

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Dr. Patrick Kraft

Press Conference



DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Going to steal something from my man James. I'm going to give you a couple bullets before. No, it's good. I appreciate y'all coming, jokes aside, I know you have a lot going on. Big day in the college football space with signing day, and I'm excited for you all to get a chance to talk to Tom Allen which we are all excited for him to be joining the family.

I'm going to just go through a couple things just because we have been so busy over the semester since I last saw most of you in Indianapolis.

But I want to highlight a couple things that I think are really important for us and then we can get into it.

First and foremost, hopefully you all saw the graduation success rate of our student athletes, 93 percent, continuing to do that at an incredibly high level. That will always be the standard here.

I'm so proud of our athletes. I think in this day and age, there's so much coming their way and they are still absolutely crushing it in the classroom. 13 of our teams had the perfect GSR.

We just found out yesterday, four women's soccer players were academic all Americans, one of our male soccer players was an academic All-American and we are waiting on the other fall sports to come through. I'm just really proud of them.

Football had a program record of 93 percent GSR. As we talk about competition and what's happening all around us and it's great, we'll talk about team achievements, I think that is a true testament to how hard our student athletes work both in and out of the classroom.

Team achievements: We have ten teams currently ranked right now, whether it's their current rankings or at the end of the season. Our men's soccer team, I'm so proud of those guys, Jeff and the team. They won the Big 10 Championship in men's soccer. We had women's cross-country, men's cross-country -- or women's

cross-country got to the NCAA championships and men's cross-country in the NCAA regionals.

Women's soccer in the round of eight, the Elite 8 had a tough game against Clemson. Women's volleyball finished up in the Sweet 16. And obviously we all know we are going to the Chick-Fil-A Bowl.

I'm proud of our athletes this fall, did a great job and just came from a 30-point win in women's hoops. Kieg's team is playing really well right now. But that was a great -- Shay just dropped 40, which is -- any time you score 40 is impressive. So I'm proud of what they are doing over there as well.

Our athletes, one of the reason I wanted to bring this up, in a semester, our athletes put in 3,200 hours no community service with our development enrichment program.

So really, really well-rounded group, when we talk about the 31 teams, it's important to talk about how everybody is doing everything the right way and I'm proud of them.

Some of the things, you all know, hopefully, how important sport performance, health and wellness is to me. We've added two full-time athletic performance coaches, decrease the load that we have. When you have 833 athletes, you have to continue to focus on all of our sports. We just added those positions over the semester.

We converted four part-time trainers to full-time. So now we have a better -- I feel better about our grasp on all 31 teams there and then I'm proud of what we've experienced with the four clinical psychologists, it's been amazing and it's been really remarkable how well they have adapted and how our athletes have adopted to the challenges and being open and honest with themselves and their clinical professionals, and we are looking forward to adding our sports performance portion to that. My priority 18 months ago was we had to get the mental health stuff really figured out. I think we are in a spot there and we'll continue to evaluate and grow.

We've been very busy in the construction space, and I'll wrap it up here. Not only the monster projects that we have going on, but we really invest a lot in nutrition



stations. We have five nutrition stations being created or built, not including the ones at Lasch, we have one now, basically every athlete has that, we are enhancing that with Greenberg and the facility at Greenberg, but now we are impacting all 833 of our athletes from a nutrition standpoint; that was not the case prior to us being here. So we are very happy, whether it's the White Building, Multi-Sport, East Area locker room, they all have up-to-date, modern grab-and-go nutrition stations which I think is incredibly important.

Okay. So let's talk about just projects, went to the board, certain projects, Beaver Stadium. I'll talk about Beaver Stadium real quick.

We are 30 percent into design of this building. This is like building a village. I'm not trying to not answer any of your questions but I haven't even briefed the board or Neely on where we are with Beaver Stadium. This is major, major project. Literally 30 percent is like, where are the pipes going, where do you get circulation.

So that one is ongoing. We feel really good about where we are headed but literally, we are looking at everything in this building from the Eastern Conference course to the main concourse to bathrooms to the west side to the premium to -- there is not a thing we are not evaluating in this process, so I just want to head that off at the pass.

But you know, just as important, we're 70 percent through design with Greenberg, which will be our physical therapy health and wellness recovery suite for all 833 athletes. It will be the home of Training Table for all of our athletes. So we are close to finishing that up. We are finishing up the fund-raising. Our goal is to have that ready to go in fall of 2025, try to break ground as we continue to momentum at some point this summer.

Jeffrey Field. You've heard me talk about it. We are 95 percent through that design. Closing up on the finances, philanthropical and capital gifts there. It will have locker room, athletic training, strength training, team meeting rooms, office suites, concessions, locations -- enhanced bathrooms which will especially had us on game day, as well, in that corridor there. But we are excited about what it's going to look like and it's the way it should be for Erica and Jeff, when you have two nationally ranked and national-calibre teams, they will have the facilities those student athletes deserve.

You probably are noticing some construction over at medicine letter. It's a little different, not truly our facility if you will. But it's a phased construction project. We began with a playing surface which Gambino put out there in the play-by-play of that. We are upgrading the lights and

putting the new scoreboard with the spikes and working hand-in-hand with that. And the next phases will include locker room, clubhouse, outdoor training, indoor training and recovery spaces in joint partnership with the Spikes, the Spikes there, so that's been really good.

Finally, I don't know, the East Area locker room, where we house really -- we run about 500 athletes through that space in that weight room. We are really close. That one is almost done. I think we are going to hopefully go out for CM soon. That will be an enhanced training table -- excuse me, an enhanced nutrition center, much improved sports performance area, much improved weight room, where that houses the two lacrosses and field hockey. That building is taking a total transformation and we are hoping to start that actually here in January, February, if we can get things lined up, permit and all that.

All right. I felt a little bit like James doing that. All right.

Q. We still have not seen you and Andy in the same room together.

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: My man. Doppelgänger.

Q. In all seriousness, James had mentioned, expressed some concerns about the transfer portal and the word he used was "tampering." What recourse do schools have and have you brought this up specifically to your fellow ADs and other leadership?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Yeah, great question, it's everywhere now and yes, we talk about it ad nauseam. I think it is -- we say this but it really is the wild, wild west right now.

I'll give you a perfect example. We were in Las Vegas for Olu's award. He was nominated for the Campbell Trophy. And on our way there, we got an e-mail of eight athletes, one of which was our own, who was not in the portal, and an agent was saying, "Hey, are you interested in him?" One of them was our -- and was not in portal was just shopping athletes around.

I was not very happy that was happening, and went to the NCAA officials there and shared it with them. We are trying to communicate everything we see, and it's hard because some people are showing it to you, some people aren't, you know, and it's just a really difficult spot to be in. And they are putting the student athletes in a really tough spot, too.

But I do think we are -- the tampering is real, and I had a conversation with someone the other day and they said,

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listen the rules that are being made are actually hurting the people that follow the rules because everyone is trying to do what's right.

And so I think James, now, I'm proud of them what they did with this class. I think they did an amazing job. He does an amazing job. You guys can talk about that later today. But yeah, it's real and we try to just hand and over and say here is what we are finding. I have to believe the NCAA is inundated with it. But it is a topic, all the way. Everybody is talking about it, coaches, ADs, everybody in the business.

Q. We have asked James a few times about how you have handle the navigation of adding a coordinator or high-profile assistant coach. You just saw it twice in a one-month span. What does it look like when James Franklin, as much as you can peel back the curtain in this setting, can you peel pack the curtain?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Yeah, it's an interesting question, it was like, what, two in two weeks. My guy he is so prepared for these moments. He just knows what I need and it's how he attacks everything, and it was great to go through this process with him, because you just don't know, right. I said this the other day; I'm here just to support him and help and be a sounding board.

But very analytical. What's the right fit and the defensive coordinator we are a four-down team and that's who we are and that's where we have had success so that's probably got to go a piece of it, right. I'm probably giving too much. He's probably going to be upset. Look how upset KP is. But I do think he's very, very focused on that. And then you start with a big list, and then you just start to -- and then it all becomes who is the right fit, who comes in this building and fits.

I cannot express to you, that building works at such a high level and it is such a good group of people; that he is never going to turn the keys over to someone that just doesn't fit in that building for whatever reason. And so it's very systematic, very thoughtful, all of the things that you would assume, and when he makes his decision, he makes it but he takes -- he calls friends of people and gets different perspective.

It's no different than how I handle head coaching searches. But he does a really -- it was really good to go through it with him, and he doesn't get fazed by -- he has his process. It's like everything else. It's the 1-0, here is how we are going to handle it, and it's true to form in everything he does.

Q. You mentioned the Beaver Stadium project, and

also Lasch and the second floor. What's your timeline for that?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Actually that's a good point. They are under construction there now. I was just over with James. James is moving his office out. Everyone is moving their offices. On Saturday they will really start to move on construction.

It's a great question on timetable. Everything is probably around 12 to 18 months, just honestly, how it works. That's actually starting. They are already doing prep work over there now. They are moving offices and moving into temp space.

Q. Wouldn't be a press conference without an NIL question. As the numbers fly around for what it takes to do roster retention, do you think it's good or sustainable for the sport to have effectively outsourced that budget to fans through collectives?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: No, I don't. Thankfully I'm only spending 30 percent of my time dealing with this NIL space, which was vastly different when I first got here.

But no I don't think that's the right way, and I think everybody would say that. I've said it repeatedly. This is the one area where we don't have -- I can't help our kids in the way I want to help our student athletes. It goes back to the tampering question and what's going on. No, I don't think -- that's not the way it should be.

So we'll see how it evolves, right. I think it's still evolving. I think we are right in the middle of this spinning world that we're in in the NCAA and it's just a matter of where it ends up.

Q. Going off tampering NIL, all of that, there's a lot more people in college sports than there used to be. Different industries and people in general.

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Right.

Q. When you think about preserving a culture in an athletic department of this size with so much different voices, how do you go about doing that? You can't avoid NIL.

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: You can't. It's in the like you are trying to avoid NIL. We all believe in NIL, name like image, our athletes should be able to do that. When you play in front of 110,000 or you play continued wrestling or sellout crowds or Erica's teams who are elite, I think that's it.

But your point about culture is so important. It's why I love



being the athletic director at Penn State because I just rattled off all these things that our athletes have been able to do off the field, and our coaches are at a high level where that culture piece really is important.

I think you have to be really honest with your student athletes. You have to be honest with your process. Don't get caught up in all the other stuff and find a way to continue to just do it the way that you believe can sustain. Because I don't think that's a sustainable model of just paying a player here because locker rooms are challenging and you're hearing from everybody.

You hit it on the head; there's always another thing out there that someone else has started another agency. Someone else has started -- you've got to run all these leads down. But I believe with my 833 student athletes and our coaches that we have a place that hopefully they can be honest with us, hopefully they feel that; that there's trust and that we are building a culture that we are all in it together. I think that communication is such an important piece to it. Like any other organization.

So it's a challenge. There's a lot of people trying to infiltrate that. And I think James does a remarkable job. I think all of our coaches really; Cael. Everybody does a remarkable job of trying to do that.

And you can't bat a thousand but that culture piece you referenced is so important. That's why I love being here because there is no undo pressure. Just do it the right way. Take your time. Do it the right way. Get the right -- we have everything that you can recruit the best. It's been proven.

Yeah, I think that culture piece is so important.

Q. You have Super Bowl ring there?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: This is just my wrestling National Championship ring, of which I had nothing to do with, I was along for the ride.

Q. James made his comments last week about the tampering and Chip Kelly had a little video. Seems that a lot of high-profile people in college football are screaming for leadership. What is the next step for ADs and commissioners to be working, can you work with the NCAA, or is it just independent of that?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: No. I think you are seeing it, which goes back to that question of like everybody is feeling it, right. And the Big Ten, and Tony has done a really good job. Sometimes it's nice to have on outside set of eyes on some of the issues that we have been ingrained with

forever.

I think Governor Baker is trying his hardest to figure it out and work through it. We have to work with them. Tony has done a really good job of working behind the scenes with the other commissioners.

I think it's not as easy to solve, as I think we all know, but we know we have to fix it. This just can't -- it's not sustainable and it's not the right course of action. And so what that is, I think we all -- honestly, like that is, as much as the time here on campus, talking about NIL and the collectives, nationally it's become in our national meetings like a real priority.

And so basically to answer your question, yes, we are all working at every angle. You see the work that the commissioners are meeting with Congress and trying to get everybody involved to say, okay, I think we have had enough; how do we address it.

And there's just so many layers to it, though, and that becomes an inherent challenge. And we are living through it, right. We are living through the real time life of this whole kind of chaos, which is hard.

Q. With the Beaver Stadium renovations, have you discussed the possibility with the NHL of having an outdoor hockey game, and maybe bringing an NHL Classic?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Yes. Now, the winterization is occurring as we speak, so that was kind of ongoing. From that perspective from the renovation, we are going to be good with that.

As you can see with Luke Combs, like, we have to use this building more. I would sign up right here for a hockey game in this building, you know, today. Like everything else, just takes a lot of moving parts and working with the NHL.

But I think there's a great opportunity to do that, yes, and we are open. They know that we are open it. But we have got to continue to use this build to go generate revenue.

I've told you, I love this building. It's time we open the doors. We did some yoga. We did Lion King. We are going to do different ideas like that. I think Luke Combs, though, is the biggest example of what we are trying to lean into.

There's other things outside of just hockey that I'm not yet privy to tell you; I'm very transparent, but it's not done. I'm a 0-0 on the clock guy when it comes to these contracts.

But we are trying to get others engaged. Remember, you've got to have a special event to sell this building. Like it's just not for everybody. And there's certain events that you could handle the volume of this.

Q. You talked about the coordinators earlier. With Andy specifically, a guy coming from Kansas in a really secure situation with his contract and a reported decent buyout, I guess what does that say about you guys with where you're at right now that you're able to lure a guy out of a pretty comfortable situation and get him here?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: I mean, it's Penn State Football. I hate to just be that bold. I think honestly it's a testament to who we have in that building, starting with James. But the athletes, and the student athletes that we have in there. You want to come in there, oh, I'll work with that group. I'll go see if I can help them.

And he was. And he was with Lance for a long time. But his story is great. I heard that story about the helmet, and I, too, ran into trees with my head, so we are very similar.

It just shows where we are. Like we are a top-ten program. We are fighting to win a National Championship. We are going to -- that is our focus. We are going to continue to focus. We are going to hire the best people to do that, and I think, I hope, Andy saw that in the process and saw that this was a great opportunity for him. When you start to get around James's team, meaning staff and players, this is special.

They did everything they could, and we are just happy that it worked out. He's a great fit, though.

Q. I know this year isn't over yet, but your first full calendar year wrapping up as Penn State's AD, how have things gone from a personal standpoint, and what will you take away into 2024?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: You mean, personally, I love it. My kids love school, which they don't get that from their father. But they do. We love Happy Valley. It's an amazing place. I'm not just saying that. We truly, my wife, Betsy and being in the community, it really was a game-changer for us to be in our house. That helped us get out of the rental and establish our roots and be engaged in everything in town. But we really do love it.

You know, it's just we have so much to accomplish professionally that my staff would know this, KP in particular. I'm a grinder. Like I see what we can achieve every single day here. I get goosebumps putting on the

Penn State gear.

So I just can't stop. Like, I just can't. And that's 31 deep. We were on a golf call last night. We got all these projects going and we are talking about other projects for golf, and I'm talking about what we can do to enhance wrestling and what we can do to enhance track and field. Because you can feel it. Like you can see, we can win and we can achieve so much incredible things that I think you all deserve, that our alums deserve. There's no ceiling here.

And so for me, it's so exciting but you've got to work within the process that's in front of you, which is like anywhere. And so I think it's been really, really exciting.

I mean, look, I floated for two weeks after winning the Rose Bowl as a Big Ten kid, to win the Rose Bowl, I never thought I would do that, and you know, being around Kelce Anderson and our wrestling program, it's amazing. And having the good fortune to be with our student athletes which is the best piece, and going on this journey, three Final Fours last year and being able to help them with some of the stuff we are doing has really been an amazing thing.

So I'm very energized. I'm excited about our future. I truly believe we haven't even gotten started yet. I think it takes two years, really, to get the foundation established where people aren't like tiptoeing around me. They are probably still doing that. KP does. We are really starting to get into a stride to get into where we go.

So I appreciate the question. Every day -- and you know what I will say, it's bigger than I thought. I don't know if I said this before but you go on the road, and I don't care what sport, and you see Penn State and Nittany Nation there. I knew it was big. I knew it was a passionate base. But it is bigger; I tell people all the time. Like, you have no idea. What we do for seven days, not me, but what our team does to put on the events for seven football Saturdays here is short of miraculous.

And to have as many people come in and to be passionate, win or lose, I would rather have everybody passionate, is truly an incredible thing.

This building, actually I have goosebumps now. This building in this football season -- and I don't know how that ever gets old. Nick knows, don't take this for granted, because there's a lot of people that want to be where we are. It's very special. The whole thing is very special to me.

Q. I wouldn't underestimate KP.

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DR. PATRICK KRAFT: That's true.

Q. From a football perspective, you could argue all four teams joining the Big Ten are closer to you than not. The repercussions of that fact for you are?

DR. PATRICK KRAFT: Insignificant. I don't care. I don't care. I'm worried about one thing: Us. We control our own fate.

They are. That's not disparaging them at all. It's just, what am I going to -- what are you going to do in got to get better. It's like -- it's a Penn State thing. It's not an Oregon thing. Ain't UCLA. Ain't about FC. It ain't about Washington. It's a Penn State thing, and we've got to be Penn State.

And that's going back to your question. We can win the whole thing. We just have to keep focusing on doing what's right for us, and it's dealing with all of this that's going around and dealing with the culture issue that we talked about; and continuing to bring the right kids that want to run through a wall and fight through it and are passionate like we have.

And that's not -- I'm not making that up. I don't lose sleep over it. I may have if I was in other jobs. Not here. By the way, it's not just a football thing. Basketball has gotten a lot better. Basketball is going to get -- volleyball, all of our sports, soccer is going to get more challenging. Okay. I'm at Penn State. 31 deep, we'll just keep getting better.

But all of these things I mentioned to you have to get done. We have to get all of these, the nutrition, the travel, the mental health support, the physical cup port, all of these things have to get done or we won't be able to achieve what we want to do. That's why I'm aggressive to get it ready so that we can attack those. They are coming and it's going to be a different day, one that we are all excited about.

Thanks, everyone. Hey, I appreciate y'all. I know you go everywhere. I know it's not easy. But I get it and I do appreciate you because here is like no other place, and I know KP makes it hard on you.

I do hope you have a wonderful holiday season. Those of in you Atlanta, I hope to see you but thank you for all that you do, it really is truly important, okay. Thanks. Have a great holiday, everyone.

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