

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always appreciate everybody coming out and covering Penn State football. Hope everybody has a great holiday season, which is coming up; able to spend some time with your friends and family.

Kind of reviewing the Rutgers game, the turnover battle we were able to win that. The penalty battle, we had the same number of penalties, but had more yards, so we didn't win that one. Drive start battle we did not win, but the sack battle we did. The explosive play battle we did.

So some positives there. Obviously some areas we got to get cleaned up. Players of the game, on offense, winner Kaytron Allen was also the Big 10 co-freshman of the week. Defensively, Curtis Jacobs and Abdul Carter, and special teams, Nicholas Singleton.

So awesome for those guys making an impact in the program and in the game.

Some positives, I thought we played well good complementary football, offense, defense, special teams, which was good to see. One of the things that I'm most proud of is we're getting better each week. Best teams in college football get better individually and collectively throughout the season, and we're doing that.

Some pretty cool stats, 16 different players with sacks this season. I've never seen that stat before in my career; 26 different players with a tackle for a loss this season, which is also a stat that I've never really seen; the kickoff return for a touchdown was just an awesome thing to see.

We worked really hard and invested a ton of time in that. For the players and for Coach Stacy and Coach Raisbeck to have some success there, that was great to see. Three non-offensive touchdowns; first time since 1998.

And then we were able to get 65 players in the game. Every defensive players that was on the bus to Rutgers played in the game, so that really cool.

Areas for growth. Starting fast, that's coaches and players.



Third down on offense. That's an area that would have a huge impacted on our team as a whole. We got to get better there.

And then ball security, ball security, ball security. Can't coach it enough; can't talk about it enough. Really that was an example of not the traditional things you talk about with ball security with the ball not being secured tight; that was not the case. The ball was secured tight. Part of ball security is also pad level. You can't allow a defender to put his helmet right on the ball. You got to get your pads down, so continue to work on that.

This week with Michigan State and Coach Tucker, who I've known for a long time and got a lot of respect for, obviously going to be a challenge coming into our place playing for maybe the most beautiful trophy in all of college football. If you guys haven't seen it or anybody listening to this hasn't seen it, look it up. The Land Grant Trophy is just a sight to be seen. It's just beautiful.

Offensive coordinator, Jay Johnson, his third season as a offensive coordinator at Michigan State. Guys that were pretty impressed is Jalen Berger, the running back we recruited out of New Jersey. Keon Coleman, wide receiver, Jayden Reed, wide receiver, tight end Danielle Barker; their center, Nick Samac; and then their quarterback Payton Thorne, who seems like he's been playing in forever as well.

Interesting fact, I don't know if you know this, Jayden Reed, Payton Thorne, and Bryce Hefner were all high school teammates.

Defensively, Scottie Hazelton, third year there. One of the things that was interesting, kind of came up in our breakdown, this is the first defensive coordinator that we play this year that was in that same role the previous year, which is somewhat of a disturbing stat in our profession.

But we have some familiarity with him. Guys in that defense that we have ton of respect for, linebacker No. 27, Cal Haladay, who's a local kid; defensive tackle No. 64, Jacob Slade; free safety, No.3 Xavier Henderson; and then defensive end/linebacker. No.4 Jacoby Windmon, transfer from UNLV.



Special teams, Coach Els. Again, another guy been there for three years, their three coordinators. Their punter seems like week after week -- this league if you look at all the statistics, this league plays great defense. It's amazing. You may be six in the conference and 12th in the country in defense, and then it's the same thing with punters. We just seem to have great defense, defenses in our league, and then also great punters.

Last week I thought the punter was excellent, and this guy is leading the nation in punt average, No. 99 of course Brice Baringer, local kid out of Michigan, local to them.

Their punt returner, Jayden Reed has been a playmaker, has got two career punt returns for touchdown at Michigan State. Going to be a tremendous challenge. We're excited about the opportunity.

Obviously today's practice and this week's preparation will be really important.

Open up to questions.

Q. How are you today?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey Rich, I think I know what's coming.

Q. You want to answer before I ask?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No. I could be wrong.

Q. Can you update the status of Parker Washington, Olu Fahanu, and Joey Porter?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so that's part of what I thought you were going to ask. Not all of it. Yeah, Parker Washington, like I typically do, Parker will be done for the season. I did have that conversation with him and his mom.

So I wanted to make sure I covered that with them first and made sure everybody was comfortable with it.

Olu Fashanu we expect back. When that is, we'll see. Hopefully this weekend we'll see how that plays out.

And same thing with Joey Porter.

Q. Following up on Parker Washington, do you expect him back then for next season? Is that something you've had a discussion with them about that now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you know Mark, I would really like

to talk about this year. We're having ongoing conversations with the players. Hunter Nourzad wanted to make an announcement of what his intentions were. That's up to him. But we have conversations that are going on, and I'm happy to talk about this week, and then obviously you know we always get together or typically get together after the season is over and we'll have an opportunity to be able to address those things in more detail.

To be honest with you, I'm not avoiding the question. Not all of those conversations and decisions have been made yet.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving week.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You as well, Frank.

Q. Sea Clifford...

JAMES FRANKLIN: Turkey or ham?

Q. I knew that was coming. Turkey. Always.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I agree. Sweet potatoes or yams?

Q. Sweet potatoes, and sweet potatoes pie is by far the best.

JAMES FRANKLIN: That was going to be my next question: Pumpkin pie or sweet potato pie. Not even close.

Q. My grandmother and my wife makes great sweet potato pie. Have to have you try it some time?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Are they local?

Q. Yeah, York, PA.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I would be very appreciative and thankful if I could try your family's sweet potato pie.

Q. Sean Clifford, you've worked with a lot of quarterbacks over your time. Maybe one unique thing about Sean that will stick with you, and what do you appreciate the most about him?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, probably his perseverance, you know, through good, through bad, through praise. And probably the other thing that probably jumps out to me is he has maximized his Penn State experience in a way that I hope more of our guys do.

We do a guest coach program where we bring professors



and donors to games so they can get an opportunity to peek behind the curtain. I always tell our guys to introduce themselves, and Sean is over at the table last week exchanging phone numbers with those people. So he's preparing for life after football whenever that happens.

Next week he'll get another degree from a Penn State. He's done a great job from that perspective. Has just handled it all I think with class, and I think he has learned and grown and evolved during his time here.

The biggest word for me with him is perseverance. That's probably the word would describe him best throughout his Penn State experience. I mean, that as a positive. Some people may interpret that differently. I think that that is one of the most important traits we can all have.

Q. Good afternoon, James. How are you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Good Mike, how are you?

Q. I'm good. We all know that Frank is the foremost foodie among us, but it sounds look you know that too.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I didn't know that. I literally didn't know that. When he hit me with the happy holidays and those things, I was curious.

What about you? I'm not going to go any further than this, but mashed potatoes or macaroni and cheese?

Q. Mashed potatoes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay.

Q. Specifically for Thanksgiving. Maybe not all year round.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay.

Q. Okay. Alan Zemaitis tweeted the other day that he's never seen anything like the energy in your building right now. Is this group a little unusual in that respect? Is that in any way an explanation for the way you guys have been able to bring it every week when we saw so many teams in college football last week maybe come up a little short in that area?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, I didn't know that and I didn't see that. Like to talk to AZ about that, because I'm curious, is he basing that off just his time now back as a professional? Is also including his time as a student-athlete? So I'll be interested in asking him that.

But do I think we got good energy. I do think we got good

mojo about us right now. It's late in the season. It's a long season and there are times where late in the season can be challenge and a grind on everybody, and just doesn't feel like that. Even with bumps and bruises like we got, and we have a bunch of them, the energy is really good.

Guys are having fun in the locker room. Guys are having fun out at practice every single day, in the meeting room. I'm not saying -- don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it's all puppies and rainbows. There is tough coaching going on. Accountability going on. But I think overall, we're in a good place.

I think our leadership has been as good as it's been in a while. We meet on Sundays, every Sunday, which has been really good. We meet with the captains every Sunday, even if it's just for five minutes. I want to hear their thoughts going into the week and I want them to hear mine, kind of what the message is going to be all week long.

Terry Smith comes to those meetings all the time as the assistant head coach, and Terry, he made the comment -- I go around the room and see if anybody else has anything, as Terry made the comment, as a former captain at Penn State and now being here nine years, I just want to give you guys the credit that you deserve. You have done a phenomenal job leading this team vocally, through their actions, on and off the field. They've been really good.

So I think they led the charge. It's easy sometimes when the leader of an organization or your position coach or whatever holds a guy accountable or makes a decision and maybe some people in the locker room don't agree with his.

But when you have alignment with the captains and they're reinforcing the message and also calling those things out, which happened, I just think we're in a good place. Positivity spreads and so can negativity. You better with be aware and working towards the positivity as much as you can and have an awareness of any negative that may be going on.

As we talked about before, the 125 guys on the team and decent size staff, you're going to have some of that.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving.

JAMES FRANKLIN: String okay, here we go. String beans or collard greens?

Q. I like both, but I would probably go collard greens.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow, I did not expect that. Nice.



Q. With bacon.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow.

Q. It's the only thinking I eat bacon with.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I prefer with fat back, but similar. This is interesting.

Q. Disappointed to hear you guys diss pumpkin pie earlier.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm really down on pumpkin pie. Let's not get into this because obviously it's a hot topic.

Q. Yeah, it is. We'll address it another time. I wanted to ask you about one of the seniors who doesn't get a lot of the attention, Chris Stoll. How important has his consistency been for you guys at a position where that's really the only requirement? And is there a reason he's been one of the game captains every week other than just availability?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So externally maybe doesn't get talked about a lot; internally in our building, we talk about him all the time. He addresses the team a lot. We bring up his role. He is Mr. Consistent and has been that way his entire career. He's gotten better every single year, not only in his consistency as a snapper, but also as a blocker, and his ability to get down the field and make tackles. He's been awesome. Great student as well. Great spokesperson.

And then typically for me, when you talk about the coin toss captains, I'm trying to kind of take that off some of those guys' plates. If you can have a specialist do it like him, specifically someone not on offense, defense, or the kickoff team, those guys can be focused and getting ready for that while he's out there doing it.

Then the other thing, I prefer to have the same guy speaking every week. I know it sounds crazy, but there has been bad mistakes that have been made in the past where somebody defers and then they chose to kick it and officials try to talk you out of it, they deferred, you sure you want to kick it? Yeah, I want to kick it.

So just how we go through that each week, what our philosophy is, what we're choosing, why. Just having the same guy do it every week I think there is a ton of value in it.

That really wasn't necessarily the plan. Just has evolved like that. Just makes sense to me to take that off some

other people's plates where they're trying to get ready, warming up for offense, defense, getting some kicks in, whatever it may be. He's done a great job.

I'm really glad and proud that he chose Penn State a long time ago. Came in here and earned a scholarship and did everything the right way.

So he's got a really bright future. He's going to have a chance to continue playing, but I know he's done all the right things to prepare himself for when football comes to an end. He'll be ready for that, too.

Q. I would like to ask you about Sean Clifford, if there is a chance he could remain at Penn State maybe as an assistant coach at some point.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Cranberry sauce or stuffing?

Q. Stuffing. I eat Stove Top Stuffing, not that bird stuffing. My wife gets mad at me.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that's kind of sad.

Q. Yeah. I can't eat the bird stuff.

JAMES FRANKLIN: The question was about Sean staying on.

Q. At some point what would you -- could he be a coach for you? What would his value be as assistant coach at some point?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I just don't think he has an interest in that. I think Sean loves football, but he's an entrepreneur and a businessman and has already started those things in the next chapter of his life. He's prepared for when football comes to an end to kind of do those things full time.

He's not one of the guys -- there are guys that I know have an interest in coaching. One of the things that is somewhat sad is there is a little bit less of that now. I think they -- a lot of players see the hours the coaches work. So some guys want to stay involved with football; a lot more of them want to be commentators and things like that. They want to stay involved in the game but not the hours of coaching.

But there is a handful of guys that I do know want to coach one day, and that's never been a conversation with Sean. I could see him doing some quarterback training on the side as maybe one of his kind of businesses, but I see him more as a businessman and (entrepreneur unless this stirs some conversations with him that I'm not expecting.

Q. How are you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, turkey or ham?

Q. See, I'm a ham guy.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow.

Q. Yeah, Turkey, sometimes just too dry.

JAMES FRANKLIN: If you cook it improperly.

Q. Yeah. I'll have to talk to my family about that one.

JAMES FRANKLIN: The next question. The ham, with the pineapples on it with the glaze or without the pineapples?

Q. With the pineapples.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Do you include the pineapples in each bite, like a small portion of pineapple per bite?

Q. I like to mix it. Sometimes it's the pineapple in the bite and sometimes it's mashed potatoes in the bite?

JAMES FRANKLIN: See mashed potatoes goes with turkey, not with ham. The yams or the sweet potato go with the ham.

Q. I mix it up.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow. Interesting. I'm learning so much about you guys. Back to your point.

Q. Yeah, so guys like Harrison, Wallace, Liam, and Omari, younger receivers who will have to step up over the next couple weeks in Parker's absence, how have you seen them develop and are you excited for them to be able to have more of a share in the offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I am excited for them. That's kind of the nature of our game and the sport. When opportunity presents itself, you got to be ready.

To me, it's always kind of an interesting situation because a lot of guys are ready when their number gets called and some guys aren't. It's always interesting to see how that plays out.

But I've been impressed with those guys and how they've handled the opportunities they've had this season, and some of the roles have grown without some of the bumps and bruises. But obviously last week and this week and moving forward that's going to be really important for us.

So between our tight ends stepping up and running backs stepping up, in the passing game specifically I'm talking about, we're also going to need Keondre and Mitch to take on more responsibility. Also going to need those other guys that you just mentioned to take a bigger role as well.

Q. Roasted turkey or just conventional or smoked turkey?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Deep fried.

Q. I've done them all. What do you prefer?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm not a big smoked guy to be honest with you. So probably traditional oven or fried, because fried seems to be -- seems to be juicier. Locks the moisture in.

Q. Yeah, it's kind of dangerous though.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I don't do it. I'll have somebody come over and do it in the driveway or whatever. We got some friends that do this. J'waun is big on it as well. Yeah, that's what you prefer?

Q. Well, if I can live with the danger of it with the house possibly burning down.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Fair. Fair.

Q. In all seriousness, you're senior class, which kind of goes over two or three different classes, how emotional are you going to be, whether it's the night before, Game Day, knowing everything these guys have gone through over the last few years with the pandemic? Couple tough years, bouncing back; it's been a rollercoaster.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's funny, Tig did his share the other night and talked about his first season was the pandemic. Just talked about how bad it was. Then I remember the next year we were able to kind of get back to our normal routine. I remember Tig specifically saying, so this is how it is. Yeah, they kind of been through a bunch, right?

And obviously everybody in the country went through it to a degree. As we all know, different athletic departments in different states handled things different. They've seen it all. Specifically the guys you talking about been here six years.

So, yeah, that is a lot of time to spend together. It's somewhat unusual. I've been doing this a long time, but I still struggle with that, the guys moving on. Been fortunate.

When you're able to stay at the same school for a long time that helps because the guys come back. I still have people that come and visit that I coached at Vanderbilt or Maryland, but it's so much more common and easier when you're still at the same school.

So that helps. A few weeks ago AK and Congo, Tangelo, whatever you want to call him, those guys were back. That really helps. Whether it's the spring game, the white out, guys depending on the bye week or their work schedule able to come back. Senior Day is an emotional time for them. It's an emotional time for the coaching staff. I know it is for me. I'm an emotional guy.

It's not just them. It's their parents. I talk to Karen Scruggs probably once a week. There are relationships with the parents. I came home last week, and Trace's mom was in town and Trace's mom is famous for her salsa. So there was two things of salsa in the fridge. I had never been able to eat it before. It was always gone before I got home. She had come into town and brought the family her famous salsa.

So it's all of it: Community, family, relationships. We'll have a ton of families at practice this week because a lot of families, when we're home -- the home games are so much better during Thanksgiving because they can come up for Thanksgiving and stay for the game, so it makes sense.

I've got a ton of people coming to my house, not only the players, but their families as well. I was pulling out of the parking lot last night and the Drivers were behind us, Donald and the whole family. They were parked right behind me. I didn't know who it was at first.

So that's a cool thing of this Thanksgiving week combined with Senior Day. It's tough when it's on the road -- excuse me, when your last game is on the road and it's the game before Thanksgiving is not at home. Makes it more challenging.

Yeah, it will be emotional, but I'll pay respect to those guys. We got a bunch of guys today taking graduation photos with me in the facility. So a lot of different things going on, but obviously a ton of respect. I hope, I hope -- this is always a challenging game because a lot of students are gone for break, but I hope the place is sold out and rocking.

I hope all of the seniors get cheered the way I think they deserved to be cheered, not only in the Senior Day ceremonies, but when they announce the starters and things like that. I think that would be the right thing to do.

As a Penn State community, I think the majority of our fans

see it the same way.

Q. I wanted to with ask you about one of those sixth-year guys, Jonathan Sutherland. When you look at the success he had on the field, in the classroom, at his experience, how well he's handled himself, just wanted to gets your thoughts -- I was going to ask how he's been an ambassador, how much does he represent what most people would consider to be a model student-athlete? How much have you enjoyed coaching Jonathan, spending time with him, getting to know him, and how much will you miss coaching him?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I try and ask you, but I can't think of anything else on the menu that we can ask him. Cornbread or just like a roll or biscuit?

Q. Corn bread. Doesn't matter what the second one is.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow. No hesitation. I didn't even listen because I was trying to come up with an either/or. Sutherland. I wrote it down.

I'm a huge Sutherland fan. He's another one in my opinion that has handled his entire Penn State experience the right way. Been a special teams weapon for multiple years, and captain. Was a defensive role player and defensive starter. Has moved positions and now is a starter at another position.

He's a huge routine guy. I mean, literally, he's in the facility taking care of his body all the time. That's when he was still taking a full load. That's undergrad, in grad school. He's a huge routine guy.

To me that's going to be part of his legacy, how to take care of your body, how to prepare, maximize your experience here. He's been phenomenal that way.

And then you talk about the Canadian guys, that situation is a little bit different. He's going to have an opportunity to continue playing the game of football - I think in the NFL -- but also there are those guys that they're extremely valuable to the CFL as well, and those people will be fighting for him, too.

That will create some opportunities for him to continue playing the game. Another guy that I have no doubt in my mind that when football does come to an end he's going to be prepared. I think that's a big part of our job as coaches and staff, is to make sure the guys are prepared for when football comes to an end.

That is a very difficult transition, and through my career I've

seen too many times and too many players and programs that those young men were not prepared. That can be devastating because a lot of these young men, when they come out of high school, their entire identity is wrapped around football, and there is so much more to them than that.

To be able to go to a program that is also going to view them and see them as more than just football player, I think is really important.

And again, I don't want this ever to come off where I'm undervaluing the importance of football. I don't mean that at all. But football is going to come to an end for all of them. Having a program, a plan that reinforces that, so when it does happen, they feel prepared and ready, and in a lot of ways excited for that next chapter of their life.

I think Suth is a really good example of that. I'm a big John Sutherland fan.

Q. Before you can ask, if you put if in front of me, I will eat it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So -- okay, that's a good point then. What do you not like? I have two things I don't like.

Q. You're not going to like this, but sweet potato pie.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Wow, have you had it?

Q. Yeah, i don't like pumpkin pie either. Not a pie guy in general.

JAMES FRANKLIN: But that's it?

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Anything else?

Q. Yes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Liver?

Q. If you cook it right.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'll eat liver. I don't like it.

Q. It's a little tough.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You ever had chitlins?

Q. No.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah. I don't necessarily like

them, the texture.

The follow-up question, yeah.

Q. To get back to Senior Day, how do you balance the emotions of it with the fact that you are playing a game -- you talk about 1-0, and part of that is keeping the emotions in in check and staying focused. You kind of want this to be an emotional day and feel what they're feeling. How do you balance that with the fact you do have to play a game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The reality is to recognize that, right? It's totally fine and acceptable to recognize there will be some emotions that go with it. What you try to do is channel as much as you can. Okay, you're going to have this time before the game. Appreciate that, experience that, go through the emotions, spend the time with the family, do all these things.

And then let's put that to bed and then let's focus on the game. Then after the game in the locker room, that's an emotional time. Last time this group will be in Beaver Stadium in that locker room together. To me, I think the important thing is to recognize that, talk about that, so then the guys can come up with a plan for it rather than Saturday morning they're hit with all these emotions at once.

Talk about it and come up with a plan of handling it the right way so you're not on this emotional high or emotional low, that we handle it the right way. In a lot of ways, learn how to funnel that in a positive way for energy during the game.

Q. Fresh or canned cranberry? No? Not feeling it?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The answer is obvious. The fresh cranberry sauce that someone, makes or the jelly one where you cut it and it slides out. It's in the shape of the can.

Q. Yeah, I know which one Corey will eat, but...

Yeah, fresh. My mom makes good fresh cranberry sauce. Shout out to my mom.

JAMES FRANKLIN: That right?

Q. She's a lot more local, so come right over.

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's offered sweet potato pie.

Q. Yeah.



JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah.

Q. Door is open.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Mom's name?

Q. Joanna. That's my mom.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Awesome.

Q. Such a hard transition. Maybe that's on purpose. I think quarterbacking and coaching share an appreciation, emotion, that people love you as much as you win. You look at Christian sort of gets a pass historically because he showed up when things were weird. Trace won too much for anybody not to like him. Sean has been through everything. Maybe at the end of the day you don't get everything done you want to do over that span, but there is a kinship, in the half these people love me, half these people hate me maybe you can only share with him in way that your other quarterbacks maybe haven't had to experience. Even if you don't do everything you want to do with him, where does that fall on the scale that maybe not?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Shared experience and sometimes shared sufferage. You know, yeah, I think that's fair. I think there is things that as coaches you can relate with your quarterback, and the role and the responsibility and the leadership that comes with that position and vice versa.

There are some times where Sean will come to my office, Trace, and ask, hey, I want your perspective on this. You've been there from the beginning with me. That's probably one of the things, especially now, that I respect so much about Sean, is I think he's self-aware. He's very self-aware.

Which I think is a really critical quality for all of us to have. It's the only way you grow. Only way you get better is if your self-aware. It makes it really hard to coach guys that aren't self-aware.

So I think he's got a really good feeling for that. Got a really good appreciation for that. There is a weight that comes with that position. There is a weight that comes with being the head coach. So it's probably the closest kind of correlation between the players and the staff specifically the head coach.

So I think it's a very good point. It's also why when you talk about our relationship, why it's so strong. You talk about -- you brought up Trace, why it's so strong. Because you went through shared experiences together. And as you know, as we've talked about before, you know, you get a

ton of the grief and the frustration and you feel that and you sense that and you see that and you hear that and you feel it.

And I know as head coach, probably too much credit when things go well. It's all of that. But I do think your point is a great one. I don't care whether that's high school, college, or the NFL, there is a strong correlation. There is a strong relationship through those experiences through though two positions. Accurate and fair.

Q. Okay. I'll play.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What do you got?

Q. Ham, so I'll say dark.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you. I was going that route. You're exactly right. So turkey, the white meat or the dark meat?

Q. Dark.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Dark? Why?

Q. Juicier.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I agree. Higher fat content. Yeah, nine years, I want to hug you right now. I feel like we connected. We finally connected.

Q. I just hope you're always winning 55-10 before Thanksgiving.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, exactly.

Q. You seem really at peace right now. This is the first year or one of the first years that your name hasn't come up with other jobs. Are you at more peace? Is it the contract you signed last year? You talk about the alignment of your administration now. Is it fair to say that you are at a place that more at peace?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I would say the one thing you said about my name, like that's outside of my control. You know, you guys could be coming in here and asking me some crazy question right now. But the other stuff, yeah.

I think probably the biggest factor for that is the alignment. You know, that's -- that has been phenomenal. I think you guys know in the past I've always been happy with the leadership, but I did feel like we needed more alignment, specifically when it comes to football.

I just think that's been obvious from the chair, to the

president, if you spend time around our president, if you haven't, strongly encourage you do it. She just has a energy and enthusiasm and positivity for Penn State specifically, but for this community and for students and their experience.

And it's infectious. Really is. Pat is aggressive when it comes to athletics, and I think is fighting for not just football, for all the sports. She is fighting. So that has been really good. That has been a really positive.

So that's probably the biggest thing. That's probably the biggest thing. I feel like I can focus more of my time and energy on our players and our program right now than probably I ever have in 12 years. All the way back to Vanderbilt.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving week.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You got anything?

Q. How quickly are the Christmas decorations up in the Franklin household?

JAMES FRANKLIN: That's not the issue. The issue is when do they come down. My wife is huge, huge decorator, all of it. All of it. But then that's the issue, when does to come down? Does it just butt up -- do they stay up until the next one? That is always the interesting one.

But I can't say anything or critique because I'm not putting them up or taking them down.

Q. I know the rules. Same deal here.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey, I don't get a vote. Just smile and say thanks, honey.

Q. Manny Diaz, he is one of the finalists for the top college assistant football coach. Considering where he's coming, a lot of guys have options after what he went through. He decided to invest himself to the defensive coordinator. What is your case, what would it mean to you, the program, and to Manny perhaps, to extend this relationship into another year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I just like I told you guys, it was kind of unique in how it happened, because you almost feel uncomfortable reaching out. You just were delivered really bad news professionally and you're calling the guy. Like it was either the day of or the next day. You try to be as respectful as you possibly can.

Also, say, hey, this may make sense for both of us. It went fast. You know, it went fast from saying, yeah, it's -- he's

interested and working through all the details to come in here and buy Brent Pry's house and moving in there, you know, to starting to put his stamp on the defense.

As you see as the season has gone on we've gotten better and more confident, his perspective in the staff meetings has been really good. Him reinforcing some things. I think as sometimes as assistant coaches, everybody has all the answers for how you should handle things.

But Manny being a head coach before, Terry Smith being a head coach before, Coach Wiz being a head coach before, you kind of go through the staff, and those experiences are valuable.

I think sometimes being a head coach and going back to being an assistant, you can be an even better assistant because you view the profession, the game, and the world differently. But he's been great. I think he's really enjoying it.

I think he's done a really good job of not just teaching the Xs and the Os, but also building a culture on the defensive side of the ball, which is something I thought Brent did a good job of. Being the head coach of the defense, which is really what I want. I want the position coaches to do that as well by position.

All those things must align with the program's core values and the mission. But he's been great. I think he's having fun doing it. Sometimes as a head coach all the reasons why you got into the profession in the first place, the way this profession has changed and evolved, in some ways it pulls you further away from the things that most of us got into the profession in the first place about.

Depending on how you construct or build your program, it could pull you even further from that. It's funny, Abdul Carter asked me, do you call any of the plays on offense, defense, special teams? I told him at Vanderbilt it was very different as a first time head coach, and over the years how it's evolved.

So I'm proud of him. I'm happy he's here. When you go into the defensive staff room, they got really good morale. They have fun in there. They work hard. Everybody in that room has a voice. I think he's done a really good job, not just from the players, but with the staff as well.

So it's been good. Then I'm looking forward to the off-season where we have a little bit more time to talk. Okay, now after you've been here a year, what are your thoughts? Then also maybe to dig into kind of what his experience was like. Really haven't had the time to do that. When you first hire a guy that's probably not the

conversation that he wants to have at the time.

So it's been really good. We had a really good staff. I'm thankful for our staff and for our players. Back to - I think that kind of goes back to AZ's point. We got a good sense, and I also think it helps he took over a defense that was in a really healthy spot. Brent had left the place in a really good place and had done a great job.

And because I think the players had so much respect for Brent, the hire was important not just from a scheme standpoint, but from a cultural perspective. He was able to come in and jump in with two feet, and he has presence, so was able to get in front of the guys and kind of get them on board very quickly which also helped.

Q. So my mother in law is English and they have a super pared bake Thanksgiving. No casseroles.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Carrots and turnips? My mom is English.

Q. Carrots. I had to switch over to carrots because I could not eat turnips.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, my mom -- I haven't done it since my mom passed, but it was always carrots and turnips. If you grew up eating it you eat it, but if you didn't, you weren't eating it.

Q. So we lost the green bean casserole. From the offensive perspective, over to something you said at the beginning in your opening statement about starting faster, how does that sort of discovery phase in the first quarter, couple drives, whatever it is, when you're trying to figure out what the wrinkles is this week from the defense, whether it's the safety shift or something like that. How long does that take before you can make those in-game adjustments, and how do you work through that time when you're trying to get that and still move the football and have an effect nephew offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The interesting thing is the longer your opening drive is the better. Obvious. That sounds obvious, but what I mean by that is when you can get through all different formations and sets and shifts and motions and say, okay, are they playing the way we anticipated them playing based on the game plan? Or where are they different? Identify those things as quickly as we can.

What's the blitz of the week? What are all those things. That's where that opening drive, not only do you want to be able to do those things, but you also want plays that are

multi-purpose. You don't want to be running plays that are specific game plan plays to attack a certain coverage that you're expecting out of a certain formation or field zone.

You want to be able to go kind of bread and butter, base plays that are multi-purpose that have answers verse a variety of things. To your point, you don't typically know. The problem is if you go three and out, not only have you gone three and out, which is negative, you haven't had the time or opportunity to see are they playing all the formations and field zones the way we expect them to?

It's kind of a double negative. Not only do you go three and out which isn't a positive, but you don't really get to figure out who they are fast enough.

Now if you struggle in your first two opening drives, you know, you had to go through two struggling opening drives to figure out who they are and how are they playing in this game and the approach and mentality, so the opening drive is important obviously. You look at all the data and analytics with opening with the score, why that's important.

But it's also important to be able to determine as quickly as you possibly can, is your opponent this week who you expect them to be based on game planning, and did they have a bye week the week before? Did they have more time to come up with some unique wrinkles and things like that.

I hope that answers your question.

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