

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



Q. How different is your roster and particularly your starting lineup today as it was from the Michigan State game, and do you expect a lot of changes before the bowl game?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, it's really still kind of a moving target. A lot of conversations going on right now; really has been since the last game at Michigan State obviously, so we'll see how that plays out.

But as you see this across college football, this is going on, so we'll see how it goes, but there still ongoing conversations.

Q. Is Anthony Poindexter going to be your DC for the bowl game? And regardless of who that person is, what's Manny's role going to be during this period?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, so Anthony Poindexter will call the defense for the bowl game. Manny is really here getting adjusted. Obviously all the HR paperwork that has to be done at place like Penn State, getting him familiar with the roster, getting him familiar with the coaching staff. You know, just getting adjusted, recruiting, all those types of things.

So he's basically here just kind of getting adjusted to Penn State. It wouldn't be fair to him or the staff to jump right in, so obvious after the bowl game we'll make that transition complete.

Q. Obviously Brent was going to be a difficult guy to replace for you guys. What did you know about Manny that made him feel like the right fit to you? Was he one of those guys you kind of had on that list of potential people to step in in case that was every needed?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, as you know, to your point, we keep an ongoing list of guys that obviously maybe fit different roles within our organization, and then obviously the time that we have been able to kind of interact over the years, there was a lot of exchanging ideas between the defensive staffs really over a long period of time.

And then when you really kind of really start to get into this and really start to do more deep dives in terms of information and in terms of fit, in terms of scheme, so that you're not starting all over with a completely different scheme and current players in your roster have some concerns and question marks there, and then obviously the recruits as well.

So being able to go out and get the most experienced defensive coordinator that we can get, the head coach experience is a bonus, but the most experienced, successful defensive coordinator that we could get that came from a similar scheme background.

So I was trying to be a little bit sensitive obviously. His last week was kind of crazy as everybody followed on social media. It was a whirlwind, so I was trying to be respectful of what he was going through both you personally and professionally, but also making sure that we talked enough that we could come to a point where both parties were comfortable with it moving forward.

The other thing, as you guys know, is I work really hard, really hard, to try to make sure that our players and our staff find out about it before anybody else. As we all know, that is really difficult to do nowadays. So trying to keep the circle as tight as possible, you know, and that can create challenges as well.

So combination of all those factors.

And then the other thing, as you guys know, there was a bunch of big time programs that were in need of defensive coordinators, and a lot of us were all talking to the same people.

So that factored into it as well.

Q. There was a story in the Philadelphia Enquirer a couple weeks ago interviewing Villanova's linebacker where he said that there were tells for Penn State's offense. I'm not sure if you saw the story or not, but he said they knew whether plays were going to be runs or passes. Just curious whether or not you guys saw anything reflecting on the film this year that gave that



kind of stuff away and what your overall analysis was of the offense this season?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, there is always tells, right? That's what you do all week long. You study and try to find them of your opponent and then you're also doing them of yourself. A lot of times you can figure out defensively if they're running a line stunt based on the stance they're in, which foot is up, which foot is back, those types of things.

And obviously I have friends on the Villanova staff, so what you try to do with the opponents that you have friends is, you reach out to afterwards and say, Hey, do you guys have anything on us? We had some things on you guys as well, and be able to share those.

But I did not see the article. Yeah, we go through these things. That's a big part of our weekly self-scout as well as opponent scout that you're trying to find tells and tendencies based on safeties depth and width or different type of stances.

We had an indicator in terms of one of our offensive lineman's stance that we were able to get resolved after that game. But there is always something there in yours and always something in your opponent's, and you're trying to figure out what those things are and try to either eliminate them or complement them with a tendency breaker.

Because maybe it's something you can't eliminate, it's going to be there, but that you're going to have some other plays or other schemes that you're going to run out in a similar tendency to break it so they're not as confident.

Q. In the last couple weeks you were able to hang on to a key assistant. You were able to beat out other programs in about five days for Manny Diaz. We aren't privy to a lot of details that go on with you negotiations or other negotiations, but do you think 12 months ago that you guys would've had that mobility to do that?

COACH FRANKLIN: You're talking about systematically at Penn State?

Q. Yeah.

COACH FRANKLIN: You know, that's been probably one of the things that we've been working on since I got here, is how can we be more streamlined, how can we move quickly.

You know, we're not really in a position where it's the weekend and people aren't working on the weekend or things like that. That could show up whether it's bringing in

a transfer student, hiring staff. In college football there is really not a day of the week or a time of the day where you can say, We're not open for business.

So I think we have improved in that area. I still think there is room for growth, and I think to your point, when I talk about competing in every single area 364 days a year, those are the type of things.

I think that's a really good example. Being able to move quickly, being able to get a contract in place that people are comfortable with, obviously there is always lawyers involved and those types of things, so I think that is one of many elements that I think we have improved on but we still have room for growth there. I think that's a really good example, Ben.

Q. James, how are you?

COACH FRANKLIN: Good. You?

Q. Good. How would you evaluate Mike Yurcich after most of his first season as your coordinator?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I haven't really at this point gone back and literally broke it all down and studied all the data. Obviously we would have loved to have put more points on the board and been more explosive and been more consistent, and that's really what we will spend a lot of time doing once the season is ended, is go back through everything, offense. Defense, special teams, and really kind of map it all out and where were we good, where were we not good, what were the reasons for us not being good in really all three phases.

As you can imagine, I think it's a really good question and fair question, but as you can imagine, from the time we played our last game we been on the road recruiting. I think you did 17 home visits the last week out, and then on the same time, I'm trying to help Brent Pry in his situation at Virginia Tech.

I'm also thinking about if I lose Brent Pry what I'm going to do to resolve that. Obviously had some other coaches involved in head coaching opportunities and I was trying to help them and also think about if they left how I was going to replace them, and then what members of the staff do I need to retain as well; dealing with the transfer portal, name image, and likeness and everything else that's out there.

To answer your question, Rich, that will be something we'll do a deep dive on. But offensively, defensively, and special teams, obviously we would like to be No. 1 in the country, No. 1 in the Big10, whatever it is in every single

category, and we're going to have to do a deep dive on all those things and say, Okay, where weren't we good enough, why weren't we good enough in that area, what modifications can we make, and what needs to be resolved either through the recruiting process, through the transfer portal, or the old fashioned development, which is a huge part of it as well.

That's development of the players and development of the staff, too.

Q. James, on your signing day show, Manny mentioned that you guys are like-minded kind of in terms of defensive philosophy. Can you tell us where you guys are aligned and maybe give us some details on what you can share with us in terms of your discussions with him when talking about those things? Thank you.

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the biggest thing, Mark, on that, is do we both base from a historical perspective and what we've done here and what he's done? Do we both base out of a four-down in terms of base defense? Do we have the ability to go three down, yes, but are we basing out of a four down? Are we basing out of a 4-2-5, are we basing out of a 4-3? We've really done both in my 12 years as a head coach.

We've been 4-2-5 really in my time at Vanderbilt just based on the personnel that we had, and then obviously based out of a 4-3 and what makes the most sense.

In terms of on the back end, are you basing out of a quarter-quarter half? Are you a man, middle of field man closed man team? Are you trying to be disruptive and create sacks and tackles for loss, or are you playing more let's eliminate the explosive play and keep everything in front of us mindset.

So it's really those things that I was aware of and I think he was aware of based on, again, previous discussions and us studying them and them studying us, which was helpful.

We have other kind of crossovers in terms of he was at NC State the whole time I was at Maryland. He was also at Florida State when we were at Maryland, so there is history there from the tree he comes from.

Again, maybe that was more of a four down, middle of the field closed defense that was man coverage and overload your numbers in the box. But then I also think it's how did he operate as a head coach in terms of communication, in terms of structure, those types of things.

Having Taylor on our staff, he's worked for me and now

worked for him as a head coach as well, and how he ran things and how he structured things. Some guys come from a structure where they don't really ever meet. So did it make sense from that perspective, and then just kind of talking to each other and him asking me overall philosophy and defensive philosophy and vice versa.

I think all those things were helpful through the entire discussion for both of us.

Q. I wanted to ask you how much bowl games matter now. Historically bowl games have been tremendously significant in college football, and especially to Penn State. Now you've got a game with two of the six Heisman top vote getters aren't going to play. Other teams may not have -- how do you convince the public that these games are still significant?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think obviously that's a challenge right now. You know, I think I did an interview the other day, I don't know whether you listened to it or not, but that was my argument. We're talking about going eight playoff spots or twelve playoff spots. In my mind, you make it as big as possible.

Once we expand the playoffs, in my opinion, we're going to continue to deemphasize those other bowl games. To me, if we're going to expand the playoffs, we should expand it as big as we possibly can to allow more teams the opportunity to play for the title, but also to be able to protect those bowl games by including them in that process as much as possible.

Your point is a fair one. Every time I turn on my phone there is someone opting out from what we would all consider people that have been watching college football and loving college football for a long time big time, significant bowl games where players aren't playing in them.

And this goes all the way back. I think it started to get maybe some national headlines I think maybe McCaffery opted out at Stanford. That's the first one that jumps into my mind, if I'm right there. But there has obviously been others.

Q. Piggybacking on what Corey said, I remember Paterno making some surprising personnel choices in bowl games like this that weren't like a top-tier, very important bowl game 25 years ago. Considering what we're talking about here, do you consider this the end of this season or kind of the beginning of next season personnel-wise and who you play?

COACH FRANKLIN: I think it's a little bit of both.



Obviously I don't know the specifics of what you're talking about. Obviously as coaches there is things that we can share publically and want to share publically and a lot of things going on behind the scenes that people aren't privy to, so I'm not sure about the specific decisions you're talking about and really what were the reasons for those decisions, not just what was presented publically.

But, yeah, I think it's a combination of both, right? It's the end of the season and still an opportunity for us to go out and play the way we want to play, and still an opportunity for players to show on a national stage what they're capable of doing, not only for Penn State, but also for their futures.

And also some young players getting some opportunities, more significant opportunities to give them some momentum going into the off-season. But I think, as you know, we change -- there is a lot of rules that are impacting all of this. A few years BACK we can changed the rule where agents could talk to players from the time they're freshman.

Now we've done the name, imagine, and likeness and you got players being able to work with marketing companies for name, image and likeness, and most of these marketing companies are tied to agents and they're being -- they're in there all year long and they're talking to the players, they're talking to the parents.

So I know coaches, including us, are having discussions with our players throughout the year that you normally wouldn't be having. There is a lot of things that are factoring into this, all relevant questions, all good questions.

But there is a lot of things that are factoring into this right now and a lot of things that need to be discussed. I've had a lot of conversations. Actually was on the phone with a good friend David Shaw last night. We were discussing some of these things. I'm going on to board, the American Football Coaches Association. I was asked to join that by Todd Berry. So going on to the board for that so we can have some discussions about what we have to do for college football, and really college athletics as a whole.

There is some decisions that are going to have to be made moving forward. A lot of factors into all this.

Q. Kind of related to the last couple questions, when people had analyzing bowl games they often talk about trying to figure out what a team's motivation might be in that game. Seems like that is more in bowl games than in normal games. Can you talk about your experience preparing teams to play? Is that a thing

based on your experience preparing team to play to a bowl game? Maybe it's too early, but can you take the temperature of your football team right now in this moment in that context?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's always been a factor, right? You remember when I was at Maryland. I actually was with Coach Whitten who is the head coach now of Driver who we signed, Cristian Driver. We were talking about this because I was at Maryland and he was at Tennessee at the time. Tennessee was having a season where they thought they were going to play for a national championship and didn't.

Maryland, at the time we were really excited about getting into the Peach Bowl. It was a huge game. I think we end up beating them 36 to 6 or something like that. So that's always been a factor of it. There is no doubt about it.

Funny, I was talking to Anthony Poindexter the other day and a bunch of other coaches about what bowl season used to be like. It was two-a-days. I remember being at Maryland with Ralph and playing in the BCS Orange Bowl. Made it to the playoffs and we did two-a-days. Landed the plane and went right to the field. We didn't even go to the hotel.

I remember talking to Anthony Poindexter. They were doing three-a-days. Then I was talking to Terry Smith and they were talking in the old days at Penn State they would go for two weeks. Go a week somewhere and practice and then do a week at the bowl site specifically to that game, and it was the same thing. It was two-a-days for that first week, and then get to more bowl prep the second week.

So if you look at how bowls have changed over the last however many years, it's dramatic. I remember being at schools that didn't have an indoor facility and you're practicing outside in the Northeast in 30 degree weather, and how that was trying to get the guys motivated for that.

So there is a lot of factors that go into it. There is no doubt about it. I think to the point that Dave had earlier, it's obviously the younger players that you have in your program that may be getting more significant experience than they've had where they are at with it compared to some older players.

And then I think, as you know, you go on social media and there is always types of information being sent out there about what's important and what is not. There is mixed messages across our society in a lot of different things right now. Some people call it rat poison.

We're trying to eliminate as much distraction as we can



possibly, but also be realistic about what's going on and try to do everything we can to put our players and our program in the best position to be successful, and also to make sure that they have the best experience they can have.

Q. James, you talked a lot about Manny Diaz, like what is sort of the same about what he does schematically compared to what you want in the past. What does he do that separates himself and what made that appealing to you?

COACH FRANKLIN: I think if you look at the data, and obviously things have changed right now as being a head coach, but you think some of the stuff that really jumped out is the tackle for losses in the turnovers. You know, he's got some really good data out there based on his time as a defensive coordinator.

And then you look at the data and watch the film and talk to people that you respect that went against them during those times as well. And not only did I get that before, but then also got that after. Amazing how many people reached out to me after the hire about why they felt like it was a good hire and the details of it.

So we did a lot of that homework ahead of time, but I think the disruptive aspect of it I think has aligned with really who we've been in the past as well. Tackles for loss specifically, and then turnovers.

I think if I had to say one area that I think we can be better at defensively is turnovers. Been pretty good in terms of sacks. I'm talking about over the eight years as a whole we been pretty good in terms ever tackles for loss.

I think we have gotten better in the turnover area, but I think that's still -- if you're looking for low hanging fruit in an area where you can really make a significant jump and the opportunities have been there, that's it.

And it was interesting after the first couple practices he watched. The very first one he addressed the defense at the end of practice not really specific to coaching or scheme, but just kind of how he saw it all and what his approach is going to be moving forward. I thought that was interesting for me to listen to.

Q. I'm working on an update on Journey Brown. Hoping you could comment on his involvement with the team since his retirement and where you think we might see him five or ten years down the road.

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, Journey obviously has got an incredible story from recruiting him out of high school and getting to know his family to see what he's been able to do

at Penn State. I was watching some highlights the other day. The Cotton Bowl when he played lights out, you know, and think about what he's been able to do academically. The number of calls that I've gotten from influential Penn State people that want to help him, and really Journey and how he's handled this. He's really handled some really tough news in a pretty impressive way.

So I think Journey is still trying to figure out what his path is gonna be, whether it's going to be in football, whether it's going to be in some type of community aspect, running a community center and making an impact in kids' lives, whether it's working on a college campus in a football department, but maybe in football -- excuse me, in player development -- whether it's community service and things like that, whether it's going into his own business.

I think Journey is still trying to figure out what that next phase is, and he's been around our program. I would like to see him every single day, but he's here more times than he's not. Trying to get him to make sure that he gets that Penn State degree so as many avenues are open to him as possible.

He seems like he's trending in that direction, so I love Journey Brown as a person. Obviously loved him as a player. I think he's got a very, very bright future, but we're still on this journey with him. I see very bright things in the future for him.

Q. Kind of going back to the bowl question, you're taking a number of guys completing their second season here, but making their first bowl trip. Spoke with KeAndre Lambert-Smith earlier and he was talking about things he was excited for, going down to Tampa, just a change a venue, a change of pace. What's the temperature like with those young guys going to be making this trip?

COACH FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, to be honest with you, as you know, Elton, I wish I had specific answers for you, but, again, since the its season ended we been ripping and running, and then we had practice yesterday, we got practice today.

I think the practices have been really good. I thought practice yesterday there was a real element of energy and enthusiasm at the end of practice and guys flying around and having fun, and some guys that are getting a lot more reps now than they got during the season, so energy that comes from that.

There are guys that their roles will be more significant in this game based on some discussions that are still going on. So I think KeAndre is a one of those guys, right, that

we're all excited about when we're able to get KeAndre to come to Penn State, and he's shown on flashes and I know he's ready to take that next step and we need him to take the next step, so I think he's a good example.

But it's been overall really good. Then I think obviously having a guy like Sean come out and make a public statement, I think there will be a few more of those coming out here, soon hopefully.

But it's been good. I think today's practice will be good because today is really the first practice we're really transitioning into Arkansas. The other practices were more like spring ball type practices that had some Arkansas introduction elements in them, but today is truly an Arkansas practice.

We will have another Arkansas practice on Sunday. We don't practice on Saturday because we leave that day open for the guys that are graduating.

And it's pretty cool, V'Angelo Bentley one of our graduate assistants is graduating with his master's degree, and super proud of him, which is also important.

And then obviously guys will get a little bit of time off after they finish up their exams and get some time with their families for Christmas, which is nice.

And then we'll travel. We'll travel Christmas evening to the bowl site. So, so far so good, Elton, but today will be a true tell because it's more specific to our opponent.

Q. Hey, James. Merry Christmas.

COACH FRANKLIN: Hey, Neil. I like that. You're usually like a scrooge type of guy.

Q. Ebenezer, yeah, you mentioned moving parts. Can you at least address --

COACH FRANKLIN: Say what you said. I didn't hear the beginning.

Q. You mentioned moving parts. Can you at least address whether Jahan's status has been resolved or are you leaving that confirmation to him?

COACH FRANKLIN: Again, this is an example where you guys are going to ask me questions, and I get it, that's your job, that's part of it. But as you know over eight years, I'm not going to disclose a player's situation, whether it's injury, whether it's NFL, whatever it may be.

Whether it's Sean Clifford announcing that he's coming

back, I'm not going to make those announcements. We're going to work with the student-athletes and guys that are announcing they're coming back or are entering the NFL draft or whatever it may be.

For eight years I've left that up to the student-athletes, and that process isn't going to change.

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