

**September 16, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Captains are the same as they've been. Louis Trinca-Pasat, Quinton Alston on defense, and Brandon Scherff and Mark Weisman offensively.

Injury-wise, we're hoping to get Macon Plewa back. We'll see how that goes. It's day-to-day right now. Then Riley McCarron is cleared so we'll get him back in the fold this week. Other than that, not much to announce there.

Then with Pittsburgh, obviously it's our first away trip this season. We'll travel on the road for the first time, which is a challenge in itself. Then the bigger challenge is playing Pitt. They're really playing well now, 3-0. Statistics show they're playing well on both sides of the football. They have a field goal kicker who is confident and competent.

It's going to be a big challenge offensively. They've got a big line that's very athletic and very well-coached. The running back is having a great season. Needless to say, they've got other backs that are very good, too.

They have an outstanding set of receivers, one in particular that's doing well. Statistics reflect what they are. They're a very good football team and we have a big challenge. We'll get to work on it today.

**Q. Have you been able to discern some of the reasons why the offense struggled the last couple weeks?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're just not playing well enough to win right now. Go back to work this afternoon.

**Q. Did Canzeri get hurt last week?**

COACH FERENTZ: He came down on that kickoff return and banged himself a little bit. We expect him to be ready today.

**Q. LeShun Daniels just didn't get in the rotation?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're trying to find the right rhythm right now and the right mix. Yeah, clearly we haven't found it yet. We're going to keep working on that.

**Q. LeShun out right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how this week goes. We're not ruling anything out. Again, we haven't found the right rhythm, right tempo. We'll just keep working at it.

**Q. One thing I noticed last week, you had about a minute left, you don't want to stop the clock for Iowa State, but maybe you can call a timeout. Take me through that.**

COACH FERENTZ: Not so much at that point, we weren't thinking about it. As they got closer to the field goal, we thought about it. I'm not sure what a big difference that was.

But it is a consideration. It also gives them more time to operate. They had three timeouts, too.

**Q. Is there a rule of thumb when you're in that spot? We want to save X amount of time for the offense or let's not let their offense rule?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's both. It's one versus the other. Pick your poison.

**Q. When you talk about the right rhythm and right tempo, what precisely does that mean?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, whatever it takes to move the ball. Sounds like that's the focal point now. We've had some really good drives this

year, some long drives, productive drives, but we haven't done it consistently enough. That was a big factor certainly I think more so in the third quarter.

To me, if you look at the game, we got totally outplayed in the second half. Third quarter we had a turnover and then didn't do anything with the ball during that quarter. Then the fourth quarter we couldn't get off the field defensively. To me, those were the two things if I summarized it what I would look at.

**Q. Teams are loading up trying to stop the run, clamoring for throwing the ball a little bit longer. Is that not there? I think you would consider that.**

COACH FERENTZ: It is. We've had some shots down the field, some near misses. Especially two weeks ago we had a couple in that game that maybe would have uncorked things a little bit. Long foul balls, they don't count.

It's something I think every team wants to do. I know the quarterback gets the focus on a lot of that stuff. It's usually a little bit more involved than that. Might be good coverage. Might be a receiver not reacting properly to the coverage, so the quarterback doesn't get what he anticipates.

It's like anything, a pretty intricate thing. But clearly we're not operating as well as we need to. Seventeen points the other day wasn't enough to win. That's the bottom line.

**Q. It appears that the zone read has been ineffective. One play where the nose guard was right there, missed by two blockers. Was that by intent?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, we don't have a play where we just let a guy go like that, especially on the interior. To your point, some people cut defensive linemen loose, over the guards, read off that. I've seen that several times. Colgate, to name one. Just saw Virginia Tech doing the same thing. Some people do that, but we don't have it in our plan. If you see that, that means something got miscommunicated or wrong reactions out there on the field.

**Q. Seems like there's a little bit of that every play.**

COACH FERENTZ: That's offensive football, too.

**Q. You want to blame one thing, but...**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. If you're not doing as well as you would like to do, typically there's going to be scrutiny, introspection, whatever. Usually it's a pretty intricate deal. If it's just one area or one point, then usually you see coaching staffs trying to address that, change personnel, et cetera. But I don't think that's the case right now. We just have to do better.

**Q. Were Powell and Willies okay Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they're both fine. Saturday, and as far as I know today. I think Scherff is okay today, too.

**Q. You have a great rush defense. What is the key to the matchup?**

COACH FERENTZ: I can't speak to their case too much. But in our case two of the teams that we played weren't as geared to trying to run the ball. Ball State, it's part of their package. The other two, probably more pass oriented.

Who we are right now, like rankings, three weeks into it I'm not sure what rankings count for other than obviously the four or five teams. Then statistics, at this point they tell you some things but they don't tell you everything.

These guys, Pitt is not throwing for much right now. There's a reason they haven't had to, but they can throw the ball. One thing for sure, they've demonstrated they can run it. They've run it against everybody, three teams.

When you look at the film, they're really impressive up front and then obviously the back's a really good player, too. They have a couple behind him that haven't had many opportunities. Quarterback, too.

**Q. You said after the game that icing the kicker is 50/50, is there a rule of thumb or is that a gut call?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's funny, I'm only smiling here 'cause I was driving home last night, whoever it was iced Philly's kicker, maybe I was hallucinating, it was like an instant replay, déjà vu all over again.

Yeah, that's one thing I haven't stayed up late thinking about. It hasn't woke me up. Probably should go back to '85. Didn't work in '85. Should probably just hang my hat on that one.

I don't think that was the turning point of the game.

**Q. I think you said after the UNI game you would really have to throw the ball down the field to loosen some things up. You mentioned maybe that's not working. Do you think that's a reason why the running game isn't clicking?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think it's that simple. We've had routes down the field. If they're not open, we're not going to throw them. It's one of these deals, so...

**Q. What are Powell and Willies missing that would make them bigger parts of this offense?**

COACH FERENTZ: They're young guys. Derrick is young chronologically. DP, as you remember, he's been here for a year basically. He missed the entire pre-season with a hernia surgery. He's working his way back in. We love the guy. He's a really talented player, high-energy guy. We'll work him in.

Nothing against either of those guys. It's just where they're at right now. They've got growth to make.

**Q. How do you think Anthony Gair did?**

COACH FERENTZ: Anthony did okay. His first real action where it counted. He's going to have to do well this week because he's going to be out there the first half.

He stepped in and did a competent job. Hopefully now he can build on that.

**Q. Do you see potential for Willies and Powell expanding their roles?**

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. It's not something we're trying to bring Derrick along. It's got to happen. The other part about it, he's playing right behind our best receiver right now. Tevaun has grown into a pretty good receiver.

It's a little bit more complex than that.

**Q. Do they have versatility to move to different receiver spots?**

COACH FERENTZ: At this point not a lot. But at some point that may have. Yeah, this is probably not the week or time for that.

**Q. You tried a couple different things to increase the pass-rush a little bit. How do you see that as far as those four guys?**

COACH FERENTZ: Historically that's kind of how we've been built. We did, believe it or not,

blitz a little bit the other day. It wasn't overly effective. I almost wonder a little bit in retrospect if our guys might have been a little paralysed by analysis. We have respect for their running ability. This quarterback runs a lot, too. But at some point you got to cut it loose a little bit and go.

The other part of football is coming out. It's not so much about sacks as it is about disruption. We didn't disrupt them enough early last week. Made it tough.

**Q. Do you see any similarities between what Coach Chyrst is running?**

COACH FERENTZ: Very, very similar. Was impressive at Wisconsin. Maybe more impressive now.

**Q. What have you seen from James Conner?**

COACH FERENTZ: A little bit. Mark is really more of a fullback converted into a running back. This guy is a pure running back, I would describe him as. He's a big back, too. He really does a lot of things very, very well.

It's going to be a real challenge. He's strong. He's fast. He had a good ability to pick holes, see holes. They're very big and very athletic up front. It's a good group, tough group to prepare for.

**Q. How did the series with Pittsburgh get made and why?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think there's a generic answer. Other than since I've been here, we've always had the philosophy of trying to play two BCS conference teams. It's not always worked out every year. But that's pretty much what we've done.

The other part is at least, I'll go on record, I'm not so sure it's the smartest thing to do to travel west. I'm not a big fan of that. We've done it, gotten back here at 5 or 6 in the morning a couple times twice. I'd just as soon not travel to the West Coast time zone. I'm okay with that for a bowl game, but it's an undue burden on anybody.

In a perfect world you would rather go where you recruit. But it's hard to check off all those things. We've played at Syracuse and Pittsburgh. At that time they were both in the Big East. Those were two teams that were available and attractive.

Scheduling is hard. I think that's why we're

playing nine games in the near future. I can see it going to 10, too. Scheduling has really become a tough thing to do.

**Q. You talked about recruiting Pennsylvania. You've gotten out of that area. Is it something you're still looking at?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. I kind of lost my interest when Shawn Lee went to Penn State. I don't blame him. I get it. It's really hard for us to get kids out of Pittsburgh or Western PA. It hasn't been productive for us. Probably better places for us to spend time.

**Q. When you identify your ideal offensive identity, how has that definition changed from O'Keefe to Davis?**

COACH FERENTZ: The comparison I'd give you, we've talked in here ample times about what kind of quarterback we're looking for. You look for one that's going to move the team, get it done. Say the same thing about running backs. Fred Russell, Shonn Greene.

So the bottom line is, one thing I'm firm on, I think we have to have the ability to be balanced, and we would hopefully play in a physical nature. We're not going to be a finesse offensive football team. Have the ability to run or pass. That could come out of a three-wide set, could come out of a one-wide set. I'm not as hung up on those things.

Probably part of that, you know, it's where you coach, too. You have to recruit to whatever your style is going to be. If you're recruiting, there's ebb and flow, which most places there is. I think you have to have some flexibility there. That's kind of the deal there.

Personally my preference is to be a balanced attack.

**Q. What was it about Iowa when you first came here?**

COACH FERENTZ: There was a job open in June. It was really random. I'm only laughing because it was probably the most -- I've been hired twice out of the blue, and both of them were just about as random as you could be.

This one I did call here. I got to Pitt late. I got there in June of 1980, so I missed spring ball. I had to finish up my teaching obligations. I got there in '80, June of '80. I got there before summer camp. It wasn't till after spring ball the next year that I thought like maybe I can do this. I don't know.

So usually coaches change jobs in the wintertime, December, January. Long story short, I had a two-year contract with my wife. She was going to support me for two years. This was open. Joe Moore gave me his blessings, so I applied.

My only intent was just to interview so I knew how to interview so when I had to go look for a job the next year, I'd have some clue what I was doing. That was the only reason I came out here. The rest is history.

I came out here, had no idea how good a place this was, the people that were here. It wasn't like it was some master plan. My goal was to stay at Pitt for another year. I was having the time of my life working with Joe Moore.

**Q. The targeting call on Saturday, I think people have a hard time interpreting the rule?**

COACH FERENTZ: My guess is yes.

**Q. The problem a lot of people have with the rule, they're reckless?**

COACH FERENTZ: Most people would agree, it's a hard rule to officiate. Hard to officiate. There are going to be a lot of mixed opinions. My feeling when it all started was when everybody in the stadium says, Whoa, that's when a guy should get tossed out. That's my personal feeling, personal commentary. A tough rule to officiate.

**Q. Did you tell Jordan to approach it differently?**

COACH FERENTZ: I thought he was trying to avoid targeting. That was my view of it. But it's easier said than done.

**Q. Jake in the past has shown toughness, stayed in the pocket, gotten hit. In the second half a couple times he seemed to be more bothered by the rush than usual, went down almost without contact. Does that draw any kind of concern?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. I didn't even see it that way. One time in particular there was nothing open, there was nowhere to go. He got down. I didn't see it him being restless on panicked. There was nothing there. That happens sometimes.

**Q. Are the penalties with the targeting rule just?**

COACH FERENTZ: The adjustment that was made, it's revealable now, I think that was a good step, me personally. Probably to me the next step is to review it during the week. Then the foul, that suggestion is what if a guy gets one in the first half. It's probably a done deal. It's just one of those deals.

It's one of those things, like a lot of bang-bang plays. It's open to interpretation. I think the intent of the rule is outstanding. To me when everybody in the stadium says, 'Whoa, look at that, that's targeting.' That's how I look at it. We saw one of those last year, helmet to helmet on a guy that didn't have a chance to defend himself. I get that.

It's a tough thing. It's the way it goes. You still have to play aggressively.

**Q. When Iowa State got its first touchdown, were you hoping they would review that when you took a timeout?**

COACH FERENTZ: Typically, at least as I understand it right now, you're probably wasting timeouts when you do. Anything close is getting reviewed. Sometimes you take that extra step, I guess.

**Q. Where do you sit with the Beathard experiment?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll keep talking about it, yeah. We'll see.

**Q. Did you think you might use him next week?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's a thought every week, for sure. It's a thought every week. Not the most prominent thought apparently, but it's a thought every week.

**Q. Was Mick supposed to take the field goal that Marshall took?**

COACH FERENTZ: We had some discussion on that, yeah. Marshall did a great job on that. I'm hoping that's a good thing for his confidence. Hopefully it will be.

It's like everything, it's clearly cloudy, I guess.

**Q. I know coaches don't live in the same world that players do. Quite a bit of negative culture coming their way. How do you tell them how to deal with it?**

COACH FERENTZ: This comes with any loss. If it's an in-state deal, amp it up times two, just like everything last week as well.

We all got to move on. Whether we win or lose, that's how it goes. We can worry about it out of season. What we really need to do now is move on. Pretty simple. Like every week, we need to worry about what we're doing and matching up against our opponent.

People that can't do that aren't going to do very well over the long haul. That's just how it is. Easier said than done. I understand that totally.

**Q. How do you handle it yourself?**

COACH FERENTZ: The same thing. It's the same thing. You got to move on. You got a day to bleed and a day to feel bad. To that point, our fans were outstanding Saturday. Three weeks in a row, great crowds, great enthusiasm. I know they're all feeling bad, too. Hopefully our players are more invested. For coaches, this is what we do. You're not human if it doesn't affect you. But you can't let it affect you for long. If you do, you're not going to be around long. That's one of those deals.

**Q. How is Greg Davis doing? Is he frustrated?**

COACH FERENTZ: If we were 500 yards a game, 35, 40 points a game, he'd be doing great. But we're not.

It's coaching. He's been around, too. He knows the drill.

**Q. You've been around Ken or whomever, not scoring enough points, you'll get negative feedback. You've been with Ken for so long, your review process is probably different than it is with Greg. How is it different?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's really not different at all. We considered a wide range of people in the job when Ken went to Miami. I like to think I'm pretty fortunate. I'm surrounded by just a great group of people on our staff, our support staff.

But Greg is an outstanding teacher. He's an outstanding human being. He's a solid person. If you coach, especially if you coach and have a résumé, a long career, you're going to go through highs, you're going to go through lows. If you don't go through the highs, you probably are in a different profession at some given point. But if

you're in it long enough, you're going to get your tail kicked. That's just the way it goes. That's part of the deal. If you can't deal with it, you probably have to do something else.

Greg is stellar. Unbelievable. I can go down the list of everybody on our staff. We've got outstanding coaches. If you play, it's the same way. You can't be a good player, I'm not suggesting I was ever a good player, but you can't stay in the game and compete if you're going to go home and cry every time you get beat. It doesn't work that way.

**Q. You mentioned statistics after three weeks. You look all over the country, there are teams getting many yards a game. Why is it so difficult right here right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: I can't answer it. All I know is that we needed 21 Saturday. That's the only stat I know. Or we had to hold them to 16. We didn't accomplish either of those. I've been here 16 years. Those are really the stats I worry about, how many points we give up and how many we get.

Really doesn't matter how you win, what kind of style of points you get. The objective is to win the game. We didn't get it done. Like I said, the magic number Saturday was 21. We came up short.

**Q. You mentioned you meet with Greg every day.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes.

**Q. How involved are you in the game plan?**

COACH FERENTZ: I spend more time in our offensive room. That's kind of where I hang out. They'll let me. So I'm totally in tune. Not like something is going on I'm not aware of.

**Q. Memories of last time you played Pitt?**

COACH FERENTZ: How good are they? I'm a coach, I have a sick mentality. I flash back to '08. That's the last time we were there. The '11 game was better. We had a chance to win one, dropped the other. The '11 one is better certainly. This will be the third head coach that I'll face at the University of Pittsburgh. Ironic, isn't it?

I feel like we faced Coach Chryst before because we have. It's just now we're wearing different uniforms. Looks very similar to a good

Wisconsin football team. That's our focus right now.

**Q. No memories from that fourth quarter whatsoever?**

COACH FERENTZ: I just liked the way it turned out. That's the day we did get more points than the opponent. We reached our goal that day. It was a good day. It wasn't easy. I remember the guy that was the first-round draft pick last year, he was a pain in the neck. Tough guy to block.

## **FastScripts by ASAP Sports**