

February 4, 2015



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: Apologize for being a little bit late. I was not trying to add to signing day drama in any way, shape or form. We're all I think probably like every coach in America really enthused about the group we were able to sign today, very enthused about the 21 guys that decided to join our program, and seven other walk-ons, as well, which I think is really significant.

The whole group from our vantage point is a very quality group. We're very impressed with each and every one of the players who have chosen to join us, and we spent a lot of time not only in the last two months but well before that just trying to find out as much as we can about their work habits and their character and attitudes, and just, again, very, very pleased.

As you might imagine, a lot of work goes into this process. It takes an awful lot of effort, and just very, very appreciative of everybody's involvement, be it our coaching staff directly, it starts with them certainly, going out on the road, making phone calls, film evaluation, that type of thing, our support staff. Then when the prospects get to campus, an awful lot of people on campus contribute, and not only on recruiting weekends, which really are kind of diminishing if you will, and it's almost become a year-round process. We have prospects joining us at all times of the year. We've already had a large group of this year's juniors on campus. It's kind of an ongoing process and we call on a lot of people at weird times, weekend hours, summer hours, that type of thing, and they've been very, very good about just coming over and lending some of their expertise about the campus and the University with their prospects and their families. It's a real team effort and extremely appreciative of that.

And beyond that, our players do a great job, and that's to me the thing that sells our program more than anything are the players on our team currently, same as I just referenced with the other people. We ask a lot of our guys on the recruiting front. They give up a lot of their free time to come over and talk to prospects about the program, and I think they understand the importance of it, but again, I'm very, very appreciative of that.

And then mostly just for the prospects that have committed here, the 28 players that we're bringing in. Just it's a very, very exciting time for them, for them individually, their families, their coaches, their mentors, teachers, just like a lot of work goes in from our end, certainly for any college football player, high school football player earning a college scholarship or an opportunity to come to a program like this, it's a real accomplishment and real achievement, something very, very significant, and this is a very, very special family day for all the prospects and their families and all those people that have helped them.

It's just a really exciting time, and I just encourage -- we have three of the guys that have started already with the team this past -- class has opened here a few weeks back, but the rest of the guys will join us in the summer, at some point, either June or August or some point in between, and I encourage them to enjoy the rest of their senior years and they'll start a new chapter when they get here, and it's a very exciting chapter, as well. Most of them are finishing up their high school careers and their time in school. It's a great, great time and opens the door for another really exciting period, as well. That's kind of where it's at right now, and I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. The three guys that came in, do they maybe have a little bit better chance of jumping into the two deep?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, realistically it

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gives them a little bit of an edge, certainly being here, being familiar with everything about school, going to school, number one, and then also the strength and conditioning program. They get a head start that way. And then obviously when spring football starts, it's going to be a chance to get involved, either offensively or defensively with the system, special teams, and start learning techniques, schemes, all those types of things. But I also tell the first-year guys, we're not really counting on them to save our program. If they can help it and help contribute next year, that's a real bonus, but to me it's about building a good base, good foundation, and the flipside my concern is they can handle the adjustment, and I think in this case it made sense for all three players for some logical reasons. I'm totally comfortable. They're all doing well so far school wise, they're adjusted well, and I think they have a good support network here on campus, James Daniels coming from the furthest distance, but he's got a brother here on campus, which is really helpful to him.

Q. Can you talk about the two quarterbacks you're bringing in, what you see in them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're different yet they're the same in a lot of ways. Both of them have quarterbacked champion teams and outstanding football teams. In Drew's case, four of them. That's pretty amazing. They look different. One is certainly taller than the other, but the bottom line is they're great players with great intangibles, great leadership skills, and we're really excited about the upside of both guys.

We feel good about both of them. In a perfect world you don't want two in the same class, but they're both players that we just felt so highly of that we're determined to get both of them in this class if we could do it.

Q. Would you say they're more dual threat than your typical quarterbacks?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, probably more so with Ryan, I think. That's not to minimize -- Drew is a very good athlete and he's capable of running and capable of catching, too. He slipped one of those in the championship game, I believe. They're both good athletes, both of them. Drew excels on the basketball court, as well. Yeah, we're just really excited and we'll see how it plays out once they get here on campus.

Q. Do you expect Drew Cook to stay at quarterback?

KIRK FERENTZ: We do, uh-huh, absolutely. I didn't know a year and a half ago about Drew, first time we really saw him out in camp, but he probably weighed about 150 pounds then. He was about the same height but he was really thin back then, I think he was coming out of his sophomore year and just the advancement and maturity we saw in one year's time and then certainly now he's a graduating senior. He's really progressed, and just knowing his attitude, I wouldn't rule anything out, so we'll just let it go in the fall and see where it takes us.

Q. Nine players from Iowa. Is that becoming more of a trend for the program?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it would be great if we could, but we're not going to force anything or try to create anything. I think the bottom line is we try to evaluate as best we can. In a perfect world we'd love to get all of our players from here. Believe me, it would be a lot easier chore for us. It's easier to recruit within state lines. It's never easy recruiting, but certainly it would be easier. But that's just not realistic I don't think with our state's population.

This is a very healthy number, and I think the one thing, you've got different positions, you've got different sizes and weights, but the common denominator, we just feel really good about the attributes we identified in the players. The thing we always do in recruiting, we try to look at the attributes and the characteristics of the guys that have had success here, whether they came from Iowa or other places, and then try to identify those in the prospects that we're evaluating. Certainly with the guys we have coming from Iowa, we feel really good about them.

Q. When you look at Eric Graham, how did you find him first of all and what was that recruitment like?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we were a little concerned about our running back depth, and you just never know how things are going to go in recruiting. We tried to exhaust every avenue we could and we looked at as many players as we could the past month after getting back from the bowl game, and Eric is a guy we came across late in the process. Seth Wallace shot down there and spent some time with him, got to watch him play

basketball and talked to a lot of people at the school and came away very, very impressed, and he came up to campus and everybody on the staff was impressed, as well. The film was good but it goes well beyond that and we wanted to make sure we felt good about him as a guy that hopefully could do well in our program, and the process kind of ran its course and we were able to come to an agreement, which was great.

Q. When did you offer Eric Graham officially?

KIRK FERENTZ: Offer him officially? Not until he got on campus. We wanted to have a chance to visit with him a little bit and just learn more about it. Up until that point Seth was the only guy that got to spend time with him and talk to everybody else, so we just wanted to make sure all of us felt good about things, and we really do. Great story. It's a good story.

Q. The Paulsen twins are from a town of about 1,000 people. If they would have been from Des Moines or Cedar Rapids do you think they might have had more publicity in recruiting?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's always interesting how that goes. I think about a guy like Rob Baxley to that point, from Oswego, Illinois, which back in the mid '80s was kind of like West Branch. It was off the beaten path or a smaller town. Now I guess it's big part of suburban life in Chicago. I could never understand why Rob was being recruited the way he was. It was basically us, Northwestern, who was not very successful at that point, and Rice was the only other school on him. He was a good student, obviously. I thought he was tremendously under-recruited. He had a good career here and played in the NFL.

Yeah, it is, there is some merit to that sometimes. We really like both those guys. They're high-energy guys. They've got great personalities and we think they really have good upside. We've had them here in camp and have enjoyed the opportunity to work with them.

Q. Not that it matters to you guys what these players' other offers are, but I think from the outside people focus on that. Did you do a good job identifying players early like the Paulsens, Jake Newborg, Drew Cook? it seemed like you got them quick before others could get them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it kind of ties in with the in-state question. One advantage we have, you don't have many, that if you're -- the closer proximity you have to prospects, the better opportunity you have to get them on campus and get them in camp and that's another realm of evaluation where you actually get to work with the players. The closest thing I can think of in the NFL is if you get to coach the Senior Bowl, you get to spend a week with guys and really learn more about their work habits and what have you. Yeah, we really feel like we know the players that have come to camp a little bit better than some of the others, and I think you know we've never worried too much about what other folks think about prospects. We try to make our own evaluations, and we obviously had a lot of good feelings about all those guys.

That one really weighs heavily into the evaluation process, and it can go the other way, too. We've had guys that have been offered by a lot of places that we just have a hard time warming up to them once we get to work with them a little bit. That is one advantage about camp. Certainly it's another opportunity just to get a little different perspective on a prospect.

Q. Linebackers seem to be a pretty heavy focus for you guys this year. Can you talk about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: It was last year, too, and part of that, it's twofold. Parker Hesse moved up front during the course of bowl preparation. He spent the month of December playing defensive end, and I think he's really going to take to that position really well. That dropped our population by one there, and then right along with that, just the special teams, I've talked about our need to get better on special teams, and certainly the linebacker position helps you there.

That was something we were hoping to sign, a minimum of four linebackers. We weren't sure that was going to be possible, but we were hoping to do that, and really happy about that, and hopefully these guys will be able to contribute. Maybe half of them will contribute next year. Hopefully that can materialize.

Q. Do you feel like the new facility may pay dividends for you in this process?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, yes and no. I think back to several years ago to when Jeff

Tarpinian was in New England, he was teasing Brian that you guys were showing me those diagrams when I was in high school. You can go back and trace the year, too, and figure out when that was. But it's been a while.

We've got a lot of mileage out of the diagrams. It's been better to see the building actually going up. To go in the new indoor facility was a big step for us, and now that we've had the whole thing in place and intact, it's a huge difference.

I guess what I would point to is two or two and a half weeks ago we had the juniors on campus, a group of 60 plus juniors, and there wasn't a prospect or a parent that I visited with that didn't comment about the facility, and right now, bear in mind the graphics aren't really up. We've got maybe a quarter of them up right now. But that's really impacted me just how important it's going to be for us because I think everybody was polite before; they didn't mention anything and say anything; they were just polite about it, but just the overwhelming feedback that we got a couple Sundays ago, it does make a difference, and it's something people take note of.

I'm in a seat where I can't judge everybody else, but just going back to Gerry DiNardo's comments when he was here in August about our facility from what he could see, he thought it was extremely impressive and I've had several other people since that time, Tom Lemming included, make the same remark. Yeah, I think it's really going to help us, hopefully will help us down the road, starting with next year's class hopefully it will really just help be attractive to the players and the prospects we're looking at, but it really just gets down to the people. The most important thing is having the right people in the building, and I'm confident that we have that.

Q. You've always talked about the importance of getting recruits to Iowa. How much more important is that now that you have this facility?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, to that point, for sure, for them to see it in person, we can show it to them on a computer, they can all look it up and we've got great pictures, but to actually see it and feel it, it does have a big impact. It's really no different than when Gary and I and our parties went out and looked at other buildings. When you get to see something and compare it to what you have, you kind of get a feel for what the difference is and how impressive it is.

For us to be able to showcase that now, which we will, it's fantastic.

When I was at the University of Maine we showcased our locker room. That was the one big facility. We made sure they didn't look at the stadium. We would always point to the right when we came up the driveway. Hopefully they didn't look left, and we showed them the locker room at least five times during the visit.

This was a little better situation than that, and certainly we're utilizing it in a lot of different ways during recruiting weekends.

Q. You retooled your recruiting strategy when you brought Seth Wallace on. How do you feel that's gone, and how has it improved your recruiting?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's been a real good transition. It's like anything, any time you bring a new perspective in, I think it can be healthy for us. Like the facility, I think the impact of that is probably going to be better judged down the road a little bit, but I thought we covered a lot of ground, covered a lot of prospects and really did a good job, worked a little bit more efficiently, and hopefully we'll just continue to improve in that area, as well, as we move along. But Seth is a guy that took charge, he's a go-getter, very aggressive guy, he's used to giving directive, I think, and I thought he did a really good job of giving us direction, and I thought the guy did a great job of working during the period.

Q. When you look at the signees, there is a lot of Hawkeye history. What does that mean for the program?

KIRK FERENTZ: There are no guarantees, but it certainly means a lot to us when you have a guy like Riley Reiff, I tell people I don't know how many starting tackles in the National Football League show up at 7:30 on Saturdays in February to work out with their college team, which Riley did a couple times last year. Riley is a pretty quiet guy, but I'll tell you takes a lot of pride in what he does, and he was totally dedicated to being the best he can be and still is.

Yeah, when you get that perspective of a player, you like to think that some of that is going to get shared with a relative, and then Mark Cook to me is one of the great stories of all time at the University of Iowa, and I've been exposed to a lot of really outstanding players and outstanding

stories, and again, you just look at Drew's résumé and what he's done during his high school career, in all aspects, not just football, but basketball, academically, et cetera, and I know Marv's recruiting story real well because I was sitting in the room when Bill Brazier pounded the table for him. Yeah, those things carry weight for sure. Again, there are no guarantees, but when you identify some of the same things in the relatives, that's a real positive.

Q. You're pretty familiar with Anthony Nelson's dad, right?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Anthony, his dad Jeff was here, his first couple and my last couple in the '80s, and another guy that played really well in our program.

Q. You guys were close to offering him...

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we just never had an opportunity really to present the offer the way we wanted to and then present the campus and the University the way we wanted to. That's the way it goes sometimes. We're just very appreciative that we got the opportunity to do that later on, and obviously very excited that he chose to come here, and really excited about him as a football player.

Again, I'm not saying it's the Matt Nelson story. There are a lot of parallels between he and Matt, I think, and the way they played and the way they are. That's got us real excited.

Q. How do you view the landscape of recruiting now with all the flips and changes?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's just interesting. The new term I heard this year which I don't think I had heard before I think is a soft offer. I've heard soft commitment before. That one popped up a couple years. I guess colleges have countered with soft offers.

I'm not sure I understand any of that. You just have to deal in good faith, and it always helps when you can talk to people face to face. I think we all feel better about that.

But at the end of the day, I tell every prospect that we recruit, it's all about them finding the right thing for them and being happy with their decision.

To me all we can ask is that they come look at our place, examine every possible aspect that they can, get to know the people as well as they can that are here, and really get a good feel

for what their experience is going to be like, and then after that they've got to do what's best for them, and that to me is how the process works. Sometimes it's frustrating, sometimes disappointing, but it's like anything you do. I think when you're putting it out there a little bit, you run the risk of getting hurt. But again, it's all about what's best for the prospect. I guess the only commentary I would give, I just hope every prospect really weighs and measures the right things, the things that are really going to be pertinent to their success as a person, getting their diplomas and also having a good experience athletically.

That doesn't always weigh into it. It's fairyland, I understand that. But that's what you hope, hope a prospect is doing, and if you have kids at home that's what you hope they look at when they go look at colleges, too, whether they're athletes or not.

Q. They're talking an early signing day again. Are you for that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I am, and it sounds like it's gaining some real traction this time around. I'm not sure what changed. There's a flip somewhere that somebody flipped on that one. I think the nice thing about it, it will relieve some of the -- maybe not relieve, maybe the wave of people knocking on doors is just going to get moved up. But for somebody that really knows where they want to go, it gives them an opportunity to sign pre-holidays and put it to rest and not having to worry about getting phone calls and all that kind of stuff as the process goes on.

You know, it's strictly an optional process. That's why I never understood the resistance to it. It's an option for the prospect. No guarantee for anybody else until a guy signs. To me nothing really changes, but I think it'll be a nice opportunity people want to commit to do it in writing.

Q. Decommittments and flips are part of college recruiting, but when it happens 24 hours before signing day, how do you deal with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: You just deal with it. If you could draw the script, you'd rather find out. I remember distinctly, I can tell you who the player was, Carter Hill. I think it was Naperville Central. But his dad played at Texas. It was December 1st or 2nd, I can't remember which, it was an early

stop for me. We walked in, he told me that he committed to Texas the night before, I remember walking out, and Carl Jackson telling me that's a good thing, and I looked at him and said, how can that be a good thing, and he says, better now than February whatever. And I learned a lesson at that point as a young coach.

So yeah, in a perfect world you'd rather find out. If it's going to be no, you'd rather find out sooner than later, but the world is not perfect, and you deal with it.

Q. Do you ever worry about with an early signing day you might miss out on any players later on?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't see us filling up. That'll never happen. We don't fill up in December. Typically I think if you look at it, especially the last couple years, we'll have a healthy block of guys committed by mid-season, and then to me it's a whole different pool after that happens, then we're looking at different guys, and to your point, we've found a lot of good players in the January period. I don't want to say I got ripped, I got criticized or prodded a little bit about recruiting last time we did a talk show before the holidays, and I wasn't thinking on my feet real quickly then, but if you think about we had three guys playing in the playoffs for the Packers, one guy was a very highly recruited guy that we got in on early, and our message resonated with him in Brian Bulaga. Micah Hyde and Mike Daniels are both guys that we found in January. Somebody just threw Mike's tape on my desk when we got back from the Outback Bowl. Hitch, involved in a controversial play in the Dallas-Detroit game, same thing. We beat somebody out, a MAC school out for him in January. There are a lot of good players out there, and again, to the point I made earlier, this is going to be the wrap-up of a phase of the guys -- everybody's careers, the prospects' careers once they get to college. Now the next step is what they do once they get to college. It's a whole new start, a whole new chapter, and what they do with those opportunities is really going to make or break what they do during their collegiate careers, academically and athletically.

Q. How did you get involved with Angelo Garbutt after he was committed to Oregon State and there was a coaching change?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, they had a coaching change, and obviously that offer, I guess,

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followed with the staff. But we were looking at the linebackers in January, got back after the bowl game, and just kind of challenged the guys, let's come up with some guys to look at here and see what we think, and we looked at Angelo's film and I thought it was outstanding. We thought there might be an opportunity to recruit him now since there was a coaching change at the school he was committed to, and to me his film no-brainer. He's a really aggressive, tough running back as well as a good linebacker, good defensive player.

So we started calling him and just seeing if he'd be interested. He opened up the door for us a little bit, and it's great to get he and his mom up here for a visit a couple weeks ago, and just really excited to have him commit to us.

Q. Five offensive linemen this year. Could you talk about James Daniels and the twins Landan and Levin Paulsen?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the first thing I think about the Paulsen twins is they're just high energy. They've got a lot of enthusiasm and energy. They're multifaceted, as well. I'm not saying they're really Julian Vanderveelde, but they're in that category. They do an awful lot of things. I remember one time in the fall talking to them, they were selling popcorn at the girls' volleyball game, they had band practice at 6:00 the next morning, and I think they're involved in debate, too, and the whole nine yards, so these guys got about eight balls in the air times two, so that's 16, right? They're really involved in a lot of different things at a small school. It's a neat family, and we just have good feelings about them. James Daniels is a guy that we kind of identified when we were recruiting LeShun a couple years ago. He was only a sophomore at that time, I believe, and it's a great family. We feel just super things about the family. LeShun has been a great guy on our football team. Talk about a guy that shows up every day with a smile on his face and works extremely hard each and every day. We're just really fortunate to have the opportunity to recruit James and get him out here.

Q. Was the offensive line a big emphasis this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: It was. We've kind of been trimming that a little bit close in recent years, and we were able to get three in the last year's class. Ross Reynolds was able to join the class a

little bit later, but it was a real concern because we've graduated some really good players and we've got a couple more seniors next year, so we've really got to -- in our feeling we had to fortify that group a little bit, and we like the five guys that we've got. I mentioned those three, and Jake Newborg and Brett Waechter, we think they really have a good opportunity, as well.

Q. Does it help when guys like Landan and Levi Paulsen come in and know they have raw talent?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's good to know what you don't know sometimes, and yeah, that's true with most offensive linemen because most of them come from one system or the other where they either throw it 89 percent of the time or they run it 89 percent of the time. There's a lot of teaching typically that goes on at that position. But the thing they have requisite ability and size certainly, and they've got the attitude and the work ethic. That's really what impressed us the most about them.

To me, it's just a matter of what they choose to do with the opportunity in front of them. I'm pretty confident they'll take it and run with it.

Q. Are handlers or mentors becoming more prevalent in the recruiting process? They're becoming much more prevalent in college recruiting. How do you deal with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: We haven't really had a lot of interaction with them quite frankly. That's something I just mentioned, what I try to encourage prospects to do and all of us to do is try to figure out what's best for us, and the other part of that for me is the best source of information for any prospect would be people that don't have agendas, and coaches have agendas, every one of us has an agenda. If a guy is a good player, we think they can help our football team, we want to get them, so that's pretty obvious. We're biased.

But I just tell guys, who's got more invested in you than your parents? Or it might be someone in the community, a member of the clergy, someone at school, a coach. There are all kinds of people that have long ties with prospects, and I don't think it ever changes in life. You always go to people for advice and for reference that you really trust have your best interests in mind. Easier said than done. But to me that's what prospects need to do and should do.

Q. The climate in recruiting today, you guys have been pretty aggressive with the next



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class in offering. Do you feel like you have to be there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think you do. I feel like if you're not doing that, you're probably going to get left behind. We still do it fairly conservatively, I guess you'd say. I think in this day and age if you're not others are thrown in, you're probably going to run the risk of getting left behind. It's a calculated risk, but everything is accelerating. I was laughing about years ago the justification for not having early signing day was that it was going to accelerate the speed of recruiting. Really? Okay, I hadn't noticed. I'm not sure where those people were living -- in fact I think the people that were resisting were right in the middle of all of that. It's kind of an interesting -- you can rationalize anything, I guess. But yeah, it's moving fast.

Q. A few weeks ago you referenced moving some coaching people around. Have you settled on anything there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Been thinking a lot about it, and it's probably the next step of the evaluation process. We have a little bit of time now to start thinking more about internal things.

Q. Do you expect there to be changes?

KIRK FERENTZ: There might be some changes in seats. I don't expect changes in faces, but we'll just see how things pan out.

Q. Is CJ Beathard going to be a part of the team in 2015?

KIRK FERENTZ: I hope so. We've had conversations. He's back here training, working out. He's got a great attitude, but at the same time, too, I'm realistic about it and realize anything is possible. We'll just have to wait and see how it plays out, but he's been working and working hard.

Q. Same with Jake Rudock?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yep, same deal, yep.

Q. You've got four signees from Texas. Do you feel like that's a pipeline that you feel like got started that you can move?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, pipeline would suggest or connote maybe we're on the victory lap. We're not ready to do that, but it's an area that we've targeted. We've invested heavily in it in terms of manhours, and Bobby Kennedy and LeVar are both down there working it, and every

time I go down there I think it becomes more obvious to me we'd be foolish not to because it seems like there's a new high school in a neighborhood every time you go down there. It's amazing the growth, and it's a state that's growing obviously, and for a lot of different reasons. But with that, the football has always been good there, the coaching is outstanding, and now you've got a population that's really growing.

I think it makes sense for us, but being realistic, too, we're never going to be the home state school there, but we'll try to take advantage of it. I think we've got some good ties back there, and historically we have some ties. I think that'll continue to be an area that we'll continue to focus on and see if we can't make our time be worthwhile there.

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