

August 30, 2008



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

THE MODERATOR: Couple of notes. This is our 31st sell-out game, and that's a compliment to our fans. Seven true freshman played today, and it will be on your notes who they were, and of course, Kirk Ferentz is now 8-2 in season openers, and that includes the last 8 straight.

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't know that. Makes sense. Hopefully we can do better in season closers. Just a thought.

First of all, we're pleased to get the win, and Phil made reference to the sell-outs, and I tell ya, we're extremely appreciative of our fans turning out like they did today.

You think about the way we ended the season last year and the things that have happened in our state during the last several months and the challenges that the people of Iowa had to face. There are a lot of other things they could be doing right now, so we're extremely -- very appreciative of them turning out like they did.

Just kind of goes back to my first year in 1981, 19 straight losing seasons and walk out and the place is packed. You talk about loyal fans. I want to say thank you. As far as the games goes, we're thrilled to get the win.

I thought for the most part the team was ready to play and our effort was good. Certainly we have things that we're going to correct and clean up, and particularly in the second quarter we did a few things there that were a little concerning, but I thought, you know, a lot of good things, too.

So it will be good for us to look at the tape, learn from it, and hopefully make some improvements this week. We didn't have the great practice week, first week of school is always a little ragged, but I did think we had a good camp, and

that showed up, too. A lot of positives, very happy about that part of it, and some other things to correct.

We squandered good field position several times in the second quarter, three personal fouls on defense in that second quarter. You can't expect to have success doing those things. We gave up a big play right off the bat, too, which, you know, those kinds of things we just can't have during the rest of the season.

So that's where we're at, and last thing I'll say, like I said on the radio, I think we played Montana a couple of years ago and we played UNI, and I think Maine is very much like those teams. They're a tough group of football players, well coached, they've got a good program, and I wish them all the best. I hope they have a great season. I still have a lot of strong feelings for the people there.

Jack and I worked together, and Steve Jones, the equipment guy was there when I was there, Robb Smith being with us, so they've got great people, and they had a nice group of folks and former players here, so it was great to see them. And I have a former player off to my right, Paul Fuller, played center for us at Maine -- don't ask him any questions about that, and former math teacher, Rick Sicanny. Upper St. Clair had the best math department ever in any high school, ever.

And Coach was the tennis coach up at Upper St. Clair. What did you lose, three matches in 30 years? Those kids never saw a tennis ball for the first month of practice. I'm not going to tell ya what he did with them, but they were tough, they were mentally tough. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. What are you going to do with the quarterback position?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. Looks like we're the same right now, from what I saw

today. Mostly good, couple of things we'll have to get straightened out, but I thought both guys did a lot of things, both guys did, and we'll see what the tape looks like and then what next week looks like.

Q. Are you a -- could you become one of using two?

COACH FERENTZ: I would rather not be, but we'll do whatever is fair and best for the team. The perfect world probably not, but, you know, 1981 it worked okay, and I think that's the only year I've been involved in something like that, at least that stands out. Maybe it's the only one that works, I don't remember the other ones, but I think both guys are doing a lot of good things right now.

Q. Are you saying next week it will be another try out?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we'll see how they practice this week. And they've been practicing very well throughout camp, and we'll see what this week brings; starts with the tape tomorrow.

Q. What did it feel like to take the ball all the way down the field and punch it in?

COACH FERENTZ: Seems like forever since we've done that. I don't know how long it has been, but that was certainly a positive, something we used to be pretty good at doing, and I don't think it's any worse than going 3-and-out that first series. That always puts a damper on things.

And I think along with that I thought our special teams functioned pretty well, all of them functioned pretty well for the most part, and certainly our kickers. I think we've made a little improvement since this spring, and that's great to see.

Q. Shonn Greene played a big role in those first couple of drives. Can you talk about how good it was to have him back in the line-up?

COACH FERENTZ: As you saw he's not, I don't think, quite full speed yet, but his attitude has been great. He's getting closer, and he's been working hard and he's a different kind of runner than we've had, so that part is neat and different and exciting. And he's a veteran player. He's got a great attitude, he's a tough football player, and he helps our whole football team. And he's not quite in game shape yet ready to go the whole distance, but we're pleased with his progress and great to have him back, and I thought Paki

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O'Meara did some good things and Jewel jumped in there and did some good things.

Q. Can you elaborate a little more on Jewel?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, first thing, we'll have to get him to pull his socks up. He was the only guy with his socks around his ankles, so we'll try to help him out there. The next thing is we've got to flex the praise he's going to get. He scored two touchdowns; he's going to think it's easy around here. But all that being said, we've been impressed with what he's done throughout camp, and he had a good week this week, too.

And you never know what's going to happen the first time a guy is out on the game field, a lot of times funny things happen but, you know, he looked like he knew what he was doing and ran tough, ran hard and we're just happy to have him on the team. He's done a nice job.

Q. (Away from mic.)

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully -- just one game but hopefully we've got a little depth there at that situation and as I said, during the week, Paki is a guy I think -- that's the great thing about college football, guys have an opportunity to jump and improve in a matter of months, and certainly two guys right off the bat, Paki O'Meara is a much better football player than he was last spring and Dan Murray, same way.

I didn't see much about our kickers, actually that gave us room for optimism in the spring, any day of practice, one day was as bad as the next. And really the only bad day we've had this year was the last time we were out in the public scrimmage, didn't look too good that day, but both those guys have been competing well, and I think it speaks to how they've worked hard and continue to work hard, and it's starting to show. Those guys are really doing a good job.

Q. Were you happy with Shonn Greene getting the workload that he ended up getting?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he ended up in the high teens, does that sound right? 20? We thought somewhere in the high teens, maybe 20, somewhere, that ballpark, so that's a good start for him, it really is. If we can rotate backs a little bit, which I think we have a potential for. Paki has earned our trust, and if we have the potential to rotate guys, big, strong back in the fourth quarter

can be a really help to our offensive football team, so hopefully we'll get to that point.

Q. After the way the last season ended, do you think it was important to get not just a win but a convincing win like you did today?

COACH FERENTZ: Scores aren't as important, but how you play, the attitude and the demeanor the team has and it was really -- we had a couple of games in 2006, second half of the season that were really disappointing, and certainly our last outing here, last time I sat here wasn't a great feeling.

So, it's good to walk off the field feeling good about themselves and knowing that the fans went home hopefully feeling pretty good about 'em, too, and that's important to us. We want to put a team on the field that the people can take pride in, and hopefully we'll continue that the rest of the season. It was important that we -- you know, we're starting a new season. We wanted to get off to a good start.

Q. Based on what's happened with the flood and the tornadoes, was it in the back of your mind, of the team's mind, to go out there and put on a show?

COACH FERENTZ: Just as I said earlier, I just know a lot of people in our state have been through an awful lot, and for them to show up today the way they did, I think, is remarkable, and then on top of it the Mediacom deal going through, so the games are back on the air statewide which is fantastic, so it's just -- one great thing about sports is it gives everybody a three-hour window to take our minds off things that aren't going so well for us. So if this was a help at all, that's a great thing, and hopefully we can provide relief for everybody for the next 11 weeks.

Q. How did the guys handle the long breaks as they were alternating?

COACH FERENTZ: Seems like they did okay. They can't worry about it because that was the plan coming in today and it may very well be the plan next week, so whatever they have to do to get ready to go in, that's their responsibility, and until somebody grabs on to the thing, we'll proceed along. It's like any other position, if things are close, we'll try to make a fair evaluation and go from there.

Q. Coach, how much of a confidence builder was this game?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. We'll know more down the road, but it was good to get off to a good start, and some of the things that have been mentioned, getting off to a good start offensively was nice to see.

I think we're growing a little bit there and not making too many -- giving up too many easy plays, although we had three penalties, and a long pass down the sideline, those are things we've got to cut out, but I think the guys bounced back and did a better job in the second half.

Q. Can you talk about the defense only giving up 3 points and the rushing yards?

COACH FERENTZ: We gave up a little more than we would like to see, the one pass play, obviously, but there were runs there where we weren't doing a good job of, getting off blocks and letting guys run through clean there, way more than we would like.

If we're going to be a good football team we're going to have to stop the run; we've always believed that, and as long as I'm coaching I guess I'll stick with that one. Just like on the other side of the football, if you can't run it a little bit, given circumstances then it's going to be tough to be a consistent winning football team.

I think that's for the most part been pretty true. That is one of our target areas, defensively. We want to be stingier against the rush, and we'll amp that up a bit. We've got work to do, so we're not there yet.

Q. Six first year guys, was that surprising?

COACH FERENTZ: Phil actually said seven. I thought it was possible, and as I said during the week, I think probably the areas that we felt where players would have an opportunity to be in the back end defensively, I think we played three guys there and, then the back end offensively with Hampton playing and Mossbrucker was in our plans all the way so that's part of it, and then Herman played at tight end.

Q. Can you give us quick comment just on Adrian Clayborn today?

COACH FERENTZ: Adrian is a guy -- I talk about how it is with college football players, last year Adrian during camp was missing in action,

during the spring part of that. I thought getting ready for the bowl game against Texas he did a nice job. That was his first December on campus, and just kind of fell off the face of the earth during spring ball, last year in camp, and then, as you know, he started to resurface about midseason and did a good job, and since then he's been doing well, practiced well, had a good camp, has three years to play for us.

Still a young guy and he has a great attitude, and he has leadership qualities, too, so we're excited about his future, and I think he's a guy who can get his hands on the ball. Both interceptions came off tips today, it was good to see guys getting hands on the ball today. Adrian has a bright future, and I think the defensive line in time has a chance to become pretty good.

Q. What do you think about Jewel, how do you think he'll handle today?

COACH FERENTZ: I said earlier, the guy can't keep his socks up. That's the first thing we'll have to straighten out with him. We'll make him wear those socks all week maybe, try to coach him up a little bit. Next challenge is I hope he doesn't think it's easy. He's had a good preseason, practiced well, and I think he's got a good attitude. But it's one game, but it's a good start for him, we're really pleased for him.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: It was a tough one, you know? All due respect to the recruiting experts, maybe we need to check the Ball State early commitment list. Maybe we need to see who else they've got. They have one of best quarterbacks in the country, one of the best tight ends. We saw 'em a couple times on tape last year, and there are a lot of great football players in the country, and the they don't all go to the top three schools.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: That's Eric's area, and he went through the process. They evaluate him, and we all look at him.

Q. Why was he overlooked?

COACH FERENTZ: I have no idea. It's funny how recruiting is, just -- that's what I kept asking during the wintertime, is are we missing something here? Is this guy like a commuter band-it? I don't know what was going on. He just seemed like a great young man. Everybody at the

school spoke highly of him and really caught our attention a year ago, TV or Snapshot Recruiting, they opened up with Glenville, and I think he had 250 yards or something like that, so that got my attention when I read that stat, and we followed up.

I guess he was a one-year starter, maybe that's why. Everybody else was probably early commitment, so we were the only school that wasn't full.

Q. Did you get what you wanted out of Shonn Greene today?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we did. He did a lot of good things. He's not in peak shape, but he's working hard at it and his attitude has been great.

Q. Is the quarterback spot open?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't want to say it's open. I still consider Jake our starter, and I think the competition is fairly even. I'm not going to say which way -- Jake is still our starter, so I would say it's tilting his way but both guys are playing well, and we're going to keep watching it and watch the tape.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: I can't articulate. We'll have to see how things play out.

Q. Did a few eyebrows raise when Ricky came in right after the interception?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I'll diffuse that one. It was part of our plan, basically, it was at the quarter, and all that stuff, so it wasn't tied -- no matter if that would have been a touchdown pass, we would have the rotation so it had nothing to do with that.

We will see what next week brings, know more about that Tuesday. If I was guessing right now, we'll probably rotate a little bit and see what happens. First thing we want to do is win a game.

Q. Are you going to keep it open or --

COACH FERENTZ: It's like all of our positions, I would like to in the perfect world like to know who the one guy is and then the two and go from there. But in this situation, we're in a healthier spot than we were a year ago and you might say that same thing with our left guard position. The competition has been good there, too, and we're probably better off.

Q. Set on the running back?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think so, not yet. Jewel has done a lot of good things, and he certainly did today, and I think you can see why he's caught our eye, but there are still some things he hasn't done that I'm not 100% sure he knows all the protections and things like that, so those are the things he's going to have to learn in the next couple of weeks.

He's not timid blocking, that's one good thing. But it's just a matter of making sure he knows one, two, three, what the details are, whereas Paki, we have good faith that he knows what to do, and I think he's up'd his performance. He's playing better than he was a year ago and in the spring.

Q. What about Moeaki, does he have a shot next week?

COACH FERENTZ: I think a chance, I don't know how realistic. We'll know more Tuesday when we see him. But he's on the right path now. All the guys, we hold him out, Mike Sabers, Tarpinian, Wade Leppert, a guy you don't know but a guy that can help us, those four guys for sure. We have a realistic chance of getting them back Tuesday, we'll see what they look like tomorrow, and some of the other guys are further away.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: Tony is maybe a jump ball right now and Sabers is probably a jump ball.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: It's going to depend on how it feels for him. He's cleared to go and it's a matter of pain tolerance, and that's tricky as a lineman.

Q. Overall how do you feel about the team?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a good start, you know, it's a good start. Good in a lot of ways, a lot of good things and a lot of things that we will be able to correct and emphasize. So it's not all bad. You know, broadly, I'm looking back to when we get started there, that first week of August it's been -- it's been good to be around the guys, they've done a good job, they're work and go trying. They handled themselves in the hotel well yesterday, that's another test, not a big one, but,

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you know, just little things as the season goes on you hope to see. We're up and running at least and doing some good things.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I said that earlier. Boy, there was nothing good to say about our kicking game in the springtime. Any day -- any of the 15, you know, and we've had one or two this practice period here where, you know, I wasn't so sure -- I think we had one in the stadium and one other day that wasn't so good but the rest of the time they were making strides and they're competing hard, both of 'em want to be the guy and I think that's good and I think it has a chance to be a healthy situation, which will be great.

Q. There's practice speed, game speed, do you feel your team has the game speed you're looking for?

COACH FERENTZ: For the most part but we're not there yet and that's usually how it goes, it takes a while, especially for us, as you know, if you look at us historically, we have never -- even in September in our best season in 2002, we have to make sure we avoid pulling a 2006 and tanking in the second half.

That's the most disappointing thing we've had to deal with on the field in my mind. But it all goes back to the attitude and how we're handling our business daily, and hopefully it will work out, and it starts with a good group of leaders and hopefully we'll -- but we got a long road ahead of us, but we're off to a good start.

Q. How is Jake handling the competition?

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't asked him. I'm sure he wants to play every snap just like Rick wants to play every snap, and I'm sure others feel the same way. I keep throwing Dr. Phil out, I hope this guy doesn't sue me, but guys are football players and everybody is competing and that's how it's supposed to go. If there's something you don't like, you play a little harder and compete a little harder, and it's like a rough week, you leave it in the gray area, it might go against you.

So put the ball in the middle of the uprights rather than near the upright and don't make it an official's call. Decide it yourself.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily but I think it's a nice story. You know, speaks highly and then you throw Paki in there, three guys out of one high school, all got here the same way, and we're extremely happy to have all three guys on our team. Rob's story is probably the toughest because of the injury.

I think he had put himself into position to be a solid starter for us last year, and that hurt our football team, but more importantly it hurt him, so I felt bad about that, and there is nothing you can do there. All three guys -- Gavin doesn't say much, he's not vocal, but he's a great team guy, extremely positive. He's our personal protector on that punt team; it's a job that Abdul Hodge had for many years and we're careful about what we put-back there.

So I think that speaks highly of the kind of guy he is and a team guy and a detailed guy he is. He's worked extremely hard and Paki, I talked about him earlier, he's a guy that keeps on making steady climbs, keeps working hard.

Q. Happy with the linebackers today?

COACH FERENTZ: I'll have to see the film. I'm sure some of that has to do with some of those runs, there were way too many runs that were knifing through there and that's a front thing, I'm not saying it was a linebackers or the line but we clearly have to tighten things up front there, we had too many -- the quarterback draw, the zone plays, guys were going in clean and we have work to do.

Q. What were you proud of or wanted to establish?

COACH FERENTZ: I just hoped we would play well, come ready to play and play well and play a fairly clean game, and I think for the most part we did that. That second quarter was bumpy. Thank you.

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