

Penn State University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 13, 2023

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate you guys coming to cover Penn State football.

Obviously the first thing is appreciate the contributions that Coach Yurcich made here. Obviously we made a tough decision that we feel like was in the best interest of the program moving forward. I know there is going to be some questions and I'll answer some questions, but obviously would like to spend as much time talking about our opponent this week as possible.

Couple other things, kind of when you review the Michigan game, turnover battle, we lost.

Explosive play battle we lost.

Third down battle we lost.

Sack we won.

Drive start battle we lost.

And then the penalties we won.

Sack battle was essentially a tie; from a yardage standpoint we won.

Getting into our opponent with Rutgers and Coach Schiano, obviously got a ton of the respect for him and what he's done throughout his career, and specifically at Rutgers.

You know, his background as a defensive guy in the NFL as well as in college, they do a really good job. He's done it that way for a long time.

If you look at the hire that they made with hiring Kirk Ciarrocca, we have familiarity with Kirk. Got a ton a respect for him. Been a really good hire for them and the complementary football they want to play.

Obviously Greg is very involved with special teams, has essentially always run the special teams, the way they play



defense and Kirk's been a really good hire. Kirk is on that staff. Also Dave Brock, also good friend of mine. Dave was my receivers coach at K-State. Really good ball coaches. Both have been at Rutgers before and are doing a good job for them.

Guys that we're impressed with is their running back Kyle Monangai. Physical back, powerful back. Doing a really nice job in their system.

And then their tight end, Johnny Langan who seems like he's been playing there forever. Does a lot of different things for them and does it well.

Defensively, Coach Harasymiak has done a really good job. It's year two for him, and their numbers really dramatically increased really kind of across the board. Playing really good defense. They make you earn everything. They do a great job limiting explosive plays both in the run and pass. Their numbers are a little bit better in the pass, but really in both areas they're playing well.

Been impressed No. 17 being Deion Jennings, cornerback No. 16, Max Melton. Kind of a legendary family there at Rutgers. And we think he's playing really well, and you can tell they've changed some things defensively based on the confidence they have in their corners, including No. 7, Robert Longerbeam.

And then their defensive end, Aaron Lewis, who we recruited. Went to Michigan, ended up transferring back to Rutgers. From New Jersey. Defensive end is playing well for them.

And then their linebacker, No. 1, being Mohamed Toure, another one of those legendary families in New Jersey.

Special teams we talked about. Coach Schiano, they got a tremendous history there on special teams and, specifically blocking kicks. Kick returner No. 8 Rashad Rochelle, and then their punter, No. 95 Flynn Appleby is doing a great job and they've done a great job recruiting and developing punters as well.

That is kind of my preliminary summary of Rutgers.



Open up to questions.

Q. James, in response to my question Saturday about Drew, you said that there weren't enough easy passes being called to get him into a rhythm. So as the head coach, do you ask for more easy passes, get more on Saturday, or -- and if you didn't, why didn't you ask for more easy passes called?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, as you can imagine, I have conversations about all the things I have concerns about, and more so than I speak in the press conferences.

I think you guys have heard me come in and talk, whether it's openers, third down, starting fast, all these things are things that we've had lengthy discussions about and had a plan for, but a lot of the times when we got to the games, either we did not call the games that way or we did not execute the games the way we intended them to.

Yeah, those things were asked for.

Q. Just want to ask about the mechanics of the -- how you're going to do game calling and game planning on offense now. Will Ty and Ja'Juan be upstairs or on the sidelines? Will your role in playcalling end or game planning increase, decrease, stay the same?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so couple things. I think the first thing is both Ja'Juan and Ty already had the title, so that made sense. They both had the co-coordinator title. Those two guys will be handling the game planning as well as the offensive staff, and that's really literally what I just walked out of with those guys.

They're doing a really good job right now. I've been pleased. I think we're a little bit more collaborative right now than what we have been here recently. I think it's been good. It's been good.

So I literally just walked out of there. When I get done from here I'll go back in there. I would say that my presence is similar to what it's been in the past over my 13 years as a head coach.

In terms of playcalling, you know, we're going to work that kind of out throughout this week and on game day, but they'll both have a role in playcalling.

Q. Hey, James, wondering, what this your decision and what Pat Kraft involved?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, this was my decision, but obviously I don't do anything in a silo. I run things up the

ladder and have conversations.

But, yeah, this was my decision.

Q. Who do you hope steps up into the role that Mike had coaching the quarterbacks, and how do you hope Drew and Beau respond to the decision and the move here?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, as you can imagine, Danny has been very involved -- excuse me, I missed a part of the previous yeah. I apologize.

So the upstairs and sideline will stay the same. Ty will be upstairs, Ja'Juan on the sideline. That won't change.

To your question, Danny is involved with the quarterbacks. I'm going to make sure that I'm in every single one the quarterback meetings with Danny.

And then it allows us to get somebody else on the headsets as well in terms of bumping somebody up into that full-time role or headset role or whatever it may be, another voice.

So still working through that. Probably make that decision today. In terms of the quarterbacks, Danny O'Brien and myself.

Q. James, we know that Drew built a close relationship with Mike starting when he was a recruit. How did he take the news? How involved, if at all, will he be in an upcoming OC search?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess the first thing is these are tough decisions, right? What makes it even tougher is it's hard to keep things quiet. I think we did a pretty good job of it, but it's hard to keep things quiet.

Not because we're trying to hide information from you guys, but I'm trying to be respectful of the process, of Mike and his family. Trying to be respectful of our quarterbacks. Trying to be respectful of the team.

We want to call all quarterback's families so they're hearing it from me and explain kind of how we got here. Same thing in recruiting.

So just a lot of moving parts you're trying to keep quiet as you possibly can so people are hearing if from you and not reading it on social media.

But with Drew, I met with all the quarterbacks first. They were the first to know. Met with him before the team meeting and then addressed it with the team. Then the

plan was for them to call their parents after practice and let them know, and then after practice I was going to call them and talk through any questions or concerns they had.

That went to plan except for while we were at practice it leaked out and the parents found out before I was able to get to them.

Besides that, the quarterbacks heard from me, the players heard from me. It's something that we don't take lightly. These are tough decisions that have to be made. They affect a lot of people. I want to be super respectful of that. I also have a responsibility to everybody in that locker room and everybody in the Lasch Building and fans and everybody else. Graduates, alumni, lettermen.

So the quarterbacks I think the discussion was good. Met with them before practice and met with them right after practice to see if they had any more questions or concerns.

And, again, tough conversations. Tough decisions. But I think handled as well as you can under tough circumstances.

In terms of being involved in the hiring process, no, but in terms of are they a part of that decision, yes. In terms of who I'm bringing in, why I'm bringing them in, do they fit the person that I'm bringing in, the person that I'm bringing in, do they fit with them, does everybody understand what they're signing up for, all these things, yes.

Just like this decision, I also like them to be the first to know. So as hard as you guys will be trying to get the information I'll be trying to keep the information quiet. Again, not because I don't want you guys to have the information, but I would like for my quarterbacks and team to hear it first rather than being on social media.

Just trying to be as respectful the process as possible.

On top of that, and I've been through this myself, sometime the names getting out there hurts your chances of actually hiring them. You know, even with head coach positions. A lot of times if it's out there and public, and those guys that end up turning the jobs down because they can't afford for the process to play out. It's going to cause too many problems where they are, cause issues.

So that's the other reason you try to keep it quiet as much as you possibly can, so as many of those possibilities stay on the table as long as possible.

Q. In the past, you've referenced hearing the, fire Franklin comments during that 2016 Minnesota game. What did you hear leading to Beaver Stadium, the field

Saturday? What kind of impact did it have?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think what I talked about in the past, in 2016, you know, as you guys know, we came here at a tough time, a challenging time. I think that was literally our first year off the sanctions and back to full scholarships, so that was a different time.

I'm much more -- is the word callused -- at this stage of my career, thicker skin between you guys and my wife that I don't really get into those types of things. I control the things I can control. Not those other things.

Q. Going off Mark's question, there is a lot of -- there is a purpose behind I guess people's emotions. How do you assure fans that things will get better the way they expect them to? Maybe a second part is when you're making this change, what exactly are you looking for in your new OC that maybe you did not have?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so at the end of the day, you know, we need to play well and we need to play well against our toughest opponents. That's the reality of it. We embrace that. That's why you come to a place like Penn State as a coach, as a player, and we understand what comes with that, you know, the positives and the challenges. You embrace it or you don't come to a place like Penn State.

In terms of what I'm looking for on offense, is, again, back to that point: Somebody that's going to put us in the best position to play our best football when it's needed most and against the best competition.

Q. If I were to suggest that a large portion of these problems stem from your wide receiver situation, that your situation at wide receiver just isn't good enough and that creates lots of other problems on offense, am I off base there? Mostly correct? Partly correct? Completely incorrect?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think we've talked about in the off-season the development of that position, depth at that position, trying to find a No. 3 before we ended up losing Trey; then lose Trey, and now it's back to figuring out who the No. 2 is.

There was a little bit that kind of goes around to a lot of different groups. Yeah, we have talked about that position and the importance of the development, the importance of the recruitment, the importance of the playmaking on a consistent basis.

But, no, I would not describe it the way you just described

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it.

Q. Could you explain the timing of this decision? You made changes in the past, but I think generally they were after the season. From your perspective as a head coach, how difficult is it to have to make these sorts of decisions, especially during a season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, very difficult. Very difficult from a personal perspective. Very difficult from a professional perspective. And then in terms of the timing, I just think for most people and most situations, if you've gotten to the point where you feel like that's what you're going to do, I'm not great at like faking it, you know. I want to be as transparent and up front as I possibly can be.

So when you get to the point you feel like that's the right decision, then I think you make it. Part of this also is the belief of the rest of the staff and the guys in the Lasch Building and the locker room.

But to me, when you feel like that's the decision, in my opinion you don't delay that decision as long as you feel like you have some internal options that can do it.

Did that answer your question? Yeah.

Q. James, this will be your sixth offensive coordinator hired here. Obviously two guys left for head coaching jobs, others did not. Why do you feel like you guys have been continuously searching for answers there?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I wouldn't necessarily describe it the way you did. Again, I think if you look at the nature of college football, there is a ton of turnover. Why? Some for positive reasons you mentioned. Two for head coaching opportunities, which is awesome, which is what you want.

In terms of the other end of the spectrum, you know, this is a place that's got very, very high expectations and standards. We have to make sure that each area, whether it's strength and conditioning, whether it's academics, offense, defense, special teams, for us to go where we want to go and play at the very, very highest level, we need each one of those units producing on a very, very high level consistently for us to go where we want to go.

And if they are, guys get opportunities to move elsewhere for head coaching opportunities. If they aren't, then decisions need to be made.

So for one reason or another, you're going to have turnover in college football.

Q. Ty and Ja'Juan are both highly regarded as two of

your best recruiters, great culture guys, great fit in the program. They have a lot of respect from people around your staff. What do you think they bring as a collective unit, and why should they be someone -- the pair of them -- be someone people have faith in going forward?

JAMES FRANKLIN: What you just mentioned, right? At the end of the day, good people that are widely respected that are fiercely loyal and also Penn State is very important to both of them.

Ja'Juan has been here now six years. Ty is obviously a letterman and a grad. Ty has also called plays before. Ja'Juan played quarterback, not only in college but also in the NFL. Has that background as well.

Both have recruited and developed positioned that are two of our better positions, so really kind of all those things. I know what I'm going to get from them. I know how collaborative they're going to be with our staff, and I also think they're widely respected by the players, and I think that's an important part of this as well.

Again, they're working really good. Started early this morning and I literally just walked out of there to come over here. I'll go back in there, but those guys are doing a good job. I think Rutgers is really good on defense, but I think we'll have a good plan that will put our guys in the best position to be successful.

Q. Obviously you guys have a regular season to play out, but what's the timeline you're looking to make the offensive coordinator hire, and what are the important factors?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Sooner rather than later, right? It's hard. Hiring someone is like a full-time job. Can't really have two full-time jobs right now. Most important thing is for us to play well this week and finish the season the right way, and then during that process, be working through, narrowing down a list.

I already have a list. It's narrowing it down, running all the numbers, seeing if people are interested, and then trying to find a way to get that turned over as soon as we possibly can through maybe some Zoom calls, in-person interviews.

And then in a perfect world, I think you would like if you could to have a situation like we did with Manny where we hired him, had him here for the bowl game. I think we have done that at other times as well.

Now they're here, around the guys, see how we operate, meet, get a feel for the culture, be able to watch and

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evaluate the players and say, okay, here are areas we're strong, here are areas we need to maybe find some solutions.

I think there is value in doing that if possible, but that's not always the case. With Manny it just worked out where he was available and could be hired and was willing to come. Some people are still in positions they need to finish out their seasons.

We'll see. It depends on which direction we go, who we hire, and kind of where they are in their careers. Is it an NFL guy, college guy? Is it a guy who's currently going to be in a bowl game, or is it a guy who's out?

Q. On Saturday, I think -- and you answered a little bit of that earlier -- but from the fans, obviously they were booing, throwing objects. It looked like they almost a lot their hope. What can you say to them now that can give them hope for the future and how important is that to the team that fans are hopeful?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think me saying something here is one thing. At the end of the day it's about actions and it's about production. It's about playing well. We have lost to two of the best teams in college football who also happen to be in the same side of our conference. We understand that. We recognize that. So I get it.

So me sitting here saying things is fine, but I think at the end of the day it's about actions. I also believe we're better positioned now, like I've talked to you guys about before, than ever before based on the alignment we have for the first time.

I think I said that to you guys this summer. I think that is probably the reason I'm as hopeful and excited as I have ever been, and I've also stated that before. But it's not like these people get in those positions and six months later snap their fingers and things are fixed or moving. It takes time. It takes time.

I think we're in a position to do that.

Q. Last four years, you're 1-7 against those big two. I asked Drew this and everyone told me to ask you. How do you close that gap and how much of that is related to your decision with Mike?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that was a big part of that decision. You know, at some point during this press conference I love to get just a few questions about Rutgers, but I'll finish this question.

Yeah, that was a big part of that decision. It's everything.

It's kind of what I just talked about. Every unit needs to be operating at the very highest level: Recruiting, development, offense, defense, special teams.

We've had times where we have done that, but we have also had times we've been really strong in certain areas and not strong enough in others.

So that's how you do it. That was a part of that decision, yes.

Q. You mentioned earlier that you feel good about the plan you're developing for Rutgers. For offense and defense there is creating a plan and then there is executing the plan. Do you feel that the creation of the plan and the implementation both needed to change? Do you think going forward you'll have a better plan of attack literally from your offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes. Yes, I felt like those both of those things needed to change. How we came up with the plan, the implementation of the plan, all those things, for sure the execution of the plan. Obviously you don't make the type of decision I made without feeling that way.

Q. Against Rutgers, what would you like to see Drew Allar look like at the quarterback position? Down the final stretch with a new offensive coordinator. When it comes to Drew, I know you addressed speaking to him and Beau, but Drew was offered by Mike and recruited by Mike. I know Beau's commitment pre-dated Mike Yurcich. Curious with his confidence level moving forward, how do you need to make sure you handle Drew Allar the rest of the season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I had really good conversations with them. Had really good conversations with their families. I feel good about that. I mean, obviously we would love to finish on a really, really high note this year as a team, and then specifically as an offense and then at the quarterback position. No doubt about it.

I feel good about that moving forward in terms of the relationships in the building. Again, that doesn't say anything about those other relationships; those were important as well. I feel good about the relationships we have in our building and playing well to end the season, and then obviously making sure that the hire complements what we have in the building, what we have in the locker room.

Q. What's the take and lesson for you in all of this?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think the biggest thing is



understanding kind of what we just talked about, right?
That for us to win the way we want to win at the very
highest level, every single unit needs to be producing and
working at the highest level year-round, 365 days a year.

There has been a lot of hurdles and battles to overcome to
get there since we arrived on campus, to be honest with
you, and the reality is we can't afford not to be thriving in
every single one of those areas to be able to beat the
people we need to beat on a consistent basis.

So for us, the most important thing we can do outside of all
the things we have already talked about is get the right
people had into the building. That's staff and that is
players, and then be able to give them all the support they
need to be successful on a consistent basis.

The most important thing you do is we're in a people
business. Got to get the right people at Penn State that
believe in Penn State and what we can do and where we
can go, and then give them all the support and resources
they need to produce at the very, very highest level.

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