

September 8, 2009



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Okay. Welcome. Start out with just our injury situation. I think we came out of the game fairly healthy. So that's certainly a positive. You know, hopefully stay that way during the course of the week.

Our captains are the four same players from last week - Tony Moeaki, Rick Stanzi, Pat Angerer, and A.J. Edds.

Last week, just a couple of words of thought that first of all, our fans were great. Again, want to thank them for their turnout. It was a great environment out there. Certainly, great to have Coach Fry back. That was an enjoyable weekend.

I think he seemed to enjoy the festivities that took place, and great to have him with the team on Friday, and on the sidelines Saturday. Then, lastly, we just want to congratulate Jeremiha Hunter on being named a special teams player of the week in the Big Ten. So deserving. He played well on special teams.

Obviously, this is a big game for both teams. We're excited about playing in it. And it's been a tough game the last ten years involvement with it. It's been a tough game each and every time out there. It's a tough rivalry.

Anyone who has been up there knows it's a tough place to take a football team and play. And I learned that back in 1981. So it's probably the same both ways. You know, wherever the game is played, it's always a lively crowd, lively environment.

Iowa State has a very experienced football team coming back. We've only seen one exposure of them this year with the North Dakota State ball game. And they got a lot of returning players, an excellent coaching staff. They played very, very well in their opener. So it looks like a much

improved team from a year ago, and we know we're going to have our hands full.

They're a very good football team. A very veteran football team. Led by a veteran quarterback, and we're playing in a tough place. We've got a lot of work to do this week, and we're looking forward to getting ready for a big game on Saturday.

Q. How did your team grade out against UNI?

COACH FERENTZ: Well enough to win. And that's about where it is. We're fortunate to get the victory. Said that on Saturday. And I think we probably used up every mulligan of our nine lives plus some to get out of there with the victory. So we've got to make some improvement. There is no question about that.

Q. Do you sense any pressure at all at being able to dictate the tempo of this weekend's game, given how close the games have been with Iowa State in recent years?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about pressure. It's whoever can dictate the tempo has an advantage. If it's for sure -- basically you can look back to the '80s, there are different series or patterns through this series, if you will. But if you look at the last ten years, I think all but two games have been pretty close. Usually gets down to the basics.

That's typical when you get two teams that are in a good rivalry. I think it's kind of typical of a good rivalry which this has become. It all started in '98, and it's been all above that. So it gets down to it, both teams better be ready to play. If it gets down to mistakes or making plays, those types of things for any big game.

Q. You sat Paki for most of the second half, and he's not going to start this week. Do you think Adam's the guy who might be the

answer there?

COACH FERENTZ: At this point we think he did the best Saturday. So we'll start him out. It's his first time out on the game field. So that was a good start for him. But all that being said, he's still a young player.

And Paki will continue to play. He'll show better. And we'll use both those guys and keep an open mind through that entire position. It's not like we've got a veteran guy back there now, so we'll keep both those guys working and take a look at the younger guys as well.

Q. Had Brinson been hurt?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he missed a lot of time during camp. We've had several guys that did, and that really impeded his progress and a big part of that is he hasn't played. So if a guy has been injured but he's played a lot, that's one circumstance. But if you're talking about younger guys just trying to learn what they're doing when they miss significant time, it really sets them back. So it's kind of two sets of guys in terms of injuries.

Q. Have you had a competition like this, running back -- I don't know if it's competition or whatever, rotation -- is a fumble a deal breaker? Can a guy come back from that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, a guy can come back from it. We're not passing out life sentences, that's for sure. But just turnovers are a big part of football, and they hurt us the other day. The way we play football, typically, is a big factor.

You know, we turned it over the first time. That gave them an opportunity for a field goal which they cashed in on. And we've got a turnover on the kicking game and gave it right back to them. We had a good opportunity there to score, and squandered that chance.

And anybody involved with touching the football, that's a big part of playing. Whether it's a returner in the return game or the quarterback, certainly any of the running backs and maybe the skill guys.

Q. There is a suggestion that a close win is better than a blowout win?

COACH FERENTZ: You'll never know. We've done it both ways. I don't mind blowouts any time, if we win. That's not a bad thing. But we'll know in the long run. I mean, what's really important now is what we do this week and the next 11 weeks combined.

Q. Do you expect Kyle to come into work this week? Is he back 100%?

COACH FERENTZ: We expect Kyle to be ready to play. He is ready to play, and we expect him to be. And then the rest of the equation we'll try to figure it out this week. But we're looking to move Davis inside. Not sure how that goes.

Q. Your program is a program that typically peaks in November. Is Saturday just getting the rust out a little bit or were there more red flags than usual?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a little bit of everything. Our younger players played young, and some of our experienced guys can't play as well as we hoped they would or thought they could. So it was a team. We all performed together, and bottom line is we were fortunate to win the football game.

So, collectively, we all need to make some progress and make some improvement. If we don't, it won't be a good thing this week.

Q. When you look at some of the other rivalries across the country. A lot of them are going to be based on pure interest. Do you get the sense that this is a more friendly environment especially among fans and players?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's hard for me to speak. I know in '81, that year jumped out. It was not a good experience. It was bad on the field, I remember that even before the game got started. It was bad on the field.

That was one set. To me the ten years I've been back now, going into 11, but the ten years I've been back - unless I'm forgetting something - the sportsmanship's been good on both sides. That's about all I can comment on.

But it's been extremely intense, extremely fierce in terms of the competition part. But I don't remember bad sportsmanship, and I do remember some of that from '81 because that was unfortunate. And it's not part of sports.

Q. You mentioned the progression that Rafael has made up front. What specifically have you liked since he came along last year?

COACH FERENTZ: He had a good month of August. It was the most consistent stretch he'd

had in recollection. That goes back through camp last year, through the season, through spring practice. So I thought that was his best performance over a period of time and we're going to need him and everybody to continue to improve.

Q. I know you guys recruited Austen Arnaud pretty hard. How did that go?

COACH FERENTZ: Not too well for us. It went well for them. I don't know if the legacy part factored in. I would assume it would. But I think he appeared to like both schools, and he just made that selection, and I think it made sense to us. We knew there was that possibility.

Q. Turned out to be the quarterback you might have thought?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah. He's an excellent football player. Great young person, tremendous personality. He looked like a quarterback, acted like a quarterback, and he's doing the same now from where we're sitting.

Q. Was Saturday kind of a microcosm of what Ricky went through a little bit last year? Kind of struggled early in the game, but in the second half without him you really wouldn't have started?

COACH FERENTZ: Hadn't thought about it that way. But I think it's fair to say. Yeah, probably a good way to put it. It wasn't smooth sailing early. That's for sure.

Q. How difficult is it to prepare for a team when you have only one game with a coaching staff? Especially with the wrinkles that offense has.

COACH FERENTZ: The only way it could be worse, this could be our first game, and that would be that much tougher. So we've got at least a limited amount of plays to look at it. And certainly we've gone back through the history of their coaches. They've got an excellent staff and looked at things they've done. So we're further along than we would be a first game, but I'm sure we'll see things this week that we haven't seen in one game's time.

Q. They've got the big receivers. You see them causing problems against maybe your inexperienced corners?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we worry about that all the time. We've never had real big corners for the most part. So that's always a concern.

Especially, if you get the tall receivers out there. It was a concern last week with Skylar Orton. He's a big guy running down the middle there.

So it's always a concern. You have to play good position, good technique, and hopefully we can play great team defense. But they have some big looking receivers.

Q. Can you tell us what you think of your true freshman?

COACH FERENTZ: They got their feet wet. You know, got them involved a little bit, but hopefully we'll continue that progress as we go along. Same thing with the red shirt freshmen, the guys that haven't played. It was good for them to get out there and get game experience. I saw some positives. So we'll keep pushing because we're going to need everybody.

Q. Were Brinson and Weghner in the rushing plans for Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really, not prominently. You know, it just was one of those games we didn't get that many rush attempts anyways. So it was just one of those things.

Q. Anything different this week?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, anything can happen. But we'll just see what happens.

Q. How about Moeaki and Stross, Tony had ten catches and a touchdown. And Stross had some really nice catches on the sideline. It's got to be nice to see those guys healthy and contributing that way?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. Our older more experienced players are going to have to make plays for us. The passing game has to help us out, too. Shonn Greene is not coming back, we know that. So we're going to have to find other ways to be productive on offensive. And you're certainly counting on your older guys, and both those guys made a good contribution on Saturday.

Q. What did you think of the new field surface? Is it a faster surface? It might be a little faster if you walk on it. I'm not sure it's firmer than grass if you walk on it. I think you're kind of splitting hairs a little bit.

Probably the two hardest surfaces I can recall being on in the last couple of years would be Soldier

Field and that was 07. And last year, Pitt, when we played Pitt, that field was really hard. So those are probably the two fastest fields or hardest fields we've played on. I hope I don't get them mad at us. Chicago put new grass in right after we left but they had played on it Thursday night.

Q. How do you like what you've got?

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully we'll get used to it, because we'll be on it eight times, seven times, something like that. It's kind of the wave of the future, I guess.

Q. You mentioned last week all the shuffling going on up front. You kind of joked about all the different combination you had up there. What is the biggest?

COACH FERENTZ: I wasn't laughing on Saturday. It wasn't funny.

Q. What is the biggest challenge you can give those guys to play as one group even this week when Kyle comes back?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there again, there is that team work that goes on within -- it's true of a lot of different positions, but in football there is no bigger group than the offensive line group. So, yeah, you like to get guys settled in a little bit, and let them learn each other's moves and get a feel for what each other are doing, because a lot of things that can happen are more visual than verbal.

You don't always have time to make calls. And Saturday we'll try to make calls and nobody's going to hear them anyways. So you get to a point where guys have to feel and react together in the same way. It just takes a little bit of time. I think we'll get there, but we weren't there Saturday.

Q. Do you ever jump in there and try to help out?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I watch a little bit. But Reese does a great job. We've got a great line coach. We've got good linemen. So we just have to be a little bit better.

Q. Talk about the running backs as far as reading the holes and hitting that?

COACH FERENTZ: You know just from where you were sitting or where I was standing,

and watching the tape, we really didn't look cohesive offensively. I think that's more than fair to say.

We had a couple of good plays in there. But overall our execution was, you know, just okay.

Q. What types of challenges does playing in a stadium like Jack Trice present to you and the team until you bring them in there?

COACH FERENTZ: It's comparable to not all the places we play in our conference. But if you think of the top three which everybody's got a different opinion, but wherever the top three might be in our league, where you have to go in and say, boy, this is going to be tough. We better be really on our game. It's no different. That's how I look at it.

I'm not there any other Saturday of the year. I've been there for a couple of Shrine games, and that was tolerable. I mean, it wasn't overwhelming in terms of sound and all that stuff. But when we show up there, I know it's a tough stadium to play in. It's every bit as tough as going anywhere else in our conference or the toughest places in our conference. So it just means we really better be ready to go.

Q. Your impression of the return game and have you made any kind of movement there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, we'll probably -- we're considering it. We'll focus on the two guys on the punt return. I think the kickoff or both. You know, we'll probably continue with Spivey and Chaney on punt returns. Both those guys did good things there. And kick return-wise we'll start out with Paki there on the return. And we'll keep looking at things.

Q. They say that the biggest improvement a team's going to make is from the first week to the second week. Are you confident that all the stuff that maybe happened Saturday that that's fixable in the next five days?

COACH FERENTZ: I think most things in football are fixable or improvable. And it's got to be our attitude. It is often said every year going into the second game, come to think of it. But in '99 we had a lot of improvement to make then, too. But, yeah, it is. There's a reason those cliches are around, because most of them are true. And I

think that is true. And we should be a better team Saturday. They'll be better, too. Especially considering the fact that they've got a new staff. So, I think you're going to see them really jump up another notch, too.

Q. What's been your impressions from afar what Rhoades has done there so far, and what he's trying to establish.

COACH FERENTZ: It's all been excellent. Starting when he got hired back last winter. It made perfect sense. He's got a tremendous resume. He's got great association with that program, not only in terms of his experience in the program, but also the fact that he grew up just down the street from campus, and he put together an excellent staff. Maybe more importantly. Not just the coordinators.

Looked to me like he really took his time putting the staff together, did his homework. Based on what we saw in film, it looks like they've done a great, great job. .

I'm not looking backwards, I thought Coach Chizik did a great job there, too. But it looks like they're on the right path.

Q. Have your paths crossed in the past in coaching circles?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Obviously, we've coached against each other just briefly, you know, ten years ago. Then beyond that bumped into him in Pittsburgh of all places. He was in Pittsburgh and I used to live there, grew up there. So I saw him at a couple of events there, and I'm still friends with a couple of people that are associates with the Pitt Program. So we've gotten to see each other during that time.

Not every visioning scenario, so it's been kind of interesting.

Q. What is your impression of the trophy? Lot of people think it looks clumsy, not nearly as cool as the other ones you've had?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, trophies are -- you've got to be careful here, right? So I'll make a good analogy. Like some of the rings, our championship rings are selected by our seniors. They pick the rings. And they're rings that young people can wear. But people like me, they'd look kind of funny to me. To me championship rings are trophies. It's more about what they stand for than what they look like. I'm not really a great one to ask about esthetics in any category, probably.

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Other than I'm a sharp dresser, you probably noticed that, right?

Anyway, it's more about what they stand for than what it is they look like.

Q. What about the decals on the helmet? Will that keep going throughout the season?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. Blame it on Coach Fry when he was on campus. So a mini throwback deal there.

Q. When you walked down the steps there's Cyclone Nation sign on the door as you enter into here, do you put that --

COACH FERENTZ: I got to tell you. I haven't seen it yet I guess. I haven't noticed it. But we had some reminders around the building. I'm sure they did, too.

Q. D.J.K., is he healthy and just beaten up by guys or what's going on there?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had a lot of players that have been hurt or had injuries. Not hurt. But he had injuries during camp. Yeah, he missed some time. I said last week he really had a good camp when he was in there and then missed some time. You know, more towards the latter part of camp. He was in there. Did a nice job in the second half. Made a tremendous catch on a tough third down conversion. And you mentioned Stross and Tony earlier, and we're counting on Derrell to play, too. He's a veteran guy.

It just so happens Marvin's played well, too. Marvin has done a great job. But I look at it from the standpoint that we lost a good one with Andy Brodell, but we've also gained some guys. And Chaney made a good play on that unfortunately the one that got rubbed out. So I think we're seeing guys make progress. And we'll play all those guys. It's not like we're overloaded with fire power right now.

Q. Is there an explanation? Chaney disappeared clearly last year. Was it a dog house issue?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not big on dog houses. At least I try not to be. I'm not saying people haven't been in them. But I'm not real big on them. Especially in college football. And mainly because, you know, players change all the time, you know. It's a maturation process, or

whatever it may be. So, as long as guys are -- if they're on our roster in practice, that means they're not in the dog house, but they may have to earn their way out or whatever.

Regarding Paul, his playing time and his involvement has really been a reflection of how he's been practicing. And I think I made the comment a while back, watching him in track last spring, that's one of the greatest things that's happened in the past three years. It seems to me he's found his groove a little bit, and was getting some confidence, and developing some confidence.

And I think he's developed some confidence on the field, too. I think we're seeing that in his performance now. To me we're seeing a confidence we didn't see a year ago. So that's got us a little bit excited. Otherwise we would not have had him back there on the punt returns the other day. He's run some good routes this camp. So we're excited about him.

You know, it's funny, players peak and come on at different times in their careers: I'll never forget, I had three guys I coached in the '80s, and they didn't start until they played in the NFL, the offensive linemen. They played in the great west, and I carried that with me. You never know. Of when a guy's trying hard, you never know if it's going to work for them. It may not, but sometimes it doesn't.

Q. Northern Iowa comes out with as much intensity as I've ever seen another team come out with. Can you imagine Iowa State coming out and being more intense than the Panthers?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we knew they'd be ready to play. And they'd have a good football team, too. They demonstrated that. We expect the same kind of thing. There are a lot of parallels here about the same amount of returning starters.

You know, Iowa State graduated four guys on defense, but they got Banks back who is an excellent corner. He was out last year with a broken arm. So really he's a veteran player and the strong safety that they've added to their lineup is really a good football player, too. And he's not just out of high school. He's an older guy.

They're a veteran club. We expect the same kind of contest.

Q. Have you told your guys now that they've been through one like that to know what to expect?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope so. I hope we're more ready. We're going to have to be. It's going to be tougher, obviously, because for one thing, we're on the road in a tough environment.

Q. The big rivalry back in the '80s, wasn't all that pleasant. Do you remember anything specific?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't want to go into details. I just remember the pregame. It just -- we got spanked, too. They beat us up-and-down the field that day. So it kind of tainted my memory. As I recall, the sportsmanship wasn't that great in that ball game. It was only my second game here career-wise. And then, you know, it changed after that though. I think we transitioned out of that stage.

It may have been equally bad the year before here. I went out to Navy and those games. But if other you're not careful, it can be a delicate situation.

Q. You talk about the presence there that helped that?

COACH FERENTZ: I know one thing, Max's presence made it a rivalry again. Because when I left there wasn't much of one. I'm not trying to be smart. But that's just how it was. But that changed in '98. It changed big time. We found that out.

Q. The perception of the big time has kind of taken a beating the last couple of years, then you get off to a big start. Is there pressure to show well in the non-conference games?

COACH FERENTZ: There may be. I don't know if other people think that way and they may. I try to worry about our games, and the perception thing, I think sometimes perceptions get exaggerated a little bit. We had a huge perception problem in 2002, and survived that. Ohio State being National champions. Went to last year to the Texas-Ohio State game. That could have gone either way.

Right now, you know, style points, you don't get points for style. And really, we're all going to know more here in late October, early November about what is what and who is who.

Q. How's your approach to this game, the rivalry game changed in your tenure here? You've been a one game at a time guy, but

mentioned there was a little bit of attention paid to the game before?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the bottom line is for any player or anybody that hasn't been associated with the game they need to understand there is a different degree of intensity in this game, that's just the way it's going to be. It's the way it has been going ten years back. So from our camp we have to be well aware, prepared for that. If we travel there, it's going to be really tough. The crowd's going to be as lively as any crowd we're going to play in front of.

So, the degree of difficulty stuff from that standpoint, and then the other part about it, it still gets down to playing the best football. I think for the most part in the last ten years, the team that's played the best and performed the best that given day is the one that's won. I don't think there have been any real fluke wins in the whole thing.

I'm correct in saying that there's only been two games where it kind of got tipped out of bounds and our game over there blocked a couple of punts. Which isn't going to happen often. And in '05 they nailed us with a couple of turnovers and they jumped on us right away. So if you make those mistakes, it's going to get away from you. Otherwise it's a game that goes down to the fourth quarter.

Q. Have you grown an appreciation for the rivalry over ten years? Maybe appreciate that intensity now more than you did six years ago?

COACH FERENTZ: Again, my point of perspective would be when I left here in '89, and I can say the same thing. I'm not saying this in a derogatory sense, it's a matter of history. When I left here in '89, we enjoyed going to Wisconsin. I remember riding up there on a nice October day. The trees were pretty, and we were going to play a team that wasn't very good. And at that point, they might have had 20,000 people in the stands. Clearly it's a different routine up there now, and it's clearly different than it was in the '80s, the late '80s, where things started to drift a little bit.

It goes back to '98. I mentioned in '81 what Coach Fry did as far as changing the complexes of the Big Ten, I think it's the same thing our first four games I think we lost when I got here, and I think you could probably argue they had the better team in all four of those. Not just that game, but the whole season. We played against a couple of pretty good quarterbacks. Phelps and Wallace. Those guys are still playing.

Q. The rivalry, I think I read where Michigan put Ohio jerseys on the tackling dummies?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not that creative. I'm surprised. We don't have any tackling dummies, so I don't know. I mean, it's a special game for both teams. I'm sure they do things and we do things, too.

Q. Special teams have been such a big part of the last few games, five field goals Andy Brodell taking the punt back. Can you speak to how close this rivalry is when it comes down to special teams?

COACH FERENTZ: Again, three phases and all that stuff, the turnovers, special teams, penalties, those are the things that are going to really decide the game unless something really random happens like the two blocked punts. Where we fell apart early in the game 2005. So when those things happen, that's exceptions to the rule.

But generally in the 2001 game is as good an example as there is there. I think we dropped the punt, didn't we. Down there. I think we did. Like on our 20. Then we had the interception, and their guy stripped the ball. Those are things that are going to make you or break you.

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