

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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James Franklin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement for Coach and then open it up for questions.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate everybody coming out, everybody on Zoom as well as here in person.

When you kind of talk about summarizing the game, we won the turnover battle, which was a positive, coming from the special teams turnover, but we did not win the explosive play battle or the third down battle, which to me was the most significant one in the game. The sack battle, the drive start battle, we did win the penalty battle.

When you talk about some positives in the game, we went on the road, battled the No. 3 team in the country and had a chance to win the game right down to the end. Protected the football.

I thought we handled the crowd noise well. That shows up with the penalties as well. I thought for the majority of the game we played like if not the best defense in the country, one of the best defenses in the country and so was theirs.

The field goals were huge. Those were huge in the game. Great to be able to get out there and get those points.

Opportunities for growth. Too many controllable mistakes to win in that environment.

I thought we tackled too high. We have to tackle lower and be more consistent, and then obviously the story of the game was third down, which impacted a lot of other things on the offensive side of the ball.

When you talk about Indiana and Tom Allen, I like Tom a lot. Really good guy. Really good representative of Indiana University and our conference.

You talk about kind of where they're at with things, and you talk about their coordinators. Their offensive coordinator, Rod Carey. Rod obviously has a significant background. Been a head coach at Temple. Been a head coach at Northern Illinois. Very, very well thought of, and I think he's

done a nice job coming into a tough situation. Obviously there's a connection there with Pat. Pat hired him at Temple.

Offensively it's hard for me to sit here and say what they are because it's just not a whole lot of data on that because he has not been in the position very long.

Jaylin Lucas is a guy we're very aware of as a running back, receiver, and return specialist for them, No. 12.

Then the quarterbacks come in. He is an athletic guy and has done some nice things for them. Brendan Sorsby, the quarterback.

When you talk about defensively, it's kind of interesting. They got Chad Wilt, the guy with the DC title, but from what I understand -- I mean this with total respect. I don't want this to come off the wrong way. We also know the co-defensive coordinator Matt Guerrieri, who I know from when he was at Duke. From what I understand he's calling the defense. So combination between Matt, Chad, and then obviously Tom has been involved in the defense for a long time.

Guys that we've been impressed with: Andre Carter, No. 1; linebacker, No. 44, Aaron Casey; and then safety, No. 6, Phillip Dunnam.

On special teams, Kasey Teegarden is their special teams coordinator. He has been there now for four years. Again, we've been impressed with No. 12, Jaylin Lucas, as a return specialist. Then also, their punter, James Evans. James Evans.

That's kind of a quick summary. Open it up to questions.

Q. You talked about the importance of staying true for your identity. How would you define that identity, especially on offense, and do you think you got away from it on Saturday?

JAMES FRANKLIN: A couple of things. I thought our identity was staying on schedule converting on third downs and then either converting on third downs or going for it on fourth down situations. I feel like that had been our identity



for the season.

We have a lot of respect for their short yardage situations -- excuse me -- their short yardage defense and how they were defending it, but we did not do that. We did not either convert on third downs like we had been doing or put us in a situation where we were in fourth and short to go for it.

I think one of the questions that you guys have, and I don't know if I answered this clearly after the game or not, but the fourth and one that we were going for, which I think was one of the significant plays in the game, to me in those types of games there's about four to six plays a game on either side of the ball that are significant. We were going for it on that fourth and one. We had 12 guys on the field.

If I don't call the timeout there, we're going to get a penalty. Then after that you kind of lose the momentum and a little bit of the surprise of going for it. Then in my conversations with Manny, we're playing good on defense. We felt it was the right thing to do to punt there after losing the momentum and the sense of urgency running out and going for it on fourth down.

I liked our call, but again, we had 12 guys in the huddle, and the official was about to throw a penalty on it for us right there.

So, yeah, I think to me I guess what I'm saying is our lack of success on third down really kind of changed the game. We just didn't have enough opportunities. We couldn't get into a flow. Didn't get enough touches for people. When you have the lack of success that we had on third down, it's hard to get anything going.

Obviously, for the most part, our defense was able to do that to them as well. What they did a good job, obviously, No. 18 was a difference maker in the game.

Q. After the game you said that maybe you could have run the ball more, and you said something about the process of play calling. I'm asking this because a lot of my readers have asked me this in various ways, but how can you impact the play calling? You personally, James, how can you impact the play calling, and also, maybe adjust the game plan as the game is going on? What's the process for that? Was that process effective on Saturday?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Obviously, it wasn't effective. That question is fairly easy to answer. In terms of running the ball and touches, when I went back and actually looked at the numbers, that was not our issue. It was not our run/pass ratio that was our problem, especially, again, when you take the last drive or the last two drives of the

game out of the equation when it was kind of normal circumstances. The issue, again, was third down.

When you go 0 for 15 on third down, normal third down situations, long situations, short yardage situations, that was the issue. We weren't able to stay on schedule. We weren't able to get into a flow. We weren't able to get the touches the way we would like to get the touches specifically for the running backs. That was the biggest issue.

Then, yeah, during the game what I try to do, which we've talked about in the past on both offense and defense, is when I feel like we've gotten conservative and we need to take a shot, I recommend those things. When I feel like we've gotten away from the run game, I make sure that we get back to the run game, whether it's being aggressive on defense and calling a pressure or making them earn it by playing coverage on a third and long situation.

So same operation that we've had here in years past. That really hasn't changed during the game. Our biggest issue in my opinion in that game was third down, and that impacted everything else.

Q. Is it obvious or do you think you guys are lacking some quote, unquote money plays in situations that you just really are super confident in that you can go to? Do you think you maybe have too many plays in the bag? Then when you get to situations, there's too many choices of not going to some of the things -- do you need more money plays, the play you have to have in certain situations?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think obviously when you don't have success, then I think the first thing you do is you sit here and say, okay, are we doing too much, and do we need to tighten the package down and get really good at certain things? It always starts with that; right?

Yeah, I think we looked at that numbers of plays in each game plan, how many new ideas we've had at each game plan. I think we're talking specifically about this game because up until then I thought we had done a good job of, again, playing the game the way we've been playing the game and managing the game and being able to score points, being able to stay on the field, converting whether it was third down or fourth down, sequencing, things like that.

Yeah, I think the first thing you do is sit here and say, do we need to narrow it down and make sure that we have these things in the run game, these things in the pass game that we can hang our hat on? I think that's fair.

Q. Did the offensive line perform the way you

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expected against Ohio State? What do you think they can take from that game the rest of the way?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I would say in general I don't feel like we played up to our standards in that environment. That's pretty much across the board specifically on the offensive side of the ball. That's really across the board.

To be honest with you, if I had to say one thing that I would be after the game with defense, I thought we played extremely well on defense. The one thing I didn't feel like we did a great job of is having an awareness of No. 18 the entire game like we went into it with. Obviously it's hard to be critical on how the defense played, but that would be one.

Offensively, yeah, I think you asked specifically about the offensive line, I would say kind of across the board obviously athletically it was a challenging matchup. We knew that. Schematically it was a challenging matchup. We knew that. But I thought we had some opportunities that we weren't able to take advantage of.

Q. Without speculating, it seemed like from the press box that the Chop had a scary situation there on the field. Do you have any update on how he is doing?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I mean, nothing more than what we would normally talk about. As from what I understand and from what I see and from what I know, I don't see this being a long-term issue, but you never know when it comes to medical, but hopefully we'll be getting Chop back here soon, but it's not like -- as you guys know, I'm pretty open when it's a season-ending injury. I don't see that.

Q. Have you had to make any changes or alterations to the way you prepare or call a game or to your signs because of the alleged sign stealing issues at Michigan? Has that affected the way you've worked over the past year at all?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, first of all, I think you do that in general; right? You do that in general. You've got to have a way to disguise your signals. Everybody does it, whether they do it with sheets or boards or whatever it may be.

We made some changes after the bye week as well in how we operate on offense and defense. Specific to that, I probably won't get into what's going on at that other school and the things that are going on. I probably won't get into that, but I think in general, we're always aware of how we signal, are we disguising it?

What happens is you get to after games, and you feel like

you called a very unpredictable call in a certain situation, and they're in the perfect defense for it. You are sitting there saying, well, how is that? What would ever make you play cover two on fourth and one, and we're in the heavy personnel group? But they're in it, and you have a shot called there.

Those things kind of make you second guess, and you kind of go back and look at those things and what you need to do to disguise it. If it happens once, that's one thing, but if it happens over and over, then you're aware of it.

For us that's something that we always are looking at, but obviously with some of the things that are going on right now, it magnifies it.

Let me say one more thing on that. I see a lot of people talking about going to the NFL system with the headsets, and I understand that. It really doesn't solve this issue. I'm not saying we shouldn't do it, but if college offenses are going to decide not to huddle, you still have to be able to get the information communicated to the receivers, to the tight end. Make you can verbally communicate it to the O-line, which a lot of people do, but how does everybody else get it?

So it's either the coaches are signaling from the sideline or the quarterback is signaling from the field, and you still have some of the same issues unless you decide to huddle, which I think you saw us huddle more on Saturday than we typically do.

Q. I want to ask you about utilization of Nick and Catron. How do you think you have done that? Not just in the Ohio State game, but the season. I ask that because I think they're averaging maybe 14, 15 touches a game, but they're arguably two of your most explosive athletes on the team. I guess at least from our vantage point, the explosive production has not been there. I just wanted to see what you thought about how they've been utilized so far.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So a couple of things. Again, I get after this last past Saturday. I think before that I think we were leading the conference in scoring, but I get it. I totally get it.

I also think it's kind of hard to say that the overall numbers, when a lot of those guys hadn't played the fourth quarter in a lot of games. So if you just are looking at numbers and data, I think it's a little skewed from that standpoint, but your point in general I still think is a fair one.

To this past Saturday, I felt after the game that those guys should have got more touches. When I looked at the

run/pass, it wasn't as far off as I thought it was, but when you keep going three and out, that's an issue. You just don't have enough touches.

Just like earlier in the year I think we had a game where we had 45 minutes of possession time. Why? Because our defense was getting three and outs, and we were having a ton of long drives. So you are able to get the opportunities and touches for everybody.

In terms of explosive plays, that's a combination of us doing a better job of blocking on the perimeter. That's a combination of us being able to make the safety miss. You either make a miss or breaking tackles. That's also back to what I've discussed with you before about how people are defending us.

When you have guys on the outside and you have the production on the outside that concerns people, it changes how people defend you. People are going to load the box up and not allow Catron and Nick to beat you until you prove you can do it on the outside with your quarterback and wide receivers and somewhat the tight ends.

I think it's a combination of those things more than anything else.

Q. Now that we're a few days removed from the immediacy of the game, I would like to present something again you were asked Saturday, and that is for all the success you've had at Penn State, there's the narrative that you don't beat Ohio State or win enough big games out there. Is there anything you would like to say personally to people who may have that perception of your tenure?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I'm actually glad you asked the question because I wish I would have answered it on Saturday, although I was thinking about that specific game at the time.

I think it's more than fair to judge me and my staff for all of it; right? I mean, that's what it's about. The good, the bad, the consistency, the lack of success in that game, all of it. That's totally fair to be judged by all of those things.

I also think it's important to judge the entire body of work, all of it, which I don't need to get into right now because I don't want it to come off the wrong way. Yeah, I think it's totally fair to be judged based on all those things, based on all those things, the whole body of work, the good and the bad.

Q. After that game, we saw some pretty raw emotions from players with us, and I could only imagine what it

was like in the locker room. Do you have a concern about where those guys are going to be kind of with their head moving forward this season given how much that seemed to bother them and upset them?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I mean, you know how hard we work and how much we invest, and that's the players and that's the staff and that's all of us. That's the fans. That's everybody.

When you look at some of the ways that we've lost to these people, whether it's by a point or whether it's by a possession or one score or however you want to look at it, however you want to term it, those are hard as well because you feel like there's opportunities.

Yeah, it's tough, but what we have to do is we have to move on and learn from it and get back to stacking days and finding ways to get wins because I also believe that we've got to make sure that this loss doesn't get us twice, which I think it has happened in the past because I think of how everybody in the Penn State community responds to these things.

So, yeah, I think there's a ton of raw emotion, which when you take how much everybody invests and how much everybody puts into these things and the physical impact and the emotional impact, yeah. In some ways I would be more concerned if it wasn't.

Q. We heard so much this offseason and earlier in the season about (inaudible) and his mobility. Was that something that you guys were hoping to get into in the Ohio State game with him? We've heard about the package, but didn't see it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, we had -- we have a package every week for him, whether we use it late in the game if the score allows us to or whether it's mixing it in. Yeah, I think that's more than fair.

We have that package every single week. Again, I think one of the things that is challenging -- again, I keep answering questions this way, but I do think our lack of production on third down limited a lot of things that we wanted to do.

Is it easy after the fact to say, yeah, then maybe we should have called it in one of the first two plays of a drive, yeah, but a lot of times you like to do that when you get into a flow, when you get into a rhythm, as a changeup, maybe when you cross the 50 or get into the red zone area.

You have specific calls for specific things. Yeah, it ended up not being a part of what we did on Saturday.



Q. I was hoping you could put some context to this stat. Of Drew's targeted passes this year, of his dropbacks, 11% of his targeted passes have gone between the numbers, over ten yards. Is that a function of something that defenses are doing to you, or is there something else going on? Just generally, is that a percentage that you are comfortable with in terms of targeting that part of the field?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think a couple of things. We've got to be able to attack the entire 53 and one-third width of the field and the entire 120 yards of the field or maybe 110 yards, depending how you look at it.

Yeah, we've got to be able to attack the entire field. If most of our production is coming in similar areas of the field, then it makes you easier to defend. There's no doubt about it.

Whether it's throwing the ball on the perimeter from one sideline to the other, making the defense run from sideline to sideline and creating space that way, whether it's play action pass and taking shots over the top of the defense, that's important for us to do. Whether it's getting the ball more into your playmakers's hands is part of it as well, whether that's the tight ends, the running backs, receivers, whatever it may be, that balances well.

I know that's one of the things Mike Leach talked about as well. He didn't look at balance in terms of run or pass, which is what we have talked about here in our past. But, also, balance is getting the balls into different people's hands so the defense has to defend it.

Q. I think it was Frank's question. You talked about how defenses play you, how they load the box, and you said it's really the quarterbacks and the wideouts that have to do their job and win outside so it can kind of balance things out how they're playing you. Do you feel you have a true number one wideout at this point, and how big of an issue in your mind is creating separation against the better defenses you're going to play, whether it was Iowa, Ohio State? You are going to see some more. How big of an issue is that right now on the offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, production in the passing game I think is obviously something that we're putting a ton of emphasis on creating separation. I think that's one of the things that is important when I'm evaluating is, okay, if you are just evaluating the tight ends and the wide receivers in the passing game, sometimes the quarterback can impact that.

So take that out of it. How much are we creating separation either on a vertical, on a run-away route, and that's what you can do as a skill player to show that you should be getting more opportunities by the way you separate and the way you're able to get open. Our production has not been there as consistently as it needs to be. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Obviously there's a lot of things factoring into it. There's sometimes where we got somebody beat, and we give up a pressure or sack. There's a lot of things that factor into it or the quarterback misses the throw, whatever it may be, but what I try to do as a head coach is when I'm breaking it down, okay, the things that the quarterback can control, did he control them? The things that the O-line can control, did they control them? The things that the receivers -- so on for each position.

To me when you are evaluating it in parts, that's what you are looking for. We haven't had enough production in those areas.

Q. Sticking on the wide receiver spot, since 2022 you guys have added eight scholarship receivers who are on the current roster. Only one of them played us before that final drive on Saturday, Dante Cephus I think had a few snaps on the final drive.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think Dante started.

Q. Dante started? Over Harris Wallace? You started two tight ends --

JAMES FRANKLIN: When I say start, I'm not talking about the first play of the game. We go 12 personnel. What I'm saying is he is in the starting 11 personnel group.

Q. I think he played three snaps before the final possession of the game. Just factoring that in, you have this huge cluster of receivers who either have done it elsewhere as transfers or you signed and liked what they did in high school. How critical and crucial is it for you to figure out what you have from that group in the second half of the season, and is it important to make sure that they're getting the game snaps to show exactly what they can offer because we've seen it the last couple of weeks go really heavy with those top two that I know you like a lot.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah, again, I think that's a fair question. I think for us what we've been trying to do really for the last year is we're trying to get some consistency because if you are constantly just rotating guys in, then it's hard for guys to get into a rhythm. You want there to be a group of guys that have differentiated themselves and

allow those guys to get enough reps and enough opportunities to show what they can do. I think when you look at Trey over the last year, maybe two years, and you look at KeAndre, there's been enough evidence that they've shown they've done it in games in my opinion.

The big discussion this offseason was who was going to be the third guy? Trey we lost for a couple of games based on some bumps and bruises and things like that. So all I can do is take the body of work from games, but the things that you guys don't get to see is obviously the consistency in practice as well. That's really what we've been looking for, consistency in practice of people to separate.

I think you guys have heard me say very similar to how you described it, we have a group of guys that I think are all competing, but no one is separating themselves from the group, and that's either in practice or that's in the game reps, which you guys have been able to see.

We're going against a really good defense every single day at practice when we go good-on-good, so it was really pretty good information to base it on. You know, how are you winning against Johnny Dixon? How are you winning against Kalen King. How are you winning against Daequan Hardy and so on and so forth?

To me there's enough information to make decisions on, and we've been talking for a while that people have not separated themselves.

The other thing I think is difficult sometimes for the parents and sometimes for the fans to understand is you also have the things I mentioned in the beginning, the missed assignments. Sometimes you guys don't know a guy ran the wrong route, a guy is blocking on a run play when it's a pass play.

Those things factor into decision-making as well because you can be as productive as you want, but if you are making too many missed assignments, then it's kind of a wash. All those things factor into it as well.

It may not be even as drastic of blocking looking at the wrong signal and running -- we're throwing a pass, and you are blocking down the field. It may not be as drastic as that. It may be the details of a route. Supposed to be at 12 yards, and you are breaking it at 8 yards. It may be your landmarks to the inside edge of the numbers, and you are truly in the divide. That spacing impacts how you stress the defense and that spacing impacts the quarterback's decision-making and accuracy.

It's all those things that go into it. Some of those things are hard for people that don't know exactly what their job

responsibilities are to judge them.

Q. You mentioned you were to evaluate the offensive play calling on Sunday. How would you evaluate your team's offensive play calling, and how much was that a factor in some of the issues on third down?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we talked about staying true to our identity, and I thought we got a little bit away from that at times.

Somebody asked me earlier about our goal line package that we've been using, the three running backs and things like that that have been very successful in short yardage. We kind of got away from that.

I didn't feel like we had been as consistent and as aggressive in certain areas that maybe we had been in the past. Part of that is who we're playing from a talent and scheme standpoint, obviously.

But, yeah, obviously when you are talking about evaluating that, opening drives are a big evaluator of that in terms of game planning and success. Third down is a big indicator for quarterbacks as well as coordinators. Red zone, those things I think are really telling.

Yeah, obviously based on the lack of success, it was not a good game for us.

Q. Obviously as press we're talking about Saturday's game a lot. The fans are talking about Saturday's game a lot. As a staff and team going forward from that, do you spend more time on this loss than any other game breakdown? Is it more because it's Ohio State, or do you just view it as a loss as you would with any other team?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you can probably tell from my voice, we haven't gotten a whole lot of sleep since that game for a number of reasons. From a fixing the issues, coming up with the plan for this week, moving forward and all the things that have to happen moving forward on Sunday, I think our staff has done a good job of that.

No, I think obviously after a loss should your process stay consistent? Yes. But for me to sit here and say that after a loss, we don't spend more time having discussions on what went wrong and watching the film more times than we normally would watch the film and sit here and say, okay, well, why did these things show up in this game and they had not shown up before?

Yeah, I wouldn't be being transparent with you if I didn't say we spent more time in the office, watching film, having

hard discussions. That definitely is happening. Has happened.

Q. Losing is nuanced, but I wonder how you approach the broad-based visualization of it all comes back to me internally, and if you think you've done a well enough job expressing that publicly in a day and age when have you never needed fans' support financially and otherwise than you do right now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. If I did not do that, I think you just created an opportunity for me to do that, which I appreciate. Ultimately it's always on me when things don't go well. When things do go well, trust me, I had all the things -- when I talk about our process of being prepared for that game and then literally what I was going to say in the press conference after getting that win, it was going to be obviously to praise the players.

What was the difference this year in being able to get that win? It was going to be about the players and some other things that I wanted to talk about, but that didn't happen.

When it doesn't happen, it is ultimately on me and my responsibility. There's no doubt about that. There's no gray area about that whatsoever.

Is it nuanced, and is there a lot of things that go into that that ultimately no one really cares about at that time? Yes. There's no doubt about it.

At the end of the day the most important thing is for me to take responsibility and do everything within my power to get it fixed. There's no doubt about it. I appreciate you asking the question.

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