

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: So first of all, like always, appreciate you guys being here and covering Penn State football.

Brief summary of the Purdue game. Some of this I've already covered so I'll keep it brief.

Turnover battle on paper it says even, but obviously one of those turnovers going for a pick-six changes that, although we did score points off of our defense's turnover, as well.

Penalties, we were able to win that battle, which again being on the road, dealing with that noise in an opening game, I think is a positive.

Drive start battle, we won that. The sack battle, we won that. Explosive plays, we did not. We did not. So got to improve in those areas.

Players of the game on offense, Olumuyiwa Fashanu and Kayvone Lee, defensively Joey Porter, Barney Amor. The scout team or developmental squad players of the week were Mason Stahl and Vega Iaone. Offense and defense, Cody Romano and Andrew Sharga, special teams Cody Romano. Cool that Sean Clifford was the co-offensive player of the week in the Big Ten.

Defensively Joey Porter was a national player of the week in the Bednarik Award, but he didn't get any Big Ten love for whatever reason.

I thought we played hard. When you watch the game, I thought we played hard against a good team. I think that team is going to give a lot of people problems this year. Same team last year that beat No. 2 Iowa and No. 5 Michigan State. So they've been in big games before.

The thing that really jumped out to me in that game was we won situational football, the thing that we work on all the time. Offense won a coming out, a sudden change, a two-minute at the end of the half and a two-minute at the end of the game.

Defensively we won a two-minute at the end of the half and



at the end of the game. A four-minute to win the game. I thought that was a big positive for us.

Opportunities for growth. Obviously too many dropped balls. I think the game could have been completely different if we caught more balls. That's on offense and defense.

Then we got to be more explosive. There's no doubt about it. We got to be more explosive on offense.

I'm pleased overall. Found a way to get a tough, gritty win on the road. We were able to come in, practice on Friday, meet on Friday, get those things cleaned up. The players had off on Saturday. Then we went back to our normal workweek on Sunday. Not completely normal because obviously we didn't have any corrections to make.

Talking about Ohio, six-game series with these guys. Last time we played them was a loss in 2012. Tim Albin is the head coach. I don't really know Tim or this staff very well. Obviously he has a tremendous résumé and history there.

12 returning starters from last year. Thought they went out and played really well in game one and did some really good things. So that will be a challenge.

When you talk about their offense, Scott Isphording is the offensive coordinator. Kurtis Rourke, their quarterback, stands out as also a captain for them. They're a spread option attack offensively. Obviously they kind of promoted from within and stayed in-house. A lot of things that they did last are still consistent this year.

Kurtis, high-completion percentage. The wide receiver James Bostic, and the running back a local kid from Maryland, Bangura, we've been impressed with him.

On defense, Spence Nowinski, they actually hired away from Miami of Ohio. Established defensive coordinator, been able to watch him in game one, then be able to go back and watch what they did at Miami of Ohio I think was important.

Obviously first games are challenging. Second games can still be challenging because you still don't have a whole lot



of data to study.

Been impressed with their will linebacker, No. 32, Bryce Houston. Defensive tackle, Rodney Matthews. Then strong safety, No. 11, Tariq Drake.

Then last thing on special teams, Nate Faanes is their special teams coordinator. They got four starters returning on special teams. The punter who punted last year, an Australian young man, we didn't see in the last game. I'm not sure if he'll be back this week or not. I thought their kicker, who is a freshman, did a really good job with his OPT times. He was 2-2.

Tremendous challenge. Obviously today's practice will be important. I loved how our guys handled both Friday's practice and Sunday's practice. We're a little bit ahead because of that.

Mainly at the end of the day we got to get better this week. That's in every area, offense, defense, special teams, and also individually. If we do that each week as the season progresses, I think we'll like where we're at.

Q. After watching film, how would you evaluate the performance of your offensive line?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I thought the majority of our offensive linemen played well. We had I think one penalty on the offensive line and one sack, so we got to clean that up.

Watching the tape, we had a chance for a few more explosive runs. We had to make that one free hitter miss, and we weren't able to do that. But we just got to continue to progress.

One sack in the game on the road, first game in the Big Ten, I think we took a step, but there's still work that needs to be done.

Q. Joey Porter Jr., normally when you talk about corners, they say the guys you don't hear about are the guys doing their job the best. The penalties, things like that, led to that. How do you balance a guy who is getting targeted a lot, but at the same time a guy who is having apparently a lot of success in those moments?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, obviously it's unusual to have a guy that's as highly thought of as Joey. I don't know if they necessarily targeted him, but they didn't avoid him. A lot of times people will just go in a different direction.

But I just think they were just going to run their offense and

do what they do, and where the defense or the quarterback's progression took them, they were going to go.

I think this guy does as good of a job as anybody in terms of throwing the ball, both the head coach as the coordinator and the quarterback. They do a really good job at it. Joey kept getting tested. As the game went on, really played well. I think his confidence continues to grow. Obviously it's a great way for him to start the season, not just with the PBUs, but also the tackles.

The next step really for him and for us, just like I talked about in the opening comment, is about dropped balls. That's defensively and offensively because that game would have been very different with a couple of those opportunities, turn it into interceptions and possibly pick-sixes for us that I think we're capable of doing.

So great way for him to start the year. We're going to have to continue to build on it because I think that's the key, right, is the elite teams and the elite players, it's about consistency.

Q. I apologize about this. I wanted to ask you about College Football Playoff expansion. What do you think the benefits of that could be and how might that change football once that comes into play? Are there any negatives at all, too?

JAMES FRANKLIN: In season I haven't really spent a whole lot of time on this. This obviously came out in season. But obviously the Playoff model has obviously changed college football, really has. I would say that's really starting with the BCS, now our current model.

But I do think, I do think if you look at most of the sports in college football or sports in general, more opportunities for more teams to get in without going too far I think is important.

There's obviously always the discussion about teams maybe that aren't Power Five schools that had great years but are left out, or a situation like us where we won the Big Ten championship, arguably top two conferences if not the best conference in all of college football, and be left out. I think it helps resolve and solve some of those issues.

We obviously in our sport also have to look at the length of the season from an academic calendar perspective but also just from a physicality perspective.

There's a lot of things that go into it, but I think in general it's a positive. I think it's something that was needed. I'm also a believer that I don't think the answer, not just in this

but in everything, I don't think the answer's always more is better. We got to find the sweet spot for college football, for the fans, and most importantly for the student-athletes.

Q. Theo Johnson traveled but didn't suit up. Was there a chance he would play against Purdue? How is he holding up ahead of Ohio?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We were hoping that we may have him available in that Purdue game. That's not our call. But we were hopeful. Traveled him to see if there was a chance of that. We'll kind of go from there.

Obviously everybody knows how much of a big-time player he is, how much respect we have for him both on and off the field. So hopefully we're able to get him back sooner rather than later. Hopefully that's this week.

We had to scramble there because a big part of our game plan was 12 personnel, 13 personnel. We had to scramble. The positive is it allowed us to get Effner some more reps rather than just at tackle. If you watched the tape closely, he actually played like an extra tight end in some sets for us, which also allowed us to get him a little bit more playing time, which he's earned.

Q. I was wondering if you could talk about Dan Rocco's contribution to the staff, his son as well, the Rocco family's link to Penn State football, how much you know Frank as well.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's obviously really cool. You talk about the dad, I guess it's the grandfather, depending on who you're calling the dad, the grandfather, the dad, the son, the brother. Obviously long history with Penn State football. Obviously very aware of all those things.

I think you guys have seen kind of with our staff when we've been able to connect from a historical perspective with some of the staff that we've been able to bring back, whether it's the Roccas, Connors, Zemaitises. I think that's been important for us. Terry Smith. It's been important to help bridge that gap.

A place with unbelievable tradition and history. For our players to be able to learn from these guys' experiences, from me to be able to hear some of these things in the past, how things were done and why, has been really cool.

I've known the Rocco family for a long time. Obviously getting here to Penn State, getting to know the grandfather well. To be honest, I mess it up sometimes. I call Danny Frank, and call David Danny sometimes. In general it helps me if I say 'coach,' and whoever turns around I make eye contact with the guy I'm talking about.

They've been great. Obviously when you're able to get that experience, that head coach experience, that NFL experience, that Penn State experience, there's tremendous value in that.

What really helped us a little bit with David is him and Ty Howle worked together as well, so it allowed me to really kind of have an understanding. I got a ton of respect for Ty Howle. Another guy I didn't mention, Tyrone. Ty Howle worked with David, so I think that was helpful, too.

So it's been good.

Q. There's a newly announced today NIL collective started by former football players and will benefit Penn State's football program exclusively. What kind of impact could that have for your team?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, obviously first of all we appreciate all the people, whether they're alumni or fans or donors, with all of the NIL opportunities and groups that are out there.

Obviously this one specifically wanted to work with football. The other groups are doing that, as well. But this is something that we want to make sure those groups are working together, doing what's best for Penn State and Penn State athletics as a whole.

But obviously certain people are going to have a connection with certain sports that they're more passionate about. We appreciate what they're doing. Obviously there's a lot of passion and hard work that's going to go into it.

Obviously from a name, image, from being supportive with us, not only in this area but really since we've been back, they've been great. We look forward to any opportunities that they can present to our student-athletes and our program. We are appreciative of that. We really are.

I also want to say we got a ton of respect and appreciation for Success With Honor and what they're doing. I think Pat has really kind of come in and I think has worked really well with these groups outside of the athletic department, making sure everyone's on the same page, we're all pulling the rope in the same direction.

Q. You've talked a lot about developing depth, played a lot of people last week. Quarterback is a unique situation. How likely is it that you would give a backup quarterback a series not in a mop-up situation but in a real, live, competitive game situation over the next couple weeks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we've had discussions about that. Obviously we want to make sure that we have depth throughout our entire program at every position. Obviously I think the last two years that had a major factor in how our seasons went.

Being very strategic and working hard to find ways to get guys on the field and gain that experience, not only in practice and our developmental scrimmages that we just had this past Sunday, but also out there in Beaver Stadium.

I think in theory what we've tried to do is hopefully play in a way in some games that allows you to get guys on the field. But it always doesn't play out that way. So being strategic the best we can to put all of our players at every position in position to gain that valuable game experience. It's something we're looking at. We'll see how it plays out.

Q. How you would evaluate your defensive end's pass-rush, especially Adisa?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I thought, again, when the game got there to the end and the quarterback had to hold onto the ball, we were able to get home and make some plays.

But when you look at this team, we knew going into it that batted-down balls were going to be as significant maybe as what sacks normally are based on how quickly the ball comes out of the quarterback's hand. I thought that was something that we really kind of emphasized and were focused on.

Overall good. Obviously at the end of the day you'd like more tackles for loss and you'd like more sacks. Again, based on who you play, what their scheme is like, you play a team like Wisconsin who is going to run the ball 80% of the time, then hard-play action pass, manageable third down situations, they typically aren't going to give up a bunch of sacks. Play a team like Purdue where the ball is coming out quickly, screens, RPOs, quick gain, it's going to impact it.

At the end of the day we want to get people off schedule. The way you do that is with tackles for loss and sacks.

Q. After looking at film this weekend, how would you describe the secondary's performance? Joey Porter Jr. had a good game. How would you describe how the other guys played?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think really good. I think we actually had it different, the number of pass breakups that we had. A lot of times when you're in the away stadium,

the way they chart it is different than you. It's not like you can call back and make your argument, they really want to have it the following week.

I think, if I'm correct, checking my notes here, I think we had us down for 14 pass breakups.

THE MODERATOR: 16.

JAMES FRANKLIN: 16, thank you.

The way we had it graded. We thought we played really well against a team that is going to test you and your pass game. They're going to test you. So I thought under the circumstances played well.

The area obviously that I've mentioned already that we got to be better at is when we have an opportunity for a turnover, for an interception, we got to capitalize on that. Very similar to when we have an opportunity for a sack, we got to capitalize on them as well.

But taking all that into consideration, there's room for improvement.

Q. The two defensive positions that we spent a lot of time asking you in pre-season were middle linebacker and safety. Keaton and Tyler got to start. Can you share your evaluation through one game on those two spots and the plan moving forward?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we haven't talked about it for this week yet, but Abdul Carter, we were expecting him to play a decent amount in that game. It was really dependent on how he was going to play. With it being his first game, we didn't want to have a strict rotation. Obviously I think he ended up playing two plays, one on special teams and one on defense. Our plan was for much more than that.

This week I'd like to get him a ton of reps both on special teams and on defense. Then obviously this game will give us a better feel of how that rotation will go moving forward.

I think the plan is probably still the same Elsdon and Kobe to rotate that by series, whether it's one to one or two to two.

Then at the other outside linebacker spot, it's really different because that position typically gets subbed out by going nickel, so the rotation wouldn't be the same there.

Obviously DeLuca was able to go in and get some reps, but we really see that Sutherland and nickel being the main rotation with DeLuca being able to get some time. We'd

like to be able to see him get some time this week as well. We'll see how that plays out.

Obviously when Abdul gets the targeting penalty, Jamari Buddin, which that really wasn't part of the plan, but it just was an example. As we all know, things don't go exactly as planned. He went in there, functioned with the defense. We were able to get Curtis a little bit of a blow. That was good. Hopefully he can build on that and gain some confidence and go from there.

Q. (No microphone.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, we haven't had this discussion. We haven't even had a practice this week yet. We haven't made any changes in things like that.

But like we've talked about in the past, we got a lot of confidence in Jaylen Reed, a lot of confidence in Zakee Wheatley. Zakee continues to make plays. Whether it was in the spring, whether it was in camp when he led us in turnovers, then he gets in the game on Saturday and the ball carrier has the ball on the inside arm, which is something that we teach to do the opposite of, always have the ball towards the sideline for that very reason. But the ball was there, Zakee has the ability to get his hands on the ball, whether it's interceptions or a critical fumble we were able to capitalize on. Both Joey and then our offense.

No changes right now to announce to you. But obviously all those guys will play.

Q. On the turnover in the second half, I noticed that Pat Kraft was on the sidelines celebrating with the guys. How does it feel to have a guy like that in your guys' corner?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, he's got a reputation. He's told me this, had a reputation, like he needs a get-back coach. He is into it, there's no doubt about it, which is cool. Was in the locker room with us after the game, on the sideline.

But he has a reputation. He almost wants to be out there I think, which I think for our team, the energy, it's appreciated, it's welcomed. Again, I rather that be the problem.

Q. You mentioned last week building up that receiver depth. Omari Evans didn't play much, but got in against Purdue. What did you see from him early in camp and the start of the season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Omari as well as Harrison Wallace, Harrison ended up playing a bunch in the game. Omari is

a guy that can flat out run, I mean, can run run, but is still kind of growing and figuring it out. Omari, the way we had it set up, I think he was a tap guy for Tinsley. He's not a rotational guy right now, but he's a tap guy. We'll see how that plays out. We got a bunch of guys each week competing for that backup spot.

He has shown flashes of some really good stuff. Like a lot of players, whether it's in football or in basketball, he's got to learn to play fast without the ball in his hand, to create that separation and the timing that we need. But he's shown some really, really good flashes in practice and even in the game that we need to build on.

Q. Your defensive front seven, seems like there's a lot going on there from a schematic standpoint. How did they handle that from a standpoint of execution and a physical standpoint of being able to execute those assignments?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think what we all hope for, right, is from game one to two that you make the biggest jump, specifically on the defensive side of the ball where we have some new wrinkles and some subtle weeks to the scheme.

But I think that's where we can really take the next step because we did have some missed assignments at critical times in the game that we got to get cleaned up. That was what Friday and Sunday was for. But I think you'll see those guys continuing to progress.

Again, giving credit to Purdue, I think they do some good things that challenge you as well. But I was pleased with those guys. We got to continue to grow, continue to gain experience. That's where getting Kobe a ton of reps, getting Elsdon a ton of reps, Abdul Carter, guys that haven't played a whole lot of football at this level in the Big Ten, we got to get them caught up as quickly as we possibly can, coordinated with the front.

In the front we have a lot of guys that have played a lot of football for us. We got to build on that. Getting guys like Zane Durant, getting them a bunch of reps, Chop Robinson, Jordan van den Berg, guys that are in that group that haven't played as much football as maybe some of the other guys. Dani would fall into that category.

It just made me think, I thought one of my favorite plays in the game, to see a guy who has kind of been working and waiting for his opportunity, was the Amin Vanover retrace big tackle, maybe a touchdown-saving tackle like 20 yards down the field. His catapult numbers were really good in terms of how fast he was running. Played really hard. I'm proud of him. I want to continue to build on that with him. I

know our defense coaches do, too.

Q. Have you made a decision this week whether Drew will be Sean's backup for Ohio? How do you think PJ Mustipher did after a significant injury?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, similar answer. I know this is not what you guys want, but a similar answer that I've given other people.

We haven't really made any decisions. We had basically a Friday corrections jog-through practice, and kind of a bonus one on Sunday which we were able to do a little bit more, but we still were only in helmets. Tuesday and Wednesday is our workday where we get the best evaluation kind of where we're at. That determines maybe some moves that we may or may not make.

But like I mentioned before, it's a competition week in and week out. I don't have that answer for you right now.

When you ask about PJ, he's just doing everything right on the field, off the field, from a leadership standpoint. He had a great message to the guys on Friday after the game about being present and being locked in, focused here. By doing that, it will take care of all your objectives and goals down the road. He's been great.

Again, I would say that I don't know if last week's game was necessarily PJ's type of game, but I thought he played well, put us in position to win.

Q. You said this is one of the best tight end groups you've had since you've been at Penn State. What more going forward do you hope to see from that group? How do you try to make them more consistent contributors in the pass game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Some of the things we already talked about: consistently catching the ball. We had one drop that I can remember at the tight end position. Then being physical, physical, having a physical, physical presence in the run game and finishing blocks because when we talk about the run game, it's not just the O-line, it's the O-line and tight ends together. Really the whole unit, but specifically at the point of attack you're talking about the O-line, tight ends. I think they can be better in that area as well.

I've been pleased with the group. I think they have the ability to be big-time impact players for us. But that's probably what I would say to you, is just being difference makers for us in the run game.

Obviously we saw what they can do in the pass game. I

thought Brenton Strange touchdown at 65 yards obviously was a huge play in the game just before the half, a combination of grit, toughness and breaking tackles, then being able to score from that far out.

The thing I thought was so amazing is how he was able to run 65 yards, and the actual play took like four minutes. I think he wanted to just kind of magnify that moment and be on the camera as long as possible. At the end of the day nobody caught him and he scored.

Q. You've been very high on this freshmen class, traveled 13 guys, seven played. A couple days later, how did you assess...

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think well. I'll have a better idea after this week. It's always hard when you're trying to compare and contrast, whether it's how many guys you played or whether it is statistics, whatever it may be, early in the season when people's early season schedules are very different. It kind of skews.

The fact that we were able to play seven freshmen on the road against a good Big Ten team I think is a positive. As we all know in college football those first games of the year can look very different, probably more so now than ever the way people are doing scheduling.

Good first step. We need to take the next step this week. Even situations like Abdul, hopefully it looks very dramatic after the game when we're talking about the number of reps that he was able to play.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, coach.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thanks, guys.

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