

Joe Paterno News Conference

September 20, 2011

Q. Joe, why has the offense struggled so far?

COACH PATERNO: Well, a couple of things. Obviously, Alabama is a very good defensive team, and I thought Temple played really well. We've got to do better, no question about it.

We hurt ourselves, which I think was obvious with field position on the kicking. We had four major penalties which were careless; that hurt us when we had the ball offensively.

But I think when you look at the tapes of the Temple game, so many times when we looked in there, there would be seven, eight, nine games with red uniforms on top of the guy.

They (Temple) really hustled, played well. That's a good team. I knew they were good when we went in there.

I think you have to give them a little credit for that. Of course, Alabama is a good solid defensive football team. So, I think we're struggling. We have to get better, but we're probably not as bad as most people think.

Q. Joe, I was wondering how concerned are you about your kicking game and are there going to be any changes this week? Will you make any changes with the kickers?

COACH PATERNO: I'm very concerned about the kicking game, obviously. And we are trying to get better at it. Couple of those kids do very well in practice, and they get in the ballgame, they get a little uptight or I don't know what.

Sometimes you've got to expect some of that. But having a blocked punt, that was just absolute carelessness on the part of one person who just had not had any problems prior to that.

I think he just got a little bit nonchalant about it and hadn't been hurt and that kid came up and blocked it. I thought on the blocked field goal we might have been just a little bit slow. It's tough to put a clock on the kicker because the snap -- and you can't judge the snap that well on the tapes that we had.

But I think that there was a good effort by Temple again in the middle there the kid jumped up, got the hand up at the right time. They made a good play out of it. That still does not condone the fact that we got one blocked.

So you get two kicks blocked. We had penalties. But your premise is right. Our kicking game needs to get better. And we're working on it and hopefully we can improve. But the proof is in the pudding.

Q. How has Andrew Szczerba handled the past week playing on Saturday just after the tragedy in his family?

COACH PATERNO: I thought Szczerba played all right. I thought he handled it, when you consider the night before you get a tragedy such as the tragedy that they had in their family and he was still able to concentrate and do a good job, I think is a credit to him and his family, particularly his family.

I think his dad, because it was his dad's youngest brother who was killed, I think that it was a real tribute to that whole family. And I hope that -- you never forget those things.

And you can't put them behind you. They're things you live with. But I hope that it won't affect the youngster in a way that it's going to affect his outlook on his college life and his experience, chance to be a good football here and beyond, hope it won't be that adverse a situation that's going to influence that. But it's a tough, tough, tough thing.

Q. Did you have any reaction about the Pitt and Syracuse move to the ACC?

COACH PATERNO: Well, I really haven't looked at that thing. Is that a definite move now? You guys may not believe me, but I very rarely look through the sports pages unless there's something there that I feel I ought to look at.

But, I thought Syracuse and Pitt were talking to them. Has it been accomplished? Well, I think that's a good move for -- where are they going, the Atlantic Coast Conference? I think it's a good move for the Atlantic Coast Conference, a good move for the two schools.

Obviously, at Penn State, I've been trying since day one to try to get a couple of those schools, one of those schools or some other school in the East in the Big Ten, because I think there's a tremendous market for recruiting and football in the area that the schools are moving into. Fifty million people live in the areas that we're talking about and awful lot of kids playing football and all sports.

And I would imagine Syracuse and Pitt moving into the ACC would not only be a big asset to them football-wise, it can't hurt their basketball, because both those people have good basketball programs.

So I think the problem you have right now is you look at it as I look at it, anyway, is things are changing and you're not really sure what's going to happen.

I don't know where we're (Big Ten) going to end up. There might be even some speculation that Penn State maybe ought to get into something different or we ought to try to go out and get some people from the East to come into the Big Ten, that we maybe ought to solicit Jim Delany and some of the leaders of the Big Ten, "hey, why don't we go take a good look and Syracuse and Pitt?" Now that they're out of it, "why don't we take a look at Rutgers?" and take a look at somebody that we can bring in from the East so that the Big Ten doesn't end in State College.

I think that might be helpful. I don't know. I haven't given it enough thought. But I'm sure there are people sitting around this morning over a cup of coffee who have some responsibility for the future of different conferences that are talking about it.

And maybe even talking to each other one conference to the other. But I do think it's a good move for Syracuse and Pitt. They're old friends and old competitors against us. And a lot of those guys who are associated with those programs, I literally grew up with. So I don't have any compunctions in wishing them well.

Q. Could you talk about some of the reasons for your struggles on the offensive line through the first three weeks?

COACH PATERNO: Well, I thought I went over that. I said I think we played against a couple of good football teams and that we have to do a little better. There's no question about it. We have had a couple of kids play a little hurt.

But, as I said, Alabama is a fine football team. I said Temple played well defensively, good around the football. Had two guys that played well. The one linebacker is probably as good as anybody.

So I think we've played good people, and we've hurt ourselves with -- you can't blame the offensive line for some of the major penalties we had. Get a 70-yard pass, pass for touchdown, got a penalty.

We had two unnecessary roughness penalties. Just flagrant. They were absolutely careless. But that had nothing to do with the play of the offensive line. That's a lack of discipline on the part of a couple of kids that we've got to re-emphasize with them that there's no place for that stuff.

You can't win doing that kind of nonsense. But we did have four major penalties. You have four major penalties and as I said earlier, mess around with the kicking game the way we did, be ineffective in that area, you're not going to have a lot of consistency.

You're not going to be able to do some things. And I think to blame the offensive line isn't -- I don't think that's exactly legit. I think that they played a tough game against some tough teams and they have not been helped by some of the other things that have gone on in the football game.

Q. You're playing your last game this Saturday before the start of the Big Ten season. I was wondering if you're feeling any more of a sense of urgency to pick a starting quarterback in time for the first Big Ten game?

COACH PATERNO: Well, we're taking every game one at a time. I haven't thought of it the way you're talking about it. I think we've got to just try to get better as a football team each game we play. We've got a team with a good football tradition, at times have been one of the better football teams in the country.

I have not looked at a lot of this Eastern Michigan team. I will this afternoon and tomorrow morning. But when I did look at them yesterday morning, they've got some really fine players. The coaching in that league is outstanding.

And so I think we've got to take care of that one first.

Q. Anthony Fera is a kid who was pretty highly recruited, and I don't think he's ever been used at Penn State to actually kick field goals and extra points or very rarely has been. I'm wondering, is he erratic or inaccurate? What is the problem with Fera that he's never been used that way?

COACH PATERNO: When you go to a game, don't you pay any attention? Our place kickers last year -- Fera isn't kicking. He punts. He didn't kick. He was a backup place kicker. Who was our place kicker last year, do you remember?

He was a walk-on kid (Collin Wagner) that did a great job for us. All right? And he beat out Fera. Now, Fera has got a chance to come back now and hopefully he'll get in the groove. Fera, again, you have a short memory. Fera did not practice with us in pre-season in some places because of some off-the-field antics. So he's now getting back in the groove.

Hopefully he'll start to put some of that stuff behind him and he'll be better than maybe -- he'll be more productive than he's been. And maybe he can beat out the kid that's ahead of him right now (Evan Lewis). I don't know.

But last year was certainly no indication as to the actual kicking of the ball. The thing that hurt us last year was obviously we didn't return well enough and we had a punt blocked in a key game against Florida.

Q. Derek Moye and Justin Brown both had big games on Saturday after some problems hanging onto the ball the first two games. Are you happy where they are at right now? Can you talk about the depth of the wide receiver position, seems like you had a lot of options there?

COACH PATERNO: I think they're doing well. I think Moye had a good game. But there again, we haven't made some plays in the clutch we have to make. We dropped the ball in a key situation against Alabama. The biggest problem we have right now is we've just got to be consistent in all phases of the game.

Some days, some things we do, we're doing very well. And then the next week we might drop off in that area and something else comes up.

I could blame it on youth, but I think you can only be young so long. I think I've got to do a better job maybe in the fact that I've got to discipline them a little tougher, maybe, I don't know.

But I think they know that. I think the schemes we have are good. I think the ability to do some things we have is certainly competitive. And we've just got to keep pecking away at it. We've lost one ballgame to one of the better teams in the country.

Q. When we spoke to Ron English, the Eastern Michigan coach on Monday, of course he's a former assistant at Michigan. What he said was: "Penn State doesn't change much over the years, meaning on offense. I see them running very similar plays to what they always have. I know philosophically what they want to do." Am I reading between the lines here or is he basically kind of suggesting maybe there's not a whole lot of innovation on offense?

COACH PATERNO: There's nothing wrong with that. I'm not going to disagree with him. But I think there comes a point when you're coaching, you know that people are playing you for certain tendencies and you adjust to them and you're ready to adjust to them, and we have been. We have been.

That doesn't concern me.

Q. Curtis Drake played against Alabama, did not play against Temple. What's his status for Saturday, and is he going to play again this season?

COACH PATERNO: I'm not sure. I don't want to say one way or the other right now. We've only had the Monday (practice). We didn't work that hard yesterday.

There's some things there that still have to be resolved for me to know for sure.

Q. Have you made a decision on what you're going to do with Stephfon Green and what is Curtis Duke's status?

COACH PATERNO: Stephfon Green, I'm going to let -- because of a series of little things that he and I have had a couple of talks. In fact, I just talked to him about an hour and a half ago.

He's going to come on out (for practice). I said, "well, you've got to prove to me that you buy into the program. And the minute I'm convinced you do that, why, we'll start to think about using you in the football game."

I think basically he's a good kid. I think he's just one of those guys that goes along with the crowd, I don't know whether they call them "the crowd" anymore. Gets involved with some things he shouldn't, that kind of thing.

But he won't play this week or next week. But hopefully, maybe things will work out for him and he'll have an opportunity to play later on.

Q. How about Dukes?

COACH PATERNO: Dukes got to beat out two guys ahead of him. I think (Silas) Redd and (Brandon) Beachum have done a pretty good job. And Dukes, Dukes' problem is not when he's got the ball. He did not play in a great, tough competitive league. And he doesn't block real well yet. And he makes some mental mistakes in the non-running game, pass protection, things like that.

But he's getting better. He's getting better.

Q. Adam Taliaferro was on the sidelines for Saturday's game. I know he's running for office in New Jersey this fall, political office. I was wondering if you had a chance to talk to him about his ventures into politics?

COACH PATERNO: Adam just got married. He got married, what, a week or two weeks ago. And we couldn't make the wedding because he had it on a day we played a game. And I honestly didn't see him Saturday (at Temple).

Q. Did you know that he was running for political office in New Jersey?

COACH PATERNO: Honest to goodness, you're bringing up something I really don't have any knowledge of. I know he's a lawyer. I've tried to keep track with what, if I could help anytime in law school, help him if there was some kind of financial aid that he could legally get from the law school he was going to and all those kinds of things. And, if he needed a recommendation. But I was having trouble myself Saturday. I wasn't sure I could even walk out on the field Saturday.

Saturday was the first time I walked out on the field. So I really didn't pay much attention. Unless somebody came up to see me, I tried to concentrate on what was going on in the pregame warm-up.

Q. Are you saying you couldn't have coached from the wedding? Kidding you.

COACH PATERNO: Maybe I should have. There's some debate about that baby.

Q. You've spent most of your career not wanting to play two quarterbacks. Seems most of the time you've subbed for them it's when maybe a kid needed a lift or the team needed a lift. Are you waiting for one of the two guys to really seize the opportunity, or do you want to just continue with two?

COACH PATERNO: I don't know what I'm waiting for. I think both those kids (Rob Bolden and Matt McGloin) are so close and both those kids deserve to play. One of these days I would like to be able to say, "hey, we are going to play one quarterback."

But I want to be fair. As I said last week at the press conference, I said one thing I want to do is I want to be fair to them. I want to be fair to the team. If I felt that the team was much more comfortable with one than the other, then - I'm repeating myself from last week - then that obviously would be a factor, but that's not the way it is. They don't -- half the time I don't think they even know who is at quarterback. Because I've talked to the kids.

I talk to them all the time. I'll say, "how are we doing? How is Mac doing or how is the other kid doing?" and I don't get any negative feedback about either one of those kids. And I watch them practice. They both practice well, hustle and play, out there early. They do everything you ask them to do. And it's very difficult for me to tell you "so and so" is better than the other one.

And so I don't know. Maybe I'm making a mistake in not deciding. Because as you said, I'm not real comfortable having two quarterbacks. I'm not comfortable with it. But I also wouldn't be comfortable if I did something that I felt ended up being unfair to one.

So I have a dilemma.

Q. Your defense played a great game on Saturday; you have to be really pleased with the way they've played all year?

COACH PATERNO: I think we played well defensively. I think we're a pretty good defensive football team. The thing I liked about Saturday we made turnovers in the clutch. We made some things happen for ourselves when we had to.

There were some people disappointed about that game when we came off the field. And my first reaction was, "oh boy, we've got a long way to go." But, then when I started to talk to some of the kids and when I talked to some of the coaches who were on the sideline and that's one of the disadvantages about not being on the sideline, there was a bunch of guys who were pulling for each other, the defense was talking to the offense about, "hey we're going to get the ball back for you guys," when we get it back. . .

So, there was not a defeatist attitude on it. So I think that -- and the thing that I liked the most as I started out to say was the fact that I think that defensively we made some things happen and then the offense took advantage of it.

They had the 70-yard touchdown pass called back in the clutch, when we really needed it. Had it called back. That did not kill them. We had the fourth down and about a half a yard to go, everybody wanted to kick the ball except Jay Paterno.

We would have kicked that ball if it wasn't for Jay. Jay said no, "we'll put it in, we'll get it in." And he said something to the quarterbacks about, "hey, you tell those guys they've got to get it in." And we got it in.

And then we came up with the interception. So there's things we're doing better, yeah. But I'm not trying to get up here and tell you I'm completely pleased with the way we're going, but we're certainly a lot better than some of you think.

Q. You talked a little bit earlier about adjusting what the defense does to your tendencies, wondering how free are the quarterbacks to audible to get up to change the play when they get to the line of scrimmage. How free are the quarterbacks to audible when they --

COACH PATERNO: These are all situations on the signal. That's why once in a while when you see some indecision on the line of scrimmage, it's because the people are changing the defense on them. They may have made a call and then -- and Temple did a good job earlier. And some of you -- I know most of you were very observant and knew right way that we started to go on quick so we made them line-up. But when you start to make them line-up quick that means you don't have a lot of time to change the play on the line of scrimmage. So you've got to get them into some kind of pattern. And Temple did a good job, as did Alabama; keep changing up on us.

And I think the observation that you've got to be able to adjust, change a play on the line of scrimmage is true. But sometimes you can't get to it, because they're late coming.

If you watched, if I put the Alabama pictures (video) up here, you would see they played it two deep, until the very last moment, they were quick enough they could come up there as the ball was being snapped, change the whole defensive scheme. So it was very difficult to make some kind of a change in the play when the ball has been snapped. Because there's a lot of people involved in the change.

So you start going on quick to make them show it quicker. And when you go on quick, then obviously you've got to take what you called in the huddle. It's a chess game out there. And it's the problem everybody has. It's not just one that we have.

I'm not up here crying about it. That's part of the game.

Q. Matt McGloin played the majority of the second half, especially the fourth quarter. Why did you decide to go to Rob Bolden in the final drive, was that the regular rotation or something more?

COACH PATERNO: I'm trying to get across one thing. This is a seat-of-the-pants kind of situation I'm in right now. I've got to have -- I've got a feel on the thing. And I'm a little bit at a disadvantage because I'm upstairs. Okay? Jay's upstairs.

We debated about putting Jay downstairs and I said, no, I don't want to do that because then when I go downstairs we've got to change the whole bit.

So who should be in there at that time? Mac seemed like he was doing well. Kids were all right. There was a lot of -- I talked to a couple of the assistant coaches. They were enthusiastic that that group that was in there at that particular time would get the job done.

Is that scientific? All right. No, it ain't scientific. If everything we did in life we've got to do by the numbers, who knows, I might be a newspaper guy.

Q. After the Temple game you said you wanted to get some more people involved in the passing game. How do you go about that? Is that a scheme thing? You hope some of these receivers will step up make more plays? How do you achieve that?

COACH PATERNO: I may not have been accurate when I said that. When I came off, as I said earlier, when I came off the field, when I came downstairs Saturday after the game I was a little bit -- I was a little disappointed we hadn't done a little bit better because of the mistakes we had made. I thought we had put some of that behind us. And then -- and I thought, well, maybe I've got to get some different guys in the ballgame, spread some things around and the whole bit.

And in response to whatever question was asked or what, that's probably why I answered it that way. But after I looked at the tapes and talked to the staff, as I had a chance to spend some time looking at Temple and what the problems we had, I think we were all right there. I think I would take those words back.