

**August 26, 2008**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. I'll start out real quick, give you an update on injuries. We have four players that won't be playing in the ballgame, Tony Moeaki, still coming back with the foot injury; Mike Sabers, Trey Stross and Dan Doering are also going to be out. And then we've got several other guys. We'll just wait and see how it goes this week. But that's a starting note.

Two other updates real quickly, Dace Richardson is continuing to try to rehab right now, and obviously he will not play this year, but his hopes are to get back and play next year. So we'll take that, you know, a week at a time, day at a time, see how he goes on that one.

And then finally, Nate Guillory has transferred. He's decided to transfer, to not start school yesterday with the rest of the student body and is going to transfer to another school here I think closer to home. There will probably be an announcement on that at some point.

Captains for this week, we'll go with two guys on defense, Mitch King and Matt Kroul. Then offensively Rob Bruggeman, and representing special teams, a guy that's been around here a long time, done a great job, Gavin McGrath, will be our special teams captain for the week. They'll do a great job at giving us leadership.

I think all of us are anxious to get started and, first of all, play a game. It's great that we're going to open up in Kinnick and get a chance to do that and play several games at home here before we travel. I think it'll be good for everybody involved, certainly good for our football team. We're eager to get on the football field and it will be good for a lot of people in our state just to be able to take their minds off the challenges that we've faced for a couple hours here and get the football season started. So we're excited about that.

Also of note, the '58 team is holding a reunion this weekend and they'll be out at practice. It's exciting to have them here, and congratulations

to all the Hall-of-Famers, as well, that are going to be honored this weekend, most notably, from our coaching fraternity, Coach Davis, and then Marv Cook, former football player, so we're really pleased for all the inductees.

A couple words on Maine, great respect for their program and obviously have a familiarity with the program and certainly it extends to the coaching aspect, Jack Cosgrove is a guy who I've known now for quite some time, since December of '89 I guess it would have been. Jack is an outstanding coach, has done a great job with the program there, a former player, and he's just done a great, great job with the program over a long period of time.

And then Robb Smith, a guy that worked with us years ago, has done a nice job up there, too, and has done a nice job as a defensive coordinator.

Then the last thing I think about it is we expect them to come in here, they're probably a lot like us, they've got a lot of players that played last year, they're an experienced team. A lot of guys got good experience last year, and I think they're looking for improvement just like what we're hoping to see from our football team, too. You know, this is no new thing for them, to travel to a BCS conference place. You just look back in history, the first story that stood out to me, I remember distinctly when they were playing Nebraska and I think it was like 15-7 in the fourth quarter, well into the fourth quarter, that got my attention, I think it was 2003 or 2004 or 2005, somewhere in that ballpark. Went down to Mississippi State, won down there in the last part of the ballgame in '06, I guess it would have been. They lost to BC, but it was a 22-0 game at Boston College.

They've been on the road. They've played in big stadiums. They go to Florida State next year, and my guess is they'll come in here revved up and ready to go, and we expect a tough contest.

**Q. Can you elaborate any further on Nate, the decision was playing time, was it --**

COACH FERENTZ: You'd have to ask him. I just think what I would say is that he did a nice job this camp, and we talked about him prior

to the start of preseason practice, anxious to see what kind of growth that he exhibited, and I thought he did. He did a good job, practiced well, but he just made the decision over the weekend that he thought he was going to move on. We wish him all the best. He leaves here in good standing, good person, good guy, and did a nice job.

**Q. Can you compare your feelings going into a game against Maine where nobody expects you to lose that game as opposed to going against a top tier Big Ten team?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll get the experience of both somewhere down the season, down the pike. I don't know how many we'll be favored in. Maybe this week we will be. But the big thing is we're going into our opening ballgame, and it doesn't really matter who we play. Our focus is really on us, what we choose to do, how our performance is going to be. I think most notably right now we're anxious to see how this team demonstrates, what kind of improvement they demonstrate and then also how we progress and develop, and it's going to be a process. This will be our first opportunity.

A couple years ago I know we opened up with Montana, probably a good comparable there, and it was a tough ballgame for us. That score is misleading. It was a tough game. We really had to work hard. They were extremely tough and well coached, and we expect the same thing from Maine.

**Q. Is the starting lineup pretty much set at this point?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we double lined a couple players, and we still have some pretty good competition going on, so right now a couple positions are up for grabs as far as who's going to start.

And then I think fair to say, too, because of the competition, we'll probably play a couple different players at several positions and just kind of continue the evaluation on for a little bit until the picture becomes a little bit more clear. But I think for the most part they're pretty healthy battles, if you will. You know, it's just a matter of now seeing who does the best in game situations, which is really the next test.

**Q. What are the spots that are still undecided?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think we double listed our left guard and middle linebacker. I brought a sheet down just to check. Kicker, too, yeah. Those are all pretty even battles right now,

and we'll just kind of keep watching until something becomes clear. But I think we've had pretty good competition, and that's been pleasing to see.

**Q. Will both quarterbacks play Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think there's a pretty good chance of that, yeah. They both have performed well in camp. Some days they haven't, but for the most part, I think we're playing better with both guys than we were a year ago, which is good to see.

**Q. Any thoughts about with Nate's departure, how it affects a position already short on experience?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think all of us were concerned a year ago -- I say a year ago, but after the season last year what was going to develop at that position. You know, right now I'm pretty confident that we're going to play well at the running back position. Shonn has practiced well, and we had a good feel for who he was, what he was, before he got here. He's had a good month.

Paki O'Meara has really elevated his play a great deal, and we're very, very happy about that. And then the newcomers that have joined our football team, they've done a nice job, as well.

The jury is still out because we haven't played a snap that counts, but based on what we've seen, we're pretty optimistic that we're going to be productive in the backfield, and that's good to see.

**Q. Which freshmen do you think will play back there?**

COACH FERENTZ: Probably maybe two of the three. We're not sure which two right now, but all three guys have really, I think, performed well. They've acted like they've belonged. None of them have wide eyes right now, which is really good to see. They've had an opportunity to be tackled, and they've exhibited good toughness out there, so I'm pretty optimistic about the whole group right now.

**Q. How long do you expect Doering to be out?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a hand deal, and I think he gets checked again today, I think. I think it was today or tomorrow. But realistically, I think he'll be able to get back, depending on his pain threshold and all that type of thing -- it's easy for me to talk about somebody else's injury, but I think next week realistically he'll have a chance to

get back into things.

**Q. How about Moeaki?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're probably a week or two away there, I'm guessing. Everything is moving forward, and I'm told it's a real predictable path back, so that's good news.

**Q. How many other true freshmen might play this year?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know how many. You know, the backfield is an obvious area where young guys have an opportunity. Probably the other two most apparent areas would be our back end on defense, so both backfields, if you will, and then the kicker position obviously because of the competition right now that's pretty close to being even, I think, with Trent and Daniel.

**Q. Talk about Shonn Greene; he was off the depth chart last week and now back at the top.**

COACH FERENTZ: He's had a good camp, and that's about all I can say. I don't know if he's quite at optimal condition right now, but he's close. He's worked real hard. First of all, he came in in pretty decent shape and then got good quality work, and he's missed a year's time. He was behind the 8-ball a little bit there, but he's worked hard, his attitude has been great, and he's a mature guy. He's not a 15-year-old guy out there, and he looks that way. We're really excited about getting him back and really optimistic that he's going to have a good season here.

**Q. Can you talk about your decision to go with Jake, at least as the starter? Is there one intangible --**

COACH FERENTZ: He came in as a starter, and I think he's practiced well. It's not a matter of his performance. He's elevated his performance from the spring. I thought he was better in the spring than he was in the fall, and I think he's continued to improve, which is what we're hoping for.

And then the other factor is that Rick Stanzi quite honestly a year ago wasn't really a factor in the race or maybe we would have seen him, but I don't think he was in the discussion seriously a year ago at this time. In the spring he improved and probably missed a third of our practice here in the fall. But the last two thirds he's been out there and he's really performing well, too.

I think both guys right now have the capability of moving our offensive team, and that's a good thing. I think we went from a year ago not

sure where we were at, period, to having two guys I think realistically that can probably go in there and lead our team. We haven't seen Rick do it in game circumstances, and that's the next challenge for him, just like for Jake the next challenge is to perform better.

But it's true of every position we've got right now. That's what we're looking for.

**Q. Are you more impressed with the offensive line now?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're gaining ground. Last time I saw you, I wasn't so impressed. That was two Saturdays ago, right, and that was not a highlight of the camp, that's for sure. But they've had some better days since then, and I think we're making progress.

But it's going to be a while. We're getting there, but we're not clicking yet, just quite yet. But it'll come, I think.

**Q. You've moved Kuempel around --**

COACH FERENTZ: We're just kind of moving everybody trying to find the right combination, and once we get it we'll probably lock in, but we're not quite there yet.

**Q. Is Bulaga 100 percent?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's ready to go. He missed that Saturday, and I think he missed a practice or two prior to that, and then he was back. We were off that Sunday, he was back Monday, and he's doing just fine.

**Q. Will there be any room to maybe stagger your two freshmen quarterbacks, or are you --**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm more worried about our two veteran quarterbacks right now. Yeah, I haven't given that much thought quite frankly. But we're happy with both guys. They're doing a good job. You know, our focus has really been on the top end of things right now.

**Q. Anxious to have a chance to get a winning taste back in your mouth?**

COACH FERENTZ: The last outing in Kinnick wasn't a great memory. We can mope about it or we can hopefully use it to motivate us. It'll be good -- it's just going to be good to start playing again and continue this. As I said, we've tried to refocus back in March, and it's still our plan to forge ahead here. It'll be great to get started. It's been fun to be with this team all of August, and we're looking forward to getting into the next

phase, which is playing some games.

**Q. Do you have a timetable for Stross?**

COACH FERENTZ: I wish I did, no. They're tricky. We're dealing with a couple hamstrings right now that are just hard to predict.

**Q. Tarpinian, hamstring too?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he might make it, he might not.

**Q. For the season or Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm talking about Saturday. He'd better make it for this season. All those guys. They're not that tricky.

**Q. How different 1-AA football now versus when you were coaching and playing?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think there's probably more parity. I think we've all seen that last year. Certainly one of the biggest upsets of the season was a 1-AA team. They've got a new classification for it. But I think there's more parity in college football now than at any time, and it's probably that way in the NFL, too, so it's probably kind of similar in that regard.

I think we're a pretty good example. We'd better be ready every week. Hopefully we learned that lesson last year and the last couple years, that we'd better be ready every week to play, and that's kind of what we're trying to focus on right now. Hopefully we're going to be ready to go.

**Q. How much more meaning does this game have considering that you're going up against a school that you once coached?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not a lot, I don't think, other than I know the some of the guys across the sideline. I've never been wild about playing guys that I've worked with, and I've had plenty of opportunities to be involved in games like that since I've been back. I'm not particularly crazy about that. But that's just the way it goes.

It is kind of interesting, I guess, I've only worked at two schools outside of Iowa and we're playing both of them this year, whereas there aren't many people left at Pitt that were there when I was there. So that's a little different circumstance. But certainly that remains in my recent history. Not only the guys on the coaching staff, but there are an awful lot of folks up in Maine that I stay in touch with that were very, very good people to me when I was up at that University.

**Q. What are some of the memories that you have from your time there?**

COACH FERENTZ: I remember the Hawaii trip, which I think was the first time we played a, quote-unquote, Division I school. I can't remember how many stops we made to get out there. It literally was the longest trip at that time in college football. We made it longer because I think we went through like Atlanta, down to Dallas, over to Honolulu. It was a journey. It was literally a journey. I won't go to the rest of the story.

**Q. Can you talk about the competition at corner? Seems like that was some spirited competition. I know Jordan was hurt a little bit.**

COACH FERENTZ: We've had injury challenges. We've had plenty of in and out of the lineup during preseason. Part of it is last man standing. But Amari has done a good job -- Spievey has done a good job practicing. It's a little bit like Shonn except he played last year, so it's a little bit different in that regard. He actually was out there playing and did a nice job. He's been here a year or two, so Shonn has got a little bit more experience in the program but Amari is fresher, if you will, but he's done a good job in camp so he'll start the ballgame and we're hopeful that he'll play real well.

**Q. Could you talk about the returns of kickoffs and punts?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's a good question. That is a good question. Right now Andy Brodell will be the punt returner, and probably kick returns would be Johnson-Koulianos and Chaney, I think, is probably where we'll start. But that could change during the course of the week, too.

That's another thing that we're really hoping to upgrade. Andy has done a great job back there when he's been in, and our kick returns we started out pretty well last year and then just fell right off the table about the sixth week on. That's an area we really need to develop consistency in.

**Q. Any thoughts about your place kickers right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's the good news. I think both of them are doing a great job out there. Although that's contrary to what everybody saw a week ago Saturday because that was clearly the worst day for both of them. I mean, that was discouraging. But for the big, big picture, they've really done a good job and they're competing well and doing a nice job in both

regards. Murray will kick off for us. He'll do that facet of it. I think we're making progress and we have the potential to be better than a year ago, which is something we needed to do.

**Q. Who handles the first field goal?**

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't made that decision yet. I don't know. I've got a couple days to figure it out.

**Q. Have you reminded your kids Appalachian State winning at Michigan from last year?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, we haven't met yet. I'll talk about that today. But we haven't said too much about any one opponent. We've done a little bit on Maine, but we don't dwell on it until the start of game week. We're trying to get into normal mode here, so that's how we do it. I'll definitely bring it up. I've got a couple other scores to share with them, also.

**Q. Can you just kind of reflect back on your time here so far as head coach?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's gone fast, I can say that. All 18 years have gone fast. It's hard to believe we're entering 10, and that's a good thing. At least I think it is. Some people may not. I'm happy with it, and I hope I can make 11.

**Q. Talk about what you're expecting Saturday, offensively.**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm hoping we can be a little bit more productive than we were last year certainly in all regards. The biggest thing we're just looking for is the guys to play with cohesion, play clean, not hurt ourselves. We really did a lot to damage our chances to have good production last year. You know, we inflicted a lot of challenges upon ourselves.

You know, we need to execute better, be more fundamentally sound and give ourselves a chance to have the kind of success that we hope we're capable of. I think we have the potential to be a good offense. Now we've got to grow into it and develop into it.

We've seen flashes of it in the preseason but not consistency, so that's going to be the challenge.

**Q. How have you been able to gauge your special teams? I know last year you were at times unhappy with them. How have you been able to gauge their growth?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we've got a good group of core guys, and Gavin McGrath is probably a good representative of that. I think we've got a good corps to work with potentially. We'll see some younger guys factor in there, too, I think. Ryan Donahue has been really performing well in preseason. We expect Danny to kick off well on the kickoffs. If we can just solve the PAT field goal aspect and then the return part of it, I think those are the areas we really need more consistency. But I think overall we've got a chance to be good if we nail those things down, and that's still up in the air a little bit.

At least from the place kicking standpoint, I'm a lot more optimistic than maybe I would have been a couple weeks ago, and I think the same thing about our returners; if we don't start getting a lot of injuries, that type of thing, I think we have the potential to be better there.

**Q. Do you feel like there's much separation on the offensive line between first and second team?**

COACH FERENTZ: There's still probably like seven, eight guys, I think, that could factor in this thing, and it could change in a couple weeks, too, with younger guys coming on. We'll keep an open mind.

But I think the four guys that are listed as starters now have kind of established themselves. There's a line there, and then there's like another tier, probably four, five, six guys, somewhere in that ballpark. We'll just keep watching it and see how they do in practice.

**Q. Are they all going to get opportunities in the game?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how it goes. Our first objective is to win the game. We want to go out and win and execute well, so hopefully we get the right guys to the field and allow them to execute. If we can do that, then maybe we'll have an opportunity to get some other guys in.

But again, some of those positions won't play in the rotation because players may have earned it, the Hunter-Angerer thing or the left guard situation, the kickers, I think we'll probably try to get both those guys involved a little bit and just learn more about them.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that both Christensen and Stanzi will probably play quarterback. How do you think Jake will handle sharing time a year after being the only guy out there?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's like every guy on our football team. I'll give you an analogy with the running back. I'll expect Paki to play, too. Paki didn't start last year, but I think he's earned the right to play. He's been out on the practice field.

That's just part of being on the team. Guys that earn the right to play get an opportunity to do so, and then you kind of go from there.

**Q. You said that there were times when you didn't think the players were really competing as hard as you had hoped they would for some of those open spots. Have they stepped that up?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think for the most part we've practiced a little better the past week with maybe an exception here or there. But I think for the most part we're getting a little bit better, little better week.

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