

August 31, 2010



An Interview With:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Just a couple of things to follow up on Phil's comments about the ticket situation and our attendance. First of all, we are just really appreciative of our fans being so supportive. I talked to our players about that frequently; just that people have a lot of options. The economy is the greatest, certainly and people have a lot of options what to do with their time and money and we appreciate them coming and supporting the team. That is not something we take for granted.

Secondly, just following up on the weekend events, as Phil said, the dedication this weekend is certainly exciting. We'll have a lot of players from the 50s here and the '85 Rose Bowl team will have a reunion. It's quite an historical weekend from that standpoint.

Our captains this week are Adrian Clayborn, Karl Klug, Ricky Stanzi and Julian Vandervelde.

Injury front, Tarpinian, it's been reported he had a fracture in his hand, so he's returned to the practice field this past weekend. He's has a splint and a padding over the top of it, so it limits him a little bit.

I think it's already been well documented that Josh Koeppel was injured yesterday. Fortunately, on the big scope of things, I think it was an unfortunate accident obviously but he was very fortunate to walk away from it. He was taken to the emergency room and got back here from a function yesterday and I actually caught him leaving the building about 1:30. He was walking out of the building and saw him again this morning.

You know, not to make light of it, but it looks like he just walked out of our wrestling room a little bit. He's got a lot of scrapes, and as you might imagine, he's pretty sore right now, but the

good news is, everything checked out, X-rays, CT scans, all those types of things.

I don't think it's realistic to think he would play this week, but I think hopefully soon in the near future we'll have him back. The most important thing is he's healthy and ready to go and that's a big thing. Could have been a lot worse, certainly.

And then we have several guys, probably three or four guys that we'll watch during the course of the week, mostly soft tissue type injuries or joints, that type of thing, and I think all of them have a chance to make it for Saturday.

But overall we are pretty healthy and we'll see how the week pans out. I think the last other thing, just as far as our team goes, we have several first-year players that we are planning on playing at this point. Defensively a couple linebackers, James Morris, Christian Kirksey, we intend to play those guys, **C.J. on offense** and then our place kicker, Mike Meyers. Mike will be playing, also.

So those four guys are right now as of this point set to go and we have got another probably four to six guys that we are looking at. We'll just see how the week develops and take it a week at a time. But I think those guys have caught on pretty quickly and done some good things.

And last but not least, a couple words about Eastern Illinois. It's like any first game, where you are not 100% sure what to expect and I'm sure they feel the same way. They returned six starters each side of the football and then they have some new faces that we don't know a lot about that will be playing Saturday. So we'll be feeling them out a little bit just like they will be doing the same with us, I'm sure, you know, we'll go from there.

But certainly their program has great success, traditionally. Bob Spoo has done a tremendous job there and he was an outstanding coach in this conference, at Wisconsin and Purdue

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back in the 80s. He was a long time at Purdue before he went to Eastern Illinois. He did a great job at Purdue and has done a great job at Eastern Illinois. Both his coordinators have been there ten years plus, have great stability. I think they have won the conference three out of five years and participate in the FCS playoffs on a routine basis.

They are a well-coached football team, disciplined and they play hard. We expect a very tough contest. All we have to do is look back to last year's opener and I don't think we have to say much more than that just in terms of what's in front for us. It's good that we are finally in a game week. I think probably like everybody in the country, we are probably eager to get started here and find out where we're at and we'll go from there. With that, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Has Trent Mossbrucker established himself as kicker or is that something you're going to --

COACH FERENTZ: We are going to go through the week and make a decision probably at the end of the week right now but it's been pretty close with competition. I think Mike Meyers plugs in on the kickoff, he'll be doing our kickoffs it looks like right now and he's still in the race a little bit, at field goal, as well.

Q. How about your returners? Who are you looking to put back there for that, kickoffs, especially?

COACH FERENTZ: We will probably start out with Derrell Johnson-Koulianos and Keenan Davis there and in the punt game, it will be Colin Sandeman now and Marvin McNutt will back him up.

Q. Anything new on Brandon Wegher at this point?

COACH FERENTZ: No, absolutely nothing. So two thoughts there. I'm hopeful that he's going to class on a routine basis. As far as I know he is. He's in class and working for it. And then secondly -- we are thinking long term now rather than short term and as I said before, there's really -- I haven't had any indication what he'll do and I wouldn't want to try to project it. We are in the season now and have to move forward with the team but our thoughts are still with him.

Q. Have you spoken with Brandon recently?

COACH FERENTZ: It's been over a week.

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Q. I guess senior quarterback coming back in Ricky Stanzi, what appears to be pretty solid depth at wide receiver and tight end, do you feel like with your passing attack that this will be one of the more explosive ones you've had in recent years?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we have a chance to be better in the passing game, and you know, when you have that kind of experience, you hope that's a by-product of the good production.

So for the most part, I think the receivers have practiced well and I include the tight ends with that group.

I think our quarterbacks have done a pretty good job, too. So our goal is to be balanced and hopefully we'll get good production in the passing game.

Q. You've spoken at length already about the lessons from last year's opening game. Do you get the sense that players are talking about it as much as you are?

COACH FERENTZ: We will know more as the week goes on. I think everybody, up until the weekend at least, everybody has been focused on the overall season and doing a good job with our preseason practices.

Now it's good to get into a game, a week routine, and we have not talked great length specifically about their program and team. Did a little bit on the weekend but certainly we will pick that up. I'm hopeful we're a little bit better prepared this time around.

Q. Is Christian Ballard more of a tackler and end in the first game or is that still up in the air?

COACH FERENTZ: He'll probably play both but our intent would be to start him outside and start Mike Daniels inside. Mike had a real good camp and followed up a real good spring with a good camp.

Q. How has he responded making the transition going back?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a real versatile guy mentally and physically and I think he'll be just fine out there. So I think it's probably going to be part of our rotation throughout the season, I could foresee that, just because of the way Mike Daniels has come on. I think we have got some good

flexibility and that's a healthy thing.

Q. What does that say to you about Christian's versatility, being able to play him and being able to play tackle when you need him to?

COACH FERENTZ: I tell you, I was really impressed a year ago spring when he moved inside. There's a Kodak Moment a year ago spring, not this past spring where he and Clayborn both jumped down inside there during one of our practices. We had a couple injuries and those guys, without anybody saying anything, jumped in there so we could keep going. That was a pretty good indication they were both thinking right. They have been that way ever since. Christian Ballard has just been very accommodating and works hard where he lines up. If we needed Adrian Clayborn inside, I'm sure he would do the same thing.

Q. When that decision was made to move Ballard down and not Clayborn, was there talk of moving Clayborn down?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. Just that's the way it worked. I don't know if we are that smart to take credit for it. It's just how it worked out.

Q. What's the status of Shaun Prater? Does he have a chance --

COACH FERENTZ: He would probably play pretty well on that side, Clayborn would, I think.

As far as -- we are hopeful. We'll see what happens.

Q. Can you talk about Greg Castillo a little bit last year, he looked inexperienced at times but really seems to have come on.

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's eager and older now. He's had a lot of time and repetition with the first and second team defense. Greg is a real sharp guy, a very detailed guy, and he'll give himself every chance to play well out there. Certainly I think the experience level is a little bit higher now than it was a year ago, so we are optimistic about his play.

Q. How is Adam Gettis coming along?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's had a good camp. He's had a good camp and I'm hopeful it will reflect. The big thing for him, he played pretty well at times last year when he was in there, the Arizona game, early in the season, the first couple three weeks of the season, more so.

The big, big thing, the challenge for him has been consistency. And that's been the big thing we noticed since camp got going, really seemed like he had really leveled out his play and was doing a good job consistently. So I think we are optimistic he's going to have a real good couple of years here.

Q. Are you settled with your five starters on the offensive line, and do you feel there's still possibility for movement and shuffling?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we are fairly settled and injuries always play into everything. We have a couple of guys nicked up right now so we'll see how the week plays out. But the picture becomes more clear I think with each day; that being said, though, we are still trying to decide a few things. But I think we have a pretty good idea who our top seven are for sure, and then after that it's a little bit cloudier.

Q. How about Zusevics, talk about his development. Is there where you thought he would be at this stage of his career?

COACH FERENTZ: Not sure I knew where I thought he would be -- we knew he would have an opportunity to play. That's why we recruited him. The big question, both he and Adam are not the same but they are similar in that they are both quote, unquote, undersized, and when we recruited both of them. And they have worked hard throughout the years and they are both big enough and strong enough I think to compete well in our conference.

They both have displayed the consistency I think on the practice field that you're looking for. So Adam -- or Zeus did a good job back in the spring, and I think he's just continued that right on through with this past couple of weeks, three weeks.

Q. How do you take with this kind of receiver depth, how do you balance that with your general philosophy? Usually pound it out first. Do you alter it a little?

COACH FERENTZ: In a perfect world we would like to be very balanced. That's our goal. We'll go into every game thinking that and how that plays out and that will determine what we end up doing. In a perfect world we would like to have that opportunity and we do have that opportunity this

year. It's realistic to think that could happen. To me we are playing our best offense when we have capabilities of doing both.

Q. What has Fiedorowicz shown you in camp so far?

COACH FERENTZ: He's just done a good job. He came in with pretty good stills, and he's been able to learn rapidly enough to envision him playing and playing well on the field. It's one thing to throw a guy in there, but also you want him to go in there and have success and be able to compete at a good level. We are trying to win football games right now, so we are not just trying to get somebody's feet wet.

He's done a nice job making the adjustment, and hopefully we can put him in situations where he'll be able to handle what's in front of him and then just start building from there hopefully.

Q. Is Marcus Coker coming back?

COACH FERENTZ: He's still in rehab. He's starting to run now. They are going to X-ray it this week, I believe on Friday. So we are getting closer but we are still really a week, two weeks away from him being involved full speed.

Q. How have you handled that, not knowing what he was going to do; how did you handle that I guess in camp and practice?

COACH FERENTZ: Whoever is out there is practicing. That's really basically what it is. Because as Andrew is talking about our receiver depth, I'm thinking about our running back depth that we are all so worried about, the logjam over the months. So I hope we haven't jinxed ourselves there, there.

Anyway. Whoever is out there is practicing and I think all of the guys have practiced really well, you have Jewel Hampton and Adam Robinson certainly, and Poggi and then De'Andre Johnson has gotten a lot of work and the fullbacks have rotated through there, too. We have not had -- with Brandon Wegher not being there and with Marcus Coker being out, that deep, deep pool of guys kind of got shelved real fast. When you're practicing, it makes it tougher.

Q. Will you see how Saturday goes with Robinson and Paki O'Meara and decide on younger guys after that?

COACH FERENTZ: Right now I think we are probably better suited just to hold him out, and that's our plan, at least. We'll see what happens.

Q. You were saying after the kids day scrimmage that the kicking can use a little work.

COACH FERENTZ: It got a little better last week, which is good news. Through the end of the week and through the weekend, I thought we were a little better. It's all very close right now with all of the guys and we'll just see what happens here.

Q. Have you given Brandon Wegher any kind of timetable about when he needs to decide about this?

COACH FERENTZ: No. Not at all. I think it's pretty obvious right now we have to move on; it's pretty obvious from him not being here, he has no intentions of playing right now. So we'll just cross the bridge whenever we get to it if we get to it.

Q. You mentioned Derrell at kids day as a guy who had shown you the leadership you were looking for. Did that continue through camp, and is that something you're looking for as things progressed?

COACH FERENTZ: He had performed really well through that point, and you know, he's had some injury issues through that time so he's missed some time which has deterred his progress. But that being said, he's got a good experience level right now and when he's been out there, he's been working hard and doing well. So we expect him to play well, yeah. We expect him to play well.

Q. Can you talk about Lance Tillison, I believe he's still a walk-on at this point?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. He's a good story, he left a year ago -- that's not a good story. But the fact that he chose to come back, just didn't work out the way maybe he had been led to believe it going to work out where he went. So he came back and joined us in the spring and Fred Mims was really helpful with him getting back and getting his feet on the ground and helping him with his academics and working through that because of the transfer and all of those type of things.

To Lance's credit he's worked extremely

hard and he's eligible to play this year. This will be his last year. On top of it, he incurred a couple wrist issues and hand issues in the spring and he has a little one he's dealing with right now. But he's had a great attitude. He really has been a great addition. It's good to get him back. And he's backing up Jeremiah Hunter right now and might play on special teams, might be on some substituted defensive packages prior to leaving. It's good to have him back on the team.

Q. He was playing kind of linebacker two years ago --

COACH FERENTZ: You know, Lance has always been kind of in that in-between area. He's been really big for a safety and maybe not quite big enough to be a linebacker. I think he's plenty big to be a linebacker now. He's just kind of always been in that middle range, if you will. I think he's where he belongs, personally, and I think he's doing a really good job with it.

Q. More than a year after Hampton's ACL; is there a magic formula you have in your mind? I know ACLs have changed over the years.

COACH FERENTZ: I think maybe in the old days it was an issue, but most players that we have had that have had to have those surgeries have come back stronger than before they left; and that's the one good thing about getting them up. But it's been our experience, and I think based on what we have seen of him at practice, it looks like that's not going to be an issue at all. I think things have really improved certainly from 20 years ago.

Q. Would you say he's stronger than he was?

COACH FERENTZ: Most guys come back from them stronger, and, you know, if he's not, you can fool me. He looks older and stronger than he did in 2008, which you would expect. He's been training hard and looks good. I think he's here to play.

Q. Lonny and Jason Olejniczak are probably the big names out of Decoroah to come here, but Brett Van Sloten is coming on as a red-shirt freshman, does he have a chance to do something?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he does. Brett did a nice job working hard as a red-shirt player. He's extremely coachable and competitive and he's grown into that body. He has a big frame and

had that in high school, certainly. We are really pleased with thinks progress and great attitude and I think he's got a real good future.

Q. Did you learn anything from the opening game last year in terms of how to prepare a team for a I-AA opponent?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. We handled it better against Maine probably and Montana, going back, looking backwards, if I'm leaving somebody out. Not that those games are easy. I think the moral of the story is there are just not a lot of easy games and if you go into a game thinking it's going to be anything less than competitive, you're going to suffer for that.

I'm not saying that we did that last year but as it turns out, we played a team that was very good and they were ready to play and we -- I don't think we looked great. Just fortunately we improved as the year went on. You know, they were an excellent football team a year ago, and we expect Eastern Illinois to be a really good football team to be coming in here on Saturday.

Q. Do you hope you might get out to a bigger lead so you can play more guys?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope we get off to a big lead in every game, but I don't know how realistic that is. That would be great. But just the game will dictate.

There are a lot of things we are concerned about right now, also; the first game, a lot of new players out there at a lot of positions. You're just never quite sure what's going to happen and how thing are going to materialize. My biggest hope is we come out and play good, sound football and play clean football where we are not doing something to hurt ourselves: Turnovers, give up a big play, just leave somebody go unblocked or uncovered. Those are the types of things you worry about in the first game a little bit.

Q. How has Adam Robinson responded to having Jewell Hampton back? I know he had competition last year, too.

COACH FERENTZ: I have seen those guys interact similar to what Wegher and Robinson did last year. That's football. You know, if we get three good players, we would find a formula or we will find a formula for three players at one position. Our guys have all been good that way. We will let it play out but the dynamics I think have been just

fine.

Q. Is there a similar growth in Adam --

COACH FERENTZ: The positive with all of the stuff was that everybody is going to be a year older and more experienced, all three of those guys are similar in that they played their first years, obviously one was a true freshman. But the good news is all of them were going to be more experienced this season. So I think we are seeing that both Jewell and Adam. Adam has practiced very well and we are all expecting to have a good season.

Q. Has the team through the summer and now camp handled all of the outside expectations good in your opinion?

COACH FERENTZ: All I can do is judge what I see on the field and see around the building what have you, and we see a lot of them around the building, at least up until last week before school started. And it seems like we have had very few bumps in the road, guys being late for something, a meeting, or missing an appointment or something like that.

For me, for the most part, the signs of people thinking right have been there -- going back to January, overall, the focus seems to be there, and you know, as I said back in August, early August, I think our older guys, the guys that have been out there and know how tough it is to win; I think they have a little better sense of things and I'm hoping the younger guys get that appreciation. But I have not seen anything that's really overly alarming at this point.

Q. Have you had a voice when it comes to the discussions on the Big Ten realignment, have you been given a timetable or anything?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I just -- I really haven't had much voice on it. I don't know if any of the coaches have. I haven't been worried about that. Whatever happens is going to happen as far as the timing. I would imagine it's going to happen fairly quickly because I think of a guy like John Streif, I'm sure he's got like 15 hotels on speed dial right now.

There are a lot of logistical work that has to get done. So I think just from a practicality standpoint, my guess is that we will hear about it pretty soon and it will be a new story and then we'll move on. I doubt any players or coaches are too worried about it right now because we have 12

weeks looking at us right now that are more important than what happens big picture wise.

Q. Morris and Fiedorowicz, do you see them breaking in as special teams or position players?

COACH FERENTZ: Playing more, the defensive guys especially, special teams. Certainly with C.J., it's a little different with tight ends, we'll play two or three of them at a time. So he may have an opportunity to be out there on scrimmage plays. In a perfect world, if you have a tight end playing, you want to get him involved in special teams, too. We will try to make it worth their while to be red-shirt or green shirt or whatever you want to call it, playing.

And similar I guess, looking at the linebackers like A.J. Edds when he was a true freshman, we tried to get him out there as much as we could.

Q. Is C.J. Fiedorowicz a guy who is physically and athletically blessed with whatever you could live with, the freshman mistakes he is bound to make?

COACH FERENTZ: C.J.? We have made that decision based on what he's done that we think he can -- he'll make some mistakes and we'll have a lot of guys make mistakes. But hopefully we can work around those and I think he'll do a good job based on what we have seen in practice. I think he'll do a good job.

Q. What's your thoughts on having the 1985 team be recognized this weekend and just their place in history?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's great, the unfortunate part, because I was here in '85 and what a great group of guys and see a lot of them around frequently. The unfortunate part, I'm going to miss all that stuff, because we are working, unfortunately.

But I think it's fantastic and it's one of the nice things, we have such great traditions here and so many great teams that have done so many good things and have continued to do things. It's really nice I think and it ties up with Coach Fry being here this weekend, too, which is great. I know he'll enjoy it and Coach Brashier is still in town. So it's all good.

It's all good and it was a unique opportunity last year, it was great having Chuck

Longback here to be an honorary captain for the Michigan game because he's been working and had that opportunity. I know he had a wonderful weekend and got to reunite with a lot of his teammates and that will happen this weekend even in larger numbers. That's fantastic.

Q. That team -- how did they cope with everything that happened to them?

COACH FERENTZ: My memory is not that good, but it just seems like that season started -- I think some things I remember. I remember it was 14-3 or something like that at half-time. We opened up with Drake. I think we scored right at the half to go up by our second touchdown, and we played better in the second half.

You know, that team, they had a good group of leaders, senior leadership base was tremendous, and they just, you know, really did a good job all season long and then we had that disappointing loss in Columbus and came back and had a pretty resounding win the next week. When they did face disappointment, they certainly responded in a very positive way. It was a pretty convincing win in Kinnick the next week, against a team that had just tied Michigan, if I remember correctly.

And that really spoke of the character I think of that football team. You would wonder why they are champions; that was a pretty good Kodak Moment I think. That's a challenge for any football team, to keep the focus where it needs to be, and then when you do -- if you do get derailed, at least be able to come back from it and recover and respond in positive way. Certainly we can all learn lessons, we as players and coaches can learn lessons from that team and probably any of the championship teams that have come through here.

Q. Any similarities between this team and that team?

COACH FERENTZ: Way too early to tell. We have got some good players and we are thrilled about that and that team had some good players, you think about three first rounders, Chuck Long, Mike Haight, Ronnie Harmon, all outstanding players; they were seniors. So we have some guys that are up front and trying to help do what they can. But there are so many steps along the way and so many things that have to happen. That team got it done and mastered it, and that's a challenge that's ahead for us right now, or any team.

Q. What about Allen Reisner and what is he capable of?

COACH FERENTZ: I think Allen fits right in there. He's different than those two guys but he's really quietly done a good job here already, and he's practiced well this camp, as you might expect. The first thing I would say, we had to play him too early, talking about guys who were going to play, I think C.J. is ready to go but we had to throw him out there in the field in '07 before he was ready. We just ran out of players. That's unfortunate. He made the most of it. He really competed well and he's caught up physically and he very quietly has played very well. I've talked many times about, you know, Bulaga being out last year and Reiff stepping in and doing a great job, and Allen did the same thing with Tony Moeaki was out. So I think he'll play well for us and we are excited about that and Brad Herman has done a good job behind him. We feel good about those two guys certainly.

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