

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## James Franklin

### Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football as always. I'm going to get right away into Wisconsin.

Obviously a lot of history with this program. A ton of respect for their head coach. Obviously he's a Big Ten guy for most of his career, a player and as a coach. He's done a nice job wherever he has been.

I think really the last three weeks they've played their best football. They're really coming on right now. Just watching them on tape how clean they're playing, how hard they're playing, it's impressive to watch.

When you talk about their offensive coordinator, Phil Longo, he is a local guy. I don't know if you know this. Started his career in East Stroudsburg. I wanted to make reference to that.

Phil has done a really good job. Obviously did a great job when he was at North Carolina and has been at Wisconsin the last couple of years. Really comes from a spread RPO tempo background, but he's evolved, and I think part of that evolution is being at Wisconsin and being with Luke.

I think there's an obvious commitment to running the football. Just running the football maybe in a different way than we're used to seeing Wisconsin run the ball, but still very, very effective.

We've been impressed with their quarterback, Braedyn Locke, who is a Mississippi State transfer. We've been impressed with their running back No. 3, Tawee Walker, who is an Oklahoma transfer, and then their wide receiver No. 8, Vinny Anthony. Those guys have been impressive to watch. Again, they're doing some really good things.

Defensively Mike Tressel is the defensive coordinator. Was at Michigan State for a long time. That's kind of his background. I think if you look at how Michigan State played all those years and how Wisconsin is playing now, I think there's some similarities.



Obviously they've evolved and tweaked some things as well, but they're playing really good football right now on the defensive side of the ball led by Coach Tressel.

Guys that jump out to us is No. 24, Hunter Wohler, the safety; linebacker No. 7 Jaheim Thomas, who is an Arkansas transfer; cornerback No. 2 Ricardo Hallman, who I think last year led the nation in interceptions; and then defensive end No. 8 Leon Lowery, who is a Syracuse transfer.

Then on special teams Matt Mitchell. I think this is where they've really stood out. Last week they had a huge game against Northwestern on special teams in a lot of different ways impacting the game, but their punter, No. 49 Atticus Bertrams, who is an Australian punter, does a really nice job for them in a number of different ways.

Then their kick returner, No. 8, again, the wide receiver, Vinny Anthony, who is doing some good things for them as a returner right now.

The bye week was good. Was able to get a ton of work done not only from a self-scout perspective, but also really from a recruiting perspective as well. Obviously this is going to be a big week for us.

So had good practice on Sunday. A little bit different practice model. Obviously not having the previous game to watch film on or do corrections, able to get a little bit more of a head start on Wisconsin. Then we'll have practice tomorrow.

So open it up to questions.

**Q. How would you assess your wide receivers midway point of the season, and how big a factor do they have to be if teams continue to design defenses to stop the run?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think, first of all, I've been pleased and impressed with our wide receiver room, with their production, with their ability to impact games, and then also different guys doing it.

You know, obviously last week Julian Fleming had a huge



game for us. Or two weeks ago, excuse me. There's been games where Omari has been the guy. There's been games where obviously Liam Clifford has been the guy. There's been games when obviously Trey has been the guy.

I think that's helpful too that a number of different guys have been impactful and making plays for us, which I think puts some challenges on the defense that there's not just one guy, but I think overall it's been good.

I think we need more of that. We need to continue to develop it. We need to continue to grow it. We need to make sure we're continuing to create opportunities and take advantage of their strengths. I think that's going to be really important.

I mean, obviously not only the running backs, but I think we all know 44 is going to get a ton of attention moving forward as well. So I think your point is a fair one.

There should be more opportunities for these guys because of that, but there's also going to need to be continued growth and production as the year goes on.

**Q. Turning to defense, could you maybe do something similar, evaluate a little bit your linebacker position? Have you gotten what you need and what you expected so far from that position? How do you look at it going forward in the second half of the season there, especially with some of the new guys, young guys, that I guess you would hope to be able to intersperse more? How do you look at that position going forward?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think a little bit different than the wide receiver position from a standpoint that I think there's a lot of confidence coming into the year with the experience that we had at linebacker. Then we had some injuries and some other things that affected our depth. So I think overall I think good.

I think Kobe and Elsdon and Dom. We've missed some time with Dom, but there's a core group of guys there that I think have played a ton of football for us. Obviously Tony Rojas as well.

Then I think the development of DaKaari I think has been big. That is something I think he's really flourishing in right now, and there's been a lot of conversation about it as well, but doing some great things for us on special teams and is probably playing better at the linebacker position for a guy that's never done it before than maybe we anticipated.

Yeah, I think the group has been good. (Indiscernible) is

another guy that has some bumps and bruises and missed some time. He's a guy that's flashed, and we need him to continue to develop for us. Not only on special teams, but on defense. I think he has to continue to be a guy that his growth continues to evolve and grow as the season goes on.

With all the moving parts that we've had there, I've been pleased with it. Obviously Kobe leads the way and Tony and Dom just based on experienced guys and having all three of them healthy at the same time right now is valuable.

**Q. In the Illinois game you were really dominant in the run game. 230-some yards. The last couple of weeks less so, and obviously the game situation and what the defense is doing to you is a big factor in that, but how satisfied were you with the way you guys ran the ball the last couple of weeks once you got out of the run game?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think for us we've got to do whatever we've got to do to win, and that will be different each week, and that will look different each week based on your point. What we're doing offensively and what the game plan is, but also impacted by that is how the defense decides to game plan and how the defense decides to play us.

Most teams are going to go into the game with something that they are adamant about that they're not going to give up. Whether it's, hey, we are going to double-team 44 or whether it's going to load the box to stop the run, most people are going to kind of have a plan and say, We are going to stop this, and if they're going to beat us, they're going to beat us doing these things.

I think that really impacts a lot of this. Would we like more production in the running game? Yeah. Would we like more explosive plays in the running game? Yes. Has that been a discussion over the last week during the bye week? Yes.

But, again, if we go out there to play Wisconsin and they got nine guys in the box, then we're going to still run the ball because we're committed to doing that, but the game may go differently in terms of our production and throwing the ball and our production in the run game.

So all those things are kind of factored in to how we're going to operate each week and what we're going to have to do to win.

**Q. Could K.J. Winston return to play for Penn State this year? How has he contributed to that safety room**

**otherwise off the field the last six weeks?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think I have somewhat answered that question in terms of the long-term injury, and that's about as far as I'm going to go with the details of that, which has been pretty typical, long-term injury.

But, yeah, K.J., we are hoping for him to have a more significant impact in terms of leadership, in terms of all those other things, but right now K.J.'s focus is on getting healthy.

I actually visited with him and his family on Wednesday night, which was also me and Dex. That was great, but he's a huge part of our program. Will continue to be a huge part of our program, but obviously based on some of the things that he was working through from a health perspective, his focus was on that, which rightfully so.

**Q. Kind of a follow-up, but sticking with the safety position. Jaylen Reed so far this season, team leading tackler, made some big plays in the back field, breaking up some passes. How would you assess how Jaylen had played through six games?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think he's playing really well, and he's not just a guy that plays really well himself, but he impacts others. You watch him out there running the defense, communicating checks. Just does a phenomenal job.

When it comes to the sideline, the information he's able to give us is extremely valuable, but playing very, very well. Typically you don't want to be in a situation where your safety is leading in tackles, but as we know, he hasn't really just played a traditional safety role. He's also played the outside linebacker position as well.

I would like to see us get back to doing that. So as DaeDae continues to develop and grow being able to get all three of those guys on the field I think is going to be important for us moving forward.

**Q. I noticed Cael came over to talk to the team. Can you tell me what goes into the decision to bring somebody like that over, and what was his message that you can share with us?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: We do it every year. He's come and spoke almost every year. We'll have different people from the campus and from the university come and speak during training camp and then sometimes during the bye week.

Obviously Cael has done a phenomenal job and is universally respected, not only across campus and in the

community, but I know on our team specifically and in our locker room.

He came this summer, and I thought his message really resonated with our guys, so we brought him back to kind of double down on it. It was good, but typically we have coaches, ADs, administrators, all these people come during the summer, and Cael was one of those guys this summer and did a nice job, like I mentioned, and I wanted to bring him back during the bye week and double down on it.

**Q. (Off microphone)**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, really his message is really very consistent with the messages that we give our guys all the time. It's just a different voice delivering that, which is powerful. So it's not the same message that we're delivering from the same people. It's a similar message.

I think a lot of it is about being present, being appreciate have appreciative, and then the other one is controlling the things that you can control and not inhaling or reading or listening to outside voices or words was really the message.

**Q. I have a question about your role as a voter in the USA Today Coaches Poll. What's the process for that? Does it vary as the season goes along? What's your strategy in voting for your own team in that poll?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, it doesn't vary a whole lot. Basically I think Sunday mornings that's got to be in I think by 12:00. Michael Hazel used to put this together for us. Now Will Ryman does that. He puts it together for us.

We typically have the AP Poll last week, the Coaches Poll and then how we voted last week. They're usually always pretty consistent for the most part, to be honest with you.

I look at that, and then I look at whoever lost that week, whoever won that week that was in the top 25, who should come out of the top 25, who should go into the top 25 based on the previous weeks.

I'm also a big proponent of the power conferences just based on the competition that they play week in and week out and the challenges that come with that, but for the most part it's very, very similar to what you see out there publicly. There's very little differences between the AP poll, the Coaches Poll and our poll that we put out every single week.

**Q. (Off microphone)**



JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, the same way we look at everybody else's. Typically, again, it's pretty consistent, right? I think all three of us had it ranked exactly the same way this past week. There's sometimes where Penn State is voted lower than what other maybe publications have us ranked, and there's a few times where we've been ranked a little bit higher. Obviously it all comes out in the averages.

**Q. Tom and Andy both talked about Tyler Warren during the bye week. Tom mentioned how impressed he was with him at Indiana, and he mentioned seeing his basketball highlights and being impressed with him from the jump. Was there a point this offseason where you knew that Tyler Warren would be a focal point of this offseason -- or of this offense, and if so, when was it?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. No, we had a returning starter that we felt like was a really good player and would be a focal point. Obviously him and Theo split time last year, so with Theo gone, I think everybody on our team and everybody on our staff felt like the guys that had returning production and starters would be focal points on our offense.

So that would probably be the two running backs, and that would be Tyler. There was a lot of discussion about some of the wideouts. I think Trey is a guy that was kind of part of that conversation as well.

Those are probably the guys. Pretty obvious probably to everybody, but it's not like there was a shift or a change. That was kind of our thoughts coming into the season, and it's continued to be that way.

Just like the running game, depending on how people play you each week, that could change.

**Q. You just talked about it when you talked about Cael's message, not inhaling, reading, getting too sucked into the hype for players. We've been at this point in the past couple of seasons before where you start talking about maybe complacency or kind of resetting that message here midseason to make sure you finish the season strong. What is that message right now when it comes to, Hey, we've done a lot of really good things, but you can't just kind of rest on what you've previously done, you have to keep looking forward?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we really don't talk about that. It's just about getting better. We need to get better. We needed to get better last week. We need to get better each week. That is collectively. That's on each side of the

ball. That is by position. That is by individual.

That's coaches. That's players. That's everybody. We really just focus on getting better every week and focus on studying our opponent and giving it the necessary amount of respect and then doing whatever we've got to do to be 1-0.

The message really doesn't change a whole lot. We're trying to be as consistent as we possibly can in our approach. That has for the most part served us well.

**Q. I wanted to kind of go back to the conversations you had with Andy before you hired him. What do you maybe recall about those conversations, and how have they aligned with what he's been able to do throughout the first half of the season with this offense?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think a lot of it is probably obvious to you guys. It's overall philosophy offensively. It is the ability to create explosive plays. That was a big part of the conversation based on how last year played out. It was the ability to run or pass and balance.

Then it was studying on film and in conversation about kind of plays that he had focused on and plays that we had focused on. Probably the biggest difference from what we've done in the past is probably a little bit more option, true option. Not off of read option, but true option. That was probably the one thing that was a little bit different in the conversations.

To be honest with you, very similar. It was also about coming in here and only changing what we had to change because, again, it wasn't necessarily broke. It was that we need to do take the next step from a production standpoint and specifically from an explosive play perspective.

I think it's been very similar to what we've talked about. I think he's been comfortable because we spent a lot of time talking about how we operate and how we do things and what my expectations are and weekly practice schedules and spring ball and summer and all those types of things.

Then, also, from the other perspective getting an idea of how he wanted to operate and how he wanted to function and then also talking to people like their head coach as well as people on their staff as well. I think for the most part for both sides, for me and for him, I think it's played out for the most part the way we both expected it to be.

**Q. In terms of your defense you've had I guess you would call them slow starts where you come on better in the second half defensively. How much of that is kind of a feeling-out process where you get a snapshot**

**of how teams call over a half and adjust accordingly, or is it more the defense just needs to play better from the start?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I don't know if I would define it that way. I don't have the stats in front of me, but score by quarter we've given up yards in the first quarter, but I wouldn't say we've started slow on defense. Maybe some opening drives, but I wouldn't describe it the way you described it.

I don't have those stats in front of me. I think what our defenses has done a good job of is game planning and have a specific idea of where we're at, what we're trying to do this week, how we're trying to cause stress on the offense. Then as quickly as we possibly can figure out are they playing in a similar fashion that we expected them to play based on our film study, or are they doing a bunch of tendency breakers?

I think a few weeks ago we had a team I think on second and long. They had been 100% passing those situations. Your whole game plan is based on that, and then right away early in the game they ran the ball to break a tendency. I think those things are important.

You want to study your opponent's tendencies to understand what they are and how you're going to game plan and how you're going to call your game, but then you also need to be aware. They should be aware of what their tendencies are as well.

I think once we got a pretty good bead on what people are doing -- is it consistent with what we've seen on film? Are there exceptions? Being able to make those adjustments as a coaching staff and being able to make those adjustments with the players. We played pretty good defense really for four quarters.

Do you have that information? We have given up 24 points in the first quarter, given up 36 points in the second quarter. As we all know, our third quarters have been phenomenal at three points, and then 24 points.

So really depending on how you're defining how well you're playing on offense and defense, to me it's about points. We've given up the same amount of points in the first quarter and the fourth quarter. We've been really great in the third quarter, which has been documented a lot and second quarters has probably been the quarter where we've given up the most points.

Your point is a fair one in terms of yards, but I think we've played pretty good except opening drives we need to clean some of those things up.

**Q. Quinton Martin got in for his third game at USC. That means he can get in for two out of the next six and burn his redshirt. Has he moved over into that green light territory? Regardless, how have you seen him maybe pick things up or gain some things since Cam went down?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so the way I would describe him right now, he's still a yellow, but he's a yellow where he understands and the coaches understand if we have to play him to win games, we're going to do that. Everybody is comfortable in doing that.

I would prefer to manage it as much as we possibly can so that we still have that flexibility and that choice moving forward, but at this stage we're still trying to preserve it and have flexibility come the end of the year.

When Nick was working through some bumps and bruises, that made it more challenging to do that. Nothing has really changed from that standpoint at this stage.

**Q. (Off microphone)**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, that goes back to me saying that I think that the kid as well as the coaching staff is ready to play him and feel like if we need him to win games, we will.

I think, to answer your question specifically, he's done a good enough job that the coaches feel like this is a weekly conversation on what we want to do with him because I think if we did green light him, there are ways that we would take advantage of his skill set in a 21-personnel package.

The challenge that I respond with that is every rep that we give him is a rep that we're taking away from Nick and Kaytron, and that's also something we're trying to manage as well as a coaching staff, and I know Ja'Juan is specifically.

Early on in the season there was conversations about ball distribution and things like that. It wasn't a whole lot of conversations about those two guys.

When you have a third back that you're trying to factor in, if you are going to burn his redshirt, then you've got to play him. If you're going to play him, then that takes reps away from those other two guys. If those other two guys are healthy, I don't know if that makes a whole lot of sense at this stage.

The young man is doing everything right at this stage. I

think there's a ton of confidence in him and a ton of confidence in our coaching staff has in him as well. I think he has a ton of confidence in himself.

I actually think Cory is coming on as well. I think he's a guy that we could look at a little bit like the defensive ends with Max and Harvey that I could see us maybe even possibly having Cory as the third back here at some point as well hopefully to preserve Quinton too.

**Q. When you come off of a big week in college football and you're on a bye and there were so many kind of interesting high-profile games and with the playoff, does that open up a door of just some potential opponents down the road? Do you guys learn from -- you and the staff learn from watching some bits and pieces of these games, or do you have to try to suppress that?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think there's a little bit of that, right? I wasn't in the best position to do that because I left Wednesday night and didn't get back here until 11:00 Saturday night on the road recruiting. So there wasn't a whole lot of that going on watching other games and teams like that.

During the bye week are you getting ahead on your next opponent? Yes. Are you also with the staff sizes now able to get ahead on some other opponents or possible future opponents and things like that? Yeah, a little bit.

But, again, you better make sure that the right amount of attention and focus and respect is paid to your next opponent on your schedule. The 1-0 mentality. But there are some work-ahead things going on too.

**Q. When you're recruiting a player like Tyler coming out of high school who was that high school quarterback and had a unique skill set, when you project what he's able to do for you at this level do you just see him as a tight end coming out of high school, or do you have it in the back of your mind that we know this guy has some unique things in his skill set? How can we maybe utilize that down the road?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's fair. The guys that we're recruiting I would say the majority of them have been dominant offensive players, dominant defensive players.

I think the more of those guys that we can recruit the better. They're actually playing both sides of the ball. They're doing a ton of different things. I think it's a really important piece of the whole evaluation process.

I think the other thing is -- and this is a credit to Andy, but

it's also a credit to Tyler. Sometimes you have guys that have really, really good skill sets and can do a ton of different things, but maybe they're lacking something else that makes it difficult to do that.

What I mean by that is, okay, Tyler obviously his ability as a tight end to be used in the pass game and the run game. Okay, we've talked about that a ton, but he's also got a really good football IQ and is really smart. You can move him around in a ton of different spots.

Some guys you do that and they're going to have a bunch of missed assignments. They can't handle moving to a ton of different spots. So the fact that Tyler has the ability to do that really allows him to be a matchup problem because although the defense is trying to do everything they possibly can to take him away, now you can line him up at number one receiver, number two receiver, number three receiver. You can line him up in the back field. You can motion him. You can shift him.

His intelligence allows him to do all those things at a really high level. I think the other thing is the fact that he played quarterback allows you to keep the defense honest and have a pass in there, which we've already done with him.

The other thing is it sounds simplistic, but even the cadence. Some guys are not be comfortable or the center is not comfortable them with a cadence.

The other thing is the mesh. So with him sometimes people put a guy back there and they just do a mesh with a running back or a mesh with a quarterback, but they're not reading it. It's just some eye candy, right?

Well, with him he's done that before. He's done zone reads before. You can do the mesh with him, and you can actually read it. Now that package becomes even more valuable.

Well, God forbid anybody take a snap under center before, right? People don't do that anymore. Well, he's done that. You're ready to jump on me right now. He's done that before.

So, yeah, it sounds good to say we're going to run a quarterback sneak, but running a quarterback sneak with actually somebody like Tyler, who is 260 pounds and has actually taken a snap from under center. So combination of Andy, his creativity, but also having a player that allows you to take advantage of that creativity.

Sometimes you don't have somebody with all those different things to allow you to do it. I think that's where I think the intelligence is probably the biggest one is when

your best players are a really a smart guy, you can move them around. That makes it very difficult for people to take that piece of the puzzle away.

**Q. I try not to inject my opinion into these questions, but from this one --**

JAMES FRANKLIN: But you're going to.

**Q. I'm going to. Run blocking generally is the aggregate of the five offensive linemen, the tight end, wide receivers all working together in unison. I'm just curious --**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I love the aggregate. I love that.

**Q. Thank you. I'm just curious, what does the affect of one dominant run blocker on that process, somebody that maybe you don't know every single play, but you feel strongly they're going to be able to generate significant movement, how does that change maybe your game plan, your calling, or your explosive play numbers?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that has a definite impact because that guy is creating an explosive play as a blocker. He's creating dramatic amount of space, and in my mind I look at that as an explosive play. It's like an explosive block. No different than a ball carrier or a receiver.

I think you could make the argument Vega falls into that category. I think that's not uncommon for people to say, okay, on this run, this tackle, and this guard is my best outside zone tackle, so if everything is even, we prefer to run behind these guys. Short yardage situation we prefer to run behind this person.

I think the other thing that maybe factors into it as well, and I think we're doing a better job of this year -- that also factors into it. I remember last year when Beau would go into the game, a lot of times we were more explosive in the run game, and not just with Beau carrying the ball, but it was the threat of Beau carrying the ball that changed how the defense defended us.

I think there was times last year where Drew should have pulled the ball and didn't, and the few times that he's done it this year has been very effective and that causes stress on the defense that they can't now say, when Beau is in the game, we'll try it as this. When Drew is in the game, we're going to treat it as, you know, the quarterback is a non-threat, if that makes sense.

I think your point is a really good one, but the quarterback

as a possible ball carrier and the quarterback following out his fake full speed and holding defenders, holding the outside linebacker a half second, holding the back side safety a half second, those things also have the ability of creating explosive runs.

Just like perimeter blocking or downfield blocking that a lot of people talk about at the wide receiver position as well as a dominant blocker that you want to try to run behind, whether it's in a gap scheme or whether it's a double-team in a gap or zone scheme. All those things factor in.

But, then again, you have to be careful that you don't have tendencies in those situations as well.

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