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An Interview With:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Injury-wise nothing really new. Said last week B.J. Lowery would miss this week and that remains the same. We are hoping we get him back next week but other than that think things are moving forward. Captain-wise, same four guys: Tyler Nielson, Mike Daniels defensively; Marvin McNutt and James Vandenberg offensively.

The bye week was a good week for us to regroup a little bit, tinker with a few things and get a little rest and get some guys fueled up. So moving on now, it seems like it's been a month since we have played. That's one thing that's kind of weird about it.

But we are moving on and we have a good challenge on our hands this week with Penn State certainly. As always, they have good players. They are very well coached and we are going into an environment that's really tough to play in. So we are going to have to be at our absolute best just to have a chance to win this football game, and we will get working on that this afternoon.

Q. You had a lot of time for self-evaluation. Wonder your thoughts on where your defense is right now?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we are improving. We are progressing. That being said, we have a lot of work to do, our whole football team for the most part. I think the last two weeks we have taken some positive steps, some things that hurt us in that week two game continue to plague us a little bit, and we just have to keep working to shore those things up.

Q. You have said that you think you will eventually have a good defense or you

think the pieces that are in place to have a good defense, what does that exactly means?

COACH FERENTZ: It means we are on the path but we are not there. We have some young players and we have also got some guys who are not real experienced but they are doing some good things. Two guys, Tom Nardo and Jordan Bernstine, they are both fifth-year seniors and both only started two games ago.

So, it's putting the pieces together. Trying to do a little bit better job with the containment, tackling, not giving up big plays, those type of things, and that's going to be the challenge for us to continue to get better at those. And then maybe eliminate a drive or two. We had a couple problems there in the second half last game.

Q. Are there some things that you think you need to see from defense, and what are some things missing now that you think you need to see?

COACH FERENTZ: Just have to play at a higher level. It's a challenge that's out there every week. As I said we are gaining some ground and making progress.

Q. In terms of being able to do the 3-4, nickel, dime, seems as though you have more experience, you have some guys who can move around, like Hitchens?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, but it's more out of necessity. We are fairly limited, I think. Probably the only potential is we have for a little bit more in the backfield, if we get B.J. back.

So we have a little bit more flexibility. We might have a little more depth than we have had in the past. If we get everybody healthy at once, that might be an option, maybe a little nickel and three-line stuff, three-man line things. See what happens, with all of the spread teams in our league, that might help us a little bit.

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Coach Ferentz

Q. What are the significant differences between quarterbacks at Penn State?

COACH FERENTZ: They both have done some good things. So I don't know if it's night and day or anything really significant. They are both a little bit different maybe but clearly it's close enough where they have chosen to play both guys and we have to prepare for both. It's not like it's a night and day contrast or anything that changes your approach real dramatically.

Q. What makes their receivers, especially Moyer so good?

COACH FERENTZ: Moyer is one of them. The whole group is really talented. They have got a lot of size, speed. It's really an impressive group of guys, so they are really good.

Moyer is really good and he's a 6-5 guy which makes it another challenge just on top of it. So he's a good player. They really stand out as a group.

Q. Penn State has had a lot of good running backs through the years, what do you see in Redd?

COACH FERENTZ: Last year, coming in for Royster. I don't know if Royster was not the top back productivity-wise in Penn State history, I know he was up near the top and when red came in the game, he catches your eye, he's really quick and a different style. So one thing, there are a lot of constants when you play Penn State. Facing a good running back is usually one of them and this continues.

Q. With A.J. Derby's suspension, that bring John Wienke to No. 2. What can you tell us because we have not seen much of him at all.

COACH FERENTZ: We have not seen much of A.J. out there, either. John is a guy who is more of a thrower probably. AJ is a little bit more athletic and John is probably more of a thrower, a deep-ball thrower. That's kind of where it's at. John is a real quality young guy, conscientious. If he's called upon, he'll do a good job.

Q. How would you explain your program's success over time against Penn State?

COACH FERENTZ: Good fortune is part of it. And then we have played well in those games.

And a couple of constants: You know you are going to play a good team, they are well coached and home or away it's going to be a tough game, so you'd better play your best. Typically Penn State teams do not beat themselves. Been that way 40-plus years. So you'd better be ready to play your best and that's going to be the challenge for us this week, see if we can get there.

Q. Did you watch the game against Indiana Saturday, and if so, what stood out to you?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm going to go off on a tangent here. I was actually cleaning a couple of things up. I have not taken time -- we have a new video system. Long story short, I don't remember what channel it was on, I could not get to it. I had a choice of two games I was watching while I was doing some stuff, weren't very interesting, and so no, I didn't get to see it. If you were in my house, you have to go like one room, you can watch this channel, another room -- it's a long story. Kind of a sore subject right now.

Q. You couldn't watch it in your office?

COACH FERENTZ: I was in the office -- if I had taken time -- we have a new system. I don't watch much TV so I haven't taken the time to have them explain to me getting on these couple of channels. I'm kind of like a guy living in the 60s in some ways when it comes to television.

But to watch the game Saturday, I kind of missed out. I missed out on Saturday night, too. We had something else going on. So one of those deals.

Q. How much do you think -- what determines success in the running game, is it four yards a carry? Is it 100 yards? Is it make sure we have 25 carries?

COACH FERENTZ: A couple of things come to mind. Yards per carry for a player is good, I think it's a good indicator. Team-wise, not always, because you are running the clock out, things like that. You get into end-of-game situations.

But for a back in general terms, I would say that and for a team, the amount of carries you have in a game. You know, if you have negative yardage rushing, which we have done that, that's a loss. And if you have 12, 15 carries if a game, you are probably losing, if you're us at least. So

probably made your way in right off the bat. We have been in those situations, too. That's not much fun.

Q. The last couple of years, since Shonn Greene left, the yards per carry as a team have been down a little bit. Is that more to one block getting missed or are running --

COACH FERENTZ: Could be a lot of things, could be the line, could be the receivers not blocking. A lot of times it's a big play, and having a Doak Walker running back helps, too.

But we have had good backs and good production, but that's what separates -- I don't what the guys from Alabama, I don't know what their yards per carry is, but they look awfully good on film and Royster was good. Good backs usually have that. And they are durable. I think Shonn's most impressive stat was, it was every game, a hundred yards. He was the only guy in the country that did that. That's easier said than done. That's really hard.

Q. Your tight end position, is it a week-by-week thing?

COACH FERENTZ: I think all three guys have almost equal potential. They are all very different players, but almost equal potential. And we are counting on all three of them to play well for us. We are going to need that.

Q. When A.J. comes back, is he still number 2?

COACH FERENTZ: I have not even thought about that. We'll see. We'll see what happens.

Q. Is he practicing?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he'll practice. There are two kinds of suspensions I guess; one where you're banished; and then the other is where you'll just work on teams over the weekend, do community service and those kind of things. Pay your price; and when you're done, you're done and you go back to work.

Q. Penn State, will that be the best defensive team you've seen so far?

COACH FERENTZ: No question about that. That's another constant when you play them. Two things that jump out at you right away, they are kind of obvious but they have four seniors in their back end. Every guy is veteran back there.

Every guy has played with a lot of football and played good football.

And then we have had the luxury of having a pretty set defensive line the last two years, three NFL players in that group that are playing right now. If you look at Penn State to me those are the theories that jump out defensively. They have depth in that front, good size athleticism, they play well and they have got a lot of depth.

And then the veteran players in the back end they are giving up 12 points a game as a result of it. That's not new. Just kind of rotation, a couple of years ago they had really outstanding linebackers and now they are in a little bit of a transition there with their guys.

And they lost a very good player to an injury, one of their linebackers. You know, the end of the day, they always put a good defense together. Like I said, it's been since the late 60's, just continues.

Q. For Brad Rogers, is it a matter of him getting back into condition?

COACH FERENTZ: Best way I can put it there, our guys have really been training for nine months and he hasn't. They have been training since January. Really, he just kind of started up here the last couple of weeks. He's just been in the shallow end of the pool up until about a week ago and now he's starting to get some work and what-have-you.

But we are just going to try to be very cautious and slow. Just so you don't have any hamstring issues or anything like that. Guys break down if they are not in great shape. So we have to be really smart about how much he does and how many plays he would play once he gets to the game field.

Q. Any way to know how quick that nine months could be worn off?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's working at it. Shonn Greene, he showed up here whenever that was, like late June I think, and that made history that much more amazing. Basically kind of a painful two months for him, July and August, trying to get in shape. He was trying to catch up from a year's absence, but he made it, and you know.

So I think things are on progress or on track right now it. It's great having them back in the field, it's great to see him in uniform and

smiling, that's a good thing.

Q. So the issues keeping him off the field have been resolved medically?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, but the problem is once they were working through that, he couldn't train, he was doing stuff like I do, which that's not good for a college football player.

Q. And the last 30 days, how much improvement have you seen with the Iowa team?

COACH FERENTZ: I think particularly we have played probably five good quarters of football. But that's what we said coming into the season, this is going to be a big five-week block for us, just like camp was.

Now the real trick is moving into conference play. These games count for an awful lot and it's going to be a whole new level of intensity out there. So how are we going to meet that and how are we going to handle it, we have only played one road game, didn't handle it, that situation too well.

So a lot of challenges out there for us, and we'll continue to learn about the team as we go along. But I think we are progressing. I think the attitude is good, and this is going to be a heck of a challenge for us.

Q. What have you seen from Alston? What has he shown?

COACH FERENTZ: He had an injury a year ago, a little slow coming in, as camp went on, he gained ground and lost a little bit of weight, which has probably helped him a little bit. He has a great attitude and he's a guy we really were high on recruiting, felt fortunate to get him; a good personality. He's doing a good job.

Q. How was his recruitment going -- with the coaching carousel, did he come back to you guys?

COACH FERENTZ: I was out there seeing somebody, and stopped by the school Friday morning. Was on my way up to see somebody in the northeast, and on the way to the airport we stopped. It was snowing. Quinton and his mom came up to the school and we had a real good visit. At that point he indicated he was maybe thinking about rethinking his choice.

So it just worked out well and they called us up that night and said they were going to visit. I think they might even have committed before they

visited come to about it. In fact, they did that day, right. That was a good day, good Friday. I have to look at my calendar to tell what you what day it was, but somewhere after the dead periods and all that stuff.

Q. When you look at the true freshmen, before they actually get in, do they come in in second team situations or when they are red-shirted --

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully not. But in our case, sometimes we do. We just keep an open mind, but more so now than ever. But recruiting is still a little bit like mail order. You never are sure what's in the package and what it really looks like.

Like my kids buy stuff off the Internet, I kind of like seeing stuff, but you see stuff on a screen and then it shows up and boy, it didn't look like that at all or whatever. Sometimes you get some good surprises.

But until guys get on campus and they really start working, you don't know how it's going to go. Some guys just make the transition quicker. Other guys, it takes a while.

Q. When they are actually in camp practicing, do you say, let's take a look at Alston, as a second-team linebacker?

COACH FERENTZ: There's enough opportunity to really see who might be. And when you're with a guy every day, you know who is learning well, who is on task here and who is really kind of struggling with the whole big picture. It's usually the picture becomes fairly clearly one way or another.

One thing about college football I keep talking about, Jordan and Tom Nardo are both good examples. You just never know when a guy is going to hit stride. If a guy works hard and has a good attitude, you never know when that day is going to come. Jay Norvell a while back, one of the great stories, a guy who had two or three different positions, didn't have a home, ends up being all-Big Ten player and captain of the Rose Bowl team. Just take it day-by-day and tune in and see what's going on.

Q. Didn't you have a couple of offensive linemen who were fifth-year seniors?

COACH FERENTZ: Chris Campbell was second team coming into camp his fifth year and drafted third round. So just, you never know.

And that's why you've got to keep an open mind on things. I think you never know.

And again, we are talking about Iowa, as opposed to a different school perhaps. But most of the guys on our walls, Brad Banks came out of nowhere; Shonn Greene came out of nowhere. Guys come out of nowhere and that's kind of fun. The experts can't predict those stories sometimes. So our stories are more fun stories.

The national pundits; we frustrate the national pundits with our stories.

Q. How do you explain for walk-ons like Nardo that come from far away?

COACH FERENTZ: I still can't explain that. I'm glad he came. And if you had given me truth serum when he was here, my thoughts were, why is this guy turning down a scholarship at William & Mary. William & Mary is a great school, great program, Jim Laycock has been there forever. It's a great place.

I was kind of perplexed by the whole thing but for whatever reason, it was in his mind to come here and we are glad he did. He's just worked hard and almost in a non-descript way. And I don't mean that in a bad way or good way, but been kind of very quiet.

And then again, the other factor is when you have three NFL guys like we did a year ago, it's a little tougher to break into the lineup. But that being said, even in August it was not obvious to us that he was a starter; otherwise we would have started him in that first game. It's a real tribute to Tom, his work ethic, his perseverance, and once he got the opportunity, his performance has really been really good.

Q. He's not the only one you've had from far away?

COACH FERENTZ: Typically our walk-ons, usually are more regional. Sean (Considine) came across the border to do it. And we were lucky here because his dad had played at Northern Illinois, and they had opted not to give him a scholarship. There's no science to this; it's not an exact science. As a result he ended up coming here and the rest is history.

Yeah, it's more typical to be Midwestern guys since we are a little bit better known. It's kind of interesting.

Q. Do you have an open door?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, yeah.

Q. So somebody can --

COACH FERENTZ: We're open to anybody that's interested in coming and working hard. And you know, the point I always say, like in 2004, we won the championship that year and we had Sean in the back end, Tyler Luebke playing defensive tackle and that was a pretty good defensive line, too, and then you've got Pete McMahon playing right tackle.

Without those three guys, there's no way we end up going 7-1 in the league, there's absolutely no way. And beat a pretty good LSU team in a bowl game. At our place, if you take those guys out of the equation, move us down a couple of notches. Most famous walk-ons, Dallas Clark, Bruce Nelson right there. I hate to think what we would have done without Bruce. That was a pretty good team, that 2002 team was pretty good. So you've got two of our prominent guys there on that offense were walk-ons. So I think we are a little bit unique that way.

Q. Do you think it's because walk-ons have to -- are pretty much self-made kids, they come in and they haven't been fed a rash of crap?

COACH FERENTZ: We treat everybody on our team -- if they are on our team, they are on our team. There's no like locker room down the hall or you guys get second grade equipment or things like that; if you're on the team, everybody is on the team. And then guys that will work hard and stay the course.

We are equal opportunity all the way. So if you're here and you can help us, we are going to give you that chance, and it usually starts on special teams. Pete McMahon, not so much, but he just impressed us every day. Showed up every day and worked hard and he's still doing the same thing and carried over pretty well to his professional life, he's doing really well. His car is a lot nicer than mine. I saw him getting a cup of coffee about two months ago; good for him, I'm glad.

Q. Did you watch the Wisconsin-Nebraska game?

COACH FERENTZ: We were hosting a dinner. We have got a kid in high school, you know, one of those things, parent night. I was being a parent. And I knew the game was on, too. I was being a good parent.

Q. So what happened that night --

COACH FERENTZ: It's football. Football. Two pretty good teams.

Q. Do you get at awe struck going up against Joe Paterno, any kind of awe factor?

COACH FERENTZ: Not as much as 13 years ago, like walking in that first league meeting, but I had met Coach Paterno through the years. So it wasn't the first time I had met him.

But all that being said, I don't think there are many coaches that have impacted college sports more than Coach Paterno in any sport. One guy we have on campus here, Dan Gable, pretty small class that he's in, throw out names like Bear Bryant and John Wooden, there are not many. It's a pretty small discussion. Just kind of adds to everything, but you try not to be focused on that certainly when you are on the game field.

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