

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Like usual, I want to thank everybody for getting on and do a brief summary of the Ohio State game. Obviously lost the turnover battle. We won the penalty battle. Explosive play battle, we did not win the explosive play battle.

A couple general thoughts, positives from a positive perspective, our third down offense jumped up to 58 percent, which I think was a big factor in the game and the reason we were able to sustain drives, obviously, and get some points on the board.

Our red zone defense was impressive. We held them to 16 percent scoring in the red zone. They had been up to this point this year 79 percent scoring in the red zone.

I thought we were much more physical up front really on both sides of the ball, O-line, D-line and tight ends, and then I think our defense continues to do a great job in sudden-change defense.

Opportunities for growth: Protecting the football on offense, creating turnovers on defense. We've got to be more explosive on offense, and then we've got to eliminate explosive plays.

I thought we did a great job defensively in the first half, had some momentum, really won the middle eight. We scored at the end of the first half and got a score to start the second half, and then they got two big explosive plays. We had limited -- maybe the most explosive offense in the country up until that point.

I think one of the big factors in the game was we didn't take advantage of an early turnover and field position and gave it back to them. I think that was a big factor in the game.

Talking about Maryland, obviously Mike Locksley and the University of Maryland, I've got a lot of familiarity with that school. I've been there off and on for eight years. Me and Mike worked on the staff together. Their offensive coordinator, Dan Enos, obviously he's got an impressive resume. He's been an offensive coordinator at multiple

institutions, been a head coach before.

Guys that we're impressed with is obviously their quarterback, No. 3, Tagovailoa, their running back No. 8, Fleet-Davis, and then their receiver Rakim Jarrett. Those guys kind of jump out to us.

And defensively Brian Stewart who I've known for a long time, been a defensive coordinator in college at multiple spots as well as in the NFL as a defensive coordinator. Been impressed with their defensive lineman No. 97, Okuayinonu, and then No. 3, Nick Cross, the safety, who we heavily recruited, as well.

Then their special teams coordinator, Ron Zook, obviously got a tremendous resume. Actually Mike worked for Ron at the University of Florida. He's been a special teams and defensive coordinator in the NFL as well as multiple spots in college, and obviously Rakim Jarrett also does a great job in the return game, as well.

So just some brief notes, but like normal, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. I wonder, are you to the point yet with the running game at this point of the season where more significant changes or moves on the O-line may be considered? I know you mentioned Olu and Landon on your radio show last week, and are you yet in that window for Landon to get him some playing time?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess that's a fair point. I would agree with you with one part, and the other part I would slightly disagree because I thought we played more physical this week. I thought we were able to run the ball, mix it in there, so I think we want to build on that.

But I think your point with Landon and Olu, it would be nice to get them some work, there's no doubt about it. We'll build on that.

I think the most important thing is I thought we were physical on both fronts last week, and we need to build on that.

Q. It was almost a year ago today you were getting

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ready for Maryland, and you had to alter your practice schedule because of the NCAA legislation with being off for election day. SI just reported not too long ago that some schools applied for waivers so they could practice today. How are you handling that this week? Obviously you practice Sunday, but Monday typically is your day off. What's the schedule like this week?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so we had planned to practice on Monday. We did have a head coaches' call, like we typically do with the Big Ten and kind of went over it in detail to get everybody on the same page with what the expectations were. There were conversations, obviously, about the waivers, as well.

We talked to our leadership council. Obviously being engaged in our communities is something that's very important to us, and we spend a lot of time discussing that and talking about that. Our captains felt like the best thing for us to do would be to keep our schedule the same, especially when you're talking about most of our guys we're going to be using absentee ballots, and then they obviously had the ability all morning with the voting centers open at 7:00 a.m., a lot of different things. Obviously, Burrow Council, school board directors, mayor of State College, commonwealth courts, Superior Court, Supreme Court justice, district attorneys, kind of made sure our guys all understood what was going on.

But with most of our guys using the absentee ballot, they felt like we wanted to keep our schedule the same and keep our off day Monday and then practice today. So we were able to get the waiver from the Big Ten. We'll continue discussing these topics. We understand how important they are. Obviously last year there was a lot of conversations, so we'll continue to build on that.

Q. It looked like in warmups that Christian Veilleux maybe has become your No. 2 quarterback. Is that the case? And how is that kind of shaping up there the last few weeks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you had asked a question last week and we weren't really sure up until game time. But Ta'Quan had been limited. He was able to practice all week but had been limited, so based on the number of reps and where he was at talking to the doctors and trainers, we decided that Veilleux would be in that position on Saturday.

And then obviously we'll do the same thing this week and look at it, but it was because of his reps being limited was the reason for that.

Q. You guys turned down a penalty that would have

given you an extra snap inside the 2 or the 3. Obviously you were right there on the goal line. You score on the next play, so it all worked out. But I'm curious, what were the steps that go into a decision like that where maybe someone else might think that it's obvious to take the extra down when you're that close, and how deep are your situational guides for things like that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so when I was asking the officials what the situation would be, we would have lost a little bit of yardage according to the officials. We would have gained a down; there's no doubt about it. But talking to our coaches on the headset, the ball at the one-yard line, we felt good about that and wanted to leave it, wanted to leave it there.

It's one of those situations you really could have made arguments both ways, but the information I got back from the official because that's typically what you do, you say okay. So right now it's going to be 2nd and 1 from the goal; if we take the penalty where will the ball be; they're kind of giving you the feedback where it would be. So you make the decision you think is in everybody's best interest right there, and talking to the coaches on the headset and how the officials explained where it would be, we felt like that was the best situation.

Q. You're two-thirds of the way through the regular season. In what area have you seen the greatest growth on this team since camp?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so obviously it's been kind of a roller coaster in some ways, right. You start out the season with maybe one of the most challenging schedules in the country. Obviously going on the road to Wisconsin to open the season, ranked opponent, and we battle like crazy and find a way to get some wins in a lot of different ways like we discussed.

And then obviously go on the road and play a really tough game against I think the No. 2 team in the country at the time, and obviously some challenges come there.

I guess what I would say is looking at the team, there's obviously some ways -- we've got to find a way to win some of these tough games, and that's through a lot of different ways. That's through preparation, that's through development, that's through scheme, that's through recruiting, from a depth perspective. That's all those things.

To me, I've seen some really good things from our defense. I've seen some really good things from our offense at times. Obviously when Sean has been healthy



that's had a big impact on that. Special teams, you know, I think overall, I think we've done a really good job of controlling field position. I wish we would have made a few more field goals.

I think obviously there's a few plays and a few games we'd love to have back. That doesn't happen, so you learn from them, you grow, you be really honest with yourself and your team, and you find a way to get a win this week and build on it from there.

I think there was enough things last week in that game to build on, but we've got to find a way to get a win this week; that's all that matters.

Q. I'm curious what this type of season can teach your players like as young men, facing the kind of adversity they've faced the last three weeks and always being in it and having a chance to win the game. What do you teach them from a life lesson perspective, or is there even time to do that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, there's always time for it, right. Sometimes you don't want to recognize it, but I think you have to. At the moment you'd better learn from it, you'd better grow, you'd better evolve, you'd better constantly be learning, and that's for all of us. That's the players, that's the coaches, that's the players in meetings, that's the coaches in meetings, that's coaches with the media, that's all of it.

Don't be defensive. Be honest. Be as transparent as you possibly can be. Have a lot of discussions. Challenge yourself. Challenge each other, and find a way to get better and then learn from it, whether it's something you're going to apply right away this week or whether it's something that you're going to write down and keep track of for next season.

That's what we try to do every single experience and every single day. We try to correct, and we try to improve. Obviously you'd like to be able to learn some of those lessons while still winning.

I think we talked about that the first five weeks. There was things that we needed to get corrected while we were winning so they don't come back to bite you, and we did that really well for five weeks. But some of those things were still apparent, and in close, highly-contested games against really good opponents, they can come back to bite you.

I think you always have to look at it that way in football and in life, and we do that every single Sunday, and as coaches we do that every single day. I know I have to

come in with that same type of attitude into this press conference.

Q. On Saturday you mentioned that you would have more on this today with how you guys played differently this game compared to Illinois. I know you mentioned the physicality today and you mentioned Sean's health on Saturday. Was there anything else that stood out in comparison of just those two games?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the biggest thing, obviously, is your starting quarterback being healthy. But that also goes into the other things that I already mentioned about development and scheme and recruiting and things like that and playing to your personnel's strengths.

But I think the biggest thing is we battled. We were more physical up front on both sides of the ball, kind of like I already stated. The difference on 3rd down, I thought we made plays in this game. Those didn't happen the week before. And I thought our guys handled adversity and rose to the occasion against a really good and talented opponent.

Even early in the game, you get a turnover and you've got momentum and you've got really good field position, and not a great situation to give the ball right back after the first play, and a lot of teams against that opponent on the road, that would have been difficult to overcome. The momentum would have swung.

But our defense stepped right up and made some big plays and gave our offense a chance to pay it forward back to them, as well.

Then I think we went on a 90-yard, 13-play drive and got a touchdown, and our guys, their confidence kind of just continued to grow, and we just kind of kept battling. I asked the coaches to call the game in an aggressive manner. I wanted the players to play in an aggressive manner, and for the most part we did that.

Obviously every game you're going to be able to look back and point out things that you want to get better, but there was some positive signs to build on, and again, we've got to correct the issues and the mistakes.

Q. It looked like on the defensive line, it looked like Derrick Tangelo sort of took PJ's role last week more than previously; am I imagining that? Looked like he was lined up directly over center. Just talk a little bit about how you changed things for run defense purposes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think a couple things. Obviously when you lose two guys, we lost obviously Sean Clifford, our captain, on offense, a significant role, and you lose PJ Mustipher - Sean for a half and then limited, and then PJ obviously for the season - those aren't quick fixes.

I think the combination of Tangelo as well as Izzard and Dvon Ellies, those guys have stepped up. They probably weren't ready to do it right away in the second half and probably weren't ready to do it right away the next game, but they're getting better.

Tangelo was already playing at a pretty high level, but obviously his rep count has increased dramatically from what we were doing before.

I think that's part of what I kind of discussed earlier on this call, and development in recruiting and all these types of things, so that when you do have injuries of prominent players like that, you really feel like you have the next guy stepping up.

I think I've said this to you guys before. You always want to be in a situation where you have obviously a really talented guy as your starter with another starter in terms of ability and experience behind him, and then a young up-and-coming guy that you're excited about.

You really want to have that at every single position, and with some of the injuries that we've had, it's thrust those guys that were young, developmental guys that we were excited about into much more significant roles right away.

I think your point is accurate. I thought Tangelo really did a much better job with the increased reps that he was playing and still played at a high level, and then obviously the reps that Izzard and Dvon Ellies, the number of reps that they have gone up -- has gone up dramatically, and I thought they battled. I really thought they battled and did some nice things.

But we're going to probably need two more guys. We typically like to have five D-tackles rotating the entire year. We typically like to have five defensive ends rotating the entire year. Obviously losing Adisa Isaac before the season started and losing PJ Mustipher early in the season changes that. But that's when we've been at our best, is when we've had a rotation of five guys.

Q. I was just curious to know, when the team is traveling to away games, is there a certain mood or atmosphere that you want to have on the plane or bus in terms of guys talking, guys not talking? Do you have a preference in this area?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I've kind of grown up in a football, in high school and my college experience and then actually even when I first started coaching, where literally 27 hours before the game or even more than that you'd be totally locked in, no talking, and obviously through doing some studies and talking to some different people, that's changed over the last probably 10 to 15 years.

So what we try do is we try to build up to it. You don't need them kind of locked in mentally and emotionally and physically that long before the game where there's no talking on the bus ride to Maryland. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

What we do is we build up. You should see -- you should be able to feel a difference -- say you've got a Friday dinner and you're playing a Saturday night game like we had last week; the Friday dinner should still be focused but guys should be enjoying themselves with their positions and kind of going through their test and tip sheets.

And then Saturday morning obviously you're still a long time until game time. That breakfast should feel different than the Friday night before, but still, we don't need them like that yet. Then all the way up to the pregame meal things should be different, and then the ride over to the stadium, obviously things should be totally locked in.

So that's changed, even in my time as a coach it's changed dramatically from my first couple years in coaching to what it is now.

But I'd also say this: I've talked to some older coaches and younger coaches; there's times where you feel like the team is too loose, and then you go play your tail off, and there's times where you think the guys are focused and locked in, and you don't play as well.

It's kind of hard to read, and there's so many different factors that kind of go into that. That's why we try to keep our process as consistent as we possibly can.

Q. You obviously spent several years at Maryland; I was curious how your time there shaped you as a coach and what things from your time there have sort of stayed with you in the years since.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I had a great experience there. It was really my first big-time, full-time job. Had a lot of success there with -- I first went with Ron Vanderlinden, which is a guy that a lot of people around here know because he was on staff here for a long time. I went with him my first year, and then Ralph Friedgen came in, and I was with Ralph for four years, and we went on a really good run and had a lot of success.

I learned a lot in a short period of time about coaching, about organizational structure, about recruiting, really all of it. It was a tremendous experience. I'm very appreciative of that.

Obviously recruiting that area, had a lot of success in recruiting that area. I was still recruiting Pennsylvania at the time, as well, so that was helpful. My one daughter was born there. There's a lot of fond memories.

My wife worked in the admissions office on campus. She's got a lot of friends there and in the community. A lot of my dad's side of the family is there, so I've got a lot of cousins and what I call aunts and uncles in that area, and then a lot of friends that are high school coaches and things like that.

I had a really good experience. I'm very appreciative. I'm very appreciative of my time there. Obviously Debbie Yow was the athletic director at the time and had a big impact on my career, as well, her and Ralph Friedgen.

So I had a great experience there. I'm very appreciative of it.

Obviously going back there's still a lot of people I know, but there's also been a tremendous amount of changes, as well, from a facilities standpoint and all those types of things. I don't think at this stage it gives anybody an advantage or anything because the rosters are completely different and the philosophies are very different, but obviously there's a lot of family.

Q. Good afternoon, James. You mentioned Tua Tagovailoa as a quarterback he's had some ups and downs this year. What have you seen from him on film and how do you think your defensive still talent matches up with what Maryland has on that side of ball?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, he's a really talented guy. He can make plays with his arm. Makes some of big time throws and he can extend plays and make plays with his feet. Does a really nice job with that as well. You know, and I think their scheme does a good job of taking advantage of both of those things, too.

I've been very impressed with him. Obviously like with all kind of deal with at this level, you look at some of the plays that he's been able to make in the games they've won and some of the challenges and issues that he's had that we're all working through.

Overall, I've been really impressed with him over the last couple years and what he's been able to do. They're a

talented, fast, athletic team. He does a good job getting the ball to players in space pretty consistently.

It's going to be a real challenge. I know our coaches and players are excited about the opportunity, but it'll be a real challenge.

Q. I want to ask but Mike Yurcich. You moved on from Kirk to him. I know you're big in the stats. NCAA stats show you're down in most key offensive numbers this year compared to last year. Just curious what some of the challenges have been like for Mike and how would you analyze what he's done so far?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think you got to look at all it, right. I think those points are very fair. You also got to look at it in the types of opponents that you've played, the type of defenses that you've played. I think all those things factor into it.

For me it's also how many guys are which getting involved. How many guys are we getting involved in the offense in terms of touching and spreading the field.

I also would say that when you look at your higher-end opponents, what are we doing against those type of opponents as well. Ohio State, were we able to move the ball against Ohio State like we did last week.

I think it's a fair point and I get the question. I also think it's like looking at records. Not all records are the same.

You know, if you have five wins and you've played three ranked opponents versus five wins and no ranked opponents, I think you have to look at all of it. It's a fair point and I think when you look analytics and data, you have to be looking at it holistically.

That's part of it as well, right. If you played three-unranked opponents to open the season non-conference and scored 60 points a game on those opponents, those numbers are going to skew your numbers the rest of the year in a positive way.

So I think you got look at it all. That's kind of how I do.

Q. Did a delayed return from Ohio State force you to change or adjust your preparation?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so we got back to Lasch based on some weather in State College, weather in State College and then not being able to find bus drivers that would drive us back, and then having to wait to get -- wait for staffing at the Harrisburg airport. I think we all realize staffing is an issue across our country right now.

So based on all that, waiting to see if we could fly into State College, trying to get staffing in Harrisburg, and then also trying to find busses to drive us back or find rooms to stay the night, which we weren't able to find rooms to stay the night. Ended up not getting back to Lasch until about 6:30 in the morning, and most of us getting home to our houses between 6:45 and 7:00 in the morning.

What we did is we pushed everything back that Sunday. Some people were able to get some sleep on the plane or busses, and then we pushed everything back in the morning so people could go home and get a few hours of sleep as a staff, and then the players obviously had most of the day to sleep.

Then we practiced later in the day, early evening. So still able to get work done, but did lose some hours that morning and some hours the night before that we normally would have.

Q. You mentioned being more efficient in the run after the game on Saturday. Having lacked explosive runs, has that been a trend through the course of the season, those explosive runs and what goes into that? What unlocks those as an offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I think that has obviously been an issue that we've had this year, just like I just got -- kind of got done answering about stats, whether it's total offense or points that you have early in the year skewing your numbers or a couple big runs, right.

You look at Ohio State. We were able to do a pretty good job defending the run, but then you let up one big run and it changes the complexion of everything. So for us, it starts with getting push and creating some holes and running with a mentality and pad level and being more efficient.

And then obviously the next step is being able to make some of those guys miss and break some tackles in the hole and accelerate and take it the distance, whether it's 40, 50, 60, 80 yards, whatever it may be, and we haven't had that.

So that's something we need to do. Obviously last week I thought was a step in the right direction from that standpoint, and now we needed to that plus creating the explosive plays.

Some of it as well is the RPO game that can create some challenges and put some people in conflict. I think our RPO game will become more explosive in the passes now that people will have to respect the run once we show that we're going to do it again this week.

Then people have a choice, right. Do they double team Jahan Dotson or do they bracket somebody or do they put you in a situation where you're able to run the ball consistently, and now they have to overload the box and then it creates an RPO situation.

Making safeties miss is the next element. Watching on film I think Maryland does a pretty good job with that. Been a bunch of runs that have broke through, but the safeties have been able to get them on the ground. That's the next phase, right, being able to make that safety miss, and then be able to accelerate to take it to the next 50 or 60 yards down the field.

Hopefully we can build on that this week from a consistency standpoint and then add some of the explosive aspects.

Q. I wanted to circle back to Christian, if that's okay. We just haven't had much time to talk about him. With him being potentially one snap away from getting in there last Saturday, what kind of impression has he made on you and the coaching staff over the course of this entire season behind the scenes?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, his mental preparation with Sean I think has been really good and it's grown. Obviously when you talk about a guy coming in from high school, it's very different. So I think he is really adjusted well to that and has grown in that area significantly.

I would also say the Sunday scrimmages that we've had, -- and excuse me, I'm going to go back and answer another question. We did not do -- that's another adjustment we made on Sunday with getting in so late. We cut out the normal Sunday scrimmage that we do with the non-travel guys or the guys that didn't get a lot of reps in the game.

But I do think the scrimmages that he's been able to get, him and Ta'Quan on Sundays, has really valuable. He's got really good poise, really good arm strength.

Sometimes he tends to throw too much just with his arm and doesn't get his lower half incorporated in the throws, but seems to have a pretty good understanding of where to go with the ball and why and protections, which is big thing usually for high school guys at this level getting adjusted to.

But I think his poise is probably a thing that stands out to me the most. So those are probably -- when I talk about impressions, those are the things that I would probably say. I thought last week with the increased reps that he

was able to get, I thought he did a nice job there as well.

We'll continue to evaluate that concentration situation. Great to have Ta'Quan back this week. Hopefully he's able get his full amount of reps again and be able to really evaluate the two of those guys moving forward.

Q. You had mentioned Maryland wide receiver, Rakim Jarrett at the start and how you're impressed with him. Given some of the problems he caused you guys last year, can you talk about the development of your corners, and do you feel like they're better prepared this year to maybe limit some of the damage he can do?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, I think last week is a pretty good sign in some ways, right. That was one of the more explosive offenses in college football. We had the two explosive plays on the hitch where we missed a tackle and kind of ran away, and then the deep over-route.

Obviously those two stand out. But in terms of competing and challenging throws, I think we've done that all year long. Obviously he's a really good player and has been since high school.

So that will be a challenge. What they do offensively will be challenging, and then also obviously what he is able to bring to the game. So our guys remember last year. We've watched it as well. Then on top of that, obviously what we've tried to do all year this year from a past defense competitive.

Also being able to get some pressure on the quarterback would help with all those things, too.

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