

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Real quick, like always, I want to thank everybody for being on and covering Penn State football.

Some quick review of the Wisconsin game. The positives: I thought it was impressive we were able to go on the road in a very hostile environment, noisy, rainy, 11:00 a.m. kick, and felt like we were prepared for all of it.

Felt like our guys willed it to happen with their mentality and approach. I thought we played really good complementary football. Obviously we won the turnover battle and the explosive play battle, the two most important statistics in football.

Offensively what we were able to do in the second half obviously was a real positive. We got to be able to do that for four quarters. Obviously punting I think had a huge impact on the game if you look at offense compared to offense in the first half, you look on the field position, drive start.

It probably doesn't make sense if you don't look at punting and how that played apart in the game.

On that note, congratulations to Jordan Stout being a Big10 special teams player of the week. He had a huge, huge impact kickoffs and special teams -- excuse me, and punt.

Then I thought our defense played championship level defense all day long, so that was great.

Opportunities for growth: Obviously consistency on field goals and PATs. That's snap, hold, and kick. Couple times there we did not have the laces; doesn't matter. At the end of the day we got to make the kick, but it's more than just a kick. That's protection. I think that showed up obviously with our block kick. It's the protection, the snap, the hold, the kick, all of it. So we got to get that cleaned up.

Two-minute defense. You get a turnover, get down



immediately, they got a strip there. They get a new first down. We got to get down immediately, and obviously we can do a better job of defending our sidelines, especially when they don't have timeouts available.

So that's something we'll talk about this week, and then four-minute offense so we don't put our defense in that position. We can end the game on our terms.

So that was the general notes.

For Ball State, obviously got a lot of respect for Coach Neu and what he's been able to do there at Ball State. You're talking about 21 starters returning with 16 super seniors. I think that's the fourth most in the country. 16 super seniors coming back from a MAC championship team.

So it's going to be a tremendous challenge. We look forward to the opportunity. Kevin Lynch on offense is doing a really good job. I think Coach Neu has an influence there as well. Those guys do a great job offensively. You look at what they were able to do.

And Tyler Stockton, their defensive coordinator, someone I been tracking for a long time, I think has got a real bright future in the industry. I know he's got some connections with Coach Dex, as well, Coach Pointdexter.

And then their special teams coordinator, Coach Dougherty, is doing a good job for them as well. Going to be a real challenge. It's a tremendous opportunity. We want to get better. We found a way to be 1-0 last week, and we got to improve and correct some things and clean some things up this week and do everything we possibly can to be 1-0 again.

And then look forward to getting back together with you after the game.

Q. Did you have a chance to take a closer look at the targeting call on Ellis Brooks, and what are the thoughts? More broadly speaking, how tough is it to teach tackling now with the ways the rules are written? It looks like a kid could ejected for incidental contact.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think you have a combination



of things there that you brought up. So you have the reduction in tackling in practice mandated by rules from an NCAA perspective, so that makes it challenging.

And then you have the rules of how targeting is really being officiated. Where I think it's changed there really was not targeting on a ball carrier unless you use basically the top of your helmet or use your helmet as a weapon like the old spearing rules.

I understand what we're trying to do and making sure we do everything we can to protect the student athletes No. 1, and protect the sport No. 2 as well. I think there is just going to come a point where -- I don't know what you tell the defensive guys.

Specifically to Ellis', the thing we're going to do a better job of is making sure that our guys are wrapping up and looking the tackle in, because you can have contact with the face mask and maybe just the front of your helmet. But whenever you turn your head down and when you throw a shoulder, when you throw a shoulder, which is what he was doing in my opinion, when you do that it's just natural for the head to turn.

But if you use proper tackling fundamentals, that should take care of that. I think it's one of those calls that could go either way. If they didn't call it, I think people would understand that. I think if you do call it you're essentially making some, I think, changes in the way the rule had been officiated in the past when it came to a ball carrier.

So it's one of those calls. I get it. If I was wearing the officials' hat and not being biased; as the Penn State head coach I probably would not have called it.

But I get it. I get it for the reasons I stated before, protecting the student athletes and the game. I do think there is going to need to be probably at the end of the season a discussion where we get coaches and officials and the AFCA involved and really just sit down and talk it all through, with the doctors as well, and make some decisions.

Because I know last night I think there was a bunch of targeting game calls in that game last night. I think it was between Louisville and Ole Miss. Bunch of targeting calls that were similar.

The other thing that's going to be interesting is are we ever going to call it on the offensive guy? You see offensive guys lowering their helmet, and I have yet to see that call. So it's interesting. I'm not criticizing. I'm not arguing. It's a challenging thing right now for our game, and I think there is going to have to be continued discussions about it. If

that's fair. I hope that's fair.

Q. Jake Pinegar was your primary kicker last year. He did travel. You said he was available, but he didn't handle the kicks he had a year ago. Was that a matter of Stout beating him out during camp or is it something else? What's the plan with him moving forward?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's more than a fair question. Yeah, it really came down to camp. I think I say this you guys all the time and I don't know if you always believe me, but each position, whether it's the starting quarterback or the starting kicker, you compete for it every year, compete for it ever camp, compete for it every week.

We track everything. Literally every kick, the consistency, the accuracy, the snap, the hold, the location. Every competitive one-on-one, wide receiver, DB rep, we track it all. We have win rates, we have field percentage rates, were hang time or punts and kicks and distance and all those things.

Based on all the numbers of training camp, he won the job. Now, obviously it's a lot on his plate. You're talking about all three things. We spent a lot of time talking to national kicking gurus of how you do you handle that? How does the practice look? What are the reps that he's taken in practice? What do we need to do to put him in the best position to be successful?

So obviously we won't make that determination off one game. Got to get those things cleaned up. There is no doubt about it. I am also very, very proud of him because some guys wouldn't be able to handle that well. That would seep into the kickoff, into the punting.

The guy was the special teams player of the week in the Big10, so I think he took the right approach. Something I'll talk to the team about today in the team meeting. We talk about six seconds at a time, being your best one play at a time, and no matter what happens at the end of that play you move onto to the next one and do it again mentally, physically, and emotionally. I thought Jordan did a great job of that.

That's how we got here. Jake Pinegar still has a tremendous future. We are going to need him at some point this year as well. I know he's approaching it that way.

By the way, I like this speaker up here. It's much easier to hear. Thank you to the Penn State comm staff.

Q. Two-part question for you. Do you believe in trap games, and I've noticed that your weekly tweet has

changed from the name of the team you're playing to just 1-0 over and over again. Is there a messaging change there? What's the reasoning behind that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you. Two good questions. So trap games, yeah, I believe in teams playing inconsistent because they either look forward, look back, get caught up in praise, get caught up in criticism, don't have the correct amount of respect for the opponent or the process.

So that's why I think you guys know almost to the point where it's maybe a little crazy our routine and process is really important to me. That's why we won't talk about anything else but the game at hand.

As you know, around here we get a lot of questions about a certain game that we have every year, not about an opponent but a certain game. We also get a bunch of questions about a certain opponent every year.

I just think those things lead to the wrong approach by a group of young men, so we try to avoid that.

To answer your question, I do believe in trap games if you're sending mix messages. If you're inconsistent in your approach. And it's subtle things, little subtle things that you say in the press conference that the fans and the players pick up on, that your staff picks up on. It's subtle things about your demeanor and approach out at practice, whether it's a conference game or out of conference, on the road or whatever, ranked opponent or not.

It's subtle things that people pick up on. So I try to make sure that we don't do that and that message is consistent so whether they go down and they're getting gear from our equipment people, that there is no cracks in it. There is consistency. Same thing in the training room. Same with our coaches and staff and so on.

So that is to answer the first question.

The second question is: Really the message hasn't changed. So in the past I would say Wisconsin 75 times and Ball State 75 times because the message was about our entire focus needs to be on this game, this opponent, and being 1-0.

The problem is our Penn State fans understand that, the media understands that, but the opponent that we're playing that maybe follows me for the week doesn't, so they think face a slight or they think it's a shot or something.

So it's really the exact same message, and I never mean to seem disrespectful to an opponent ever. I have

tremendous respect for the University of Wisconsin, tremendous respect for Ball State, tremendous respect for every opponent, every University on our schedule.

So it's more just about I don't want other people misinterpreting what we're talking about.

Again, no matter what you do, people are going to find ways to complain. They say, Oh, he's saying he's already saying they're 1-0 last week. I wasn't. Obviously I think as the season goes on it makes a little bit more sense to people, but I'm just trying to find ways to be as concise and clear with our message most importantly for our players, our program, and our fans, but also to try to eliminate some of the billboard material or what other people may misinterpret.

The reality is if you want to find a reason to be angry and mad, people are going to find it no matter what you do or say.

Q. The scheduled tweets can get some people.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that was the plan. That was is the plan. I was trying to get you.

Q. I wanted to ask about your left guard. We saw a lot of Eric Wilson in the second half. Do you feel like you have a solution there and how did Wilson grade out?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we thought Eric played well. Whigan did some good things, too. But we'll decide that this week based on last week's game, which I think your evaluation is fair, and then obviously what we do this week as well.

So combination of those two things to determine who will start or who will play more on Saturday.

Q. In light of the --

JAMES FRANKLIN: Mike are those seashells over your right shoulder?

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Where are they from? Jersey Shore? Delaware beaches?

Q. Probably Ocean City, Maryland mostly, although it's a variety of places maybe. I'm not even sure about that actually. In light of the practice limitations, full pad practice limitations you've talked about, I thought that on Saturday the parts of the game that I thought would be hard to drill and get good at given those

limitations you were pretty good at. I didn't see a lot of missed tackles; stuff like blitz pick up was good. When their runningback got to the second level you got him on the ground. So do you agree, and have you figured anything out about how to coach that stuff and drill that stuff to get good at it?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's a good question, especially early in the season. Obviously the NCAA keeps making changes that we have to adjust to, and you see around college football that can be challenging early on for people.

So we made some adjustments during training camp this year that I thought were helpful on defense and on special teams, which I think showed up for us. Whether that's a little bit more live work on special teams, whether that is a little bit more live work when we can based on the rules in practice, we did a little bit more of that, and then we also had a specific drill that we had not really done in the past. We had done it individual but not in a team setting that we added this year that I thought was really valuable for us.

Not going to get into specifically what the drill was because I do think it's something that we're doing that maybe others aren't, the way we're actually implementing it into practice, but I think your point is a good one. We were able, except for the one, to clean up a lot of the things that you see early in the season in games, whether it's missed tackles, substitution issues, burning timeouts unnecessarily, things like that that show up in games early in the season, special teams blunders.

Again, excluding our two missed extra point and field goals, I thought for the most part we did a pretty good job of that. I appreciate the question and comment, Mike.

Q. I imagine this is going to be a similar answer to the (indiscernible) question.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I see all will Yankees stuff.

Q. Yeah, got some of Yankees stuff there.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Did you see any first pitch at Yankee stadium?

Q. I did.

JAMES FRANKLIN: One of the better opening pitches that you probably have seen.

Q. Yeah, it was impressive.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you.

Q. There has been some bad ones; certainly wasn't one of them.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Q. I wanted to ask about the personal fouls on the punt coverage. Is that a similar thing to the targeting thing where it looks to the layperson like he's making a really good play on a kid who didn't call a fair catch and he doesn't want to hit him make a move, but they've called it once and he did a similar thing the second time. How do you address that with the kid, with the player? And do you feel that's something that the conference needs to address or the NCAA or whoever?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I think it's a good question. It's a little bit like -- I don't know if you saw, I sent it out to the team last week. Tom Brady was in an interview talking about that he doesn't necessarily agree with some of the rules now in the NFL on defensive football where a quarterback would throw the ball over the middle and put the receiver at risk and then the defensive player gets the penalty.

But the quarterback should have never threw and put his receiver at risk in the first place, so it leads to some bad football. And I would make the argument that if you want the protection, then you should call for the fair catch.

Obviously there is a fine line to that because you don't want to put the player at risk, but they have a responsibility to protect themselves as well with the fair catch. The way I felt like that rule has been interpreted in the past is you got to give them an opportunity to catch it, and once they catch it, then you can hit them.

I thought it was a bang, bang play. Again, one of those plays that could be interpreted either way. We're not upset with AJ because the way we teach is once the hands go up, we want them to shoot. Obviously the way it was officiated on Saturday we have made some adjustments to how we're coaching it, but AJ did it exactly the way we coach it to be done.

The second one he was clearly blocked in the back into the returner, so that's why that flag was picked up.

But I think your point is a fair one. Again, if you want the protection after the catch, then you should go fair catch. But a returner should never be hit before the ball gets there. And I thought it was catch, hit, which I think is football.

So again, I think when you're talking about player safety and protecting the players, and if it's in that gray area, they're probably always going to lean on the side of player safety, so I get that, too.

Again, it's back to one of those conversations that I think we have to be careful, or as a defensive player what are you really supposed to do? If he breaks down, let's him catch it, and then the guy goes for 80 then we're screaming at the kid that he didn't do his job.

It's a fine line in between the two. The other thing I would say, you also see like the quarterback running out of bounds but then right before he turns out of bounds he sticks his foot in the ground and runs over the defensive player, but if the defensive player hit him right there, they probably call him.

So it's just a tough spot that we're in in football, and I think right now the approach and the mentality is do everything we possibly can for player safety, but it puts the defensive guys in a tough position as well, because if it you go in and you're hesitant then you're putting the defensive guys at risk, too.

That's coming from a guy with on offensive background.

Q. Along those lines then, do you believe that targeting should lead to an automatic ejection or would you like to see that modified?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, there was a bunch of discussions about that in the off-season, and I think what they did is they actually did do that, like a year ago, correct, where the replay official can overturn that?

So I think that's already really happened. It's not an automatic disqualification. The replay guy can take that off. I do think your point is a fair one, that there is different types of targeting, but I do think they've done some pretty good jobs allowing the replay official to either put it on or take it off, and that wasn't the case when we first put the rule in.

Q. From there, we talked to Noah Cain early. He mentioned how he had an opportunity to workout with Ezekiel Elliott but missed it to take a Spanish test. One, what does that say about him, and two, for you, who's the coolest athlete you ever worked out with?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, yeah, Noah has been a model Penn State student athlete since he arrived on campus. He's crushed it in the classroom. Really is doing extremely well in the classroom. I think he has a chance to get a master's degree if he chooses to do that, which I

hope he does.

And I love the fact that he had an opportunity to work out with somebody like that. He's got a lot of respect Ezekiel and so do I.

But in terms of who I got to work out with, you know, I actually got a pretty cool picture. I think we post it a few years ago. When I was in this high school, Ron Jaworski had a training facility by my house, and there is a picture of me and I'm holding a football and Ron is kind of coaching me up on this clinic he had at this workout facility by my house.

Obviously growing up where I grew up with the Eagles and all those types of things, so that's probably the most impressive guy that I got a chance to work out with as a player, which is pretty cool.

Ron is still doing great things in the Philadelphia area, for the city, for the community, which is great to see.

What's the trophy for?

Q. Which one?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The one over your right over of your shoulder.

Q. From high school.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You?

Q. From a basketball championship.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Awesome. Love it.

Q. Ji'Ayir Brown, what did you see in him when you recruited him, what did he do in camp to win the job, and how good can he be?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah I think the thing that stood out to me right way when I recruited Tig, and he's just an awesome kid. He's always got a smile on his face. He's super appreciative of his time here. Very proud of his time at Lackawanna, but also very appreciative of what he has here at Penn State. His mom is great.

I remember going to a home visit and we went to a soul food restaurant in Trenton, New Jersey not far from where my dad worked growing up. One of the things that stood out to me that I think is telling is how many family members were there, how many people from the community were there. His high school coach, Pop Warner coach were all there, and they just all love Tig.

That's the type of guy he is. You love to coach him. He's got a really good way about him to be one of the guys with his teammates, but also has a really good way, a respectable, coachable, fun way to be around coaches and adults as well.

I just see him getting better. He was a guy when we recruited him Lackawanna had played him at corner, so you saw him I think at corner his first year and a little bit at safety, almost slash outside linebacker second year, so he had a lot of the traits.

What I love about Tig as well a bunch of guys is he came to camp. He came to camp and earned it. So I love that as well. Guys that aren't afraid to compete and he came here and earned it. Was under-recruited out of high school for a number of reasons, but his junior college coaches, they just spoke the world about his character and the type of football player he is, and that's really who he's been.

I think there is still a lot left if the tank for him. I think there is still a lot of room for improvement. Saw a few flashes last year. I think you'll see more this year as the year goes on. Really proud of him, really excited about him. I'm glad he's on our team.

I think you guys, you and the fans, will really enjoy getting to know him, because he's a special young man and his mom did a great job raising him.

Q. You talked after the game about how Sean rallied the offense in the seconds half. How have you seen him improve in terms of his preparation, his focus, and his attention to detail with the revamped offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think he's always really prepared well. That's always been a strength of his, kind of understanding what you have to do at this level and the next to be successful.

He's always done a good job of that. Obviously you get better at it every year, you tweak some things. Obviously with his academic schedule he's able to spend a lot of time in the facility on his own watching tape, so that helps, too.

But I also think the success he's had has built confidence. I think the challenges and the adversity he's had has built thick skin, which I think is valuable, too.

And I don't think anybody would question his toughness, based on this past game as well as last year. So I'm just really proud of him. I think you'll see him grow in this comfort as the year goes on with the offense.

What it's about is not just knowing the plays and the defense. It's what are your answers? If they bring this pressure, what's the adjustment to the protection or where are me relief throws and so on and so forth.

I think that's where it really becomes powerful as a quarterback is when you feel like the defense can't be right because you have the answers.

Here is my man beater, here is my zone beater, here is my pressure answer, whether it's adjusting a protection or a hot throw, whatever it may be, or checking the play. That's where I think you got a chance to be really good on offense, is when the offensive player, specifically the quarterback, feel like you really can't be right on defense because we hold the chalk last on offense and you have the opportunity to make the adjustments.

That's about anticipation, right? Because pre-snap based on your film study and your experience you got a pretty good understanding of what's coming. 70% of the time you should know what's going to happen before the ball is snapped, and now 70% to 80% and now you're just confirming it at the snap. It is what I thought it was going to be.

And when you're able to do that at a high level, 70%, 80%, 90% of the time, you got a chance to be really successful at offense and especially at the quarterback position.

Q. Not counting sacks, Sean had four carries for 18 yards on Saturday. He was kind of more selective about taking off on passing plays in general. How do you balance that and take advantage of his ability to run with the ball?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think your point is a good one in terms of his athleticism. He's a better athlete than I think people realize and he's shown that in flashes over his career.

I think the biggest thing, and Mike has done a good job of this, is make sure you're going through your progressions and not going progression one, progression two run, make sure you're going progression one, progression, two, progression three, step up in the pocket, climb in the pocket and hit a check down, or keep your momentum going and stay on the move and go get us some positive yardage.

That's what you want to see at your quarterback position, a guy that can take a negative six yard sack and turn it into an escape, buy time, get a big throw down the sideline, or, again, get us some positive yards with your feet.

That could be to stay on schedule or to create an explosive play. The biggest thing you don't want to do is wait on routes to come open. You want to go through your progression, be decisive, and then climb in the pocket.

If an outlet is there or a big route is coming into your vision or an OTB or whatever it may be, then great. If not, stay on the move and go get us some positive yards.

If it's a two-minute situation, understand that the throwaway is probably for valuable than the lateral scramble. In a two-minute situation you want to be able to get the ball out of your hands quickly, climb in the pocket, and take a check down or scramble for positive yards.

But lateral scrambles in a two-minute situation you have to be careful because it puts the ball at risk and burns more time off the clock. A lot of times you'll see a quarterback scramble and run around and then run out of bounds and he gained a yard and a half or maybe lost a yard, and 11 seconds came off the clock. That's not worth it.

Q. After the game Saturday you showed a lot of emotion, particularly with the fans and the families who traveled. How big of a role does emotion play in your coaching approach, and especially in connecting with fans and players and also with players' families?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's a huge part my leadership style with our players and how we meet, how we lead, how we bond as coaches and players. I think it's a big part. It's my personality, my style, and I have to be authentic and true to who I am in my leadership role.

But also specifically with our families, you know, when you look at Jahan Dotson and the recruiting process and getting to know his family well and understanding the success and challenges and adversity we all go through in our families, being a part of that is meaningful to me and important to me.

That's past players -- I got a text message from Trace McSorley this morning. And then that's the fans that I don't get to know as well, but there are some that you do. The gentlemen with the white fedora on Saturday. I don't know him very well, but I see him at all the games. I feel his passion. I appreciate his passion. He's also handsomely dressed usually, and I appreciate all those things.

When there is an opportunity to connect and show my passion and appreciation for them as well, because they're a part of our family and process, I want them to feel that as well.

Q. Ellis Brooks, what kind of evolution and

development have you seen from him, and I guess specifically at that position what's the value of having the experience that he has?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I thought he played his best game, or at least half that he's had at Penn State. I think the experience at the middle linebacker position is very similar to experience at the quarterback position on offense in terms of the confidence that you have to have to run the defense. There is a lot of checks and thinking that go into it, especially with formations and shifts and motions and everything that we try to do in getting everybody on the same page.

So there is a lot of value in that. I don't think there is any doubt about it. Then there is also just the leadership experience as well. He said something to the team the other day, and I wish our young players would understand this. The hard part is they just have to go through it themselves.

Amazing how many of the vets get up and talk about appreciating their time here. Everybody is trying to rush to the next stage. A lot of them late in their careers admit that they had already made up at some point that this was going to be their last year at Penn State and they were going to the NFL before their eligibility was up, and how looking back at that now, that wasn't the right approach.

And Ellis, you know, talked about that with the team in his share the other night at the hotel. So he's just in a really good place. I think his mom and dad are in a really good place about his Penn State experience. I think Ellis is in a really good place about his Penn State experience and where he is at.

He's super confident right now, and I think you see a lot of our players confidence is really high. And why? Because I think Ellis is really invested into this Penn State football team.

I think his preparation level is through the roof not only this year, but what he's been able to do over his time here at Penn State, and all those things are coming to fruition right now.

So we'll obviously miss him in the first half, but he'll come out like gangbusters in the second half. I'll never forget, I was the offensive coordinator at Maryland and we had a player that I suspended for the first half of the game in a bowl game.

He didn't play in the first half and we were playing Boise State. He showed me in the second half. He had an unbelievable game. Came out like gangbusters in the

second half and he was actually the MVP of the bowl game.

So I think based on my previous experience, I think Ellis will have a similar second half and I think he will have a really dominant season, and I think he'll learn from that. It's not worth slowing shoulders. We want to wrap up and use fundamental tackles whenever possible.

Q. Few guys we didn't see on the travel roster that stood out. Ellis, Hakeem Beamon, and John Lovett. Are you able to give any clarification on their availability moving forward for you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, they were not available last week. This is to be determined this week.

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