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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: So like always, appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football.

Couple things just to cover with you guys from really last week. You know, going back and watching the film was good. Was about what we anticipated in terms of how it felt during the game and then be able to watch tape and go through and grade it.

I think you guys already seen players of the game. One of the things I think was interesting is, if you do a statistical comparison between our West Virginia game last year and our West Virginia game this year, no one is really talking about our defense and our defense really played well.

If you look at last year, we gave up 15 points; this year we gave up 12. So we were better in that. Better in points per possession. We were better in explosive plays. We were better in in total yards allowed. We were better in rushing yards allowed. We were better in yards per carry. We were better in passing yards allowed, yards per attempt.

Third down efficiency was exactly the same, which was interesting. We were better in average third down yardage forced. We were better in takeaways. The only category we weren't better in was sacks. Three last year, two this year.

Red zone touchdown percentage, we were better. Time of possession, better. And QBR significantly better of the opposing quarterback.

So I think on a real positive note our defense played better, and then not only did they play better, they played better on the road without the home environment.

So those were positive.

Turnover battle you guys know we won. Explosive play battle we won. Third down battle we won. Sack battle we won. We got to clean up really drive start. When I say clean up drive start, I didn't feel like we kicked the ball as well as we're capable of kicking. That's kickoff, punts, field

goals, really all three phases. And then penalties. Just gave too many yards away trying to be aggressive. We got to eliminate those things.

So a lot of positives there.

Few more notes in terms of offensively, defensively, and special teams. Positives on offense, we were explosive and physical. We got to be better in ball security and some of the pre-snap things.

Defensively, we did a great job stopping the run. We limited explosive plays. I think we only had one. Sudden change response, that take away was huge. That was a huge play in the game.

And then zero points in the third quarter. I think you guys also know I think we have the longest streak in the country of not giving up a touchdown to start a game, so that's been a real positive for us.

Areas for growth, the penalties, just overall communication and substitutions. And then special teams, thought we played really physical. There is some really physical clips on tape from our special teams.

And then opportunities for growth, like I talked about, we've got kick the ball a little bit better. We did have a substitution error. Then we did have to burn three timeouts, one on offense, one on defense, one on special teams. Not looking to do that.

For this week and Bowling Green, Scot Loeffler, the head coach there, we know Scot pretty well. Been a guy that's been in this conference. Obviously played at Michigan. We know them very well. Frank Leonard and him were on staff together at Boston College.

So got a ton of respect to are him and his career and what he's been able to do.

You look at them offensively, it's essentially his offense. He calls the offense. Has done that for most of his career.

And they did a really good job and put up big numbers this past week. They're a run-first offense predominantly, but



do a good job at the quarterback position and taking shots where appropriate.

Been impressed with their tight end No. 0 Harold Fannin; running back, No. 4, Terion Stewart; and then their quarterback Connor Bezelak, who also has some history here in the Big10 as well.

Then defensively, Steve Morrison and Sammy Lawanson running the defense over there, from what we've seen on tape so far, they're going to create some challenges.

I would say looking at their team in general, they're a bigger, more physical team than what I anticipated. You look at them on film but also their numbers, they're a big, physical group. This is a team that's going to play combination and odd and even front.

They're primarily a middle of the field open defense, but will close it up and play some zone, cover three, and a decent amount of pressure as well.

Guys we been impressed with, corner back No. 1; defensive end No. 5; and then their linebacker No. 3. Very productive players.

And then on special teams, Alex Bayer does a nice job for them in coordinating their special teams. Right now their rankings and statistics are really good. Returned the opening kickoff of their game for a touchdown. Their kick returner No. 20 and their punter No. 41 are guys we been impressed with.

Still early in the week. Kind of figuring out who they are right now, putting the game plans together. Obviously we do not have practice today. It's a game planning day for us and the players are in the building watching film on their own.

Tuesday we'll have practice and then see you guys out there for a portion of practice.

No changes on the depth chart at this time. No changes to the red, yellow, or green list that you guys are aware of.

Open up to questions.

Q. James, Smith Vilbert is somebody who more or less missed two seasons. Just wondering, to see him have the impact he did Saturday, what was going through your mind? Also, what do you think kept him going to persevere through everything?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that the first thing I would say, I think you guys remember me talking about Smith as a guy

that no one is really talking about that I think is going to have a big year for us.

It's understandable, right? He missed essentially two years of football. You're talking about a guy who was a high level basketball player when we recruited him. He is 6'6", 280 pounds. He can run, he can bend, he's aggressive, and he's mature. You got a mature football player.

So I'm proud of him. He's also a guy that got his degree. He's done it right from that standpoint. I know he's extremely hungry this year with as much time as he's invested to really help this team as much as he possibly can to help the defense as much as he can, and also to have a big year for himself and his family.

So I think you guys are going to be continuing to talk about him a lot this year. I think there will be a lot of conversations about him on a national scale as well. Those guys are hard to find; guys that have a chance to be physical against the run and be disruptive as pass rushers.

His length is an issue for people. I'm really proud of him. I think he's going to have a big year and I'm glad you asked about him.

Q. You mentioned specifically a lot about the defense. How do you think Abdul Carter did in his first go-around playing mostly at defensive end?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think to your point, I think he predominantly played defensive end except with some of the third down packages where we just kind of move him around.

Yeah, I thought he played really well; was disruptive. We talk in our building about real football. Study more than just statistics. So there are times where he's taking on two blockers where a couple of them I think could have been called holding where he's splitting two blockers and they're unable to come off; either a linebacker or another defensive lineman gets the sack or tackle for loss.

Obviously some of the pre-snap and post-snap penalties we got to get cleaned up for sure. Overall, I thought his first game as a full-time defensive end was very disruptive and I think he's just going to get better each week.

You guys know there has been a bunch of buzz about him for his ability on the field, but I'm also really proud of his growth off the field. Had some conversations yesterday about the penalties, and just the way he approached it, his maturity, his ability to take some constructive criticism and be accountable for it was really, really impressive.

So I'm proud of him. I think he's going to have a big year for us and I think he's setting himself up for really bright things in his future as well.

Q. You kind of anticipated my question with your opening stuff about the defense. Thinking about last year as a barometer against West Virginia and what your defense became last year, why -- seems like maybe you're a little ahead of where you were last year based on that West Virginia barometer. Why do you think that is, if indeed that is?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, it's a small snapshot for all of us, offense, defense, and special teams. Got to say, okay, these are things we did well; these things we got to do better; and find a way to work on these things each week and refine and get better.

So I think your point is a fair one. It is a small amount of data. But it's a really good starting point. I think West Virginia's offense is going to give people problems. It gave us problems last year, specifically running the ball. We went into that game with a ton of respect for their O-line, ton of respect for their quarterback and the two running backs; we still feel that way.

So I think that's probably the biggest thing for me, is that's a team that prides themselves on running the ball, and they weren't able to be overly productive against us running the ball.

If you look at the quarterback's QBR last year compared to this year, it was a significant difference. So I think it's a really good starting point. It's a foundation to build on. We get to build on it and we got to get better.

Q. What was your assessment of Anthony Donkoh at right tackle?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we're real high on Anthony. He's such a conscientious young man. Extremely intelligent from a football IQ standpoint and also in the classroom. He's very, very athletic. You know, there is a lot of good signs about his habits early on as you guys have heard me talk about before he committed to us, before he became a national recruit, and I think we had six camps. He came up to every single camp with his mom and two brothers.

That's kind of the approach he's taken. He's got a workman-like approach and just continues to get better. Played really well in the bowl game which gave us some excitement about what his future could be.

Then we thought he went out and played really well in

week one. Can't have enough guys that are 6'5" plus and 330 pounds and can move like him. The consistency and the intelligence he has, he's another guy that I think is just going to get better and better as the year goes on.

We also plan on playing Rucci more and getting Rucci some opportunities as well. But Donkoh is playing really well in the two games that we been able to kind of watch and evaluate him.

It's also what we see in the weight room, summer workouts, winter workouts, and when we saw throughout training camp, too.

Q. I was wondering, Sander, looked like you showed confidence in him to take that shot. Would you have liked to have got him a closer field goal to get started with? Can you walk through that a little bit?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, the plan was there to either go for it on fourth down. If I remember correctly, it was third and ten or third and nine at the time, and we were planning on going for it and trying to get it to fourth and five or a shorter field goal.

I think we ran the ball in that situation. I think we ran an option play with Beau, and I don't think we gained a whole lot. Now you're stuck in a tough situation. Do you want to go for it on fourth and ten? Didn't feel like that was the right thing to do.

Take a shot at a field goal or sky punt. We had sky punted earlier in the game and kicked it into the end zone, which is the worst thing you can do on a sky punt situation. It's like if you do that, then you should have gone for it on a fourth down. Wanted to give him an opportunity to get a field goal and start on the right foot.

Not ideal probably all the way around, offense and special teams. So yeah, I think your question is a fair one. Yeah, ton of confidence in him based on what he did all training camp and spring ball. I know he'll make the next one.

Q. What was your assessment of Julian's play? I think you mentioned it with Abdul. Some people look at his stats sheet and think boy, there is no numbers there. Overall how do you think he played in that game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We thought he played really well. Couple times where we tried to get the ball to him, but, again, based on coverage just didn't play out that way.

We definitely want to get him more involved in this game early in the game, but I think the most important thing is the things that he could control, he controlled. He blocked

really well; ran really good routes.

If you go back and watch the play that we threw the touchdown, Beau threw the touchdown to Tyler Warren, that's because of Julian. Julian, basically it's almost like a three-vertical scheme where he has to get at that time backside hash, but before going to the backside hash he attacks the safety in the middle of the field and crosses his face, which occupies the safety and doesn't allow him to slide over and get into the window of where we threw the ball to Tyler Warren.

Here he is late in the game still running great routes to put us in a position to make big plays.

You could say the same thing for the ball we threw to Tre. He runs a corner routed, pulls a safety out of the window, allows Tre to get hit on the skinny post or seam or however you want to describe it for the touchdown. So the things that he could control played very, very well.

Again, just like we talked about earlier, those are the things we talk about in our building. Those are the things that for these guys' futures they watch. Obviously love stats to go with it. Those will come. We're confident in that.

I thought he played very well.

Q. Beau Pribula and his usage throughout the game, early, often. Curious how would you evaluate game went and what you ultimately would like to maximize from that situation moving forward?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's a real positive for us, because although Drew obviously is showing he can make plays with his feet, Beau has that ability maybe at a little bit different level and a little bit more of a playmaker.

So being able to get him on the field and really challenge the defense, and we have a ton of different ways we're going to be able to do that with both of them on the field or just Beau on the field, and ways that we can take advantage of it and just pure runs, pure passes; and then some of the things we can do with Beau in the game as a runner, Beau in the game as a receiver, Beau in the game in a lot of different ways.

Being able to each week add to that package so that the defense can't put you into a package when he comes on the field. If Drew is on the sideline and Beau comes in, they're able to do to a true Wildcat package. For us, just like we did last year, we want to try to build as much around this that they can't do that.

Even the throw late that we talked about to Tyler Warren,

that causes some issues if you want to put him into a Wildcat package mentality.

All of those things are important. Want to be able to use him throughout the game. I think I mentioned to you guys after the game that was the approach in the play to get started right away, get him involved as soon as possible, and felt good about the concept. Want to continue to do that.

Want to make sure, like I already mentioned, it's not the same things you're seeing out of him each week.

Q. We saw Kaden Saunders on punt returns but not on offense. How do you think the other receivers stepped up without him playing?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we weren't sure if he was going to be able to go. The plan was as long as the doctors and trainers and Kaden felt like we were going to go, we were only going to use him as a punt returner in the game.

On top of that, the way that West Virginia punted the ball end over end, more of a hang time type of team, we thought it was going to be mainly a fair catch game anyway, so felt like he was able to do that. We're hoping we'll have him back as not just a return man but also as a receiver this week as well.

And then I think your question about the other wide receivers. Again, I thought the group played well. We had some other bumps and bruises as well. I think we're through now. But we would like to get as many guys involved, because I think one of the things, when you talk about balance, you know, is not really the ability to be 50% -- 50% run, 50% pass in the game.

It's having the ability to run or pass in any given situation. Also like Michael Leach talked about, balance is also ball distribution. The defense isn't just concerned about one player they need to eliminate. They realize and see through form that those seven, eight guys that can get the ball and make plays, that's running backs, tight ends, that's receivers, and the ball can be distributed across the field making them defend all 53 and a third and all 120.

Q. I want to ask you about that connection between Drew and Tre. Obviously a big game from both of them. Curious your assessment of their chemistry together, and was there an opportunity for even more in that game that you saw that they could work on and kind of get on the same page, or were those situations different than that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I think just trying to be

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

careful that we don't jump to too many assumptions based on one game and a limited amount of data. What I would say is when you talk about missed opportunities, you guys probably saw the play-action pass we ran out I think it was, and Nick Singleton should have aborted his fake, because typically when you have play-action pass and your man comes you abort the fake and go pick him up right now.

You guys probably saw the play with Omari running wide down the middle of the field, that the pressure got us off of it. So talk about a missed opportunity. That was a missed opportunity there.

And things like that will get cleaned up. Drew and all the receivers and tight ends have worked really hard all summer, as well as Beau, to build that chemistry and that timing and that confidence that we're going to need. So we're going to build on it this week in practice, going to build on to this week in Beaver Stadium.

You know, being able to throw the ball at a high level to go along with our rushing attack is going to be really important to put us in the best position to be successful this week. But also moving forward throughout the rest of the season.

Q. How do you feel like Kaytron Allen did?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, you know, it's funny, because, again, stats can be deceiving, right? I think the biggest thing you're looking for is what do you do with the plays that you get and the production that you get.

The easy thing is to look at the stats column and say one guy averages seven yards a carry, another guy averages three yards a carry, or whatever it may be.

The more important thing is to look at the film. Nick happened to be in a couple plays where the play was blocked up and literally he didn't get touched for 45 yards.

Or the first opportunity for contact is in the backfield with a defensive back. The reality is the plays that you got as a running back, if the play was blocked up to gain three and you gain four, that's a positive run.

So just the way things played out, the way their defense defended some runs, Nick had the ability to create a few more explosive plays, but it wasn't anything from the standpoint the lack of something that Kaytron did.

It's just maximizing the runs you get. Going to be some games where Kaytron is in and they call a defensive alignment or movement that creates an opportunity that we're able to take advantage of, and Kaytron averages eight yards a carry and (indiscernible) averages two or

three yards, whatever it may be in the game.

That's just how football goes. We think we got two backs that are two of the better backs in the country, and we think we got a third one, a fourth one, and a fifth one that are developing and that we're excited about, too.

Q. Watching some of the film how would you overall evaluate Coach Kay's first game? Have you heard any early feedback maybe from players or coaching about what it's like to be in a game under his system?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it was good. It was good. I think he did a really good job. Obviously when you're able to do the things that we were able to do in this game on offense, in terms of running the ball, in terms of throwing the ball, in terms of explosive plays, it's definitely something to build on.

And then also the fact that we were able to create touchdowns and not turn the ball over. Touchdown to interception ratio, that continues to be a strength of ours. Drew has done a really good job of that last year and started out this year the right way.

Yeah, I think there is a ton of excitement. I think you guys have heard me say before it's been more balanced during all training camp. It was more balanced in the West Virginia game as well.

So, yeah, a lot of the excitement and a ton to build on. It's been fun working with all three of those guys.

Q. Kind of following up on that, Nick was able to rush for a touchdown, multiple touchdown catchers, passers. How hard does that make it for other teams to game plan for you guys?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that goes back to the comment I was making earlier about balance and when you're able to bring multiple quarterbacks in and create explosive plays and touchdowns and able to bring multiple running backs in and get them involved in not only the run game, but also the pass game and tight ends and wide receiver, I think we did a good job of that.

I think there is still a lot of room for growth there. Getting other guys touches and opportunities, I think that's really important. I think a big one we talked about is we got to be better on third down. Why that is so important is No. 1, so we don't get into a situation in the first half where our defense is on the field too long. You look at the play differential in the first half, not a positive for us.

So by being better on third down keeps our offense on the

field longer and does two very important things: keeps our defense off the field, but the other thing it does, creates more offensive plays. When you have more plays it creates other opportunities to get touches or for certain guys to get more touches.

So I think those things are real important. And then I think our defense plays a part in that as well. Being able to create some three-and-outs. Our offense staying on the field, defense getting off the field and creating more opportunities for touches and more opportunities for explosive plays and more opportunities for scoring points.

Q. We talked a lot in the off-season about the potential of the cornerback room. Without seeing it yet, what did Kimber and Harris do from the start and takeaways from the group as a whole?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think you're going to see a rotation there. We feel like we got six guys that all can play, and I think you'll see a little bit of a rotation. See how this week goes, but different guys starting based on how they practiced that week. A true competition based on weekly production and practice habits.

You know, I think Elliott is another great example. Played really well in special teams starting in four units and also got reps at corner and made a huge interception which was a big time play.

So I don't think -- I would be careful if I was you guys not just at corner but a lot of positions feeling like the guys that started in game one are going to be the exact starters in week two or throughout the year.

Q. How do you attack this week knowing that on the back end is a really early season bye week? How much do you want to see from your guys? How important is being back at home and being able to settle some of those things that might have been challenges on the road?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, this week doesn't really change. We'll stick to our normal routine. Obviously next week having two byes and how that factors in, we spent a ton of time this summer as well as last week talking to Andrew Nelson about that, talking to Tom Allen about that, talking to Justin Lustig about that, Andy Kotelnicki about that in terms of what did Kansas do during the bye week, what did Indiana do during the bye week, what did Vanderbilt do during the bye week, what are some of the NFL organization doing and other programs that we have connections, what do they do and any tweaks that we need to make to our process.

And then also, the fact, again, that we got two byes and how do we approach that. Won't really change anything for this week, but obviously next week all those things and all those decisions that we made we'll execute them.

I don't see a whole lot of changes because the feedback that we got from a lot of the places that we looked at are similar. But we try to do as much after-action review as we can. We just got -- I was talking to Andrew Nelson this morning about that, Nelly, about training camp. I want him to go back and revisit all of the training camp and any suggestions he would make and me and Ben Kerr documented them for next year and made the adjustments on next year's practice for training camps and things we think we can do a little bit better.

We'll do the same thing after this first bye week. We'll look at it now and say, okay, with the second bye week and later in the season and obvious wear and tear that's going to occur, how do we handle the second bye week different than the first bye week.

But I don't see a whole lot of changes this week in our approach.

Q. We saw a more demonstrative side out of Drew?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Demonstrative, I like that. Where did you go to college?

Q. I don't know if I should answer that.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I want to know. And the fact that you're nervous to answer it...

Q. University of Maryland. We over-lapped for a year in 2010.

JAMES FRANKLIN: 2010, nice. Demonstrative.

Q. We saw Drew with the official after the cadence. We saw him signalling first down.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Did you guys go back and watch that play on the TV copy.

Q. Yeah?

JAMES FRANKLIN: What did you think?

Q. You can hear some things.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm not talking about hearing things. You see the guy clapping. It was pretty obvious on TV. It was interesting.

I don't know if everybody saw that. I think a lot of people thought that's what they were reviewing. That's a nonreviewable play. There was some confusion about that as well.

Back to Maryland and your other questions.

Q. Drawing with West Virginia players, the defenders said this is a different side of Drew they haven't seen that much. What has it been like bringing that part out of him and what has gone into getting him to be this comfortable and kind of showing this side of him?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think part of it, too, right, it's year two for him as the starting quarterback, year three in the program. He shouldn't look the same, shouldn't behave the same. There should be growth. There should be more confidence, more swagger, because he's earned that, right?

Confidence is something you earn, it's not something that you give. It's something you've earned.

He's worked really hard. You see it in his play. That stiff arm was a credit to our strength and conditioning program and also a credit to Drew and the work he's put in.

And I also think for that to happen on our sideline and for our sideline to see that and see him make a play like that that he has not made in the past and to react the way he reacted was really pretty cool.

I think all the points you make are fair, but, again, I think some of that is Danny O'Brien, Andy Kotelnicki, our coaching about things that he did well last year and things he needs to do better this year.

I think it's also just part of his maturation process and his being comfortable with being the starting quarterback at Penn State and everything that comes with it.

But I think the word you used was a really good word to describe it. I don't know if I necessarily would've said that I knew that was coming, but I sure was glad it happened.

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