

September 9, 2008



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: My week has been off to a big start already. Yesterday I got to open the paper and saw a little picture of my face, nice smile on my face, cited a like 2-and-20 record against Iowa State since I've been here. And then the highlight of my day today, I just got off the Big Ten -- whatever they call it, media call-in or whatever it's called, but it's like a call-in show, and we wrapped it up with a question about the tight end at Wisconsin. I thought that was a good question. We're off to a good start here.

But hopefully this will be the crescendo right here. We'll wrap this thing right up.

Injury front-wise right now, I think we're gaining ground. Probably the only guy that has no chance to play this week is Jeff Tarpinian. He had to pull out last week. He worked on Sunday a little bit, but even if he is 100 percent cured today, I just don't see him having enough volume of work. Outside of that, I think everybody has got a chance to play in the game.

Captains this week will be King and Kroul again on defense. We've got Bruggeman again offensively, and we'll add Seth Olsen to the group, so those will be our four guys.

Certainly I'm pleased with Saturday's results. I think we're doing some things well out there, and that's a good thing. Fan support has been tremendous; very, very appreciative of that. I'll say that one more time.

That being said, we've got a bigger challenge this week than we've had the last two, no question about that. Iowa State is probably like us; I think both teams have improved from a year ago. Very impressed with everything that we're seeing about them. They're playing hard. They're well-coached, good scheme. More importantly, the players I think know what they're being asked to do, and they're doing an excellent job of it.

They're playing opportunistic football, which is what good football teams do, and they're

creating a lot of positive situations, be it the turnover situation. And the other thing that's really factored into their production has been their special teams. They've played excellent in all phases and have addressed some things that were probably concerns for them. The guys kicking right now are doing a good job, and clearly when you block a couple punts, that really helps out, and that's a sign of good coaching and good execution.

So I think if you look at the return yardage, for and against, all those kinds of things, they're doing a great job on special teams. So they're playing well, and it's a challenge for us to play a lot better here than we've played the last two weeks, and we've got about four days to do it.

Q. What have you seen out of Ricky that gave you the confidence to put him on that top line over Jake?

COACH FERENTZ: So far he's played well. You know, and this is pretty much based on what's happened since August. I'll say it one more time. I think both guys have really done a good job in all the situations that they've been in, and the thing that motivated us to start Rick last week, we didn't have a chance to see him as a starter. This is the first time we got an exposure to that. I think he handled it well.

But there are a lot of things we don't know about him yet. We really haven't seen him in tight circumstances. On the game field we've seen him in those circumstances and practice, and based on that, we think he's going to do just fine. But there are a lot of things he hasn't experienced yet, and I made reference a week ago or whenever it was, he hasn't been sacked 40-something times yet.

Jake took one on the chin in our first ballgame. He got rid of the ball, but he took one under the face mask. Those things aren't fun, and Jake has been through a lot of not-fun things, and it wasn't fun for him Saturday, I know, having to come out and visit with the media afterwards, but he's done a great job in all those circumstances. That's why we think so highly of him. I'm sure Rick will do well but there are a lot of unknowns.

It's not like we're ready to crown him king or anything like that. It's kind of like our football team. We've played hard but we really haven't

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Coach Ferentz - 9 9 08

done anything yet, either. Maybe he's representative of our football team at this given stage.

Q. What did you take away from the film that you liked, that Stanzi did out there?

COACH FERENTZ: I think you guys saw the game. I think probably pretty much what everybody saw. He operated well, made some good throws. He did some things wrong, too, and hopefully he'll make improvement this week.

Q. Do you anticipate any kind of rotation at all?

COACH FERENTZ: Don't have a set plan right now, but we'll just play things by feel. We'll see how the game plays out. But at this given point, no, we'll just kind of see how things go. They'll both work this week in practice.

Q. Is Jake getting any playing time at all then?

COACH FERENTZ: It's possible, but we haven't -- we haven't really -- we'll see how the week goes, too. This will be his first -- there are a lot of firsts, but this is Rick's first week of practice after starting a ballgame, and we'll see where his head is at and see how he's practicing, too. We've had a couple situations like this, and we're not displeased with anybody. It's just a matter of doing the best at any given time.

Q. How pleased are you with the offensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: They're making progress. You know, it's like a lot of things on our team, we're making progress. But when you look at the tapes, too, you know there are a lot of things we need to do better, can do better and will have to do better this week because they've got an excellent coaching staff, and they're watching the same tapes we're watching. Things that we're not doing real well they're going to try to exploit, and I think the level of competition clearly goes up, especially given this series. I mean, it's going to be a tough ballgame, so we're going to have to take a couple steps this week, not just one or two, but a couple.

Q. I assume the offensive line will have to take care of the blitz?

COACH FERENTZ: I would imagine we might see a couple of them. Yeah, that's a big part of it, and our back is going to have to do a good job in the pickup, and then in cases where we can't get a body on the blitzers, then the quarterbacks

and receivers have to be on the same page. It's intricate and we're going to have to be sharp because it's coming.

Q. Do you have any concerns with Ricky, like him getting a big head, that type of thing?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't, but again, I've never seen him in this situation. But again, he's a lot like our team; it's not like we've done anything yet. I mean, we've won two games, we won two games last year and the season didn't have a happy ending. I think all of us just need to keep that in mind. We've done some things well, but we've got an awful lot we can still improve on. I think that's probably true for every individual on our team right now.

Q. You guys haven't been challenged at all this year. Iowa State really had to fight last week. Are you concerned at the fact that you guys haven't been pushed that much?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not concerned. There's nothing you can do about it. We've tried to challenge guys in practice and what have you, and sometimes we look good and sometimes we don't. But that's part of the season, and certainly in the next ten weeks starting with this week we're going to be in plenty of those situations.

That's part of the growth process, and it'll be interesting to watch how we respond.

Q. In watching the tape, are Phillip Bates and Austen Arnaud similar enough quarterbacks where you can get by with one game plan?

COACH FERENTZ: I think clearly if you just look at the statistics, both of them -- neither of them are afraid to run it, but you look at the statistics, and Bates has really been productive with his feet. Both of them will throw it and can throw it and do throw it and do a nice job throwing it. But they're both capable; they're both dangerous performers. But statistically you've got to probably give a little bit of an edge to Bates as a runner. But that doesn't mean Arnaud is a slouch. One thing is for sure, odds of getting a sack on either guy is -- it's going to be -- it's just probably not -- don't sit around waiting for too many of those because you're not going to get many chances to sack those guys. Either they're going to get the ball out or take it and run with it, so we're going to have to be sound with our whole team defense.

Q. Did you have to spend extra time

because they have two quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I don't know, I mean, if you have to spend extra time. I think you have to worry about both guys in both categories, and the way their offense is set up, you have to respect the run, including the quarterback run. No matter what's in the ballgame you just have to be alert for that and sound for that. If you're not, you're going to be in trouble. We lost contain a couple times the other day, and if we do that this Saturday we're going to pay for it. There won't be a shutout on the board then, I can promise you that.

Q. What do you have to say to the cynics that say maybe you don't take this game as serious as some Iowa fans would like?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I'd say they're probably misinformed. But everybody is entitled to their opinion. It's a great country.

We think every game is pretty important. I thought the last two were important, too.

Q. Do you expect Moeaki to get back on the field this weekend?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, if he gets through the week. He's making progress. Two questions, how effective will he be, and then the second thing is how long can he go, how many plays could he actually play and be effective. He's missed a lot of time. That's really the case with all the guys we're dealing with. We've got a lot of guys that have missed time. To think they're going to come back and be at the same form the other guys are, it's probably not realistic. They may be for a while, but over the long haul we have to be smart about how we bring them back.

Q. Do you like Trey Stross also this week?

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a chance. He gained ground last week during the week, and if we can get him through the next three days, you'll see him Saturday. If you don't see him Saturday, that means we didn't get him through the next three days. Doering has got a new cast, which is good news. So I think he's got a shot, but we haven't seen him in practice yet really with the new cast, so hopefully he'll have a more realistic chance now.

Q. I believe the number is 423 rushing yards the Cyclones have given up in two games. Is it fair to say there will be an extra dose of Shonn Greene this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I don't know. Yeah, we're going to run our offense the way we run it pretty much. The styles of teams that they've played are a little different than what we are, so that kind of adds to it. I'm not sure that we resemble either those games real well, and it won't be as easy to get yards this week. I know that.

Q. Can you talk about the secondary? Have you seen any surprises so far? And is Dalton and Sash just kind of a game-day decision?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that competition is pretty even, and you know, we're doing some good things back there. But it's not like we've really been tested at this given stage.

I think, again, with our whole football team, we're going to learn a lot more this week where we're at. I think it's going to be interesting just to see how we perform.

Q. Do the guys kind of know the significance of this game, what it means to not only the players but to the fans and the state of Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think probably the only people that don't would be the first-year freshmen that haven't been involved in this game. Even the guys that were first year last year that didn't travel I think got a little sense of it. I assume they watched it on TV. I think they understand, and pretty much I think if you've been around this thing one time or even half of a game, I think you've got a feel for how intense the rivalry is.

It's one thing to look at statistics or hear people talk about it, but once you've been involved in it I think you've got a better taste. The way it is now I think it's just about everybody on both rosters, no matter where they grew up or whether they were born, they've probably got a feel for it.

It's a great thing; I'm not quite sure -- I wasn't around here when they quit the series. I'm not going to look at anybody that was. I know there's somebody in the room that was probably. But for whatever reason, they discontinued the series at one juncture and brought it back in the '70s. I'd be hopeful that they would never discontinue it. I think it's a good thing for football in general. Certainly it's good for football in our state.

Q. When you're walking around in public do you get asked if you're going to beat Iowa State this year more so than any other game? Do you feel like there's more questions about Iowa State more so than any other

game?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. Not to ruin your story, but no (laughter). But it does come up. I'm not going to minimize it. But it does come up, and a few other things come up, too, especially after last year. They had a couple other teams on their list, also.

Q. Some of the spots where you have multiple guys listed, like left guard, kicker, how soon would you want a definite No. 1?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll just let it play itself out. There's no way to, I don't think, make a decision until it becomes evident you can make a good decision, so we'll let it play out and see what happens.

Q. This is the first time in a long time where you've had competition affect the depth chart like it has. Is that what it is, just competition has picked up now and maybe some help on the roster?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think probably in most cases it's a matter of two guys that we feel are pretty capable. It's usually more of that than anything else. Sometimes it means you don't have anybody, and we may find that to be true down the road. But I don't think that's the case.

I think our depth is probably a little better this year than it's been maybe in some years at some positions. You know, there's still a couple where we're a little thin, and I hope that doesn't show up anytime in the next 13 weeks. But you never know -- or 11 weeks I guess at this point.

Q. I know you don't want to get too excited about only two games, but what does it say about the depth and the quality of the defense, and a guy who I believe is a backup is Big Ten Player of the Week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've got a tough jury in the building. He didn't get Player of the Week in our room. He got a runner-up or honorable mention, and I was teasing him about that. I said, geez, the Big Ten is a little kinder to you than the coaching staff. But it was good to see and it was good that Carl got a chance to play. Carl is a guy that we had a lot of good feelings about from day one, and he's endured some injury problems and some challenges there, and he's getting his feet back up underneath him. I think he's found a niche, found a home, and he's a high-effort player, so that's good to see.

Talking about depth, that's a position we're not concerned about but aware of certainly with two guys that have played every snap for

three-plus years, so to have some good young players coming along at that position is good, and I think Carl is certainly going to be in that mix.

Q. You mentioned Moeaki this year, what do you think about him in terms of being one of few guys to go to the NFL? Looking pretty good so far?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's way too early to tell. We're happy, don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to put water on the parade here, but it's way too early. Anytime you keep people out of the end zone that's a good thing and that's the number one objective.

All that being said, we know it's going to get a lot more difficult and challenging here in the next ten ballgames. Each step will be a test for us, and hopefully if we stumble, we get back up on our feet, but hopefully we're not going to stumble too badly.

Q. Where is Shonn in terms of game shape compared to a few weeks ago?

COACH FERENTZ: I think a lot better. The thing we can't -- I guess you could, but we don't want to simulate in practice, is him running the ball and getting tackled and getting banged around. And he got tackled in preseason, don't get me wrong there. But for instance, like with Fred Russell, I can promise you he didn't get tackled the last two years he was on campus by our guys. He might have got knocked over by one of our linemen doing something wrong. But that's something that Shonn needed and needs more of. He's not there yet, but at least these have been good -- it's a good start for him at least to go out there and compete in game competition, to get whacked. He got whacked pretty good the other day, and to have to play through that, that's a good thing.

Q. The last two years you've played somewhere around 18 true freshmen. What's your philosophy on playing true freshmen, and has it changed over time?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not sure -- like there's nothing in black and white right now, but it has changed. I've rethought a few things, I guess, and probably the poster children for this whole thing would be Edds and Reisner. Reisner ended up playing last year and he was hardly ready but we had no choice unfortunately, so we threw him out there and gave him a life preserver, and he competed and did a nice job, but he was struggling early. But I thought in the spring he

really had a good spring. It looked like he belonged on a Big Ten field. So that kind of opened my eyes.

I think him playing last year speeded the process, and I think Edds, the same way. Edds didn't play as much probably as Allen did. He played that one game, but I just think the jump that those guys had in year two or the advantage they had as opposed to maybe red-shirting probably helped them, and I guess where I'm thinking right now is probably for most cases, guys that are more on the perimeter, backs, tight ends, receivers, have a better chance, although with Bulaga it's an exception to the rule, and I guess there's been some others.

If a guy can help our football team right now, that's kind of the approach that we're taking. We're going to get him involved, knowing that it may be on a limited basis, but for the next three years I think it will benefit him.

Q. Was that your philosophy say nine years ago, to try to save those 18-, 19-year-olds?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, for sure years one and two we were thinking red-shirt everybody possible. I didn't think we were going to the Rose Bowl, especially that first season. So that was kind of our thought was to try to build a little bit and get some guys, get their feet on the ground and let them develop and then go from there. So yeah, things have changed a little bit in that regard, and I think times have changed.

The other part of it is a guy has got to be doing okay off the field educationally and also with his social transition. The good news is I don't think it deters them academically. But if it does, then you've got to reassess it.

Q. What are your thoughts right now on the production you've gotten out of the tight end position, both Brandon and Allen, given the stats of Tony at the moment?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Brandon has done a good job, and he did a good job last year. And I've considered him to be a starter. I think he and Tony are both starters in my opinion. We like to play a lot of two tight ends. And Allen has made good progress. It's good to see all those guys get involved. Hopefully we'll get to the point where we have all three of them involved.

Mike Sabers was one of our more improved guys during the past spring, and unfortunately he's been out with that ankle. He's got a chance to play this weekend, so we'll have to see how the week goes for him.

We talked about depth earlier. That's one position where we had some depth, and thank goodness, because we've got two upper classmen out right now. The other guys have done a good job carrying us through.

Q. Is there one thing that jumps out on tape when you look at Iowa State as opposed to a year ago and the improvement they've made, faster, more athletic? Is there something you see right off the top?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's everything, which you'd expect. I mean, I know they've worked hard up there. It's very evident when you look at the tape. Everybody looks better physically. They look -- everybody is in sync. They're on the same page as I think what the plan is intended to be, and they're playing with great effort and execution. And they've had -- we've seen that before. I mean, Dan and his staff did a great job up there, too, as we all know.

But I think everybody realizes in any sport, I think most sports at least, team sports, the first year is always a little bit of a -- it's a transition. It didn't seem to hurt them too bad in our game last year, but clearly they were 0 and 2 coming into that game, and they nailed us pretty good. This year the difference is they're 2 and 0 and looking good. Last year it was a grab bag those first two games for them. It didn't affect them in the third, but this year it's not the case. I mean, they look like they're ready to roll.

Q. You mentioned earlier that you guys were 2 and 0 last year and didn't have a happy ending. Have you mentioned that to the team or have they mentioned that without you needing to bring it up?

COACH FERENTZ: Not to sound too cliché, but we talk about games one by one, and we finished up Saturday, talked about it Sunday, and complimented them on the effort, and I think the guys have played hard and they've come ready to play. We're doing a lot of good things, but again, we're just -- there are a lot of loose ends, a lot of open doors that we've got to get taken care of, not only for this week but for the next nine afterwards. Or ten if you include the bye week.

So we're just starting to -- we're at that point right now where we've got to make strides, and we made some strides last week. We did some things better. I'm not saying it was totally the same, but we've got to pick up the pace here now. That's where we're at. When the season is over we'll count the wins and see where we're at, or

somebody else will count them for us. I think other people do that, too. We've got to keep our focus on where we're at and where we're trying to go this week.

Q. What is your opinion on the defensive secondary?

COACH FERENTZ: Ours?

Q. Yeah.

COACH FERENTZ: Again, I like what we see, but it's not like we've really been tested yet. The other day, however many sacks we got, that's not going to happen this week. We're going to have to be sharper back there, and we're going to get tested. We're going to get tested a lot more than we have the first two weeks. But so far, so good. The guys are playing well. They're hustling around and doing some good things. Other than the first play -- the first play of the season, we kind of cut one loose. But other than that, I think we've done fairly well.

Q. You said you were happy with the way Jake has handled this situation. Have you had to spend any extra time, I guess, explaining it to him?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we talked last week, he and I talked last week, and offered to him on Sunday to talk this week, and he hasn't taken me up on it, so that's fine. I want to make sure he's doing okay because it's not like just any other position. I mean, you say it is. I've said that before. But it isn't just like any other position because it's everybody's business what a quarterback does or who the quarterback is. It's been that way around here. This is my 19th year, and I think it's been that way every one of the 19 years that I've been here. It's just we're in a situation where we are -- without the pro teams in our state, it's a prominent position, and technology is a little bit different than it used to be in the '80s, so a lot of people get to voice their opinions in ways they didn't used to do.

So yeah, I'm concerned about that a little bit, but I also know I think he can handle it. But he's human, too. You've heard me say it before, and it's a cliché, quarterbacks get more credit and more criticism than they deserve typically. That's just the nature of the beast, and anybody who plays quarterback knows that. It's kind of like being a head coach. That's just the way it goes.

But all that being said, the guy is a human and he's got feelings, and I'll revert back to the voice of displeasure by several fans last week. I don't think that's typical of our fans. I read

somewhere where it's happened three times. I missed it in 2003, and if it did happen in 2003, I'd lump that in with 2003, 2001. Nathan Chandler and Kyle McCann, just like Jake Christensen, are good guys that work hard, try hard, they care about the team. They've gone through tough times without being negative, without being complainers, and I've got great respect for them. I certainly hope our fans would. Both those guys had happy endings to their careers, too. They both finished up on high notes.

That's one of the neat things about sports; you never know how it's going to turn out. But I'm just talking to a handful of people, I think, and I can't hear anything Saturday because I've got headphones on. I miss a lot of things.

I know that's not representative of Iowa fans. Iowa fans have been awfully good, awfully good. I'd just hate to see any individuals get singled out unless it's an adult and they boo the coaches. That's fine. We're getting paid. But this isn't pro football; I hate to see individual performers get singled out. Did I answer that question? I kind of went off there; I didn't mean to give anybody a lecture, but I don't think that's what anybody wants in sports.

Q. Do you have any kind of relationship with Gene Chizik?

COACH FERENTZ: It's very casual. We attended a dinner together a year ago April, and I saw him last September. I think that's about it. But professionally I'm well aware of what he's done, and I think we're probably both in tune to what we do program-wise, at least, and I've got great respect for the job that he's done all throughout his career. Certainly he's doing a great job there.

I like his background in that he was the -- he's not one of those guys that was born on third base and thought he hit a triple. He's earned every opportunity he's gotten from an outsider's perspective. He's earned every opportunity that's come his way, and he's done a great job with every one of them. I don't think it's surprising that he got hired there.

Q. Were there signs maybe in retrospect that you guys were headed for a lesser year after being 2 and 0 and maybe some of those -- are you not seeing those this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, one of them was week three (laughter). I could name a lot of plays. I'll start with the blocked field goal. It's just

funny how things come back and get you and blocked field goals are like blocked punts. It's not a good deal. That's a high school play, and I don't mean disrespect to anybody, but it's not like a big thought process play. It's a play you should be able to execute.

But yeah, just -- and it continued. We had things that we didn't -- challenges we didn't meet very well, and unfortunately we didn't meet the one at the end of the season. That's where we ended up, and now we're moving forward. And we'll know more here in about 10, 11 weeks where we're at this year.

Q. Do you remind your guys throughout this week of the emotions they felt after last year's game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, more prominent to me is just the ride home. That's a long ride home. I remember that ride home. I remember riding home from Northwestern in 2005. I remember the week or so after the last ballgame last year. I remember the last week or so after our last ballgame the year before that, the Minnesota game. There are certain things that just -- snapshot memories you have, and they're not pleasant thoughts. If those motivate you, great, they should, motivate you to work harder. But at the end of the day you've got to perform.

Q. To your knowledge since you've been a part of this series as a head coach here, is this the first time that both teams have come in with kind of, at least as the thought process, two quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I haven't thought about that. I thought you were going to ask me if it was the first time both teams were 2 and 0. I haven't thought much about that, either. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know how many quarterbacks we had our first couple years. I know we were in a rotating system at some point. I know this, when they had Wallace, Rosenfels, who am I leaving out, they weren't rotating those guys, Meyer. I mean, those guys were in there. But it seems to be working for them and seems to be working for us so far.

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