

September 2, 2008



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: It was a good start Saturday certainly. Just a couple points of interest. First of all, I thought the fan turnout was great. We're very appreciative of that. It was a holiday weekend. I think with all the challenges our fans have been through the past year, it was very much appreciated.

Also it was great having the '58 team here. 50 years since they played, you know, what a great group that was. It was neat to have them at practice on Friday. Randy Duncan did a great job addressing the team. That was a real honor for us to be with them on Friday, have them at the game on Saturday.

I think it was a good start overall. We certainly have a lot to work on right now. That's what this week will be important for.

On the injury front, you know, the medical meeting went pretty quickly. Hopefully today will go as smoothly as the medical meeting was. I think really right now the guys in doubt are probably Mike Sabers. Still looks like he's a way away. Tony Moeaki, Trey Stross. Dan Doering, we'll see, he has an appointment today, we'll see how that goes. I think those four guys right now are in limbo. I think outside of that, we've got a chance to get everybody else back.

Our captains for this week, defensively will be Matt Kroul, Mitch King. Offense will be Rob Bruggeman again. And then special teams will be represented by Jayme Murphy.

Then just a couple words about Florida International. It's really the second year of their program. It's a relatively new program overall. Coach Cristobal has been there, this is only his second year. I think what we've seen, based on

one game, you know, based on film from last year, then what we saw again in their opener, they look like a more mature team, a more developed team. They played hard and played with good effort last year. I think they're just a better team physically now than they were.

Staff-wise defensively they haven't changed much. Pretty much matching with what you saw last year, what you'd expect. Then offensively they've got a little bit of a Purdue flavor with Coach Legg being there. He had been at Purdue the last several years. I think you can see that influence with him taking over the offense down there.

You know, our task right now is to get ready during the week. I don't think we had a great week of practice last week. I think that showed up a little bit. Overall our operation was good Saturday, but a lot of things we need to get better at. And I think that's probably the biggest focus for us right now, see if we can't have a better week during the week this week so we play a little sharper on Saturday.

You know, we'll go from there.

Q. What would be some of the areas you'd concentrate on this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Blocking and tackling would be a good start. I say that. I mean, blocking at every position, not just the linemen. You always think of the linemen. Just technique-wise. I mean, we got the job done for the most part, not always, but for the most part. A lot of things we need to get sharper at and better at as we get going here.

We missed a lot of tackles defensively, which you hope you don't do that, but we did. It's early in the year, I understand that. But we're going to have to get a little bit better in that area, too.

I think for the most part, again, we operated okay, but just our overall sharpness has to improve if we're going to move along here.

Q. I know fans don't make personnel calls, but did you notice at all they seemed to be a little more behind Stanzi than Jake?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, you know, it's not uncommon for the number two quarterback to be a fan favorite any time. I didn't notice, to answer the question. That one's almost a hundred percent. I don't know if it's a total hundred percent. There are a couple of things that are predictable in life, and that's one of them.

Q. Same type of quarterback rotation this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's fair to say that's probably something we'll do. You know, depends how the week of practice goes. But it's pretty fair to say we would expect that.

Q. Will you be doing the same against Iowa State?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I mean, right now we're just worried about this one. We'll take next week next week. But we'll see how this week turns out, go from there.

Q. What would one of those guys have to do? You mentioned on Saturday you were waiting for one of them to grab onto that starting job and not let go.

COACH FERENTZ: Well, just see how it pans out. The good news is right now both of them are doing a good job. I make that point especially clear with Jake. You know, I think he's a better player than he was a year ago, which you would hope. I hope that's true of all of our guys that were with us last year.

The major difference, Rick is a factor now, where a year ago he really wasn't. I don't mean that in a derogatory sense, but he just wasn't. He really wasn't in the mix. You know, he's come on. So we've gone from, you know, having one quarterback to I think now two. Clearly both guys are better than they were a year ago. That's a good thing.

Q. Is everybody making too big a deal about this?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. But I understand. We have a couple positions like that. Middle linebacker is a little bit like that. The Will (linebacker) position could be like that. It's more interesting. Quarterbacks are more interesting. But Tarpinian is back, be curious to see what he

does this week, if that ramps up a little bit. You know, we still have some things going on in the secondary.

The good news is I think overall, you know, we have competition. We've had situations, sometimes where we haven't had that. One guy's kind of been there and nobody else has been involved at all.

Q. Have Jake and Ricky's attitudes been what you've hoped?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. I say they're playing better. I think both of them are playing better. And part of that's attitude. That's a big part of performance.

You know, I think they both have been doing a good job.

Q. Three true freshmen in the depth chart in the secondary. What did you see from them on tape?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, they're up and running. You know, as I said, I think I said a week ago, perimeter guys, we could see them getting involved. The back end is one, the offensive backfield, then DeMarco Paine also played a little bit at receiver. So those are areas that we thought might have some open spots.

And the good news is all those guys in the secondary have done a good job so far. It's really early. But our plan is to get them going on special teams. With defensive backs we'll have a chance, if we play some substitution defense, which kind of all hinges on their performance. If we feel like they're ready to do it, that will open up the door for us to play some of those nickel and dime defenses everybody has been clambering for. But we have to have guys we trust out there on the field before we do it.

But I think the potential is there, and that's encouraging. You know, we like what we've seen so far in four weeks. Injuries have opened the door there a little bit there too. We didn't have Bernstine or Gardner dress that week. That being said, we're going to keep these guys. We've made the leap with them, so we're going to keep going.

Q. Can you elaborate on Moeaki if you could.

COACH FERENTZ: He's coming along well. You know, based on Sunday, I'm no doctor, but didn't seem like he had the confidence yet. I

couldn't envision him having a great week of practice and then going. So hopefully he'll be in gear today. He'll work today, you know, at a smart rate and smart volume, then we'll see where he's at tomorrow. You know, we'll see where he's at at the end of the week. Give him another workout Friday, Saturday, maybe something like that, he'll be ready to go Sunday.

Even if he would be perfectly healthy Thursday, you know, he really hasn't had much work, so it's probably not fair to put him out on the field. That wouldn't be fair to him.

Q. If he does return, what will that mean?

COACH FERENTZ: That means we get a good player back. He's proven himself to be a good player. He looked excellent in camp prior to his injury. You know, it's always good to get a guy who's experienced. And Tony's talented. He's got a great attitude. Any time you get a player like that, that would be a good thing.

Q. Status of Bernstine and Gardner this weekend?

COACH FERENTZ: They worked on Sunday. Look to be, you know, ready to go. So they got some work last week. But, again, you know, you hate to put a guy on a game field on Saturday when he hasn't -- he's missed a lot of time. Both those guys are in that category, as was Tarpinian. They got a good workout in Friday. They worked on Sunday. Hopefully they'll get a good week this week. If they are, then we'll be able to play those guys.

Q. Any time frame for Trey?

COACH FERENTZ: Same thing as everybody else. You know, if a player can get out there and actually practice for a week, at least a week, then you have a chance to, you know, maybe play him in the game, depending on where he was, how much time he missed, that type of thing.

You need demonstrated performance on the practice field I think in most cases. You know, there's been exceptions to the rule. I mean, Bob Sanders in his fourth year, you know, might hold him off the field all week and just out of fairness to everybody else put him out there Saturday. But that's rare. Usually that catches up to a player also if do you that.

You know, but especially with an injury like this, you know, I think we got to make sure he's confident before he goes back out there.

Q. Find yourself looking at any old Purdue stuff to gauge what their offense might do?

COACH FERENTZ: We've done that. We've already went back and looked at some of the stuff. Didn't like what we saw last year obviously. But, yeah, most definitely. You can just see some Purdue flavor to their offense now. You know, last year they played a couple quarterbacks, one guy a runner, one guy a thrower. Now it looks like they're leaning towards the throwing part of it, and that makes sense.

Q. In the ballgame Saturday, Mossbrucker's field goals were between 30 and 39, and Murray's were 40 and 49. Has distance been a determining factor?

COACH FERENTZ: It really wasn't. It's just how it panned out. Down the road it may be, but it wasn't on Saturday. It was just kind of a rotational deal, too.

The good news is both those guys performed well. So hopefully that will continue. They've done a pretty good job in practice, so we had a good feeling about it. It's always good to see them, especially Trent, you know, first time he ever played. So that was a positive.

Q. If you can, will it be your plan always to have a scholarship kicker?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope so. I hope we have one, you know, that merits that. You know, again, just based on where we're at now, it's early, but I thought that was an encouraging thing, and be a guy -- got one out of high school or a guy that earns one here. We've had them go both ways. First guy that comes to mind is Rob Houghtlin. That's one of the better guys we've ever had that earned one.

Q. Could you see yourself having two kickers on scholarship?

COACH FERENTZ: It would be okay with me. I mean, there's a lot worse situations. You hope it's not two because the first one didn't work, that's all. Yeah, I hope it's not that kind of two. If it ends up being two that are doing well, that's great. I'm all for it.

Q. Game administration, did you notice any difference with the 40 seconds?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. Somebody asked about that on the teleconference. I'm sure at some point we will. Probably the biggest thing I can think is a long completion in the passing game. You better get down there and get set, especially if you're a team that huddles like we are.

You know, again, our staff reaction initially was we thought 45 seconds might be better since we don't have a helmet transmitter like they do in the NFL. But it didn't seem to be a big problem. We got caught on the clock once.

You know, I guess my only request at this point, I'm ready to say uncle. I just hope we settle into whatever it is we're doing. I thought we had a pretty good game about eight years ago. It seems like we've been tinkering, not every year since then, but the last couple years it seems like the rules change every year. It would be really great if we could just kind of settle into who we are, what we are, then go with it, get everybody on the same page.

Q. I get the facemask thing, but the horse collar has always been a part of the game.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I opened my big mouth. I haven't seen a horse collar in nine years. We had one right in front of our bench. I got a nice good look at it. Yeah, I'll keep my mouth shut from here on in.

But, yeah, I didn't think it was a huge factor in college football. I haven't seen enough of pro football to comment on it. They're the first ones that instituted it. I agree with you, I don't think it's a huge thing. But apparently I guess maybe we're trying to be the NFL. I don't know. Seems that way. I'm not saying that's bad or good, but anyway...

Q. Talking about rules, how about when the main player intercepted the ball, got up in your player's face? The video I saw, I thought that was going to be a point of contention.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it would be a possibility, I guess. Yeah, I don't know. It is definitely a point of emphasis. I can concur with you on that one. It's a point of emphasis this year, sportsmanship. Then it's an interpretation, yeah. I

guess if you get horse collared, our guy, would have nailed him.

Q. How much did you really learn about your team playing an overmatched opponent?

COACH FERENTZ: I think you learn something every time you're with your team, in all circumstances. I mean, it may sound ridiculous, but just making the trip up to the hotel, you know, can everybody get dressed right, properly, all that. Just be on time for meetings, all those kinds of things.

And, you know, with guys like Kroul, King and Edds, you don't worry too much about those kinds of things. But we had a lot of guys that were in high school four months ago, three months ago, you know, on the bus. You know, who knows what they're going to do. You know, it's a good process for us.

Then the game operation, you know, we've had some trouble - not a lot, but we've had trouble, substitutions, you know, special teams substitutions, things like that. So just any time you're involved in a process, you know, it's a learning experience. You never know what's going to happen in the game either.

You know, we've been involved fairly recently with games where, you know, everybody thought we knew what the outcome was going to be and it didn't turn out that way. There were a couple of them this weekend. It's just part of football. We're not assuming anything. Every opportunity we have is an opportunity to do something well or do something poorly. Hopefully we'll do it well.

Q. Any areas of concern that maybe get overlooked by the fan base because the final score was so lopsided?

COACH FERENTZ: If there were, I probably wouldn't share them. But I think basically just our operation, our whole mode of operation last week was okay. You know, it wasn't great. If we're going to develop into a good football team, we're going to have to pick up the pace a little bit.

But that being said, positives, we had a real good camp. So I don't know if it was the first week of school phenomena or whatever it was, but hopefully we can pick up the pace a little bit this week.

Q. You talked about Eads earlier. What do you have to say about the progression he's made to the point now where he is like one of the key contributors to your defense?

COACH FERENTZ: Changing of the guard a little bit. He's earned it. He works extremely hard, does a lot of good things. Brings up a good point, too. I mean, it goes back to the last question, too. There's not a player on our team right now that can't do better. The film verifies that. We all saw it Sunday. That goes for everybody on our staff. Certainly with me, too. I mean, all of us can get better. We need to be a little bit better this week.

But A.J. really has done a good job. I thought he did an excellent job last year. Was a little bit under the radar because of the position he plays, and then also having guys like Humpal and Klinkenborg in there, too.

But he really played pretty well. That position's not a "glory position" in our defense, but it's one of those ones, it's like a good defensive tackle, it's hard to play without 'em. If you don't have one of those guys, it becomes glaring. But when you have one, it's kind of a quiet, quiet position, if that makes any sense. You know, when Humpal was out there, nobody really knew who Humpal was. Boy, he was pretty noticeable then.

Q. How was the Crowne Plaza experience?

COACH FERENTZ: It was fun. You know, those folks have done a great job. You know, we had invitations there a couple years ago. The number one reason we've gone back every year is just the people that work there. I can't say enough about them. I really tip my hat to them, too, because I know -- I understand they've had difficult circumstances. I'm not real worldly on current events. I apologize. But I'm a little bit familiar that it's been a challenge there.

You know, the people have just been outstanding. I'm hoping everything works out for them, I really do, because they're good folks.

Q. Intensity on your kick coverage team has been missing. Has that been a point of emphasis?

COACH FERENTZ: If we're going to have a chance to be a good team, we're going to have to play really well on special teams. I think our guys understand that.

You know, it was a start. It was a start. So you know, our good teams have usually been

pretty good there. So that's something we've really got to do well. It's good having Brodell back in the rushing game. Hampton looks like he's okay back there on the kick return phase. You know, if we can get a little help along the way in those lines, it was great seeing our kickers perform. Donahue didn't do much, but when he did, he did okay. But our core teams, we think we have the potential to be okay there. But if we're going to have a good team, we're going to need that. Something to build on there, too.

Q. These maybe aren't the big names that some fans want, but for a good five years now the fans keep coming out.

COACH FERENTZ: They do. You know, I go back to my first year in '81. My first time to walk out there, it was sold out. We had had 19 straight losing seasons. That was my first taste of the loyalty and support that our fans have given us.

But, you know, we had pretty good crowds all through the '80s. But it's never been anything I've taken for granted. We weren't selling out 10 years ago. We've got a nice string going right now. A, I hope nobody thinks that's automatic. And, B, particularly in these times, particularly our last performance last year, the taste that we left last time our fans saw us play, we didn't play very well, quite frankly. Then, you know, we've got all these challenges in the state with tornadoes, weather problems, all those kinds of things.

I believe everybody in this program realizes fans have other things to do with their time and money, and we're really appreciative of them being supportive of our team. I thought that was a great, very positive thing. And hopefully we can, you know, continue along those lines. But we don't take it for granted.

Q. Can you talk about the running game. The three guys meet your expectations? Are we going to see more of the same this week again?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. Hopefully. You know, it was a good day for Shaun in that he needed to play in a game. He's done a good job in camp. He's a little bit behind the rest of the crew. You know, so that was good for him. It taxed him pretty well. And hopefully we'll just keep building. His attitude has been great. His work ethic has been great. I have no reason to think that it won't.

As I said last week, I think Paki O'Meara is

one of our more improved players on the football team. I think he showed some things Saturday that maybe we didn't see last spring. Hampton got off to a good start. So hopefully we can keep him going the right direction, too.

Q. Did you get the sock thing figured out?

COACH FERENTZ: We didn't talk about it Sunday. Got a couple days here to keep an eye on them.

Q. (Indiscernible) tongue-in-cheek on Saturday, keep from Hampton's head getting too big. How did he deal with that?

COACH FERENTZ: He was fine. You know, he's fine. Proof will be in his performance. We'll just watch him in practice, what have you. I'm sure everybody is telling him how good he is on the outside, how excited they are, which is great. He did a nice job out there. But it's one game. So, you know, he's got hopefully a lot more ahead of him. Hopefully the way he worked in camp, he'll keep doing it. I think he will. He's a good young guy.

Q. Is three enough or will you throw a fourth in there?

COACH FERENTZ: A back?

Q. Yes.

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. Three looked okay Saturday. I hope it's not a repeat of some of those years where we got down to four, five or six, one of those deals. That's not good.

Q. Talk about the offensive line. Did it meet your expectations?

COACH FERENTZ: A good start. You know, a good start. Again, you know, we didn't cut guys loose. You had these nightmares, I think I started getting a little worried about Thursday night. You know, you have visions of guys coming through the line or somebody blowing an assignment, you know. Same thing in the back end, somebody blowing an assignment. You know, there goes a guy down the sideline, which I guess we did have one of those early in the game first play. You know, those kinds of things always worry you.

But I thought it was a good first step for them, a good start. You know, we got some questions to answer there, some things to work through, too. But, again, the good news Saturday

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was I think the guys that we're playing and in contention right now, they're all helping themselves right now, which is good.

Q. Were you expecting to get a little more pressure out of your defensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, yes and no. You always want more. But if the ball's coming out, you know, a lot of people right now, they get that ball up there pretty quick. You know, a lot of times sacks aren't going to be realistic. But, you know, if you can make the quarterback alter his thinking, you know, his footwork, that's a good thing. Then we had both interceptions came off tips. That's a good thing, too. When you get teams that operate that way a lot of times, disrupting the quarterback, getting your hands up, that type of thing can be as important as maybe a sack.

Q. Can you talk about Anton as a student-athlete. There's not many guys that can juggle football and be a teaching assistant.

COACH FERENTZ: It's really amazing. We've had our fair share of Academic All-Americans. I guess, you know, Coach Parker, either one of the Coach Parkers, good role models there on our staff. But, you know, Anton really is at kind of a different level. He's an interesting guy. He's really an interesting guy. First generation, you know, Russian. He's really a very, very intelligent guy obviously. So it's pretty impressive what he's done. He'll probably, you know, be our biggest recruit coming out of here since Will or Mike Elgin, I guess. I imagine a few people are going to try to corral him and try to get him to work for them.

Q. Andy had the end around play. Would you like to see him be more involved in the offense?

COACH FERENTZ: It's however things pan out. There's no way to dictate typically where the ball is going to go other than handing it to a guy. In the passing game, it's just a matter of how it works out. I'm sure he'll get his share. I'm more interested in him staying healthy and having a great senior year. All that other stuff will work itself out. He'll be involved.

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