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An interview with:

## IOWA HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome to everybody, and it's good to be in Chicago. Certainly it marks the end of the summer for us and a chance to get started with our football team. So I know all of us are excited about that. It's no different with us. We had a very enjoyable last year and a successful, I think, season on many fronts. Had a good football team.

Like any time you have a good football team, it means that you've lost some real good players. We certainly did through graduation. We're excited about those guys and wish them the best in the future. The good news is we do have some good players coming back, so we're excited about that, too.

We're eager to get started here in another 10, 15 days, a week from Friday, I guess, and looking forward to that.

I think in a nutshell our season going into this season is much like the last eight years. We have a chance to have a good football team, an opportunity to see our team develop. Like most teams, we have to replace some good players, replace some great leadership. I think something that's maybe a little bit unique to us is we need to have some great stories emerge. And certainly if you look at last year's team and go back through Iowa history, that's usually the case.

Last year we had Shonn Greene come out as a one year starter and do a fantastic job as a running back. Drafted right behind Shonn was Bradley Fletcher, a guy that started four or five games at corner going into his senior year and played extremely well.

Another guy Rob Bruggeman who started his first game last August and played as well at center as anybody that I've had in my tenure at

Iowa. Guys like Pat Angerer who went into camp last year is a second team middle linebacker; Rick Stanzi was second team last year. For us to have a great year we're going to need more of those kinds of stories to surface during the coming weeks, and we're anxious to see how that goes.

The other thing I just mentioned regarding our season, we expect all of our games to be challenging certainly. But if you look at the road portion of our schedule, you know, it's extremely challenging. If we are going to be standing around in November, the end of November, looking back saying that we had a successful year, we're going to have to prove our meddle certainly away from Kinnick as well as in Kinnick.

We're excited to get started, certainly about the excitement of the league right now, what's in store for everybody, all of us as we get going, and just the great exposure that we've been able to enjoy, ABC, ESPN, Big Ten Network has been tremendous, so we're excited to get this thing kicked off.

**Q. You guys bring back all those starters from the defensive side of the ball. That was one of the best defenses in the country. But how much did losing Mitch King and Matt Kroul, will it affect this defense?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That remains to be seen certainly. Those guys were not only good football players, they're guys that started four years for us. They played well as redshirt freshmen back in 2005, and that's hard for any football player to do. It's certainly hard at the defensive line position.

Both those guys were extraordinary players, extraordinary team leaders, very different personalities, different styles of play. It's probably going to be a little bit like our running back position, I would guess. I think we're going to see several players, in other words. At the running back position we expect a couple guys to contribute, and I think it's fair to say at the defensive line there will be more than two guys playing in there; whereas the last four years King and Kroul pretty much monopolized all the

repetitions in there.

We think we've got four or five guys that have done a nice job, and we're curious to see they grow during the next four or five weeks and hopefully in four or five weeks those guys will be ready. I can see us filling those positions by committee a little bit.

**Q. What are your expectations this season for Jewel Hampton?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, Jewel is a guy that did a nice job last year as a first year player. Probably impressed me and all of us on the staff probably as much with his blocking right from the day one. It's unusual to see a running back come in and block the way that he did. He did an extraordinary job back in August. That caught our eye as much as anything.

I thought he progressed as the year went on, and went from being a young guy that really was kind of feeling his way around and became a pretty confident player second half of the season. So we're certainly hopeful that his growth will continue. We're confident that it will. He's worked extremely hard, and I think has a good demeanor. He's a guy that's certainly capable of playing well in our conference.

We've got a guy behind him in Paki O'Meara who's been very solid for us, and we see him improve on a weekly basis. And we're also hoping that Jeff Brinson, a young redshirt freshman can help us out, also. We're really probably focused on all three of those guys contributing to replace some of the productivity that Shonn Greene gave us, and what a great year he had.

**Q. So many of the coaches in the Big Ten have less than four years of experience. Does that give you and like Jim Tressel and coach Joe Paterno, an advantage? And if it does, in what way?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know. I think you can argue there's an advantage to having experience in the conference, but every time a staff changes you've got a new staff, new philosophy that comes in so you're starting over again.

In our case, we rotate our schedule every two years, so you're almost starting over there again there also when you don't play a team for a couple years. You know, so I don't know that it's real prominent. It really isn't.

You've seen coaches come in and do very well right off the bat in their careers and have great success. Bob Stoops coached Oklahoma to a

National Championship his second year as a head coach. I haven't been there yet.

It's a wash, I'm sure.

**Q. This year Ohio State is the favorite in the league, and obviously they've won the last four titles, or at least a share of them. I'm wondering, given that success and the tendency to copy what works, have they had any impact on maybe how the game is played in the league?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, I don't know specifically in terms of schemes, that type of thing, if that's what you're talking about. But they're a model program. They've done a fantastic job top to bottom. Jim and his staff do a great job, coaching, recruiting, right on through. Their players have played extremely well in all three phases, not just offensively but defensively, and they play great on special teams, as well.

They've got a great environment in Columbus. It's a great football environment when you go there. It's tough to play there, and they're tough on the road. They've done well in all phases. It's not a fluke or an accident that they've had the success that they have had. It presents a challenge to all of us to try to get to that level.

**Q. Did you guys beat an SEC team in the bowl game last year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was South Carolina.

**Q. Do you see a marked difference between where that league is and where you guys are now talent-wise, et cetera, or what do you see? The national perception is that they're head and shoulders above everyone right now.**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, they've got a tremendous conference. I'll start out by saying that. Whether you talk about what you see on the football field, you look at the combine, you study the draft, and I think you can say the same about most of the BCS conferences. You see some good football and you see some bad football at times, as well.

They're on a good run right now, no question about that. But I think perceptions tend to get a little bit exaggerated or stretched. They've got an outstanding conference. I'm not taking anything away from that. The games get decided

on the field.

I was at Iowa for nine years back in the '80s. I think there was a marked difference at that time. I think there were a lot of gaps regionally around the country, and I think things have changed out of the nine years I was out in Division I football. I think things changed a little bit.

Our teams have been competitive, and when I say our teams, our conference teams have been competitive. I still go back to 2002 coming into this meeting and the sky was clearly falling. That was the tenor of the meeting. At the end of the season, we had four teams in the top 13 with Ohio State winning the National Championship.

So I think perceptions. It seems like the more we talk about things, the more we focus on things, the more pronounced they become. And I'm not sure they're always factual. It's usually a pretty fine line between winning and losing in a lot of cases, and I think the balance of power tends to go around.

But you could argue obviously there's some geographic differences. You look at the west coast, the southwest and southeast portion of our countries. There's a lot of growth, a lot more athletes there, perhaps, if you look at the big scheme of things. The state of Iowa you've got three million people, a little different than Florida or Texas or certainly California.

Anyway, I think at times things get a little bit more exaggerated than probably are factual.

**Q. You returned most of your offensive line. I was wondering how that will help the running game, and could you comment on the development of Bryan Bulaga?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'll start with Bryan. He's a tremendous young man. I mentioned King and Kroul both came in and started for us as second year players, redshirt freshmen, and Bryan started the majority of his freshman year. He missed about four weeks with a shoulder injury, but really played well as a true freshman.

That's really unusual. I haven't been around many true freshman to could play like that. Last year we moved him to left tackle, and I thought he handled that real well. He still has work to do and improvement to make from a technique standpoint, but you won't find a better young man to coach and be around and a guy with a better work ethic. That's where it all begins. We're counting on him to be a leader in that group.

We have some good players coming back up front, but we also lost, I mentioned Rob Bruggeman, who's been one of the best centers to play at Iowa in the last decade, and certainly Seth Olsen was a three and a half year starter. I don't want to minimize the leadership they provided just like King and Kroul did on the defensive line. We think we're going to be okay, but we're certainly not there yet. We've got a lot of work to do in this next four to five weeks.

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