

**July 24, 2008**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just say hello and welcome. Obviously our state has been through a real tough period this past spring starting in May with tornadoes and floods and it's been a really interesting year and a challenging year off the field for us in many, many ways, so you know, it's a first-time experience for me. We did go through flooding in '93, I missed that, being gone during that period, and it's been amazing to watch the people of Iowa's resiliency, helping each other, and our state has got a long road back certainly, but I think the challenge has brought the best out of our state and the people in the state. So it's really been an amazing phenomenon to witness.

A couple words about our football team this coming year. We have a real unusual and rare combination, certainly a little different than what I'm used to, but we still have a relatively young football team this year. We have a very experienced football team in a lot of ways, so we're really optimistic about the way things are going to shake out for us and anxious to get started.

Defensively, certainly when you look at our team we have two seniors, four-year starters, Mitch King and Matt Kroul, our defensive tackles, and we haven't had a lot of four-year starters around in the last nine years and both those guys have done a great job on the field and off the field for us. It all really starts from that point.

The other guy I mentioned is our most experienced linebacker coming back, A.J. Edds is a third-year junior next year, second-year starter, and has done a great job for us last year and I think will be a great leader for us. Losses defensively turned out to be pretty symmetrical. We lost both defensive ends, both inside linebackers and two corners. We've got work to do there. The people that are competing for those positions offensively, a lot of players who have

experience and our statistics last year are certainly less than impressive.

So the key there is getting everybody back, putting it together and hopefully keeping everybody healthy to start up front. Seth Olsen played an awful lot, and Rob Bruggeman, another senior who has done a great job, unfortunately endured an ACL repair a year ago in the spring, really in contention for a starting position, and missed all but one or two games last year. He's back healthy and we expect him to be right in the thick of things.

Really have about eight or nine guys in competition for a starting position. Up front one guy that won't be in the equation is Dace Richardson, a young guy who has really had a tough go recently, tried to come back last year from a knee surgery and played a little bit, a game or two, really had a tough time making it back and unfortunately had another setback this summer, so I don't think he'll play again for us and that's really unfortunate. Dace did start and played a lot as a true freshman a couple years back. He's a good player, a good person and a couple years back we thought he had an outstanding future and more fortunately is a tremendous young man. We always feel terrible any time someone's career is ended prematurely. We feel better about our tight end and receiver situation going into this season. We've got guys like Brandon Myers and Allen Reisner who is a true freshman that has played well for us last year. We've seen him continue to grow. We welcome back Tony Moeaki who's, we think, one of our top football players, loads of potential, basically missed last year and missed a Big Ten portion of our schedule with an injury. At the receiver position right now are Trey Stross and Derrell Johnson-Koulianos are our two most experienced guys returning and certainly will welcome back Andy Brodell, who is also injured in our first Big Ten game, so in effect he missed last year as well. I feel like we have a little bit more depth and experience at that position.

Jake Christensen returns for us at quarterback. We're counting on him to be more



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mature and increase his production, and our biggest losses would be obviously in the backfield position. We graduated three seniors that played a lot of football for us, Albert Young, Damian Sims and Tom Bush, all three were outstanding performers for us and we'll miss them.

Probably the most notable back there would be Shonn Greene rejoining our football team, he'll be with us in August so we'll welcome getting him back in the equation.

On special teams right now we had a first-year punter, Ryan Donahue did an exceptional job last year, but was inconsistent being a young player and we're excited about having him back for three more years. The place-kicking position remains very much up in the air, and we'll let our players compete in camp on that for that position. That was certainly an inconsistency for us last year, much like our offensive production. Overall we feel like our core special teams will be improved and we feel like whenever we can settle on a returner we'll be a better network. So that's an area we've targeted for improvement.

As I said earlier, we're a young football team. We do have some experience and we need a lot of work right now. We're counting on a lot of players to improve. And I think all of us are excited about getting started with that work here in another eight or nine days.

With that, I'll field it out to questions.

**Q. Coach, it's been obviously a trying off season for you, not only with the flooding, obviously certainly a multitude of issues. Are you taking any steps differently this year going into the preseason to try and keep the focus on the field and get people's minds off some of the difficult stuff that's happened in the last couple of months?**

COACH FERENTZ: Certainly the best way to do that is to find a way to get our players to make better decisions off the field. That's where it all starts. And any attention -- maybe not any attention, but much of the attention that we've drawn to the program as a result of our decisions off the field. So I guess maybe good news or bad news here is we've been down that road before back in 2001. Up until last year we've had our worst year off the field as far as decision making. The good news is we came back and had our best year off the field and on the field following that. And just like we did back then, we've examined everything that we can. We've tried to look at different ways to be more proactive, better in our

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educational efforts and see what we can do to improve in that regard. We're confident that this will be a different year and we ask people to judge this roster on what they do basically starting in March. And this roster really took form. And I'm very confident this year will be different, but only time will tell, just like our results on the field.

**Q. You all decided to hire a life skills advisor. Can you talk about what impact you hope that position has on the team?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're in the process of doing that right now. I think we're going to call him a player development coach, if you will. It is as a result of going back and looking at things and just re-examining every step that we've taken.

And one thing I've shared with our media is the first starting point is I think we're not looking at this position as a panacea, if you will. It's not as simple as -- but our goals are really to help someone with our players, particularly our younger players. I think that's been a constant that a lot of the bad decisions have been made by players in their first and second years on campus. The vast majority of them have. So our goal with the position is going to be better supplement the coaching staff, better help our players with the transition, just another person for them to have to meet with and visit with, perhaps offer a little bit more accountability for our young people. The overall goal is to help educate them a little bit more to the environment that they walk into. So it's certainly different for every incoming freshman any time they walk on any college campus in America it's a different thing and every campus has its own personality, every town or city certainly does, as well. That's what we're looking for. There will be some grunt work involved. We're not looking to hire Dr. Phil. I don't think he's available or we can afford him, so we'll have to skip that. But we are looking at this position as basically a support person for our coaching staff. We're very excited about that development and eager to get the position filled.

**Q. Coach, regarding the floods and the tornadoes and all that fun stuff, have you seen -- sometimes this kind of stuff will make people appreciate what they have a little bit more and make you appreciate the game of football a little bit more. Have you seen or do you expect to see a little more passion, a little**

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**more dedication from any of your guys or just an appreciation for life a little bit more?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think there's any question about it, any time you go through a very challenging period, hopefully that's one of the lessons you take away from it. If there's any good news, and I think a lot of lowans will tell you the same thing, our players have had an opportunity to get involved firsthand, first off in Parkersburg and we were -- we had about 55 players up there for a day to try to help out with cleanup and some other chores that they had assigned. And I think what all of us learned that day is what we did was just like what a lot of people did in the state, there was a group from Harlem, which is probably a five or six-hour bus ride away, they had been there already, people from all over the state had come through Parkersburg trying to offer any help that they can. And I think that kind of compassion is what really makes our state very unique. It's a good neighborhood, if you will. Everybody is trying to help out and everybody realizes tragedy like that can happen anywhere. So I think there was a spirit of cooperativeness there. It was a great learning experience for our players.

I think you're probably aware of the four NFL players from that town, three of them are Iowa grads, and as far reaching to not only their four teams, but other people in the NFL making very significant contributions to try to help that community get back on their feet.

Ironically, when we were up there is when our flood situation started to escalate. And as you might imagine, our players, staff, everybody involved in our football program had ample opportunity to get involved locally. And again, I think what all of us found that participated, we were there with professors, just people from town, all ages, all backgrounds, everybody pitched in and we had people come from other communities to help us, just like we had witnessed in Parkersburg. So I think great life lessons there certainly. That was -- again, I think what you find is challenging times bring the best out in people and we certainly had an opportunity and all the players had an opportunity to witness that firsthand. And many of our players are not from the state of Iowa, yet they were every bit as Iowan as everybody during that period.

**Q. You were running down positions before, which do you think are the most important components to a successful season? Which areas are you most concerned with and**

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**which areas do you think you can make the big breakthrough in?**

COACH FERENTZ: For our football team? I think special team's performance, I'd start there. We're totally inconsistent there. We did some things better, but if you look back at our successful teams, we have been good on special teams. That's a requisite for us and I think it always will be.

And if I was going to grab a couple of key statistics, I would start with third down on both sides of the ball, the first thing to jump out, but there are other things on the list, but that would be the first and foremost in my mind.

**Q. You guys have had an opportunity now to come back to Bloomington and play Indiana when they won arguably their biggest football game under the Terry Havener regime. Just your thoughts about playing a tough and upcoming IU football team that's really gotten the best of you guys the last two years.**

COACH FERENTZ: The only good news there is I don't think James Hardy is still there, is he, brother, sister or cousin, because we haven't covered him in three years and look at the films. That's a matter-of-fact. I don't know if he had poison ivy or what it was, but we didn't come close.

That aside, and I think that's what's important there is the development of the Indiana football team. They've done a tremendous job in all regards starting with Coach Hoepfner. I don't want to minimize the job he did, to walk into very tough circumstances, extremely tough circumstances and do an outstanding job, what a credit to he and his staff and the players, and that's really where the credit belongs. They've willed it to happen. They've put the work and effort in. It's a great story, from my perspective, and I think that's what makes our conference so outstanding. So, you know, we had a very tough occasion and that really kind of got us going on a downward spiral that season. All that aside, it's going to be a tough road game in the Big Ten and we'll have to be our absolute best to compete that way.

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