

October 13, 2009



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Moving real quickly, it was a great weekend last weekend. Our crowd was just fantastic. Again, I want to thank our fans for just creating such a great, great environment. We appreciate that.

Probably the only downside, we had a significant injury coming out of the game. Paul Chaney tweaked his knee Saturday night, and it swelled up a little bit after the ballgame. Long story short, we did an MRI last night. He's got an ACL that's going to have to be repaired. We're going to lose Paul for the season. That's really unfortunate. He was working hard, having a good year, doing a lot of good things for us. It's a tough loss.

Like every injury, we feel badly for him, and I know he'll get back and come back strong and have a great senior year. It's very unfortunate.

Our captains again will be Pat Angerer and A.J. Edds on the defensive side, Tony Moeaki and Ricky Stanzi on the offensive side. We're on the road obviously so no honorary captain.

We're heading out to Wisconsin for a road game, and more importantly, again, just playing an excellent football team. It seems like every week whoever we play has no losses or one loss, and we're coming up on a team that's having a great year right now. They're playing well basically in all categories. They're very balanced. They've been impressive to look at on tape, and it's going to be a tough challenge for us.

We'll get back to the practice field today, start preparing for this game, and hopefully have a great week. We're going to have to be at our best Saturday to get the desired outcome.

Q. With Paul Chaney Jr. being out for the year, is there a chance that Keenan Davis could get more looks, more reps at wide receiver?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, , Paul was in our rotation. We've been playing pretty much about six guys, and we haven't had all six at once typically. I think the other night we did for the first time maybe. Anyway, with Paul coming out, Keenan will do that, and then Colin can play at both sides. At least we've got five guys right now that have been playing, and that will be our rotation.

Q. Which knee was it, left or right?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. It doesn't really matter. It's a clean repair, and he'll be back. But that doesn't help him or us this year.

Q. With Paul being out, are you looking for Colin to be the primary punt returner?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Colin stepped in and did a great job the other night. The good news is that Colin's back appears to be healthy now. He stepped right in and did a nice job. But it's still a tough loss, obviously.

Q. Will you use him on kickoff return?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we'll probably stick with Brandon back there, and then we've got Amari, we've used Paki, and I think Colin has asked about going back there, too, so we'll figure that out and kind of go from there.

Q. When you look at the schedule, the whole schedule over the summer, were these two games, the stretch here on the road, are these the games that kind of worried you most back then?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I mean everything worried me starting with the first game, and I was in the minority there. Every part of the

schedule is going to be a challenge. This is certainly a different challenge. We're playing two very good teams the next two weeks; we're playing two games on the road. And at the beginning of the month we just talked to our guys, we're like a baseball team, we've got a two-game home stand and a two-game road trip. We got through the home stand part okay, and now we start the next part of the segment here or the next segment of the schedule.

You know, big picture wise, that's what it looks like. Small picture wise the only one that counts is this one. So that's where our focus is.

Q. Will you continue the rotation at guard?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how this week goes, but I thought all three guys did good things Saturday, so we'll just keep playing with it and see what happens.

Q. Is that difficult to do, keep one guy going from one side of the game to the other?

COACH FERENTZ: Potentially, but he played right tackle in the first game. You know, I've always thought that stuff gets overblown a little bit. But it may be. He might tell you the opposite. He may tell you it is tough. But we've got a couple thoughts in mind maybe to make that a little bit easier. But I don't think overall it's that bad.

Q. You must really Riley -- you said Saturday he brings a physical nature to the game.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he competed well. It wasn't necessarily our choice to put him in there the way we did, but when he got in there, the important thing is he took advantage of his opportunity and competed well in all three games, played against good competition and did a nice job. He took that opportunity to maybe grab a spot, earn some recognition and playing time. We had fooled with him back in camp at the guard position, it just wasn't really working real well, so we said let's let the guy get settled; he's a young player. But now he's got some experience, and I think last week when we threw him in there he did a little bit better. We're hoping he'll play a little bit better each week at that spot. He doesn't have a lock on it, but at least it gives us another way to rotate and another option.

Q. A lot has been made of this start, best since '85, best winning streak since the



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'20s and all that, but is there a equal challenge in the guys handling success more than sort of bouncing back from adversity at this point in the year?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know how our players are thinking. I guess none of us right now are thinking too globally. Just in nutshell, last year at this time the sky was really falling. I mean, it was falling in right now, and my guess is on the outside it's probably a lit bit different.

But we're pretty much about the same team we were at this time last year. We're certainly further ahead win-loss wise, and you could probably argue a little better team, but I don't think we're that much different.

We all need to just understand that this thing is pretty fragile. We've got six tough games coming up, and none of us, at least in this building, need to worry too much about the big picture at this point. We'll see where we're at here in a couple weeks. Right now we've just got one task in front of us, and we've got more than our hands full with this thing.

Q. Halfway through the season is there a team strength and/or a team weakness that you wouldn't have predicted at the beginning of the season?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think probably just how guys have responded in general, and that's maybe not something I would have predicted, but more specifically the way some young guys have stepped in. We just talked about Riley Reiff. He got called into duty maybe a little bit before we would have planned. Certainly both running backs have done a good job; both Adam and Brandon have jumped in there. Not that we didn't think they were in the mix back in August, but they weren't prominent when we started two-a-days. So there's three guys right there.

And then a guy like Colin, not that it was a big surprise the other night, but when he jumped at the at the punt returning position, he really did a great job, and it looked like he had been doing it for the whole season.

Overall I'm happy with the way guys have responded to all the challenges that we've had so far. So that's been a positive. Like I say, some of those individuals I couldn't have pinpointed that back in August, but it's happened. Team-wise I think the attitude has been great, but that's not a surprise. They've been that way since January,

and I think it's been that way since last year.

Q. A couple years ago and even the first part of last year it seemed like you guys were losing all the close games, you were something like 0 and 9 in games separated by four points or less. You're 4 and 0 since the Penn State game. What's changed? How are you guys winning those games?

COACH FERENTZ: We're just probably a little bit better now, a little bit more confident. Going through it, it's like anything else, you have to go through it and experience it. We certainly came close four times last year but couldn't get over the hump four times. The Penn State game was a turning point that way.

I know that stuff does get tracked, and I follow that, too, because if you're going to have a good football team and a good season and you play in a good conference, you're going to have to win some close games. It's a pleasing thing. It's been a real positive for us.

Q. In the past I know you've mentioned that you enjoy kind of the -- you look back and you enjoy the way the season comes together, not necessarily how it ends. If you win a Bowl game, that's great, but for a team from where it starts to where it finishes, is there any way you can actually enjoy the season while it's going on, or do you just have to keep out of your mind, wow, we're 6 and 0?

COACH FERENTZ: I guess everybody involved in football is a little bit demented or else you wouldn't be involved in it. There's nothing sane about the game certainly. Now, when you graduate to coaching, you could probably argue that's not for normal people, either. But in some strange way, I enjoy this time of year more than any, even though I'm miserable most of the time. But it's enjoyable miserable; just like when you're playing, it's great to be sore on Sunday in its own strange way.

It's a work in progress, and sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's not so fun, but it's interesting to watch how things go and how every day shapes up. One thing about it, it's a very dynamic process. There's always something new, always something going on.

We've already had our share of interesting turns and twists, a lot of them behind the scenes, and we'll have more as the year goes on. Some are public, some aren't. But it makes it interesting. Sometimes you wonder how you're ever going to

line up on Saturday, and then you find a way to do it.

Q. You look at the running game, and obviously last year was a phenomenal year on the ground for you guys. How do you like the running game so far midway through the season?

COACH FERENTZ: It's been adequate, I think, overall. We got off to an underwhelming start week one. But again, predictable.

I think most of our challenges have been -- there are things you could see coming, so it wasn't like, wow, how did that happen. Most, not all.

But we're gaining ground. Not totally, but for the most part, it's been adequate for us. I think it has a chance to develop, and I kind of feel like that about our whole offense. We're hardly where we want to be at this given point, but I think the potential is there the next six games for us to start making progress, if we can just keep things fairly consistent on the practice field. I think that gives us a chance.

Q. Wisconsin's rushing attack has been working pretty well --

COACH FERENTZ: Real well, yeah.

Q. You guys were able to kind of shut them down a little bit last year. What can you do this year to replicate that?

COACH FERENTZ: Learn from last year and any year. It won't be easy. They come into this game it seems like every year where they're leading the conference in rushing. It's ten years of reference point there, but it goes back certainly since I think Barry went up there. They made that a priority.

It starts right there, and then on top of it, I think -- I don't want to speak for the folks up there, but I would think they would tell you they're probably a little bit more comfortable with their passing attack than a year ago. I think that's probably fair to say. As an outsider looking in, that's our perception. So I think they're a very balanced offensive football team right now, and that makes it tougher to defend the run when you have that capability.

Q. The two quarterbacks are kind of similar, aren't they?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. Yeah, I

think so. I think their guy is a winner. That's where it starts. He really seems to be good control of the football team and what they're doing, and he's done a lot of good things for them. Again, I don't want to speak for the people in their camp, but I think they've got to be really pleased with the way that's going.

Q. It's Ricky Stanzi's tendency to look like Tom Brady on a few plays and then not so good on the next. How do you explain that?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't. I don't. I can't try to, I won't try to, and we're just working to correct it for obvious reasons, and nobody is working harder than Rick. That's his makeup.

Q. How much satisfaction did you get out hearing the news of Tony being the Offensive Player of the Week Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: I wasn't real surprised, but it's been nice, we've had a lot of guys recognized, but we've had some success, and that's how that works. I was more interested in him getting in the end zone both those times. That was great, just absolutely fantastic.

We've been saying all along, this guy is an excellent football player. He's one of the better football players in the country that's flying under the radar, and nobody's fault, he just hasn't been able to stay on the field as much as we'd like.

But what he does in terms of production is significant, and then I think in the weeks to follow, what he'll do in terms of drawing attention and maybe opening up other things offensively for us, he's going to get a lot of attention for obvious reasons. It's a good thing for us.

Q. You've won ten in a row. How have you done that?

COACH FERENTZ: Week by week and inch by inch. It's been pretty close for the most part. That's what we need to do from here on in is just try to take it week by week. Most of those clichés are pretty true. The trick is to stick with them.

Q. With all these close games, clearly the intangibles are great when you keep pulling them out. Is there concern for yourself that at some point being in so many close games might come back to haunt you?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, anything can happen, that's for sure. In 2004, we managed to win them close and keep winning them close. I

mean, everybody would rather -- I'd rather have them comfortably -- comfortable margins at the end. But it's probably just not -- we are kind of what we are, so right now that's what we are. Hopefully we can -- we're all just happy to win right now. That's the bottom line. That's what you're trying to do every week.

Q. Last year's team seemed like it was ascending even with the losses; you essentially just kept breaking through and kept ascending through the rest of the season. Do you get the same impression of this team?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we're improving. That's what we're most focused on. Sometimes you lose and improve, and that's not fun. It is more fun not to improve and win. We tried that a couple weeks going out there. I'd rather do that. But the idea is to make some progress every week and hopefully have something to show at the end of the game.

But, I think we're making some strides, and we're not there yet. I think, again, probably mostly on the offensive side, I think that's where our most potential for growth is right now. But we're more experienced on the defensive side, and that's not to say we can't get better. We certainly can. And the other thing is every week is a new adventure. You just never know what's going to happen.

Q. Talk about the defense last week with what Michigan was able to do with running the ball.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they drove the ball a couple times, and any time a team drives the ball -- first of all, you don't want to give up big plays. That's where defense starts. But you'd rather not give up the scoring drives. We did, and then we couldn't stop the drives. We couldn't keep them out of the end zone a couple times.

But that's going to happen during the course of a season, too. Again, we're playing 12 games. To think we're going to hold everybody to one touchdown a game probably isn't realistic, not in the conference we're playing in. If we're going to sit around thinking, okay, the defense will hold them to seven legitimate points, and then we have a propensity for giving up seven more some other way the last four games, so that puts us at 14 if you throw in a field goal. You know what I mean.

Every season is going to have its twists and turns, and I'm sure we'll have one of those

track meet games somewhere down the road here. I'd rather not get one of those, but I'm sure we'll have one or two of them, and conversely we might end up in one of those single-digit deals, too. Just play them as they come.

Q. When you say they are experienced, (indiscernible)?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and that's football. It's week to week, and whatever happened last week, we've just got to learn from it, and we're moving on.

Q. When Brett was your assistant at the beginning of your tenure, did you anticipate he would be a head coach, a successful head coach?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not surprised. I feel that way about basically everybody on our staff. I don't think Norm is going to go anywhere right now; I hope not. And I say that kind of jokingly. I kind of saw a parallel with Norm and maybe Bill Brazier where I was hoping Norm would want to come here and find a home, and I think he has, and I think he's having fun coaching right here.

But yeah, Brett had a lot of the qualities, just like a lot of our guys do, that they'd be excellent running programs. He got a nice opportunity at Kansas State and then up to Wisconsin. He's really climbed fast and climbed very well and has done a great, great job up there.

Q. Talk about the rivalry, how it's evolved. You've talked before, was the Wisconsin rivalry just intensified even maybe more than it was in the '80s, and is it Alvarez that gets credit for that?

COACH FERENTZ: Initially when I got here in '81 it was a great rivalry. We had a great series going. And then somewhere there, late '80s I guess it would have been, that's when it really just kind of bottomed out right before Barry went. At that point it wasn't really much of a contest. But then certainly when Barry came, what a great job he did.

And then unfortunately back in '99 it was a flip from '89 where we were the victims, and we couldn't even get our hands up in that ballgame. It was just -- I still remember Bart walking by, Bart Palmer, in the locker room that day, who's a great guy and a tough competitor, but he was a walk-on linebacker, about 5'10", 225. He was playing nose tackle against Casey Ray Buck, who's an NFL

player, and they had a couple NFL guys up front. And I said, "Ooh, this might not be fun here." And the back was bigger than the center. We've grown in ten years. We've grown. It's a great series again. It's really been good.

Q. There's been so much attention on this flu epidemic. I think it has you obviously. Has it been different in the locker room from a health standpoint than any other year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Russ Haynes, our trainer did a nice presentation, whatever, Sunday, and we immediately had about 15 guys out following. I think it was right after the Iowa State game. So it worked. We talked about it, and boy, everybody got it.

It's still floating around. But I think like every college team in America, we're trying to be smart about hygiene; they give you that stuff to put on your hands and all that stuff. And we've had guys get the medicine and what have you, and a lot of us got the flu shots. I guess there's two kinds of flu right now. Whatever.

Q. So from a frequency standpoint, it's a lot worse than it's been other seasons?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think that's very real, no question. I know the local City High here got nailed last week, the whole student body and a big part of their team. We had a kid at home who spent a couple days at home in bed, too. Firsthand knowledge of that one. I was doing the medicine run last Tuesday night, I think it was. I think at 12:30 I ran down to the Hy-Vee.

Q. You mentioned that Colin looks really comfortable punt returning. As somebody who saw him in high school, he's always looked that way. Is that something you saw even recruiting him that you thought --

COACH FERENTZ: We did. I remember watching him over at City High, actually. I think I had a kid playing in that game, but I can't remember. But it was a playoff game, and I'm pretty sure we did. Bettendorf beat City High that night. But he was doing everything, and they used him a lot of different ways. Coach Scott had him doing a lot of different things. And he's been very comfortable for us back there, too, when he's been healthy and going.

The good news is I think he's back hitting stride again and playing the kind of football we all

knew he was capable of.

Q. Is it kind of a unique ability returning punts?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. It's not just guys that are athletes can do it, not just -- there's something about it. Some guys just do it better than others. We've been fortunate, we've had guys do a nice job going back to Hinkel, Ramón Ochoa, Andy Brodell certainly had a knack, and Colin has been very natural all the way through it, good judgment on the ball, and showed that the other night, too, picking that one up at an opportune moment and made a nice return off of it. That was a huge play in our game. That was right before the touchdown pass, so it was a big, big play for us, started off by the defense with a great stop.

Q. What are some of your memories driving to Wisconsin, especially on the two lane roads?

COACH FERENTZ: It's pretty. It's usually pretty. Back in the old days we stopped at Timbers maybe; does that sound right? We used to stop and have a meal. It used to be a production. Coach Fry, he liked productions, I guess, but yeah, we used to have a nice meal going out, and I think we used to stop in Platteville coming home. We stopped somewhere on a bluff on the river. Timmerman's. If there was a meal, you know Phil was around. (Laughter.)

Anyway, it used to be kind of nice, and it was nice especially in the late '80s because we had a pretty good feeling about the game, but I guess I'm not as much fun. I'm a fun killer.

Q. Do you think there's been more concussions in college football this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think just in general. It's like a lot of things right now. 20 years ago guys had concussions and it was smelling salts and get back in there. The whole thing has changed, just the approach has changed dramatically, probably more so the last ten years. And then when you get one of the best players, if not the best player in college football, a very prominent illustration of it, then that -- could you turn the TV on last Friday or Saturday and not hear about concussions? Probably not. So that adds to it.

But I think just the whole medical approach right now, and obviously it's for players' safety. It's a great thing. But we're all a lot smarter about how

we treat those things than we were years ago. You look at a guy like Phil Parker, who set the Michigan State record for concussions, ends up being a secondary coach. That's a great illustration right there why they should be taking strong measures.

Q. Speaking of knee injuries, how is Jewel Hampton's rehab going, and where do you see him fitting in the lineup next fall?

COACH FERENTZ: Jewel is doing very well, very pleased to say that. We had a medical meeting this morning and his rehab is going very well. He's got a great attitude towards it. The repair was good. It's just a matter of hard work right now and him being patient. I know he's doing that, and he's going to be a very good football player for us.

I think we've got two pretty good guys running the football right now, so hopefully a year from now we'll have three of them. It hasn't been an issue around here, but I hope it will be. That would be great.

Q. Have you given any thought to rotation, because --

COACH FERENTZ: This year or next year?

Q. This year. Adam seemed to find a rhythm in the second half. I don't know if it changed, I can't remember, but it seems like it's every other series now --

COACH FERENTZ: We're pretty happy with that. I think that works pretty well.

Q. I have a stat here that says Wisconsin is 34 and 3 at home. Can you just talk about --

COACH FERENTZ: Just kind of like that question last week about us getting our tails kicked every homecoming. What was it exactly? The last two homecomings, I guess, right?

I mean, it's a good Big Ten stadium. When you see a record like that, that means it's a tough place to play. But more importantly, you're playing a tough team every time you go in there. We've already hit a couple of those this year, so if there's a good thing there, we've been on the road in two tough environments already.

I think we can handle the road part of it. I think what we need to worry about is handling

Wisconsin. That's probably going to be a tougher issue for us.

Q. What do you see when you look at the Wisconsin-Ohio State thing?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we all saw the statistics. But the biggest thing is just the big plays and how they affected the football game. Think that was the story of that game more than anything else.

Q. But for 60 minutes what did Wisconsin show?

COACH FERENTZ: They're a good football team. If they clean up the mistakes, the obvious mistakes that took place, which you can't do, but -- those things get you. Otherwise they played a very good football game on both sides of the football. It's those kind of mistakes, tough to overcome. It just, I guess, reconfirms that they're a good football team. They're 5 and 1 and you could easily argue they had a chance to win that football game if you can clean those things up. Those things get you every game. Typically those things are going to get you.

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