

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate everybody being on. Hope you guys have had a great day.

Summarizing some notes from the Rutgers game, obviously we won the turnover battle, we won the penalty battle, the drive/start battle, the sack battle, and the explosive play battle. Those were positives for us. Obviously very impactful on the game.

When you talk about general positives of the game, I thought it was a gritty culture win. We had 63 guys play in the game on offense or defense, not counting special teams. So that was a real positive.

I thought obviously the story of the game is the guys that played through injury and played through sickness. Even if they weren't able to play the whole game, guys really tried to put the team first, sacrifice and do what they had to do to give us the best chance to win.

Areas for growth. We got to consistently protect our quarterback. We got to finish our sack opportunities on defense. The other areas for growth, more turnovers on defense. We could have had three more turnovers fairly easily in that game on defense with interceptions.

We got to be more disciplined with our penalties. I think we're getting better in that area, but still penalties. The one drive that Temple had in the game was extended by three costly penalties that almost led to a score.

Specifically you know I'm not a big fan of the pre-snap and post-snap penalties. They're the ones for sure you got to get fixed. To me they're discipline penalties.

We talked about finishing blocks, straining, finishing tackles, making sure we're wrapping. Sometimes we're coming in and throwing shoulders. We got to make sure we're wrapping.

Obviously the other thing is it would help us if more guys got the flu shot. That's our staff and everybody involved. I think there's some vaccine fatigue with everything we've



been going through for two years. I think our number of flu shots were down this year compared to normal. I think that's maybe due to all the COVID vaccine conversations going on out there. I know there's a lot of talk amongst our guys that they don't want to go through this again. This I think will be a motivator moving forward.

Getting on to Michigan State. Obviously Coach Tucker is doing a good job in his second season there. Got a lot of respect for Coach Tucker. I've known him for a long time. I think I might have mentioned this before. He and the Alabama defensive staff came and visited us a few years back to exchange ideas in the off-season on defensive football.

They have five super seniors, COVID super seniors, this year on their team. When you talk about offensively, I think Jay Johnson does a really nice job for them in coordinating the offense.

Obviously they got a running back that everybody's concerned about. Then they do a really nice job of play-action pass. Everybody is so focused on stopping the running back that they hurt you with play-action pass. They've run a bunch of flea flickers that have been successful, huge plays. Reverses, fly sweeps, quarterback keeps off of zone read, again off of the running back.

They do a nice job complementing obviously Kenneth Walker, maybe the best running back in the country, with all these complementary plays, schemes and pieces.

Jayden Reed, the receiver, has had a really good year for them. Jalen Nailor, who had been out, the other receiver, No. 8, and Payton Thorne, their quarterback. Those four guys are probably the guys that jump out to us the most. There's probably other guys we could mention.

On defense Scottie Hazelton. Mel Tucker has a defensive background. You have the combination of Scottie and Mel on the defensive side of the ball. Guys that jump out obviously is defensive end No. 96 Jason Panasiuk. We recruited him and his brother, very familiar with him and the family.

No. 3, Xavier Henderson, their safety. Then corner, No. 9,



Ronald Williams. All those guys really jump out. Again, there's other guys we could mention, too.

On special teams Ross Els. Again, as a returner, Jayden Reed as a kick returner and punt returner is a guy that is obviously dangerous.

That's my review of Rutgers, and a brief summary of going into this game with Michigan State. I open it up to questions.

Q. I wouldn't normally ask this question, but I think in this moment it's appropriate. Are you going to be Penn State's football coach in 2022?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Fair question and I get it. I was hoping that I'd be able to have a conversation with you guys at this stage, but I don't have anything new to report at this time. Hopefully I will be. I'll get with you guys on Wednesday.

I don't mean to keep kind of moving this thing out. Like I told you guys before, I want to make sure when I say things to you guys that it's completely transparent and totally honest. There's still some moving parts going on.

But I understand the question. Again, I think last time I met with you, I was hopeful that I'd be able to talk to you guys about it today in more detail.

Q. With respect to the flu, where are you guys? Do you expect to have most of your starters back? With Sean Clifford particularly.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Good question. I appreciate the question. I thought I was going to get another one on the last topic. I get it guys, I truly do.

Where we're at right now, as you know, we had massive numbers on Saturday with 35 guys. Most of those guys are coming out of it and in a pretty good place. As you can imagine, we've had a few more kind of go into it with the flu. It's a little bit of a moving target.

I think you mentioned Sean. Sean wasn't feeling great on Sunday, was feeling better on Monday, is feeling back to normal today. I think that's one of the guys you specifically mentioned.

Again, those 35 guys that had it, we've looked at this thing, it's been typically about three days. So most of them are either through it or coming out of it, but there has been a few more over the last couple days that have got it kind of late in this cycle.

Q. On Saturday it sounded like some of the guys were flu-related, some weren't. Where are you at from an overall availability point? Michigan State has some issues in this regard, too. Guys are banged up, playing through things. Coming out of Rutgers, where do you feel like you're at?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think this time of the year everybody is banged up, as you can imagine. Some are healthier than others. I think once we get through this last bit of the flu - knock on wood, I don't know what this is - I think we could be as healthy as we've been in a couple weeks, which would be great.

Yeah, I think if you have anybody specific you want to ask about, that's fine. But I think we got a chance to be healthier than we've been in a couple weeks. Obviously after last week, which was an extreme, but I think you guys will get a good feel for that on Wednesday when you come out to practice. I do think a couple of these guys should all be ready to go by Wednesday for sure at the latest, I hope.

Q. I want to clarify something. You touched on it. Sean leaving the game Saturday was because of a virus situation, not something else, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. Sean, like I said, he was not available at Friday's practice at all. It came down Friday morning, happened. Saturday we didn't know. We thought Mason Stahl was going to be the starting quarterback in the game because we didn't have Sean or Veilluex.

We actually had to create a new cadence Friday at the hotel because if Sean was going to be able to go, he wasn't going to be able to talk. I don't know if you go back and watch, when Sean was in there in the beginning of the game, we were using a silent cadence with Sean in there because his voice was pretty much shot.

After the IVs, the doctors, trainers and all, Sean felt like he could go. But him and Caedan Wallace, both of those guys tried to go, and they were on IVs. They did not have the energy and were light-headed, weren't really productive. We said, Yeah, we're going to make a change here. Caedan was pulled out to take care of him. Then Sean, obviously we pulled him out as well.

They were valiant efforts. I think there was 14 guys that tried to play with the virus. Some of them were more successful than others. I think everybody, a couple of these guys, sent me a text Saturday night. Everybody had envisioned that they were going to be the Michael Jordan flu game. What did Michael score, 60 points, played his tail off. There was a heck of a story to write. It didn't necessarily play out that way for a lot of our guys that were

sick.

Still truly I know their teammates appreciate the effort that they tried to give, especially when, again, we felt like we only had one quarterback available for the game.

Q. You mentioned asking guys specifically. Where are Mike Miranda and Curtis Jacobs at from a health standpoint?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We expect both of those guys to be back. This week we expect both of those guys to be practicing this week and today, to be honest with you, today.

Q. They took all my questions, but I'll go to Plan C. From your experience, when one of your team gets firebombed like Michigan State last week, do you have the ear of the players more so or do you have to build them up emotionally and psychologically? That's like getting knocked out in boxing, which from your experience is it?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I can't get into the specifics of how you phrased the question, but I understand what you're saying.

I think it's challenging. As you know, whether it's a close loss that people feel like you should have won against a really good opponent, or whether it's the opposite, it's challenging.

Not only do you have obviously the disappointment that you got to push through and learn from and grow from, you got to bounce back physically, you got to bounce back emotionally, bounce back mentally as quick as you possibly can. Then these guys are also getting hammered on social media, getting hammered kind of out walking around in the community. So it's challenging. There's no doubt about it. Especially teams that have high expectations and have high standards. So it's challenging.

Q. When you went back and watched the film on the offensive line, you had three guys out there who really haven't played a lot in the past, Whigan, Effner, and Tengwall. What did you think of the job those three guys did? Do you think they were able to build off the physicality?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think we've been building on it each week. We have added an extra inside run period. We did that about six or seven weeks back, took it out of individual and added that. Our O line and tight ends and running backs versus a scout team, inside drill, I think that's helped us. I think we've gotten more physical, finishing more

blocks, running better.

I thought Landon came in as a freshman and played really well. We were very, very pleased and very impressed with him. Obviously there were a lot of moving parts that magnified it against a team that I think plays good defense and is physical and tough. We were very pleased with Landon.

I thought Whigan did a nice job. He's been a great teammate. He's big and strong. He's kind of handled his role as well as you could expect a veteran guy to do like that. I thought he did a really nice job, was serviceable in the game, did some really good things to build on.

Then Effner, a little bit like Whigan, he's a veteran guy who has waited his turn and has accepted his role. But the fact that he played three positions in the game I think is really impressive. I think those things are exciting for all three of those guys for their future and for our future.

Obviously the flexibility with Effner. I think Landon is a guy that has a chance to be flexible as well at both guard and tackle and possibly even center. Really proud of those guys. It's something to build on for sure with our offensive line moving forward.

Q. For most of Penn State's football history, people were led to believe that the school had as good of facilities as anybody out there. Until you invite everybody for the beer you were talking about, what exactly do you want from Penn State's facilities? What is the message you would want to have everybody know these are specific things that we need to compete 365 days a year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'll get into that in a little bit more detail here soon. I'd like to focus on Michigan State as much as possible.

But I think it just aligns. I think you guys have the ability to tell this story, the media has the ability to educate as much as anyone.

I've said it really since I got here. We have to compete the 364 other days a year with everything. Everything matters. When we go to these other schools and these other campuses, try to go see them. It's pretty easy on social media to track kids and where they're going, what they're doing, what they have, what they see. There's universities all over the country putting out information.

For us, I'm always studying best practice. But I think it would be pretty easy to do. We've done it internally. It would be pretty easy to do. There will be a time and place

for me to speak on these things. But I think it's even more powerful if it's not coming from me. You guys are experts in this field, as well.

There will be a time and place here that we'll talk about that in more detail. It really just comes down to I think the original statement you made is a really important one. It's about competing in every single thing 364 days a year. That's what I think makes football so exciting and why it's so competitive, because everything matters.

Q. I'm not sure if you want to go into it now or not. You mentioned the internal study. What are some of the things you found within your own facilities and with regard to some other places in the Big Ten?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Facilities is just one part. There's a lot of things. Like I said, I want to talk about Michigan State as much as possible. Again, I know last time I talked to you, I said something. I understand these questions are coming.

I think it's really, really important that we keep our focus on Michigan State. We keep talking about facilities. It's much more than that. Again, I understand the questions.

Q. When you look at what Michigan State is good at and what it's not good at defensively, a lot of teams that you face are usually in the middle of the pack. When you face a team like Michigan State that is statistically dead last in passing defense, how does that impact a game plan when you want to be balanced with what you want to do, but the reality is there's always stories within the numbers but they're not good at something?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, I think the numbers do matter. You have to play your game plan and you have to stay balanced because I think if you try to become something on Saturday that you haven't been throughout the season, then I think you're going to get out of whack. Your players aren't going to play with the same confidence. You're not going to call the game the way you naturally would call the game.

I think there's an awareness obviously. Your game plan should be impacted by that a little bit, but you just don't want to skew too far in one direction.

I think continuing to commit to the run game and be balanced, not only to be able to run the ball to win games but also to take some pressure off of the passing game and our quarterbacks and those things, as well.

But I do think your point is a good one. They're looking at

us and are saying what are their strengths and weaknesses and how do we hide some of our weaknesses and how do we attack some of their weaknesses. How do you minimize their strengths. You're trying to do the same thing.

I think that's a big part of the game. I always try to look at that. On Monday nights I sit down with Coach Lorig, the special teams coordinator, we go through everything in detail. At that time I really look at our special teams compared to their special teams, how do we match up, what are their strengths and what are our strengths, do they negate each other. Same thing on defense and obviously on offense as well.

As you know, some teams and some games just match up better. Some of their strength is at an area that's a weakness for you, that gets magnified on Saturdays. That's always an interesting thing to look at during the week and see how it plays out.

I've seen you guys kind of write stories on these things, as well. There are certain opponents you match up well against and there's certain opponents you don't because their strengths may be at a position or area you're weak. You know that and you're trying to do everything you possibly can to maybe not eliminate but minimize the impact of it.

Q. Instead of asking you how you're doing, I'm curious what your favorite Thanksgiving food is.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Favorite Thanksgiving food? I don't know. Kind of a combination. I'm kind of like I want to blend multiple foods together, whether it's macaroni and cheese and turkey, whether it's black-eyed peas and collard greens. My favorite thing is sweet potato pie. A lot don't have that, they have pumpkin pie. That's my favorite. My wife and daughters will make that.

Q. As we wrap up this second season that's kind of been impacted by COVID, what has the team showed you over the past two years that gives you some confidence moving forward into next season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, resiliency, right? Off the field, on the field, families, personal lives, academically, all those things. This is a place that has really high expectations and standards, and should. We align with those, as well. That's not just of the fan base, that's of our players, that's of the coaches, all of us.

It's something that I'm excited about moving forward because it's been painful I think for a lot of people in college football, really athletics and really just people in



their everyday lives. COVID has had a huge impact on everybody. I know our kids getting back to school and things like that, it's had a huge impact in every kind of walk of life.

I'm proud of our guys, of the staff, of this community. I think we did a pretty good job with COVID. As you know, I kind of bounce back and forth a little bit with my family down south. Coming here I was really proud of how the state of Pennsylvania handled it, the amount of masks that you saw. If you really look specifically when it comes to Centre County, we've done a pretty good job of it which has allowed us to get back.

I know there was a lot of concern from people about getting back to a full stadium. I think based on attendance we're second in the country. I think we've averaged 106,000 plus. There were a lot of people that questioned that, had concerns about that, rightfully so.

We showed we were all willing to make individual sacrifices for the greater good. I know that was great for Penn State football. I know it was great for the university and the community as well. I'm proud and I'm appreciative of what we did inside the Lasch Building and outside as well. Some Saturdays were better than others, but overall I'm proud of our guys, I'm proud of our university and community.

Q. I think all of us on this call respect what you've been saying about wanting to talk more about Michigan State, not about this other stuff. You want us to educate the people on what your concerns are. I was wondering if you could give us a little more help.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I'm happy to do that. You're one of the guys that will get an invitation to the beer in the basement, just so you know. Well, not everybody is getting an invitation, but you are, Joe.

I'm happy to kind of go through that in detail. I actually think it's important for it to come from others. I think it's really important for that to come from others. I think that could be media that get to travel to other places and venues, that could be from coaches on our staff that have worked at other places that we've hired and brought in. I think that would be a great question for you guys to ask. The assistant coaches that have been at other places when you have opportunities to get with them. I think that would be great for our administration to talk about, as well. I've had very, very honest conversations.

I think you know all the way back to year one we've been talking about these things. We've made great strides. I don't want it to come off the wrong way. I'm very

appreciative of the strides we made. There was a long period of time where we did nothing, and it put us behind, and we've been playing catch-up.

There will be a time and a place for it, and you will get an invitation to the Franklin basement. I call it a man cave. The ladies in my family say it's a woman cave, that they run the basement. But you will get an invitation to that night.

Q. Got the chance to speak with Malick earlier today. What makes him a candidate to be a key contributor not just for the Michigan State game but moving forward?

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's a cool kid, isn't he? Yeah, big smile on his face, so appreciative about being here. You look at his body, you're talking about one of the taller receivers that we have, 6'3" plus. One of the faster guys on our roster. He's a legitimate 4.3 guy, which I don't really believe those guys exist. He's really worked hard on his route running and his ball skills. Him and Parker Washington are best friends, they're constantly together.

What's great is they both kind of complement each other. Parker has elite, elite ball skills, and Malick has really improved in that area.

He's smart. He works hard. It's very important to him. I remember going on the home visit, flew to Canada. Him and his brother had an apartment. The snow was like up to here. He was very appreciative of the opportunity to come to Penn State. That hasn't changed. He approaches that every single day. He's a great teammate. I think he's going to be a really good special teams player.

I think he has a chance to develop into a real vertical threat, maybe more so than we've had really in a number of years. That's I think something we need.

Obviously Jahan has brought that. I think KeAndre can do that. Parker has shown some flashes too. I think he has a chance to be a real vertical threat up the field at 6'3", 4.3 in the 40. He can make some big plays.

I did almost strangle him on Saturday because he put his arms up and celebrated at like the five yard line. If they wanted to, they could have threw a flag, there would have been no touchdown, ball would have been back at the 20. As much as I was hugging him and telling how happy I was for him, I was also telling him if you would have got that penalty, you could have run right out the tunnel because he wouldn't have wanted to come back to the sideline.

I'm super excited about him and his future.

Q. At the risk of jeopardizing any kind of invitation, even though I know you have a ping-pong table, if you go back to the original question about coaching here in 2022, which you deflected. Can you at least clarify that that's your desire on next year or is that up in the air?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I've been asked this question a bunch. I think I've said and shown of my commitment and my loyalty over eight years. I don't really think that's a question.

Obviously this is much more complex than just a yes or no question that I get in these press conferences. I know a lot of coaches handle it different. But when I speak, I want to be able to speak in detail and I want to be able to know exactly what's going on.

You guys keep asking me these questions. It's not a simple yes or no answer. I think I have displayed and showed my commitment and loyalty over the last eight years.

Q. Through your experience this year of guys that you brought in through the transfer portal, have you learned anything? Has anything changed in terms of what you think your approach will be moving forward, specific to bringing in fifth-year guys or sixth-year guys as opposed to guys that naturally fit into the scholarship roster?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think you'd love to be in a situation -- I guess it's a different answer. I guess what I'd say is, I'd love to be in a situation where I could study the data over the last 10 years and make a really strong prediction of where our numbers would be because that's how I prefer to work, then be able to say, Okay, we're going to save three scholarships for transfers on defense and three for offense, or maybe five this year, maybe eight one year, whatever it may be.

The other hard part is we're recruiting at a really high level right now, so it's hard to turn down a really, really good high school player, which is how I would prefer to build and recruit anyway, when I don't really know what's necessarily out there in the portal or who's going to. It's hard to turn down something now who is a really good player waiting on a possibility of something later.

I've also tried to remind our staff that we got to make sure that we continue to be thorough. We're so thorough recruiting high school student-athletes. I don't see people being thorough at the college level. There's guys transferring to other schools from our place that no one's

ever called about. I don't know how you can do that. You have no idea what was going on at the previous institution.

We've done a really good job of that. We've talked to coaches at the previous schools. We've talked to high school coaches. We've talked to the kids, the parents. We got the transcripts. We do all these things. Some of these kids, literally you hear they've hit the transfer portal, in a day and a half they've already committed to other school. I don't know how that happens if you're not talking ahead of time. We've seen that literally time and time again, which is illegal.

So for us, we may be a little bit slower in the process because we're going to be thorough. But I want to approach the transfer portal very similar to how we approach the high school prospects and make sure we have all the information so that the young man and his family, so we can make an educated decision to find the right fit.

I think because we hit on such a high percentage last year in the transfer portal, I don't want our staff to let their guard down and feel like it's going to be that easy moving forward because I don't think it is.

To answer your question specifically, I'd love to be able to hold a few every single year. But it's just hard to tell. It's hard to tell what you're going to have, especially this year with the COVID numbers.

Did I answer your question? I hope so.

Q. Last week you talked about Senior Day, who was walking wasn't necessarily indicative of plans for next year. One guy we didn't see walk was Ji' Ayir Brown. Obviously this is a senior, been here for two years. Are you expecting him back next year? If so, what do you see as a next step for him and his development?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's more than a fair question. I have not talked to (indiscernible) about how he wants to handle this. I don't want to make an announcement on here that I think is really for him to do, if that makes sense. I hope you respect that and understand that.

Sometimes you guys ask me really good questions, and I don't think I should answer until I've talked to my staff, talked to my team about it or given them a heads up.

We've obviously started this process a little bit. We did it during the bye week with guys. We got a pretty good feel for what guys are probably going to do. But some of these conversations are going to need to happen right after the

season ends during bowl prep.

I think the people that have covered us for a number of years, they see we usually put out some statements or some graphics post that these guys announce what they're doing. We'll try to coordinate those things, again. There's a lot of things that go into it, too.

The extra year of eligibility impacts a lot of these guys. Obviously graduation dates are impacted by that. Then also obviously NFL opportunities. You're trying to balance all those things out.

I have another year, but does it make sense coming back, trying to maximize my experience at Penn State. Have I already graduated. Do I still need to graduate. What is my NFL status at this point and opportunities at this point.

Obviously for us, one of the great stories is all these guys that decided to come back, all the feedback that we've got, their draft status has either dramatically increased or stayed the same, allowed them to get closer to graduation.

Right now the model is working pretty good. All these things factor in. Talk to their parents, talk to them about it, explain, give all the data and information, then try to help them make the best decision possible for them and their family.

I know that was a long answer. Sorry.

Q. Christian Veillieux, surprised I haven't heard that name pop up yet, but where does he stand in terms of getting the reps on the field? How do you evaluate that with Sean Clifford being back to normal and how that pans out for your quarterback plan at Michigan State?

JAMES FRANKLIN: You guys must have went out and got after it last night. Nobody has their cameras on.

Veillieux did some really exciting things that we're excited about, want to build on. I think I told you guys he's been getting the number two reps in practice, was ready to play. That's how it will be again this week. Sean will get his reps.

I think I told you guys, I thought Sean had his best week of practice last week before getting sick. Obviously Christian Veillieux came in and did some great things and ended up being our player of the game on offense as the coaches vote. I think we usually put a graphic out after this press conference. That was great to see.

We'll go back to the rotation that we have had. Obviously

it's a good feeling knowing that you have a guy that you feel has played and played at a high level in actual game reps, which is something we hadn't had up till that point.

Thanks, guys. Again, I appreciate the questions, and I understand them. I'm sorry I couldn't give you more information.

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