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An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Just a couple notes here real quickly. Injury-wise, I think we're doing okay. Jeff Tarpinian is still very doubtful. We're hoping he can work further this week and maybe get back for the week after. But we'll see how that goes. Then Mike Sabers is trying to work back. Hopefully he'll have a good day today and feel good tomorrow. We'll see how that turns out as well. Everybody else I think has a better than reasonable chance to play.

Captains this week will be Matt Kroul and Mitch King and Rob Bruggeman and also Andy Brodell will represent the offensive side, special teams also.

Again, good to get the win. Congratulations to Andy for being recognized as Big-10 Special Teams Player of the Week. I think on a side note, we had three student-athletes from all of our sports recognized by the Big-10 over the weekend. So that's great to see.

Again, thanks to our fans and also great turnout, and Zach Johnson for his unselfish efforts, you know, being part of this weekend, heading up such a great, great cause. He and Pat Baird. Appreciate that also.

We've got another challenge this week certainly, traveling on the road, first time to do that. Leave Kennick here, hit the road on Friday. Obviously we've got a tough opponent to get ready for playing Pittsburgh, heading out there. You know, we expect that to be quite a challenge. It will be another test for us.

We're happy about the weekend. We've got to bounce back and get our focus where it needs to be, make sure that we have a good week of preparation because, again, it's going to be a

tough contest for us. It's probably going to be that the next nine ball games. Right now we're just worried about this one. We'll go from there.

But, Pitt's a team we've got great respect for. We know it's going to be a tough challenge. Hopefully we'll be ready to go.

Q. Tony Moeaki took quite a hit on Saturday.

COACH FERENTZ: We had three guys get dinged a little bit out there. It's early in the week right now. They won't practice today, all three of those guys. Unless something unusual would happen, we'd expect all three guys to be with us. I guess the good news is, his foot doesn't hurt right now. Tough way to take your mind off your foot. Guys that came out of the game. Klug and Daniels both came out of the game the other day. It was a hard-hitting game.

Q. Quarterback, got to ask, is this a situation where you'll let it work itself out in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think that's probably the plan right now. You know, if we were playing today, which we're not obviously, but if we were playing today, Jake would be our starter. We'll just kind of go from there.

But, you know, happy with both of them. I think we'll see how this week goes in practice. Like I said the other day, really not trying to be coy. I don't think it's going to affect Pitt at all in preparation because we're pretty much the same team running the same plays offensively. We'll just see how the week materializes. Hope that both guys continue to prepare like they have been. Just see how things pan out.

Q. Would you consider using a rotation?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I'd consider anything. I'm not sure I'd want to do that.

But we'll just see how it goes. It's kind of been a unique experience so far.

Q. It will kind of be a homecoming for you.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Absolutely actually. Interestingly enough, yeah. Three Rivers, I have some scar tissue, plenty of scar tissue from being in there, because every time I coached in there, it wasn't a good deal. Pittsburgh Steelers did a pretty good job against us. It was a tough place to play. I've never been into Heinz actually. I've been in PNC Park as a fan. Beautiful baseball park. I've driven by Heinz Field probably a hundred times, but I haven't been in there.

It will be good. It will be good to get in there, see what happens. Hopefully it's a good matchup. I don't know how much our fans know about Pittsburgh, in general. I know our players probably don't know much about it. Little bit of an educational experience. It's good to play another team from another conference. Hopefully it will be a good deal. I think we've got the ticket situation under control, which is even better.

Q. Obviously another game, you want to win it. Will you be thinking about family and friends in the stands?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Like I said on the teleconference a few minutes ago, it's really like a Bowl game only shorter. Bowl games are great things for the fans, they're great things for families, but they're not great for coaches and players because, you're practicing, trying to get ready for a ball game. You've got to play a game. It's really like that, only a much smaller scale. It's less than 48 hours.

I'll get in. Might be able to say hello to a couple people Friday evening when we're done with our meetings. But pretty much, we're just going to play a game. Hopefully, all three of my friends and my family members understand that.

Q. How familiar are you with Coach Wannstedt?

COACH FERENTZ: I've known Dave a long time. We were both grad assistants at Pitt. Big difference is he played there. And Pitt didn't want me. They were trying to win. But he played there, coached there. He left four or five years -- not even that. He left when Jimmy Johnson went to Okie State, late '70s. Then, he'd come back and visit the year I was there. I got to know him then. We've crossed paths. Ironically when we were in

Cleveland, we used to go to Platteville and train against the Bears.

We've kind of known each other through the years. I've known Tony Wise probably better. Tony is kind of a similar guy. Tony was a GA at Pitt with Dave, went to Oklahoma State with Jimmy Johnson. Being a line coach, we've gotten to know each other through the years. Good people. Dave is an excellent coach. He's done a great job there. He's back home. Grew up in Pittsburgh. He played at Pitt. He's truly at home. I think he's doing an excellent job there.

Q. If I remember right, when you were at Cleveland, two of the biggest people on the face of the earth got in a fight during practice, Orlando Brown.

COACH FERENTZ: Orlando Brown. There's kind of a line of our guys. Orlando Brown, Steve Everett. That was a Michigan/Ohio State thing. Orlando Brown was the protector there. He got kicked out of the practice, first practice, second year. He had been thinking about that one all year. But, yeah, we had some good heated practices with them. It was good spirited work. It's fun. Break up the monotony of camp. Orlando Brown is a big guy.

Q. The defense through three games, top of the nation in scoring defenses. Last year same thing. Tailed off a little bit. Talk about your defense right now.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, for the most part statistics, rankings, all those kinds of things to me in September don't mean much. What is important, though, is how we're doing things. And I think the guys are working hard. You know, we're doing a lot of good things. We still have a lot of things we can get better at and are going to have to get better at. I said that a week ago.

Certainly the margin for error closed down a great deal last weekend. It's going to be that way the next nine weeks. We've got to keep our focus on improvement. We have some young guys getting experience, which is a real positive thing, good experience. We'll just see how we play the next nine games.

But at least we're off to a good start. Guys for the most part are operating in a pretty good fashion. The good news there is we can continue to improve if our attitude's good and, you know, we're realistic about what we're doing, what we're

doing.

Q. McCoy remind you of anybody?

COACH FERENTZ: He's just a tough runner. He's garnered a lot of attention, justifiable so. Had a great year last year as a first-year player. He's a tough runner. But the other guy, 34, comes in and he's very, very effective, too. He's got a good average, very dangerous player. So they've got a 1-2 punch. It's not just McCoy, but McCoy's awfully good.

Q. Is the team progressing the way you hoped it would through three games?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm pleased with our attitude and I'm pleased, you know, with our competitiveness, if you will. You know, we're happy, first of all, happy to win Saturday, but also we had to respond numerous times. You start with the first play. That was an ugly first play. But, you know, the team kept responding in a positive way. So that was good to see.

You know, again, we're going to get tested. We knew that going into that ballgame, it was going to be tough. Realistically hopefully the next nine will be that way. We're going to have to work to make sure they are. But that's probably going to be more of the kind of game we're in for here on in. We're going to have to, A, prepare it and, B, be ready to compete, and then C, respond to situations during the course of the game. So it was a good start, that's for sure.

Q. In addition to playing Iowa State every year, seems like you always have another non-conference BCS team on the schedule. Is that a conscious effort?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, in theory that's what we're trying to do. You know, the Iowa State series I think's locked in, which is great. Then trying to find another BCS conference school. Then we go from there. But that's kind of been our mode of operation in general terms. And not every year it's possible. You know, we had somebody pull a series on us last, you know, couple years back, so that alters things, you're scrambling a little bit. But I think things are pretty well in place.

Q. Who is that somebody?

COACH FERENTZ: I can't remember. That was a long time ago. A long time ago.

Q. What do you think of Shonn Greene's performance through three weeks?



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COACH FERENTZ: You know, yeah, just watching our team, obviously he has a chance to really impact our team in a very positive way, and he's done that three weeks out. The good news is, you know, he's getting into game shape now. Just working real hard. So really pleased about that. I think he's having fun, enjoying it. And, you know, that's part of football, is to try to get the ball in the hands of the guys that can help you. And he certainly can.

That being said, I feel good about our other two guys, too. They'll have to play the next couple weeks. You know, just need to get the passing game in sync a little bit and keep making progress up front.

Q. With the academic problems that he had a few years ago, leaving the team, how nice is it for you to see him not just get back to the team but get back to the team and be a significant contributor?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a little bit like we talked about the other day. You talk about guys like Andy Brodell, Pat Angerer, they've all faced their own forms, different forms of challenges. You know, it's good to see that. Good to see guys stick with something and come back and fight hard and then on top of that experience success. So those are feel-good stories.

But all three cases, you know, we got plenty more than that, but all three cases are just reflective of those individuals, you know, having good attitudes, continuing to persevere, even though things get a little bumpy.

Q. What are the chances, I mean, I remember Clinton left because of grades, came back, but it doesn't seem like that happens very often. A lot of time, people leave, you never hear from them again.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that happens, too. Just depends how guys end up leaving. You know, Clint, Amare, all in the same boat where they dropped their guard academically. It's challenging here to go to school. You know, you got to do what you're supposed to do, and they didn't. And, you know, fell victim to a decision that none of us make. That's not in our jurisdiction.

But all of them paid the price to get back here. And I think, you know, they'll pay a little closer attention. Hopefully those are good stories for other guys, too. You hate to see anybody leave

your program. You sure hope they get a chance to come back, want to come back and do the work necessary to come back. When it goes the other way, that's a loss for everybody.

Q. You have a relatively young team. What are some of the challenges of bringing them on the road for the first time?

COACH FERENTZ: Just I think them realizing that the game is the game no matter, you know, where we're at, what the terrain may be, what the stadium looks like, you know, what the uniforms the other team may look like. You know, you have to get ready to play the game and focus on that. Not, geez, look at that building or, oh, boy, there's Three Rivers right outside the stadium. It's probably why they call the other stadium Three Rivers stadium. But those kinds of things. You know, it's not a field trip. We're going over there to play a game, just like we have the last three Saturdays.

But for the younger guys it's a little bit of a novelty. You know, so hopefully they're able to keep their focus where it needs to be so they can perform on Saturday when game time comes around.

Q. Saturday was a bit of a throwback win in that it was strong defense, lean on the running game. Is that a formula you can see this team using the rest of the way?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I've never been averse to that formula. Seems to work pretty well through the ages. You know, I mean a lot of things come and go in football. But if you can do those things well, you've got a chance. So if it settles into that, you know, that would be great. The bottom line is we're trying to win. So we'll do whatever gives us the best chance.

You know, conditions the other day were a little tough. The opponent was tough. And we weren't throwing the ball especially well. So that's what worked for us that day. We'll do whatever we have to do to try to win the game, though. Good formula.

Q. Is the field going to be ready in 10 days?

COACH FERENTZ: I assume it will be. Andy's done a great job. The saddest part about all this is, this is by the far the best the field's ever been in 10 years, the 10 years reference. The field has been firm. We've been scrimmaging there twice. You know, two games prior to, it just was in

fantastic shape. So we knew we had a drainage problem there and we were hopeful that wouldn't be the case where we'd have to play after a heavy amount of rain. And they worked extremely hard to get it corrected, best they could. But it's going to take a little bit more repair. You know, it's not something you can do in a week's time. But my guess is they'll have it ready to go, if the weather's good, we're getting good weather this week. So that will help, I'm sure.

Q. Any re-sodding?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. I don't think it's to that point, but I haven't heard.

Q. Does Dave Wannstedt run the Bears sort of offense with Pitt?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there are some real parallels. Matt Cavanaugh, another Pitt guy, is the offensive coordinator. Matt has been with Dave through his tenure at Pitt. They go back a little bit. There are definitely some things representative of what they did when they went to the playoffs. I think Cramer was the quarterback back then. But offensively and defensively some things that are similar. Obviously some things change, too. That's been a few years.

But, you know, I think Dave is like any coach, you know, he's got some things he believes in philosophically and those things show up. We're probably a little bit alike in that there are certain things that they do and they do 'em over and over. But we're different in that the things they do and we do are probably a lot different, you know, different family trees, if you will. But, I think you know for the most part what you're going to see in a lot of cases. It's just a matter of can you stand in there and get it done.

Q. What were you able to gain from the time that you spent as a grad assistant?

COACH FERENTZ: It was just a great experience for me. It got me started on the path of college coaching. And I spent, you know, probably 98% of my time with my high school coach, Joe Moore, his grad assistant, offensive lined grad assistant. So my scope was pretty limited. But it gave me an exposure. It's the first time I'd ever been around big-time college football, so that was an experience. I'd seen it on TV, but that's about the as close as I got. Coach Sherrill was an excellent head coach. It was good place to learn.

We had a great team. I couldn't imagine being with a better coach to mentor me than Joe Moore, so I was really fortunate in that regard.

Q. How do you feel that team stacks up with some of the others you've been associated with?

COACH FERENTZ: That team? That Pitt team was one of the best in college football history I think. You go back and look at that team. It was an unusual team, just an awfully good team. And, you know, you got guys like Marino as a quarterback, Trocano, two NFL quarterbacks. Marino got hurt. Trocano was an NFL quarterback. Basically the whole line played in the NFL. You go right down the list, it was just a phenomenal group of players.

I said, okay, pretty good deal in college football with this team. Nothing to it. When I came here in '81, it was a little different makeup. It was a whole different story. It was a bunch of different guys, we didn't have near the talent level, if you go by the NFL Draft, respective drafts. But this team had great determination and great team chemistry, the '81 team here.

It was a real contrast in styles, but, similar results. Both of them were excellent football teams. But, yeah, I got plopped down there for one year and I didn't know, you know, A from B. So it was like, whew, this is pretty impressive here. In retrospect, it was.

Q. Teams both in college and now in the NFL tend to defer. Is there some Coaching 101 philosophy behind that?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm sure there is. I just missed the clinic. I mean, I don't understand it. I just don't understand it. But it seems like you're supposed to defer 'cause everybody does. You know, I don't get it. You know, last time I think we deferred, we may have deferred at Illinois, which would have been smart, 2004. But 2003 at Michigan State, we deferred 'cause it was pretty windy, and I just remember they drove it 80 yards in about 10 plays. It was 7-0. You know, that didn't work out so well. They ate up about half the quarter.

Q. Is weather the biggest factor?

COACH FERENTZ: To me it would be. If the weather conditions are really crazy, that makes sense. If you're confident, you can make them punt into the wind. I guess we got snake bit on that one. That was enough for me.



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Q. Can you talk a little bit about Tyler Sash and just what put him in the position to be a starter?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's like a lot of positions. He's been competing with Harold. And Harold has been doing a good job, a really good job. We saw Tyler keep coming on and coming on. We made the decision to give him a little bit more opportunity two weeks ago. For his first start, he did some things pretty well, and did some things he's got to get better at. I think he made some progress last week. He's been working hard, competing. He made the most of his opportunity this past Saturday and now he's got to get back out there and do it again.

Q. What attributes does he have?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's got a lot of things safeties -- you hope safeties do have. He can run and cover and can also tackle. And tackling's real important at that position. Again, that sounds really basic, but you'd be amazed how many guys don't tackle well at the safety position. In the NFL, it's really no different.

So, you know, he does a good job there, has done a fairly good job. He missed a few two weeks ago and was a little bit more proficient this past week. Made a real nice play on that interception, too. A nice athletic play there. If you get a guy that can tackle, cover some ground, and then there's a mental part of it also, especially for safeties, they're involved in the network there. So, those are all attributes you have to have.

Q. How confident are you in your backup safety?

COACH FERENTZ: Harold Dalton has played a lot. Harold jumped in and played I thought his best football Saturday. I think he had nine snaps, eight or nine snaps when Sash came out. And, you know, Morrow jumped in there and did a good job when Greenwood came out. It was his hand, is that what it was? I think he's fine. I think he's fine. I didn't know he had a hand. I mean, a hand problem. I knew he had hands (laughter).

But I think he's fine. He must have had a boo-boo or something, yeah. Finger dislocation. They set it, he was back out there.

Q. Moeaki, got back healthy, injury in

camp, have what happened on Saturday, what do you see as far as it wearing on him mentally?

COACH FERENTZ: Nothing. I mean, he wants to play. He wants to play. He's a little frustrated, obviously. That's a rude welcoming. It wasn't exactly his first play back. He was in the game before that. But it was his first notable play. Tough way to start it out.

So I had that thought in my mind maybe we should have put him in a middle route. But you can take collisions there, too. It's one of those deals. But he'll be fine.

Q. Do you have to pay more attention to players' mental health than maybe 20 years ago?

COACH FERENTZ: Potentially, yeah. Potentially. I don't want to think about that. It's always been something you try to be aware of. But probably there's more information and misinformation for players to get involved in now that they probably get sucked into. We didn't used to have the Internet, all that stuff. Again, why people read that, I got no idea. But I know people do it. It's one more thing to think about, what have you.

Q. When do you expect to make a decision on who's going to start at quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, you know, just during the week. . But, I mean, it's not going to be anything dramatic. I don't think it's really going to affect the game or impact the game critically either way. Just based on what I've seen the last six weeks or whatever it's been now, you know, both guys have been doing a good job. So, I don't think we'll get to the point where we're throwing darts. But, I think both guys are doing a good job.

Q. Whoever starts, if they're playing well, will they stay out the whole way?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. we'll just see how things go. If the guy's throwing a shutout, you know, I heard somebody question whether or not they should have taken Zambrano out, I think I heard that on, what was it, Sunday? I was watching SportsCenter late that night. I'm no baseball guy, but I think I'd keep a guy if he's throwing a no-hitter. I think I would. I don't know. I knew he had a sore arm, but it must not have been hurting him too bad that day.

Q. So you're comfortable with the baseball metaphor for this? Saturday you said you weren't.

COACH FERENTZ: What did I say Saturday?

Q. I asked you about relief pitchers and stuff.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're talking about a starter who is throwing a no-hitter here. Guy walks the first six batters, we might be going somewhere else, too. Yeah, I'll go with that one, yeah. In obvious situations, we'll do the obvious.

Q. Why are you so at ease about the quarterback situation?

COACH FERENTZ: Because they're both good. I'll just put it in perspective. Last year, let's say Jake -- what does Zambrano have? Tendinitis. If Jake had tendinitis last year, I wouldn't be too easy with anything because I'm not sure where we would have gone. But right now, you know, both guys are really I think -- you know, we see 'em every day. They're doing a good job. So it's a good situation.

Q. Kind of goes against the grain. You hear that saying, if you think you have two quarterbacks...

COACH FERENTZ: Normally that's the case. I'm just referencing it from where we were a year ago. So you asked about my Pitt experience. That was 1980. I'm pretty fuzzy on 1981, too. I was just trying to find my way to work every day and the practice field. But I do know we played with two guys that year, and it was really successful. The difference there is it was a different attack with both guys. Although, you know, Pete could throw it, but we ran it a little bit more with him. And Gordie was a better thrower. But that worked, you know. We ended up winning the championship that year.

So, you know, ultimately all we're trying to do is get to the finish line, have something good happen there. So whatever steps it takes to get there, I think we can only do it a day at a time, a week at a time, to determine that until it becomes obvious.

If somebody's throwing a no-hitter, it's pretty easy to figure that one out. If somebody walks the first six guys, it's pretty easy to figure that one out, too. I guess I'm at ease right now

because I think both guys are doing well.

Q. Stanzi, against FIU, isn't that kind of close to a no-hitter?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. But, again, you got circumstances, all that stuff. You got a lot of things to factor in and plug into the computer. You know, so I look at it from a lot of different ways, I guess. Right now it's clearly cloudy. How does that sound, okay?

Q. What is the biggest factor in deciding?

COACH FERENTZ: How they practice. And, you know, if one guy's just having a bad week, the other guy's having a great week, it's easy.

Q. If they're both having good weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: I'd probably do what I said earlier. If we were playing today, I'd probably go to Jake, if we were playing today.

Q. Do they both seem to be able to handle the situation, mentally?

COACH FERENTZ: They both did. We expected Rick too, and he did. Jake was the guy going through a little bit of a situation, you know, a traumatic situation, if you will. And he amped it up. So it was good.

Q. Do you ever get frustrated that there's so much attention on one position?

COACH FERENTZ: Again, those stats really don't mean a lot in our minds right now. No, because it's the nature of the position. I understand that totally. Pitchers are the most interesting thing in baseball, pitchers and guys that hit home runs. In football, it starts with your quarterbacks on most teams. That's the way it goes. There's a lot of ways to win. That's all we're focused on right now. Whatever gets us to the finish line, that's kind of what we're hoping to figure out.

Q. Do they seem like mentally they can handle it, juggling them?

COACH FERENTZ: Now, again, we're not trying to juggle them. We're just trying to do what's fair. Thus far I haven't seen it. Again, I can just go back most recently to last week. Jake really responded I think very well. I couldn't help but notice Stanzi when Jake was on the field. It's one of the things I was kind of peeking at there a little

bit. You know, I'd say the same about Ricky. He got yanked out of the game. "Yanked." Guys will like that one, right. That would be Y-A-N-K. So, yeah, we pulled him out of the game. That's subtler. So, he got yanked out of the game. He's into the game, and then when Jake came over to the sideline, he's the first guy congratulating him or one of the first guys.

So, I mean, that's what you're looking for. I think they're both -- they like each other. They enjoy each other. I think they respect each other. The reason they respect each other, they're both doing a good job for the team.

Q. Are you the one making the call?

COACH FERENTZ: Ultimately I do. I'm the guy getting fired. I'm the guy -- I have to answer to the media. So, yeah, it's ultimately my deal.

Q. You're doing this when you bring in the lefty, the righty?

COACH FERENTZ: Haven't thought about that. You're going a little too far with this baseball stuff. I think we're about ended, right? Thank you (laughter).

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