

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. I mean that. I don't just say that. I do mean that. We appreciate it.

I did want to follow back up with you guys on Cam Wallace. It'll be a long-term injury, so he will be out. I kind of want to talk about this process a little bit.

You know, I try to be very, very respectful of the student-athletes. You know, and specifically their health. And sometimes you guys ask me, to be honest with you, I almost didn't have the answer today.

It was going to have to wait until Tuesday. Sometimes as you can imagine, if it's a long-term injury and they're going to be out, it's a significant injury.

I don't want my first conversation to be can I talk to the media? You know, I would like to kind of support the kid for at least 24 to 48 hours and sometimes 72 hours.

I don't want my first conversation to be about answering media's questions. So I get that you guys need the information and you want the information, but that is why.

Does that make sense? That's why I'm not answering it right away. I want to be respectful of the kid and have a conversation with the kid, and I also don't want that to be the first conversation I have with the kid, is about talking to the media? Does that make sense, everybody?

So that answers that question for you guys.

We expect to have DeLuca, Wormley, and Kimber back. I don't have a lot more information than that right now. Obviously the game was Saturday. Sunday is a jog-through. Monday is the off day.

So we expect those guys back, but I don't have that information for you right now either.

Talking about the game, you know, just kind of recapping some things, we won most of the critical stats. The



turnover battle, explosive play battle, third down battle, sack battle, the drive start battle. So we were able to win those.

Penalties, after the game actually thought we had won that statistic because we had less penalties, but we had more penalty yards, so we really did not.

Then I think you guys saw we started to announce the players of the game, so you guys have already seen that.

One of the things I talked to the team about is the importance of us taking a significant step this week and not having to be one of those teams you see all over the country that have to have a setback first before they make a wake-up call and take a significant step.

So we need to do that this week. Very, very important for us. You know, obviously getting into UCLA, one of the things that was interesting that I was unaware of when you kind of first start doing your homework on this opponent, is in our last five matchups against UCLA, we're 1-4. I did not expect that.

Coach Foster, obviously got a lot of history at UCLA. Although he's a first-year head coach he has a ton of history there obviously. You know, a team that is still kind of trying to kind of find their way.

Offensively, defensively, and special teams you see them do some really nice things at times. Played really, really well against Hawai'i. Did some things against Indiana, LSU, and Oregon that were impressive at times.

But obviously it is going to be a challenge for us with them coming into our place. Also them dealing with travel. Just like we're going to be dealing within the future. That will factor in as well.

You know, I've known Eric Bieniemy professionally for a long time. As the offensive coordinator he's got as good of a resume as there is. You know, 23 years of experience, first year as offensive coordinator at UCLA. They do a ton of really good things. Creative. You're going to see 11 personnel, going to see 12 personnel, going to see 21 personnel, 22 personnel, all of it. Very pro style in kind of



how they operate.

The quarterback, who's a Washington transfer, been impressed with him, Ethan Garbers. The running back is another big back, 220 pounds, 6'2", No. 25 TJ Harden. Been impressed with him. And wide receiver transfer from Notre Dame, No. 1, Rico Flores. All these of those guys have flashed on tape up to this point.

And then their defense and defensive coordinator, Ikaika Mallow. I've also known Ikaika for a decent amount of time. 24 years of doing this. Defensive coordinator last year, Penn State grad, and went to USC who we know well.

Ikaika was promoted from within, I think in large part not only because of his background and experience, but also because they want to keep the system similar and they had had a ton of success.

Guys that we been impressed with is number 49, Carson Schwesinger; No. 7, KJ Wallace, a Georgia Tech transfer; linebacker No. 20, Kain Madrano; and then defensive tackle, No. 93, who's a USC transfer, Jay Toia; defensive end No. 44, Devin Aupui, Notre Dame transfer and been impressed him as well.

They're a good looking team physically on the hoof.

Then on special teams, Kodi Whitfield is their special teams coordinator. His first year in this role. We have been impressed with their kicker, Mateen Bhaghani. He's made eight of nine field goals with a long of 54, so obviously they got tremendous range in that area.

And then just to kind of give you guys some updates, red, yellow, green, nothing has really changed at this point. Luke Reynolds is a go, green. Cooper Cousins is a go, green. And Dejuan is a go, green.

The rest of these guys are kind of transitioning from yellow to green, possibly, depending on how the season goes.

Open up to questions.

**Q. James, good afternoon.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey, Mike, how are you?

**Q. Talking about the officials Saturday, you said I just want to feel like it's being called both ways, which that sounds -- that's a little bit beyond I disagree with his call. So has there been any communication with the conference?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Say that again. Say your question and statement you made.

**Q. I'm sorry. Okay. Postgame Saturday night, you said I just want to feel like it's being called both ways, which seems to go beyond saying I disagree with his call. So has there been any communication with the conference about the officiating? If there hasn't, do you think there should be?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I don't know if I would characterize it the way you just characterized it. Yeah, I wouldn't connect the dots the way you just did. There is always communication with the conference. We turn in the plays we disagree with; they respond back to us. We turn in plays before our next game, things that we're seeing on film that we're concerned with.

So there is constant communication. We got to do a better job of being more disciplined and handle the things that we need to handle, first of all, priority No. 1 is us. Been that way my whole career, and specifically here at Penn State. So I want to be very, very clear on that.

Yeah, the way you're characterizing the statement I made, I wouldn't characterize it that way.

**Q. Before I ask my question, can you go over what you said before you started talking about UCLA? We didn't hear it.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, is so obviously our system is a mess. What didn't you hear? Oh, okay. So the injury stuff that I talked about, was that what you didn't hear, Rich?

**Q. I didn't hear anything, yeah.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Sorry, Rich. So Cam Wallace is out; got a long-term injury. What I was talking about with the people in the room is I want you guys to kind of understand that process a little bit.

I always want to be respectful of the young men and their injury and make sure that them and their family are comfortable with me talking about that. But the other thing is because typically it's the more significant injuries, right?

I don't really want my first conversation with the kid to be, hey, can I talk to the media? I would like to show him and demonstrate my concern is for him and make sure he's okay, give it a day or two before I have a conversation about addressing the media. Sometimes you guys ask and I get that you have to ask.

But that's why I'm waiting, is I don't want my first

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

conversation to be about addressing and answering your guys' questions. That's what I was talking about.

Then I think I said DeLuca, Wormley and Kimber, we anticipating those guys being back. Again, it's hard for me to say on ooh Monday press conference when today is the off day and yesterday was a walk-through. You still got to kind of see them on Tuesday and Wednesday.

But we're anticipating those guys being back.

**Q. Okay. How would you say the offensive line has played...**

JAMES FRANKLIN: You broke up again.

**Q. How would you say your offensive line played to this point?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Just so you know, talking slower doesn't help with the breaking up. Yeah. (Smiling.)

It's like people saying I don't understand English so you talk louder or slower.

So I think, again, all things considered, right, the fact that we had three guys that are playing in the NFL right now off last year's team, I think very well.

I think that's a credit to Coach Troutline and Frank Leonard, and Bill Queisert. Those guys have done a really good job, as well as the players.

I think Nick Dawkins is a big storyline there as well. Guy that's been waiting for his opportunity and his time, and we had high expectations for him. I actually think he's probably playing better than we anticipated.

Not only physically but mentally in terms of calls and leadership. He's been really good.

So I think you look last week, I got a ton of respect for Illinois and Bret Bielema what he has been able to do throughout his career. It's been built based on fronts. Front seven on defense and O-line and tight ends and running game.

That running back, I don't know if you guys got a chance to see him close up, he was a specimen. 250 pounds and I thought we played very well up front against a team that is built to win games in the Big10 on their front.

You know, it's one thing -- like our defense, it's one thing to hold a team to whatever it was, 60 yards or whatever it was.

**Q. 39...**

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, rushing. How many yards did they have rushing?

**Q. 36.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, 36 yards rushing. It's one thing to hold a team to 36 yards rushing. It's another thing to do it against a team that's committed to running the ball.

Same thing with their front seven. They were committed to not giving up explosive plays so they played more cover three and less man than we expected.

And with that cover three, it allows to you get another safety in the box so they were committed to stopping the run and not giving up explosive plays. That was the game plan from my perspective.

And we were able to run the ball and do it in a very physical way. Not only the O-line to answer your question, but also the running backs.

There was some punishing runs that Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen and Tyler Warren as well. There was some physical runs.

I've been pleased with that group.

**Q. How has Kaytron Allen specifically progressed as a player and person in your program since his freshman year?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm really proud of Kaytron in so many different ways. To be honest with you, Kaytron has always -- you know, really just kind of maybe some bad luck, but historically with his time here he's always had some lingering injury in the off-season that I think has hurt some of his development.

He's one of the more natural football players that we got. Was really that way when he showed up on campus. Don't get me wrong. Has worked very hard at his development. Just missed a lot of time in the off-season.

So to see him playing the way he's playing right now is awesome. Also to see him and Nick, they're both fairly quiet guys, very different kind of personalities. Both quiet, and to show them showing emotion and having fun and being supportive of each other as well as the O-line, I thought that play that Kaytron scored on and he does the whole deal where he's kicking down the door and the whole offense did that with him. I thought that was a very

telling of how connected our offense is and how connected our team is.

But I'm proud of him. He's doing really, really well. I was at IMG a few weeks ago bragging on him to everybody how well he's doing. Doing really well in school. He's a great teammate. He's beloved by his teammates. He's playing really well. Very, very productive.

I'm proud of him. He's really growing up. I think we have challenged him there as well in terms of his leadership, how communicative he is. He's really growing in all areas and I'm very proud of him. I was back there at IMG telling everybody on this campus how proud they should be of him as well.

**Q. Could you please evaluate your punt return situation and production there so far? Who is Kaden's maybe toughest challenge at this point?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so Kaden suffered an injury during training camp. That's why you guys see he hasn't been playing much wide receiver, and we had anticipated him having a pretty big role for us on offense.

So he had an injury, and early on we weren't sure if he was going to be able to go, and then he got cleared and it was him getting confident back to being out there.

Really the plan for the first couple games was to just have him catch the ball. We had a ton of confidence that he would catch the ball and predominantly fair catch the ball.

While he was injured, we had a ton of different guys back there to catch the ball, decision making, when to fair catch it, when not to, backed up punt, when you're going to let it go into the end zone, when you're going to catch it, being able to advance it.

Some really good athletes, but that is a unique job. That's a unique skillset. I think you also saw we used Jake Spencer, another guy that's caught punts in college games before. Obviously put him in on this one and the ball got to the ground. You know, that obviously created some challenges for us.

So we've had a bunch of competition for somebody else while Kaden was getting healthy. No one really took the job. So we were still kind of at a point where having Kaden for the most part catching fair catch.

Zion Tracy is a guy that we think is close. As you guys know, he's got a background from high school, not only a returner but also a wide receiver. And we were hoping that he would be the guy during that time and just hadn't

happened during practice. Right now, Zion is doing some really good things on defense and special teams and gaining a ton of confidence.

So we'll see how this goes this week.

But that's why you're seeing what you're seeing. Kaden had an injury during training camp that limited what he could do as a receiver as well as a return man.

**Q. Kobe told us that Dan Connor is now the guy in his ear in the helmet communication. What makes Dan the right guy for that? Take us through what you see his trajectory as a coach is.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think Dan has got a very, very bright future. You know, Dan is a unique guy. He really is. He doesn't say a whole lot but when he speaks everybody listens. Has got great perspective on college football, great perspective on the state of Pennsylvania, he's got great perspective on the NFL and what it takes to be successful at that level.

Obviously he's got unique Penn State experience. So he's been a really good hire and extremely valuable. And you're talking about a guy that's been a defensive coordinator in college before and there is value in that I think.

But I think the headset, as you guys have heard me talk about, that's taken some time to kind of work through the kinks and what's best for Penn State.

So last two games Tom has gone up into the booth and that's been a positive, but on top of that, in terms of like we talked about the best place to call a game and that role and that job description, that was just another thing that Tom didn't want to necessarily manage.

So Dan was an option to talk to the linebackers. He dealt with it in the NFL. What he liked in terms of communication in the NFL. What you find is sometimes coaches can give you too much information.

So tell them just what they need to hear. The defensive call. Maybe a few more things. Not a whole lot more than that.

That's what our linebackers wanted. That's what Dan was comfortable doing. And Tom, just allows him to just call the game and not have to worry about also communicating with the linebacker on the field as well.

So we've done that the last two weeks. I think that's been good for us. I think that's been good for our defense.



Been good for Kobe. Been good for Dan and Tom.

As we've been working through this technology piece, we've had some of that on offense we had to work through and some of that on defense. I think we're getting to a good spot now and what's the best way for Penn State to do it.

Going to be different at ever school and place based on the personalities and team.

**Q. Curious how you would describe what you saw from Abdul Carter on Saturday night. Nine months of collaboration, how do you feel like you're positioned to maximize his skillset the remainder of the season?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: The good thing is it's just going to get better. The transition from linebacker to defensive end is a significant one. He's done some really good things already, but as he gets more comfortable there, and then like you saw last week, we started to put more on his plate where we're doing different things, whether it's just one time lining him up on the left another time on the right at defensive end. Just that alone so they can't game plan him and know where exactly he's going to be.

Or whether it's having him spy the quarterback and add-on in the blitz. Whether it's lining him up over the center or guard and trying to get him matched up on linebackers -- excuse me, getting matched up on running backs, which is what the offense doesn't want to happen.

As this goes on, as he continues to get more comfortable playing defensive end, but then as the coaches find more and more creative ways to use him, I think that's the exciting part. That's the fun part. I think just going to see him become more and more impactful each week.

**Q. Given some of the struggles in the kicking game in game, how does that impact your offensive aggressiveness and decision making? Are those decisions solely yours, or something you and Andy talk about when it comes to fourth downs and how you're calling third downs?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so those things we typically discuss during the week. We have an overall philosophy and get together as coordinators on Monday and kind of talk through these things, how we want to play this opponent. Like I guess for example, last week early in the game, fourth and one, it was obvious that the stadium wanted us to go for it.

I would say in a lot of games, I probably would've. But when you're playing a team like Illinois and Bret Bielema

where they are a field position team, all about field position with them, all about playing great defense, all about playing great special teams, very like Iowa, you would play Iowa the same way.

You want to force them to go the long field. You feel like defensively even with a punt you feel like defensively you should still be able to get the ball back in really good field position.

But it's going to be a field position type game, so that's really what predicated that decision.

In terms of going for it on fourth down on offense, I always want Andy to have his call ready after third down or excuse me, once he's made the third down call, I want him to get in his fourth down you have down call.

I've already told him on first down what is a go. So we can handle our sequencing in terms of how we call the offense. They I will click over to Tom on the defense like I've always done, and say, hey, what are your thoughts here? Thinking about going for it here. What are your thoughts?

Because the result of that play, the defense is going to have to deal with. Always like to get their feedback. Did that with Manny and Brent as well. Ultimately going to be my call.

**Q. You said in your opening statement I think you said we can't wait to take a significant step. I hope I didn't misquote you there. What did you mean by that and what did you not see on Saturday that you want to going into that game?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess what I'm saying is we got to get better each week. Like individually and collectively we have to get better. No doubt about that.

What I'm saying is I don't want to be one of those teams that waits until you have a loss for the wake-up call to happen and now you start doing all the little extra things and getting things corrected.

Obvious one we haven't got corrected is penalties. That's just making things harder than it needs to be on offense. It's making things harder than it needs to be on defense.

We have been a disciplined team, so we need to get that fixed. That's probably -- I was talking about in general, but when you're talking about specifics, that was my message to the team. You take the penalties out of that game, the ones that we can control, then that game will probably wasn't as hard as it needed to be.

And like what happened in the second half, the game and the score gets out of whack and you force them out of their traditional game plan. That game was going exactly how they wanted it to go for a long time.

Then what happened, is we were able to get a more significant lead. Now they have to play a style of play they don't want to play. Then all the sacks come.

If that doesn't happen we don't get the stacks and you guys are asking me after the game we haven't got pressure only the quarterback. It's because the style of game and how the game was going. It's those things I'm talking about.

In general we got to get better. We shouldn't have to have a setback. We got to just make sure we're in the getting complacent and get better every week individually and collectively.

Also the areas that are obvious we need to get cleaned up, like penalties. We can't just keep talking about it. You guys don't want to hear it, the fans don't want to hear me keep talking about it. We want it fixed.

And ultimately, as coaches, we got to make sure that happens. Also the players have to make sure that that happens.

**Q. When you kind of look at your kicking situation where you guys are, I guess how will you go through that this week and what maybe are you seeing in practice? Is it different in practice than in games with those guys?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes. Yeah, it's different. I mean, first of all, we're talking about kicking. It's not kicking because we been punting fairly well, particular I can I have kicking off fairly well.

It's field goals. But the question was are we kicking better in practice than we were in the game. Yeah, I mean, obviously we decide who the starter is at every position based on practice.

So, yeah, Sander had won the job. Won it during training camp. Won the job this season. All the data and the statistics back that up.

You know, during the spring it was a closer battle. Then Sander slowly but surely took the lead. But it was close. It was close.

But I think everybody felt comfortable that that was the right decision.

So we'll factor all of that in this week in making the decision. It will be a competition. Won't just be a competition just based on just practice data alone. You have to factor in the game data as well.

But we'll go from there. Yeah, obviously he was the starting kicker for a reason, and up to this point, or at least before that, most the data we had was practice data.

**Q. Wondering with UCLA, USC, between you and your staff, how much intel with colleagues that you typically gather, and the enact that they're on the west coast, how much of that has maybe changed or challenged between you and your assistants that wouldn't maybe have as many relationships out there as you have in the east?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I don't know about that. I think our approach when it comes to scouting our opponents is the same. Just like in your guy's profession, our profession is the same way. It's a small world. You got a lot of contacts and connections of where you're trying to get information from.

But ultimately, it's really about the film, right? It's getting the film, getting it broken down. It's running all the data to find out what the tendencies are.

And then building your game plan from there. That's really the majority of what we do. The stuff I would say that you're asking is really more about -- that I think to answer your question is significant -- is talking to buddies and friends that have done the cross country travel.

You do all this planning. Okay, what did you learn? Okay, you actually did it. What did you learn and what would you do differently next time. Asking a ton of those questions. We did a lot of the it ahead of time with NFL teams and other college teams that have done that type of travel.

But then also this year being able to talk to other teams and letting our ops people talk to other ops people, talking to head coaches that are friends and saying, hey, what did you learn from it after doing it now for the first time in Big10 play.

That's where I think things are maybe different. Game planing and scouting doesn't change a whole lot based on those opponents.

**Q. Did you guys figure out when you're leaving next week?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, Thursday.

**Q. We saw DaKaari get the start linebacker on Saturday night and played a significant number of snaps. How would you evaluate that game and development going from safety to linebacker at this point?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, just proud of him. You know, the light has really gone on for him and that happens for players at different points in their career.

Started like most of them on special teams. He was having success on special teams. That success has bled into defense and he's having success there.

The transition from safety to linebacker is something that he's embraced and trusted us on. I think he's having a lot of fun right now playing football and having success. He's been acknowledged publically multiple times in front of his peers about how well he's doing and how proud of him we are.

That's not an easy transition. Just like we talk about Abdul going from linebacker to DN. That's a very different world. It's obvious this is the right position for him and he's doing some really good things.

Very, very proud of him. Exciting thing is, again, this is really his first time doing it so he's just going to get better as he gains experience and knowledge.

But we're excited about him at that position and on special teams. Really doing some nice things for us. With Dom being out last week he had to. Hopefully having Dom back this week creates some flexibility and hopefully a really good rotation with some of those guys.

**Q. You said on Saturday was really interesting about the team discipline and meetings and notes. Kind of a two-part one. I'm sure you shared that with the guys. Is it going too far to tie that years ago after the Ohio State loss you also made mention of something like that? How do those things transfer and translate for you?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think they always translate. I don't know about the reference you made there, but I think the point I feel very strongly about it. Talked about it with the staff. Talked about it with our team, is discipline that shows up on game day is tied to discipline that shows up in practice, that is tied to discipline with going to practice and not showing -- excuse me, going to class and not showing up on lists and being on time. Sitting in the front row and taking notes. Study hall and meals and just all of the responsibilities that they have on their plate. Discipline in those areas translates to the field.

Coaches have been talking about those things forever. I think there is a correlation. There always has been. So we need to get those things buttoned up. Always. It's always a challenge when you got 120 18- to 22-year-old males still figuring out the college experience is addict for normal students, let alone student-athletes trying to balance both things.

Yeah, that's something I've always believed and always approached. That's not just this year. That's been every year that is a challenge to get 18- and 22-year-old males to consistently do what they're supposed to do and how they're supposed to do it. Those things do translate it the field.

I believe that wholeheartedly.

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