

Penn State University Football Media Conference

Tuesday, October 31, 2023

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Happy Halloween. We had our annual Halloween party at the office last night. I shouldn't say party. It's like, what is it, like 35 minutes of all the families and all the kids kind of walk around from office to office and get candy, which has been awesome.

Then we go to The Training Table.

But that was great. Appreciate you guys coming out, like always. Kind of get into the summary of the Indiana game, turnover battle, we won. That's been probably the most consistent storyline of the year and something that I take a lot of pride in, and I think we have done a really good job of that.

Explosive play battle, Indiana won that. Our defense did reach their goal; offense did not.

Third down battle, we won that.

Sack battle, we won that.

Drive start battle, we won that.

Penalties, we did not win that. We did not win that.

Some more summary of the game. When you talk about players of the game, on offense was Kaytron Allen. On defense was Dani Dennis-Sutton, and special teams Tyler Warren.

Just want to say this and be clear about this. Obviously stats play a factor in this for us in our winning grades each week, but really it's about how they grade.

Had a player talk to me this week about how the staff does it. The offensive staff does it; the defensive staff does it separate; I'm not involved in that. You got to be productive, but you also got to have a winning grade and feel like -- let the stats alone, play winning football from a coach's grade perspective.

From a D-squad perspective, on offense we had Golden

Achumba and Amiel Davis. On defense, Jace Tutty and Jake Wilson. Jace Tutty and Jake Wilson have really been awesome all year long.

And then Finn Furmanek, local guy, doing a really good job for us on special teams.

Just a few last points, positives. You know, obviously we won. I thought we were resilient. I think right now our special teams over the last couple weeks is really playing well. I think it starts with our specialists, Gabe Riley, Duzansky, and Felkins, and I would throw Hardy in that as well. I think that group is really playing much more consistent and making plays. Hardy is a weapon for us right now.

I thought as a team we made plays when it mattered most and won the middle eight. That was an important stat in that game as well.

Opportunities for growth, we were tackling too high. We need to wrap and consistently wrap and tackle lower.

And then we got to protect the football from a decision making standpoint and a fundamental standpoint.

You kind of get into Maryland, obviously I got a lot of history with the university. I was there I think for eight years. Was kind of my first big break in the profession. I've got tremendous respect for the university as a whole and the athletic department. Was there for a long time two different times.

Was with Coach Locksley, and got a lot of respect for him and what he's been able to do throughout his career. We were at the University of Maryland I think from 2000 to 2002 together, three years if I'm remembering that correctly.

You kind of break them down on offense, another guy that we're familiar with is Josh Gattis. We were together for six years. We hired Josh from Western Michigan at Vanderbilt, were there three years, and then three years at Penn State, so know Josh very well.

Josh is running the offense, doing a great job. They're an



11 personnel spread team. Guys that we have respect for is their quarterback obviously. Wide receivers, No. 6 and No. 1, Jashaun Jones and Kaden Prather, and running back Roman Hemby. We got respect for those guys.

Other guys as well obviously, but really kind of runs through their quarterback who has been playing there and been productive, owns every record that university has.

Defensively, Brian Williams. I've known Brian for a long time. He's done a really good job at Maryland, and really throughout his career. We got to know Brian when we were at Vanderbilt. We recruited a young man by the name Jakari Thomas out of Godby High School, and Brian was the defensive coordinator at the time at Godby High School in Florida.

Guys that we been impressed with is No. 11, Ruben Hyppolite, middle line backer.

Their linebacker, No. 1 Jaishawn Barham. As you guys know, we recruited him very heavily. Got a lot of respect for him and his family.

And then safety No. 2, Beau Brade, has done a really good job. Been playing for them for a long time.

James Thomas, special teams coordinator. I don't know him very well, but Braeden Wisloski, we been impressed with him as a local kid who's a kickoff return guy for them and has a touchdown on the year.

Open up to questions.

Q. How would you evaluate your run defense, especially in the second half Saturday?

JAMES FRANKLIN: You know, obviously I don't think in general on Saturday we played our best football. We've arguably been the best defense in college football. You could be a part of that argument.

Manny was very honest and transparent with the defense on areas that we got to get better. That kind of goes hand in hand with the point I made about tackling as well.

But we've obviously played better. We've obviously played better. I don't think there is any doubt about that. So we worked on those things on Sunday. We made the corrections that needed to be made. I think we'll be better for it.

Q. I love the fact that your description of the Halloween celebration included the term Training Table. I like it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah, we walk up there afterwards. I took my costume off because I didn't think that would go over well. Or it would go over too well.

Yeah, then we always go up to dinner. Monday night is family night anyway from a dinner perspective, so just fits our normal routine.

Q. Obviously that wasn't my question.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I was hoping it was.

Q. You said on Saturday any win -- this is obviously true -- any win is a good win and it's hard to win. At the same time, we've heard you say that you can't allow the final score to sort of distract you from the issues that the team might have. How do you balance those two things not only in talking to the public but in the coaching part of it, talking to the players?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think -- well, first of all, to your point, I think there was three teams ranked inside the top 17 that lost to unranked opponents on Saturday, so I guess your point and the point that I made is we're never going to make excuses for winning.

You know, at the end of the day that's what it's all about. They're all going to be different, right? They're all going to be built differently in how you get there throughout a long season.

To your point, after wins you have to be as transparent and honest as you can be with yourself, as coaches and as players, but then also be able to have those conversations head coach to assistants, head coach to the players, assistants and coordinators to the players, and Dvon said something in the locker room. Dvon Ellies, you know, I'm really proud of. I'm going on a different tangent real quick.

Really proud of Dvon and his total development since he's been here. Maybe one of the more impressive developments I've seen in my 13 years. I'm just so proud of him in school, in football, and as a leader. He spoke to the team afterwards, and what he said was something we talk about a lot.

The best teams are honest teams. You got to be willing to have those conversations with each other. To me it's always at its best when it's player-led, right? When the players withhold each other accountable and have real conversations with each other, whether it's at practice, locker room, game days, or Saturday nights.

I think it's always best when it's the players.



But to your point, we got to be able to peel things back and have honest conversations and look at things and check the data, because we have to win and find ways to get better. But there is a lot of ways to get better throughout a season, and sometimes it takes an ugly game, a setback.

You hope and wish it doesn't and do everything you possibly can to learn after wins and not have to go through those setbacks or challenges, but sometimes it's needed. Sometimes it's needed.

Q. How would you evaluate the play of the offensive line the last two weeks? How do you think they're playing well over that time, and in what ways moving forward do you think they can improve?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yep. Well, I think the first thing is across the board, and specifically the last two weeks, we got to play better. We got to continue to get better and grow. There is though doubt about it.

I think what happens specifically with the offensive line is, I don't care what offensive line you're playing or what quarterback is back there, if you're not good enough on first and second down and you're in obvious passing situations and people can just tee off on you and twist and game, that's challenging on the best offensive line.

So we got to manage it as coaches. The players have to execute to allow us to stay ahead of the sticks. I mean, you look at some of the best sack teams in the country. That's a stat that can be skewed because they don't throw it, and when they do it's typically manageable third down situations.

So for us, I think we have to continue to play better. We got to continue to develop depth so when we lose guys, the next guy can go in and play at a high level.

On top of that, we have to execute and play better on first and second down. We got to manage the game as well. Are you going to get some third and longs and obvious passing downs? Yes. No doubt about it.

Obviously you don't want to live in that. Probably too many third and longs over the last two weeks that have impacted that, so a combination of both if I answered your question.

One other thing to Donny. Also, obviously the opponent factors in, too. All those things factor in.

Q. Yeah, you mentioned Josh Gattis. I think this will be the fourth time you guys have faced him as a play caller after he spent three years at Michigan. Given the

familiarity there, does that help at all from a game planning perspective? How different is this Maryland offense with Josh to the one you guys faced last year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think, you know, I get this question a lot actually when we play someone like this. I think the answer is pretty typical, right? We know them, but they know us as well. You know, what I would say is I think it's similar to how Maryland has been in the past, because you got to remember I think Locks and Gattis were together at Alabama.

I think it's probably more aligned at Maryland than maybe even Michigan. You know, obviously the head coach has some influence on the coordinators. It's not like it's exactly the same wherever the coordinators go.

But, I think we have an awareness of who Josh is. I think it's similar to what Maryland has done. Probably one of the big reasons why Locks hired him, there is familiarity there. They don't have to change the offense and hire a new coordinator to come in. They can build on what they're currently doing.

There are obviously things in Josh's personality and philosophy that are probably magnified, and other areas that are probably decreased based on the previous coordinator.

So I think it's a little bit of both. We know him; he knows us.

Q. I was curious what you feel the tenets of good quarterback development are, and if there is a difference -- or what the differences are between developing a quarterback that's more of a traditional pocket passer or a guy like Trace that has the ability of his legs differently than Drew? And is there anything you learn from Christian's career that translates to how you're working with Drew, done it differently this time, et cetera, et cetera?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I think when you're talking about developing the quarterback, it obviously starts with footwork and mechanics, but I've talked in great detail in the past about the mechanics. Drew is one the few guys that I've seen that has really changed.

Typically it's a footwork game. If their feet are right then they have the ability to be in rhythm and be accurate, so you got to spend as much time as you possibly can in the footwork.

The other thing obviously is being able to play to that quarterback's strengths. The challenge with that, right, is

there are so many factors that go into it. The offensive line, the running backs, the tight ends, the receivers play a major part in that.

When you talk about the mobility of Trace and quarterbacks we've had in the past, that opens up a part of the playbook and also changes how people defend you. People are less bold when you have a quarterback that has the ability to beat you with their feet. They're more cautious about some of the blitzes and defenses and things that they'll call against you.

So all those things kind of factor into it. But I've been pleased with his development physically. Pleased with his development mentally. I think we got to do a better job helping him and making plays for him. He has to be more consistent with somethings as well.

Then I think the other thing that goes into this as well, is there is a lot more to being the quarterback at a place like Penn State than just running the offense and managing the games. There is a lot that goes into it for a first time. I saw that with Trace. Saw that with Sean Clifford. Now obviously seeing that with Drew.

I'm pleased with how it's going, but there is obviously a lot of room for growth there, not just specifically with him, but the pieces around him as well.

The last thing I'll say, because we've talked about this a lot, is I also think the explosive plays help. You know, when you're able to complete a ball like we did with KeAndre, the more times you can put that on tape, that affects the defense very similar to a mobile quarterback.

It gives them things that they fear, that defense fears. It's like the other day we threw a go-ball, wasn't a long one, versus cover zero. To me, if you can make a defense pay for playing an overly aggressive style, then you're going to get less of it.

The more times you can do that the better. If you throw like a slant verse cover zero and they tackle you, even if it's for a first down, you could make the argument it was worth it because you were putting pressure on the quarterback and putting him in a tough spot. Putting pressure on the offense and offensive coordinator.

Some of those you'll get sacks, and if the other ones that they win go for six to ten yards, then it was worth it. Where if you can beat them for a touchdown to throw it over their head, then that changes things, very similar to how a mobile quarterback scares a defense as well.

I hope that answers your question.

Q. Do you have an update on Trey Wallace? And how did Malik McClain play, and where is he in his development?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So no announcements on Trey. Malik McClain, I think is like a lot of these guys. I think I've spoke a bunch about Malik and how he's been since he joined our program. One of the harder working guys on our team. Always a smile on his face. He's been very impactful on special teams. And on offense, in practice and in games has shown some really good signs.

But it's about consistency. I think that's really kind of always the measuring stick, not just for wide receivers but at every position. The guys that are starting or playing significant reps are the guys that have shown the most consistency in practice and shown the most consistency in games.

Sometimes I think that gets skewed for the players because they may be being consistent, but they're doing it against different competition. If you're going against Kalen King every single day at practice, that consistency is judged a little bit different compared to going against somebody else.

So that factors into it as well, the competition that they're going against. Across the board it's about consistency. And Malik is doing some really good things and we're excited about him. But it's about doing things in practice, and when he gets the opportunities in games just being as consistent as possible.

That's not just Malik. That's all of us.

Q. I want to ask you about Daequan Hardy. Expound a little bit about his uniqueness as a weapon. He looks so good at what he's doing punt returning. How did it take four and a half years to get to see him do that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, fair question.

Q. Lastly, how close has he been to getting a shot at offense in his career, ever?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So fair question about the four and a half years. You guys also talk like there wasn't a guy like Jahan Dotson on at Penn State. Four and a half years makes it sound dramatic, like we had some slug back there.

So just to put that in reference in my mind to be fair in both directions.

Yeah, I think the hard part and challenging part sometimes is the No. 1 priority is that when you put somebody back as a punt returner, no matter what, has got to be the consistency of catching the ball. That's got to be priority No. 1.

No. 2 is obviously the ability to make explosive plays. The challenge for coaches and players all the time is how much live do you go on special teams with a punt returner who is also our starting nickel and corner, and you go live and all of a sudden while you're doing the evaluation process you lose that guy, and then the defensive coaches are upset because you lost that guy during a live period as a punt returner to evaluate him.

Or you guys are saying, you lost this guy as your punt returner or as you kick returner, and now he's not available on offense or defense. So those things factor. You don't get that many live reps. It's almost like a dual-threat quarterback and he's in a competition with a guy who is not. A lot of times you never get to see the dual-threat quarterback's ability, that aspect of his game, unless it's live, and the quarterback doesn't go live very often.

So that's the challenge. It's a fair question obviously the way he's impacting games right now. But, again, we had a guy by the name of Jahan Dotson before. In the past it had been based, No. 1, on who was catching the ball most consistently in practice, and there were guys catching the ball more consistently at practice.

But totally fair. I get it. He's doing a great job and we want to continue to put him in position to make plays. I hope that was a fair answer. There was a second part to his question?

On offense, yeah, we have not done that. Again, it's not that easy. It's got to be something that you make a decision on very early on and somebody that has the ability to learn both and do both at a high level.

It's not something you can just say, okay, this week we're going to make this guy an offensive player. If you do that, you're probably just going to use him on the pass plays, and everybody knows he's in for just the pass play. You lose some of that.

So it's more complex than that. We have guys on defense that just play defense that have missed assignments. We have guys on offense that just play offense and have missed assignments, and that's limiting their ability to play more, too many missed assignments.

When you do both that magnifies it, and that's something you have to be working on more than just after he returns a

punt for a touchdown.

Q. Obviously going into this season you had pretty high hopes for Trey and that bore itself out in the first couple games. How much has his in availability hurt your receiving corps, and are you surprised that nobody has stepped up and seized the opportunity when he was out? The stats reflect that you have KeAndre up here and everybody else stat-wise further down.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so to your point, as we talked about a bunch, we felt like Trey and KeAndre were two of the more proven commodities we had. We had Trey. We lost Trey for a couple weeks. Then we get Trey back. Then we lost him again.

Yeah, there is no doubt when you have two guys at a position of two or three guys that are on the field and you lose one of them as your proven commodity and playmakers, it no doubt has an impact.

There has been a bunch of conversation really since training camp about wanting somebody else to step up into that third role, which right now would be the second role, and has been for a good part of the season.

Goes back to the point about Malik. We have guys that have done some really good things. It comes down to consistency. That's kind of really where we are at. It's consistency.

Q. How do you think Drew Shelton played against Indiana? Kaden went out of the game. Can you evaluate his development as a second-year player, and do you feel confident in who your swing tackle would be if you needed to lean on Drew against Maryland?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, Drew, as you guys know, started a bunch of games last year, has played a ton of football for us again this year.

Yeah, we have a lot of confidence in him. Does he need to get better like they all do and be more consistent? Yes. There is no doubt about it.

But he's been very steady and consistent since he's got here. Doesn't get too high or low. Very conscientious young man. Does a really nice job.

So I just think continue to get better. You know, we're going to need him. We're going to need him this game. I think Kaden will be available. I don't see that being an issue for this game. But we're going to play Drew either way. I'm pleased with his development. He needs to

continue to grow and get better and be more consistent in his physicality in the run game, as well as consistency in pass pro.

Q. I know you discussed the top end of that, but it seemed like the rotation or work from that group was a bit tightened up against Indiana. We didn't see Omari Evans, we didn't see Kaden Saunders. It was a little bit different. Even without Harrison Wallace on the field, were you please with the personnel approach against Indiana, or do you feel like it's important considering what you don't know about the receiver room yet to see some of those guys in game action?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's fair. The two things that you guys don't get to see is practice, and we're looking for that consistency physically, looking for that consistency mentally.

Then it's kind of back to the punt return conversation. Okay, this guy catches the ball most consistently, but then there is the play making part. Sometimes guys make plays but don't consistently catch the ball.

Based on who you are, you put the value in that, right? So for us, it's that, and then the other thing, like we talked about before, is there are times where you don't understand why a guy comes out of the game, but you don't realize he had a couple missed assignments and you don't know what his assignment is.

So I think those two things probably are the biggest factor of impacting playing time and rotation and those types of things.

Again, I think I said this to you guys the other day, I'm always trying to do everything I possibly can to answer your questions, and I think sometimes you guys think I'm going to avoid the question.

I'm trying to answer your questions the best I can without being divisive to my team or players. We've all seen examples of coaches that have not handled that well. Whether they meant to be that way or not, that's how it comes off and it causes problems. That's all a delicate balance. How do I answer your question without doing one of those two things.

That doesn't mean I'm not having very direct conversations with someone. I also don't want to say something in this press conference that I haven't said to that player first or to those players first. I don't think that's the right thing to do.

Sorry.

Q. No worries.

JAMES FRANKLIN: First it was Mondays, and now you got to ask a question and I go another direction. I apologize. The numbers, it was 1 and like 30.

Q. Depending on the metric and the stat you look at, Maryland is maybe the most explosive offense you face this year. Do you think Indiana found a little crack or do you think now after reviewing tape that was an isolated incidence?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think a couple things. I think there has been enough evidence over the season of who we are as a defense, and specifically who we are as a pass defense. When you play man coverage, are there some things that we can do technique and fundamental that probably wasn't executed on that play the way it should have been? Yes.

But when you play man coverage as much as we do they're going to get you from time to time. The other one was a total blown assignment. I think there is enough body of work of who we have been as a defense to feel comfortable and confident with that.

You had one play where guy made a phenomenal throw and the receiver made a great catch and run. You know, they're going to make plays, too. They're on scholarship, too, right and? Then the other one was a blown assignment. So is this going to be a challenge this week for a number of reasons? No doubt about it.

But it's not like you're watching the tape and saying, ah-ha. This happened here and we're going to capitalize on this. I would not say that, no, sir.

Q. At this point of the season, obviously you're a good chunk of the way into this. Given Drew, all the developments on the offense, the changes, the receiving corps, how would you evaluate the job Mike Yurcich has done?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I think when you take all those factors in, I think there is a lot to evaluate, right? The depth and the consistency at wide receiver. How we're using our tight ends. The run game and where we're at, whether they're explosive runs or not. Where we at from a production in the Big10 in terms of stats, production, whatever it may be. In terms of points, what are we doing from a points perspective? In terms of turnovers, as you know, we talked a ton about-turn overs and explosive plays.

One, I think we're doing very well. We were at one point

ranked No. 1 in the country in turnover ratio, which isn't just an offensive stat. It's a combination. Even from an offensive perspective I think we're Top 4 or 5 in the country in offensive turnovers.

It's not on there, Greg. You keep looking. It's a team stat.

I think you have to factor all these things in. I think for the most part, I feel good. Obviously we'll dig into all these things after the season. I'm not in the business of mid-season or three quarters of the season getting into evaluations of the staff. I don't think that's appropriate. I don't think that's the right thing when we're focused on Maryland this week.

Again, when you take all the things into consideration, there are some metrics that we feel really good about and that you guys say nice things about, and there are some metrics that aren't, that we have to continue to work on.

When I talk about metrics, it's always metrics based on how they lead to winning. It's all about winning. To be clear, it's not like it's just the wins and the metrics don't matter. It's a combination of the both together. Just to be totally clear.

Q. Through six weeks, there were some questions about how would your team fare in the fourth quarter. Now these past two weeks we have gotten to see your team both in tight games both weeks where the defense needed to make a stop and the offense needed to score. What are your thoughts on their execution in the fourth quarter so far?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that was kind of my point. I just gave a brief summary, but we made plays when it mattered most. You think about the first turnover that Drew has of his career, and it's in the worst area of the field that you want it to be at critical moment.

Well, our defense didn't blink. They went in there and got a critical three and out at that time, and then our offense was able to respond.

So I thought when it's mattered most our guys have really stepped up. That's really been kind of throughout the season.

But to your point specifically, last week when there was some adversity and we were being challenged and our guys were resilient is how I would describe it.

Yes, sir.

Q. We talk a lot about the wide receivers, and the

potential of not having Trey Wallace. If you don't have Trey Wallace do you feel like you're in a spot where you can trust a second wide receiver or where you have to make schematic changes, maybe more 13 personnel, more two-runningback sets?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No. It's funny you brought that up. I said this to the guys on Saturday before the game, and I said this specifically to the offense, really to the whole team. I have total belief of everybody's ability in that locker room and in the Lasch Building.

If I didn't they wouldn't be there. Every single person. Now, there is a difference between their ability and their maturity as a football player and as a young man to do it on a consistent basis. There is a difference there.

And I also think there is the argument we talked about before, is that's also why 12 personnel is a big part of what we do and how we do, and probably will be moving forward. Why? Because our tight end room are proven commodities and have the ability to help us in the run and the pass, and I think have been pretty darn consistent.

Are there things they can do better? No doubt about it. I'm not saying that. But that's also part of it as well, right? As the receivers continue to become more consistent or make plays, you never know. Saturday the light could go on, boom, they have their coming out party and you guys are excited and writing positive things and saying positive things and I'm excited coming to the press conference talking about somebody.

But we do have the ability to play more 12, which also helps, and can also be challenging. There is ways to take advantage of that schematically as well.

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