accepted being a leader, it's very, very clear. Got a chance to watch those guys work out, not throw a ball but training during the course of the summer, and he's just a totally different guy. His demeanor is different, and he's a much more mature guy and he's accepted the responsibility.

When you play quarterback, there's a lot of responsibility that goes with it. I think he's embraced it. He's excited about it. He's practiced well in three-a-days. And then equally excited, and not to suggest that Tyler is on the same level, but he continues to make a lot of progress, too. We

were confident that he would. He's a quality young man. He's totally invested, highly intelligent and he's got good skills. So he's playing a little bit faster out there, a little bit more confident, and I think it's two positive developments so far.

Q. You make that move in January to help your team on the field. What do you expect to see out of the quarterback position this year that maybe you didn't see last year?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it wasn't an easy decision by any standard, and it hasn't been for a couple years. We've talked a lot about it and looked at it and looked at the information that was in front of us, but things change. That's one thing about life and that's one thing about sports, certainly no two days are the same and no team is the same the next day. There was a consensus that we thought it was the best thing to do, and I think there's a stronger consensus right now that we did the right thing. And it's not necessarily going to look all that different. Quarterback obviously is a key position and every player brings his own personality.

The thing I'd offer up is there's a lot of different ways to be successful and a lot of different styles of quarterbacking. We've seen that here in 15 years to be successful.

The bottom line is he's got to play within his skill set and his personality. The big question mark always where is he at in terms of preparation, and the maturity that is required when you touch the ball every play. We were confident in January that he was ready to accept that.

Q. When did you sense that change in CJ?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's been ongoing. There was one particular practice that really stands out in my mind from a negative standpoint back in late September, early October. It was a Thursday practice. When you want things to be clean, crisp, and feel pretty good about things so everybody can feel confident coming off the field, and it was not a stellar performance on his part, and I'm not talking so much about accuracy but more so just some mental errors that were made. There's too much at stake when you're talking about a quarterback position to make certain errors that he shouldn't have been making at that point.

That was a downside, but then the positive side, we saw an awful lot of things as the season

continued just about his growth development, and he demonstrated to us that he was getting it. The light was really coming on. It's different for every player. I'm not ready to ordain him right now, but I think he's in a good position right now, and we're very confident we'll play well with him as our quarterback.

Q. One of a few changes you made to your staff was that Jim Reid now oversees all the linebackers. He's got an extensive history coaching at different levels and what have you. Why make that change, and is that a consistency issue so you can coach all three positions the same way?

KIRK FERENTZ: The biggest thing is utilizing our personnel most efficiently. If you go back to when we got here back in '99, Norm was the coordinator coaching the outside backers and then Brett had the inside guys, and then we transitioned out of that. In a perfect world, in my opinion at least, if you've got quality GA's, you let a GA work with a linebacker coach so when that outside backer breaks off and does other things -- we also have Seth Wallace to help catch some of that, too, because he's in a pass coverage mode at that point.

It allowed us to get another guy back on offense which I just felt was really important. We needed a full-time guy at the tight end position. That's a really important position in our offense, has been historically, and I just felt like those guys needed more attention from a full-time coach, and LeVar Woods is such a quality person. He's embraced that role and done a great job, too. So I think it's really going to be a beneficial for thing for us overall for efficiency.

Q. Speaking of which, he didn't play that position, he played outside backer. I think he went and saw Ted Brewster during the spring or winter or whatever. How quickly has he grasped coaching?

KIRK FERENTZ: I was a small, slow linebacker, cut my craft playing offensive line. I think that stuff is so minimal, it's more about the kind of coach a guy is and his eagerness, his professional curiosity and what have you. LeVar works hard at his craft. Tim is one of the guys he visited with and several other people that are really knowledgeable that have been very, very helpful. And all of us as coaches do that. We all talk to people that we share responsibilities with across

the country and just always pick their brains to try to get advice and wisdom, and it's no different.

But certainly he went through that process last spring and will continue to do so.

Q. You spoke this spring about the need to develop some offensive line depth. What have you seen from those guys so far?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's tougher to evaluate guys without pads on. It's always hard. In fact, almost impossible, other than assignments and things like that, to know what are they seeing. But I thought today was an encouraging start for us in the morning.

It's going to be interesting. It's great to have Sean Welsh back on the football team. He had a great summer, and he's a guy that's played for us and played well, maybe not with the consistency you hope for, but that's what experience is all about, and he's off to a good start.

I think we have the makings right there. It's just a matter of a race against the clock between now and that first game week. That will continue for a while. We've got to be ready for some ups and downs, just like anytime you break in new players at new positions. CJ doesn't get that hall pass. The tackles do, not CJ.

Q. On paper it looks like maybe the secondary could be a strength of this team. What do you like about their potential?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we have experience back there, and that's certainly a positive. We have to play better. We gave up too many big plays, and it's not just the secondary, it's a team thing. We've got to get better on the perimeter. We got hurt on the perimeter, run or pass, and especially in the running game. Those are things on our radar right now.

We've got to harden up a little bit, and I think being a more experienced group, we should be able to do that. Then obviously we've got to decide who's going to be John Lowdermilk's replacement, what's our best combination at safety going to be, and we've got a couple weeks here to figure that out, but eager to see how that competition goes.

Q. Are you thinking about moving Brandon Snyder maybe to a different position?

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously Brandon, of all the safeties right now, I see being position

flexible. Maybe not Miles Taylor; I think Miles is probably going to stay at strong safety. But Anthony Gair has been flipping back and forth, I certainly think Brandon can do both and will look at both. Jordan probably could be an excellent strong safety, as well. I'm not sure we want to move his experience out of that role, but we're eager to see what happens over the next couple weeks, and see how that develops.

Q. Are LeShun Daniels' injuries minor?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he should be fine. I expect him to be practicing when you guys see him next week and talking and all that stuff. Just want to get him off his feet.

Q. You put him in the 1 spot on the depth chart. Is there any reasoning?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's so close right now, and it's a reflection that we're really pleased with both players. Jordan Canzeri has really had a really good spring and a really good summer. Since the last time I talked to you, I guess I know a lot more about our personnel and how the summer went. He's doing things like you'd hope a senior would. We're excited about that, and I'm confident both of them are going to play really well for us.

Q. You talked before about scar tissue during bad seasons and retaining it and what it can do for you motivationally or what it can do for you in a negative way. Have you sensed at positions maybe like linebacker where guys struggled a little bit, have they come through it okay, and have they done the right things with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm just smiling; I've got a little bit right up here actually. You know, it was a great night. It all healed, and we went back to work. I don't think anybody has got any inferiority complexes or any of that stuff. That's the great thing about sports, you get a chance to get back up on your feet and do something about your last experience or things that you weren't happy about.

So no, we didn't have to call Dr. Phil in or anything like that for our football team. We're just trying to work a little bit harder, work smarter, and get better at the things that really determine successful outcomes. I think the key thing is identifying where we've got to get better and working hard at it.

Out of a lot of positive things with our team over the course of the last eight months; probably the most encouraging thing is just the attitude.



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They've been really willing. We'll see how energetic they are a week from today, but so far, so good.

Q. What would you say about the schedule?

KIRK FERENTZ: I talked to our team about that this morning very briefly, and I think if you pay attention to college football, you can expect every game to be pretty tough and competitive. I remember a time where there were certain games that weren't this challenging. I can remember us being involved in a few in the '80s I'm going back to, but for the most part if you look at the world of college football, it's tough week in and week out. I know we're going to transition away from the FCS opponents in our conference.

But you consider this year that we're playing Illinois State, who just came out of the championship game, next year we've got North Dakota State, who's I think four-time champs, and last year we played UNI, who beat both those teams last year. There are no days off. If you're going to play college football, you'd better be ready to compete each and every week. If you do that, you don't have anything to be worried about. You let the chips fall where they may.

If you're not ready to go, I don't care what the name on the helmet is; it could be a tough day. And you look at evidence of that each and every Saturday.

We're excited about the schedule, but it's going to be a real challenge, and we're looking forward to that first game.

Q. You talked about getting the right combination at linebacker. You said in spring there were five guys. Is that pretty solid, the five guys? Is there any breaking into that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it is and Aaron Mends is a wild card. How quickly he can learn to play in the system, is probably the best way, which is what all young players have to learn. I'd say he's further behind those other five guys, because he hasn't really had experience. I thought all of them played with confidence in the spring and have had good summers, so I think we've got some good competition there.

We also have position flexibility, so it's a little bit like the safety position. I wouldn't want to predict right now how it's going to go, but I think I'm seeing some good things at that spot. Certainly

we'll be more experienced further down the road than a year ago at this time.

Q. Boone Myers, you talked about he was right tackle last year and now he moved to left. What do you see different from him?

KIRK FERENTZ: I wouldn't make a lot out of that. He's worked extremely hard. He's off to a good start three days into it, one day in pads. But even in the spring you could see the continued growth, and you watched him train during the course of the summer, watched those guys when they're doing their conditioning, and for a 300-pound guy to push the way he does -- I'd say the same thing about Ike Boettger and Cole Croston. Those guys are pushing hard. They're not there yet, but they have the right characteristics, the right qualities, and it's a matter of how fast you can get the guys to grow into the positions we need them to be in. I feel good about it.

Same thing at the line. We'll end up getting the guys where we want them, we've just got to figure out who the best five are to start with and then we'll work it from there.

Q. The punter, I know Marshall Koehn has been in it. After three practices, there an update there?

KIRK FERENTZ: So far, so good. We've had three workouts and both of them are punting well. Marshall is every bit as good as Dillon Kidd right now at punting the football, but we'll let the test of time determine that. I look at it as a good development because last year we really didn't have that luxury. Marshall has been in the race, he's competed well, and we'll let that play out.

Obviously, we're needing our punting game to get better.

Q. How wide open is the special teams coverage? That Nebraska game obviously stands out.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, you can judge football teams by how they cover, whether it's punts or kicks, and if you can't cover, you'd better have read your OB. You can't count on your kicker to kick it out of the end zone every time, either. You've got to have guys stepping up and covering, and to me that's just so fundamental.

We're confident that we're going to be better in those areas. We've worked hard. We've invested time. I think we have some newcomers that are going to help us in that regard. A guy like

Aaron Mends, hopefully he can be a guy that would be tough for opponents to block and what have you.

But time is going to tell, but it's certainly a point of emphasis for us. We're not going to be a good football team if we can't cover kicks or punts. That's so fundamental.

Q. You've seen the wide receiver, you have one guy who could be on the verge of being a star in Tevaun Smith, what he did, at least the YouTube video back in January or whatever.

KIRK FERENTZ: Who's defending that video? I didn't see it. I missed it. I heard about it.

Q. Two other receivers who have played a lot in Jacob Hillyer and Matt VandeBerg. Right now you've got kind of a cast that hasn't played a lot. What do you think of them and what's the distance between Tevaun and the other two versus those guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, to the first point, if you look at us historically, if our best guys, the guys that have the ability and potential to be our best players, if they don't develop into really good players, we're going to be in trouble. It starts with a guy like Tevaun. I'm not picking him out but anybody that's played out there Austin Blythe, Jordan Lomax, Drew Ott, if those guys don't play better this year than last year, that's going to be an issue. And they understand that. That's how good teams get better.

It sends two messages: It's production for the football team but also just how you do things, how you go about it. Then after that, certainly the guys you mentioned, Matt VandeBerg and Jacob Hillyer, are the two guys we're counting on. After that it's wide open right now. We've got Jay Scheel on the depth chart, but it could be anybody that's there, including maybe some freshmen. We'll see how that goes over the course of time.

We've definitely got an open mind there, and it's twofold; who can we get ready to play this year, and then also, it's like when you know you've got guys. We've got two senior defensive ends so who's coming in behind those guys, who's going to get that work and be ready to step in there, just like when we took the redshirt off Tevaun a couple years back knowing that he would have to step into a starting role the year after.

There's a lot of wheels in motion right

there, but it's wide open right now, and we're all anxious to see how it pans out.

Q. You mentioned the true freshmen. Is there a chance a few will play this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we've got an open mind. Again, it's tough on the interior typically, but we've got open mind with the exception of maybe special teams. If a linebacker can really do something dynamic covering kicks or blocking kicks, then we'd be open to that. But guys on the perimeter I think have an opportunity, and we'll play anybody that can help our football team win games, that's what we're interested in. We want to win now. In a perfect world, you'd redshirt everybody, but the world is not perfect, so we're just going to try to get ready to go.

Q. If we saw Darian Cooper right now, would he be able to do anything in practice? Are you going to try to seek a sixth year?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's still rehabbing, and until he gets cleared by the medical staff, which he has not been yet, he's got a road to hoe. We talked last week about it. He's determined to keep trying and keep working at it, and it's just really hard. It's very disappointing for any player to invest so much and then have the opportunity taken from him by injury, but it's the reality of what we do, unfortunately.

He's handling it well. He's been mature. We're counting on him right now to lead other guys. He's rooming with a younger player that needs guidance and needs some direction, so he can still play a really positive role on our football team, and if we can get some snaps without putting him in danger, that would be great, too, but I think he's got to weigh both, and that's really a medical decision, not a coaching decision, but we're all pulling for him.

He's a tremendous young guy. He was a teammate of Jordan Lomax; that's who we were going to see the day I met Jordan.

Q. What about Jameer Outsey?

KIRK FERENTZ: Two things: I was going to throw the Dallas Clark analogy out. That's not fair for anybody. He was doing okay at linebacker, showed some good attributes, but as far as really being able to play the game at that position the way we'd hoped, probably not. His growth potential, you know, I think is going to limit him at linebacker. So we've had a discussion with him and we've talked about defensive end, tight end,

and his preference was offense. Right along with that, we have a real need right now. We've got a couple seniors that are going to graduate at that position, and again, based on three days of watching him, I think he's got the potential to be a good football player at that position. Now we've got to try to push him forward here and see how he does.

Q. How is Jon Wisniewski looking?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Jon is back fully healthy, he and Jay Scheel. Good to have those guys back on our team.

Q. Is Jon a prototypical tight end for you or how would you describe him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I would describe him as a well-rounded prototypical tight end. That's probably the best way to say it. He's an effective run blocker, good hands, and does a nice job. Probably more of a Henry Krieger Coble type player if you will.

Q. Jonathan Parker had some big plays when the ball was in his hands late in the year, whether it was confidence, mental, whatever, do you anticipate him at the wide receiver position to be able to do more with his ability than he has in the past and help you in different ways?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was our motivation for talking to him about moving, and we're hoping that we can use him in a real effective way. All that being said, it goes back to Mark's question earlier about just the confidence. He's got to get over what happened in the last ballgame. We all have. We've moved on, and he's a year older just like everybody that's in the program that was here last year. They're a year older. He should be a better football player. He's trained hard, but there's some newness there for sure. We think he's got some ability and potential to help us. We'll try to use him in a smart way out there.

Q. You lost both of your fullbacks last year; how important is it getting them back in the running game?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's one of those stories that doesn't gather much attention, garner much attention, but for what we do, the tight end position is really important. When you lose good players at those spots, which we just had an unusual

situation when you talk about Adam Cox and Macon Plewa. Those are two outstanding college fullbacks and just happen to be the same year, basically the same story, came here as full linebackers, so to lose those guys in a quiet way, that affected our team in a fairly significant way. It's great to have them back, not only for the way they play but the leadership they give and provide, too.

They're both outstanding young guys. What is that, the all-Joe team or whatever, they'd be on that team, but that's about the only team they're going to make. Not a bad team to be on, though.

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