

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. I don't want to take that for granted.

Quick summary of the Ohio game. The turnover battle was even. Offensively doing a pretty good job securing the football. We have to continue to do that.

Penalties was essentially even when you talk about yards. I think we did a pretty good job of that overall, but I still think we can be better there.

Drive start has been a positive so far this year, and that's without a whole lot of turnovers. So Barney Amor has had a big part in that.

The sack battle is an area we got to get better. We did lose that battle.

And then the explosive play battle, we did win that both offensively and defensively, as well as overall.

So those things are real positive.

You talk about players of the game, on offense, Nicholas Singleton; on defense Chop Robinson, on special teams, Devyn Ford. And then we talk about our D-squad, developmental squad players of the week who have a huge impact on getting us prepared to play while they're also being evaluated.

On offense was Grayson Kline and Robert Rossi; of defense was Jake Wilson and Stephen Ripka; and then on special teams was Tyler Holzworth.

Obviously the Big 10 freshmen of the week was Nick Singleton, so that was great to see there.

Few other things. You know, positives, obviously we won the game. Again, I don't want to take that for granted either. We need to celebrate and enjoy winning. I think I said this to you guys before, I don't want to become one of those coaches that you don't appreciate the wins.

I want to make sure we're doing as a program, because a lot of programs were not able to do that Saturday and not able to enjoy Sunday the way we did.

We played a lot of guys. 34 on offense. 36 on defense for a total of 70 players in the game. Obviously opportunities for growth on offense, third down, and on defense just being more disruptive. Talk about tackles for loss and turnovers.

On special teams, punting, the times that we punted, that's been a real positive for us.

And then kickoff return, we need to be better in PAT field goal protection and production overall.

So that's Ohio.

Getting into Auburn just briefly, obviously got a ton of respect for that program as well as that conference. Obviously I got some familiarity. Been a head coach in that conference for three years. I've known Bryan Harsin for a long time, more from a distance.

Respected his year, what he did at Auburn, as well as other places. You talk about Auburn, still early in the season, and I think it makes sense to still talk about returning starters from last year. They had seven on offense, seven on defense, and returned all of their specialists, all four specialists.

So have an experienced team coming back.

Their offensive coordinator, Eric Kiesau, I've known for a long time. Brian is back kind of in a position where most of his relationships and history with his coaching staff for the most part now, his most trusted assistants, are all guys that he's got history with, and Eric Kiesau is running the offense for him.

Guys that we have been impressed with is obviously Tank Bigsby, but you could even mention their backs in general.

Their wide receiver No. 6, Ja'Varrius Johnson, guy that can really run, a ten 300 meter guy. And then obviously the



changing of pace quarterback, Robby Ashford, who we recruited out of high school who's an explosive athlete.

Defensively, Jeff Schmedding, again, back to a guy that was Coach Harsin's defensive coordinator when they were at Boise, so spent a lot of time going back and studying their tape and what they did defensively at Boise, as well as what they have done in their first two games.

And then guys we been impressed with, their defensive tackle, No. 25 Colby Wooden, their DN, No. 29 Derick Hall, their Will linebacker, No. 13, Cam Riley, and then their Sam/strong safety, Donovan Kaufman, No. 1.

Guys that stand out, their front obviously defensively is I think the thing that really stands out to us.

On special teams, Rock Bellantoni. His first year taking over as special teams coordinator, so most of our stuff is based on what they've done this year, our studies on their special teams.

Their kick returner, No. 27, who is also the backup tailback, is from Philadelphia, Mississippi Just to be clear. Not Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Punt returner, No. 6, Ja'Varius Johnson we already talked about, then their punter, No. 91 Oscar Chapman. He is an Australian punter; does a nice job for them.

It's going to be a challenge. Obviously this is their orange out. Kind of listen to all their press conferences and watched all those things, talked to a lot of people that have played there and been a part of that environment. I've been there before as well and played there before.

So getting our players prepared for what that will look like and what that's going to be.

Open up to questions.

**Q. Good afternoon, Coach. Drew Allar, can you talk to me just a little bit about the progress he's made since spring, maybe even since the beginning of camp? How drastic has it been? What does that say about him going forward?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, spring ball is invaluable for these guys that are able to come early, obviously if it makes sense for them both from an academic perspective, as well as just from a maturity standpoint.

So having him here early as well as our other quarterbacks to learn the system, to study the system, get comfortable,

get familiar so they have a chance to truly compete.

But obviously we all knew that he had the physical traits and skills to be successful, but I think he's done a really good job of how to prepare, how to study the game. I think Sean has had a big impact on that as well; obviously Coach Yurcich.

But he's done a nice job. I think he's already at a point where the game has slowed down to him a little bit and he's able to anticipate what's going to happen from a coverage perspective or from a pressure perspective.

He's doing some nice things that we have been able to build on, and we're going to need to continue to build on. I thought we did a good job of getting all four of those guys reps in spring and early in camp, and now obviously once we made the decision to move him to the No. 2 spot, his rep count has obviously increased which is important. Invaluable.

And then obviously him being able to get reps in the first two games for different reasons has been valuable as well.

So still got a lot of areas, a lot of room for growth, which is exciting, but obviously he's doing some really good things.

**Q. How do you prepare for a tough environment? Is that easier thought of than actually accomplished? And how do you compare what you see of Jordan Hare to what you see at the Big 10, or anywhere else in the SEC since you've done it a lot?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's going to be similar to some of better environments in the country. There is no doubt about it. Obviously they take a ton of pride in their program and their university and their community.

Obviously football is really important there, in that region of the country. So we know it's going to be challenging and got a ton of respect for it, but we didn't wait until this week to get started. We did it during training camp, but really did it last week.

The guys are looking at me like I was crazy. The staff and the players. Like we went all silent count all last week in practice with, as everybody knows, the music as loud as possible.

Everybody is like, well, we're at home this week. Well, obviously we were starting our preparation a week ahead for that without telling anybody that's what we were doing.

We'll show them some pictures of what the locker room will look like, what the stadium will look like, show some

videos. Obviously the War Eagle before the game. You know, the band. The scoreboard side of the end zone has been problematic. You watch obviously San Jose State last week. They were able to get down into the low red zone and I think have three penalties in a row that knocked them out of there.

So it's going to be challenging, and we are going to try it prepare for it the best we can. At the end of the day, we still have to go out and execute it. And that's not just with our starters. That's with whoever could possibly be in the game.

**Q. How would you assess your run defense and your linebacker play through the first two games, knowing, A, you haven't really faced team that's a run-oriented team, and also with Auburn being a run-oriented team?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think your point is a good one. It's hard to get a true evaluation on that. You know, obviously when you just talk about disruption plays, like tackles for loss and sacks and things like that, I think going into the year we knew that linebacker -- we had questions there in terms of just returning experience.

But, again, we have been able to get those guys a ton of reps. They're getting better every single day. Again, I still am a huge believer that it starts up front with our defensive line in setting the tone, especially when you still have some inexperience behind them. It helps and takes some pressure off.

This is going to be a challenge. No doubt about it. You make a mistake against this crew and it has a chance to cost you. They've got guys you watch on tape and obviously guys that can make big, big plays, so we're going to have to be sound. We're going to have to make sure that fundamentally we are prepared and executing the way we're going to need to execute.

But we're going to be challenged, by their run game, by their athleticism. We're going to be challenged by the environment, and that's why we got to make sure we have a great practice today. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are really important from that standpoint, especially talking about the run game. And put our guys in the best position to be successful come Saturday afternoon.

Then on top of that, obviously you just also have to understand the play-action opportunities to come off that run game as well. Got to be prepared for both.

**Q. You mentioned about kind of pre-prepping last week with the noise and stuff like that. What did you do then preseason or during the off-season to get**

**ready for going to Auburn, having never been there before from a travel, heat, facilities perspective, that sort of thing?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, kind of the same thing. Obviously noise, we -- sometimes maybe in the past we may transition inside or modify some practice.

But we were fortunate to be outside for as many of those practices as possible. We messed around with Holuba, closing the doors and turning the heat on and trying to get prepared for that as well.

Then travel. You know, we really were working on flying into there, but that wasn't able to get done. So flights are challenging, hotels are challenging. Our hotel is about an hour from campus. I actually think they used to stay an hour from campus as well, the home team.

So they're are some things that we're going to talk to the team about today just to be prepared for. But we are, we got a plan for it. But it is a little bit different than the way we normally operate. That's why I'll tell them today and go through these things, Kevin Threlkel will go through them at the end of practice just so our guys -- I don't want them ever to be caught off guard on Saturday afternoon -- so they're prepared for those types of things.

For the most part, everything else in our routine will be similar. You know, we'll be as prepared as we possibly can be for the environment. Once again, at the end of the day you still got to be able to go execute at the moment and at the time.

**Q. Sean talked after the game about the importance of yards after the catch in this offense. In the off-season did you see an improvement or extra focus in that area? Is that an area you have been pleased with so far through two games?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I wouldn't say any more so than other times. Obviously when you talk about that, that's recruiting and development in terms of strength and athleticism to break tackles or be able to run by people.

Obviously the other thing is accuracy at the quarterback position. If that ball is thrown in stride and away from the defender, you're encouraging run after the catch.

The fundamentals and ball security have been able to catch the ball cleanly and confidently. I think Parker Washington is a great example of that, a guy that can make the tough catch, with still being able to transition or not even slow down the catch. Be able to reach back and contort his body into positions to catch the ball.

So catch radius and ball skills make guys faster than they actually are. So all those things we try to emphasize as much as we possibly can. I know they spend a lot of time working on it in the summer, but I wouldn't say any more or less than we've done in the past.

**Q. You go back to Trace and Sean, neither of them had played a lot of football for you before they were named starters. Obviously they had some game experience because of circumstances. Where does Drew compare right now to guys that were in the program for a while but had not really played football and ended up having -- I guess we'll see with Sean -- two of their best seasons as a starting quarterback right off the bat?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that's I think a lot in how we practice, in how we prepare. Our twos get a lot of reps in practice, which I think helps.

You know, I would also say with Trace, one of the things with him was over his career, over his time, he just was so durable as well that a lot of those opportunities just didn't present themselves like they normally do.

But obviously being able to say we're going to make sure like we did last week to be able to get Drew some experience, especially when you're talking about a freshman compared to -- because I do think it's different.

Say it's a redshirt freshman or a redshirt sophomore that maybe hasn't had a whole lot of game experience but has had a ton of reps within the offensive practice.

It is different when it's a true freshman, and he doesn't really have either. So being able to get some of those opportunities I think are really important.

But, yeah, I think the way we practice and the way we train and the amount of reps we get. Some people give very little reps to their backups. It's very much the starting unit for the majority of the reps. We try to balance that for multiple reasons. Not only obviously for practice reps and experience, but keeping guys fresh and healthy, the starters.

So hopefully we're putting ourselves in position not only for current success, but also future success with the way we are managing it.

**Q. After Purdue you said that wasn't really a middle linebackers' kind of game, not really an interior linemen's kind of game, obviously because of the way they play. So whose kind of game might Auburn be?**

**Related to that, it seems like when not you've had a lot of the like extra D-back position groups on the field defensively, like Ji'Ayir, what he's been doing almost reminds me of Marcus Allen a little bit. Does that make any sense at all? Again, talk about what players might come to the fore in this matchup.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's fair. Maybe not stylistically how we're using him compared to Marcus, but in terms of plays he's making. There has been a couple times where people have run in nontraditional downs, and Ji'Ayir has made some big time plays. Even sometimes taking on offensive guards, defeating a block, and making a tackle on the ball carrier, or just timely tackles in space.

So, yeah, I think in terms of similar types of plays that he's been able to make. But, yeah, I think this game obviously -- I'm a big believer it starts up front with the front four as well as the front seven.

This game, you look at their running backs and you look at their style of play, especially over the first two games of the year, and we're going to have to play well up front.

There is no doubt about that. Then they have the skill and ability to play-action pass off of it and shoot down the field. So we're going to have to be able to do both.

But I do think to your point, how our front seven plays in this game is going to be critical based on stylistically how they want to play on offense.

**Q. Olu through two games, what have you seen there and how did he put himself in a position to be successful this season?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's playing really well. Had a ton of respect to are Olu really since he stepped on campus. He's one of those high production, low maintenance guys that really does everything right.

You talk to the academic people about him, they love him. He's done everything right since he stepped on campus. You talk to strength and conditioning, the trainers, equipment staff, just Olu is one of those guys. He just goes about his business. He does everything the right way; extremely focused. His play strength is exceptional.

There are times, whether it's in games or practice, where one of our defensive ends or somebody will put a good move on him and catch him, and he's able to recover with his play strength. It's really impressive.

And he's just consistent. I think you've heard me talk about this. I know the team has had nausea. That's the

difference at this level. The guys that consistently can do it.

His process and his habits are really good. It's really not a surprise to any of us how high -- the level that he is playing at right now. Been super impressed with him.

Did I answer your question?

**Q. Yeah. Curtis Jacobs was telling us today he's excited to go against Auburn's run game and excited to put the hard hat on. He didn't come to Penn State to play seven on seven football. How are the rest of the front seven feeling going into a game against Auburn with a strong run game?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's interesting that Curtis said that. When we recruited him, his dad, we had a bunch of heated arguments that he was a wide receiver. It's interesting that this has kind of moved to this point. I love this Curtis is approaching it that way, because I think he does have the right mentality that we need at LBU, but also has the athleticism to make the plays in the passing game based on his background.

You know, he's kind of the total package and I think has been playing really well. I thought last week played really well.

But, yeah, I think obviously that approach this week, not just with Curtis, but with our entire front seven, defensive line, defensive tackles, and our entire linebacking corps will be tested this week. Not just the run game, but also the complementary play-action passes that will put those guys in conflict and some of the RPO stuff as well.

So it'll be really important, and I'm glad that we're talking on Tuesday and he's got that approach. That will be reinforced in the team meeting and reinforced at practice all week long, starting today, which is a hard hat day for us.

**Q. Staying on the linebackers, last week you sounded like you wanted to get Abdul Carter a lot of playing time on Saturday after how the first game went. How do you think he fared in that extended time?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I thought it was really important for him. He flashed and did some really good things. He has the ability to find the ball in traffic. He's one of our more explosive guys. All the catapult numbers and things like that tell you that, what he's done on special teams. Obviously not getting more reps in that game one was not ideal, but obviously there is enough to build on now.

I know he's gaining more and more confidence and I know

Manny is gaining more and more confidence in him as well, so that he can literally go out and use all these skills that he has with less thinking, which will make him even more of a violent and fast player with less thinking he has to do as a true freshman.

**Q. Two games into the season, Adisa Isaac, he is back on the field after the injury. How is he progressing and what are you seeing from him confidence-wise?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think well. One of the things that we're working on not only with Adisa but with a number of our guys is getting their weights back to where they have been in the past. Adisa has had a really good combination of strength, size, speed, and quickness, and that's probably the one area that we still haven't gotten completely back to is the size.

He's a few pounds -- nothing significant, but he's a few pounds down, which I think will help him not only in this game, but as the season goes on and from a durability standpoint, just the wear and tear and big time college football.

But I do think he's getting more and more confident each week. I think he's getting more and more comfortable each week. I felt like he was in a good place going into game one, but obviously every game you play after coming back from an injury where you lost significant time, there is more and more confidence that comes with it, both physically, mentally, emotionally, all those things.

So we love that he's back. He's another guy that's kind of Steady Eddie in his approach and maturity and demeanor. Big fan of Adisa's.

**Q. At the top you mentioned sacks from the Ohio game. Do you think or would you like to see your quarterbacks either get the ball out a little bit quicker or maybe throw it away? I didn't know all the sacks might have been on the offensive line.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think there are some times that we have done that, both in games and in practice, which we've talked about the importance. I think if you're not careful, you're in practice and the quarterbacks know they're never going to get hit and they don't throw the ball away because they are extending plays and working one scramble drills, and all those things are important, but it's not game-like.

You need to make sure that your movements the pocket or scrambles or ability to extend the play are game-like. That is something I try to reinforce as much as I possible can at practice. If not, you can fall into some bad habits at the

quarterback position.

So there are times that we probably need to do that a little bit more, but I wouldn't necessarily say all of those sacks fall into that category. Some of them. Some of them probably be good to get the ball away.

Sometimes it's just knowing where the outlet is and launching in that direction out of bounds. But you better be good there, because you're still in the pocket. So better be sharp and confident with that.

**Q. Two quick ones. Hollidaysburg little league team. Were you watching the little league as it was unfolding, and do you have a long field goal plan? Is that going to be Jake? Or last year it was Stout. Just wondering how that shakes out.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, long field goals, we're talking about game-winning field goals, is Sander Sahaydak, which is I think 52 yards or more.

And then the little league, no, those guys, we had reached out to them and they has we reached out to us, so we invited them to a practice. That was a couple weeks back. It was good to spend some time with them and congratulate them on a great season.

Obviously representing the state and Hollidaysburg community and really Center County. Really cool experience for those young men, those young kids, for those young kids, excuse me, and their coaches and moms and dads.

So being able to have them here and recognize their success was pretty cool. I was not able to watch it. I think that's kind of in the heat of our training camp. But it was also cool having them here.

**Q. Prior to Purdue you mentioned having five and a half wide receivers that you were comfortable with. After two games are you still in that spot, and are the top three guys still tap guys or are you more comfortable rotating guys in now?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's expanding. Getting Jaden Dottin back has expanded that. Omari a guy that's really starting to come on and gain some confidence as well, so...

Kaden Saunders has been able to get in and play a little bit. So the list is expanding, but I would say from a rotation and a tap standpoint, probably still the same.

**Q. You're obviously aware of what Will Levis has**

**done. With CV going from three to two to three, what are your challenges these days playing quarterbacks, slotting them where they are in the order, given the way the college football is now?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think in general, across the country it's a challenge in college football. There is no doubt about it. But at the end of the day, you just have to manage your team and people appropriately and just have to have honest conversations and tell people where they are at.

You hope people will have patience to battle and compete, because there are a bunch of stories and examples of guys that have stuck it out and competed and it's worked out well for them and the team.

There is less and less of those stories in college football because of some of the new rules and dynamics that are there. At the end of the day, you just want to be as transparent and direct and honest as you possibly can, and hopefully be able to have the type of relationships with them and their parents that that conversation and communication is a two-way street. So that they can make great decisions and so you can be aware of what's going on.

**Q. You just touched Omari Evans and said he's gaining confidence. I guess what have you seen from him in the last two games and is he somebody that plans to burn the redshirt? Why do you think he's been able to get on the field so quickly?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, another guy, if I remember correctly, was here for spring football, which helps. He's got some skills and talents that aren't really coachable. You know, God given talents skills and ability in terms of speed.

Was a guy we were able to get in camp and get a true evaluation on in the recruiting process and did extremely well really. Some of those things are starting to show up.

For him, it's -- he has not played a lot of wide receiver in his life, so this development was important. But more than anything, it's knowing the system inside and out, understanding defenses, and getting in the weight room to get strong enough to develop the size that he was going to need to.

Because speed was never going to be an issue for him. It was all about strength and wide receiver fundamentals and techniques and understanding defenses, strengths, weaknesses, and how we want to attack tack. Those types of things. Voids and zones and how to change and modify

rounds based on man coverage.

Obviously getting on the field and having some success helps because that field experience in Beaver Stadium or on the road, when you have success, it usually has the ability to magnify and speed up a kid's maturity and developmental from a football perspective.

So hopefully that will continue.

**Q. I guess we're going to be sticking with the wide receivers to end. When you're talking about that group outside of your top two, and the players that are coming in and out, how much is speed something you're looking for? How I guess would you look at that group as a whole and assess the speed of your receivers?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we have gotten faster this year maybe compared to previous years. When I say that, I'm talking about the unit from top to bottom. The entire unit. I do think we're faster. I think we have more consistency from top to bottom in terms of ball skills and fundamentals and techniques and natural ball skills.

So that helps. There is more true competition through the entire unit. Yeah, speed is always something. Obviously if you can have guys that can go 80 and take the top off the coverage and beat one-on-ones, there is a lot of ways to do that. Obviously speed is a big part of it.

So we try to recruit it as much as we possibly can, in this region of the country, the numbers of those types of guys compared to maybe some other areas of the country.

But it's something -- that's where camp is really important, to get true evaluation on guys, true times, and been fortunate enough to be able to do that more times than not.

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