

November 4, 2008



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. To start out, injuries quickly. The good news and bad news on Wes Aeschliman. Things went pretty well for him, but he had a real serious injury. Dislocated his hip. It's the first experience I've ever had being around one of those. Extremely painful. He returned to Iowa City Saturday night. They brought him over in an ambulance. You know, he spent two nights in the hospital. The pain subsided greatly once they got it reset. But that was a bit of an ordeal, I guess.

He'll, as I understand it, be on crutches for a few weeks. Everything's checked out well. There's no damage or anything like that. He'll be okay in short time. Short for us. Easy for us to talk about. Fortunately it won't be anything more than that. But it was pretty painful, as you might imagine. But he's doing well and I think in good spirits.

Otherwise, I think probably the only injury of real significance right now as far as a player being doubtful is Andy Kuempel. He's got a muscle problem that, you know, may or may not come around, so we'll see how that goes. I think everybody else has a better-than-realistic chance of being ready.

Captains, we're kind of locked in right now, the same group. We've got Mitch King, Matt Kroul, Shonn Greene and Rob Bruggeman. All those guys are doing a great job. They'll lead the team again this week.

Penn State, I think a couple things just jump out at you. Talent, first of all. They've had a great season. They've got a very, very talented football team. Everywhere you look, they're very talented.

For the most part everywhere you look, they're very experienced, with a few exceptions. The players that don't have a long résumé of experience are all playing at extremely high levels. So it's hardly a big factor. And that even includes their kicker. Their kicker and punter, seems like everybody is a senior or junior on their football team.

The last element is they're very well-coached. You know, I don't have to say much about Coach Paterno. But that staff's been intact for the most part for a long time. It just shows everybody understands what they're doing out there on the field. All three phases, they play at a real high level.

You look at them statistically, that's scary to look on film, but it's even more impressive. So they're a great football team.

I did find one Achilles' heel. Everybody's got an Achilles heel. I'll test you guys. Anybody find it? They have a deficiency in one area.

They seem to struggle with interception returns. Right now they're giving up about 25 yards a return on interceptions. That's the good news. The bad news is they've only had two interceptions all season long. They're probably working on that during their bye week.

But the other stat that jumps out at you, they've scored 47 touchdowns. Their opponents have 11, which explains why people have 11 points a game against their defense.

They're just an excellent football team. It ought to be a great environment Saturday. It's going to be a great challenge for our football team. We'll have to be at our absolute best. That's a challenge for us. We got an exciting week ahead of us. We'll look forward to getting back to work this afternoon.

You guys didn't know about that interception thing, did you (laughter)?

Q. Penn State in the Ohio game had no

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penalties, no off-sides.

COACH FERENTZ: I told our team, it was our bye week, I told them that Sunday. I thought that was the most impressive thing. As impressive as they played, it was a great football game. I read somebody's account of it. It was less than complimentary. I think it was out of a Cleveland paper. They thought it was a terrible game. I guess they don't know much about football.

I thought it was a great game. But I thought that was the most impressive thing out of a lot of impressive things they did. To play at Ohio State in a night game like that against a great opponent, not have a penalty, that really tells you a lot about their football team. They're extremely disciplined. Gets back to the coaching, what they're doing. They're leading the Big-10 in penalty yards, too. They've got it all going. They're good in every turn right now.

Q. Do you expect them to try to take away Shonn?

COACH FERENTZ: I was on the teleconference with the writers from Pennsylvania. I grew up in Pennsylvania. Penn State traditionally has had a great defensive football team. Jerry Sandusky was there, Dan Radakovich prior to that. Tom Bradley has done a great job. I'm going back probably 40 years now, just those three individuals. I know philosophically, a good defense always starts with trying to make your opponents play left-handed. I'm sure they're not going to make it easy for us to run the football. We anticipate that.

Q. You said 'talented' earlier. Is there another word that comes to mind when thinking about Penn State this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the things I said: talented, experienced, well-coached. Kind of sums it up. They are talented. They're talented at every position. It's just very, very impressive. It's as good a line as we've seen this week offensively.

Defensively I'd say the same. Their linebackers are always good. This is no exception. They cover very well in the back end. You know, flip it over on offense. A great, great group of receivers. Very skilled and very talented. Play well. Tight ends are dangerous. The running backs are outstanding.

Yeah, the big variable I thought coming into this season, not that I'm a prognosticator, I thought they would have an excellent football team if they got good quarterback player. Daryll Clark is one of the inexperienced players I referred to.

He's playing at an extremely high level. Their kicker and punter are both great. They've got all their bases covered.

Q. They were kind of off the radar before this season. Did you see this coming?

COACH FERENTZ: The only variable I thought would be the quarterback play. We played them last year. I was extremely impressed with their football team. And I thought just watching them last season the biggest variable on their team was how their quarterback played during the year last year. You know, when he was on, they were really tough to beat. So obviously, you know, you graduate a guy that's got experience like Morelli did, Daryll Clark is a guy we were familiar with, tried to get involved in recruiting a little bit. He's really just played at a real high rate.

Then it was impressive, too, I mentioned the penalty in the Ohio State game. He comes out. Devlin comes in, leads a drive, ends up deciding the game.

They're a very good team. They've got great personnel at all turns. They're as experienced as anybody coming back in our conference. So that part, again, that doesn't surprise me that they're playing like they are. When you look at Maybin, he jumps in there, plays end. He's not bad. The guy he was starting in front of is awfully good. Tells you the kind of football team they've got.

Q. A lot of talk about the BCS national title coming down to the last few weeks. Do you think about the idea at all of playing spoiler with a team like Penn State?

COACH FERENTZ: No. We just want to try to win the game. That's what we're thinking about. You know, just hung up with the writers from Pennsylvania. That's all they seem to be focused on. I don't really pay attention to much of that. At the end of the day, I'd be really surprised, and I'm not a handicapper or prognosticator, but I'd be really surprised when January comes around that there's more than two undefeated teams. I just can't -- you know, to me that would be the upset of upsets right there.

Q. Can you talk about Penn State's linebackers and how they have played?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, they're good everywhere. Their guys up front, they don't have

to try to bring much pressure because the guys up front get that done for them. But they'll bring those backers, too. They're athletic. They're tough. They're smart. So it's just a good combination. They've got Shawn Lee out. Connor graduated. They're still playing well. But they've recruited really well and they play well. They're older guys. They know how to play.

Q. What are some of the attributes you've seen with Derrick Williams?

COACH FERENTZ: He's just playing at a high level, not only as a pass receiver, but also his return game. Just faced a guy that was really dangerous from Illinois. Now you take it up even another notch.

He's a big play guy. But he's an excellent football player. He's not just a big-play guy; he's very steady, very talented, very tough-minded.

Q. That trio of receivers they have, they're so experienced. How much of an impact does that have with that level of experience?

COACH FERENTZ: I remember those guys playing well as a group a couple years back. I think it was the Michigan game. But again, they're just kind of representative of their whole football team. Most of the guys on their roster are very experienced. They're older. They know how to play, and they play well.

Q. How critical do you feel special teams is going to be on Saturday? You mentioned Derrick Williams with punt-returning ability. You have Donohue back there punting.

COACH FERENTZ: Ryan has done a real good job for us and the trick will be for him to keep his -- his hang time has been excellent, as a rule, not always, but as a rule. That gives us a chance to cover. When you face a guy like Williams, you need every little bit of help you can get.

The hang time's going to be critical for us to have a chance to cover. We're going to have to really work hard because they do a good job with their returns. But for us to have a chance to win this football game, we're going to have to be at top proficiency in everything, including all phases of special teams.

They've got a guy like Williams fielding the ball. Kelly, the kicker. They're good at every position. So they keep the pressure on you. They're capable of making big plays in any phase,

special teams, offense, defense. That's kind of where you have to be at your best.

Q. When Coach Paterno retires or if he retires, outside of wins and losses, is there a lasting specific legacy? Is there something that teams generally do now that he was the first to come up with?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about that aspect. But I've said it many times, I just think he's impacted college sports, collegiate sports, not just football. He's done an awful lot for our game, but I think collegiate sports in general. To me, he has just impacted collegiate sports in a very positive way and certainly has impacted Penn State.

Again, I'm going back to -- not that I was there in the '50s, but I'm kind of familiar with the history of that school and the prominence that they've had, the reputation they enjoy. A big part of that is his influence and impact.

I was aware of that when I came out in '81 and people were impressed that my wife had gone to Penn State. I used to tease her she got credit for taking pool. I think they had pool class or something like that. But, anyway, the image out in the Midwest was that Penn State was almost an Ivy League-type school.

To me they've had a model program for a long, long time, as long as I can remember growing up, just the way they do things. They're a first-class outfit. They've always been that way. I don't think Coach Paterno would have it any other way.

Q. Is there anything specifically, whether it's in your coaching persona or your private life, that you sort of patterned after Coach Paterno?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if I've patterned it after, but I've always respected the fact that to me as an outsider looking in, he's always had the right priorities in terms of how they run the program and how he coaches. He pretty much does things, and certainly he's got enough experience now to know what he wants, but he does things the way he thinks is best for the football team and best for the program. He stays the course. That's what good coaches do.

Q. Do you picture yourself when you're 81 years old out on the field practicing an

on-side kick?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I won't be out on the field (laughter). I hope I can make it that far. That would be great. I hope we all look and act as vibrant as he is. That would be a great thing.

Q. Among coaches there's good guys and bad guys. Is Joe a guy that you like to see have this sort of success?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, except for this Saturday, I'm all for it (laughter).

But, one of the thrills for me when I came back here 10 years ago was to go to the first head coaches meeting and see Coach Paterno. Obviously, he was 10 years younger then. At that time it just impacted me. Here is a guy who is over 65 at that time who is just so enthused about what it was he was doing, passionate about what he was doing. That's a great thing in life. If you can find something that really grabs you and then maintain it the way he is, that's a pretty good deal.

The lives he's impacted along the way, I mean, can you imagine how many there would be in the amount of years he's been there? You look at guys like he and Coach Robinson, those two jump to mind. It's never going to happen again. Basically their adult lives have been spent at one institution. Both of them I think found their wives at that school. I think I'm correct in saying that about Coach Robinson also. Just two extraordinary men in coaching.

Q. Do you think the challenges coaches of your generation face are more than what he faced maybe at your age, which is why he can coach at age 80?

COACH FERENTZ: Never say never. Never say always. But I will say never. You'll never see what those two gentlemen have done. I don't think you'll ever see that again. I don't think you'll ever see a Don Shula, Chuck Noll, Tom Landry in football either. Jeff Fisher is making a run at it. Bill Cowher could still be doing it; chose not to. I just think those days have moved by us. I don't think that will happen again.

Q. What are your thoughts about Coach Fulmer yesterday? He was in the title game last year; now he's on his way out.

COACH FERENTZ: That's the world we all live in as coaches. That's the world we live in.

Q. Have you been able to get a sense from your players so far this week how they're

feeling about this game, a game that probably most people are picking Penn State to win?

COACH FERENTZ: I would imagine. I saw the players Sunday obviously. And our focus was more on Saturday at that point. I saw a few of them in the building yesterday. But today will be the first day.

But, our guys, they'll get back up on their feet. This group's been resilient. They've responded. You know, if you can't get excited about playing in a game like this, I don't know why you'd want to be playing football. You don't get many chances in a career or a lifetime to play an undefeated team, a highly ranked team in November. That doesn't happen by accident. If it does happen, you know you're playing a great opponent.

The challenge again for us is for us to be at our absolute best in every area, every phase. All that being said, we'll still need to have some things, some breaks, whatever, happen. But those things happen in sports. That's the fun of it and that's the challenge.

Q. It's not like you haven't had some success against Penn State.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know if we've faced a squad quite as good as this one. In fact, I'm pretty sure we haven't. I think they were ranked second in '99 when they came in here. To me, this is a much stronger team. I think that was early in the year, if I'm not mistaken, wasn't it, where you can take those polls and I was going to say stick 'em, but no. Stick 'em in a garbage can.

Early season polls aren't really reflective of where a team is. But when you talk about November records, November polls, they're certainly deserving of their ranking. You can argue they deserve to be ranked higher. I know people have. I'll stay out of that one. But they're an excellent team.

But it's going to be fun. It's going to be a fun challenge for us.

Q. You said earlier they'll try to make you left-handed, make you play to what isn't your strength. What do you need to do to make them left-handed?

COACH FERENTZ: That's the problem (laughter). I'm not sure. I'm not sure what you do. You know, really they've been fun to watch up until this week. You know, during the season, we've

had them on a lot of our Big-10 cut-ups. It's fun to watch a good football team play. I mean, if you like football, you like watching a good team perform. And we've seen them on tape. I've got great respect for what they do offensively because they're very balanced. They can run it, throw it. They block. Everybody plays their position really well. So it's fun to watch.

How you make them play left-handed, I don't know. To me when you face a team that is balanced and it's talented, if you try to load up in one area, you're going to pay in the other. It won't take them long to get there either. So you just have to try to play sound football.

Q. What's the status with Dezman Moses right now? Does Harold Dalton have a chance of coming back at all this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Dezman is back with us, rejoined us the first practice of the bye week, whatever that might have been that Sunday, you know, post Wisconsin, the game before the break. I'd say in Harold's situation, the more I've learned, I'd say it's very doubtful, yeah. Initial report, I was disappointed. Probably more disappointed after learning more details.

Q. Some of these problems in the past with freshmen, he's a senior, does that add to your disappointment?

COACH FERENTZ: It does. The common denominator, alcohol is so often involved. That's a common denominator. Our uncommon denominator in this case is that he's an older player. We've talked about that before. I'm a little more understanding with younger guys. But it's really disappointing.

Q. What do you think are the chances that Seth Olsen will play?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's got a shot. Yeah, I think he's got a shot. That being said, we haven't gone through the week. So he's got some steps to climb. But I think he's got a realistic chance.

Q. Moeaki?

COACH FERENTZ: Realistic, yeah.

Q. I think you said mild concussion.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he bounced back. He actually got cleared during the game. We just kind of held him out.

Q. Is a dislocated hip like a finger in which you snap it back into place on the sideline or...

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a question I had for Wes on Sunday morning. Went over and saw him. I said, Let me use my imagination. I have an image of our doctor with his foot on his chest. It wasn't quite that graphic. But, people have to hold you down. You got to get that joint back in the socket, which is... You can imagine.

I remember Tony, the pain and discomfort he experienced last year with his elbow. This is a bigger joint. So, you know, he was not in good shape. But the good news is now he was in great spirits on Sunday, other than he just wanted to get out of the hospital.

Q. Tony looking forward to finishing the game healthy?

COACH FERENTZ: I would imagine. I don't want to speak for him, but I would imagine. I think we're all keeping our fingers crossed.

Q. How hard is that?

COACH FERENTZ: You worry about that. Any players with injuries, injuries are tough to deal with, and then when they just keep moving around, that's frustrating. Yeah, it's frustrating. So, yeah, if there is -- hopefully all these things balance out and even out. It would be great to see him have a nice run just for his own sanity.

Thank you.

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