

September 21, 2010



An Interview With:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Sounds like a lot of you had the same difficulties we had. At least it didn't take you three hours to get through security hopefully. Just start off with the injuries. It was a tough game on a lot of fronts and the injury front was not kind to us. Looks like we are going to lose Jewel Hampton and both he and Bruce Davis for the season with knee injuries. It's certainly an unfortunate development there.

And then I think Paki O'Meara, most likely, will miss this game, too. So we've got three guys that had tough, tough nights injury-wise. Captain-wise, we have the same four guys, seems to be a consensus there with Adrian Clayborn and Karl Klug on defense and Ricky Stanzi and Julian Vandervelde on offense, so those four guys will be our captains. In a nutshell, the game was disappointing. Certainly disappointing to lose. Any time you lose, that's tough.

If there was a positive, we fought back in the second half and gave ourselves a chance to win. We couldn't quite get it done. So if there was a positive, that was it, certainly, and then just looking at the loss, not to beat a dead horse, but our special teams leave a lot to be desired right now. And any time that you give plays up that are unearned, what I would categorize as unearned, it makes it really difficult to win against anybody and particularly against a team that's favored to beat you. We didn't do ourselves any favor and we are going to have to work on that.

Moving forward, we play Ball State this week. Stan Parrish has been there several years now is an excellent football coach. Their team is well coached. They do a good job and have a good staff. Just two years ago, they had a tremendous season, 12-2 run, great, great year.

From our vantage point we have to first get ready for Ball State, and start our preparations this afternoon getting ready for them and secondly, bigger picture-wise, we need to do a better job correcting the areas we are coming up short in right now - get those things corrected, and then hopefully fortify it at some given point and so that's a process, too.

Those are the two things on our radar right now. We will start that process this afternoon and go from there.

Q. Who is backing up Adam Robinson at the running back spot, is it Marcus Coker?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a little tough right now. We've got Adam, obviously, and then right now with Jewel out, plus Jason White is going to be out another week or two would be my guess so that moves Marcus Coker and De'Andre Johnson up.

Q. How is Jewel Hampton doing from a mental standpoint?

COACH FERENTZ: Very disappointed and doing it about like you would expect. He's very disappointed and he's invested a lot. He's one of the most competitive guys on our football team and it's just really a very disappointing time.

When a player gets hurt, it's really hard for them for obvious reasons, and when you have a couple of them, then it makes it tough. The only good news we can share with them is that we've had players that have gone through similar experiences, and you can still have a happy ending and at some point, he's going to feel bad. Losing a game, you feel bad for a while and at some point you have to turn your attention towards the future and what you can do down the road. Guys like Albert Young and Chad Greenway come to mind, a couple guys who have gone through a couple of those and they are still going well. They will both be down here in a few weeks; they are

both up with the Vikings. So it's not the end of football life necessarily but it just feels that way and it is going to feel that way for a couple days I'm sure.

Q. Have you given any thought, is anybody going to move position?

COACH FERENTZ: We may have to just to take a look at it but I don't know if we are ready to pull the trigger on that yet. We are really kind of out of bodies.

Q. Brandon Wegher at this point --

COACH FERENTZ: And do what? I mean, we've talked about this. He's kind of made his decision and he has not been with us now since second practice. So I think, realistically, for this year, it's probably unrealistic.

Q. Would James Morris be a possibility?

COACH FERENTZ: I wouldn't rule it out. We'll see how this week goes. I wouldn't rule anything out. Not that we've talked about James, but we are pretty comfortable with where he's at. Now with Bruce Davis being down, puts a little pressure on us at the middle linebacker position, too. So we may need him just to stay right where he's at and kind of go from there.

Q. Can you talk about what the two young freshman running backs, Marcus Coker and De'Andre Johnson, their styles and what they bring, what you've seen from them in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's a little tough with Coker mainly because he's been hurt. He got hurt right off the bat, too. So last week was his first full week of practice. Perfect world, we wish we would have had a couple more weeks to get him ready but we just don't have that afforded to us right now. And De'Andre has been on the scout team pretty much ever since we started the season, so we have a little work to do there, too. Just trying to get those guys caught up and go from there.

Q. Is this feeling like 2004?

COACH FERENTZ: Well there are some parallels, certainly, some parallels. I hope the outcome is the same and there are some parallels. You go into every season knowing there are going to be some challenges, some difficulties, and you

deal with them, and that's where our focus is right now.

What are we going to do to come up with some solutions. The good news is we still have a lot of players on our football team that are healthy and will be playing this Saturday and we have to play to our strengths right now and get everybody else to catch up.

Q. Adam Robinson is a guy who is a very hard and physical runner. Given the circumstances, is there something that you can do to get him to protect himself a little more or is that something you don't want to do with a guy?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know how you tell a player to change his style. I don't know how you do that. So put him in a body suit or something like that, I don't know. Might slow him down. That might not be a good idea.

Q. What did you see, with your offensive line down -- let's just start off, why did you struggle to run against Arizona?

COACH FERENTZ: I think I said this the other night, it felt like we were kind of climbing a little the whole night and I've been in games like that before. We all have. It's football.

If you want to go right to the start, they did what they do. They tried to take the run away. A lot of teams try to do that against us and that's why some of the passing plays work pretty well. That's how football works, you pick your spots, but when you are looking at a three-touchdown deficit in the first half, it just throws everything out of whack so it's not much fun.

In general terms, hopefully this will be a learning experience. We were on the road in a tough environment, and tough and given the circumstances that we have put ourselves into, so it's just not that much fun playing football in that situation. It's going to happen.

And all that being said, we came within a blocked extra point or a tipped extra point from going ahead, taking the lead in the fourth quarter. So it's not like we rolled over. I mean, the team fought back, did what they had to do, and then we just couldn't get it closed down, a little bit like the Iowa State game in 2002, different circumstances totally, but yet here we are in the fourth quarter and we couldn't quite get it done.

So the thing we have to do now is move

forward, and going into the last series. If you want my opinion, the critical point in the last series is we gave up a sack on second, third and fourth, and we were to me, a second away from a 15-yard completion. It was wide open. We couldn't get the ball out. So all of a sudden you're 15 yards down the field, moving, and maybe have a little bit of momentum, as opposed to being third and whatever we were, ten or 12. Now you just let them pin their ears and come after you.

And not that we handled it well, that play, but it's bigger than just like, well, okay, one series. If you look at the details of things, but that's how close football is, and that's why it's important you execute as well as you can on every play, because the ramifications of a sack on second and three just really compounds a tough situation already.

If we are going to get over the hump, that's what we have got to do. We have to learn from those kind of things and get better and sharper.

Q. A lot of fans have been talking about the heat; are any of those reasons --

COACH FERENTZ: The thing I'm focused on, we gave up a blocked punt, which as I said the last time we did, it was '08 at Pittsburgh, I believe, and we lost that game.

You give up a blocked punt, and that involved -- it's something that we are prepared for, at least I would like to think going into the game, that -- I know we had practice at and we just didn't execute it.

And then, you know, a kickoff return, a 100 yards where the guy virtually goes untouched, and again, it was something I think we were prepared for. We didn't get it done, didn't execute and then uncontested interception for a touchdown, and that was a makeable play for us and we didn't execute again. That's what I'm fixated on and I don't think the weather or time of day had anything to do with any of those plays.

If we are going to give up one of those plays in a game, you dig yourself a little bit of a hole and then you give up three of them and it really makes it tough, against a team that was favored against us, at least that's what I think I heard during the day; they were favored.

Q. You've lost some key special teams guys. How do you groom guys for game speed and how do you prepare with new guys going in?

COACH FERENTZ: Two things have to happen. Either we have to mix in some veteran

guys that have done it. That's one option. Another is some guys have to step up and grow up a little bit, and historically we have had a tradition of that. We had a guy like Bruce Davis who wasn't very good two years ago in '08. Last year he became a force and became one of our leaders on kickoff team; whereas the year before he really might as well not have been out there. Jeff Tarpinian came on, Tyler Nielsen came on last year, those guys did. Paki O'Meara came on and did a great job, and we need some of those stories to emerge. And if you look historically we have had that through the years.

Dallas Clark was really an unknown entity in 2000. He was a third team outside linebacker and that's how he kind of emerged as a football player. So, you know, the opportunities are for guys right now, and that's what we need, we need somebody to take a little ownership and jump in there and go. I'm optimistic it's going to happen. I think it will happen, but hopefully sooner than later.

Q. How about kicker?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll continue to evaluate that. I think I said before, I wasn't overly pleased last spring with the way we were doing things in practice, and you know, just we need to improve a little bit.

Q. How much bigger of a role will Adam Robinson play with Jewel Hampton's injury and how confident are you that he can take on the additional work?

COACH FERENTZ: There are a lot of teams that play primarily one tailback and go the whole season that way and that's our plan for right now. We plan on him being the primary ball carrier like he was in week one, and we'll get him in and out of the game when appropriate. But it's not an unheard of phenomena for one guy to be the featured ball carrier.

Adam's done a great job and we are all very pleased with what he did a year ago; more pleased with how he's playing right now, and when I was a freshman at college, Tony Dorsett was at the University of Pittsburgh, weighed about a 175 pounds and basically ran every game of the season. I think he ran for a 100 yards in every game, if I remember correctly, never missed a snap. It can be done. It can be done. And that was a skinny freshman back in 1973 probably when that was done. He went to the Hall of Fame,

but he was 165 coming out of high school, he was not a big, mammoth guy or anything like that.

Q. How do you think your defense has performed? A lot of people are going to think of that last drive, but they were in tough spots.

COACH FERENTZ: I think they are playing well. When we tied at 27-27, we had a blocked or tipped PAT, we could not get a stop on defense and we did give up a big play and they took advantage of our aggressiveness and gave up a big play on that drive. Then we got the ball back and didn't score and that's how the game turned out. And that to me is a parallel to Iowa State in 2002. We had a bad turn of events in the third quarter in that game, but we had ample opportunities to finish it off and couldn't quite get it done then.

But we moved on and became a pretty good football team and that's the course that we need to take right now.

Q. So you don't take a lot or shouldn't view the defense's overall point on just that one drive?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't. I think you evaluate people in the game and look at the whole game. Like I say, we just basically gave 21 points to Arizona without making them earn it. I don't want to put that on the defense's tab. It's not their fault we got a punt block or a kick return or gave the other team the ball on the eight. We need to stop them once the ball is on the eight. I'm not dismissing that, we have to keep them out of the end zone, give up three instead of seven. But, you like to win 35-0. Everybody would be happy.

Q. What do you see in Ball State's quarterback? Two different guys they are using?

COACH FERENTZ: One guy is a little better runner than the other and the other guy is a little better thrower and which way they go, we'll find out Saturday.

Q. When you look at the kickoff coverage, is it a matter of technique or are they out of position or combination of all three?

COACH FERENTZ: Both things, out of position and getting blocked, and that comes down to technique and just understanding what your role is and doing it well. It's like every part of football.

You have to win your individual battle and, so we are just going to have to harden up there and get it done. That's something traditionally we have been really good at with the exception of our last game of the season in '08, which was just, you know, a travesty. We were terrible up there in the Metrodome.

But we came back in the Bowl and did very well and that's what we've got to do. We have just got to either change our mind-set or change some personnel and maybe a combination of both. We'll look at everything this week and try to get it straightened out. I said that a week ago and we went from bad to worse, so you know, maybe we'll have to change our approach.

Q. Does the situation maybe change the mentality for your players when you win 35-7? Do they not maybe take it as seriously?

COACH FERENTZ: That's possible and something we talked about last Tuesday. Let's not wait for a loss to give attention to the areas that need to improve.

You know, it's human nature not to, but you can't do that and move forward as a football team.

If we need any more evidence now, then, we are really sleeping through meetings, because it's just right out for us to see. We have got to get better and we are not going to be a good football team if we don't. You can have the best defense in the country, but if they are getting the ball at midfield or we are just giving up seven points, part of playing football is field position, making the opponent drive a long field, and throwing the plus-50 punt the other night that we couldn't down, ball was hung up in the air over five seconds. You would like to think that we can field that, keep it from going in the end zone, it came down on the five.

Little things like that, if you do them well you win games and if you don't, you put yourself at risk, and I'm not discrediting Arizona, they played an excellent game, they did what they are supposed to do and we helped them along the way and that's not smart football on our part.

Q. Is Norm still in the hospital?

COACH FERENTZ: He is. I think things are moving forward now. A week ago, it was kind of a cloudy situation, a little bit muddled but right now the plan is in place and it all came together

Friday, they have done a lot of tests and what-have-you, and right now, I think he's got a good chance of being released sometime this week and with a little bit of luck, maybe in the office sometime next week, we'll see, but realistically in the bye week and getting him back for the last seven games would be a pretty good scenario and I think it's realistic right now based on what I've heard.

Q. The passing game had a few misses the other night, a couple long balls and the drop, are you happy with where that's at, given you have a veteran quarterback and veteran wide receivers?

COACH FERENTZ: When you have makeable plays out there, you like to make them and that's the key to being a good football team. You know, so we can improve there, just like we can improve everywhere. That's just -- we have got a lot of improvement to do. We are doing some good things in the passing game but it still can improve.

Q. Ricky Stanzi took a few shots; how is his health?

COACH FERENTZ: He's okay, he's fine.

Q. You mentioned the positives in the team bouncing back; is that a character of the team that you see?

COACH FERENTZ: Time will tell. I'll be really disappointed if we don't. First of all we need to if we win this football game, it would be good if we did that but big picture wise, it's how you do things, and again, I was really pleased and proud of the way the guys battled in that second half last week, and you know, historically for the most part, that's been something we have been able to accomplish, and if we are going to have a good football team this year, we are going to have to demonstrate that this week and the weeks forward.

And I'm confident they will. I think we've got a good group of guys here but we've just got to take care of every little detail to make sure we are giving ourselves a chance to be successful.

Q. One guy who is playing well is Mike Daniels, obviously, can you take us back to when he was recruited? I know he was another one of those guys that wasn't real heavily recruited?

COACH FERENTZ: And I can't tell you what bowl game it was, probably do the math on it,

but I don't think we saw the tape until for whatever reason it got here over the holidays, and I remember watching it in January, a couple guys looked at and got passed on to me and the obvious question is why isn't this guy being recruited. Height, I'm guessing, however tall he is right now, under six foot or at six foot, he's maybe 6-1, I'm not good on heights. But anyway, and he was like, 225, I think he was wrestling at 215.

But my Kodak moment with him was calling him -- called him on a Sunday, he was driving back from his official visit at Villanova and we asked him if he would be interested in coming out to take a look at our campus, we liked what we saw on tape and thought he was a good football player and for whatever reason he wasn't being recruited by any BCS schools and I think he was getting ready to go to Villanova.

And then, you know, met his family and did a home visit and all that stuff, we were really impressed, and just a good guy, a hard working guy. And he's, I don't want to say self-made but he really has worked hard to become a very good player.

You know, he's done a nice job.

Q. How is the MacMillan and Gettis rotation working out?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's kind of a similar situation, it's what we are talking about. We were not sure where Nolan was three weeks ago. We had a comfort level, if you would, with the first starting five and then we had to play Nolan out of necessity, I'm not saying it's the Riley Reiff story but similar, he did a good job and continues to do a good job, and I think the good news is right now, we have three guys we are comfortable with. Adam did a lot of good things since the end of last season, including the bowl preparation, spring ball. We had camp and depth was a concern on the offensive line and we are adding to it now and I think you'll probably see all of those guys play.

Q. Tony Moeaki is leading the Chiefs in receptions, have you had a chance to watch any of his highlights and what do you remember of him?

COACH FERENTZ: I saw him catch one ball a week ago Monday night in the second half, and that's about the extent of it. But all of the reports are really good and that comes as no surprise, Tony is one of the better players we've

had, he's a tremendous young guy and I do know they are very excited about their rookie class down there, it's a new regime and they are just trying to change the chemistry and mind-set of the team and they are very excited about the young guys they have gotten and the one guy from Mississippi, I know they had a big play the other day -- was that one of their DBs maybe or something.

Q. On a personal note, during the day, do you set some time to run or relieve stress?

COACH FERENTZ: I have a schedule worked out. Yeah, during the outer season I'm a little more conscientious about things but I try to take some time during the in-season phase and I'm better now than I was ten years ago at it, certainly. Although I'm not up for any awards, I know that, for fitness awards or anything like that. I just try to be smart about it and try to keep things in perspective. I've been asked about that a little bit and I venture to say there are a lot of professions where people, some of the health concerns and issues that we have seen, and I'll be the first and foremost, everybody was concerned to hear about Mark's (Dantonio) situation but also very happy to learn that it sounds like everything is going to be just fine. Mark is a great guy and a great football coach.

But this isn't the only profession that it happens to, and people get sick and have illnesses in all professions I think. They have stress in all professions, too. It's a concern, but there are people that work two jobs to put their kids through school. Farmers have stress; is it raining, too much rain, all that stuff. It's not like, you know, we are the only ones that work a little bit extra, I don't think.

Q. Is there a number on average you put in hours-wise?

COACH FERENTZ: You just do what it takes. I've always been a little reluctant to talk about how hard we work. Like I said, there's you know a lot of people that work hard. If I was in Iraq right now, I'd be a little bit more, look at me, one of those deals, I've got a tough deal. Then if I think I was in Iraq or Afghanistan, Jeff Tarpinian's dad was over there for a couple months, he volunteered to do it, and just all you've got to do is talk to him, and, you know, coaching football is a pretty good deal compared to like the ammo coming in and all that stuff, and going out and it's all concrete and desert and 120 degrees every day. That makes this look pretty easy to me.

...when all is said, we're done.®

ASAPsports

visit our archives at asapsports.com

Okay, thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...