

October 20, 2009



**An Interview with:
COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Dr. Ponseti - I have never met him, but I've read about him through the years with great interest. Matt Amendola knows him very well, and we talked about him a little bit last week. And his story is really certainly an inspirational one. So it's a huge loss for our state and certainly for the university.

Looking backwards, it was a good weekend. We were pleased to get out of Madison with the win last weekend. Happy about that.

On the positive front, I think we came out of the game healthy. But just to keep our string alive, instead of having the flu this week, we've got five players that have an exam this afternoon right in the middle of practice. Just a key Tuesday with some key players missing. But I guess that's better than the flu, if they do okay on the test.

Captains will be the same. We've got Pat Angerer, A.J. Edds and Tony Moeaki, Rick Stanzi. And heading up to East Lansing, similar to last week, or a lot of the weeks we've been playing.

We're playing another very tough opponent in a tough environment, and it's a tough opponent who is playing very well right now. That it was certainly the case the last couple of weeks, when we went up to State College. I don't see this game being any different.

It's just going to be another football game for us, tough challenge and we'll get to work today and see what happens.

Q. The first BCS stats came out on Sunday. Were you surprised to see, I guess, the last team, lowest among all from major conferences?

COACH FERENTZ: "Impressive resume" those are your words not ours. Apparently not many people are buying that. But I thought there

might be a question about the BCS. I thought that might come up. Took a wild shot. Somebody told me it was a three-hour program about college football on the BCS on Sunday night.

I can't imagine anyone watching that one start to finish; but if you did, that's good for you. But fortunately I got some guys helping me out upstairs, had somebody to do research. Quick one for you, the teams that were 6 through 10 last year in the initial poll, anybody want to take a shot where they finished?

Three moved down. One stayed the same and one moved from 10 to 1. So a conclusion there is you could go up, you could go down or you might stay the same. So that's about all I took out of that whole thing. And it's October 20th. So I'm not too worried about any of that stuff right now.

It's kind of amusing, but apparently it's helping fill air time. And it's good for college football people paying attention and talking football. So I guess that's all good stuff.

Q. Brings about questions, though, on national talk shows and schools, fairly or unfairly getting ripped. I'm sure you don't care much about that. But it certainly fires up the fans.

COACH FERENTZ: It's good for the game. It's a positive thing. And we weren't in the talks last year, but half an ear out there listening to it. A lot of good discourse and a lot of arguments about the Big 12 in particular, I remember that being a hot topic of conversation, which team deserved to be where. And the bottom line really is if you win all your games, it doesn't matter, with the exception of Auburn, that one year, whatever year that would have been.

So that's probably about the only safe way to get through it and that's the only guarantee, safest bet. Odds of that happening for anybody are really pretty minimal based on recent history.

Q. Hasn't there always been arguing, though, whether it was over a split national championship, is it heightened because of the BCS?

COACH FERENTZ: I remember as a kid, Penn State and Texas, that one year, I think the president, whoever it was, at that time, might have been the same president that was in office when we beat Michigan State last time when we were in East Lansing; but anyway that president called Texas's locker room and then called Penn State's and there was -- everybody was kind of mad about that in Pennsylvania. But it's part of college football. It's probably a healthy thing. I think that's probably why the BCS exists.

Q. Does it ever frustrate you that some people they almost value winning with style points over simply just winning?

COACH FERENTZ: Especially this time of year, I think that's to be expected. I think that's to be expected. You know, it's pretty simple. If you win, you feel pretty good. When you don't, you don't feel so good. That's good for us right now.

Q. How do you keep your team grounded at this point, or is it a challenge at all?

COACH FERENTZ: I think just the things that we talked about, that BCS stat, that's the only reason I looked it up. I'll share it with the team. But that's pretty telling. And the other thing all of us need to remember, we're not even halfway through our conference play yet as a team.

We have such a long road ahead of us right now. It's natural for people to talk about it and think about it, but the best way for us to get anywhere is just try to take care of this week and that's about all we can handle right now.

Q. That said, I'm sure the players are getting pats on the back, free beverages, their families are calling them telling them they're going to go to the national title game and all that. Do you bring them in and share with them things like, hey, here's the film from Arkansas State?

COACH FERENTZ: We can just look at last week's film, there's plenty off that thing to correct. But the good thing it's a little bit like winning on the road. We have a fairly veteran football team. So that's a starting point. We talk about these things year-round about how you're

going to handle praise, how you're going to handle adversity or challenges, those types of things.

But it's usually the message is better received, typically more veteran guys, and those guys can be a little bit more vigilant in terms of keeping everybody on the right page, I think, because there's so much that goes on away from this building.

But it's a mindset. And I said this after the Penn State game, it's usually tougher to deal with success than a tough outing.

Q. Shifting gears, the BCS talk, you talked before about putting the offense on a path where it was going to improve, something Tony could do last week. How important is he to the offense continuing to progress as the season wears on?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a marquee player. Historically we haven't had a lot of those. But when we have them, it sure helps. And it's not the end-all or be-all; but when you can have a guy like that who can contribute in a special way, it's a real advantage. Shonn Greene did that. And Gallery did it in his own way. Kaeding. Brad Banks. Go down the list.

We've been lucky. We had Dallas Clark. Five guys nationally acclaimed for doing what they did. I don't know if Tony Moeaki will be recognized in that way. Really doesn't matter. But as a player he can do that for you.

So when you have a good team and then you add a couple guys like that who can give you extra octane out there, and I think last two weeks we've certainly seen how he can impact a game.

And then as I've said before, too, a lot of things that maybe aren't as visible that you're not going to notice that where he's helping us out through blocking or through the attention he draws that might help open up some other receivers. Those are all positives.

When you have a guy who is a good player and plays well, it's one thing to be a good player but when he plays well consistently. It really helps you.

Q. Your third, what I recall highly anticipated game, hyped up a bit. Is the third one hard, a couple of road trips?

COACH FERENTZ: I'll let you know Saturday. We talked about this month at the beginning of the month saying we had a two-game

homestand. In the spirit of the World Series, two homestand playoffs, two home games and two game road trip. Wrapping up the second game of a road trip now. So that's how we look at it at the start of the month. We all knew what the package was.

And now it's our job to finish up these last five days of this portion of the schedule, and then we'll deal with the last part once we get there.

But in some ways going on the road can be less challenging in that it was just crazy around here, the Friday of the Michigan ball game with homecoming, and we had so many people in town. I think until we got on the bus to go up to the hotel that night, it was probably the first time we all had just a chance to purely think about what was in front of us and fortunately we had an entire day the next day to think about it.

So this is kind of a quieter week, if you will. You don't have a lot of visitors. Don't have a lot of distractions, and hopefully we'll have a good week of preparation. We certainly have that extra time during the course of the week to get ready mentally for the game.

Q. Was last Saturday Stanzi's best game?

COACH FERENTZ: I would say for sure. A couple of plays he'd like to do over again. I think that's true in every football game. You're going to come out say, boy, I wish I had those two to call back, like we all do. Everybody has those.

But I thought he did a nice job, protecting the football and made some beautiful throws, making beautiful passes. But, most importantly, he kind of keeps us together out there.

Q. Do you think he gets unfairly criticized by the media?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about "unfairly." I'm not going to use that word. But it's the nature of the playing quarterback. It's the nature of coaching, too. Those are easy plays to highlight. They're easy plays to focus on. And interceptions are that way. That's just how it is.

So it's part of playing quarterback. He deals with that pretty well, too. So I think he does okay.

Q. Will McNutt be back this week?

COACH FERENTZ: He should be. He jammed his thumb Thursday I guess somewhere during practice. I can't tell you when. But he had a shot. He didn't catch the ball very well in pregame.

I think we're all on the same page there. It might not be in his best interests to be out there. But he's made improvements since Saturday. We don't anticipate this thing being big at all.

Q. Talk about Angerer and what does he give you besides the tackles and all that? In the Wisconsin game, it seemed like he delivered a couple of blows that maybe changed the mood at least in your own huddle?

COACH FERENTZ: To me, middle linebackers are like quarterbacks, except they don't get scrutinized as closely as quarterbacks. They serve as your catalyst, when you're playing well, typically.

And the way we're built, that's certainly true of our linebackers who historically have had to make a lot of plays for us. And Pat does that and he does it with spirit. He's got a personality that's what you're looking for on defense. He makes it fun for everybody and keeps guys on their toes. But he keeps it light, too, but he's 100 percent invested. That's just how he plays, and I think that permeates to everybody else.

Q. Is Wegher's hand okay?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think they're taking the cast off tomorrow. I'm joking. I'm joking. (Laughter).

One of our coaches was asked on an interview yesterday about the cast on his hand. And Lester's response was no, it was really his right leg, I think you're misguided where the cast is. Apparently it's one of the Internet phenoms. I haven't had a chance to catch up this week. We expect him to have a better than fair chance to play Saturday without any cast or other things.

Q. What's your Michigan State scouting report?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a little bit like last week. We're playing a very physical team. They probably throw the ball more effectively than Wisconsin did. You can argue that Wisconsin ran the ball more effectively. Very similar. Big physical team, both sides of the football. And very good in the kicking game.

So they've really been moving the ball well, scoring points. And they've really played good defense since Mark got up there. He does a nice job with that group. And I think they're very comfortable with who they are, what they are, and

you could say that about Wisconsin, too, they've got a system they believe in and their players have bought in and really done a nice job.

Q. Their linebackers seem to be their strength, Jones?

COACH FERENTZ: All good players, all very active. Like us, they play a different type of defense. We have two guys off the ball, they've got three. But the idea is the same, get those guys to the point of attack and they do make an awful lot of tackles.

They moved Jones inside and it makes him a little more prominent and things so he's right in the thick of it, both directions now. And he's doing a great job with it. And they shifted to that somewhere after we played them last year, the end of the year they were doing that.

Q. Going there two years in a row, does this offer some of your guys a little chance at redemption?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about the redemption kind of thing. But I was talking to the Michigan State writers, and they brought up the '84 game, controversial '84 game. And I said we were able to straighten that out in '85. And it dawned on me when I was talking to those guys answering the question that we were back-to-back home games that year.

Maybe this is like every 23 years we do the quirk in the schedule deal. So history is repeating itself. We had two there and now we're going up there for two.

Q. How do you explain the failure Iowa's had up there since '95?

COACH FERENTZ: Come out and played. At least I can speak to that one. It's like the Wisconsin series. We played at Wisconsin in '99. At least we were scheduled to be up there. And we played. We tried. In '99 at Michigan State it was similar. It was a mismatch.

I remember Ken O'Keefe saying he thought we were in Jurassic Park when he saw Plaxico Burress running up in warm-up drills. That was a pretty good description.

It was all downhill from there. They had Plaxico Burress and Julian Peterson, who has played pretty well in the NFL. I think the gap certainly has been closed. But we haven't been able to get it done up there and it's to their credit and something we'll have to straighten out this week.

Q. They do a good job getting to the quarterback. Anything you're concerned about this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Their linebackers are active. They'll get them involved and certainly their front four is very capable. They've got four guys there that are good pass rushers. So we're going to have to try to do our best to keep Rick secure back there.

Q. Using two quarterbacks outside --

COACH FERENTZ: They have. And my guess is we could see both again. But it's working for them. Their offense doesn't seem to change a great deal regardless of who is in there.

And we'll be prepared for both. But they're throwing the ball pretty well right now. So I'm guessing they'll lean in that direction.

Q. At what point do you re-examine how you're using your running backs?

COACH FERENTZ: When we think it's appropriate, I guess. We still have confidence in both guys. And really simply the statistics were pretty lopsided the other day. But if you went back and looked at the tape, Adam didn't have much opportunity. We had some disastrous plays when he was in there from his standpoint. He had no chance of getting it going.

I thought it was a reflection on the timing of some things we didn't do well with our execution or things they did. But it wasn't him. He basically had some dead plays that he had to try to execute and he made the best of them. But he did a nice job in the passing game and Adam continues to run well. I'm happy. I'll go back to the Penn State game.

Both those guys, they were the two leading rushers in the game. I think they've proven they're capable, and we just have to keep working to pull this thing together. But we're happy with the rotation.

Q. What do you like about Wegher right now? What's the difference between the two guys?

COACH FERENTZ: I like both of them. But if you ask me about Wegher, the first thing that jumps in my mind is mental toughness to do what he's done after he's playing high school football last Thanksgiving, and now he's playing college

football and really just acts like he belongs out there.

He looks totally unfazed. So that's the first thing. I've been impressed. He had a little period in camp where he was trying to get his feel. But since that time he's really done a good job.

Q. Talk about Tyler Sash's versatility a little. He's had five interceptions and five tackles for loss. A little bit all-purpose safety.

COACH FERENTZ: One of his prettiest plays I thought the other day he came up on an outside run and really hit it hard and had nice tackles, too. He's growing into a pretty good football player, and I've made that comparison before. I think it's a little bit where Greenwood was at last year as opposed to his first year '07 versus '08. And I think we've seen that.

There's nothing like confidence for a football player, and usually it takes experience and time on the football field and I think he's starting to benefit from that.

Q. Are any more settled on the O line from a week ago?

COACH FERENTZ: Sort of. Yes/no. I don't know I guess that's a no, right? We're settling on six guys right now. I think that's fair to say. We'll keep playing on all six of those guys. We feel good about all six. That's a positive.

Q. Did the line regress?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. There were some -- we had a hard time catching up to 50's speed, his speed and quickness. Took us a while to get that part of the game under control.

And I thought, I mentioned some dead plays or some plays that -- we're not far away. Right now we're not far away. I was more encouraged after watching the film a second time. But we're not there either.

But I don't think we've regressed and I think they're working hard and I think they're doing a lot of good things, and I can see some hopefully the clouds will break up here and the sun will come popping through eventually. And that's a bad --

Q. You have a weird schedule, 7:00 against Michigan last week, 11:00 this week, 6:00, is that something to do with --

COACH FERENTZ: It will be 7:00 eastern time. We're on the same schedule we had for the Michigan game. That's good. We scored 30

points in that game. Maybe that's reading into the stars.

As I joked about the other day, we forgot about those 11:00-ers, we're not doing so good in the 11:00-ers right now. So that will be a point of emphasis next time we have one. But I think we went into the season knowing that we had all possibilities. So we just had kind of roll with the flow and. The guys still think probably the biggest downside of playing night games is what it does to you the next couple days.

So it won't affect the game Saturday night. But we've got to be smart about it next week.

Q. How much real teaching is happening at halftime, if there's it's no trend. Is there real teaching?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope so. The coaches are all acting like they're doing something. I don't know. Hope they're saying good things.

Q. Time crunch, you have to get your message across?

COACH FERENTZ: Compared to the NFL, we have forever. If you want a quick halftime, go to the NFL. It's like whoa. But we have time to talk about things. And every game presents challenges and situations. Seems like we had a couple. Two weeks ago, I think we had -- was it three or negative three, doesn't matter, yards rushing at halftime.

So there are things that we try -- it's going on continually during the game. Coaches are always talking. And a big part of that, I'll interject this, a big part is feedback we get from players. Those players, again, the guys that are experienced, they give us a lot of great information, some thoughts, suggestions, and then try to pull it all together and present it logically.

So it's usually a race against time. But I think the staff has done a really good job. And again I give an awful lot of credit to our players, all three phases, special teams especially. Don't want to overlook that they give us good feedback.

Q. Is there a player that the coaches go to?

COACH FERENTZ: No, everybody can talk when they come over to the bench, the coaches meet with the players and get some insight, some thought, how is this guy playing, et cetera.

And then we try to lean in a smart direction if at all possible. But we've got an experienced staff and they've been together. I think we know our system. So at least if everything's working right at least you have a chance maybe to get a little bit of an edge going off in the second half.

Q. How much time do you actually get to talk in halftime, get in the locker room after --

COACH FERENTZ: It's about a 20-minute halftime. I don't call them up until about under five minutes, usually. So it gives us some time.

Q. For halftime adjustments, is it overblown? Are you really making a lot of adjustments?

COACH FERENTZ: Just depends on the game. Some times there's not a lot to say. Other times there are. We've been in scramble mode a couple times.

We were getting hurt a little defensively the other day in that first half. There were some things going on that we had to get straightened out or settled down, and there's some things offensively, too. So I think that was a good example of a game where I think we pulled together and got some good thoughts and went out and executed a little bit better.

Q. Whatever issues you guys had with the flu, have those passed?

COACH FERENTZ: As far as I know. We're going to school today, that's all. I've always tried to figure out, you know, why a test gets scheduled at 5:30. It will be like us scheduling practice at noon. But I don't know.

Q. Talking about your schedule, how much confidence does the team have with your wins at Penn State and Wisconsin?

COACH FERENTZ: Those are helpful. Iowa State, too, it's a tough trip. Never easy going over there. It's like anything else, winning close games or winning on the road, those are all positives.

We try to accentuate the positive anytime we get a chance. It was a little tougher in '99, but at least we see some things we can throw out. I'm not saying it's going to be any easier this week. But it won't be any tougher than the last couple of road games we've had. That's for sure. We've walked down that road and we'll see how we do this time.

Q. Can you talk about Amari, Saturday he was quiet, didn't seem they were throwing it his way?

COACH FERENTZ: For corners, the film tells you a lot. But I think that's pretty accurate. And the plays he made the other day were both beautiful plays and big plays. The first one ignited us a little bit. Seemed like that was our spark, just like Adrian's play up at Penn State. It's good and two experienced players doing some big things and helping us out, and Tony, the week before that, maybe, with the big play.

Q. He was an offensive player in high school. And he's transformed himself into a corner. Has he, technique-wise, moved up into that upper echelon as far as being a cornerback, or seemed like was more of an athlete trying to learn how to play cornerback?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's getting better every week. He played well last week. I'll put it this way, at this age he's way ahead of Brad Fletcher, I was walking by the TV, went in to change Sunday, and they were on the TV and he was playing, I don't know if it was third down, first down, but he was in there playing. Fletch is doing a good job.

At this point in his career he's certainly in front of where Bradley was at. And Bradley was kind of a raw player, if you will, coming in. Probably a good comparison except he's a little head on the curve, been out there quicker.

Q. In your mind is your team a national championship contender?

COACH FERENTZ: I have no idea. Right now I hope we can contend at Michigan State. I think we're underdogs going up there, too. It might be a record. I don't know if a top 10 team, I guess we're top 10 this week, right? So we're hovering near it last week and we're underdogs two straight weeks. So that's a good one to research if you guys got the time.

Q. You're actually minus 2.

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not looking up. Is that good or bad?

Q. Favored by two.

COACH FERENTZ: Somebody told me last night we were the underdogs. Don't rat me out. They know better than I do, I promise you.

Q. Will you ever allow yourself to consider yourself as a national championship challenging team?

COACH FERENTZ: If we're up there in the table, maybe we're in that group. We were close in '02. We didn't make it. That's the way it goes. We haven't played half of our conference games yet, so it's premature to be worrying about that stuff.

Q. Outside these walls you hear this a lot, but there's a segment of the fans that creates respect or doesn't think your program gets enough respect nationally. Is that anything that you or your team follows?

COACH FERENTZ: No. One thing -- I've learned a lot of things I guess in 50 some years. I was not quite in my 30's I guess last time we beat them, '95, I guess it would have been just turned 40. But winning takes care of itself. It's that simple. If we win enough, you usually, not always, you usually get what you deserve in sports. It's really how it works, and Auburn might be the exception to the rule that one year.

But there wasn't much I look back on and regret in 2002. I mean, the what-if game on the one game. We weren't good enough that night. So we got beat and that's the way it goes and it's in the books and you move on.

And where we end up at the end of the year that's probably where we belong. But we've got a lot of football ahead. That's what we need to worry about now. That's the best thing we can do to help our cause at the end of the year.

Q. You can match up pretty quickly with their passing offense and your pass defense?

COACH FERENTZ: If you look at it statistically, you can say -- again, we're probably so early in the conference play, I'm not sure how valid statistics are, at least a lot of them. We'll find out Saturday. But it's going to be a challenge. I know that. They've got good receivers. Their tight ends are like Wisconsin's tight ends, they're active in the passing game as well. Receivers are big receivers. They've got good size and they've got a good line that can protect and quarterback can throw it. So it's going to be a challenge for us.

Q. If I would have told you today that Jewel Hampton's knee got blown out, today

we'd be talking about National Championship, BCS championship, would you --

COACH FERENTZ: You're talking about it, not me. Those are your words not mine. We're just talking about Michigan State. We're talking about so far so good. We've played well.

And there's no question I'm pleased with the way the young guys have stepped up and performed in a time of need, because we kind of ran out of options with Shonn walking out the door and Jewel going down.

So our options are a little bit limited. But you hope that guys can play well. In the back of my mind I'd looked at the Oregon State/USC film this summer and that running back for Oregon State who did a heck of a job in that game at least. He had a terrific year. True freshman, if I remember correctly, not a big guy.

There's evidence of young players doing well at running back. Not that it's related, but maybe related, I was riding in the car on Sunday and they were talking about the Saints, and they're at the top, somewhere at the top in the NFL rushing the football, and they got the guy from Illinois, and the other guy, two guys, guy from Illinois I coached in the Big Ten. The other guy I never heard of.

They're getting it done. In the NFL typically they say you can get a good back in the third, fourth round. I think it's good for us because we don't get many first round picks at Iowa.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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