

Joe Paterno News Conference

October 11, 2011

Q. Can you evaluate the progress of your team at the midpoint of the season?

COACH PATERNO: We're getting a little better, you know, which is always encouraging. I think they worked hard and they're getting -- we're doing some things better. Obviously, there's a couple things we still have to do better. But, overall, I think we've made progress. I was pleased in some areas Saturday. I think we picked up in the specialty area. We ran the ball a little better. I thought the offensive line is playing better, getting a little more confidence in themselves, a little bit more cohesion.

We've played defense well most of the year, so that has not been a big concern, but it's always going to be a concern with the kinds of people we have to play against. But I think overall we've made good progress. Never quite as much as you'd like, but overall, pretty good. And I think we're getting a little bit better.

I think this is a big week for us because there was so much pressure to win last week that I hope we don't have a letdown, because we can't afford it. We're not there yet, and we've got to have a good week and keep getting better. But we've made progress.

Q. How do you rate the play of Jordan Hill this year, and why do you think he's so much better this year than he was a year ago?

COACH PATERNO: He was pretty good a year ago. Jordan Hill is a good football player. In fact, those two guys (Hill and Devon Still) are tough. He hustles every day, he's a great practice player. He hardly ever says "boo" in practice. He just does what he's told and is trying all the time to get better. He's a strong kid, good quickness. So I think he's a good football player, and I think he's played that way. It obviously is tough for those guys to get the kind of attention that you'd like to get. The things they do don't get noticed. But I've been really pleased with the way our down four guys have played, and Hill is one of them, obviously.

Q. You haven't played Purdue since Joe Tiller retired. What sort of differences do you notice when watching tape on them now under their new coach?

COACH PATERNO: Well, you've got to remember, when Joe came in the league, the league didn't have much of a -- we didn't throw the ball much, and I'll never forget the line that they would talk to Joe when, maybe one of his -- if not his first press conference, one of them, they said to him, "Well, what are you going to do now that you're in the Big Ten about throwing the football?" He says, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "We threw the football out at Wyoming," and they said, "Well, it's different." He says, "It's no different." He came in (to the Big Ten) and everybody started throwing the football.

Now we've got everybody has got a pretty darned good quarterback; they throw the ball well. And Purdue is the same way. The quarterback -- they're playing two quarterbacks as we are, which, you know, I think we've hashed that enough -- but it's good and it's bad. But the kid that played second half for them last year played very well.

So, I think they're very similar to us in a lot of ways. Some days they look really good, they do everything well, they have some lapses. And I would think it's that kind of a game. I think the team that comes in and is most consistent will win the football game, makes the least mistakes, which is usually what happens, but I think particularly in this football game.

But they're good and they've got a lot of talent. I think they've done a good job coaching them, and they can hurt you a lot of different ways.

Now, they score a lot of points. I don't care who you play, you start scoring 50 points, you're doing something right. So we've got to be very precise in our defense, can't get careless, got to line up properly, otherwise they'll take advantage of it, and we'll end up having -- getting in a basketball game with them, and we're not good enough for that.

Q. How did you challenge the toughness of your offensive line last week?

COACH PATERNO: Well, I thought they played tougher, yeah. I don't know how I would answer that question. It was never in my mind the inability to be tough. I think there was a question as to how reckless they

could be on certain plays and how to follow through on certain things that they would never -- not never, but at times not quite sure they were handling the person they were supposed to handle, and as a result they were a little bit tentative.

I thought last week they knew better what they were doing, had grown up a little bit. They realized they were -- had a tough job, and they responded to it. So I don't think it's ever been a question that they weren't innately tough enough, if that's what you're referring to. I don't think that was the case. I think it was just a question of whether, "hey, am I hitting the right guy," and they weren't reckless. I think last Saturday they had some success, and the more success they had, the more they played with enthusiasm.

Q. How frustrating or disappointing has it been with the offensive struggles in the red zone and what can you do at this point to try to keep working that out? How close are you to working that out?

COACH PATERNO: Well, obviously, we can do a better job. We've made mistakes; we fumbled on the three-yard line (at Indiana), we've had some penalties, play selection, maybe we can do a little better job from our end, the coaching end. And we can work a little harder at it. We've spent a lot of time or are going to spend a lot of time this week on the red zone, try to get a package a little bit more compact as to what we want to do down there so that we can do it with a little bit more finesse and a little bit more confidence.

But there's been a lot of reasons why we haven't done well, and we haven't done well down there. It would be foolish for me to get up there and say, "well, this, that and the other thing." But one or two things you could have made it a little bit -- given us a little bit more confidence down there that we didn't come through with; as I mentioned, fumbling on the 3 and that kind of stuff. It almost gets to be a self-fulfilled prophecy.

I think we've got to do a better job. We're working at it all the time. We talk about it all the time. And hopefully we'll start to improve.

Q. My question is about Gerald Hodges. You recruited him as a safety but it was only a short time later that you moved him to linebacker. What was it that you saw in Hodges that prompted you to move him?

COACH PATERNO: Well, we were in pretty good shape in the secondary, and we obviously wanted him to play. He would have been a big secondary guy physically. He's about 235 pounds. He's probably a natural outside linebacker. Where we have him now is probably his best spot as to what he can do to help the team, and if he's got a future in pro football, that's where it would be.

I think we've got him in the right spot. Sometimes you've got to fool around with them a little bit in different spots to see where they really are comfortable and where they can be the most effective, and I think we've got him in the right spot now. He's playing well. Obviously, we're still missing (Michael) Mauti, but Mauti is out of it, and Hodges has had to come through, (Nate) Stupar is going to have to come through, and I was pleased. I was pleased the way they did come through Saturday.

Hodges -- I think we've got Hodges in the right place. That was a long answer to it. I think that's where he is best. I think if he's going to play a lot of football in his life, outside linebacker is the best spot for him.

Q. This is a little bit redundant from the last question. Are you surprised and maybe even gratified a little bit by how well the defense has been able to absorb the loss of Mauti, the loss of (D'Anton) Lynn and continue to play well?

COACH PATERNO: Well, we went into the season with the idea we thought we had pretty good depth on the defensive side of the football. We started out with the idea we had six or seven linebackers, so now Mauti would have been one of the two or three best ones we had. But, when we lost him it was not a crushing blow. Same thing in the secondary; we have a lot of kids who have played a lot of football in the secondary, and we've been fortunate in our recruiting a couple of the younger kids like (Malcolm) Willis, who's a true sophomore, and the other kid, (Stephen) Obeng-Agaypong, he's developed into being a good player, and obviously the true freshman is a talented kid, (Adrian) Amos.

We were lucky, if you want to call it luck, that when we lost those kids, we had people that we felt could fill in, that they were good enough that we could still do the same things we had been doing and do them almost as well.

Q. Your defense has become one of the best in the nation at forcing turnovers statistically. I know you were a bit frustrated earlier in the season about how few turnovers that you're getting. I just wonder if your opinion has changed over that, and how have you thought about being a little better about kicking the ball off?

COACH PATERNO: I think when you start to do some things that you're working at, you start to feel better. No, I don't know how to answer that question except, yeah, I'm glad we're getting some turnovers. We've worked hard trying to get our kids to understand that turnovers are a big factor in a ballgame, both hanging on to the ball when we have it...we can go back to that Alabama game, and a couple times -- we catch the ball one time and don't have one called back and don't fumble in a key spot and we make a catch on an interception and all that kind of stuff.

So I'm pleased with -- we're doing the things that you notice that we're doing, and I think we are doing better, and I think that we've obviously got to keep it a certain tempo. We can't go backwards. Our schedule doesn't get any easier. We've got to get a little better each week in all areas, but I think turnovers will be a big part of any success we have from now on in, just as it has been from up to now.

Q. I want to ask you how you're feeling physically. You said you're a little sore after getting run into. How are you feeling now?

COACH PATERNO: I'm glad you asked that. I was feeling great (last week). I was going to go the whole ballgame downstairs last Saturday. I got -- one of the kids from Iowa came over and a couple kids on the sideline got a little panicky, grabbed me and threw me back. Well, I fought them, and the darn right leg went, and it's still sore. So I went backwards a couple of days. I was scared to death to stay down there for the second half because I'd be in the way.

The worst thing I could do is when guys are looking to see where I am, afraid they're going to run into me or -- so that was a setback. Yesterday I had a tough day, and I'm trying to stay away from some of the pills they want to give me. This morning I was a little better, but I think tomorrow or the next day I'll be back to where I was because I was feeling pretty good. I was doing pretty good.

Q. Is it still a goal to be on the sideline for a full game?

COACH PATERNO: I'm hoping I can, yeah. I mean, I don't like it upstairs. If I can stay downstairs I'd love to. But as I said, I think as long as I can move around and nobody is worried about me, I can be helpful downstairs. The minute I become somebody there, two or three guys watching, and I get in the way, "where is he?" and I become a distraction, I don't care how good -- yeah, that becomes a problem for the team.

Yeah, if I feel I can move around and I can go find (Mike) McQueary and yell at him in a hurry, then I'm okay.

Q. Can you give us updates on Lynn, Beachum and Morris?

COACH PATERNO: Well, (Stephon) Morris practiced yesterday, and I think he'll be okay (for Purdue game). Lynn is in what we -- I think most of you are familiar with it, they have a red cross, which means you can't do anything, green cross, no contact. He's still in the green cross. He and (Brandon) Beachum are both green crosses, and I've been needling the medical people, "hey, let's get them doing some things," but they've been very careful with Lynn and the other kid, Beachum, because both those kids I had felt at the beginning of the year would be real leaders on our football team. I'd love to have them both back.

But, I doubt if either one will play this week, although they're going to practice at least. I think we can look forward to having them next week if we don't have them this week.

Q. I would imagine you have to be pleased with the development of your running game in an overall sense over the last couple weeks.

COACH PATERNO: Yeah, I think we did all right last Saturday. I'm not so sure I would put the week before in that category because I didn't think we were as consistent as you've got to be the week before. But you know, last Saturday -- I thought this past Saturday, we took off, and we thought the kids ran hard. Turnovers were not a handicap to us. So I thought we had a pretty solid ballgame that way.

Am I pleased? You guys don't want to hear me keep saying it, but we've got to get better. Starting this week, every game is tougher. I mean, we've just got to do a couple little things better, particularly as has been mentioned several times, we can't pass up that many opportunities inside the 10 as we have done in the first few games. Our red zone has got to be better. If we're eventually -- eventually it has probably cost us being in a close ballgame against Alabama, but it'll hurt us, and we'll lose a ballgame we should win if we don't get better in the red zone.

Q. What in your mind has made your defense better this year than it was last year? Obviously you're healthier on defense, but what are the guys doing better this year that they didn't do last year?

COACH PATERNO: Well, we were pretty good last year defensively, but they're older. They're older, they're stronger, they know more about what they're doing. They've had more experience. The secondary now has been together until Morris got hurt, the four guys have all played together, linebackers have all played a lot of football. Still and Hill both have been good, we've got (Jack) Crawford back. No, those things have made a big difference.

But we weren't a bad defensive team last year. That was not our big problem. If we were a little bit more explosive offensively, a little bit more consistent, probably we would have had a better record anyway last year than we had.

Q. I am wondering if you can just kind of evaluate the decision process to use both quarterbacks now that we're at the midpoint of the season?

COACH PATERNO: I used to think I liked you. (Laughter.)

Well, I think we've done what's been best for everybody. Really, we've lost one game to a very fine football team, and I don't think you can blame that on the fact that we played two quarterbacks. There were a lot of things that we didn't do well enough. So I don't think that -- I think right now we've got the luxury of two kids that we have confidence in. It will be nice if we get to where we're going to play one, I think for everybody. But I'm not going to do that just to do it because people want to know, "hey, why doesn't he have one quarterback?"

I've always liked to have one quarterback because I've felt that that would -- that was the easiest way to relate to your team because you could relate it to one guy instead of having -- each one of them has a little different personality. It's not as if they both -- you can treat both of them exactly the same way. You can't. They're both talented; both have strong personalities.

But, I will not second-guess myself, and I'm not going to make any decision as to whether we're going to go one or two. I feel sorry for the staff because everybody thinks -- I mean, I make the decision. I mean, I look at it as you've got to be comfortable as to whether we're going to play one or two, and we argue it out. We've got some guys on the staff that -- a couple guys who are responsible for more of what goes on on the field on a game day than I am that would probably like to have one. I'm just not in a position that I want to have one right now.

Who knows; some day we may end up with one. Right now we're a two-quarterback team.

Q. You changed up Saturday and started McGloin in the second half.

COACH PATERNO: That's the luxury we have.

Q. Is he getting closer to winning the job?

COACH PATERNO: No, I thought it was just the way the game was going, that we were going to run the football a little bit more, and he had a little better feel for what was going on that particular game. I don't think you can read too much into that.

Q. You said at the Big Ten media day when you were feeling better that you still hoped to go four or five more years. Has your physical condition changed that, or do you have to look at it as an issue?

COACH PATERNO: You guys think -- I'm not thinking about it. I have to worry about Purdue. I'm not worried about anything else right now. You know, if it comes time that I should worry about -- I'm not

worried about it. Who knows, maybe I'll go 10 years. I'm not like Jeff; I don't let a little stone in my gut put me out of work. I've probably got stones in my head, had them there for years.

No, I don't know, I think that's all -- that's newspaper talk and media and fans, but I feel too good for me to be thinking about that. Outside of the leg hurting, I feel great.

Q. What kind of leadership qualities does Quinn Barham have, and how important has he been to the offensive line's progress?

COACH PATERNO: Am I surprised about him? Well, I said before the season started, I think, that I thought both Quinn and the other kid (Chima Okoli) had a chance to be two of the better tackles around. I've been a little disappointed in the way they played a couple earlier games. I thought Saturday, this past Saturday, was the first time that they played up to their potential. Now they've got to keep building on that. They were consistent, they had a little animation, it looked like they were enjoying themselves. They weren't afraid to make mistakes, which I wondered about whether I had maybe in bragging on them a little bit and maybe even when I've talked to them one-on-one and said, "you guys are not anywhere near as good as you should be, and you're letting yourself down, the team down." I may not have been fair in demanding more of them, but they are good football players. Offensive line is getting better, but Quinn is probably as good as anybody we have up front.

Q. Can you foresee using the two-quarterback rotation the rest of the season, or do you have a timeline in your head when you want to make a decision?

COACH PATERNO: I don't know. I don't have to make that decision. You know, when the time comes, and I think that the decision should be made for the better of the team, we're going to be more productive, we're going to be a better football team, if all of a sudden it just -- "hey, we've got to, we're much better off with this guy in the ballgame the whole game," then I'll sit down and I'll talk it out with the staff, and we'll pick a guy. We haven't gotten to that.

Q. You lost (Nick) Sukay last year halfway through the year. He seems to come back pretty strong this year. Can you talk about the way he's been playing?

COACH PATERNO: Well, I didn't think we -- last year was a tough year in a lot of different ways for the team because I was -- I didn't do a very good job for them. You know, we really -- I really had a good winter program and I had a good spring practice and pre-season. I was having a lot of fun with them pre-season until a kid ran into me (at practice). I think the whole attitude has been -- from my end of it has been a little better, and they smell that. The kids smell that. And I think that they're more experienced and better, and to their credit, they made up their minds that they weren't happy with the results of last year, that they could be better, and we talked about being better, and we're playing better.

Now, we still have a long way to go, guys. We go from one extreme to the other. You know, we're terrible all of a sudden -- we're much better than we were last year. We're not. We've got a long way to go. We're going to peck away and peck away.

Q. What do you make of Sukay, though? How do you think he's playing?

COACH PATERNO: Sukay is getting better. He's got a little more confidence catching the ball. Sukay played well last year except he didn't make some plays. I mean, he was solid, he didn't hurt us, but he didn't make some plays he's making now, and the other kid that has really come on is (Drew) Astorino.

Q. Are you satisfied with Curtis Dukes' progress he's made this season?

COACH PATERNO: With Dukes? Yeah, I think Dukes is going to be a good running back. He's got to get where he understands you've got to block, too. He's never done any of that. Came out of high school, a small high school, and a very dominant football player. He's just got to spend a little more time worried about his technique blocking. He's got good hands, but he doesn't quite understand timing on passing and things like that. But he's got a chance to be really good.

And you've got to like the kid. He's very, very -- he's an easy guy to be around. He's easy to coach. Sometimes he doesn't follow up because I don't think sometimes we do a good enough job of getting something

across to him, and he comes away from some things that we may talk to him about and not be sure what we're asking him to do. But he's getting better all the time. I like Dukes. I think he's going to be ok; a big back who can run.