

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Good seeing everybody. Appreciate everybody coming out and covering Penn State football.

Just some notes. Another awesome environment, 110,830, second largest crowd in Beaver Stadium history. We won the turnover battle, explosive play battle -- excuse me, not the explosive play battle, the 3rd down battle, the sack battle. We did not win the drive start battle. I think their punter is exceptional, and we did not win the penalty battle. Didn't have a lot but still did not win that battle.

Had the same number of penalties, but we had more yards.

You talk about players of the game. We went with the offensive line, the group that we consider the starters, which is Olu, Hunter, Kaden, Sal, JB, Vega and Drew. We kind of view those two guys as starters, as well.

Defensively Chop Robinson, special teams Dom DeLuca. Dom just continues to make plays and show up. He's been disruptive now three weeks in a row in terms of being involved in turnovers.

D-squad players of the week, on offense, Golden, which it's also his birthday - happy birthday, Golden - London Montgomery, and then on defense, Lamont Payne and Jameial Lyons, and then on defense Jace Tutty, who's been really good for us. He's been a really good teammate since he's arrived here, and he's bringing value, and it's appreciated by our coaching staff in the locker room.

Some positives from the game, we won, 1-0, shut-out, but what we've been kind of preaching is we got better. I thought we got better last week.

I thought the three biggest plays of the game was the fumble caused by a combination of Dani and Jaylen; Jaylen on the hit, Dani punched it out, recovered by Curtis.

If you really look at that game, that game started out the way Iowa wanted it to go. They had the ball. They were able to get at least a 1st down. They were able to punt us



deep, play field position, pin us deep, then we didn't do a good job in that coming-out drive, then we punt the ball back deep to them, so that turnover was huge in the game. Huge. Because that game started really the way Iowa wanted it to go. That's their style of game. But that was a huge play.

I thought the 4th and 1 from the minus 48-yard line in the beginning of the game was the second biggest play of the game, and then the punt, the rugby-style punt that hit their guy in the head and we got a turnover, I thought they were the three biggest plays in the game that really got it going.

Kind of an amazing stat. Audrey, please double check this. But pretty amazing stat. After the shovel pass for the fumble that we just talked about, Penn State ran 80 of the next 96 plays in the game. There was 96 more plays in that game after the fumble, and 80 of them we ran, which is amazing. Of those 16 plays that they ran, went for negative five yards.

I thought our preparation was excellent, and it translated to the game. We've got to continue to build on that, our process, individually and collectively of preparing each week.

I think our D-squads have been excellent. Those guys have been excellent and given us the looks for our opponents, and I know the team really showed an appreciation for them on Sunday.

We are leading the nation in time of possession, in turnover margin, in total defense, and in pass defense. So pretty cool.

We're not a big stat team, but I do think the stats sometimes tell a story and kind of reinforce some things that you're doing right and allow you to also kind of look into some things that you need to do better.

Opportunities for growth, opening drive on both offense and defense, and then just continuing to refine our collective and individual preparation.

Kind of getting into Northwestern and David Braun, David is serving not only as the head coach but also the



defensive coordinator and doing a nice job. He's got a really good reputation and a really good resume and doing a nice job.

When you talk about Mike Bajakian is a guy that we've known of for a long time. Actually Coach Leonard and him worked together at Boston College, but he's been a coordinator for a long time, coached in the NFL, is very well thought of and is doing a nice job there.

They're a no-huddle offense that really -- they can run tempo, but they're more kind of the illusion of tempo so they can see how you line up and then get to the plays they want to run. They base mainly out of 11 personnel. They want to throw the ball. I think that's where they feel like they have the best chance to be successful.

I do think Ben Bryant, their quarterback, is probably the best pure thrower that we've seen this year. I think he's a four-time transfer, which is strange. Cincinnati, Eastern Michigan, then back to Cincinnati and now Northwestern. Also impressed with A.J. Henning and then obviously their wide receiver No. 17, Bryce Kirtz.

That game last week was really interesting to watch the coaches' tape as well as the TV copies which I like to watch, as well.

I think it was 31-10 in the fourth quarter, and when you think about how Minnesota likes to play, you would never say that they would win that game based on Minnesota's style of play. But they found a way. They found a way, which was impressive to watch.

Like I mentioned, David Braun is also the defensive coordinator. They're generally a four-down mixed-coverage quarters-based team. Doing a nice job.

Linebacker No. 34 Xander Mueller, linebacker No. 32 Bryce Gallagher, and then their Sam/safety, however you want to look at it, No. 24, Rod Heard, they're guys that kind of jump out to us.

Then on special teams, Jeff Genyk, who I've known for a long time. Jeff is a respected long-term special teams coordinator as well as was the head coach at Eastern Michigan.

I'm not sure if I've told you this story or not, but if I have, I apologize. I want to say maybe I was at James Madison at the time. For the Daily Collegian group that's here, you won't remember these days, but this was pre-cell phone, and I remember I was out recruiting I think in the spring, and that was a nightmare when you didn't have a cell phone. You didn't know it was a nightmare at the time, but

now looking back at it, it was a nightmare. Didn't have a cell phone, so you'd pull over to the side of the road, your big recruiting book, and you'd kind of swipe through it and you'd get the pay phone, drop the quarters in there, and you'd try to call the high school coach, and you'd have to do that for every school, let them know you're coming.

Well, Jeff had a cell phone, and we were kind of in the same recruiting areas, and that was like gold. I remember I just kind of followed him for the day. I just kind of went to the same schools he did. He called the coaches, let them all know that we were coming, so I'm still appreciative to this day of Jeff.

But Jeff is a very well-thought-of special teams coordinator. He's done a nice job. Was a previous head coach at Eastern Michigan, and then they got A.J. Henning, who's a transfer from Michigan, has done a nice job in the return game for them, as well.

Open it up to questions.

**Q. I was wondering if you could assess the play of your wide outs the first four games. Are there areas where they've exceeded your expectations coming out of camp, and where do you see as the biggest areas of improvement there?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I've been pleased with the group. I think we need to be more consistent as a total group. Some guys maybe more than others.

I think KeAndre has shown what he can do. Getting Trey back last week, although I wouldn't even say he was necessarily 100 percent, but he was cleared and good to go, that was big for us, as well.

Then we've got a group of guys, like we've talked about, that have shown flashes at times and are doing some good things, but we need that to continue to grow.

Like we've talked about, I think it's still probably the same, we've got about five guys that we think can play and have shown some good things in games and in practice, but we just need to be more consistent.

Overall good, but we've got to keep growing and getting better in that area.

**Q. When you have a team this deep, the talent margin between the first and second teams can be so thin. How do you handle unhappy players that might come with it, and does the competition at each position, does that prevent complacency?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, a couple of things. I think the running back position is a good example of kind of what we're talking about. We really look at probably our two deep as starters. We've really tried to kind of sell everybody on the fact that we are sharing the reps, which is going to help us in the fourth quarter, sharing the reps, which is going to help us in a long season, hopefully a very long season.

You look at us I think defensively, I think to this point of the year, I think we have 86 less reps than we had last year at this same point of the season on the defensive side of the ball.

Then obviously we've had some games where we've been able to get guys out.

So I think guys have just embraced and understood -- oh, and also probably six less plays a game on each side of the ball. So I think guys have just kind of really embraced the idea of what do we got to do to win, number one, and then number two, what do we got to do to keep developing our roster, continue to stay deep, and understand that ultimately it's about what you do with the reps you get.

We've been pretty good there, to be honest with you, in terms of culture and in terms of buy-in to that.

Obviously everybody would like a few more catches. Everybody would like a few more carries. But I think ultimately, I think people are pleased and happy with how they're being used and how they're being coached and how they're being developed, and then Sunday helps because I think you guys know, even guys that play in the game, we do a developmental scrimmage on Sundays, and that's been helpful.

I think our threes and fours, even guys that play, the younger players I think are really much more bought into that this year than in the past.

I think we've made them more competitive. I think they've been a little bit more fun. It's pretty cool, the veterans all stay out there, and they're cheering them on, and it's been really good energy. So I think that helps, too.

It's not perfect, but for the most part, I think it's been good.

**Q. Does the competition prevent complacency?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the competition always helps. It helps solve a lot of issues, I think.

I think the other thing is I think when the backup goes in and the starter respects the backup, I think that helps.

Same way if you're the backup and you respect the starter; I think those things help. The locker room usually knows.

But yeah, I think that competition in practice, good-on-good -- one of the really cool things that I thought happened on Saturday is after KeAndre scored his touchdown on the fade ball, which I thought was a really big-time play, the first guy to meet him coming off the sideline was Kalen King, and Kalen and KeAndre's battles at practice are like legendary.

I think that was kind of a really good example and kind of a tip of the hat of Kalen seeing KeAndre be successful and KeAndre saying, well, you're a big part of that success because of how we go against each other every single day at practice. So I thought that was a really cool moment for our players on the sideline to see and for those two guys to be so supportive of each other because it's pretty heated at practice sometimes.

**Q. Last week the Ohio State AD testified to Congress that it has become common for recruits to ask for money in exchange for visiting your campus, and the number he gave was \$5,000. The question is have you had to deal with that, and if so, how have you dealt with it, and if you haven't had to deal with it, how do you think you would deal with it if it came up?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you can probably imagine, it's kind of like we had the discussion a few -- maybe it was a year ago when something came out from that school, as well, and they talked about a number, and you guys like wanted to know if my number was similar, and I said, well, why would my number not be similar. People seemed shocked by that.

Yeah, as you can imagine, the schools that you're mentioning, we're all dealing with the same challenges and issues. We all are. So yeah, sometimes I think things are said publicly that maybe you guys weren't aware of before. But yeah, we're all dealing with the same challenges and issues because most of us are all recruiting the same guys. That's about as far as I'll get into that and then talk about Northwestern.

**Q. This year you've had 12 drives, 12 touchdown drives that have lasted four or more minutes. Last year you had 13 of those. We talk about explosive plays and all of the excitement that you're trying to find in the offense, but you have found a lot of success sitting on the ball, tenderizing people, taking what the defense gives you, and you're scoring 30 points or more a game. How much are we missing the plot on this is who you are versus you're just not where you**

**want to be? Obviously you're not going to turn down explosive plays if they're there, but it also stands to reason as you reach the halfway point of the season your offensive identity isn't just going to change overnight.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so first of all, I think that's a good question, and I also think it's good information.

It's interesting, one of the things that's really cool is in our team meetings, Mike gets up and talks and Manny gets up and talks and Stacy gets up and talks because when we're talking about football and we're teaching situational football or talking about how we played, one of the things that's been important I think is Mike talking about how the defense helps our offense, and Manny talks about how the offense helps our defense.

That's been brought up about -- like Manny talked about they were on the field, and then the next time they got on the field, the score change and the clock change and how that's been really helpful and impactful.

That goes back to the 86 less reps we've had on the defensive side of the ball at the same point of the schedule last year.

So I guess what I would say to your question, too, though, is to me, I'm always looking for balance. We're always looking for balance, and right now I think we have shown the ability to run to win, and we've shown the ability to pass to win.

I think we need to be able to show that we can grind it out to win, which we have, but I also think we need to show that we can be explosive to win, as well. We've done that at times but probably not as much as we've grinded it out, but I would also say that also plays a little bit to how people were playing us.

If you look at Iowa last week, they were playing soft on the perimeter and were not going to give up the big play. They were not going to let us throw it over their head. You can even go back and watch the tape.

A lot of times when people are playing soft on the edge, you may not feel like you can run by them, but you may be able to run a double move, a stutter to get them to bite from off coverage and then be able to run by. We tried to run a stutter; we weren't able to run by. They didn't bite.

I think some of it is how people are defending us in terms of trying to stop our two running backs by overloading the box, but then also playing soft either like Illinois with a safety at 25 yards deep in the middle of the field, in their

way of stopping the explosive play, or with soft corners.

For me, back to the initial statement I said about balance, we've got to be able to show that we can grind it out or be explosive, run the ball to win, pass the ball to win, and we need to continue to grow and develop in the explosive play area.

I will tell you this: In the locker room at halftime, that was a point that I made to the offense is do not get bored. When I say the offense, the offensive coaches. Do not get bored with grinding this game out because it is working for us in a style that is going to allow us to beat this Iowa football team.

The 4th and 1 conversions, the sequencing of how we're calling the plays, knowing when we're going to go for it on 4th down, like grind it out. It wasn't like we went at halftime and said we need to be more explosive in this game. No, let's not get bored with how it's going.

What's interesting is if you look at our yards per carry in the first half and then you look at our yards per carry in the third quarter and you look at our yards per carry in the fourth quarter, we just kind kept chipping away at them, and we didn't average a great yards per carry in the first half, but in the third quarter and the fourth quarter it was excellent.

Part of it is kind of sometimes just the style of how you have to play to win the game and to control the game, if that makes sense.

**Q. Beau Pribula has gotten in quite a bit so far this season. I think he's up to like 60, 70 snaps on offense. What have you seen out of him and how he's handled himself when he's getting into games?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so we've been very intentional, very much like we were last year with Drew in making sure we're going to get Beau these reps. Also I don't know if you've noticed, sometimes we're putting him in a series before we've really made a change, allowing him to be in with the majority of the ones still because we think that's important. Then after that series, then make some more changes.

We'd like to get him involved more in a situation where he can actually run our offense because I think right now he's being used primarily as a runner, but we feel like we can run the whole offense with him. But a lot of that is because it's borderline four-minute offense, as well, and it's something he also does well. So it kind of allows us to do both, gain a hat in the run game, four-minute, and play to one of his strengths.

But I do think it's important that we continue to grow those other elements. He's getting in in practice a lot, obviously, but I think it's been really good.

But we want to continue to develop that, and then there's obviously a place for getting him in situationally throughout the game, as well, maybe in the red zone or maybe in 3rd down or maybe as a change-up. We had a play we were going to run yesterday, and it was during a time-out, and I kind of vetoed it at the last minute.

But he's got a bigger package than what you've seen to this point. But I've been pleased with him.

He's another guy that prepares really well. Kind of emotionally steady Eddie. Doing a really good job of protecting the ball. We've got to continue to do that.

But we're pleased with him. I know talking to our defensive coaches and talking to some of our analysts, we feel like he's a weapon that defensive coordinators and head coaches are spending time on, okay, yeah, he's just being used right now at the end of the game, but you've seen enough of him that everybody knows at some point you're going to have to be prepared for him during regular times.

I think it's been good. And he's been good.

**Q. With respect to special teams, you had a lot of question marks coming into the season. Through four games, how would you assess the overall performance of those groups?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think, like we've talked about in a lot of other areas, I think there's been flashes of really good things. I think our units are playing well and are playing fast and are playing aggressive and hard. I think we just need to be a little bit more consistent at the specialist positions in terms of our field goal percentage.

I also would say we have gone for it on 4th down as a philosophy coming into the season that could have skewed those numbers with some chip shot field goals that would have helped.

Punting, I think you really have to talk about drive start with that because although we're not, again, crushing the ball, it's difficult for people to get returns on us.

Our kickoffs, I think that's been that's been pretty consistent in terms of our philosophy of kicking it out and covering downs.

I think good, but we need to take the next step from a

consistency standpoint.

**Q. My question is about turnovers. I know you track should have, could have been turnovers as much as you do real turnovers --**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Not just track them, we share it in the team meeting, as well.

**Q. When you look back at zero turnovers through four games, is it as impressive when you look at the should have, could have as it is to us when we look at the actuals?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think so. I guess for me, I think what happens a lot of times because it's so exciting is that people spend a lot of time on the turnovers, but just as exciting to me is the lack of turnovers and how we're respecting the football and essentially program by doing that.

So we've got to continue to preach that. We've got to continue to not get bored with that, with those fundamentals in that period that we do every single day.

But I think it's been really good. I think rather than just brushing over the times where we got away with a poor decision or we got away with a lack of ball security, that's where I think you have problems, if after wins you don't address the problems.

So same as turnovers. Just because we didn't turn it over doesn't mean there wasn't some coaching and teaching that needs to come from it. That's how we've been addressing it, and so far so good, but we need to keep it up.

**Q. Drew's 4.5 per attempt combined with Nick's down over five yards per rushing attempt in the first four games compared to last year, what does that tell us or tell you?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: So a couple things. I'm not a good stat guy. I'm a guy that I think the stats that are in the extremes are what you have to be aware and concerned of. So the really good stats, they tell a story. The really bad stats, they tell a story.

For me, with what you're talking about, in terms of yards per carry, I don't know if I could have addressed that more. I've been asked that question like a thousand --

**Q. You covered that about the scheme. I think that answers that.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Right, but you just asked it.

**Q. I'm asking you the two things together, what do they tell us.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess what I'm saying is I'll get to the other part, but in terms of the yards per carry, we've talked about that in my opinion a ton, but in terms of Drew, I think a couple things. I think it goes hand-in-hand with protecting the football. I think it goes hand-in-hand with completion percentage, and I think it goes hand-in-hand that we need to be more explosive. I think it's all those things.

We've got to do a better job of being more explosive when the opportunities present themselves, but I also think it tells a story of times where we have called shots and people are playing soft, and he's not holding on to the ball, because it also goes hand-in-hand with sacks. He's not holding on to the ball waiting for a route to come open; he's working through his progression and he's taking a check-down, so that reduces sacks. That keeps us on schedule. That increases completion percentage, and those things equate to wins.

Also, it helps with turnovers because a lot of times the turnovers are pressures because the quarterback is holding the ball too long.

It's all those things. But I think at the end of the day, we also have to be more explosive. It's just a fine line. It's a fine line. We still want to throw for a high completion percentage. We still want to make sure we're protecting the football. We still want to reduce the sacks because we don't want to take negative yardage plays that get us off schedule, but when the opportunities come for a big play, we've got to hit it.

The last thing I'll say on it is also the ability to get the ball to people on the perimeter with a cushion, and then our ability to make people miss, because the explosive plays always don't have to be the ball that's spiraling in the air for 40 yards. It can be a five-yard completion or a 12-yard completion where you make somebody miss and go 80, very different than the first part of your question with a running back.

A running back usually is going to have to break multiple tackles or make multiple people miss to get that explosive play.

We need to be a little bit better with our YAC, as well.

**Q. Earlier you said you guys need to refine collective and individual preparation. Can you expand on what**

**that means?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so it's our team's process of Sunday through Friday, how consistently we practice. I think it's also how we approach, the players approach their Monday film sessions on their own. It's how the guys handle taking care of their body and coming in with preventative maintenance in terms of nutrition, hydration, flexibility. Say you're a guy that's got a history of ankle issues; are you coming in and doing the preventative strengthening and flexibility work, whatever it may be, watching film, studying your opponent, going through the game plan.

It's all those things that, yeah, we do collectively as a team and how we practice and stacking days, Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, leaving the practice field feeling great, Friday leaving the practice field feeling great, gives us the best chance to be successful on Saturday because of consistency.

I think that's the key, whether it's football or probably any other industry, is who can do it on a consistent basis. Those things are collectively about our team and how we go about our business, and those things are individually.

I think there's examples. I think why has Dom DeLuca been so successful? I think he's an example of a guy that is super consistent with his approach. I remember back to John Reid, super mature guy who was very consistent; John Sutherland, a guy that was super consistent with his approach.

I think those guys leave a legacy, right? John Reid learned from somebody; Sutherland maybe learned from John Reid. Our guys now learn from Sutherland and so on and so forth. You kind of pass it down.

I think Drew learned from Sean and so on and so forth. That individual and collective process of preparation I think has been good, but we've got to continue building on it and we've got to sustain it. It's one thing to do it for three weeks or four weeks; can you do it week after week, day after day for the entire season. When you play well and when you don't play well. Do you still put in the same level approach, and actually do you get better each week? Are you self-reflective? Are you self-aware where you kind of look at yourself and say, okay, this is what I did last week, and maybe I wasn't as good in this area; what am I doing to do differently this week.

We talk a lot this year about being intentional. Are you intentional about your plan and areas where you can improve and where we can improve.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Mike Yurcich, you mentioned a couple times the not betting bored part. What have you seen about Mike through these first four games because I imagine as an OC that's got to be challenging when you're in a game like that and kind of staying the course.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, first of all, I think Mike has done a great job. I think he's really built a culture in the offensive staff room where he's getting really good thoughts and feedback from the entire staff. There's good discussions. There's conflict, which I think is always good in terms of if the coordinator brings something up, people can push back. If the assistants can bring something up, the coordinator can push back. It's not just a bunch of yes men in the room, which I think is also important.

I think Mike is a guy that both him and Manny talked about in the off-season what they want their offense and defenses to be is winning offenses and defenses. I think both would probably admit that maybe earlier in their careers they were focused on maybe leading the country in yards or points or whatever it may be, and that's really ego, not necessarily what's in the team's best interest.

When those two things can go hand-in-hand, that's fine, but that's just a byproduct of doing what you have to do to win.

I think that was a really strong message from both of our coordinators on their retreat before the season started, which I thought was excellent.

On game day, I think that's kind of my job is to help with that, like to remind on the headset from time to time, hey, Manny, they're probably in four-down territory right now.

I think a lot of times Manny knows that, but sometimes it's a good reminder to hear it.

For Mike, hey, they haven't stopped this yet in the run game; stick with it, don't get away from it. Or hey, we're getting a little bit conservative, they're sitting on our routes. Next chance you get, let's take a shot, those types of things.

But I think Mike and Manny have been great. I think they've been really good complementary pieces of each other on game day, but I also think they've been very good complementary pieces of each other with our team and in front of our team, which is really important.

I think that went all the way back to training camp, those guys working together when we'd go good-on-good in periods against each other, and it's not always like that.

I've been some places where it can be divisive.

I think that's been really important culturally, the respect that those two guys have for each other and them putting the team first in front of any ego type things this I think can hurt a lot of football teams and organizations in general.

**Q. Just two quick ones on the 4th down sneak and the conversion rate you've been able to have. Even though it's a small gain, I think it's had a dramatic impact for you guys, and it looks like you've tweaked your sneak with your 240-pound quarterback. Also how has it kind of enhanced Tyler Warren's value to this team because of his role on the play, but also he is a threat as a catcher, a blocker, and he can also run the ball as he's done in the past. It seems like that 4th down success, if he can continue to do that, will really impact the team going forward.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it has been good for us. It really has. I think a big part of it is the rule change.

I'm going to be interested to see if the rule stays the way it is. I remember all the way back, I think when they changed the rule or maybe they didn't - I'm trying to remember correctly - but with the USC play.

For a while you couldn't do it. Then they changed it and said you could. It's going to be interesting if this one stays.

But yeah, I think it has been. I think it has been good. I think your point of a 240-pound quarterback helps. Being 6'5" helps. Our offensive line and tight ends help. And then Tyler, the way we've used him.

But obviously there's going to be different ways and different things we do, as well. You're not going to run it the same way every single week, and then you're going to have a complement off it, too, to keep people honest.

I think it's been really good for us, and we'll continue to invest in it, but we've got to have the complements off of it, as well, to keep people honest.

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