

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## James Franklin

### Press Conference



**Q. How far did the wide receivers have to go to get them to where you want them to be**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I would say solid. He's been solid. He's been -- I think they have all been good at times. It's still obviously a small number of practices and number of plays to truly evaluate.

I thought our entire staff, as well as team, felt like the where I understand took a big jump in day two compared to day one. And I know a lot of the coaches and players, Jay Reed, actually speak to the team after practice about it.

So I thought that was a real positive. But it's just kind of a small ball right now to really base that off of. I'll have a better idea a week from now.

But so far, solid, and obviously there's still some steps that need to be taken there for that entire room. Obviously that's been a big question mark for the media and some of the fans. I think the coaching staff and I think the players have, I would say a good amount of confidence and what that room has the ability to do and the amount of work that they have put in with Beau and Drew all summer.

**Q. When you just look at your defensive end room and you get past Abdul and Dani, guys that have a chance to have some really big years for you, who are some of the guys behind them that you are excited about and can maybe take a step forward for you and you're counting on, maybe in August, and moving forward?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: And you said Dani and Abdul?

**Q. When you get past those two guys. Obviously they are known quantities. Behind them, who are the guys you're excited about and who are the guys you're counting on to take another step in August?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, I wouldn't even say behind them. Vanover is a guy that I don't think enough people are talking about. We have a ton of confidence in Amin.

And I think the other guy that -- and I get why but a lot of people aren't talking about is Smith Vilbert.

Smith Vilbert is a guy that we have a lot of confidence in as an organization and as a program. He's missed, obviously, a lot of football, so you guys haven't had a chance to see him the way we have. But you talk about big, strong, physical experienced mature.

So that gives us really three defensive ends that have played a ton of football in my mind in terms of games and practice with Vanover, Dani and Vilbert.

And then you've got Carter, who is new to the position, but still has played a ton of football. And then we've got Mason Robinson who is going into year two in the program that we are going to need to take a significant step for us.

And then after that, there's a bunch of guys, whether it's Mupoyi, whether it's Williams, whether it's Mayer, whether it is Granville. There's other guys kind of in the mix there.

But I would say for us, you've got Vanover, Carter, Dani, Vilbert, Mupoyi and Mason Robinson probably the six guys that we know the most about right now if that makes sense.

**Q. Generally speaking, do you see more progress in the guys from spring practice to camp physically or mentally and the ones that jump off the page mentally, does it show in command of the hook or the way they communicate with their teammates? Any guys that fit that mold.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Just to be clear, compared to what?

**Q. Just what they looked like. An individual in the spring to now. Physically you can see the differences but mentally how do you see guys progressing? Do you generally see more physical or mental progress and mentally, how do you see it?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think it's probably both, maybe not the answer that you want. But probably both. I mean, you see changes -- a guy that right away to me, when we went out in the field on the first day was Ta'Mere. Ta'Mere looked different. He really looked good. You noticed that



right away.

I think everybody kind of had noticed Rojas already, obviously; the numbers that have been reported and just looking at him, he obviously looks different, as well.

Another guy that a lot of people aren't talking about but were excited about that is really kind of changed his body as well is Boyer. I want to say Boyer has put on 35, 40 pounds, and is really doing some nice things.

But I would say that's probably the biggest change in terms of physical appearance, and then in terms of mentally, obviously there's a big jump at the quarterback position. Grunk is really doing some nice things. We think he's got a very, very bright future and has really taken a step.

I think Jaxon Smolik has been really impressive in terms of what he's been able to do mentally. Maximizing what he's been able to do right now, that's been impressive, as well. But I think it's just a combination. Some guys have a lot of room for growth mentally. Some guys have a lot of room for growth physically. But there's a few examples.

**Q. You mentioned max Granville as one of those guys you're looking to learn more about. We all are. Can you peel back the curtain as much as you're comfortable with doing and when you realized it was a possibility he could be on this roster and the final moments with his family where this was the outcome and what you can realistically expect from a freshman who did not get here until the final week of July?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's already flashed in the first two days: Athletic, quick, a lot of things you saw on the high school tape but you don't know if those things are going to show up when they get here but that's already happened. He also tested really well with our baseline testing with Coach Losey and that staff, as soon as he was cleared and able to do that.

In terms of the process, we really kind of had no idea until really very late in the process that this was even something they were thinking about. And then there's one thing to be thinking about; there's another thing to actually be able to do it.

You know, I think he was taking summer classes to be able to ensure the fact that he would be able to come at mid semester and once he got the classes done and realized he could qualify now and graduate now, that they brought the option up to us, and I think that also triggered to us that they are very serious about Penn State because they are having these types of conversations with us.

But it was pretty late in the process, so then it was a ton of work that had to happen for him in terms of the application process and all that; for us, in terms of getting all that documentation and then also getting him here. Like I think the same weekend his brother got married; so they had the wedding and were driving here.

So there's a lot of stuff that we had to get done in a short period of time and because of the wedding, he couldn't -- it's not like he could even come a couple days early, like was getting here right at the last minute.

But so far, first impression, really good. But obviously there's a big difference between running around in shorts and a tee shirt than there is in full pads. So we'll see that today. We'll have a better idea today.

**Q. Jay won and tie talked at the end of last season about getting the ball in the hands of the best players regardless of who that was. How does Coach K subscribe to that mentality and how are you anticipating that play out with guys like Drew and Beau, Nick and Kaytron, kind of that third-year class of guys, how do you think Coach K is it going to handle the number of offensive guys he has?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I think really you can kind of take two different points right here, talking points from a conversation standpoint. Explosive plays to me goes hand-in-hand with getting your best players the ball.

I felt like the last couple games of the year, you saw a significant change there. So obviously with that, that kind of went through the interview process. That was a big part of the interview process is production of explosive plays and the data to back it up, not just saying in an interview, hey, I want to be explosive; the data to back it up.

But then also philosophically, how are you going to get your best players the ball. How are you going to get them touches. How are you going to get them touches early in the game. Those types of things are a big part of it.

Again, it's one thing to talk about those things in the process; it's another thing to go watch the till film and it's another thing to study the data and make sure those things are happening. Sometimes it's easier said done than depending what position the guy plays. But so far, so good, and been a ton of discussions in the off-season about that, and then I think from him being able to watch us during Bowl prep, and then winter workouts and then spring ball and all these types of things, I think he's got a pretty good idea of the guys we have, the weapons we have, the experience we have.

And then I think the other thing we are going to have to do, back to development of some of these positions, is hopefully by Game 3, we feel like there's other guys that you guys are all talking about our best players and that we are talking about in terms of people that we have to get more touches to.

**Q. How many guys do you plan on playing at corner and who is standing out right now as potential starters of that position?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Terry is the model. Terry is the model in terms of recruiting and then in terms of development. You would say, typically, when you have a year where you essentially lost two corners to the NFL that you would feel like that was a big question mark going into the season, and feel like that was an area where maybe you had some concerns.

But we actually feel like that position from top to bottom could be better this year athletically. Now, don't -- again, don't misinterpret what I'm saying. They still have to do it on game day, and obviously when you have lost the amount of production that we lost at that position, we understand that.

But in terms of, I'd say seven guys that went through spring ball and went through summer and now are in training camp, we feel really good about those seven guys, and specifically, six guys, three deep on either side.

Right now it's hard to really say. Cam Miller has got the most experience here at Penn State.

You guys know how we feel about AC, Audavion Collins, what he's been able to do all off-season. Been a ton of conversation. Maybe most improved guy on our roster since the end of the season.

Kimber has come in and really developed and changed his body in our strength and conditioning program and has played a lot of football in a very good conference.

You know, Harris. There's just a lot of guys that we feel good about.

Tracy, who, you know, we got a ton of confidence and Washington who we have a ton of confidence in. All those guys have for the most part either played, whether it's played here or played at other places.

So Terry just does a really good job in terms of rebuilding and retooling that position. And I don't think it's a position that as coaches, you know, we have a ton of concerns about.

Now just to be -- again, to answer your question, I just don't know; I don't have enough practices to feel like it's "these" guys. I feel like we have a group of players that we feel really good about. Now somebody has got to separate themselves and be the guy; or, we are going to be rotating a lot of high-quality players that we feel good about.

**Q. You guys are putting in obviously a new offense with Coach Kotelnicki. But walk us through what the process of installing an offense looks like, and where are you on that timeline and are you happy where you're at on that timeline?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think you guys heard me say this before. We are really not in a position in year 11 in the program to start all over. We have not done that. So I think you guys heard me say this before.

So in terms of all three coordinators were hired based on what they had done well in their careers but also, what are you able to do and how comfortable are you, honestly comfortable, keeping the same, and what needs to change.

I would say on offense, there's probably more change than on defense and special teams. But probably not as much as you guys would think.

So I think Andy has done a really good job of that. That takes a ton of confidence. That takes a ton of intelligence. And I think it also takes enough experience that you feel like you're able to do that.

And again, that's so that we don't have 50 players learning a completely new system. We have, you know, kind of a blend, a combination of one coordinator, and then the things that need to change.

So I think we are in a good spot there. I think some of the rule changes over the last couple years that allow you to have essentially OTAs in the off-season where you are actually able to coach, that's helped. Because I think in the old days when you hired a new coordinator and you could do no coaching in football when other sports could, those transitions, those changes, are more significant.

It's less significant now because you get spring ball. You get summer OTAs, and we have been able to get a ton done. I think we are in a pretty good spot, and most importantly, I think the players are confident with what we are doing and how we are doing it.

**Q. From the end of last season to now, how do you assess the growth Drew has underwent, both on the field and also in the Lasch Building working with Andy**

## and working with Danny?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I would really say the whole group. Drew, Beau, Grunk, Smolik. I've been as impressed with Smolik's growth and how he's handled this situation as anybody.

I think the dialogue is really good. I typically sit in the quarterback meetings, and I think the dialogue and discussions are really good.

I think Andy, with 19 years of experience as a play-caller, and really being able to float, which is really what he wanted to do coming here, to be able to float as an offensive coordinator, almost like a lot of the NFL organizations do; and then have someone like Danny, even before the rule changes as a GA, Andy was able to get comfortable with Danny. I think that helped, as well.

But the dialogue in that room has been really good. I think the players got a ton of respect for Danny as a former player that's walked in their shoes.

And I think we have a system now that is going to put not only our best players in position to be successful but I think Andy's background as a former line coach, I think helps, too. Because typically on offense, everything you're doing is about how do you make things as challenging on the defense as possible, obviously. But also, how do you limit the complication of things for your O-line and for your quarterback. You want to try to keep things as simple for those two positions as you possibly can in two positions that are not very simplistic.

And I think he's done a really good job of that. Sometimes I think coaches say that because that's Coaching 101 interview process and things like that. But the execution that have, I think Andy has done a really good job. Again, experience matters; 19 years as a play-caller that you learn not only things that have worked but things that you would do differently. That experience really counts.

Drew obviously has been able to lean into Danny and has been able to lean into Andy, but I also think some of the things systematically that we are going to do -- and I would say even some of these things we are going to do, you guys are going to look at and say, I don't know if that's something I would imagine Drew doing but by him doing just enough of it opens up and creates opportunities for other things in our offense and makes us difficult to defend. I think it's really good. I think it's been really good.

It's interesting, to your question, too, when you watch just the Kansas film from the last two years, Beau was pretty excited. But when you look at over 19 years, Buffalo,

different types of quarterbacks, and just the overall knowledge of offense, there's a reason for all those guys in that room to be excited.

## **Q. A new era of college football with a playoff. I wonder if that affects at all your approach to an overall season, and also having a tough road opener, how does that change or affect preparation?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I would say the first thing is the length of the season. I think you guys know, we have always talked about trying to create depth, was always important playing in a conference like the Big Ten.

So that was philosophically something that we've always believed in but I think your point is a good one. It's magnified now, right. You have the potential of 17 games.

So how are you going to do that; I think that, coupled with some of the rule changes over the last couple years where you can play in four games, safe your redshirt, but then you also get to be able to play in all of the postseason games and not burn your redshirt, I think that factors in to strategy in how we do these things.

And then, you know, just making sure we are doing a really good job of rotating and playing guys for the fourth quarter, for late in the season, and now a playoff run, all those types of things.

I guess to answer your question, it's not really dissimilar to what we have done in the past. I just think it's heightened if that makes sense.

And then your other part of your question was what?

## **Q. Opening.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Opening at West Virginia, fortunately we have done a decent amount of that. Going to Auburn --

THE MODERATOR: Purdue in 2000.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I know it was Purdue.

THE MODERATOR: Wisconsin.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What game of the season was Auburn when we went to Auburn?

THE MODERATOR: Game 3.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It wasn't the first game. Game 3. Excuse me.

But Purdue was a great example going on the road. We've done a few of these things before; I think has been helpful for us, and I think it gets everybody's kind of attention.

I have probably more respect for West Virginia than anybody just because I've played there so many times and I know what Mountaineer Football means to the state of West Virginia and I know what the environment is going to be like. Played there a ton of times.

And in some ways, there's a geographic component to this, as well. There's some historical factors there, as well, in terms of being a bordering state or whatever -- however you want to describe it.

So I think it's going to be a great game. I think it's going to be a great environment and then on top of that, the way they ended their season, right. You know, I think they ended up winning nine games and the quarterback ended up playing really well and finished the season on a real high note. So they got a ton of confidence coming into this year because of that.

Started getting nervous about geography when I said bordering state but (Laughter).

**Q. I think you got that one right.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I was a little concerned. East Stroudsburg psychology.

**Q. When we talked in June, you mentioned there was not anybody that had stood out enough yet to be named a captain at this point. Curious with the start of fall camp where you feel like the leadership of your team is at?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: We feel good about it. Typically for most of the people in the room that have been covering us for a while, we typically wait on that, again, unless there's just an obvious person that everybody has identified, players most importantly and staff, that you feel like going into the summer, this person has separated themselves, and everybody views them as such and you want to name them to have that leadership going into the summer.

There's also the aspect of holding it as long as possible and then there's multiple guys that are working their tails off to become leaders on our team. And the reality is, you know, when you're talking about a team of 125 or whatever the number may be, we're going to need more leadership than just the captains.

So I think we're in a good spot there. I see this team being more vocal. Myself and Chuck Losey and Coach Palko

spent a ton of time talking about this. I see these guys being more vocal in challenging their teammates. Holding their teammates accountable. I think those things have been pretty evident in the summer workouts and so far in camp.

So I think we are in a good place, but we're going to need it. We're going to need a ton of it. And we'll probably hear, probably in the next two weeks, we'll probably name captains. But then we are going to need more leadership than just those guys, too.

**Q. Just kind of a little housekeeping thing. Is Danny O'Brien still a GA? Obviously the rules change doesn't matter but is he still a ge?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: So if the rule changes don't matter, then why are you asking?

**Q. Because he's listed on the website. I'm genuinely curious if he still is or not.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Sometimes you ask me questions and I can't really answer them yet. You guys follow our websites much closer than I do.

But right now, he is a GA. But to your point, which I think is a fair one, there's really no difference any more with the rule change between a GA and an analyst. We had Danny -- that's one of the reasons why this worked out well, is we had a guy that still qualified to be a GA because the rules say you have to be within seven years of either graduating a school or playing.

So we felt like he had the experience and the knowledge to serve that role but still fell under the GA rules where if he was an analyst, he wouldn't be able to coach.

So it ended up working out really well but now with the rule change, it doesn't matter. So now it comes down to master's degree, do you want to get a Master's Degree, do you want that time during the season to take classes. But right now, he is currently a graduate assistant, and for a number of reasons, that's probably as far as I can go with answering this question at this time.

**Q. You have another kicking competition this year. Sander obviously won that competition last year and things happened against West Virginia. How do you see him coming into this year in that competition overall?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I probably shouldn't say this because this will skew the numbers.

First of all, I love the question on specialists. I was with the specialists just a minute ago. They have an over/under going, every year, based on how many of you will actually talk to them on Media Day. They have a ten push-up wager going on, I'm not going to tell you what the number is.

Back to your question. It's been really good. And I think the competition is really important. Having three guys there, two of which that have kicked in college games, I think is really important; a young exciting player that has really done a nice job in practice.

But as we all know, I don't care what position it is, sometimes there's a difference between practice and games. So the game reps carry a lot of weight for us. I think if it's close between two guys, at the end of training camp and we are talking about naming a starter, you probably give the edge to the guy that has game experience to go with someone that has no game experience, then the competition, the gap needs to be significant enough to make up for that.

But I just think the competition is important. I think sometimes at those positions, there's not the same level of competition. Maybe there is for the defensive end or the corner position, and we've tried to create that as much as we can.

Sander has grown a lot and learned from that experience.

In terms of just pure talent of kicking the ball, he's impressive. I mean, he's very, very impressive. So we'll see how this plays out. But the competition has been really good but I think the game experience could and will factor into the decision process.

Did I answer your question?

**Q. Yes, sir.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thanks, guys. Have a good one.

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