

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, just briefly, obviously we're pleased with the class. It's pretty balanced between offense and defense. A lot of hard work, a lot of hours went into this, a lot of building significant relationships with the recruits as well as their parents and high school coaches.

Pretty proud. For 12 years we've had for the most part very little drama on signing day. The relationships and the kids that we have developed and the process we have, you know, it's been pretty smooth from that perspective, so I'm pleased with that.

But overall we got ten guys coming in in terms of early enrollees. Pretty balanced across the board positionally. Excited about the guys that we're bringing in. Obviously they have different rankings and ratings depending on who you're talking to, but the type of young men that we've been able to recruit both as athletes, with the types of body types that we're looking for in terms of growth potential, athleticism, speed, number of these guys came to camp. I think we had 17 of them in some form of a camp with us.

Overall we're very, very pleased. The early enrollee thing continues to grow for us, which I think is a positive when the situation fits the family, the family and the high school. So overall, we're excited about this. Obviously we still have another signing period and then we also have some transfer portal possibilities as well, but that's kind of where we are.

Appreciate you guys jumping on and covering Penn State football. Look forward to answering questions hopefully about the recruiting process and signing day.

Q. You signed two really good quarterbacks in this class, Drew Allar and Pribula. They're a little different in some ways. Both really good athletes, but they bring different things to the table. What did you guys see through the evaluation process between the two, and then also how important is it to have Sean Clifford set the tone for these guys moving forward?



COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think Sean is a big part of this, and we didn't know that for sure. I think Sean does as good as any quarterback I've been around in college in terms of how to prepare, how to watch film, how he studies the game and studies defenses.

I think that's going to be really valuable for these two quarterbacks. I think obviously also with Veilleux's experience that he was able to gain last year, I think we're in a healthy position at the quarterback spot with those two guys. I'm really proud of both of them and how they handled the situation throughout the entire process.

You look at in-state with Beau Pribula; comes from a football family; dad played at Shippensburg; brother is a quarterback at Delaware. Unbelievable student. Really had an unbelievable senior year. You look at the numbers he was able to put up and the wins that they were able to have this year, it was a special year.

Made plays with his feet. Made plays with his arm. His touchdown-to-interception ratio was fantastic. Completion percentage was fantastic. Coach Yonchiuk over there did an unbelievable job with him.

And just really kind of how he handled this whole process. He never wavered. I think he really embraces competition, and I couldn't be more excited about him and more proud.

And then obviously Drew Allar, you know, comes in, really when we were recruiting him early on we felt like obviously we signed two of the better quarterbacks in all of college football this year in terms of signing classes.

Drew is a guy that kind of did it kind of old school. As he went to camps and as he played in the season, he just continued to do well and his rankings continued to rise and people you were really impressed with him.

Big kid who can stand in the pocket and deliver the ball. I think people underestimated his athleticism as well. He does a great job making some of the plays that maybe aren't in the playbook in terms of extending plays and off-balance throws with unbelievable accuracy.

You know, play making ability, he was able to make some



plays with his feet, too. So another kid that just handled the process extremely well, is embracing the competition, and excited about the future. Both have been really big time leaders in the class as well.

I think there is probably more similarities with them than there are differences, but there are some. Obviously a Allar a little bit bigger I would say. Pribula may be a little bit more athletic. But I think both of them have a lot of traits and skills that you look for and desire, and I love the fact that both of them are embracing the competition.

Q. You were able to bring this in for a smooth landing despite what you call noise that was out there during the season, and then a key coaching change after the season. How did you guys manage to do that, and what does it say about the kids in this class that nobody really seemed to blink?

COACH FRANKLIN: Well, I think for the first thing, Mark, as you know, and I've tried to communicate with you guys and be as transparent as I could the whole time, is there was a lot of communication going on with our current team, a lot of communication going on with the recruits and parents so they I think felt informed and weren't shocked by anything, and we were able to really able to ride that out.

You know, a season that saw some unbelievable highs and some challenges as well, and nobody really blinked. So I love the character in this class as much as the athleticism. When you see all types of drama right now in college football and recruiting, we haven't had a whole lot of that. I'm very appreciative and thankful for that.

Then losing Brent Pry, as you guys know. Virginia Tech got a great one. I'm really happy for Brent. Actually his wife was at our signing day today. She's still part of our family and is here in town. It was great to see her.

But losing Brent personally and professionally was a big one. Guy has been with me for 12 years. Known each other for 30 years. So being able to go out and hire somebody like Manny Diaz who has a similar philosophy, we've shared ideas on the defensive side of the ball together for a number of years, so I think that helps.

Obviously a proven defensive coordinator with a successful track record to back it up, and then obviously the head coach experience is going to be valuable as well. Even through that process I've been communicating with our team as well as recruits coming in that we were going to get somebody really good but, we were also going to get somebody that had similar philosophy, and we been able to do that.

So so far so good. Appreciate it, Mark.

Q. Good afternoon, James. How are you?

COACH FRANKLIN: Good, Rich. How are you, buddy?

Q. I'm great, thank you. You knew this was coming. I got to ask you about Nick Singleton and Kaytron coming in. What do you like most about those two running backs? Is there potential for them to be on the field next year?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, really every guy we recruit we recruit with the mentality that they're going to come in and play. Obviously the higher they're regarded, the fact that he's coming in mid-semester, both these guys, that helps with that. They still got to go out and earn the job and things like that, but obviously both of them have a really impressive background, and obviously being here at mid-semester, those things help.

We'll see how that plays out. It's interesting because it's like you look at Kaytron and has a different style. He's a physical guy. He is going to punish you. He's been as big as 225 pounds. I think he's about 215 now, but has been as big as 225.

But it's funny, because people talk about it's almost like thunder and lightning and Nick is like this undersized scat back. Nick is 215 pounds and has the ability to go 80. Obviously both of them, I don't know if there is a better running back class signed in the country, and obviously Nick being named Gatorade National Player of the Year is pretty cool.

We've got really good history as you know with keeping running backs in the state of Pennsylvania and those guys playing well. Obviously with Saquon and Miles and so on and so forth.

We'll see how it plays out. We're super excited about getting them. We've got a lot of work to do, but should be exciting, and I know you'll have fun covering it.

Q. The kind of quarterback that people think Drew can become and the kind of success that you want to have at Penn State, these things are related. Because of that, it seems hard to talk about him as he's just another freshman because he's not really. He is, but the importance that he could have for the program is somewhat obvious so far. How do you balance that with your own process of developing quarterbacks giving not everyone a fair shake necessarily, but seeing how those works out, and what does his next

couple months look like?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we all realize, whether it's high school, college, or the NFL, having a difference maker at the quarterback position and what that's able to do, you talk about franchise quarterbacks in the NFL, you look around college football and you look at the programs that have been able to compete at the highest level. They've had difference makers at the quarterback position.

So obviously when you recruit quarterbacks in this class, like we have, and they're highly regarded very similar to how we were just talking about Nick Singleton, it's a little bit different.

I understand that and I get that. Obviously we're excited about what we're going to be able to do moving forward and they're going to play a big role in that.

But I understand your point. In this sport and at that position, obviously carries a lot of weight. Like a pitcher in baseball that can dominate games, quarterbacks have the ability to do that as well. I think college football has probably become even more quarterback-centric than maybe it was 10, 15 years ago.

The NFL has been like that for a long time. So what I want to try to do is support Drew as much as we possibly can and Beau throughout this entire process. I think Sean coming back helps because I think we want to find that fine line of how do we get these guys ready and develop them but also not put too much pressure on them that comes with the type of rankings and ratings that he has.

Q. Looking through at least one site's rankings, this is the most I guess highly ranked guys from the state of Pennsylvania that you have been able to get on signing day in a couple years, I think dating back to around 2018. What do you make of your approach to in-state recruiting this year, and I guess just what do you think about your ability to get this many guys to stay home in this class?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's a couple things. When you're signing a little bit of a bigger class that allows you to maybe get involved with guys earlier. I think it's really good percentage, right? I think you have to look what were the number of four and five star recruits in some of those other years coming out of the state as well.

You look at the Northeast in general. Talked about this before. The population has gone down. Number of Division I recruits has gone down really in the Northeast.

But it's something from my very first press conference I

walked in here was about keeping the best players in the state of Pennsylvania home. We worked very hard at that, and this year really showed that.

I think obviously when we knew we were going to sign a class of around 25, that helped. That helps when you have a smaller class and you can't throw out as many offers just based on your numbers. That impacts it as well. Or whether it's a position of need. All those things factor into it.

So we're very pleased with the success we had this year in the state of Pennsylvania. State of Pennsylvania is always going to be a priority for us with the high school coaches and the prospects that we have here. We've got to do great in the region as well.

And then I think this class we have also done a pretty good job of going out national and getting some high-profile players from out of our normal footprint too, which has been great.

So I think this is really kind of how we would like to build it every single year, and I think it's a good spread by position and offense and defense as well.

Q. You guys introduced Flowers and Driver today, both as defensive backs. I guess why do you feel that way for both those guys now, and what kind of versatility do they bring in particular?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I would say this for a lot of our guys. We talked about this. We want to recruit as many guys as we possibly can that you look at and you say, You know what? I think these guys could play either side of the ball. The guys that we're recruiting should have that type of ability.

I think the more DBs that we can recruit that have wide receiver skillsets the better we'll be at creating turnovers and big plays on the defensive side of the ball.

The more wideouts we can recruit that have a defensive mindset and mentality and are physical and tough, the better we'll be. You look at Kaden Saunders. I think you could make an argument he could play corner here. I think with the two guys you just talked about, Mehki and who was the other one you mentioned? Mehki and Driver, excuse me, I think you can make arguments both ways, and we've had conversations with both of them about that.

There is still flexibility there that exists. You never know what the future holds, but we feel like that side of the ball, we initially offered Driver as a defensive back, and then he felt like he want to play wide out and then about halfway

through the season he texted and said, Hey, I'll trust the coaches and I'm open to playing anything. Excited about playing defensive back.

And then Mehki, we've had an opportunity to see him in 7-on-7 in some camps as well. It's interesting, at the home visit last week sat down with mom and dad and dad asked the same question. So we want as many defensive backs with ball skills and length as we can possibly find, and I think these two guys fit those characteristics perfectly. Excited about their future and what they're going to do.

I think you could see those guys doing other things, too. Returning kicks, returning punts, and maybe even playing some wide receiver down the road, too.

Q. If I could bring up Kaden Saunders. He committed to you really early on in the process. He got a lot of interest across the country and shut it down with you. What did his loyalty mean to this class, and what kind of receiver, playmaker are you getting in Kaden?

COACH FRANKLIN: I think he was the first commitment in the class. We talked about that today over Zoom with the family. Mom, dad, grandparents have been phenomenal. He was a leader in the class early on. We've been recruiting him for a long time.

I think Terry Smith actually was the coach that started us getting involved with the young man and his family and his high school coach, and then they committed and never wavered. Did a great job recruiting other guys to come with him. Obviously blew up when he got on the camp scene. He came to one of our camps and dominated that as well.

Mom and dad have been phenomenal. We had a great home visit last week. Just tremendous character, tremendous play making ability. Kind of reminds me of a combination between KJ and Jahan. Jahan did a great job today talking to him over Zoom at the signing day ceremony and talking about how he wants him to come in and have a great career here and break all his records.

From a cultural standpoint, it was great to see Jahan do that. I know he's really excited about coming, and Kaden is excited about coming, and obviously coming mid-semester that helps, too.

Q. You mentioned going outside of the footprint nationally to get some players this cycle. One of those places was Texas, bringing in Cristian and Omari. How significant is it to have a presence in a state that's so talented as Texas when it comes to producing athletes?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's really important. You know, we kind of talked about that. You talk about the number of four and five star recruits in our state as well as surrounding states, and then you compare that to states like Texas, Florida, California, Georgia, the number of four and five star recruits there.

And the opportunity to be able to kind of spread our wings and get in some of these areas I think is really important. Really two very different situations. One of the things I'm really proud of and I think speaks volumes about the relationships that the coaching staff has been able to build and how significant those relationships are is a guy like Donald Driver who I coached with the Green Bay Packers.

It was really surreal today. We all got emotional. Mom and dad got emotional talking about that. The fact that they feel strongly enough to trust their son to not go down the street, but go far away and come to Penn State and play for me, and be able to coach dad and now son is really special. Obviously that was the connection there that we were able to get involved in that process very early on. We had to work on mom. Mom wanted him a little bit closer to home at some schools that you would be familiar with. But once we were able to get them all on campus I think they -- everybody felt like it made sense.

Then obviously the other one that we're talking about in Omari, that was a very different situation. We feel like we needed to have a really strong recruiting class at the wide receiver position and get some speed and some size in here, and Omari was playing quarterback so really didn't get to evaluate him as wide receiver. He came to camp and had one of the more impressive workouts that we've seen in terms of his 40, in terms of his broad jump, vertical jump, triple broad, pro-agility, and caught the ball extremely well. Did not drop a ball in our workout.

It's interesting, because he's playing out of position in high school. I don't think people understand what we got there. But based on the in-person workout we had, special. So that was a different situation. Here is a young man that really came to workout for us outside of the footprint. There was no real connections there.

The only thing is he lives with mom in Texas but his father who was involved in the process does live in Ohio, so I think that helped a little bit.

But overall, it's going to be important for us. We're not going to make a living in California or Texas or places like that, but we would love to be able to go get a couple a year, real high character, great students that are great fits here at Penn State.

I think we got a strong enough national brand to be able to do that.

Q. It's been a few years since I've been able to ask you about kids from the city of Philadelphia. I spoke with Coach Johnson at Imhotep a couple weeks ago, and he said he had some good conversations with you to improve the communications and listening to his concerns about your recruiting of Philadelphia city kids. Wondered how you felt about that, and how happy are you to have signed three kids today?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, it's always been something that's been really important to us. I think one of the things we did which has helped is we moved Terry Smith there. You know, obviously Terry was handling Western PA. He obviously spent time at Temple is familiar with the city. I thought that was an important move for us, and I think that helped.

Obviously the other thing was hiring Deion Barnes who came back to us, former Philadelphia player who came to Penn State and had a bunch of success and some time in the NFL and was coaching in high school and now is able to come back and be a graduate assistance for us and get his master's degree and has a really bright future as a college coach.

That helped as well. We have had some players out of Philadelphia that have come and been really successful. We've had some players that we wanted to get but weren't able to be able to get them here for one reason or another.

But obviously being able to recruit the entire state is critical to our success, and if you look at the number of players coming out of the state every single year, Philadelphia has really grown. I think the coaches are doing a great job there. There are some really strong high school programs. Imhotep obviously is one that's a great example of that in terms of being highly successful on the field, great job of coaching these guys.

And then also they've had a number, large number of Division I prospects that have been able to go on and be successful. It's something really important to us, and I think you know I grew up just outside of Northeast Philadelphia, so it's something that is very important to me as well, and we want to continue to do a great job there.

Q. Are there any needs that you guys didn't address that you want to address moving forward? I know with the second signing day coming up. If so, what are they?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, so whether it's the second signing day or whether it's the transfer portal, I think we have some interest depending on how some things play out. But I think we have a need on the offensive line. I think we would be interested in a wide receiver.

And then if you talk about the defensive side of the ball, a defensive end, possibly a defensive tackle based on some things that could happen on our roster.

And then obviously we're losing some big time linebackers. So linebacker, D-line on the defensive side of the ball and then on offense, offensive line, and then possibly wide receiver. We'll see how that plays out, whether it's the second signing day or whether it's the transfer portal. There are a lot of things going on, a lot of moving parts right now.

One of the things we want to make sure we're doing a good job specifically in the transfer portal is that we are doing our homework, we talk to the high school coaches, all the same process that we would do with recruiting kids out of high school.

The challenge a little bit is a lot of these guys entering the portal, they know where they're going before they enter the portal, and that makes it challenging. A lot of times the guys that we want, it's over before it really starts, which is a whole 'nother conversation.

Q. How did you approach players with their families the opportunities for NIL prospects, whatever they may be, with the program or outside?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, NIL is something that we been pushing hard with really since this became an opportunity in college football. It's something that I think as a university, and specifically as an athletic department, I think we're going to have to be a lot more aggressive in. Obviously there are things that you can do as a university and athletic department and coaches and there are things you can't do.

But this is an area that I think we're all seeing every single day is a major factor in the recruitment process, as well as the current players on your team.

So it's something that we need to be bold and aggressive in, and it's something that I think is going to be very, very important not only today, but moving forward.

So it's something that we're going to have to be bold and aggressive in and make some strategic moves and commit to doing it.

Q. Good afternoon, James.

COACH FRANKLIN: Good afternoon.

Q. A little bit of a parochial thing. My understanding is Brent Pry, his geographic recruiting responsibility was District 3 and our area. So have you decided who will take that over that are will you shuffle the deck in terms of your staff and their geographic areas?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, good question. So couple things. We'll wait until we get through this bowl game and the signing period to kind of go through that in detail and make sure we have the entire state covered.

We put every single one of our coaches has a section of the state to make sure we're doing a great job of being thorough and detailed. On top of that, we recruit by position as well. So really we want all these recruits to feel like they're being recruited by the area coach, being recruited by the position coach, also being recruited by the coordinator and by the head coach.

So it's not like if we don't decide right away there is going to be a void, because it should be getting covered one way or another. But your point is a good one. We'll sit down once we get through this completed recruiting season as well as the bowl game and make sure we were it divvied up.

Obviously the other thing we do is with the coordinators, they have a little bit less on their plate than maybe the other positions coaches do when it comes to recruiting.

They are still heavily involved and have areas they're responsible for, but their area may be a little bit smaller. So we'll look at all that and see what makes sense. I know Manny is looking forward to jumping in with both feet. Just got to make sure once we divvy this up again and look at it what makes the most sense to be able to play to our strengths based on our coaching staff's history and backgrounds.

Q. Just curious about two guys on the defensive side of the ball. The importance of them joining your class. Dani Dennis-Sutton, and what was that like recruitment like, and KJ, Kevin Winston, as well?

COACH FRANKLIN: So two guys obviously from Maryland. Dani we've had a bunch of success with his high school as you know, so I think there is history there. There is trust there. Really all of those guys have come here and thrived, so I think that helps. I think that helps. Those guys end up going back and helping us recruit, and I think the parents are aware that these guys are coming

here and getting a great education and playing big time football.

Dani is a guy that was heavily recruited. Really could have went anywhere in the country. Also not only going to high school in Maryland, but he is from Delaware. Had a bunch of success recruiting the state of Delaware as well if you look at our history.

But he is also a guy that you look at his film and also his measurables and he's a guy that you sit here and say you could pencil him in as a guy that's going to have an opportunity to compete even though he is not coming in mid-semester. He's 6'5', 255 pounds, physical against the run, he can rush the passer. So he's not like an undersized defensive end that you're going to have to develop over time.

He's got the ability to come in and compete from day one, and I think that's going to be his mentality and approach. He's also a very mature young man. You go to that high school, McDonough High School, everybody is raving about him. So that's Dani.

Talk about KJ or Kevin Winston. DeMatha High School. I've been recruiting DeMatha and McGregor seems like forever. We've had a bunch of success obviously with young men from there as well. Two high school programs that do a great job of coaching these guys about the game and techniques and fundamentals.

I think KJ may have been All-Met in terms of the player of the year in the DMV and a guy that not only was able to impact the game on defense, but was able to impact the game on offense.

Has the length we think can play safety. We think he could also play the star, the nickel corner position, and there is part of me that would like to start him at corner to see if he could do that. The more guys we have with those type of bodies that can play on the perimeter and not only make plays with their athleticism, but also their length, I think there is tremendous value to that.

Two great guys from a two great programs that I think will have a chance to come in and compete as true freshman, and we're expecting them to. Neither one of them are early enrollees. I wish they were. The way their schools are structured and set up that wasn't going to be an option, but I think they'll hit the ground running.

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