

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate everybody coming out and covering Penn State football. I don't really have a whole lot from an opening statement standpoint, so we'll kind of probably get right into questions, although I do love your sweater. Fantastic.

I'll open it up to questions.

Q. To follow up on the question I asked earlier this week, can you let us know what your plans are for the defensive coordinator position, who specifically will be handling things for the bowl game and that sort of thing?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so very similar to what we're doing on offense with Ja'Juan Seider and Ty Howle, we'll do the same thing on defense with Coach Poindexter and Rob Smith will be the two guys on defense in a similar role to what we're doing on offense.

Q. When would you like to make a decision on def --

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yesterday.

Q. Okay, second question. What are the qualities that you're looking for in this position?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, kind of like what we've talked about in the past. Obviously someone who's got extensive defensive coordinator experience, someone that runs a similar scheme and philosophy because our current players have had a lot of success in a similar system.

I've had three defensive coordinators that have all been able to play at a high level, and we've taken a similar approach with all three. But then we've also recruited towards a certain scheme, as well, and to me, I'm not saying that what we have played is the only way you can play defense. There are guys that run a 3-4 that are highly successful. There are guys that are running a 3-3 stack that are highly successful.

I just think there's a lot of gymnastics that go into making

that change and can create a lot of questions if guys are asking am I going to fit into the new scheme.

Prefer not to do that, being as thorough as we possibly can, and then I think the other thing is you do in-person interviews, you do Zoom interviews, you watch film on your own, you study the data and the analytics and what they say, and then on top of that, I think most importantly, you're looking for a fit. You're looking for a fit with our players. You're looking for a fit with the staff, a fit in the community.

If somebody had head coaching experience, I think there's value in that. I think Manny's time as a head coach was valuable. Stacy Collins' value as a previous head coach, there's value in those things.

I don't think that's the end-all be-all but it's helpful if we can find it.

Q. When we talk to these players, some of them considering their futures whether they're going to declare for the draft, but Curtis Jacobs was talking about how important this is to finish this out with his teammates, the opportunity to play in the Peach Bowl and what that could mean for Penn State's history and legacy. When you talk to the guys, how much can the bowl game impact where they can go and is there pride in knowing they want to play for their teammates, finish it out regardless of what their plans are?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I will say I don't necessarily love -- not in reference to you, but the seven guys of guys after they've already answered it multiple times, whether they're opting out of the goal game or coaches moving on or players coming back next season. To me it comes off as negative. I don't really understand it. I also don't understand once the question has been answered once or twice why it gets asked literally five, six times, the same question over and over again.

But I do think there's a ton of value in finishing what you started, and there's a lot of ways to do that. I think we're very aware of what's going on in college football. We're very aware of some of the trends. We're very aware of the advice that some of the players are getting.



But I also think through relationships there's the ability to have a conversation, an open conversation with the players, with their parents, and make sure that guys are making the right decisions for them and their futures.

Sometimes I think there's a feeling like what's in their best interest and what's in Penn State's best interest don't always align, and I think more times than not, it really does.

There are some cases, obviously, like we've had all the way back to Saquon Barkley, who was being projected as a first-round draft choice and was being advised to not play in the Fiesta Bowl and sat and met with Saquon and talked it all through and we had a plan to limit his reps and all those types of things, and it worked out really well in everybody's best interest.

I think all the information that's out there and the data that's out there is playing an opponent like Ole Miss in this type of venue for the majority of our players playing in this game and playing well is going to increase their value and increase their opportunities and draft grades and things like that.

For us, I just want to make sure that we're thoughtful and that we're looking at things from both sides. I think that's something that's very, very important to do in my position really, and really in any real situation, I think it's always important to look at things from multiple perspectives.

Curtis has been great, Olu has been great. Really our guys have been phenomenal in the way it's been handled.

But it's more challenging than it's ever been. There's no doubt about that.

Q. We'll have a chance to hear from Andy himself pretty soon. But I'm curious from your perspective what have the last couple weeks looked like for him, and what are you hoping to accomplish for him and throughout your offense in the next couple of weeks, beyond Peach Bowl prep but setting the stage for his taking the reins?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think it's been really good. I love this model of being able to bring guys in and allow them to kind of get a feel for the culture and the program and the structure and the organization and the personnel and all those types of things and then be able to hit the ground running.

I think it also helped -- he had a really good situation. I've got a ton of respect for Kansas, and I've got a tremendous amount of respect for Coach Leipold, and he didn't need to leave there, right, so it forced a ton of dialogue to make

sure it made sense for both parties. And fortunately it did, I think worked out where it made sense for everybody.

But we were able to have a ton of conversations ahead of time to make sure we're all on the same page. The reason I say that is I think it helps once he arrives on campus, I knew what I was getting, he knew what he was signing up for, so I think that's been helpful.

We haven't really had a ton of time together. I didn't get back until, I don't know, 9:30, 10:00 last night. Been gone all week long.

I think we had one day where we crossed over together, but haven't had a whole lot of time together.

It's been good. So far, so good. He's got a ton of experience. He had a ton of responsibility at the last place. So it's been good.

Been a lot of time spent on looking at the terminology and the language and what can stay the same, what should stay the same, what should be tweaked, really for both of us. Sometimes you call something a certain way, and it just evolved that way over eight years, and it may not be the best way to call it, and I think he's got some situations like that, and we've got some situations like that, things that could be a little bit more descriptive and helpful for the players from a teaching and a learning perspective.

So we're kind of working through those things.

Then as you know, we were also able to hire somebody that he had with him on his staff, as well. That's been helpful. Billy has done a really good job since he's arrived. Very similar to how Lyster was for Manny.

So far, so good, but to be honest with you, once again, we haven't had that much time together. Everybody is running in a thousand different directions, but it's good to all be back, and today will be great for everybody.

Q. Obviously you said Andy's (indiscernible) but when he arrived in Kansas it wasn't necessarily the most desirable position. Seeing how he was able to engineer such a change in offensive production, how much does it excite you to work with him?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, a couple things. When I say that, I'm talking about he had been with the same head coach for 11 years. Ton of respect for him, friend of his, friend of mine. When I talk about tough to leave, that's kind of what I'm talking about. Tremendous amount of stability, and obviously to your point, that's what excited.

You look at the head coach and the offensive coordinator, there hadn't really been that type of success and productivity in a place like Buffalo. They go to Kansas, there really hadn't been that type of success and productivity at a place like Kansas before. So that was a big reason for me being attracted to him in the first place and then also coming up under a guy that I have a ton of respect for within the profession.

But yeah, I think that's really kind of what got this ball rolling is what you described with the success and the points and the yardage and gained control that they were able to have at Kansas and was a big part of their success.

Q. A couple of guys said that it would be in their minds tougher to replace Manny as a person and motivator than an Xs and Os guy, as good as he was as an Xs and Os guy. Is that a challenge when you're looking to fill a vacancy like this, even more than the Xs and Os, to try to find that fit from a relationship standpoint?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's a huge part of it. I think you guys are aware of this. We're all aware of this. But I think sometimes it gets undervalued. Who you follow has a big part of your success. You follow a guy who's a real disciplinarian or you follow a guy who's extremely loose or you follow a guy that's extremely charismatic or whatever it may be, those things factor into it.

I think one of the things that was really good about Manny is we didn't really do a whole lot. I mean that as a compliment. We did just enough to be difficult to attack.

But I think if you look at it, I think Manny did a really good job of keeping things simple so that guys could play fast and aggressive.

But the other thing to your point was his ability to get up in front of the room, of the coaches, as well as the players, and command the room and be able to get buy-in. That's just as important if not more important than the scheme. When you're talking about hiring somebody, all those things factor into it. All those things factor into it. That's when you're talking about fit, the fit at Penn State is different following Manny.

But I will also say, Brent was really strong in those areas, as well, and when Brent was leaving, like people were really upset. Brent had been with me long enough that he had recruited all the players as well as coached the players.

Manny had had a ton of success but hadn't really recruited the guys, so there wasn't that type of relationship, but really

came in and built them strong, and more than anything, I think really earned their respect.

So that's what makes it challenging.

Then also being able to hire somebody that's not intimidated to walk into that room with the No. 1 defense in the country. A lot of times you're taking over a job, and you say, hey, my job is to improve the defense. That's going to be hard to do statistically, right?

It's all of that that's more challenging to do than I think people realize when you're factoring all these points in.

Q. The Peach Bowl is one of the most charitable bowl games of them all --

JAMES FRANKLIN: Which is really cool.

Q. Is that something you've talked to the team about, and what does it mean to play in something that's bigger than just a football game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, I think it's cool. I think all of these bowls, as you get to know, I think they have a significant impact on the communities that they're in.

But I do think the Peach Bowl, the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl has probably done more of that than anyone, than any bowl, and to me that is special.

The game of football and what we do here at Penn State, although I clearly understand it's about the wins and the records and the opportunities and -- I get it, trust me. But I would also say this is a place that says that the game of football transcends even more so than that.

To be able to play in a bowl that is really within their core values believes the same thing. Okay, there's an aspect of this, there's a business that we've got to run as a business. But that doesn't mean you can't do it in a charitable way. You can't do it in a way where you're making a significant profound impact on the community and the people within your community. I think that's really cool.

I think there's great leadership within this bowl, and I think all those things really kind of factor into it.

I would say as a society, those things are probably more important to us than they've ever been, to especially the young people in our society that organizations, companies are trying to make a greater impact than just serving the best chicken sandwich in the world. I think those things are important, and I think whether it's Chick-Fil-a or whether it's the Peach Bowl, I think they're doing that at a

very, very high level, and I'd also make the argument that so is Penn State.

Q. How would you describe your schedule over the last two weeks with recruiting, portal and two coordinators?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Are you saying that because I look like s--- right now? Is that why? (Laughter.)

The schedule is not good. It is not good. It is chaotic. You're recruiting your own roster. There's mixed messages everywhere. There are agendas in every direction.

It's more challenging than it's ever been. Schedule-wise, you used to be able to just focus on your current team and recruits, whether that was high school or junior college. Now obviously the transfer portal is factoring into it, as well. We're not a huge transfer portal team, but we do it. That's factoring into it, as well.

Tampering is rampant. I mean, I think if you talked to any college football coach in the country, that's an issue. Agents, coaches, calling parents, calling high school coaches of your current team, it is rampant. All the reasons why we've had all these rules in place that now are not being enforced, all these rules were put in place for a reason.

But it's challenging, right? It's challenging.

We're running in a thousand different directions, and then it's magnified when you have an offensive coordinator search, and then as soon as you get that done and you're like, take a deep breath for a minute and get back to focusing on my players and recruiting for the future, then one of your staff members get a chance to go be a head coach in the ACC, which is awesome for him and his future and his family, and then you're starting all over again.

It has been a sprint. It has been a sprint.

I do think, as we've talked about, I do think things are -- there's less battles that we're having on campus, so that's helpful. That's helpful. But it's a challenging time.

Then we're trying to go play a really good Ole Miss team on the road in SEC country, and that's going to be a challenge, as well.

A lot of different things running in a thousand different directions, but it's a challenging schedule.

The issue is I don't know how to pull it back. I think that's

the challenge for the NCAA. I think that's the challenge for commissioners. I think that's the challenge for ADs. I think that's the challenge for college football coaches.

I think the only people that can really fix this is the commissioners. They're the only ones that I think have the power to do it right now, get all the commissioners in a room for like a week, lock the door with some Chick-Fil-a sandwiches, and like literally A through Z, let's come up with a new model for college football because I don't think this is sustainable, for the players most importantly but also for the coaches and the staff, and I think you're going to see more and more coaches leaving college football.

It's funny, that's been talked about a lot, but the other concern I have is that it's attracting people into college football I think for the wrong reasons, and I think that's as big of a concern as the other.

Q. How do you feel going into Wednesday with regards to the early signing period, and how would you assess your plan and your approach to the portal thus far?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so knock on wood, we've been fortunate really in my 10 years here, we have not had a whole lot of drama. There's been a little bit, but we haven't had a whole lot of drama, and you guys have heard me talk about that before. We're very up front and transparent. Really always have been.

Sometimes that hurts us where we miss kids, miss on kids because we don't tell them what they want to hear. We're an under-promise, over-deliver program, and I think that's been a big part of our success, as well. We don't pressure guys or try to convince guys by selling them on a dream and not reality, and I think that's worked out really well for us.

We've had very little drama when it comes to signing days.

With the transfer portal, as well, again, we're transparent with our current team. We're going to go out, and our job, whether it's through high school or whether it's through the portal, is to create competition at every position. Once again, we're not making promises. A lot of programs promise you come here, you're the starter. We don't do that. You're going to be promised an opportunity to come in and compete, and the best players will play.

Once again, the high school prospects were told that when we recruited them, and the transfer portal prospects are told the same thing.

I don't think that's happening at the places we're competing



with. They're saying, well, why would I come and compete when I'm being offered a starting spot somewhere else. Well, I said, pretty soon -- I don't think that's happening everywhere. I think people are being promised a lot of things.

Again, I think that hurts us from time to time, but I think the people that really do their homework and talk to previous players in our program or current players in our program or the parents, I think in the long run, it's helped us.

We look at the transfer portal where we need to gain experience. Say we have young players that we think are going to be really good and talented but lack experience, then at some positions we're going to look to bring experience in, very similar to how people maybe nowadays use junior colleges, and then sometimes it's to create more competition, that we feel like we like the room, but there needs to be a higher level of competition.

I think you look at some examples, I think our tight end room has been really competitive. I think our running back room has been really competitive.

We play a ton of guys on the D-line. We want to continue to be able to do that. The secondary, the same thing.

You look at specialists, we've tried to create competition at every position. That's really all we're doing is trying to create enough competition at every single position that it brings out the best in everybody.

Q. You talked about the transfer portal. Wide receivers specifically, you guys lose one player to the portal, KeAndre obviously hasn't announced his decision on what he's going to do. How important is it to add there, and what would you like to add? What type of player would you like to add at wide receiver?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so to be honest with you, there's really not a whole lot of ambiguity within the program. Just because things haven't been announced to you guys doesn't mean there's ambiguity. I think sometimes there's a plan that the player has on when they want to make their announcements.

Sometimes God forbid there doesn't need to be an announcement, like I'm coming back, and why does that need to be announced. That should be the expectation.

So there's less ambiguity in between the program than maybe you guys feel, and to be honest with you, maybe that's part of your rationale to ask over and over again.

But sometimes that's the only reason the players make

announcements is because they don't want to get asked the question anymore. It's kind of a fine line between those two things.

But I think we have a pretty good idea. We talk about there really should be no surprises, that we hope over their time in the recruiting process and really the time they've been on campus that they've developed a relationship with their position coach as well as the head coach that they can come in and have an honest conversation, that we can be a part of the process with them, because we're going to tell them the truth.

Again, it doesn't always work for us because we don't tell people what they want to hear. We lost a guy a few years back because he wanted to be promised the starting job, and I thought he was going to be the starter. But I wouldn't make a promise.

Again, we try to be transparent. I want to win as many games as possible. We have very, very high expectations and goals here, but I am not going to change my values and morals and treat people the way -- in a different way than I would want to be treated, and I'm not going to treat the players different than I would treat my own children.

That's been good to us. Although I look awful, I try to live my life in a way professionally as well as personally that I can put my head on the pillow at the end of the night and try to get a few hours of sleep.

Q. When you talked about handling the DC job internally, you mentioned the name Rob Smith. What have you learned and observed from him this year, and what prompted you to hire him to come to Penn State?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, first of all, it starts with Anthony Poindexter. Anthony has been phenomenal, has been awesome, has been extremely valuable. So Anthony is part of that discussion. We've had really good conversations, me and Anthony.

Then Rob, Rob became available. Rob is from Pennsylvania. We have a number of people in common that he trusts that knows me and that I trust that knows him, and then he's been a defensive coordinator at Duke. He's been a defensive coordinator at Minnesota. He's been a defensive coordinator at Rutgers. He's been a defensive coordinator at Arkansas.

He's got a track record. He understands our program, the culture. Although he was more with the offense this year, he's got a pretty good understanding of what we do on defense, and I think that's part of it, as well. Do we want to just continue exactly what we're doing, or do you go

outside, and there may be a few tweaks, no different than there were with Manny transitioning from Brent.

Whenever you're able to get these types of people into your building, there's value in it, but then it also creates some opportunities when possible to promote from within, as long as back to the question I got earlier, they check enough of those boxes based on the person that they'd be replacing.

It's interesting, you may have the same guys on your staff and one time you have an opening they may be the fit, and the next time they may not be, and part of that may be based on who they're following. All those things factor into it.

Q. You mentioned about the staff. Once you get the DC hired, do you anticipate being able to keep the rest of the staff intact?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so for me, I think if you look at my history as a head coach, I'm a very, very loyal guy. You look, we got the Vanderbilt job and came to Penn State, I think we brought 16 people with us and their families. That's not common, if you look at what's going on in college football.

Then a lot of those guys stayed with me for a long time, and then kind of lost a guy and then lost a guy over 10 years.

For me, just like when I hired Manny, that was a big part of hiring Manny. Hey, I really would like to keep the staff in place. I've got really good guys. They've been loyal to Penn State. They've been loyal to me. Although we're trying to obviously hire a new defensive coordinator, a lot of times coordinators want to bring people with them. I totally get that. We were able to do that with Manny, and he brought Coach Lyster with him as an off-the-field person, and it worked out really well for everybody involved.

I think more times than not when we can do that, that's what I'd like to do, and I'm very clear and up front on that on the front end with the coordinators I hire.

So we'll see how this thing plays out, but I've been very clear and transparent about that, and again, I think I've shown that over time.

Let me say this, too: The loyalty part, too, sometimes you make a change and people say, well, you made a change; I don't understand how you're talking about loyalty. My loyalty is to Penn State. My loyalty is to the players. My loyalty is to the entire staff. Sometimes you have to make

a change for the loyalty of the entire staff and the entire team. So I want to make sure that that doesn't come off as contradictory.

I think over time that's worked out really well for us, and I'd like to continue doing that if we could.

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