

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Head Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then open it up for questions.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, appreciate you coming out and covering Penn State football. A couple of things obviously from last week. We already went over the UCLA important statistics that we talk about each week, so those have been covered. You guys saw online I think the players of the game and things like that.

The one thing I will say kind of going back and watching that game and also during the game I think they found a quarterback. I think that quarterback was really impressive for his first start as a freshman. He's a big kid. He's athletic. I thought he was poised. I thought he was very poised. I thought he managed the game well. I thought they called the game well for a first-time starting quarterback as well. That's probably the biggest thing that stood out to me, and the rest of the things have already been covered.

I'll move on to USC, USC and Lincoln Riley. Obviously Lincoln has a history of doing some really, really good things across his career both at USC and Oklahoma. Obviously USC speaks for itself. It's a program with tremendous tradition and history, and we're looking forward to this opportunity and the venue. So should be a great opportunity for us.

When you talk about breaking down into the specifics, their offensive coordinator is Josh Henson, but the way I understand it, Lincoln Riley calls the plays. It's been that way for a long time with Lincoln.

But Josh, I've known Josh for a long time as well. Got a ton of respect for what they do offensively. They've been able to score points and put up yards for a long time in a lot of different places against a bunch of different teams.

So it will be challenging, and it's always challenging when they've got a quarterback, and they do in Miller Moss, who has done some really good things in his time at USC, back to the bowl game last year. His completion percentage,

touchdown interception ratio, all those things, are really good.

Running back Woody Marks has been impressive on film. Just literally got done watching again the Minnesota game before coming over here, and really did some nice things with their tackle wrap play. Did some really nice things in that game.

Then Zachariah Branch is a threat. Not only on offense as a receiver, but also in the return game. We'll talk about him more later. Then also, No. 8 Ja'Kobi Lane. Those guys are the guys that stood out to us the most.

Defensively D'Anton Lynn, who we know very well, is a Penn State grad that they hired from UCLA. Came across town to them. Had a top-15 defense last year at UCLA and has done a really good job already at his time at USC changing that defensive scheme and changing that defensive identity.

So this will be a challenge. The guys that jump out to us is defensive end No. 6, Anthony Lucas, a transfer from Texas A&M; linebacker No. 4, Easton Mascarenas-Arnold, an Oregon State transfer; linebacker No. 18, Eric Gentry, who we know very well, Arizona State transfer; and then safety No. 7 Kamari Ramsey, a UCLA transfer. So a bunch of transfers on the defensive side of the ball that have stood out to us.

Then on special teams Ryan Dougherty is a special teams coordinator, and this is I think a major emphasis in this game is their punter No. 16, Eddie Czaplicki. Then also obviously their kick returner/punt returner, Zachariah Branch. He has had a very explosive career last year and this year as a punt returner/kick returner, so he has our attention for sure.

That's pretty much the synopsis. I look forward to answering your questions. Open it up to questions.

**Q. Are you getting closer or are you close to where you want to be as an offense, and do you feel like you've been getting the ball in the hands of your best players as we heard so much in the offseason?**

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JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I don't know if we'll ever be where we want to be on offense and defense. As you know coming in here, there's always going to be areas that we're going to be looking at and trying to get better at and being critiqued. I get that. I totally get that. That's always going to be the case, right?

But, yeah, I think we are doing a good job of getting the ball in our playmakers' hands. Specifically the guys that have been proven commodities already here at Penn State. I still think there's some guys specifically at the wide receiver position that we have to continue to get the ball in their hands to develop that aspect of our offense.

The thing that I do think is a positive is there's been a game where Omari has made some really big plays. There's been games where Trey has made some really big plays and been very productive. Then obviously Liam this past week and Julian has flashed.

I think that's helpful. We would like it to be a little bit more consistent, but I think it's helpful that when you watch our tape or when you study us, all those guys have made plays at times, and that's concerning that it's not just one guy that if you stop this guy, you're going to stop their offense.

Obviously our running backs and our tight ends have been doing it now for a while. Our wide receivers I really feel like they are developing and have really had a nice year so far. I think as you guys know better than me, that was a big question mark going into the season, and a lot of discussion.

I think if somebody would tell you before the season kind of where we were at the wide receiver position currently and you knew that before the season, people I think would be overall pleased but not satisfied. We still want to do develop that area, and I think we're going to need to develop that area as the season goes on.

**Q. Your offensive line, can you talk about the physicality of it? How much of a difference do you see in terms of that with your line as far as that mindset, the mentality, the way they're going about blocking? Is it much a difference to you from, say, last year, years past? Could you talk about that a little bit?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I think we're more physical as an offense right now. That starts up front. Always will. When I say up front, that's the O-line and tight ends.

I think if you look at Tyler Warren's blocking, physical. Khalil Dinkins had a couple of really physical blocks on Saturday. The O-line. Obviously Vega got everybody excited with some of the things that he was doing. It wasn't

just the motion stuff. He did some other things as well.

But it's also you watch our guys on the sideline. There's been some significant runs on our sideline punishing people that has gotten our sideline to erupt. There's also been intimidating runs on the opponent's sidelines finishing runs and not just running out of bounds.

I think we're more physical. I think it starts up front is your point, and I think we are more physical than we've been in the past. It's something we've worked really hard at promoting. I think the guys are having fun with it right now, and it's growing.

I think we're starting to build a reputation of being a physical team, which is something we take a lot of pride in.

**Q. What will you need to see from Nick Singleton this week to make sure he can play Saturday?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I thought he was going last Saturday. He didn't practice Tuesday, as you guys know, because I think you are out there on Tuesdays. I'm sorry. Wednesdays. Didn't practice Tuesday. Didn't practice Wednesday, when you guys were out there, and then was able to go limited on Thursday and was able to go limited on Friday which, as you guy know, is not a whole lot. The trainers take those guys and work them out on their own, so that's part of the evaluation.

And then Saturday I wouldn't say he was 100%, but again, we thought he was going to go. So I guess my point is he was very close to going last week. So as long as we don't have any setbacks this week, I would anticipate him going, and I also would anticipate him practicing Tuesday and Wednesday, but we'll see how this whole thing plays out.

But, yeah, we're very confident and I think Nick is very confident talking to him on Sunday that he will be ready to go.

**Q. When we look at those availability reports every week from the Big Ten, you've had -- every week you've had 14, 15 names on it. It seems like more than any other team in the conference. How beat up is your team compared to other teams you've coached, and what kind of challenges does that pose other than the obvious? You know, it's better to have Nick Singleton rather than not have him. In terms of player development, in terms of ability to run practices, what are the challenges that poses for you?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess the first thing I would ask, Mike, is you made that statement about our team compared to others. Have you looked at that, or are you

just saying that?

**Q. I've looked at that, yeah.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Because I have not, so I'm going to check that out myself. But, yeah, I think I've mentioned to you guys in here that I think we've had more season-ending injuries this year than in years past. Obviously that's not ideal, and that's where the development of the other guys in the depth is always important, but even more important this year.

A lot of those have been noncontact, just ones that guys just running without a hit or rolled up on. Just happened. So we spent some time kind of looking at that as a staff and studying that to make sure that we weren't missing anything.

Yeah, obviously you would prefer to be as healthy as you could be. I wouldn't say we're that. As you guys know, I don't talk a whole lot about injuries on the front end, so it's hard to use them on the back end. Next-man-up mentality and keep plugging along and finding ways to develop and create depth.

I think Dede Lane is a good example of that. He is a getting better each week. We're going to have to continue to do that at safety as well as other positions too, but I think there's been some benefits.

Quinton getting in this past week and doing some good things and the reps that he got. The challenge is how do we balance it, right? It's easy just to say, Play them, but I also want to make sure that we don't look back and the kids don't look back at the end of the year and feel like, I wish I would have redshirted. With the new rules it allows you to be strategic and try to hold those guys as long as you can until you can't anymore. So that's what we're trying to do.

**Q. Obviously we saw what Abdul Carter did against Illinois. I thought Dani was a handful against UCLA, and then Zane Durant has been a handful on the inside all season long. How would you assess the pass rush both on the interior and on the edges so far this season, but more specifically Big Ten play?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I've been impressed with those guys across the board. I think your point is a good one in terms of Zane. I think we've gotten used to around here defensive ends being disruptive. I don't know the last time we've had a defensive tackle as disruptive as Zane, and now that makes it challenging, right? You've got a guy inside that you're watching on tape, and it's a concern. Now you've got D-ends on either side that can be

problematic. Where are you going to pick your poison?

You can't double them all, and if you do, then your back is not getting out or your running back -- excuse me -- or your tight end is not getting out. We do some chipping as well and things like that, but a lot of times when you keep guys in, people are going to add on. So that's not really always the solution. You want to try to get five guys out whenever you possibly can.

I do think Zane changes things for us and changes things for our opponents and makes it more difficult. I also think the depth that we have at D-tackle and the size that we have at D-tackle has been helpful. Not only for the unit and for the productivity, but also to keep Zane fresh as well.

Deon is doing a really nice job, him and Torrence. I think that position has done a really nice job, and I think Zane has been a guy that I think is becoming more and more of a leader on our team and specifically on our defense.

**Q. I was wondering what you're doing to try to get off to better starts offensively. I'm presuming you guys script the first couple of series, but I'm just asking if you are doing that or just what steps you're trying to take to improve that area?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, sir. We do script opening drives. I think most people in the country do that. You don't always stick to the script, but yeah, I think making sure that we get some early throws, high percentage throws, getting the ball into our playmakers' hands, all those types of things, being able to run the ball and get ahead of the sticks.

All those things are really important, and we spend a ton of time talking about it as a staff. Also that's part of your walk-throughs and things like that at the hotel as well as during the week.

So, yeah, we are investing a lot of time in it, and we understand how important it is. There's nothing that we want more really on all three phases. We've done it some games on offense. We've done it some games on defense. We've done it some games on special teams. It sure would be beneficial for us to do it in all three phases, which I don't think we've done it in all three phases yet this year.

**Q. What's the rationale for leaving on Thursday, and will you guys go from here or Harrisburg?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: So the second part of your question is a big part of us leaving on Thursday is we cannot fly out of

State College. That was a big part of our discussions with the Big Ten when all this thing got started.

Not only are we one of the most northeast schools, but based on runway length, size of plane, weight of plane, fuel on plane, we can't get out of here unless we would stop for fuel. So with that, we've got to fly out of Harrisburg.

To me that's one of the things I think we have to discuss is increasing the size of the runway here and the size of the airport, for a lot of reasons... for the university, for the community, for businesses, for the athletic department, and for us now that we've decided to make this move as a Big Ten. To me that's something that we need to do for a lot of different reasons.

That's a big part of it is you're talking about adding another two hours to your trip on top of the flight, and I think the flight is already five and a half hours or whatever it may be. That's pretty much a full day. So that's one of the big reasons for leaving Thursday.

Feel good about our plan, but that's a big reason why, and that's something that I think we're going to need to look at addressing moving forward because it does change things for us compared to a lot of other teams in our conference that either even if they are northeast, they have an international airport and things like that within a short distance from campus. Kind of got the double whammy. It's the distance as well as the airport.

**Q. We've seen you guys deal with some absences at linebacker for various reasons. How would you evaluate how that group has played this year, and do you think it's a position to be ready to deal with some of what USC does offensively?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think to your point considering all the moving parts, and we've had a lot at that position, I've been pretty pleased with it overall. I think when you talk about DaKaari, the whole story with DaKaari, I think he's probably playing better and gaining more confidence than probably anybody anticipated coming into the season based on he wasn't even a linebacker at that stage and is playing and playing well.

Elsdon has obviously played a ton of football around here. DeLuca has played a ton of football around here. Having him back is helpful.

Then also, as you guys know, Dede Lane coming on at safety now also allows us hopefully to get Jay Reed back playing the Lion position, and I thought in the beginning of the season he was playing really, really well there.

The depth at safety impacts the depth at linebacker ask vice versa.

**Q. You had four games at home, five-week homestretch. Really successful here. How well does that set you up to go on the road and go to California and execute?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, I think opening the season in West Virginia, which has a lot of similarities to California, right, I do think that helps. That was a tough environment to play in. Opened the season that way. I think if you hadn't had one of those types of games, you would be more concerned.

I think as a team we know kind of our identity now. We're in a much different place at this point. We know who we are. They know who they are.

The other thing is we've got enough film that you're not guesstimating who they're going to be. There's enough film evidence to come up with a real game plan on offense, defense, and special teams. I think all those things help.

But, you know, as we all know, going on the road in general and going on the road in this conference is challenging. So we're going to pay them and the situation the respect that it deserves, and we're going to prepare that way.

**Q. You mentioned D'Anton Lynn in the opening statement. I wonder is there any connection between you guys other than him being here? Do you know him professionally well or at all or anything like that?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, I don't know him very well, but I think you guys know, I've said this before, guys from Pennsylvania, guys that are Penn State grads, I track. Obviously the success that he had last year, obviously he's a guy that we had on our radar and have on our radar.

I want to make sure I know where all the Penn State grads in the NFL and in college football are coaching as well as Pennsylvania grads. I just think -- excuse me. Pennsylvania people that were born and raised in this state. I think that's an important piece to be aware of when you're putting your staff together.

**Q. UCLA obviously had some issues as far as their travel. It would have been a 9:00 a.m. start for them back home. What are some time difference changes or challenges that you see for your team and how does this prep maybe differ from say if you have a bowl game and you have more time to prepare?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm sorry. Say is one more time.

**Q. Basically what I'm saying is what are some of the time difference challenges you anticipate, and how does this prep maybe differ from the Rose Bowl or something like that where you have more time?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think there's two different ways of looking at it, right, and approaching it. You've got the bowl game where you want to get out there early, get adjusted to the climate, get adjusted to the time, all those different things. When you don't, then you just don't make an issue out of it. You just go. You stick to your normal routine. You play the game, and you get out of there.

I also think this is a time of the year where the weather is going to be somewhat similar. I think some of the challenges with a bowl game is not just the time zone differences and things like that. It may be or is the middle of the winter here in Pennsylvania, and you may be going to play a game in a climate that's very, very different. So that factors in.

I think when it's in-season talking it all the NFL teams and talking to all the college teams that have done it, you want to try to keep your routine as consistent as you possibly can, but that kind of, back to Mark's point, we have some challenges that other schools don't have that we have to factor into our decision-making process and our planning process.

**Q. Ryan Barker is a guy that, compared to some of the other kickers, maybe not as much of a known commodity of guys that have started for you, guys who have gotten a bunch of FBS offers. He didn't have those opportunities coming out of high school. So can you talk about what stood out to you about him and your staff when he was in high school and why he was able to get that walk-on spot here? I'm sure there are dozens of kickers in the state of Pennsylvania who would like to get that spot.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: If I remember correctly, we loved his statistics. We loved his film. Then we met him, and he's a big, strong guy, so that factored into it as well. Felt like he had a frame that could put on size and strength and increase his kicking power.

Then if I remember correctly, came to camp and kicked well in camp as well, but we still, to be honest with you, didn't know what we were totally getting. Then last year he showed up, and he was like -- opened everybody's eyes and was a real pleasant surprise and literally was competing for the job last year.

Then, again, like I mentioned to you, with less experience had competed all spring and all training camp again. Again, I would say probably going maybe into the spring or at the end of spring, if I remember correctly, he was the leader and then early in the summer he was the leader and then Sander kind of gradually just slightly overtook him, but it literally came down to the wire.

He's been a guy that since he stepped on campus, has been really impressive. I think the thing that I've been most impressed with him is just how steady and level he is. He doesn't get too high. He doesn't get too low. He's got a very mature kind of way about him.

I've been very impressed with him. Very, very consistent. It's one of these guys -- because the other thing is, okay, you have the statistics to say you made 91% of your kicks in practice. Okay, fine. Also, the thing with him is it's almost like a machine, like a JUGS machine or something. A large percentage of his kicks are right down the middle, so it's not just the ones he is making. It's the accuracy of how he makes his kicks too.

Then I think the big thing, as we you will know, that's important at every position, but maybe even more at that position is how quickly can you flush it and bounce back? I think that's important at every position. It's probably magnified at the kicking position because you just don't get adds many plays and you don't get as many opportunities, so each play is magnified.

But that ability to flush the last play, good or bad, and move on to the next one is really important. I think from what I've seen from him, he does a very good job of that.

**Q. Kind of a big picture question for you. Back in 2022 you made a pretty pointed call to get bigger up front, especially on your defensive line after the Michigan game. Last year you finished No. 1 in rushing, and this year I think you're No. 7, under 100 yards, and I think the No. 15 of the last 16. How far do you feel like you've come in that situation? I know we talk a lot about putting good weight on up front. What do you attribute it to?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think we've made progress there. Obvious when you just look at the size of our D-line and specifically our D-tackles. I do think it helps even having a guy like Dani, who is an unusual defensive end at, like, 270 pounds and really a mean at 265 pounds. So we're bigger there.

I don't know if that necessarily was the plan at D-end. Those are the body types and how those things work out, but a D-tackle I think we were a little bit more strategic

about that.

I think Zane is a guy that just athletically and movement-wise was going to factor in, and he was a guy who was undersized out of high school. Then probably didn't anticipate playing him as a true freshman and then he came in, and he was ready to play as a true freshman, but he was still undersized. So that kind of impacted the size of your depth at D-tackle.

But now pretty much just across the board we got good size. You look at Hakeem Beamon, and he would struggle with his weight for a while. I think he was, like, 297 last week. I think it's been a positive for us.

Offensive linemen are trying to get movement to the second level, or they take the first level of the defensive linemen to the second level on double teams to linebackers. When you're not able to get movement on those guys, I don't care what type of system you run, even if you are like us and attacking style front defense where we're trying to penetrate gaps and create tackles for loss and sacks, there are still times where the gap you're going to try to penetrate, they're double-teaming you, and you've got to be able to hold point. Five pounds can make a difference. Ten pounds can make a difference.

You look at Vega. Being 350 pounds is unusual, but size is a weapon just like length and speed and quickness are weapons. That's one of them.

I also think I can't not give credit to Pat Kraft and Vinnie James and our chefs and the training room. We're probably one of the only top-15 programs in the country that didn't have a football-specific training table in my 11 years here until this year.

I think that's been a real benefit for us as well specifically this year. That's been a huge win for us. It goes more than just calories and pounds. There's also an aspect of your chemistry and your morale on your team. No different than the importance we all know is breaking bread as family in your own homes.

There's value in that on your team as well that after practice everybody is going in there, having a great meal, laughing, spending time together. There's a ton of value in that as well.

That's one of the things I know that we're so excited about as an athletic department. This will be available to all the sports next year. We're just kind of in a little temporary space for this year, but the entire facility will be done for all the sports next year. That will be a huge win for our entire athletic department.

**Q. We talked a lot about getting Jaylen Reed back to the Lion position. In reference to Dejuan Lane. Part of that transition would also be playing Zakee Wheatley at the other safety position. How is your assessment of his play been so far, specifically against the run or in pursuit?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Zakee?

**Q. Yeah.**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think he's playing really well. I thought last week he was flashing and playing fast and playing physical. I think you guys also know I talk a lot about team defense. A lot of times this guy gets the sack because this other defensive lineman penetrated and made it very difficult for them to pass it off.

It's the same way with safeties sometimes tackling. It's a corner setting the edge on a screen where the lineman is coming to block him, and rather than running around the block, a lot of times running around the block is the same as getting blocked. You're still creating space, and the corner being able to set the edge and the defensive end pursuing and the linebacker pursuing allows the safety to play fast and confident because they're able to run an alley where the ball is going to hit, not having to make an open field tackle, which is very different in terms of how you approach it.

So I think Zakee continues to play faster, continues to play more aggressive and more confident. Again, I think the other ten guys in the defensive doing their job allows individuals to shine, and Zakee is an example of that.

**Q. You talked on Saturday after the game about the 5-0 streak, the way that Penn State has been able to build those over the last few years as well. How do you use that as a teaching tool for the guys headed into kind of more of the bulk of the Big Ten schedule: What we've done is good. How do we build on that? Especially when you couple in what's happening in college football right now, this week in particular, what Alabama, Tennessee, Mizzou, Michigan, USC, all these schools falling from the top 15. How do you use all this as a teaching point as you head into more of the bulk of your schedule?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think for me it's just like I talk about after wins that we're going to try to enjoy them for a couple of hours and then it's being able to recognize these things and all the hard work that goes into it and not take them for granted. When you are able to say you're the only team in the country that has started 5-0 four straight years, when

you're able to say those types of things, to me that's impactful.

I want the staff to understand that, and I want the players to understand that. Consistency is something that everybody is working for and is hard to do. I think this week was a really good example of that.

When you're also able to say that not only did you do something that you're the only team in college football that's done that, but you are also able to say it's the first time in Penn State history that that's happened, those are things that the players should be proud of. They've done that. The staff has done that. The coaches, the assistants, eat equipment people, everybody. They've done that.

I think it's an opportunity after the game to recognize those things, make them understand that those things are special and don't take them for granted because a ton of programs would love to be able to say the same thing, but at the end of the day all that matters is that we're 1-0 this week because if we don't handle our business and be 1-0 this week, that stat that we're talking about won't mean anything.

I think there's a time and a place after the game to recognize all the hard work that's gone into us being 1-0 that week and however many 1-0s we've been able to stack and address that and recognize that. To be able to recognize a guy like Liam Clifford, first career 100-yard game. To be able to recognize a guy like Tyler Warren, who breaks the touchdown record at the tight end position. Or whether it's Barker going in and making those field goals, which were awesome to see go through the uprights. You want to recognize people's hard work and then move on to the next task and the next goal and the next objective.

That's what we try to do. To me there should be some confidence that comes from those things, which is you can take into the next week and then there's also a ton of things that we got to get corrected.

I think that's part of my job after the game is to be able to show them these things, recognize it because the next day we're going to come in and watch the film, and we're going to spend the majority of our time on what? Correcting the mistakes and the things that we did wrong. So we want to make sure that there's balance, right?

**Q. We've talked a lot about the uniqueness of playing USC from a travel perspective, but I just am curious maybe put your fan hat on for a second. You're watching tape to prep for USC watching them play Minnesota. You've played UCLA. Now you're heading**

**to USC. Is this kind of still unique for you as a coach to kind of understand and look at what the new Big Ten looks like as oppose to do what had been for so long?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I don't know if I have ever done what you said, like put the fan hat on. There will come a point where I will because even when I watch other teams, I don't watch them like just a fan. It's too much of what we do and our lives to just watch it like a fan.

I'm sending things. Hey, this play happened. I want to show this to the team on Sunday. I'm send it to Jevin all night long.

I think I told you guys, I tailgated for the first time in my life. I've never done it before. What concert was that? Luke Combs. We ate hot dogs. That was cool. I haven't really done a whole lot of that.

So, you know, I think for us in my mind I don't necessarily look at it the way you just said. It's the next team on our schedule that we've got to find a way to beat, and a lot of ways it doesn't really matter whether it's a conference game or a nonconference game. For us and what we're trying to do, they're all significant.

I made a comment a few years back about this win was no different than another win, and people lost their mind about it, but the reality is for where we're at and where we're trying to go, each week is the Super Bowl for us. We try to approach it that way and give it the right amount of respect, try to be as informed as we can, try to be as aware as we can of what the environment is going to be like, what the locker room is going to be like, what the stadium is going to be like, all of that, so we can try to replicate those things during the week so that when we go there our guys aren't surprised.

Even little things. I'll show them pictures of what the locker room is going to look like, what the sideline is going to look like, all those things just to try to get our guys as prepared as possible. I think we had talked maybe a week or two ago about that's some of the things that when we go and scout hotels and opponents, that's the stuff that we're doing with our travel people that are setting all of our travel up ahead of time.

**Q. I think my math is right. After those 5-0 the last three years you're 13-11. So what have you learned when you divide the season in half like that that you can apply to what's coming up, which is a really challenging stretch?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, it's continuing to do the things that we have to do each week as the schedule gets more



and more difficult. We play in one of the best conferences in all of college football, which is going to create challenges.

I think we have three teams right now ranked in the top four. That's what comes with that. You embrace what comes with playing one of the best conferences in all of college football, and those challenges come with it.

So we've got to do the things that we've done to this point to get us to be 5-0. That's something that we can control. We've got to make sure that we're doing it for the long haul, and that's as the schedule goes on and as the opponents get more and more challenging and as you have bumps and bruises and things like that that affect depth, you've got to find solutions to give yourself the best chance to be successful.

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