

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

James Franklin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our football press conference. We'll start with an opening statement from coach and open it up to questions.

Coach.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate everybody coming out covering Penn State football. Literally just landed back in State College. I've been everywhere the last two weeks. I've literally been everywhere. Excited to be back, see the family, get around the guys again.

Really talk a little bit obviously about Utah, then get into questions. I don't really have anything else to cover with you guys before that.

Pretty cool, first-ever matchup against Utah, 2022. Not many things you get to say first time ever. I think that's a really cool thing for not only Penn State and Utah but the Big Ten and the Pac-12.

Kyle Whittingham, known for a long time. Ton of respect for him. He's been at Utah for almost 30 years. We both at one point were at Idaho State. I think he was the defensive coordinator at Utah when I was at Idaho State. I remember seeing him on the road recruiting a number of times.

He's done a great job. You watch them. I think if you're a true football guy, you watch them, that's what a team is supposed to look like, in my opinion. Offense, defense, special teams, complementary football there. Tough football team there. They're a physical football team. They know how to win games in a lot of different ways. I got a bunch of respect for them.

Andy Ludwig I've also known for a long time, their offensive coordinator. When I was the offensive coordinator at Maryland, Andy actually came and visited. We actually spent some time together talking football. He's been doing it a long time. He's really respected nationwide. He's worked a ton of different places and he's done a really good job at the University of Utah with their offense.

Cam Rising, their quarterback, I think that play in the USC game kind of exemplifies who he is. He got knocked pretty good, his helmet flew off, he jumped right up, put his helmet back on. I was actually at his high school last week. Got a ton of respect for him. He's been really productive. Obviously MVP of the Pac-12 title game.

Their tight end, No. 87, Thomas Yassmin, their tight ends really make their offense go. They use their tight ends in a similar way that we do.

Their left tackle, No. 71, Braeden Daniels. Then their running back No. 2 Micah Bernard. A ton of different guys that can hurt you in a ton of different ways. Offensively they're multiple enough to cause people issues.

Morgan Scalley, their defensive coordinator, been there 17 years, been at Utah for 17 years. They've probably led with their defense over coach's time there. Been very, very consistent. Been very, very disruptive. They got a bunch of guys that we're impressed with.

Linebacker No. 21, Karene Reid. Defensive end No. 81, Connor O'Toole. Defensive tackle No. 58, Junior Tafuna. Safety, No. 11, R.J. Hubert. Linebacker No. 20, Lander Barton. Then linebacker No. 3, Mohamoud Diabate. They got some really good players. The Diabate kid is a transfer from Florida. They are big, physical and they are tough. They are disruptive.

On special teams coordinator, Sharrieff Shah. The guy that kind of stands out for us on special teams, kind of an unusual body type as a punt returner, but Devaughn Vele. They do a good job.

I wish I could speak in more detail about these guys at this time. To be honest, we've been on the road for the last two weeks. Last weekend we were back in town, but it was mainly practice and official visit. It was more, as you guys know, program development type practice, spring ball type practice where we really hadn't got into our opponent in great detail at that point.

This will be a busy weekend getting caught up on film and those types of things. We will practice tonight. We were



supposed to practice today, but classes got canceled yesterday. Some exams got pushed to today during our practice time. We ended up having to push our practice time back or we would have missed too many guys from practice. We'll practice today. Tomorrow we'll be off because of graduation.

Appreciate you guys being here, and I open it up to questions.

Q. As you indicated, it's a really important recruiting time. How do you balance this next week or so leading up to signing day with finishing up this class, looking ahead to the next class, then the portal to be monitoring?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think the next class will become more of a priority after this first signing day because we'll have more time at that point to focus on next class, to focus a little bit more on the transfer portal and go from there.

'Balance' is kind of the key word. You're running in a thousand different directions, making sure our guys finish strong academically, obviously making sure that we're doing everything we can for bowl prep. God forbid you go buy a Christmas present. All those types of things.

Just running in a thousand different directions, making sure our guys are in a good place here, making sure our staff is flying all over the country, safe, doing what they need to do, then finishing in recruiting.

There's literally not enough hours in the day. Last week was a grind because then we also had LaVar Arrington being inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame, which was awesome. What wasn't awesome is the two days before flying out there to be there for LaVar's induction, which I thought was really important. My flight was at 5:10. The next day the flight was at 5:10. After LaVar's deal, I had to fly from there to Florida, so my flight was at 4:10 a.m. I wish it was p.m.

I got to the airport and the plane had broke down, so I sat there till 9. Luckily my old buddy Dabo Swinney came in and he was going to the Orange Bowl press conference in Fort Lauderdale. I said, Dabo, can I please jump on this plane with you?

We flew out to Florida. Dabo and Clemson, thank you very much, appreciate you guys. I think Dabo will rub this in and hold it over my head for the next 20 years.

I think 'balance' is the right word. It's a crazy, crazy time. It's gotten crazier with everything that's going on in college

football.

Q. Can you tell us what the status is of Olu and Caedan Wallace for the Rose Bowl?

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you guys know, there's still some time and there's no reason to rush these guys. I haven't had a chance to sit down and talk with them, where we're at. But right now we are planning for Olu and Caedan to be available. That could change. We'll see how this thing goes.

We're not going to rush either of them back. It will all be based on where the medical staff feels that they are and where these guys feel they are, both physically and mentally.

We're planning. I'll even throw a bonus one in there, Olu, Caedan, Keyvone, we're expecting to have all of those. We'll see how it plays out.

Q. Just had Pat Kraft for a while before you. Something I asked him is what he learned about you going through the season, on the road with you guys. I'm curious to pose that to you about Pat, what you experienced, what you kind of picked up from him. He called it 'embedded 'with you guys for much of the season.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Really I can speak in a lot of ways about Pat and Dr. Bendapudi. Both of them, their energy is contagious, it is contagious. I never know if I should say Neeli or Dr. Bendapudi. I want to be as respectful of her position.

She spoke at the foot banquet last Sunday and she crushed it. She's just so positive, so energetic. She just had the whole room kind of eating out of her hand.

Pat is the same way. They love what they do. You never know when you take a new job, right? You take a new job, you don't know what it's going to be like. I think both of them are very, very happy at Penn State, being in Happy Valley.

Pat has been great. Me and Kevin, kind of my right hand man, we got to change our approach because we're wasting time in meetings. We'll go to them a lot of times with things that we think we need to do, things that are going on in college football. We kind of put on our sales hat of why we need to do it. We don't really need to do that. We just kind of talk about what's going on, why these things are important. They kind of see it the same way. That's not just with football. I've been hearing it from all the coaches.

So it's been great. On the plane rides, on the away games, he's sitting right there next to me. It's been really good.

He is passionate about Penn State, Penn State athletics, all the sports. I think he's going to have a strong voice. I think he's going to be vocal from a Big Ten perspective in terms of representing our school. I think you're going to see it on a national level, as well.

It's been really good. He was out there, as well, for LaVar's induction. It was kind of cool. We were taking pictures. It was LaVar and Brandon Short. Pat goes, Hold on a second, I have to get in this picture, three of us Big Ten linebackers. It looked a little different.

It's been really good, it really has. To be honest with you, Vinny has, as well, which is like Pat's right hand man. He works specifically with football. It's been really good. It's been really good. I think the word 'embedded' is probably a really good word for it.

I was a little worried about him on the sideline, but that hasn't been an issue. I think he is passionate about Penn State athletics and also Penn State football, which is great.

Q. The transfer portal window specifically, has it worked or has it been as effective as you thought it would be? When you talk about alignment with the administration, have you been able to get the things done you need to make transfers an easier reality at this point?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So the first thing, I think with the transfer portal and the window, I think a lot of things that happened and that the NCAA comes up with, I think probably in theory makes sense. As always, I don't know if there's enough conversation going on with the actual practitioners.

Yeah, I think in theory it makes some sense. In terms of the transfer process, I think you can have all the conversations you want beforehand, and when it hits, it's different.

I just think the pace at which things happen, specifically to athletics, then obviously in more detail about football, it's just a very different pace. I mean, literally you could get a phone call from a kid that's been on the fence, then you get a phone call at 12:00 at night, and he's ready to jump, and you better have the answer because now, if you don't give him the answer, he wakes up in the morning and he has second thoughts because you haven't given him a direct answer.

Things happen fast. We're still working through those things. A lot of different moving parts.

Q. You brought up the pace. Do you feel that the December busy schedule needs to change because it's kind of chaotic not only for yourself but also college and high school athletes?

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're talking about with the early signing period?

Q. This entire six-week period. Does the NCAA need to change that schedule?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Are you saying because of the early signing period?

Q. Because of everything combined: signing, transfer portal.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess what I'm saying, really the discussion is what's changed to make it more because it's always been like this. There's always been coaching changes. There's always been signing day. There's always been bowl practices. The thing that's magnified it is the earlier signing period is I guess what I'm asking.

Q. Yes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: They just changed it, so I don't necessarily see them changing it again. But the early signing period has essentially become their signing period for most people.

I think the biggest thing I'm probably concerned about is the number of guys going into the transfer portal. Then also how that is impacting high school students.

The other thing was when you added an extra year because of COVID, but you only expanded the scholarship limits for one year, you just basically took a bunch of opportunities away from high school kids because there's just less scholarships available out there.

It's interesting. I think obviously everybody always focuses on the high, high profile, the most elite recruits. It's usually always going to work out for those guys. But there's a ton of other guys that I worry could be left in some tough spots.

But to answer your question, if I think I'm understanding your question correctly, I think the reason it feels that way is because we moved the signing day up.

I think you guys have heard me talk about this before, I was in the SEC at the time when this discussion was really

first going about. The discussion was, Let's have an early signing day, but let's not change anything else.

The problem is once they changed the early signing day, then they changed the visits, allowed for earlier visits because they said they had to create access, things like that.

For what we discussed, the kid that was going to go to Penn State and always was going to go to Penn State, let that guy sign, but don't change anything else in the model. But once we did, it's created all these other things.

Q. 10 wins, Rose Bowl. When you're out traveling around or talking to recruits or the portal, have you seen the tangible benefits of that momentum, all the positive momentum? Are you able to experience all of that on a tangible basis? What has that meant for you, this season, bounces back after a couple of trying years?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I think nationally you feel it a little bit more. When you're out traveling, talking to old school football coaches, things like that, I think yes.

Me personally, I would say I think this is kind of who really we've been. Obviously the last two years, I know everybody dealt with COVID, I think COVID affected us. But this is really who we've been. So it's been my expectation and our expectation and our players' expectation.

I understand your point. But I feel it out on the road recruiting. High school coaches, they respect not only the record but how our team has played. You hear it from other coaches, college coaches, NFL coaches, whatever it may be.

You feel it on the road. It's obviously different conversations and things like that are going on. Obviously with us recruiting out in California, everywhere in between, with the Rose Bowl you hear that a little bit more, too.

Q. At this point it doesn't seem like you've got many guys opting out of this game. Is it it's because the Rose Bowl, these guys want to play one more games together?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, probably similar answer. This is who we've been. In my 12 years as a head coach, I've never had an opt-out until last year.

Again, I think part of it goes back to the leadership of our captains this year. That was a big part of our conversation before the season started with our captains, what their

expectations were, what their standards were, what mine were as well.

Really the way, in my mind, we've billed it at Penn State, there's really no reason to opt out. We will be flexible with all of our guys. I want our guys to be as successful as they possibly can. I want the bowl experience to be a great experience. We'll work with our guys.

There's really no reason to opt out. That goes back to communication with the players and the parents, things like that.

I remember all the way back with Saquon in the Fiesta Bowl, I had a conversation with him and his family about that game because he was getting some people advising him to opt out of the game.

Again, I look at this season more as getting back to who we are. The last two years, specifically last year, to your point, was probably an outlier.

Q. With the two early road wins that you got, how important do you think that was for setting the tone for the whole season, ultimately ending up in the Rose Bowl?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, early wins are important. Middle-of-the-season wins are important. Late-season wins are important. They're all important.

I think that's when I go that 1-0 mentality. Sometimes people get frustrated, whether it's fans, especially of other schools, media. At the end of the day when you beat what people would say is a big opponent like Auburn on the road, that had a different feel to it. But I can guarantee you, you lose to somebody you're not supposed to lose to, that has a significant impact, as well.

They're all important. We try to emphasize them that way as much as we can, although they hear different messages from everybody else. Then what we try to do as much as we can is reinforce and show in our guys how you can't take it for granted, and you better prepare the best you possibly can, dot every I, cross every T, because every week, whether it's college or the NFL, there are teams losing to teams that they're not supposed to lose to. We try to illustrate that the best we can, make sure we're taking the right approach as coaches and the players as well.

Q. The transfer portal at the quarterback position seems like a tough sell, especially with things as they are. It seems like you would need another quarterback, but maybe one of the better quarterbacks you could get is the guy that just left. How do you sell

that position to a transfer portal guy, or do you not, and three is enough?

JAMES FRANKLIN: You prefer to have more than three. There's no doubt about it. I think if you look across the country, whenever you're in a situation where your starter is a sophomore or less, to your point it's a hard sell, it really is a hard sell.

Sometimes you can convince an older player that just wants to be a part of a big-time program and part of a special experience to come as more of a backup, a senior backup, a veteran backup. Sometimes you can find that. More times than not, the guys that you're going to want want to go somewhere to play and be the guy and compete. That's always a challenge when you're starting a true freshman, a redshirt freshman. You may start a true freshman and have five quarterbacks on your roster, but after the season ends your room is going to change dramatically.

We've had some conversations early on as things started to play out. Does that mean we try to sign two quarterbacks in this class, whatever it may be? We try to not ever box ourselves in when we're talking to recruits and their parents.

I'm a big under-promise, over-deliver guy. What you try not to do is say, We're going to sign three defensive ends in this class. Once you say that, then you sign four, people are upset about it.

For me, I always say if we're expecting to sign three, I'm always going to say four, I'm always going to say one more, just to try to explain there's going to be some flexibility and things that happen on your roster that you're not expecting. It's easier to address that on the front end as much as you can. I think your point is a good one.

Q. You mentioned LaVar's Hall of Fame induction ceremony a couple times. Given how busy you are, why is it important for you to be there? I saw Wally was there. What was it like to be around that group of lettermen?

JAMES FRANKLIN: There were a ton of guys out there that came out for LaVar's induction, which was good. It's an event, to be honest with you, that I go to pretty much every year. It's a who's who of college football event. It was obviously a lot more convenient when it had been in New York for a long time at the National Football Foundation. Almost all the ADs are there, a good percentage of the college football coaches are there.

On top of that, when you're at a place like Penn State, it

seems like we have a player being inducted almost every year. So that helps, as well.

But on top of that, LaVar has been a vocal supporter of the university and the athletic department and the football program. To be honest with you, specifically me. He's been phenomenal. Sometimes I'll call LaVar for some perspective, sometimes he'll call me for some perspective. It's always good to hear.

It's always important to kind of be at those events and support Penn Staters. But LaVar has been outstanding really since we arrived here.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thanks, guys.

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