

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate everybody coming out to cover Penn State football. We do appreciate that. Don't take it for granted.

One of the things that we're going to talk about with the team is this week of football Thursday through Sunday shows our staff and our players that you'd better appreciate winning and what winning takes. You'd better respect it, and you'd better appreciate it and what winning takes, because it's hard to do. It's hard to do.

I want to thank our fans. The environment was phenomenal. It was a great crowd. Obviously one of the larger crowds, especially for an opening weekend, that we've ever had. So that was awesome.

What a statement it would be this weekend if we're able to do it again. So challenge all of our fans to come out, and let's enjoy another Saturday in Beaver Stadium, and we're very, very appreciative of the environment and the type of support we get.

This Saturday is our Thon game, and we will also be welcoming back and honoring the 1973 undefeated team, celebrating their 50th anniversary. A bunch of good stuff there.

When you talk about the clock, there's been a lot of discussions about the clock in college football. If you go back and look what we averaged last year, what West Virginia averaged last year in terms of plays, we lost five plays and they lost five plays, so you're talking about a total of 10 plays.

I think for the average football fan or person, you probably don't notice it a whole lot. For us, it did feel -- I know it sounds crazy, but it did feel dramatically shorter, especially the first half seemed to fly by.

But in terms of just football in general, you're talking about 10 plays.

A couple other things, talking about West Virginia. On



offense, Drew Allar was our Player of the Game on offense, was also the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week, which is cool. Defensively Curtis Jacobs, special teams Malik McClain.

I'd also like to just talk about two guys specifically, kind of follow up with Malik McClain. He's been just a wonderful addition to our football family. The guy has got a smile on his face all the time. I mean, literally all the time, in the weight room, walking around campus, going to class. He's done very well academically here. He's trying to help the team be successful in any way, special teams. Obviously he played really well in his opening game on offense, as well, so he's been a really nice addition and has done a really good job not just from a production standpoint but from a cultural standpoint he's been great. Another young man that we recruited out of high school, as well, so we had a preexisting relationship with.

Then the other one is Kaytron Allen. I just want to make sure that our fans and everybody that follows Penn State closely knows how fortunate we are and how blessed we are to have Kaytron. In our locker room, we've done a ton of respect for him, and so does our staff.

We are blessed to be one of these programs that has two backs that are two of the better backs in all of college football, and we recognize that, and we're appreciative of that.

D squad players of the week: Jan Mahlert and Golden Achumba on offense. On defense, Jace Tutty and Jake Wilson, and then on special teams, Jason Estrella. Felt like those guys did such a great job all week long in getting our team prepared to go out and play against a good West Virginia team.

Some other general notes about the game. Positives, no turnovers on offense or special teams. We met our explosive play goal on offense and won the overall battle. Nine different offensive players had receptions, real positive. We played 62 guys in the game, 26 on offense, 26 on defense, and 10 on special teams.

Then I thought Kaden Saunders, it's probably one of those things that goes unnoticed, but he just looked so



comfortable and poised catching the football, and then also, which we haven't done consistently over the last couple years, being comfortable running up in there in traffic. I thought the one should have been a penalty where there was almost contact with his shoulder as he was running to try to get the ball and caught it in traffic. That ball gets to the ground, some bad things can happen. It can roll for another 15 yards, but the other thing is it can bounce and hit one of your players and be a turnover.

So being able to go up in there and catch the ball in traffic is something really positive to build on.

Opportunities for growth. I think it's great that we played so many guys, but the standard is still the standard. Did you play in a way that earned you more reps or less reps based on your performance? We've got to create more turnovers through strips and fumbles and obviously INTs, and then consistency in the kicking game.

That's my West Virginia review.

Getting on to Delaware, got a ton of respect for the University of Delaware for a long time. Very successful program.

Obviously you look at their history and their traditions, we have a ton of respect for the university as a whole.

Ryan Carty really is a head coach with an offensive coordinator background and has done some really good things. 10 returning starters; that's still relevant at this point of the season.

Ryan Carty also is the offensive coordinator, as well, and play caller. They're an RPO spread-style offense.

Their pass game is vertical, and movements, but in my mind I expect us to see a ton of quick game, a ton of screens, and a ton of move-the-pocket type stuff. I think that's how I think they'll play us.

They base out of 11 personnel. Guys that we're impressed with is wide receiver No. 17 Jourdan Townsend, quarterback No. 14 Ryan O'Connor, and then running back No. 21 Marcus Yates.

Defensively Manny Rojas really kind of comes from like the Al Groh tree of football, and then you look at them, they've taken some of the Iowa State three-safety scheme and kind of merged those two things. Coach Rojas is from Oakdale, Pennsylvania. But they're a multiple scheme front and coverage, a lot of kind of unorthodox and unusual looks.

Guys that we're impressed with is linebacker No. 0 Jackson Taylor, who's from Pennsylvania, nose tackle No. 55 Keyshawn Hunter, who's an Old Dominion transfer, and then defensive end No. 12 Chase McGowan. They're guys that jump out to us.

Then on special teams, Art Link, not a whole lot of examples. They didn't punt in this last game, so we don't have a whole lot of film on those types of things. But we've been impressed with kick returner No. 10, Kyron Cumby, who's an Illinois transfer, and then their kick returner, No. 5, Josh Youngblood, who we're familiar with. This is his third school. He's been at Rutgers, he's been at Kansas State, was actually the Big 12 Special Teams Player of the Year, so we have some familiarity with him.

Hope that gives you guys some information and some talking points, but I open it up to questions.

Q. James, a guy who used to sit in that chair said that a team, a football team often makes its greatest improvement from week one to week two. Do you agree with that, and if you do, where would you like to see your team make the most improvement this week?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we'd need to. I think your first couple weeks in the season, I think you can make significant strides, and you need to make significant strides.

I think that's what the best programs do, and I think the best programs improve and learn and make corrections after wins. They don't have to have setbacks, wake-up calls to be able to do it.

Now, that's easier said than done.

But yeah, I think if you look at us, kind of some of the things that I just hit on, the areas for improvement. So we need to be more consistent on the special teams. We need to create more turnovers on defense. Then on offense, we need to improve on our 3rd down percentage and stay on the field.

The best offenses get most of their 1st downs on 1st and 2nd down, which we did do, but when you're able to combine that with also being efficient on 3rd down, then you're difficult to deal with.

The areas I talked about, areas for improvement with us, is really, I guess, what we'd be focused on, saying what we'd like to see in these next couple weeks, us build on the things we did well and improve in the areas that need to be addressed.

Q. You've referenced occasionally the similarities between Beau Pribula and Trace McSorley. What traits do you think they share?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, first of all, it's the mobility, I think is the first thing.

I think the other thing is both of them are kind of men of few words. Both of them had significant impacts at their high schools in terms of winning and having really productive high school careers. I think they also both have really high football IQs and the game makes sense to them.

I would say style of play probably more than anything. Beau is obviously a little bit bigger, but I would say style of play and guys who have the ability to beat you with decision making as well as their legs.

Q. Your defensive line, how do you think it performed Saturday, especially in the interior? I know some of those guys rebuilt their bodies a little bit, added some weight in the off-season. Is it what you expected? Did you learn anything from those guys?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think good. We needed to get off the field a little bit more on defense, but we played really good defense when it mattered most and were able to get off the field.

Defensively if you look, they got the ball out of the quarterback's hands quickly, which was smart. Wasn't a whole lot of traditional drop-back pass. I was impressed with that quarterback.

The timing -- the one throw he made to the tight end on the seam, that ball comes out way before the receiver is even looking, so I was impressed with that.

But the other thing they did is they were smart. You look, they had their tight ends chipping our defensive ends a lot. I think to me that shows respect for our defensive line, and I have a lot of confidence in that position and how they're being coached.

I think we're going to end up having a very productive year up front. That's going to allow our defense to have the type of success that we need to have.

Q. This is just something I'm kind of curious about more than a newsy thing. The tight end position --

JAMES FRANKLIN: Did you say newsy?

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Is that a word?

Q. Well, news-ish.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay, newsy and news-ish. I love it.

Q. I'm glad to be of service in terms of language. The tight end position, it seems like you make extensive use of that position, multiple tight end sets almost every week, but it seems to me like the way they get used from week to week changes quite a bit. A lot of that last week, but for whatever reason, they didn't get targeted much in the passing game. Just talk about that. I'm just curious about that in general, how that works. Obviously it's somewhat of an opponent-specific thing, but you're thinking about how to use -- the different ways you use the tight end from week to week?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think it's an interesting discussion, not just to tight ends but in general. This is things that I think the media ask. These are things sometimes parents will reach out and ask about, about why their son didn't get this many touches or why the ball didn't go to them.

It's interesting because as a coaching staff if you look at our notes on Sunday and Monday, it's how do we get the ball to Theo and Tyler, but the reality is I think our production on Saturday shows that we want to spread the ball around. Nine people touched the ball.

But what we're not going to do is we're not just going to force the ball to somebody if they're not open. We did have one specific route that was called that's going to go to a tight end, and that's the primary throw, and we got sacked on that play.

I think there was another throw to the tight ends that got batted down by a defensive lineman.

But the reality is it's like whether it's the running game, we're not just going to hand the ball off and run into a dead look. That's where the RPOs help you, right, so you're not running into a play that pre-snap you pause the film and say, this run play has no chance to be successful. We're not just going to throw it to a tight end because we want to get him touches.

I don't know what their plan was. It may have been to eliminate the tight ends as much as possible from the passing game.

But I guess to answer your question, we have a plan to get the ball to our playmakers every single week, but then



once you get to the game, you're going to take what the defense gives and not force the ball to any players. It's just not the right thing to do.

That's going to equal sometimes you rush for 300 yards, other times you throw for 300 yards. That's going to also equate to some games where the tight ends get 12 touches, and there's going to be other games where the tight ends get two touches.

It's just how the game plays out.

I think when you're a good offense, you have the ability to do that. When you're dependent on one or two guys or one or two positions, then you're easier to defend. I hope that answers your question.

But it's interesting, that comes up a lot from a lot of different resources, but I can guarantee you, we go into it saying, Theo and Tyler specifically, those two guys have shown and end the right to be a big part of our game plan, and they were.

Q. I know things don't change in the snap of a finger in football or any sport, but when KeAndre has that kind of a game in the Rose Bowl, have you noticed a change in him, not just on the field but in the room confidence-wise and how he's able to lead the group in both ways?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, I think confidence is a real thing, and it's a powerful thing. There's no doubt about it.

I think obviously the way the season ended last year, we were able to build on it all spring, all summer, and now obviously you love that he was able to start out really strong and then keep it going and continue to build on it.

There's no doubt about that that that's a real thing.

I'm probably just most proud of him in terms of his maturity, both on and off the field, his growth as a leader, his growth as a football player, his growth as a competitor, his steady, consistent approach when it comes to being a mature teammate and football player.

I'm really proud of him.

He is thriving academically. He's thriving as a football player. He's earned the respect of the locker room and the coaching staff, and yeah, it hasn't always been a smooth ride. I think he's a really good example for a lot of guys that you trust a process, you keep working, and at some point you're going to have that breakthrough moment, and it's going to turn for you.

I am proud of him.

Me and his relationship I think is really good and really strong. Sometimes with guys like KeAndre and a lot of the guys, they doesn't really get me when they first get here. I'll mess with them, and they can't tell sometimes when I'm kidding and when I'm not, and he's one of these young men, he really knows how to interact with the coaching staff and specifically with me. He knows there's a time and place for everything.

He's going to go on not only this year and have a really big year and be one of the better wide receivers in the Big Ten and in college football, but he's got a bright future, not just in football but in life, because he's learned really good habits while he's here, and he's embraced the program and he's embraced the process.

I will also say, going against guys like Johnny Dixon and Kalen King every single day at practice, iron sharpens iron. It's been impressive to watch those guys compete.

Q. West Virginia's coach made some comments about the last-second touchdown. I wanted to give you a chance if you have any response to him, and what's your mindset of getting Beau some playing time and letting your guys run plays versus if you score late, maybe you open yourself up to some level of criticism?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah, I guess everybody looks at it differently, right. For me, I believe that my responsibility in those type of situations is to get my 2s in the game.

But I think once those 2s get in the game, then they deserve the right and the chance to play and compete. That's what I believe.

I believe that from the opening kick to the last whistle, you compete and you play.

Now, if you leave your 1s in, that's a different story. Then you should change how you play, and you take knees and you run in situations that you normally wouldn't run in. That's different.

But when your 2s go in the game, those guys get limited amount of reps. They should have a chance to compete.

I believe that not just from a Penn State perspective. If we're ever in that situation -- I see it the same way. This isn't me looking at it just from our view. I've got a bunch of other things I could say. But I'm just going to leave it at

that. That is my philosophy and our philosophy.

I think when our 2 offense was in there against a majority of their 1s, they have the chance to go compete, and I think Beau getting in there and being able to run the offense, they went to cover zero, which is hard to run when you go cover zero, Beau should have the ability to check to our cover zero plan and have a chance to execute a play that has a chance to be successful against cover zero, and then should have a chance to score.

I'm comfortable with that. I can't do a whole lot more than that, and I'll leave it at that.

Q. Daequan Hardy, Coziah Izzard, Amin Vanover showed up as out on that pregame availability port. Any of those players out for the year or for a significant amount of time, and with Daequan out, what did you think of Cam Miller stepping in at nickel?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so they are not out for the year. They are not out for the year. Cam Miller, obviously his role will continue to grow. Johnny Dixon -- we didn't play a whole lot of nickel last week. If we do, Johnny Dixon will take that role and Cam will be on the field, as well, obviously.

But I think Cam is really kind of that guy who's showing up a lot of different ways, special teams, defensively, is going to continue to grow. He's a guy that I think is a lot like some guys that we've had in the past like John Sutherland where every single day this guy practices and meets and prepares like it's the Super Bowl, and he's going to maximize his time here at Penn State and have a really good career, and I think he's a really good example for young players in our program.

Q. To the extent that you can share, can you let us know what your message is to a guy like Sander after that kind of game and the balancing act between letting him know that the job needs to be done but also you don't want to lose a kid after one difficult performance?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, it's interesting because you guys know, I've done it with you guys, but I've also done it with our team, and he was here this past weekend.

I tell the Ficken story all the time, and not just for our specialists, but for our team. I think it's a really good example.

I wasn't here his freshman year, but most of you that have been covering Penn State for a while know that story better than me, but my first year on campus, Ficken couldn't have

had a better year.

I think it's a great example of again, trusting the process, not getting too high, not getting too low.

I will say this: Sander Sahaydak got up in front of the team on Sunday without me talking to him, without anybody talking to him. I usually end practice and I say something, and he said, Coach, I've got something to say, and got up and just handled himself really well. I was really proud of him as a young man, like if it was my son, very proud of him. As a member of this team, as a teammate, I just thought he conducted himself really well.

I think he's earned everybody's respect. I thought what he did right there and what he said did it even more.

But I would also say as tight as that competition was all camp, I don't think there was a shock by anybody on our team when we made the change because literally it was that close all training camp.

But just like Felkins had to keep preparing because you never know when your number is going to get called, Sander has got to do the same thing. We haven't made any decisions at this point. But that's where all of them, as much as you can get them to do it, first team, second team or third team better be preparing as if they're the starter because it can change like that.

Q. What were your impressions after going back and watching, and how do you think Abdul Carter fared because some of the things he does don't show up on the stat sheet.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I thought he flashed. I know he wouldn't have the same type of production in the stat sheet that he's had before, but in terms of being a presence on the field, in terms of allowing us to execute the defense at the level that we wanted to execute at, he allowed us to do those things.

But I think you'll see his production continue all season long starting this week just to continue to elevate.

I know he's got really high expectations and standards for himself and so do we, but trust me, we're glad he's in there, and we've got to remember he's still a young player, started as a true freshman, so he's still a young player who's growing and learning.

But as we all know, Abdul is one of the best linebackers in college football.

Q. Drew can clearly make throws that other people

can't, and I wonder how you balance his ability to do things with the classical quarterback decision-making tree of don't throw across your body, don't throw off your back foot, these things he can do differently than anybody else. How do you take advantage of that skill set without turning him into a quarterback that does too much?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's a great question, and I think it's a fine line. So I would say you maybe put it on a degree scale. So what I'm saying is, okay, maybe for most quarterbacks if you're rolling to your right, you would say, never throw back across your body with a crossing route.

I'd still say that is the general rule, but maybe that degree that he can throw is maybe a little bit wider grace period than you'd give for other guys. I still think in general you don't want to roll to your right and throw way back across the field, but he may have a little bit more wiggle room on that because he's shown the ability to do it.

So what we want to do is coach him in things that are time tested but also not limit his ability to make special throws for our offense, as well.

You know, it's a little bit like the KJ Hamler kickoff return against App State. You shouldn't have brought it out. The coaching book said don't bring it out, and I'm on the sideline going no, no, and they make somebody miss and then the ball is on the 48-yard line, and you're like, yes, yes, and then we go down and score and win. There's just a fine line to it, and for me to sit here and say that ability doesn't affect the rules for coaches and players would not be accurate. Ability plays a part in that.

Q. A question about two of your offensive guards. How did you think J.B. Nelson did starting at left guard, and I know that Venga played a lot at right guard. How did you think those two guys did?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I thought J.B. played really well. He is a physical guy. We talked about it all training camp. Our defensive line talked about it all training camp. He is a physical dude who can play guard and tackle, so there's flexibility there.

There's still a lot of areas where he can grow and get better, but he gives us a presence out there that I think we need. I think he was the -- we do an offensive finisher of the week, and he won that award.

In terms of Venga, we have a ton of respect for Venga. We think he's got a very, very bright future, and I think he did some really nice things while he was in there. I think

there's still a ton of growth potential for Venga. That's going to be kind of our challenge this year is how can we continue to get him as many reps as possible so that he's prepared to be a starter and can play like a starter whenever he's in there and whenever we need him.

Q. You've seen the tape now. What stuck out when you re-watched the game Sunday or Monday that you didn't notice on Saturday in person?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I don't know if there was something after the game that stood out to me that I was not aware of during the game. Sometimes that happens where it's like, I didn't realize this.

Yeah, I think the thing that probably was reinforced is I thought we were very efficient in the run game. I thought we were really good on 1st and 2nd down. We had a chance for two or three explosive runs that would have dramatically changed the game earlier and also would have really helped obviously Nick and Kaytron's stats.

So I think we're close there. Most importantly, we're efficient, and if we're efficient in the run game, those guys are going to make their plays. They're both so good. So that probably stood out to me. I thought that during the game, but then you watch it and you watch the end zone cuts and the tight copy film and you see there was some opportunities there for us.

I thought defensively what stood out to me is we played our best when it was needed most. There's some things that we've got to get cleaned up for sure. But when we needed to make plays on defense, we did. That was important.

Then I think back to the point I made earlier is whoever is in the game, the standard is still the same. When we got a lot of those backups in the game on defense against mostly the 1s of their offense, the expectation is to still play up to our standard of defense.

Q. Going back to the offensive line, a couple linemen we saw play last year, but kind of different situations now, Hunter Nourzad at center, curious what your evaluation was of his debut in that starting role, and then Caedan Wallace and his return to the starting role at right tackle?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think Hunter really had a nice camp. He's got some bumps and bruises right now that we've got to get him healed up from because I think he's one of the better centers in college football when he's 100 percent healthy, which in college football you're very rarely ever 100 percent but as close to it as possible.

I think I've told you guys, I think Caedan had a really good camp, and back to that iron sharpens iron, going against Chop and Adisa and Dani and those guys every single day at practice I think is really valuable for both sides.

But he's had a really good camp and I thought showed that on Saturday, as well.

I think the biggest thing with Caedan is consistency. He has shown flashes to be one of the better offensive tackles in the country, and this year for him and for us is about consistency. How many practices, how many days, how many drivers, how many games can he play at that elite level, which I think he's capable of doing.

Q. I have a quick preliminary question. Are you aware of or heard of the S2 cognition test before?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, sir.

Q. Aside from that then, Drew's ability to see the field, is it something that you've noticed from him? What is your assessment of his ability to recognize not just where routes are but where guys are in space, and is it different from other guys you've coached before?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, I would say there's been other guys like that in the past. I think where he is unusual for a young player with a pretty sophisticated playbook, I think he knows this stuff cold or knows this stuff pretty darned good where when he gets into problems, he knows where to go with the ball. He can focus on the defense because he knows where everybody is going to be.

The things that I think are what we just talked about is his ability to make some of the non-traditional throws. That and his poise, because I think what happens is when you're not poised you have a tendency to jump over reads and skip over progressions because your feet are antsy or because your eyes are antsy. He's just so calm and poised, it allows him to go through progressions and read defenders.

He doesn't hang on progressions. Sometimes young players -- say you've got a smash concept or a China concept, however you want to call it, with a corner route and some type of flat control. A lot of young quarterbacks, they want to throw the corner route, so they hold on to the ball waiting for the sexier route to come open rather than just going through your progression; is he open, is he open, is he open, based on the defender.

The flat defender that we're trying to high-low, the curl flat defender that we're trying to high-low, the middle triangle that we've created, whatever it may be, and some young

quarterbacks will hold on to the ball waiting for the sexy route to come open, so he doesn't do that.

So that's where you're able to distribute the ball to nine different receivers. That's where the defensive coordinator watches the film and says, God, we have to cover the entire field.

Being able to throw the flash out, I've always said that if you can throw the speed out to the field, it changes a lot of things on your offense because again, that's where most college defenses, that's what they're going to give you. They're going to give you that wide field out or flat, and he can make that throw with ease, and when you do that, it opens a lot of other aspects of your playbook up.

Q. Chop Robinson on Saturday spoke about the defense holding themselves to a higher standard. He's satisfied with the win, but if they want to be a great defense, they have to hold themselves to a higher standard. Just that competitiveness, is it something that you instill? Is it something that he and the defensive unit brings to the team? Can you talk about that a little bit?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes and yes. I mean, I think it's in a lot of the players and how -- from the time we recruit them, it's there. I think Manny and our defensive coaches instill it. I think our program reinforces it over and over and over again.

Whether it's in school or whether it's in the profession, you'd better be a lifelong learner. You'd better be trying to get better and grow. The minute you think you've got everything figured out in any industry, you're going to have problems.

As players, when you get to a point where you're satisfied and you think you played good enough or the defense played well enough or the team played well enough, then once again, you're not going to grow, you're not going to continue to thrive as an individual or as a unit on either side of the ball or as a team as a whole. So that's something we talk about a lot, not just in football but in life.

You'd better be constantly trying to grow, evolve and get better and learn. I think what you described from Chop I think is a real good example of that.

When you chase perfection, right, the old Vince Lombardi quote, you may never achieve perfection, but you fall to excellence, or you've got a chance to achieve excellence.

So I think it's kind of that mindset and approach, whether it's in school or whether it's as a father or a husband or as

a football player or whatever profession you choose to go into.

Q. You guys ran a lot of three-safety looks on Saturday. How much of that is a byproduct of West Virginia running the ball so well and how much of it is going to be a feature this year because you have that kind of depth at safety.

JAMES FRANKLIN: We ran three-safety look?

Q. Maybe not a lot but more than last year, at least.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm not totally sure what you're referencing. We played all four of those safeties a lot. Obviously we have some packages in our power -- to me, there's the three-down power package where we're like in a dime defense. I think that's what you're talking about. When you say three safeties, I think of what Iowa State does on defense that's become somewhat popular in college football now, but I think you're referencing what we call our power package or our front defense that can line up with even spacing at time and allow us on 3rd down to bring some different blitzes or drop eight, show pressure, get them to check to max protect, drop eight or bring pressures and challenge their protection. So that, yes.

It's very similar to last year on 3rd down when we have the ability to get those guys in there and run that package, yeah, it plans to be a big part of what we do and how we do it.

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