

July 28, 2014



An Interview With:

IOWA COACH KIRK FERENTZ

THE MODERATOR: Coach, an opening statement.

COACH FERENTZ: It's great to be here, certainly. I've read couple articles over the past couple of weeks kind of poking fun at coaches that said they're excited to get started, so I'm going to try to avoid that mistake and move on to something else.

Truth is most of us I think really enjoy doing more than talking, and this is the talking time of year. We've got three days off campus this week in our calendars where we're off campus and talking, and the rest of the time we're going to be in the office looking at each other and talking.

So it will be a good thing when we get around to practicing next Monday. That will make I think all of us happy.

This is a special year for Iowa football. It's the 10-year anniversary of our 2004 championship team, so that's a great thing, certainly, and basically, like most years, we think we have an opportunity to have a good football team. We've certainly got some good players, some real leaders that we lost last year that we've been in the process of trying to replace. It's been a process now since January.

And on the positive side, we certainly have some outstanding players on our football team returning from last year in the three seniors that are here today and tomorrow. Mark Weisman, Carl Davis, Brandon Scherff I think are all representative of the kind of players and leaders that it's going to require for us to have a good season.

So we've got work ahead. That will begin next week in earnest. And certainly we're looking forward to getting started. I'll open it up for questions.

Q. There's so much -- Scherff has so much talent and he's getting so much hype. Tell us what makes him so special compared to some of the other Iowa linemen that you've had through the program.

COACH FERENTZ: The first thing I would say is he's a lot like some of the other great players that we've had. And that's a very complimentary term. First guy that comes to mind is Marshal Yanda who's a three-time Pro Bowl guy and three-time All-Pro. And the first thing I think about with Marshal is just his enthusiasm and his eagerness to improve and work hard, and that certainly would sum up Brandon as well.

We've had a lot of outstanding players over the last 15 years, linemen that have come through. And I think Brandon really embodies a lot of the best qualities of all those guys, and certainly he's got some physical characteristics that are just highly unusual, quite frankly. So it's a great attitude with a good skill set.

I think the thing we're all excited about more than any is the fact that we all believe he can improve and be a much better player this year than he was a year ago.

Q. Talk about Mark's ability to rack up the yards but also be tough, physical guy, especially in the way that the Big Ten divisions are set up this year. Can you talk about his play and how important his last season with the Hawkeyes are going to be and how he is going to be able to take his game to the next level from last season?

COACH FERENTZ: Mark's a great story. And hometown guy here. A lot of things I just said about Brandon, I think Mark embodies those things too. Tremendous attitude, tremendous work ethic. He's a pretty quiet guy but certainly leads by example.

And his career has been very interesting, walking on at our place as a fullback. We fooled around two years ago, threw him back there at the running back position, and really did a good job with that.

He's a tough, physical runner, there's no question about that. And we've had all types of runners during our 15 years that have been successful. You think about a guy like Fred Russell who was certainly under a 200-pound guy, not tall. Ran a different way.

There's a lot of different ways to be successful. And Mark I think plays within his skill set. Does a great job of that, very much team oriented.

And I think, again, the good thing with our running back situation as opposed to two years, we have a chance to use him a little bit more judiciously this year. So hopefully we can do a better job keeping him fresh throughout the entire season so he can play at a level where he's fully effective.

Q. What's it like having Illinois back on the schedule this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm going to laugh because -- only in that I did a luncheon over in Rock Island somewhere in April. As I was driving over that afternoon, it dawned on me we hadn't been there since 2008 to play.

Kind of funny, a border state, the university, we hadn't played them since '08. We were over there.

Dawned on me that afternoon how unusual that is. It's just one of those funny, quirky circumstances, if you will, and I think the good news is not only do we play this year, but we'll play annually now with the new division.

I think it's certainly one of the good byproducts of the new realignment. It gives everybody a chance to, at least for the most part, play their border state teams. And in our case, at least, I think it makes a lot of sense.

Q. Jake Rudock, your young quarterback, at times he struggled last year. What type of improvements has he made from last year to this year?

COACH FERENTZ: A year ago at this time we didn't know if we had a quarterback on our roster that could play and compete in the league. And neither one -- Jake had not taken a snap; certainly C.J. Beathard had been redshirted. We liked what we saw leading up to the season. We don't hit our quarterbacks in practice. We didn't really know what his level of toughness would be.

And I think he did a lot of great things in his first year as a quarterback for us. And the big thing about it, he's a really smart guy. He's an extremely hardworking guy. Critical of his own

performance. So he learns and improves. And he's got great toughness. He's got all the attributes I think of being a good quarterback. Good leader, respected by his teammates.

And it's like any position. People tend to get better if they've got the right attitude, a good skill set. And I think we saw that with Jake in the spring. He's certainly more confident. You can't hand confidence to a player; they've got to go out and earn it on the field.

We're excited about the fact that he's still got two years left and C.J. Beathard has three years left. So we've got two players now at that position that have played, that competed. And like I mentioned about Brandon, I think they've got tremendous room for continued growth, and that's exciting to all of us.

Q. You sensing from fans any more excitement or curiosity now that the playoff is here?

COACH FERENTZ: I think, certainly, everybody's talked about that nationally, and I think it's been a good step certainly, personal commentary. I think that model always made sense. I say "always," going back 10, 15 years ago.

I think it's been good for the game certainly, and our game is a very popular game anyway, so probably just one more step to enhance the whole picture.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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