

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 6, 2023

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. Really appreciate it.

Game captains this week, Sean Lee, which is awesome having him back. Haven't had him back in a while so excited about that. Obviously everybody knows his background. Penn State linebacker 2005 to 2009, then 11 years in the NFL with the Dallas Cowboys, two-time All-Pro, so it's great having him back.

And then Brad "Spider" Caldwell as well.

Talk about kind of quick summary of the last game. Won the turnover battle; won the explosive play battle; won the third down battle; won the sack battle; won the drive start battle.

We did not win the penalty battle?

Players of the game on offense, Drew Allar and Kaytron Allen. On defense Adisa Isaac and Abdul Carter. On special teams Alex Felkins. And the D-squad players of the week, Matt Detisch and Ethan Black, and on defense Jake Wilson and George Hlavac. Jake has been Mr. Consistent. Been phenomenal for us and having a big role in getting us ready each week to be able to be successful. On special teams Kaveion Keys has won it multiple times now.

Some positives from the game. Dominant win, 1-0. Turnover margin, turnover margin, turnover, and respecting the football. We are plus 16 in turnover margin, which is No. 1 in the country. The next best is plus 12 in the country.

Starting fast was huge in this game. That first fourth down stop, not only was that a huge play in the game from a momentum standpoint, the first big momentum play of the game, but then also the offense was able to turn that into a first drive touchdown.

Won the middle eight.

Then our ability to make them one dimensional on offense, negative 49 rushing. They actually just stopped calling runs. We were three for three on field goals and six for six or PAT, so that was great.

Kickoff return I think was a big play in the game, not only from a field position standpoint, but they had just scored, got a little bit of momentum, and to be able to respond right away with that play was huge.

Third quarter dominance continues. We have scored 97 points in the third quarter and given up zero. And then just Dom DeLuca, he's just a great example. Talked about him a bunch. Think he's just a great example. Has come to Penn State, and every opportunity he's been given he's maximized them. Doesn't say a whole lot, but you give him a responsibility, he puts his head down and gets to work.

He's really been able to take every opportunity that he's been given and maximize them. When you do that, more opportunities come. He's been a great example for our team. Big fan of his.

Getting into Michigan and Coach Harbaugh, obviously one of the most highly-rank and regarded teams in the country. Talk about them on each side of the ball, Sherrone Moore, offensive coordinator, has done a really good job. This is his second year in this position but first year without sharing the responsibilities.

You look at scoring offense, they're No. 1 in the Big10 and fifth in the country. Passing attempts, yards per attempt, first in the Big10 and sixth in the country. Turnover margin, second in the Big10 and sixth in the country. Third down, first in the Big10 and second in the country.

So really good numbers. Their quarterback has been a differentiator for them completing almost 76% of his balls. Also has the ability to make plays with his feet either running for first downs or extending plays.

We all know about Blake Corum. Roman Wilson is having a great year who we also have a bunch of respect for. And then their offensive line has won the Joe Morrow Award for the best offensive line in college football the last two years.



So a lot of respect for that unit.

Jesse Minter, the defensive coordinator has done a really good job. Look at their numbers, again, total defense, first in the Big10 and first in the country. Rushing defense they're third in the country and 10th in the country. Passing defense, first in the Big10 and first in the country. Third down defense, second in the Big10 and 13th in the country. Scoring defense, first in the Big10 and first in the country.

So really good numbers. We're impressed with their nickel, No. 0, Mr. Sainristill; linebacker, No. 23, Barrett, linebacker No. 25, Junior Colson; defensive end No. 17 Braiden McGregor; defensive tackle No. 55 Mason Graham; defensive end No. 32 Jaylen Harrell; and then cornerback No. 2 Will Johnson, guys we have a lot of respect for.

And then on special teams, their kickoff coverage unit ranks first in the Big10 and fourth in the country. Punt return is second in the Big10 and ninth in the country. We got respect for their punter and kickoff specialist, No. 19 Tommy Doman, and punt returner No. 8 Tyler Morris. Tyler ranks fourth in the Big10. Excuse me, and their kickoff and punter ranks third in the Big10.

So it'll be a challenge. I know our guys are looking forward to it. Appreciate you guys working with us and adjusting the schedule to do this on Mondays.

Open up to questions.

**Q. What has changed with your run defense since the Michigan game last year? Why have you been so effective? And can you give me more reasons -- you mentioned Corum, but why is their running game so successful?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: So first of all, I think we have been much more disciplined and consistent in gap responsibility. There has been times where we have tried to make plays and get out of our gap, and against good teams the ball will find the open gap.

I think we're a little bit bigger. I think the size has helped us as well. We're a little bit bigger across the front, specifically the D-line. Not to the point where it's affected our ability to move. I think that's a big part of what we do as well, is our movements and our games.

And then with them, offensively I think they do a really good job getting a hat on a hat. So really good job of IDing the front, being able to get their six blockers on our six most dangerous defenders, and I think Corum has the

ability to have tremendous vision and balance and behind the line, because they are able to get a hat on a hat. He's patient.

Once he decides to go, he has the ability to burst through the hole. Even though he's undersized guy he's a powerful guy and he is always falling forward. And then obviously they got a change of pace back as well who's made some huge plays in the passing game and is explosive in Donovan.

So they got two really good backs. They got an experienced offensive line. They have done a good job being aggressive each year in the transfer portal on the offensive line. They have been able to bring in experienced guys. I think the two guys they brought in, one was captain at Stanford and one was captain at Arizona State, so they got veteran guys in that room whether it's their own guys or guys they have gone out and gotten.

**Q. The stuff that's been swirling around Michigan this year has brought the whole idea of signal stealing and protecting sort of into our consciousness and into the public's consciousness. Obviously something you're always aware of. The question is: Have you had to spend more time on that and deal with that more this year than other years? This week more than other weeks because you're playing Michigan?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I know these questions are going to come this week. I'm going to focus on the things that we can control. We always have to have a plan and I think I've kind of covered this and talked about this in terms of what we do and how we communicate to the players and team during games.

But I'm going to leave it at that, because less is more.

**Q. You mentioned JJ McCarthy being a differentiator. What you have seen on film so far this season? How is he a different player and quarterback, if at all, from the guy that you guys faced last year in Ann Arbor?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think he's just a more experienced player. Always been able to make plays with his feet. He's just improved. Kind of well-rounded. He's throwing for a higher completion percentage. Going a great job protecting the football.

He can extend the plays and make big time throws. The biggest thing with them is they really have not been challenged. They've had really good game control on offense and defense. They're usually ahead on the scoreboard for the most part and they're usually ahead of

the sticks in on offense and defense.

And when you're able to do that, then you're putting your quarterback or your guys in a very advantageous position as well. So that game control will be an important part of this game.

Hopefully here at home, just like we had to go on the road and play in some tough environments, hopefully this is even more of a challenging environment here. I just got off doing a quick call and somebody that asked me about the 12:00 game compared to the 7:00 game. I think sometimes the 7:00 games, the whiteouts and thing like that can be a little sleepy. It's late at night. The guys are tired.

The 12:00 game will be much better environment because between the coffee, the Dunkin' Donuts coffee and the sugar from the doughnuts, our fans will be ready to go, will be in that stadium early, because we're a morning group anyway.

So it's going to be ideal. But I hope that the environment will also be something that's going to be difficult and cause some challenges, because when you can get penalties and get people behind the sticks, they have not had to play that way a whole lot this year.

So that will be a big part in the game.

**Q. What impact did Chop have off the field at Maryland? Could he return Saturday?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, I think it's very telling, right, that when we talk about our depth that we have two of our better defensive ends out of that game in Chop and Amin, and specifically Chop, maybe our most explosive defensive player, having him out of that game and still be able to play the way we played.

So the opportunity and the possibility to have both of those guys back this week will be significant. I thought being able to travel him was big, not only from a rehab standpoint to get him with our trainers and doctors, but also from a morale standpoint. You know, that was something we talked about in the locker room.

Not just finding way to get a win and playing well, but also playing for Chop with his inability to play last week. So we're hopeful to have both of those guys back.

**Q. I know you embrace your running back combination. Is there a way this can look where you will go with a lead guy at this point in the season? What would that look like, and is Kaytron close to**

**possibly getting that status?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we did this last year and it was pretty successful. We're doing it this year and it's been pretty successful.

We've talked a ton about the running backs and having a way to keep those guys fresh for the fourth quarter, but also for the length of their careers, not only at Penn State, but afterwards as well.

So we feel very comfortable with the model and the plan and how we're using it.

**Q. You have faced challenges this year, both at Ohio State and some other closer games. How much do you think the fact that your team has been challenged in some games has helped prepare you for this kind of opponent?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it definitely helps. I think whether it's being on the road on being at home or from a scheduling perspective who we've played out of conference, you know, all those things are decisions you make and strategy that prepare you for games like this.

So, yeah, I think it's been helpful. I think it's been beneficial. There has been some games where I've watched them. There has been some games, not just cut-ups, but some games where they've maybe started out a little slow or were down early on, but they have been able to wear people down over the last couple years.

Even if they gave up an early score, something like that, they've been able to wear people down and be able to get a significant dominant win.

So I think it's helpful. But at the end of the day we're going to have two of the best, if not the best, defenses in college football in that stadium, very similar to what we faced when we went on the road a little bit earlier in the year.

It'll be an interesting game. It'll be a challenging game for both sides. I think very similar to our last game, I think it could come down to a one-possession game.

**Q. You talked about gap accountability in that game last year against Michigan. How are you guys set up personnel-wise in terms of depth, size, those sorts of things on the defensive line and linebacker that's may be different than last year?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think, again, we are bigger up front. I think we have more depth. I think sometimes, again, they do a great job getting a hat on a hat, the backs



being patient.

Sometime you feel like you've been in your gap long enough and now you want to go make a play on the ball, and their backs have been patient enough and their line and tight ends have done a good job of getting a hat on a hat and being inside outs and prying a crease.

You know, Corum has shown he doesn't need a whole lot of space, a whole lot of room to get the job done. So I think we're better positioned for that. I think we're bigger, more experienced at linebacker. Last year we were pretty inexperienced at linebacker. So I think the combination of our front four and our experience and depth at linebacker gives us the best chance to continue to play great run defense, which is going to be very important in this game.

**Q. After this past week's seeing what the wide receivers did, specifically Dante Cephas, do you feel like they've taken a step forward where they can play at a high level against a defense like Michigan?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, obviously Dante having a huge game last week was huge for us. KeAndre had a good game as well. Tight ends did some really good things.

We have to continue building on that, not only this week, but then also on Saturday. We need some other guys to step up as well. We need KeAndre to take the next step, Dante, the tight ends to take the next step, because we're going to have to make some plays in the passing game. I don't think there is any doubt about it.

We're going to have to be as balanced as we possibly can with the run and pass, stay on schedule, but there will be times and opportunities where we will have to take our shots. I know you guys will be happy about that, and go from there.

**Q. I want to circle back to a question I poorly asked on Saturday. Drew had maybe his best game of the season. He was also at his loosest during that game and after that game. Do you think the looseness of the game is as a result of the performance, or the performance came as a result of him being loose and feeling better about himself?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: What is your looseness metric, gauge?

**Q. He was smiling. If you look at photos, he was smiling from ear to ear for all 60 Minutes. He just seemed like a happier, looser when we saw him on the sidelines. Is that in response to how he played, or do you think that contributed to his performance?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes. My wife gets mad when I do that, too. She asks me two questions and I say yes because I think it's both of them.

Yeah, I think obviously the more you play the more comfortable you get and the more confidence you get, the more relaxed you can be. I do think being loose, being relaxed at every position I think is important.

That comes with preparation and confidence.

And then obviously how we play helps with that as well.

But, yeah, besides that, I don't know if I have a whole lot more for you. I think it's both, right.

**Q. Final quarter of the season you've got seven offensive linemen engaged by design right now. JB is back and Kaden was able to get back. Is this setting up for the final stretch essentially ideal for your offensive line and the availability and experience that you've accrued there? How do you think they can finish out the season?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I do think that helps, and this is kind of your question, but going a little bit different direction as well. We've also done a good job managing the roster in terms of there is some guys that not sure how many -- they would have played in enough games throughout the season that burning their redshirt would've made sense.

So we have done a pretty good job managing it. Now, here at the end of the season we should be able to play even more guys, specifically at the home games, because we don't have the issue with how many guys you're traveling.

So there are some offensive linemen, Donkoh and J'ven that I could see playing, you know, more as the season finishes up, starting this weekend. That's other positions as well. Kaveion Keys was all over me on Sunday after practice about wanting to get on the field. Wanting to get on the field. Whether that's on defense or special teams.

And the reality is I think a lot of those guys could have and would've played this year, but I'm always struggling with do they get enough reps that it makes sense. That was my concerns with Jameial Lyons. You know, we ended up deciding to go move forward with Jameial, but I want to make sure when we look back at the end of the year that it was enough reps that I feel good about it, Deion feels good about, and Jameial and his family feels good about it. There will be value for that moving forward.

With the offensive line, specifically to your question, yeah, I think Shelton has got a ton of reps. Wenger (?) has a ton of reps, which has helped I think keep both of our tackles fresh and healthy for most of the year. The easy thing would've been to say we're just going to leave Olu on the field, but getting Shelton over to left tackle has also helped Olu. Same thing with Wenger. Wenger being able to get reps at both sides of the ball, which isn't always easy for guys to do that, to be able to go to both sides and get in different stances and have different opposite footwork.

Yeah, I think that's been valuable. Hopefully with these other guys getting some reps as well that may help us even more moving forward.

**Q. I'm going to ask you about your defensive tackle size again. Just kidding. Sorry. Clearly didn't read the room.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Good one.

**Q. Linebackers, seems over the last couple weeks from a run perspective have taken things to a new level with Kobe and Abdul specifically. Just wanted your opinion on their growth and awareness of things going on around them.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I thought Abdul played his best game. Was flying all over the field. Was playing kind of within the structure of the defense. Made a ton of plays. You felt his presence on the field.

Curtis, you know, I think is playing at a really high level. Consistent. He's the guy that, again, you look at the stat sheet at the end of the game, he has 11 tackles and tackle for loss. Kobe has been Steady Eddie all year long. Elsdon played well last week, Rojas.

Dom DeLuca, as you guys know, is the man. I've said that over and over. We've talked about all the reasons why.

And then also we were able to get Keon Wylie in the game, and Keon did some good things. So that is important for us moving forward as well.

And again, to your point, that's going to be important this week because it's not going to be just the D-line challenged by this O-line, tight ends, and running back room; it's going to be that front seven and their totality.

**Q. I'm going ask an optics question. I realize has been grinding your gears lately. For the most part, the question in these games has never been competitiveness. When you take off your coaching hat and put on the trying to get people to buy into where**

**you are and where you want to go hat, do you think there is a big picture need to show people a more complete game offensively in juxtaposition to how it went against Ohio State?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's a fair question. Again, you're playing the No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 defense in the country, and they're ranked that for a reason. You know, they're ranked that for a reason. Yeah, to your point, yes. Yes. There is no doubt about it.

But, again, the rankings are there for a reason, and for the same reason people struggle against our defense. Yes, there is no doubt about it, that in these types of games we have to show that we can manufacture yards and points against whoever we're playing.

But I think there is a way to do that, and I also think as a coaching staff, we have to be patient and we've got to capitalize when those moments come, because there is about four to six moments or plays a game in these types of games that you got to capitalize on them and we need to capitalize.

Yeah, fair question. I hope I answered it.

**Q. Last year maybe not the final score, but you guys were pretty in the game, maybe like you said, six plays away. How much can you take away from that in building some confidence for this year?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that kind of goes back to what I was saying a little bit to Ben's question, is that's where I think we're going to have to be patient. I mean, could this game turn out to be game where there is multiple touchdowns scored on both sides and it comes down to a one-possession game and more of a shootout? Yes.

Is it more likely to come down to a low-scoring game and a battle and a one-possession game and four-minute, two-minute type situations at the end? Probably most likely.

So for us, we got to make sure that we don't lose patience. There will be times where punting may be the best option. We just got to manage this game, and when the opportunities present themselves, we got to take advantage of it. I think patience is going to be critical.

I look at the Iowa game. I think that was one of the most important things we did. Came in at halftime and I said, don't get impatient. Keep doing what we're doing against a really good football team and a really good defense, one of the best defenses in college football and has been for a long time. Don't lose your patience.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Sometimes as an offense and offensive play caller you can do that. You can do that.

**Q. Also there has been a lot of reporting on the status of Jim Harbaugh. Wondered how much you guys are following that and whether you have any expectations on his status for this week?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Your flashlight is still on. Will somebody help him with the flashlight?

No, I was going to try to use that -- didn't work.

I'm focused on all the stuff I see on film. That's what we're focused on, all the stuff that we see on film, their plays, scheme, all the stuff. When I say see on film, see on the coaches' copy of the film. The stuff going on between the sidelines, the 53 and a third, that's what we're focused on.

**Q. Last year you called it big boy ball and said in the trenches that you guys needed to be prepared. How do you feel like that mentality or that adjustment has transpired? I do think some of that is a mindset. You're going to be physical because in these types of games at that seems to be differentiator.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think so for sure. It's funny, people would describe Big10 football like that historically. I think that's changed. It's interesting, sometimes with recruits and recruit's parents and talking to people, the Big10 has changed offensively dramatically compared to how it used to be.

But, I still think this is a league that plays defense on a consistent basis as good as anybody. I remember hiring Mike from the BigXII. You know, obviously he's got -- had Big10 experience, but hiring him from the BigXII and what that conference was like defensively and the styles of defense differently than the styles of defense in the Big10.

Yeah, I think it's up front. I think if you look statistically, you know, and if you are using the NFL as a benchmark, I think the Big10 had more offensive linemen drafted than any other league.

So I think when you take all those things into account, historically how good both of our defenses are playing, the fronts, being able to commit and establish the run, I think last week was a good example, right.

I'm not saying you can't win just throwing the ball, but it makes it harder to win if you don't run the ball effectively.

So it's going to be a big boy game. I don't think there is

any doubt about that with both front sevens, whether you're talking about the offensive line, tight ends and running backs, whether it's the defensive line and linebackers, and then everybody is trying to find a way to get an extra man into the box to stop runs or to create pressure.

So it'll be an interesting chess match for four quarters. Going to be a physical game. Yeah, it's going to be a physical game up front. I don't think there is any doubt about that.

**Q. Along those lines, your offense has scored a number of touchdowns this season, like Kaytron's on Saturday, or Drew or Beau, they will get to about the five yard line, get hit, and appear to be wrapped up and they just keep moving. The offensive linemen, really the entire offense, will push them across the goal line. That attitude and playing to the whistle do you believe that says something about your offense that perhaps doesn't show up in the numbers? And if so, what?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's really important, right in so finish blocks with a physical, nasty demeanor, to finish runs with a physical, nasty demeanor and finish plays with a physical, nasty demeanor.

If you look, you should be doing that all the time, because the rule changes, the officials don't want to blow the whistle because they're afraid they're going to blow the whistle early and the ball may have come out.

So they don't want to blow the whistle early, but also puts you in a bind. I get frustrated if they throw a flag on somebody before the whistle is blown. I'm like, how are the defense or the offense supposed to know that? You can't have it both ways. But to me, on offense we want to finish plays like that.

On defense, we want to finish plays. How do you show your value to the defense? How do you show your value to the offense? When a whistle blows and you freeze the camera, are all 11 or at least nine of the 11 guys in the picture frame around the ball?

So running with the ball and finishing plays is really important. It can solve a lot of issues and problems for you in really all three phases.

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