

September 11, 2007



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, I apologize for being late. Late for two things today. I apologize. Better get a new watch.

Well quickly, medically going into the ballgame, we've got two players who definitely will not be playing. Bryan Bulaga suffered an injury in practice last week, so he's out. And Trey Stross will also be out. Looks like he'll be out a minimum of two weeks with a leg injury. Hopefully we'll get him back here in the near future. But those two guys are definitely out.

Two guys who have been cleared to play are Paul Chaney and Jeff Tarpinian. They've been cleared medically. They've been working on a very limited basis, Jeff more than Paul. Basically what we'll do is just see how it goes during the week. I don't know, they've been cleared, but we don't know if they're going to be ready to play. We'll have to evaluate them after they go through practice, see how things go from that point.

Then the only other news item I guess I'd share with you, Marvin McNutt got elected to represent our first-year players on the leadership group. Happy about that. It's a good group of first-year players. They've done a nice job so far. Marvin was the guy elected to represent them in the leadership group. So that's good.

Captain-wise this week, we've got on the defensive side of the ball Mike Klinkenborg and Bryan Mattison will lead the team, then offensively we've got Albert Young and Tom Busch, two of our seniors in the backfield. Those will be our four captains.

Last week, just a couple words there. First, congratulations to Kenny Iwebema. Glad to see him receive recognition as special teams

Player of the Week for the conference. Did a nice job. Certainly I think his two plays were probably representative of what we're looking for. He made a great individual effort, but also all the other guys involved doing what they're supposed to do, too, it made that possible. When you get that going, it gives you a chance to have a good play. That's what took place on both those blocks.

I think overall, again, the effort was pretty good, positive. We did a little better on third down than we had the week prior to. Then on the negative side we didn't do a good job protecting the football. Have to do better there. Just a couple things that came out of the ballgame.

Looking forward. Obviously this is a big game for all of us involved, you know, both sides of the fence. Certainly any time you have an interstate rival-type ballgame, you know, to think it's not a big game would be silly.

Along with that, you know, we know this is a tough environment to play in. We know that from experience. We also know it's going to be a tough ballgame. Just based on the last eight years, half of them being in Ames, half of them being here, this will be a tough trip for us. Our job this week to get ready for it.

Their team is capable of making big plays. Certainly we've seen firsthand what Bret Meyer and Todd Blythe can do. Their kickoff return team has really done a nice job. Then defensively they've had a breakdown or two, but other than that that they've been playing pretty well on defense.

That's what we need to do is get ready to match up against them and expect a tough contest. That work will start this afternoon for us.

I'll open it up.

Q. Do you expect them to try to isolate Blythe one on one?

COACH FERENTZ: I would think so. He's not only an excellent receiver, but he's got great

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size. That makes it a tough, tough match-up for anybody. I guess the good news is maybe we're a little bigger than we've been at corner in years past. But we don't have anybody quite to match up with him just one on one that way.

We expect them to try to put Bret Meyer in position to make some plays that are going to hurt us. It's just good coaching. We try to do the same thing with our good players, get them where they can impact the game a little bit. When you start their offense, you have to start with those two guys certainly.

Q. Is this rivalry any different now that Dan is not a part of it?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I don't know. I think to me the series is probably bigger than any individuals involved. It gets down to common sense starting certainly as early as last Sunday, maybe earlier than that. There's going to be a lot of words written, a lot of words said about the series, about the game, more importantly this game.

You know, whether you're from Iowa or not from Iowa, all of us live in Iowa, both coaching staffs, both rosters full of players. You know, when you have that going, it certainly adds to the mix a little bit. I think it's going to be a real important game for both teams.

Q. You have a lot of players who this will be their first time playing in an Iowa/Iowa State game. How do you impress this is a big game no matter who is coaching or what the records are?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's like -- a little bit like those guys just being involved in their first games, period, whether it be two weeks ago up in Chicago, or Saturday night. Any first-time experiences, you can talk about them, but until you get involved in them, it's really tough to get that point across.

I think when you get in a game like this, it's almost a Bowl atmosphere intensity level or playoff level intensity level. So, you know, just by the nature of the whole thing the intensity is going to be a little bit increased.

You know, you can share those thoughts, but it's one of those things you have to experience, I think.

Q. Have you been satisfied with special teams play?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. I think we're doing a lot of good things on special teams. But our consistency is hardly there. Go back to Saturday night. Three of our first four opportunities were pretty ugly. We punted the ball not far enough to make a first down. I think that was the first one. Our PAT ended up being okay. But kickoff coverage was less than spectacular. What's the other one I'm missing here? Did something else that was a little dicey. The penalty on the kick return. That was the first one. That was the one that got the ball rolling. We started where we were inside the 20 first possession.

So those are the things I was hoping we'd see a little more progress coming out of week one. You know, we were able to survive those things. But, you know, that's a couple weeks in a row now we've put the defense in a tough spot or put the offense in a tough spot with, you know, penalties on the kick return phase. Those are things, we've got to get those cleaned up.

Q. Week one you were able to have a lot of success running. Saturday a lot of success passing. How is Iowa State's defense going to challenge you?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's football. You get into a game, you're never quite certain. Anybody can I'm not going to say take something away from you, but they can make it a little bit more challenging to do something. Certainly Syracuse was determined to make us maybe play left-handed, pardon the pun, but throw the ball a little bit more than we had the week before.

So, you know, it's hard to predict. It gets down to -- I'm sure what we're going to see is a mix on Saturday. So the whole key is, you know, being able to recognize what the situation is, get yourself into a good play hopefully, and then most importantly execute it.

So I think to me, that's going to be the story all season long, how well we can do that. That being said, it was good to see us execute a little better in the passing game. I thought we did some better things there. Caught the ball, first of all. We caught the ball a little more consistently.

Q. From what you've seen on tape, would you say it's still a spread offense?

COACH FERENTZ: We expect that. We sure do, uh-huh.

Q. Their defense, does it look anything like Texas' defense? Did he bring up the same system?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not the whole ball of wax at this point. Of course, when we played Texas, that was the 12th game or 13th game I guess it would have been into the season. You know, as we know, they're going through a transition right now with a new staff, new system, new players. To expect the whole playbook to be in would be unrealistic, just like what we went through eight years ago.

But, yeah, you can see the shell. I mean, it's pretty much -- you know, I'm sure they're all in harmony on that thing, the installation. The challenge is getting your players to be able to respond. I know we have that problem. Just any changes we make or adjustments, still can be a challenge even with a veteran group. So it's a little bit of a deal.

But, yeah, you're seeing the basic skeleton there.

Q. Your defense is keeping points off the board. Is there a completeness you like about it?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I think the guys -- we didn't get tested in certain areas on Saturday. But obviously the guys up front are doing a good job. They're really working hard and working well. I do know that much. If you play good defense, you have a chance in anything. So I'm hopeful we just keep doing that.

I think most of all, the guys, they're playing hard and they're playing well together. They're looking out for each other. For the most part, we're not making too many errors right now, and that's something we've got to continue to do, not give up big plays.

Q. James Cleveland, has he stepped up to the starting role.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah, I guess if we start two wides on the field, my guess is, yeah, we'll start with him and just with Trey being out of the mix. But, you know, we have a group of probably, four guys right now, those two guys and Sandeman and Johnson-Koulianos who we're comfortable playing. So I think you'll see those four guys in the rotation. Then if Paul Chaney can jump in and help out, that's great.

James has done a great job. We're really pleased with his development.

Q. That must be satisfying for you, going into the season two guys you thought would be there, Stross being hurt, you haven't really seemed to have lost a step.

COACH FERENTZ: We're still thin. That concerns you. Right now any injury that we experience makes it a challenge. I mean right now we're going in with four guys that have played. Outside of that we don't have anybody that's played significantly. I'm including Sandeman who was in high school two months ago.

We're not the most veteran group, but it is good to see the guys step up. They've done a good job, I think. We blew some things at that position the other night, just from inexperience. The guys are working hard. The only way to get experience is to go out and play. As long as we learn from the mistakes we make, we'll be okay. But we're a little thin.

Q. Have you seen improvement in Jake from week one to week two?

COACH FERENTZ: I thought he made some real progress, no question about it. I thought he did some good things. His awareness remains good. It's been good both games. This is going to be a different challenge for him. Now we're going into the first hostile stadium. We were kind of in the friendly confines of Soldier Field. This is an away game, quote-unquote, but this crowd is going to be a little bit more of challenge. This is going to be another experience for him. This will be new for him.

Q. He showed a wrinkle Saturday. He kept the play alive with Tony, kept his vision down field. Reminiscent of Drew.

COACH FERENTZ: He could have pulled that out of the 2004 files, no question. It was good to see. I think he probably surprised a lot of people with his ability to keep the play alive with his feet. That was great to see certainly.

Then, like you said, to be cognizant of a guy that might be open, which Tony was. The defender had left him. Covered him initially, then left him. That was really a good play. Hope he has a couple more of those in his pocket for the year. That would be great.

Q. Is this Iowa State more of a threat as an 0-2 team coming off a loss to Northern Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I mean, you know, I really think what we've done and what they've done is probably irrelevant. What happens Saturday is really all that counts. I don't know how to handicap what's happened in the last couple weeks for them or us, how that factors in.

Really what's important is what we do this week. That's all we can control. I know what they're going to be working on. We're working on the same thing. It ultimately gets down to how well you prepare and then what you do on Saturday.

Q. A lot of Iowa fans are upset about the ticket prices being so steep for this game. What are your thoughts on that?

COACH FERENTZ: I heard something about that. I don't know. I mean, we live in a free-market economy. You decide what you want to do with the dollars in your pocket.

I just saw the headlines of the paper this morning or yesterday, I don't know which way it was, one of the last two days. Sounds like it's a hefty price. I guess all of us would probably think about it before we do it. But that's a personal choice.

Q. With Huntrods being kicked off the team, is there more to that than released or just zero tolerance?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I handle every case individually. Based on all the things that I had to consider, I thought it was in the best interest of our football team to dismiss Clint. I think we met yesterday morning. I think he understood totally my thinking, the reasons for it.

Basically he just wanted me to express to the team that he's sorry that it took place, what took place, and he's also hopeful that anybody younger on the team will learn from his mistakes. Kind of leave it at that.

Q. Was that incident amplified by the other involvement?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes. But that was not a huge factor or a big factor in this thing. Again, I try to look at everything individually with each player. That's pretty much how it works.

Q. Was there a discussion after the arrests of the other two? Were you planning to ramp up any discipline? Was there a 'Come to Jesus' type of discussion with your team?

COACH FERENTZ: Basically what I told them is what I've shared with you, all of you in the

media. That what we need -- any time you go through a series like we did in the past several weeks. It's a little bit reminiscent of coming out of the 2001 season. We need to be beyond reproach. If somebody spits on the sidewalk, we brought that attention to ourselves, nobody to blame but ourselves, not unlike 2001. You know, it's up to us to respond in a proper way.

But to say that one isolated incident for any player is going to cause dismissal, no, that wouldn't be accurate to say. You'd have to have more going on.

Q. With the off-field distractions this team has had to go through the last month, does it make it even more satisfying to see how well they've played?

COACH FERENTZ: We've only played two games. I'm just pleased that we're playing hard. We're playing hard right now. We've only played two games. But, you know, be it distractions, there's always going to be something going on in the course of a season. I say "always," almost always. You might go through a period where things are smooth.

We've had two members of our team experience deaths in their families within the last couple weeks. That's just life. There's always things going on that present challenges, and I think your ability to keep your focus on what needs to be -- where it needs to be, collectively that's a factor in doing well. And teams that can do that well have a better chance of being successful.

But, you have to deal with things. Things are going to come up. We're going to have to injuries, more injuries during the course of the season. You're going to have things happen that you just didn't plan on. You just have to work through those things.

Q. Talking about deaths in the family, with Mike Klinkenborg last year at this time, how much did that, the way he played, inspire the team in last year's match-up?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I think everybody had great respect for Mike prior to that. Then certainly, it was a family decision for him to come back and play the ballgame. I think everybody understands that one. You know, but it just -- it was an inspirational effort. But it doesn't surprise you because of the kind of guy Mike is and the way their family is. They've got a

tremendous family.

Certainly, I would imagine it's probably an emotional time for him, anniversary of. But, all you can do when something like that happens is try to continue to live the way your loved one would want you to, and I think Mike has done a great job of that.

Q. How much more mature do you think he's come since he's had to deal with that?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, those are life experiences for anybody to have to go through. But, unfortunately, it happens. That's part of life. It usually does mature a person, I think. I'd rather it happen later in life - all of us would have. It's just one of those things. You don't get to pick and choose some things in your life. It's how you deal with them, how you respond to them that really defines you.

Mike Klinkenborg is just an outstanding person.

Q. Talk a little bit about your long snapping situation now, who is in there. Are you concerned because they haven't had a lot of experience?

COACH FERENTZ: Dan Olszta continues to be our deep snapper. Andy Schulze jumped in there and did a great job. He's also wearing No. 65 Saturday. He's a lot taller than Dan. I guess that's how you know him.

Les was kind enough, he introduced me to him in the locker room, so I got to meet him before the game. He did a great job.

Q. You have a number of players on the team from the Des Moines or Ames area. How do you recruit somebody from out of the shadow of Iowa State to come to Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably just about the same way we recruit everybody else. We just try to expose them to what we have at the university, why we think it's a great place to come to school and also play football. I've never, as a coach, taken a much different approach to in-state players as with out-of-state players.

I used to recruit in Missouri in the '80s. I always chuckled because a big line of the staff who was employed at that time, they would tell young people that they owed it to their state university to come play there. I always thought that was kind of warped thinking.

I told the guys in Missouri, I said, you know, they owe it to you to make it a place where you'd want to come. I think we've worked hard. I say "we," not just the football program but everybody on campus has worked hard to make this a great school. I think we all would hope every young person in Iowa would consider coming to this school, realizing it's a great place with great educational opportunities, a lot of great people, and hopefully our athletic department puts teams on the field that do the same thing.

That being said, we've got a lot of great schools in this state. Three state schools and we've got a lot of great private schools, also. We have a lot of our options. It gets down to personal preference. That's been our thing, just try to make this as attractive a place as possible and sell opportunity.

Q. Was Tony's game on Saturday kind of everything coming together for him or is that kind of the harbinger of things to come this season?

COACH FERENTZ: We're hopeful. I'm real hopeful it continues. But it's a little bit like everything else. The ball kind of gets spread around. Some days the passing game is more a bigger part of what you're doing. The week before it might have been the run game. Those kind of things are cyclical, I think. For us to be successful, it really helps us if our tight ends are active. I think we've proven that historically.

I think Tony also has displayed that he's very capable, has a chance to really have a nice career here. He's already gotten off to a good start with his two-plus years of playing. This is kind of his time now. He's our No. 1 guy. I think he's got a great future. We feel really good about Brandon Myers, too. He's doing a really good job. Having two guys will help both of them, just like it helps our receivers.

Q. Have you gotten to know Coach Chizik at all?

COACH FERENTZ: We met briefly at an AFCA -- excuse me, Hall of Fame dinner last April, I guess it was, on a Saturday night. Both of us had spring practice that day. But I did get a chance to meet Coach Chizik and his wife that evening. Obviously, I've read with interest everything going on over there. Just been very, very impressed. You know, probably more impressed or more

exposed to the work that he's done not only at Texas and Auburn, but you look at his background, you know, he came up the hard road. He climbed the ladder. He's more than paid his dues. He's an excellent football coach and will do a great job there.

Q. There's always comparison to your first couple years when a coach comes in, struggles a little bit. Do you like that reference? Are you okay with that reference?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, it's accurate. All you have to do is look at our record. I think it was 2-18 first 20 games. That's kind of etched in my mind. But that's just the way it goes. I know at that time we weren't worried too much about the big picture. We were just trying to get better and trying to do all we could to improve week to week, day to day. Things really haven't changed that much.

I don't think your approach changes a lot. You just come in and do what you can do. It either works or it doesn't work.

If it doesn't work, you're not there much longer. That's just how it goes. That doesn't really matter if you're 10 games into it or a hundred games into it. You better -- you just got to work at it. I don't think you can worry about all the peripheral stuff. You just kind of do your job. I'm sure that's what they're doing, like we're doing.

Q. Would you equate that to what Iowa State's situation is now?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I really haven't given it much thought. I don't know. I'm kind of worried about what we're doing. But I haven't given it much thought.

Q. But it is tough, isn't it?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the one thing I would say, any time you go through a transition, if you haven't been through one, and I've been through two of them now, it's a challenge because, both situations I've been involved in, you spend a lot of the time your first year just trying to figure out who's who, faces and names going together, then what positions, body, weight, height, all that stuff. Then, you get down to the stuff like what town is he from, all that, what state.

But it is nice. One thing that's nice is a chance to go in and be involved in the recruiting process where you've been in their schools, you've been in their homes. You get a little insight in

terms of what a person is all about beyond what you're seeing in your building.

That's one of the advantages I think of being around somewhere for a while. I think that's one of the -- I've always been of the school that to me you work on problems. The way to solve problems is work through them if you got the right people, and if you don't, I guess then you make changes.

In this day and age, changes get made so quickly. It's kind of -- you see it at all levels. I don't know. I guess I'm just not of that school. How did I get on that topic? Anyway (laughter).

Q. What was your reaction when you saw the score from Ann Arbor on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Surprise. You know, surprise. I think everybody in the country would feel the same way. Just really surprised.

Q. How about Saturday, knowing that one of those two teams could be 0-3?

COACH FERENTZ: I guess that's a surprise, too. Again, I haven't thought too much about it. But, yeah, it is surprising if you put it that way.

Q. Klinkenberg kind of parallels your experience with the Penn State game a couple years ago with your own father passing away. Did you have conversations and was there a bond created there?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not of the school that you have to experience something to really be able to connect with someone. But, yeah, it made it easier certainly. We both had gone down the same path. I got dealt a little better hand. I was in my late 40s. A little tougher when you're younger like that.

But that's how life is. It's not fair at all times. But, you just have to deal with what happens, what comes to you. I think everybody here is really supportive of Mike, as you know. For obvious reasons, everybody respects him so highly.

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