

Joe Paterno News Conference

September 6, 2011

Q. Joe, do you believe alternating two quarterbacks gives you the best chance to beat Alabama?

COACH PATERNO: I would have bet anybody 100 bucks that the first question would have been about quarterbacks. We're going to play the guys -- you've got to understand, both those kids (Rob Bolden and Matt McGloin) are so close and they're both good. And if we play well and everybody else plays well, it won't matter which one plays.

Sometimes, you guys don't realize, these kids have worked so hard to have an opportunity, and they're so close. It's difficult for me to get up here and say: "Well, so and so is better or this guy is better." I think we're very fortunate to have the situation we're in. In fact, even (Shane) McGregor, he's improved so much.

So, I think that what we'll do this Saturday is we'll try to win the football game. Whether we do it with two quarterbacks or one, I can't tell you right now. We're going to practice as hard as we can. We're going to try to get as good as we can be.

We're going to try to get the supporting cast as good as we can get them so that there isn't any more pressure on the quarterback than there has to be, so that they don't have to win the game.

They've got the kind of help that will enable this team, not this quarterback, but this team, to get a good win. But it's not going to be easy. We're playing a big-time football team, one of the better teams in the country.

And for me to get up here and tell you this guy ought to play or that guy ought to play right now, geez, we went out yesterday just to get a feel for the thing.

So that's a long answer to a simple question. Which appears to be a simple question but it's a tough question. I like both those kids, and I think that hopefully we'll do what's best, the fairest for both of them and the football team.

Q. Could you evaluate your offensive line play against Indiana State, and can I get your thoughts on the defense?

COACH PATERNO: I thought our offensive line did a good -- not a great job, but a good job, solid job. And I thought a couple of the kids like (Matt) Stankiewitch and a couple of kids like that, who have not played a lot, I thought when they got in there, they handled themselves well. And I thought overall we did well.

Defensively, I think we're good. We've got more experience on defense. We have some people that probably have a little bit more confidence in themselves right now on defense than maybe some of the kids do on offense.

I think we're playing good defensive football. We have to play better offensively. The offensive line has to be a little bit more consistent. I think we have to catch the ball better.

I thought we had a chance early in the game where we had a couple of really well-thrown passes that were catchable, but didn't get caught.

There's a lot of little things we've got to do better. But I thought overall the offensive line did a good job. And I think defensively we're a pretty good football team.

Q. Will Anthony Fera play for you this week, and have you decided on who your kicker will be?

COACH PATERNO: Well, we're working Fera. We're working (Stephfon) Green. We're working (Derrick) Thomas. I think -- I asked them to prove to me that they understood what this program's all about. And I've almost literally talked to the staff day-by-day about them.

I think that we all feel comfortable that they all deserve -- they're ready to go. So I would think that with Fera playing and the other two kids, they will be part of the ballgame.

Q. With Andrew Szczerba hurt on Saturday and is he available for this game against Alabama?

COACH PATERNO: Szczerba did get bumped up a little bit. We will not know until Wednesday -- We have two days, the doc told me, to get maybe let him do a little running tomorrow and then we'll see how he is.

But he did get -- I don't think they would classify it as a concussion. But he got -- he's had some problems. And so they're going to watch him for a day or two before they make a decision as to whether it would be safe for him to play.

Q. You were just talking about Anthony Fera. When he does play, do you think he could be punting and kicking for you, and what's your thoughts on having a guy doing both jobs for you? You haven't had one in quite a while.

COACH PATERNO: Well, obviously I would prefer we didn't have one guy doing both. And I think that we've been -- we'll watch him through practice this week and in the pre-game warm-up. But Fera certainly can punt the ball and he can kick it off.

And whether he's as consistent a punter as the two other kids we've worked there, Butterworth and the other kid, I don't know. But we'll find out. We're still a little bit up in the air about the kicking situation. But with Fera in there, obviously it improves.

Q. With all the debate going on outside the team about the quarterback situation, are you concerned inside the team that the lack of a No. 1 might cause a split within your team about one group of kids favoring one guy and another group of kids favoring another guy?

COACH PATERNO: Not at all. I think both kids have handled themselves well. Worked hard, had the respect of the squad across the board.

No, I don't think that's -- that's not the problem. The problem is doing what's being the fairest and what's going to be the best for this team to be able to win games.

And I think that there's certainly no question about respect for either one of them. At least I don't see it.

Q. Could you update us on Curtis Drake's situation and how likely is it that he'll play on Saturday?

COACH PATERNO: Well, Drake's a little bit like Szczerba. They examined Drake and he came out of everything with a good bill of health as of Friday. Last test they gave him. But they still want to have him run some. He ran some yesterday. And we'll have him run a little bit more today and tomorrow and see what kind of reaction he has.

There again, we'd rather be safe than sorry. And he's a young kid with a great future ahead of him. And we don't want to push him too hard or too soon.

But he's getting very close to where I think everybody will be comfortable that we can put him in there, let him play a lot of football. He's certainly got the physical ability to do it.

Q. Alabama's is also planning to use two quarterbacks this week. I'm wondering, is it more difficult to prepare defensively when you don't really know which quarterback is going to play for the other team?

COACH PATERNO: Haven't played enough football for me to really pinpoint exactly what to expect from both of them.

I think we've got to play our game and we've got to be flexible enough on defense and be able to adapt to whatever -- what Alabama's doing, which will not be easy, because they are a very innovative football team. They give you a lot of problems on both sides of the football.

But as far as knowing exactly what to expect from either quarterback, I could not say we have the answer to that right now. We don't.

We'll just have to play this thing and play it literally down-by-down, and if they alternate quarterbacks, whichever way they decide to go, we're going to have to be ready to handle whatever problems they give us.

Q. I know you place great stock in winning the turnover battle. Alabama won big last week, but they had five turnovers including four interceptions. Do you think that's maybe something that indicates maybe some warts on their offense that need to be worked out, or what do you make of it?

COACH PATERNO: I don't think there's any question of it (importance of turnovers). If you lose the turnover battle, you usually lose the game, particularly when you're playing against a team that has the

explosiveness that a club like Alabama has. Alabama has fantastic speed in positions that if you give them the ball in good field position, because of turnovers, you're in for a lot of trouble.

So, I think the turnover situation will be very, very important. We did not do well last year, either against Alabama or anybody else. I think we were way down the list in the turnover ratio.

And I think we've got to do a much better job this year, not only against Alabama, but throughout the year for us to think about having a successful season.

But, I think your observation about the turnovers is a good one and I think we're going to have to hopefully at least hold our own in that area for us to be competitive.

Q. Just wanted to know just your thought process in the mental preparation from last week against Indiana State and stepping it up, mental preparation for Alabama, just how much different is it?

COACH PATERNO: I'm not sure that I really know what you're looking for with that question. We practice. We have a routine we have on Monday, we have a routine on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. And obviously you have to make some adjustments, because different teams have different strengths. They emphasize different things.

So you spend maybe more time on one aspect of a game, let's say on a Monday you might spend -- instead of spending 20 minutes for blitzes you might spend 25 minutes. Maybe if you're not as worried about their blitz situation you may go 15 minutes. So that changes.

But other than that, you can't change a lot, particularly in a ballgame this early in the year. The question was asked earlier about the Alabama playing two quarterbacks and how do you adjust and all that kind of stuff.

Well, what you do is you try to get your football team prepared for whatever may happen. And you don't do that by emphasizing one thing at the expense of the other. You try to go out there and have a practice that's going to make us better in all areas of the game and go from there.

So I don't see us changing much in the way of what we're going to do in practice, except, you know, slight -- as I suggested, we're going to maybe emphasize to a little bit more degree one aspect as opposed to the other.

But there won't be much. It won't be much. Big problem with Alabama, obviously, is the fact that they're so -- they've got so many talented people, that if you're not in good position and you don't know what you're doing and you give them some -- you don't contain them, it's six points. And they do such a great job coaching, game day coaching as well as teaching year-round.

So, we've got our hands full.

Q. Wonder how you're feeling and do you expect to be on the sideline this weekend?

COACH PATERNO: I'm getting better every day. I feel better. If you would have asked me this morning at 3:00 in the morning I would have said I would have been sprinting out on the field. I got up and I started to do some things and all of a sudden it started to hurt a little bit. So I don't know. I've got my fingers crossed. I think I'll be able to be on the sideline and there's a good chance I will be. I feel good. I've got some pain.

I can't jump up and down the steps or anything like that. But, overall that's not a problem for me as far as the coaching.

The only problem I have is, I would love to be down on the sidelines. And unless I can move a little bit better than I have been, they probably would say, "hey, you're taking too big a risk, you've got to -- you don't move well enough to get out of the way."

But I've got my fingers crossed. I think I've got a good chance to be on the sideline.

Q. You guys lost Mike Farrell the other day. What's his status? If he can't go, what does that do to your ball club?

COACH PATERNO: Fera won't be able to go for a couple of weeks. He's got an (MCL). He doesn't have to have an operation but he's got a couple of weeks he won't do anything. We've got a kid the name of (Adam) Gress that I think has been working pretty hard and I think he's got a chance to step in there for Farrell and get the job done.

A lot will depend, obviously, on how well he practices this week. He's been working more on the demonstration team than he has been with the guys who have been playing on Saturday. But he's going to have to right now be a part of the football team to get himself ready to play against Alabama.

So I think he'll be all right. Obviously, we'd like to keep the other guys healthy, because they've all played, both tackles, (Quinn) Barham, and the other kid (Chima Okoli) have played. So I hope we can keep them healthy anyway. But if not, Gress will have to come through in one spot.

Q. A lot of fans who made the trip to Alabama last year talked about the hospitality they received. And it looked like there was a lot of respect for you down there. Are you hoping that Alabama gets that back kind of the same way?

COACH PATERNO: Yeah, I would hope that our fans would...this is a great -- this should be a great weekend for both schools. It should be for the Alabama people coming up here, hopefully the weather will be decent, it will break. They have a great team and it's a lot of fun to watch for them. They were great down there last year.

I thought they were good sportsmen and the whole bit. And I hope our fans would be the same way with these people. They're our guests. Hopefully we can make this as pleasant an experience as we can make for them. We obviously want to beat them. But I think the idea you've got to go in there and call people names or you've got to boo and all that kind of junk, I don't think that belongs in college sports. So I'm hoping our fans will -- we're fortunate that we've got a game against a team and with the kind of tradition that Alabama has and the kind of game they can play and go out and enjoy it and root hard for our team and hopefully maybe we can come away with the win.

Q. Could you talk about the emergence of Glenn Carson? The way he's been kind of coming out this year, the way he stepped in, moving into the middle, things like that, playing full back last year, making that transition.

COACH PATERNO: He was a linebacker when we recruited him. I think he's done well. I thought he played a good solid game (last Saturday). There wasn't a lot of pressure on him last week. I don't think that we had a particular big problem with the pass game or anything.

And we had a little bit more speed than Indiana State, and I think that that will not be the case this week.

So I'm like you guys, I'm anxious to see us play. I'm not so sure how good some of them are -- I know they've worked hard. They've been a good group of kids to be around. We've been looking forward to playing against a team the caliber of Alabama and with, you know, the tradition and the way they play.

And I think Carson is kind of a kid -- his father was a coach. He was, I think, a state heavyweight wrestling champion when he was in high school in New Jersey and overall he's a competitor. And I would think that Carson, he'll be looking forward to this one.

Q. Even though they (Alabama) kind of had their way last year, you guys moved the ball a ton. Do you take much out of last year's game in terms of confidence going into this year?

COACH PATERNO: Well, I thought we -- we obviously didn't -- it wasn't as close as maybe people thought it was. I thought that Alabama got ahead of us and they kind of sat on that a little bit.

This is a better team than we had last year. Whether it's good enough, we'll see. But they've worked. And I think we've done a little bit better job coaching. I know we've asked more of them and they have responded. And I'm pleased with some of the leadership that has come out during pre-season and over the summer.

So I think we're a better team. Whether we've made up that kind of difference, because Alabama is, I think a lot of people think they're one of the three or four best football teams in the country, and they probably are.

So it's something we're looking forward to. If I were a kid playing, I know I would be looking forward to it. And we'll see what happens.

Q. Yesterday, Coach Nick Saban talked about the respect he gained for you growing up in West Virginia and watching your teams play and just what you mean to college football. Could you talk a little bit maybe what he's done at Alabama and also as a college football coach?

COACH PATERNO: Not only Alabama, he did a great job at Michigan State. He's been a class act. I think when you watch their teams play, there's not a lot of junk going on. They play hard. They play tough. They play all out. They're disciplined.

It's nice to hear what Nick would say regarding me. But we have a lot of guys in this business that have done an awfully good job for programs. And Nick's certainly done a great job for the programs he's been at.

But I appreciate what he had to say. And I personally have a lot of respect for Nick and what he's been able to get accomplished wherever he's been. And if you watch, as a coach, when you watch, even when we played Michigan State...we beat them one year (1995) on a great play by Bobbie Engram. Caught a ball on the three-yard line, fought his way into the end zone to win the game on maybe I think the last play we had from scrimmage.

Nick's a fine football coach, a good guy, good family guy and the whole bit. So it's nice to hear him say that about me. So when I see him, I'll pat him on the back...

Q. Is there anything in particular that you tell your team, particularly the younger kids, about the emotion of playing in a game of this magnitude with a highly ranked team this early in the season?

COACH PATERNO: I don't know whether we put it that way. I think we've talked about how tough the schedule is. We've got a tough schedule going right down the line. So we really -- we certainly have got to understand how good Alabama is. And I think we do. I tried to emphasize that. And we want to play as well as we can play at this stage of the season.

But I don't think we've gone overboard with, "hey, this is a game we've got to win or else," kind of attitude. I think we're going to go out there and play well, play hard. Got to play with poise. We've got to know what we're doing. We've got to feel good about our effort and come off it. And if we win, great. If not, hopefully we've learned from it and it will get us better prepared for what we have to do down the line.

Q. Rob Bolden said after the game the other day that he thinks a lot about how he played at Alabama last season, how poorly he played, in his words. Will he get a chance to start again against Alabama this week like he did last year?

COACH PATERNO: That's a leading question, all right? I think I answered that whole business about who is going to play quarterback earlier. I'll just repeat myself. So I'll let that one go right by. You make your own mistakes.