

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate everybody coming like always, cover Penn State football. We talk about the stats that we talk about every week. We won the turnover battle. We won the penalty battle. Did not win drive, start, sack, or explosive play battle.

When you kind of go back and look at the game and watch the tape and meet with the players, I think we played hard. We really did. But we did not play nearly as clean as we needed to play. Talked about that from the beginning of this season, typically the team that makes the least amount of mistakes is going to win.

And uncharacteristically I think there was times we lost our poise and composure. I think or kids have a ton of investment and our staff has a ton of investment, and we did not play or handle that as well as we should have obviously.

Moving on to Minnesota with PJ Fleck and University of Minnesota. I've known PJ for a long time. PJ actually when I was at Vanderbilt came and visited, when I first got Penn State came and visited, so I knew him before. Both of us were in the Big10. Obviously followed his career closely.

Obviously Kirk Ciarrocca, obviously a ton of history there not only coming from the state of Pennsylvania, but also had been on our staff for a period of time. Kirk has done a great job. He has had a great career, and back obviously doing a really good job with their offense.

Guys that jump out to us, the running back is a really good player, Ibrahim Mohamed. His sixth year there. From Baltimore. Good Counsel High School and has had a productive a college career as there is.

Got a massive tight end, No. 88 in Spann-Ford. Obviously their quarterback is also another six-year guy, and him and Kirk have worked extremely well together.

Then their center is on every award watched list there is, and he's another six-year guy as well.

Defensive coordinator also a Pennsylvania guy. Joe Rossi. I know Joe. Got a ton of respect for what he does. He's from Pittsburgh and has done a really good job in taking over the defense there and improving it year by year.

The guys that jump out are middle linebacker No 55 Sori-Marin if I am saying that right. I hope I'm saying that right. If not I apologize.

Free safety No 27, Nubin. Cornerback at No 5, Walley. Defense end No. 8, Rush. All those guys are playing really good football for them right now.

And then on special teams Rob Wenger. Rob has been with them for six years. And their kicker, No 95, Trickett. Their kick return/punt return guy is an undersized guy, but has had some explosive plays, No, 81, Redding.

Tremendous challenge. Looking forward to getting out there in Beaver Stadium and finding a way to be 1-0 this week and being able to come to this press conference next week and have some good stuff to talk about.

Q. James, can you shed light on Sean Clifford's ability for Saturday, and if he can play, you still plan on playing Drew?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so as you guys know, unless it's like a season-ending injury I typically don't announce that. Also it's Tuesday. We haven't even practiced yet, so it's hard for me to give you guys an answer that helps you do your job at this stage.

But, yeah, nothing is changed with the plan or the model at this stage.

Q. Your tight ends, do you think you got enough from that group this year? How important is that group, especially the last couple games? I know Theo is healthy again. I think he only has a couple catches the entire season.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, well, to your point, just like you just said, he missed a couple games, too. That plays a



part in it. Yeah, I think when we have played well the tight ends have had a big role in what we were doing offensively. When we struggled, they haven't.

So I think your point is a good one. That's a room that we got a lot of confidence in and has done some really good things for us. We need to get them involved and keep them involved in both the pass and run.

Q. When you went back and watched the film, what did you see with the run defense that went wrong against Michigan? And when you look at Minnesota on film, another team that likes to run the ball, how similar is what they do to what Michigan does in that aspect?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think there are similarities, and I think we also know this is a copycat business, right? So people are going to watch the film and take some ideas.

Minnesota wants to run the ball. They want to constrict the life out of the game in terms of time and possession, all those types of things.

So, yeah, we're going to have to be ready to defend the run and the play-action passes that come off it for them. They got a really, really productive back that they did a great job within their system. So that will be a challenge, no doubt about it. We are going to need to be ready. The corrections we made on Sunday from the previous game as well as getting prepared for what Minnesota is going to try to do obviously is going to be a big storyline in this game.

Q. How would you define Penn State's offensive identity this season, and have you achieved it yet?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think there has times where I think it's been pretty obvious what our identity is, which is run and play-action pass and be efficient in the passing game. We really haven't been explosive in the passing game this year like we had last year and previous years, but I think when we have been at our best we have been able to run and pass the ball in play-action pass and spread the ball around.

That's I think when we're going to be at our best. Obviously when we can sprinkle in some explosive passes like we did on Saturday, those things would be helpful, no doubt about it.

I think it's when we are able to run and throw the ball consistently and keep people on their toes, not being able to predict what we're going to do and how we're going to do it.

Q. Probably football in general, everybody likes to talk about the backup quarterback. That's just a generality thing. There are a lot of people now that would want to see Drew, both media, fans, everybody. What would you say to those people that are calling for a possible change at this point?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I don't agree with this statement "everybody." But I guess there is a lot of different things that I would say. I think number one, that's the wrong message. That's the wrong signal. Sean has earned the right to be on the field. That doesn't mean that Drew hasn't done some good things. Would we would love to get him an opportunity and continue to grow and develop him for his future? No doubt about it.

It's just interesting. We've kind of talked about the whole dynamics of college football and how it's changed, and specifically at Penn State. But I got a text from Mike Gesicki on Sunday when I was breaking down the film, and in 2016 we lost to Michigan and played Minnesota the following week and found a way to get that win.

The rest of the season went pretty well. So I think there are tons of examples, not only at Penn State, but across the country where you do everything you possibly can to win the next week.

I think some of those approaches aren't necessarily about winning this week. In my opinion.

Q. James, look, how nice is it to have someone like Olu on the left side, the way that he's developed and grown into his own? And on the right side between Bryce and Caedan, is that a rotation that you're comfortable with going forward? Do you want one of those guys to step up and take that job?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, obviously you always love to be in a position across the board where you got one guy that's really playing at an extremely high level, but I think I've told you guys before we have a ton of respect for Bryce Effner and how he's played. I think he brings a ton of value not only at tackle and guard, and we'll continue to play him in both of those roles.

But again, back to when you talk about protecting the quarterback, I do think that's an area overall that we been better. I also think it's how we're calling and managing the game that's helped with that.

But, yeah, I mean, obviously Olu is playing really well at left tackle. We're not really rotating there, so whether that happens at other positions, obviously that's a positive.

But there is still some guys that I feel like on the offensive line as well as other positions that deserve the right to get on the field based on how they have trained and practiced and prepared. Bryce Effner is a really good example of that.

We want to make sure Bryce is getting on the field at tackle and guard, or when we go with an extra offensive lineman, which we've done at times this year as well.

You look at his rep counts. They're very similar to some the other guys he's playing with.

Q. Want to ask about Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen. How would you evaluate where they are at this point in the season and where you thought they might be at this point in the season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it really depends on what you're talking about. You talking about before the season started? Talking about the beginning of the season? I think their ahead. They've played a ton of football for us. They've learned a lot through both good experiences and challenging experience and adversity.

I think they learned how physical and how challenging our conference is, specifically our side of the conference. So, yeah, for this week those experiences are valuable for them. I'm a huge believer in the experience that they gained on the field from a physical perspective, a mental perspective, that they're growing every single day.

They been very supportive of each other as well as Keyvone has been a great mentor, too. There is a lot of positives there. Obviously we need to create some more big plays and get more explosive with those running backs. We have the ability to do that and we have done it at times this year; we need to be more consistent.

Q. Wanted to follow up on your comments after the game where you mentioned the defensive tackles, that you need to get bigger. I think what you were getting at is you have to recruit better there. I don't want to put words in your mouth. Could you expand on that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, I would not describe it the way you described it. I think you guys know typically when I talk about these things it's all of it: Development, weight room, nutrition, recruiting, scheme, all of it.

But what I was talking about is just size is a tool and size is a weapon, no different than speed and quickness and power and strength and agility and all those things. Just that fine line and that sweet spot I have to find in terms of

the size you can put on these good weight of, lean muscle mass, and big and strong as athletic as they possibly can be. Not putting on weight for weight's sake.

So it's all of that. It's not the specific point that you made. It's all of those things. I know when we're breaking film down on offense and studying people and they've got two 300 pound, or a 300 pound and a 330 pound defensive tackle and a war daddy in there, and they're between 255 and 265 or 70 at defensive end, that's a problem.

I think there is some defenses that we have played or that we have studied that do that. Don't get my wrong. I really like our D-line room. I think there are some guys that I think could help us and help them if they gained a few pounds. I think size is a weapon. I would like to be bigger really across both fronts.

Q. This will be Mike Yurcich's 20th game working with you as your offensive coordinator. Curious up to this point, how would you evaluate his ability to adjust the game plan based on your personnel strengths and weaknesses?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the change in use of our tight ends and formations and running the ball and things like that I think is a change and is an adjustment that puts us in the best position to play to our strengths.

Obviously we got to go out and execute consistently across the board, but I think there has been a pretty dramatic change. If you look at Mike and who he's been over his career and who we are right now based on our personnel, I think it's pretty significant.

Q. You've talked about you would like this or that in terms of size, in terms of approach, in terms of consistency in certain areas. What's the disconnect in making that happen? I realize that fixing problems isn't a finger snap, but I would, like bigger defensive linemen. That seems in the hierarchy of things an easier one to navigate around. When you have those issues that seem a little not straightforward but less complex than on things, what keeps that from happening over the course of time?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's more than a fair question, but I don't really feel like right now is the appropriate time to get into it. I pretty much have answered your question in the past. We've talked about these things in the past.

I'm happy to talk about them in the off-season. Right now, literally, we're focused on beating Minnesota and what we can do in the short-term.

Yeah, that's not one of those things that's a short-term fix. Obviously we can put on a couple pounds, but that's not a short-term fix for us right now.

I'm happy to get into those things after the season, although I've answered some of these questions in the past. But we're focused on Minnesota and getting better and putting our guys in the best position to be successful, making sure we're using the right techniques and fundamentals to give us a chance to get a win this week and build off it.

Q. James, early in the game looked like there was nobody over, say, the right guard. Sean was under center. Can he call an audible there or did he just not see that? Curious also what happened in the tunnel, if you could explain. Was that after the game, if that was an issue with Michigan or something that you guys broached with the Big10?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yep. So it was audibles. Yeah, we have a system that allows us to audible at the line of scrimmage, or look to the sideline like I think you guys see us do a lot. But that wasn't necessarily what we were looking for in that situation.

Our biggest issue is we got beat on that play at one offensive line position and we didn't come off on a double team on another. Yeah, we have the ability to check. As you guys know, we do that fairly often.

Again, I prefer to talk about these things in the off-season, but the one tunnel is a problem. It's a problem, and has been. To me, we need to put a policy in place from a conference perspective in my mind that's going to stop -- we're not the first team to kind of get into a jawing match in the tunnel. For me, I want to focus on getting my team into the locker room and not jawing back and forth.

Get my team get in the locker room and their team get in the locker room. There really should be a policy that first team that goes in, there is a buffer. If not, this team starts talking to this team, they start jawing back and forth, and something bad is gonna happen before we put in the policy.

All there has to be a two minute or minute buffer in between the two teams. This team is in before that team gets close and however we want to do it. But we're not the first team that's had issues like that. To me, under the current structure we won't be the last. To me, there is a really easy solution. We got to do it.

But for me, I want to get our team in the locker room.

That's my concern.

Q. You mentioned the lack of offensive explosion this year. Is that more about Sean not connecting with wide receivers on those opportunities, or calling for those opportunities less from an offensive coordinator perspective?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes. It's both. We got to hit more of the ones we call. We could call a few more, but the challenge is, right, if you take a shot on first down and hit it, then that's a great call. If I don't, now you're on second and long and increasing the chances of being on third and long.

So that's always the fine balance between those things. Then the other thing is you don't want to always be taking shots on second and one when everybody in the stadium knows that's a shot down.

So it's that fine line between those two things. You're always most effective when you're being explosive and creating most of your first downs on first and second down before you even get to third down.

Q. James, Nick Tarburton talked today about the defense watching the film today as a unit and having to sit with that result. How have you seen the defense respond to what happened Saturday, and how confident are you in them to avoid a similar result against a team that like you said is going to try to do something similar to what you did?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think the meeting was good. I was in the meeting. I thought it was a really good meeting. I think what has happened at times, and we talked about this a little bit before, is our guys, their investment level is high and guys end up trying to make plays rather than specifically doing their job.

The reality is a lot of times when do you that the plays come to you organically. It was a good meeting. Went through everything in detail. Make sure everybody is on the same page. But it was needed. To your point, it's going to be important that we get those things corrected and corrected quickly, because we got a team that likes to do similar things.

Q. So obviously a big week, White Out. When you guys made the decision at the beginning of the season to make Minnesota the White Out over Ohio State, what kind of factor did it being a night game play into that, and why do you think it's important to have that game at night?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we talked about this before. We did a survey with the fans, kind of figured out what they felt like was the most important thing to do. We had a pretty strong inclination of what time certain games were going to be at.

Obviously your record factors into those things in the teams you're playing.

But, yeah, we talked about that the beginning of the season. That played a factor in the decision making, no doubt about it.

Q. Lost Landon Tengwall before the game started. Do you anticipate him being able to go this week?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So, it's Tuesday. We haven't practiced yet. It's not a season-ending injury, so I won't address it unless it's a season-ending injury. We have not practiced yet and I'm not sure if he will be available or not.

We're hopeful. He was in getting treatment on Sunday, getting treatment on Monday, and we'll see kind of where he is at end of the week. He's also a guy that played a lot of the football for us, so hopefully if we can get him some practice reps this week then he has a chance to go.

I just, again, I don't have a whole lot of information on Tuesday when it comes to injuries unless they're season-ending injuries.

Q. And the follow up, how do you think Hunter Nourzad has done?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, it's been good. Hunter, we look at a lot like Effner. We view those guys as starters for us. Having him available and able to play was obviously really important after losing Landon, because he went from being in a rotation to starting and being the guy.

Q. After a game like Saturday, I think there is a lot of external overreaction or intense reaction about the need to change X, Y, Z. How much do you internally feel that at times in a situation like that? And when do you know, okay, it is time to pivot offensively or defensively if something hasn't been working for you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so, again, I think perfectly fair question, but I'll go back to what I said with Mike Gesicki. We were 2-2 I think. Lost to Michigan in a similar type game and things went well.

So I'm not going to look too far ahead. Not going to look too far behind. I think there were six undefeated teams that lost last week. You know, where I probably am

concerned about it is to your point, it's hard for me to insulate the players and the staff from it.

And I think the way you described it I think is accurate. So what we want to do is, okay, let's watch the tape, make the corrections. Let's learn from it, and then let's move forward and find a way to be 1-0 this week.

Winning is hard to do at this level. That's our focus. But I think your point is a fair one. What I'm trying to do is everything I possibly can to control the Lasch Building and the messages and the vibe that's in that building so that the Lasch practice fields are the way they need to be.

And then Beaver Stadium is the way it needs to be, so then we got a chance for 110,000 or 107,000 fans or whatever it is fans coming out of that stadium Saturday night at sometime around 11:50, 12:00 happy.

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