

September 29, 2009



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: I'll follow up with that thought and just say congratulations to Pat on his game and his recognition. Adrian Clayborn also was recognized by the Big Ten Conference, so great for those guys.

It was a good weekend overall, obviously. We're thrilled about the victory and the outcome. Just happy to be 4 and 0 at this given point. Now we turn our sights towards this weekend.

Medically it's been a long winding road. Bryan Bulaga was cleared yesterday to resume full activity, including playing, so unless some unforeseen circumstance takes place, I think we're in good shape there.

Tony is improving. We'll see what this week brings. He dressed out Saturday, he went through pregame, and our biggest concern right now is having somebody fall on him, that type of thing. We're going to try to be smart, and we've already given up a couple weeks here of his season, and we're just going to be prudent in fairness to him most importantly. He's a senior player who's a very good player, and to me it doesn't do him justice to put him out there at risk or put him out there where he's not 100 percent. We'll see what this week brings and make a decision at the end of the week. But at least he's improving pretty rapidly.

Going back to Bryan quickly, he had a thyroid condition, and the good news is it was something that just passes. It could have been a little bit more extensive than that, and they'd have to go through a series of checks to make those decisions and what have you. But the good news is it's an illness that hit. It passed in time with proper supervision. He had great care, obviously.

The good news is now he's been cleared. We don't anticipate any further problems, and he won't be on medication the rest of his life or any of that kind of stuff, which was all a possibility at the front end. I think all the drama has been resolved. It's been very frustrating for him, certainly. He wanted to be out there playing. It was killing him not to be out there. Now he gets to get back into action, so we're really happy for him.

It would have been nice if it happened in February, but that's probably asking too much there. Just one of those deals.

On the captain front, a little bit of a change, we've got Pat on defense, also Adrian Clayborn will join him as a defensive captain/special teams; I guess he's become a special teams enthusiast now. And then on offense now we've got Rick Stanzi again, and Tony will represent us out there, so those four guys.

We play Arkansas State this weekend. We've got an awful lot of respect for their football team and their program. I think if you look at their team overall, the first thing you have to do is look at the coaching staff. Steve Roberts has done a great job there. I don't want to pretend to be an expert on Arkansas State, but I do remember bumping into them recruiting back in the '80s a little bit, and they had gone through some coaches, I know that. He's been there seven years now, he and his staff. They've done a great job. They have a good, stable staff. They've had the best seven years of football they've had since the '80s at Arkansas State and been Bowl eligible three of the last four years.

A bit more impressive than just what you see on film. You see a team that's well-coached, they're very aggressive. They play hard. We've watched film from this year and last year, needless to say. We've got a lot of respect for them. They've got some very good players.

Offensively their quarterback is a real slick football player. He's a good thrower, good runner.

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Coach Ferentz - 9 29 09

He gets the ball out and gets it where it has to go. He's really a very proven player.

Running back is a record-setter for them. He's really done a nice job, a very, very productive football player.

And they've got some guys on defense, particularly up front, that do a nice job, and the one defensive end Carrington, is a big strong guy. I understand he ran like a 4.75, something like that, for the pros. He's a good football player. They've got some good guys, and they play very well on special teams, too.

We've got an awful lot of respect for them. They beat A & M last year, and they're not going to be intimidated coming in here I can assure you. They play a couple stadiums like that every year, and I think maybe the thing that caught my attention as much as any, the game after we played Texas in the Alamo Bowl after the '06 season, they opened up at Texas the next year, and lost by eight points. So we saw Texas at the end of that season. We saw them in the beginning of that next season, and Arkansas State played the heck out of them.

We'd better be prepared well and we'd better be ready to go at kickoff on Saturday. That's kind of where we're at right now.

We're excited at being back in Kinnick certainly. It was a great environment there for the Arizona ballgame, and we're just looking forward to getting in front of the home fans again. It was a great environment the other day, just went the wrong direction that way. But it'll be great to have the home crowd. We're looking forward to being back home and an 11:00 kickoff, so we'll go from there.

Q. You talked a little bit after the Penn State game about handling success is sometimes tougher than handling adversity. This team seems to be well-grounded, though.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll find out. It's going to be a big test for our team right now. There are people who are successful and smart but have done stupid things. It's no different in sports, and it's tough, because I know a lot of our guys have gotten a lot of accolades and taken some bows this week, and rightfully so; they did a great job over the weekend.

But it's time to turn the page. We need to move onto the next challenge, and we certainly have one coming in here Saturday. I doubt Arkansas State is impressed with our résumé, and you could argue on paper we're supposed to win

this thing, and I think it was probably said about a month ago, too, and we came out of -- just eked out very fortunately out of a pretty sticky situation there. It'll be a real test for our football team.

But I'll flip it around, too, and say for us to do what we did last weekend took a lot of maturity, took great leadership from within the ranks, and we're going to have to draw upon that this week to make sure we have a good week.

Q. Can you draw anything on this from what happened a couple years ago with Western Michigan?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I just think we were fighting for our lives every day in 2007, and I think there were a lot of different circumstances there. I'd go back a month maybe, and I think that's a better comparison. We've advanced a little bit since that time.

It's just an age-old problem. We went out at Penn State in 2002 and came back here and had a similar kind of game against Purdue, and they're a good football team. But we were really fortunate to win there. It's one of those deals. It happens everywhere. At least I think we have a good corps of guys right now that will help set the tempo for our team, and that's what we need this week.

Q. Does the term trap game mean anything to you?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's another way to put it. That's a good way to put it, certainly. I believe in that stuff. I think that's very real.

Q. I guess a two-part question. First off, can you explain the process that you guys went through being able to find Arkansas State to fill the void that was on the schedule a while back, and then also, given the fact that they changed their nickname, does dealing with the mascot policy that the University has, did that play any degree of difficulty at all in terms of trying to find opponents?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so, but I'm not the right guy. Mark Abbott and Gary Barta really handle those kinds of decisions, probably more so than I do. Not to make light of it, but I think in our circumstance we were really just looking for a game. We might have let anybody come in here, as long as they just changed their name for a day. And I make light of this, but it is a

real challenge right now for all teams to schedule. For obvious reasons we went to 12 games, and I think that was -- it's a good thing, but when it was decided to do that, nobody -- I shouldn't say that, but it doesn't appear that anybody really thought ahead about how it's going to impact scheduling.

So as a result of that, you're probably paying more than you were 15 years ago to bring opponents in to play in your stadium. A lot of us want to play at home for obvious reasons. It's just a productive thing. So it's really becoming competitive financially to find teams, and all of that being said, it's a challenge.

I don't know what our list was at that point when we were trying to get this game scheduled. I think it was about a week after we got the papers signed, they beat Texas A & M, so I was like, oh, crap, twice in one weekend. But it was like, geez, we found a good one there.

It's a real challenge right now. Scheduling is a real challenge.

Q. Would you like more of a true round-robin in the Big Ten, which would eliminate some of that --

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I just threw that out there, and in our conference there seems to be a lot of momentum right now. It seems like we're all talking about playing post-Thanksgiving, which is fine, but if we're going to do that, then why don't we just maybe play 13. Because I do still think players want to play. There is a big issue about round-robins or going to nine, and I think that makes the waters even more cloudy if you will. It's a thought and maybe something to consider. I'm not really too worried about it today, but it's a thought. I think we can play on Christmas, too, I guess; that might be next. I don't know if there's a rule against that or not.

Can't play during finals week. I know that's still a sacred time for college students.

Q. Same situation for next season?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're scheduled. I'm pretty sure we're good for next year, but I think we have a hole in our schedule somewhere coming up, somewhere in the next three years.

Q. Ball State wanted to pull out of that.

COACH FERENTZ: I read that, and I haven't heard much about it. Although I did read the article, and my thought was, why don't they drop Purdue; I think we signed first or whatever. I

guess right now I'm not too worried about that. I'm worried about Arkansas State.

Q. After getting such a big win, would you guys kind of rather keep staying in the Big Ten, maybe have a Big Ten game this weekend?

COACH FERENTZ: It doesn't matter. I'd rather not have played at Penn State, and I'd have rather not have played at 8:00. If it was my choice, we would have rather been at home with them at 8:00 or any time at home. I mean, our schedule is set, and we're just going to play it. I don't think it'll be a factor at all. I think how we play will be the biggest factor.

Q. Will Bryan Bulaga start this week or work his way in?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, if he has a good week at practice, we would anticipate -- typically, I know everybody is different, but if we have a guy that's a proven player, established player, usually when they're healthy, if they're out because of injury reasons, medical reasons, we put them right back in the lineup when they get back. How much he plays, I don't know that; we'll have to wait and see how the weeks goes. He's missed, it's three weeks now, three weeks of pretty intensive work.

We'll probably play both guys. If he's ready to go, we'll start him. That brings me to another topic. I'll throw a bouquet out.

We've had a lot of young guys step up this year. We're getting good leadership from our older guys, but really pleased with guys like Riley Reiff, our two running backs, our corners have done a nice job, because that's been a little bit of a scramble drill. That's really important. So I'm not real big of throwing bouquets out, but those guys have really done a great job. It was a tough circumstance for Reiff. Reiff has played three games now, and our running backs have played three and four I think it is.

To go out there and perform and compete the way they did in that environment, that was really encouraging. I know those guys get a lot of support from their teammates, too, which is great. But you've got to give those guys credit. I'm really happy about the way they're doing things.

Q. Will there be changes in the lineup for Bryan Bulaga being back?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, he'll be in the rotation. I mean, all I can say is we've got a lot of confidence in him. I felt that way going into the first game he played three weeks ago. It wasn't like we were trembling or shaken about it. You worry about inexperience mistakes. I thought he might jump offsides a few more times the other night because that's inexperience. But I thought he really did a good job, and we've got total faith in him. He'll compete. He's not as technique proficient as you'd like, but I can say that about probably everybody on the team, and that's what we're working on right now.

Q. I know you used Andy Kuempel as sort of a second tight end Saturday night, but would that be possible?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll do whatever we thing we have to do to help the team win. Andy did a good job. That's another guy I should have mentioned, stepping in and really doing a nice job there for us. When you have injuries, I've said it before, we're a little bit like an NFL team in some ways, and in terms of our depth, we don't have guys stocked up on the shelf there.

We'll try to be resourceful and find a way where we can keep running what we want to run without maybe the personnel. It would be great to have Tony and Allen in there together. Silly me, I thought we had two pretty good tight ends, and I thought we had a good tackle situation coming into the year. I should have kept my mouth shut or shouldn't have even thought about it, but we're getting through it.

Q. How did that start, having him being the second tight end? Is that something you guys were messing around with all week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and we weren't necessarily looking for a proficient pass receiver there, and I think they probably noticed that since he had a 60s jersey on. But we just wanted somebody who could better hold the point a little bit and do some blocking for us, and for that package it just gave us a way to keep that package alive without -- otherwise we probably would have had to toss it, and I didn't like that option right there. We thought that was something we needed for the game.

Q. Do you feel that you guys have a chance to challenge for a Big Ten Championship this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we've had a chance every year, probably since 2000. I think we've had a chance. Some chances were better than others. But basically going into the 2001 season, we felt like we had a decent football team then, and we've had a chance. But usually there's about eight other teams that have chances, too. It just depends on how you handle the week-to-week, and that's what's ahead of us right now.

Q. Do you anticipate moving Riley Reiff inside at all or competing inside?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know how we operate. We fooled with him at guard -- I can't remember, I don't think we did it in the spring, but we did it in camp for a while. First thing you want to do with the young guys is get them comfortable, and I think he's made good inroads there. So we'll open our mind up to that a little bit. But we've got some guys playing at guard playing pretty well right now, too.

If we're healthy, we have a chance, and I think that's one thing, we're starting to get a little continuity up front. We're not there yet, but we've had some guys miss some practice time the last couple weeks, even I talked about it in camp, the last couple weeks, things that -- they made it back for the game. But we're not there yet. But I'm optimistic that we can get there, and certainly after you see a guy play in game conditions, you feel a little bit more confident that they can jump in there and do a good job.

Q. How long was Adam Robinson a safety in the spring? Was that just like a one-practice deal?

COACH FERENTZ: It wasn't very long, but it seems to be -- we've talked about having guys work at furniture stores, and in fact one of the coaches brought that up yesterday, maybe we should just have all the running backs go over to defense for a week or two.

I think I did share with you at the Doak Walker dinner, I learned that Calvin Hill was playing tight end for the Cowboys up until somebody got hurt. One of their good guys got hurt, and they moved him back in a preseason game, and he ran for like 200 yards, and he said, oh, maybe he's a good running back. Tom Landry and I are both -- it's good company to be ridiculed with, I guess.

Q. Was he receptive to maybe playing --

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Adam just wants to play. I think you guys have interviewed him. He's just happy to be here and just wants to play. He's a great team member, a really good team member. He doesn't say much, but he's a positive guy, and he just wanted to get on the field.

Q. Do you remember why --

COACH FERENTZ: He'd be a good special teams guy except we can't -- for obvious reasons we're not using him right now.

Q. Do you remember why that ended so quickly?

COACH FERENTZ: It just wasn't clicking. Sean didn't really click back there, either. I guess it's like the Dallas Clark story. It never clicked for Dallas over on defense, either, but he found a home.

Q. What was different -- is there anything that was different with this September? In the past history there's always kind of a little bit of a slow start for you guys, but anything in particular or just a veteran group?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's just where we're at. As I said, we had our close call; it could have been that loss very easily. We survived a close call this time, and in years past we haven't, and some of them haven't been so close. That Arizona State game wasn't real close, obviously. We've been through the gamut.

And historically speaking, Phil caught me off guard the other day where he said this is the third time we've been 4 and 0. I can tell you this: We've never been 5 and 0. It's kind of the story of our program, I guess.

Q. Is this the best defense that you've had in a while?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we've got eight games to go, so we'll find out. But they're playing well, and their effort the other night was phenomenal. It could have been better. That's the good news is it could have been better. I think even the things we're doing well in any area right now, we can still do better, so that's really where we need to be focused.

But our guys are playing hard, and the guys up front are starting to jell. We're certainly

way ahead of where we were three weeks ago, four weeks ago. The last two weeks we've started to look like a coherent group out there, and that's a good thing.

Q. What's kind of clicked for the defensive lineup the last couple weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: We had two new players in Klug and Binns, and then you've got Clayborn, who's an experienced player, but moving inside is tough. It's a whole different traffic pattern, and there is a lot of different -- just a whole different feel. That takes a little time. He's not there yet. He's going to play better football. He's playing well right now. I'm not being critical. But I'm kind of excited because I think as we go along here, it's going to be a lot of fun to watch him really be like that.

Adrian has really found his gear this past two weeks, which was great to see, too. So I think we're starting to get there, starting to get there, and that's encouraging.

I can't say enough about Broderick's effort the other night, too. Adrian made some great plays. All the guys made some good plays. Broderick, obviously the safety down there, he drew a holding penalty on that one completion up the sideline. He just works extremely hard, and I've been kind of tooting his horn since last October, November, and he just keeps working at it, and he doesn't say a lot, either. Great demeanor, great young guy.

Q. How much have they grown? You were talking about feeling it out and switching positions. From UNI 'til now, was UNI kind of a feeling out process of that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and we've gotten better since then. But that's experience. I think we have that -- not that we've arrived on defense, but we're playing better than we were, and I think we have that potential, offensively.

We're not in sync yet. A lot of that is just too much moving parts in practice, too many moving parts on the game field, and you know -- I've got to tell you, I didn't feel real good going into the Arizona game with three of our key guys not looking like they were going to play, so that was a little disconcerting. The guys are playing hard, and that over comes a lot of deficiencies.

Q. The Big Ten has handed out these

game suspensions and reprimands. Is this something that Carollo has emphasized?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure of the origin of that, but I think Bill probably had some impact on that, and I think nationally right now there's a huge emphasis, if you will, on sportsmanship. And I think that's good. There's no question about that.

I think the personal foul we had the other night was a reflection of that. It was a bang-bang call, and you could say either way. If they threw the flag, we can't really argue that one. That if had let it go, I don't think that would have been a big argument, either, but I think it is a reflection of just how things are going to be called this year, and that's something we need. A great teaching example for us on that particular call.

I don't think we've had anything flagrant, which there's really no place in the game for flagrant fouls. Just sophomoric behavior out there, and hopefully we won't be guilty of that. Anybody can be, but I hope our team won't do that, because it's very costly. He was the guy for a game the week after. That's not a good Christmas present in the middle of the week.

Q. And he was a captain.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, so it's a message to all of our players and all of us as coaches. We have to be vigilant on that front. I don't think it's a bad thing.

Q. Going over game tape from Penn State, what did you see in Stanzi?

COACH FERENTZ: I thought he played a good game. A couple throws maybe could have been a little sharper and what have you, but he made some great decisions. I'm still kind of of the camp -- I think two things; he's leading our team really well, and he's really keeping his poise out there on the field, which I think spreads to others.

And I think as we -- hopefully as we settle down personnel-wise offensively in practice better, I think we have an opportunity to become a good offensive football team. We're not there yet, but with him playing quarterback, I think that gives us a good chance, and the other pieces have to fall in place, too, and I think they will.

Q. After Saturday's game, his teammates seemed to -- I forget exactly how you put it, but they respected him more, they listened to him or they believed in him --

COACH FERENTZ: All those things. They respond to him. Everything you do as a player I think gets evaluated. If you're a quarterback, people are always watching you certainly. Who you are, what you are, it works for you or works against you.

Rick is -- I've got to be careful how I say this. When he was a first year guy here he was kind of a happy-go-lucky young guy. He wasn't real focused, what have you. Delightful guy, no problems. But wasn't like he was wired in.

And I think that's been his evolution. That allowed him to compete a year ago for the position. He's intensified that, if anything. So he's really -- he just carries himself the way you hope a quarterback will, and I think his teammates just follow him. He's displayed good mental toughness and physical toughness out there on the field continually since he's played.

And then the other thing is he stays positive. When it starts hitting the fan, he stays positive. To me that's what good quarterbacks, that's how they're built. We've had all kinds of good ones play at Iowa. I'm going back to the '80s, too, different sizes, shapes, dimensions. Those are common traits for guys. That's a key position, we all know that, because everybody is watching. I'm thinking more internally. I know everybody is watching on the outside, but I'm thinking internally everybody watches quarterbacks.

I'm not ready to say he's the next Chuck Hartlieb, Chuck Long. We've had some great guys play here, Matt Rodgers. But I think he's got a lot of fabric like those guys, and you throw Brad Banks in there, and Chandler did a great job in 2003 for us, Tate did a great job in '04. Those are things you're hoping you have.

I think his best football is ahead of him, and that's exciting for us.

Q. You're getting a lot of national recognition; you mentioned you have a chance to challenge for the Big Ten Championship --

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't mention that. Well, I guess I did to answer your question.

Q. A lot of fans get a little ahead of themselves and they actually start thinking more than that, a National Championship game. Is that something that is a realistic possibility?

COACH FERENTZ: Let's hope we win the Kinnick Stadium championship this Saturday, I'll be

happy with that, and then we'll go on to the next game after that. We've played one game in conference play. We were 0 and 1 in '04, and we still ended up doing fine. I suppose we've probably been 1 and 0 at some point and done poorly.

There's so much football, so many things that can happen. We've already seen how things can change, and our offense I think has been affected by a lot of change already.

It doesn't take much to knock us off our little track here, so we'd better just hang on tight and hope that we're getting better. I don't expect fans to do that, but I know as players and coaches we'd better be worried about what's right there in front of our nose. We can't get too global there.

Q. Arkansas State's spread offense, it looks like the quarterback almost prefers to run? What did you see?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's not afraid at all. I think our defensive coaches put it best; they're a lot like a very nice Northwestern attack, Basanez. Norm compared to Leonard to Basanez, and that's probably a pretty good comparison. The back looks a little bit like Sutton. Those guys are good football players, and these guys are pretty proficient.

But the quarterback really knows how to -- he's very confident in what they're doing and he knows how to run that offense, so it makes it a real challenge for you.

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