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Cpach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey guys, like always, appreciate everybody coming and covering Penn State football. Obviously following up on last week's game, there is nobody more disappointed than the guys in our locker room and the guys on our staff.

We also understand what the expectations and standards are and we embrace those things. When you look back at the game, opportunities for growth, some things we got to get fix asked be more disciplined. We're giving too many yards away or extending drives or creating field position in the margin of error, and with teams like that it's too small. We got to get those thing cleaned up.

It's concerning when that happens on back-to-back weeks. We got to get that cleaned up and addressed as soon as possible.

We talk about some key statistics in the game. Third down was a key statistic in the game. I thought defensively we had three drives that you would like to be different and execution be a little bit different level. You got give them credit for playing, but three drives, the two scoring drives, and then the drive at the end of the game.

And then obviously offensively the interception in the end zone and the goal line stand. Those two things were difference makers in the game.

I did think that Zion Tracy is really coming on not only as a defensive player, but also as a special teams player. Looked a lot more confident catching and returning punts. He continues to trend in a real positive direction for our team.

Barker is two for two and eight for eight. Has been a really positive.

I thought Gabe played one of his best games. Three touchbacks and the deep kick on the kick after the penalty where I think we were able to still get them stopped at the 26 yard line. That was big.

Overall obviously got some things we got to continue to work on, but most importantly, we're on to Washington. We got to find a way to get a win this week. I thought the staff and the players did a good job last night and yesterday of making the corrections and then moving on to Washington.

We got to make sure that one loss doesn't turn into two, and that's controlling the things we can in our building and flushing it. Although whether it's on campus or in the community or social media, that makes it more challenging specifically for our players to do that. We got to make sure we moved on.

We got to find a way to get a win against a really good Washington team coming into our place. I've known Jedd Fisch for a long time. Respect Jedd and what he's done over his career. Got a ton of experience at a ton of different places. Obviously did a really good job at Arizona. Left and took the Washington job and is doing a nice job there.

So this will be a challenge. They hit the transfer portal hard. I don't know if I have the numbers here with me, but I want to say they have 12 or 13 players from the transfer portal on both offense or defense. Excuse me, and defense.

You look at what they're doing offensively, Brennan Carroll, these two guys that he has a background with as coordinators from his time in the NFL and specifically with his time with the Patriots and the Seahawks.

Brennan Carroll is doing a nice job with their offense. He's got an O-line background. They want to run the ball. They're committed to running the ball, but had pretty good production out of two wide receivers as well. They're an 11 and a 12 personnel team, which is a pretty consistent theme we've had all year.

Will Rogers, transfer quarterback from Mississippi State is doing well. Running back Jonah Coleman, a lot of respect for him. Big, thick back; hard to bring down. 5'9", 230 pounds.

Then their receiver, Denzel Boston, who's leading the



Big10 in touchdown catches is doing some really good things.

And then another NFL guy and name you'll be familiar with is Steve Belichick, who's their defensive coordinator. Spent pretty much his entire career at the Patriots and then I think college in Rutgers with Schiano.

Statistically their numbers are really good. Specifically when you talk pass defense, we been impressed with their linebacker No. 42 two, Carson Bruener; defensive end and linebacker No. 11 and their safety No. 13. Really, really good players that have been productive this year.

And then special teams coordinator, Jordan Paopao has done a great job for them. Two guys that jump out to us is Denzel Boston again as a punt returner as well as wide receiver, and then their kick returner and wide receiver number 15, Keith Reynolds.

Two guys that have been very, very productive, and we need to be aware of where they are at all times and try to limit their production on special teams.

Open up to questions.

Q. James, after having a chance to review the film, what did you see from that goal line stand in terms of personnel, execution, and play calls, and what's where biggest takeaway from a those four plays?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think first of all, obviously we didn't get movement. We didn't get movement up front. We got two of the better running backs in the country. You want to try to feed those guys and allow them to get downhill.

They've done a really good job of it, not only this year but throughout their careers. I think that's the right thing to do.

But I also think there is a piece where you can say in critical moments you got to think players not place. You know, maybe in one of those three downs at least you got to make sure Tyler Warren touches the ball, however that is, whether it's Wildcat, in the passing game, or whether that's as a ball carrier.

But, again, I think we got two really good running backs that we feel good about. Those guys have got to touch the ball as well. That's probably the biggest thing.

I think when you do throw the ball you're going to have to understand that they're just as aware of Tyler Warren as we are trying to get the ball to him. Likelihood is that guy is going to be double teamed as well.

So obviously hindsight is 20/20, but at the end of the day you got to create movement and score when you need one yard. Whether that's picking up a critical fourth down or whether that's goal line. We got to do some things better scheme-wise, but also we got do little bit better job fundamental and technique-wise to make sure we get the movement we need.

Q. The running game, it doesn't seem to be as productive as going a smoothly it was earlier the year, especially Nick. I think he has 90 combined rushing yards the last three games. How do you view that? If you view it that way at all, how to you go about fixing that, so to speak, right now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think our traditional running game with the two running backs we got to get going. You look at it, obviously when you compare it to the beginning of the year and now competition plays a part in that obviously. Who you play plays a big part in that.

I think there are some things we got to do in terms of scheme to make them defend the field and spread the box out as much as possible. Whether that's outside zone. Whether that's gap schemes. Whether that's inside zone. Whether that's personnel.

I think some of the heavy stuff has been really good to us, but it's the age old argument, whether it's the run game or the pass game, if you go heavy they got a chance to go heavy as well.

They got a chance to match personnel. You bring in another lineman, they bring in another lineman. You take a lineman out, which sometimes I think people wonder why you do that. Well, you put more wide receivers in and you spread the field, you make them defend the field. That's one less block you have to make in the box.

No different in pass protection. Everybody thinks to throw the ball down the field you have to keep more guys in. They're also going to bring more people the more guys you keep in in pass protection.

We got to get our traditional running game going. I think that's going to be a combination of both still doing some of the heavy stuff, but I think we can expand on some of the spread stuff as well to get some guys out of the box to create more space.

And then also from a scheme standpoint as well, making sure that we're making them defend the field as much as possible. So outside runs, outside zones, which also could have an impact on inside zones in gap schemes as well.

Q. In July you said of the season, we've got to play our best when the best is needed most in the big games in the big moments. How would you assess the program this season in that context?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think a couple things. Obviously after the game that we just played we did not do that in that game. Again, just like the comment I made about the run game, the competition factors into that. At the end of the day we lost to a Top 5 team and one of the top programs in the country. We had opportunities to win the game and we have had opportunities to win those types of games in the past. We got to find a way to get it done. That starts with me.

But I'm also very, very proud of where our team has been consistently, and I think most programs in the country would be envious where we have been on a consistent basis pretty much over ten years.

Q. You mentioned after the game that all your goals are still ahead of you, and part of that is the 12-team playoff. Do you think the way the wide receivers, the production and what they've given you guys, has that been enough to, looking forward, get to where you guys want to ultimately go?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's a fair question. I think we have improved. I don't think there is any doubt about it. From last year we've improved on the field, in practice, in production. I haven't checked statistically, but I don't know if we had games last year where we had multiple receivers at times, different games, go for over 100 yards, which we have had this year.

I don't know if we had at times last year guys step up in critical moments and make clutch plays when it was needed most.

So I think there has been significant strides made there, but there is still more work to do. That last game is an example of that. We have got to be able to threaten people. Got to be able to stretch people. Got to be able to make plays and create separation and make tough catches.

That needs to happen.

I think that needs to be an emphasis really for the rest of the season. I think that that question and the question that I just got, being able to run the ball more consistently in traditional running sets with traditional running backs and be able to make more plays in the passing game at the wide receiver position is going to be really important not only for this game, but long-term for this season and where

we want to go.

Q. Talking about discipline as you mentioned earlier, I'm wondering how you can teach that and coach that in the middle of the season or within the season? For example the taunting call on Saturday. I mean, that may have been a marginal call, but discipline seems to me would be don't even give the ref a chance to make that call. It seems like that would be a hard thing to teach and coach and work on during a game week. How do you coach that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think first thing, your point is a good one. I did not turn that in to the Big10 officials this week because I know what the response would be. Technically, by the rules, there is justification for making that call. I watch college football not only on TV but I watch tons of hours of cutups. That call could be made five or six times a game in every game in college football.

For me to turn it in and say well, technically that is, I didn't turn it in. But I think the way you address it is in a team meeting setting. It needs to be addressed so not only does that player learn, but the whole team learns. Not only in a team meeting, but also on either side of the ball, offense or defense, it needs to be addressed. Needs to be addressed with the individual, which it has. And with the group, which it has.

That's how you address it, is you face it head on. You have the conversation. Where I think it's concerning is if it happens in back-to-back weeks. That's concerning, where you feel like you've addressed something and it happens again.

Q. After going back and looking at the tape, what is your take on the defense's performance on that last drive by Ohio State and the way they were able to move the ball?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, the last drive was concerning, right? Starting with the quarterback sneak for four yards. Obviously we needed to score in that goal line drive. You can also make the case that them having the ball at the one yard line, getting a safety, puts us in an unbelievable situation now to go win the game.

You get safety there, two points. Now you get the ball back, you go down, and now not only do you score, but you score and take time off the clock. Now you have enough points to win the game in regulation.

As an optimist there was an opportunity there to really do something special. Whether those are championship drives from an offensive perspective or whether they're

defensive gut checks, you have got to be able to stop the run when everybody in the stadium knows that they're going to run the ball.

Just like on offense, you got to have the attitude that you got to be able to run the ball when everybody in the stadium knows you have to run the ball. That did not happen in that scenario. I was very pleased with our defense. I think that team was averaging 40 points a game, so I think overall, you look at how we played against them, I think we played well.

But, there are three drives in that game where I don't think we played up to the standard of how we played this year and specifically in that game.

Q. You mentioned on Saturday postgame the introspective part, looking in the mirror. You had a couple days to do that. Is there anything you wish you personally would've done different, whether it's how you handle the leadup to the game or the game itself?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, obviously always introspective. You know, this game and this week I feel like myself and the coaching staff handled it very different than how we had in the past. There was a ton of time spent on that in the off-season. Ton of time spent on that during the week; being very intentional about how we approach this game.

Talked to the players about that in the off-season. Talked to the coaches about that in the off-season. Talked to other coaches about it as well. Yeah, very, very introspective.

At the end of the day we did not play well enough against a very, very good opponent get the W. Obviously needs to be more time spent on it and more discussions spent on things that we have to do outside of what we did that game week. There is a lot of things.

I think as you guys know, I came into that, I had already planned out what I was going to talk to you guys about and what I was going to say to you.

There is a lot of things that go into it. There is nothing more than I wanted to do than walk into that press conference after the game and talk about why that game was different and also where we were headed.

But, again, I'll save that for the appropriate moment.

Q. You talked in the past about not needing a loss or setback to learn a lesson. Obviously you have one now. From a mindset perspective what does a loss do for the team in terms of now you know what that feels

like, you don't want to feel it again? Is there also a pitfall coming off a loss, as you mentioned, you don't want to make that turn into two? Going into an emotional week with the White Out game at home, and that game comes with difficulties; environment is crazy.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, good question. I think a couple things, right? I think the first thing is I have read and seen other programs that felt like they were loose, they were not dotting the Is, crossing the Ts. They were able to get away with things from a talent standpoint.

After a loss it was, hey, no more being late to meetings. That's not our issue. We run a tight ship. The guys do a really good job. They understand what the expectations and standards are. It's not like that.

It's not look you need a setback and we're going to start doing things different. If the process is the right process, it really shouldn't change a whole lot week to week. I have think that's one of the big reasons we have been so consistent.

But I think to John's point, I do think it causes everybody to be introspective. It starts with that. The first thing after the game, the first thing everybody better do, and I think the best teams do this, they start looking at themselves. That's the coaches, the players. That's the offense. That's the defense. That's the special teams. Teams that the culture is not right there pointing fingers in the other direction.

I know it sounds crazy, but I've been around coaches that they're blaming the players for why plays don't make sense. The players are blaming the coaches. The offense is blaming the defense or the defense is blaming the offense or special teams or whatever it may be.

We don't have that. I was very proud of the guys in the locker room after the game. I think Devon has done a really good job in the locker rooms with messaging to the overall team when the seniors get up in the locker room and address the team after each game. Devon has been really good there.

So for us, I think more than anything, it's about being introspective. For me, as the head coach, it's not just the things this week, it's all the things that go into building a championship program. Making sure the things that I can control I'm controlling and the things that are outside of my control I'm getting the right amount of support to get those things done, too.

Q. Going back to the goal line sequence there, can you just take us through what it's like? Obviously heat

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

of the moment; a lot of stuff going on. But the conversation on the headset. Is there any back and forth? Is it even possible for to you maybe interject? How does that unfold?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we've talked about this before. There is really no discussions on a headset during a play call. Those things lead to second guessing. Those things lead to delay of games. Those things don't typically lead where you want to go.

So what will happen though is like I've mentioned to you guys before, after a play call there could be, hey, you may want to think about this. We haven't pushed the ball down the field enough. Not talking obviously in the goal line, but those types of things.

Hey, from a sequencing standpoint in this situation we got four downs, so let's call the third down understanding you have two downs in this situation.

Yeah, not discussions about a call when the call is made. The last thing you want to do is the person that's calling the game, that the head coach or somebody else is interjecting in those critical moments and making that coordinator hesitate.

Those discussions are happening all week long with your preparation and planning at what's best in those moments. As the game goes on, how things are going. The run game is working well, the pass game is working well, whatever it may be. That's the emphasis.

Obviously after you run the ball vertical two times and get stuffed, everybody is telling you to be creative. If you're creative in those moments and they don't work, then everybody is telling you you got too cute and you should've ran the ball north and south.

So hindsight is 20/20. I get it. At the end of the day you could make a lot of arguments. Could we have been more creative? Could we have gotten the ball into Tyler Warren's hands in that moment? From a technique and fundamental standpoint, could we have gotten more push? All those things.

The reality is back to when we won a big game in the Big10 Championship game on fourth and one, we made a stop on the fourth and one to win a game. Team we were playing didn't pick it up. That was the difference in the game.

The reality is you got to be able to get a yard when you want to get a yard. I don't know if it's necessarily about the play call. Play calls matter and count. Don't miss interpret

what I'm saying. At the end of the day you got to be able to get a yard from a mentality standpoint, a fundamental standpoint, a schematic standpoint, and all those things come into play there.

I've also been a part, you're creative on first down, creative on second down, you throw it on third down, and then everybody says you got too cute. At the end of the day we didn't get the ball in the end zone. When that happens you're going to be second guessed and critiqued. I get it.

Q. James, the altercation with the fan, the interaction with the fan, is that regrettable? Also, if you could, the last minute of the first half you let 20 seconds or so go by; still ended up down there. Did that play out the way you wanted it to?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, at the end of the day you want to make sure you can get all your plays run. The timeouts give us the ability and the flexibility to do that.

And then you also want to try to score with the least amount of time left on the clock as possible. So I was comfortable with that.

The interaction, yeah, I'm really good with it. Someone screaming at me and my daughter within a couple feet as we're walking off the field, I'm good with that. That comes with the territory. I asked the young man what his name was. To me it's like posting something. If you're going to post something, post it with your picture and name and own what you post.

If you're going to say something, own it. I just asked the gentlemen what his name was. He starts stuttering, backed up, and didn't say his name. Critiques and opinions come. That's part of the territory. I get it. I asked the young man what his name was.

Q. A variety of your veteran players in postgame told us they were aiming to earn an opportunity to play Ohio State again this season. I'd like to follow up on that with two angles for you. One, was that rematch potential part of your message in the postgame? And two, how do you feel about your veterans being openly public about their desire to play Ohio State for a second time in 2024?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm totally good with those guys speaking how they felt at the moment. I'm totally fine with that. I'm totally fine with them having enough confidence and having enough grit and determination and anger at the moment that they want a second shot.

In today's college football, that's a reality in ways that it



probably hasn't been in the past. It wasn't my message in the locker room, but there was people talking about it. I'm totally fine with that. I'm totally fine with that.

What the message is the way I interpret the message is that we want to play well enough to continue playing as a team and as a family as long as we possibly can.

Again, in today's college football, those things that you just said, you know, they're possible. They're realistic. Which I also think is probably cool about college football now where that wasn't the case in the past. You would have to wait a full calendar year depending on the schedule.

So, yeah, I think that's a cool thing for college football.

Q. I want to ask about the interception there at the end of the first half. Drew after the game took responsibility for that interception as you would expect a quarterback to do. Do you talk to him about things like that and a play which I don't think anyone thought it was his fault? Do you talk to him about that to make sure something like that doesn't affect his confidence?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, from what I have seen from Drew in his career here at Penn State and then his evolution over the last 12 months, I don't think it will. When you do what he did against USC, I don't see that impacting him. To me, I want the receivers coach to take responsibility for that. I want the receivers to take responsibility for that. I want Drew to take responsibility for that. I want Danny to take responsibility. I want Andy to take responsibility for that. I take responsibility for that.

So what I mean by that is like I want Drew to say to himself, all red zone throws I'm going to throw it away that are high that the receiver is going to catch it or nobody is going to catch it. You can make the argument he made the perfect throw.

But the way we teach those throws, we want them to be high where the receiver is reaching for the ball and if he doesn't catch it it's out of the back of the end zone.

The reality is I want my receiver and my receivers' coach to take total responsibility for it. I think if everybody approaches it that way, then that's a healthy way to approach it.

Then the coaches, look, did we put the player in that position enough times in practice? The quarterback, the receiver, did we put those guys in this position enough times that they have the fundamentals, the technique, confidence to make that play at that moment?

That's what we should all be doing. If we haven't, that's where the introspection happens, the changes happen, or adjustments happen to make sure those things do happen on a regular basis.

To me, that's the healthy way. Drew should take responsibility for it. The receivers should take responsibility for it. The coaches should take responsibility for it.

Where to me it's problematic is where guys get interviewed after the game and they say, that wasn't me. That guy has to make a play. That's a problem. That leads to things that are unhealthy. So a lot of ways I'm very proud of how that was handled.

I think to be honest with you, it's very telling. From the things that you guys are saying and how our guys handled it, the things that Chris and Greg told me how our guys have handled it, I'm proud of how they handled it.

Everybody is taking ownership and everybody wants the next opportunity. The next opportunity comes in Washington, and the more opportunities we handle like that, then we still have a chance to do the things we talked about in the beginning of the season and what our fans want so badly and what the lettermen want and alumni want so badly and what that fan was yelling at me walking off the field wants so badly.

I totally get it. Again, you do not fill up 111,000 seat stadium without passion and commitment, and we appreciate all of that. Can it go too far sometimes? Yes. Should it be addressed? Yes.

I saw something with Jason Kelce. He was coming go State College. I wanted him to have a wonderful experience. I didn't get a chance to meet him or see him. I saw something that I wasn't very proud of. I wish that didn't happen.

But there is also in 2024, I love that that person -- there was a consequence to his action. You know, so can it go too far sometimes and we talk about the passion and all those things being great, yes. But that also doesn't excuse bad behavior at times.

So it comes with the territory, but that doesn't make it right, if that makes sense.

Q. We talked about the failed goal line possession and then not being able to punch in at the end and the defense not being able to get that stop.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, sir.

Q. In terms of your new coordinators, how do you assess Andy and Tom and Justin in how they handled that game from a playcalling and just overall standpoint?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so couple things. Couple things. The first thing that I'll do to try to take the emotion out of it is you look at the statistics, right? Where are we at statistically on defense? Where are we at statistically on offense? Where are we at statistically on special teams?

I think one of the things that that helps with is it takes the emotion out of it. It takes the bias out of it. It also takes who they're following out of it, because who you follow has an impact on the perception of the job you're doing.

That is No. 1.

I think No. 2, that I made very clear, starting with myself and the entire staff on Sunday morning after we all graded the film and everybody had a chance to talk about how their positions played, recruiting updates, how the weekend went, all of it, is I made sure everybody in the room clearly understood it.

Again, the buck stops with me. Everybody is in that room to beat that opponent and opponents like that. So the 6-0, 7-0 leading up to that is awesome. We appreciate it and don't take it for granted and all the hard work that goes into it, but we've done that.

So the reality is everybody in that room is in that room based on those type of games. That's why you're there. I want to make sure everybody clearly understands that. I clearly understand it. Trust me. I clearly understand that.

And I want to make sure that everybody in the room understands that as well. We've done some good things and we got a lot to be proud of. But, at the end of the day these are the type of games that we're ultimately going to be evaluated on and we embrace that and don't hide from that.

We appreciate that. But I also want to make sure that the guys like Terry Smith and Andy Frank and Kevin Threlkel and Chuck Losey and the guys that have been there from the beginning. I also recognize what those guys have done for this program from the beginning and what we took over.

You got to balance both. I think this message got across very, very clearly, just like it got across to me very clearly. Again.

Q. Question about your pass game. You mentioned earlier getting your standard or traditional run game with the running backs going. Has that had an effect on the passing game? More to the point, do you think there is a disconnect between Drew's -- In don't want to say Drew's portion of the offense, but the passing portion, the progression portion of the passing game and the rest of offense? Is there a solve for that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I think it's a good question. I think, again, competition plays a factor in all of this. We can't just answer these questions and act like the competition does not factor; it does.

So what was different in that game, except for the opening drive, we weren't able to stay on schedule. The more you're able to stay on schedule, the more shots you're able to take down the field. What I thought we did a good job in that game is making sure that the defensive ends who are talented didn't wreck the game like they have in the past.

I thought we did a very good job from a game planning and from a plan perspective to make sure that certain players and certain positions didn't impact the game more than they needed to. I thought we did that. Even not staying on schedule where we had too many third and longs which made third down difficult.

So it does a ton of things. It makes third down more difficult when you're not on schedule, whether that's the run game or high percentage passing game, shots down the field, all those things.

So the run game is critical to that. The opponent plays a factor in it.

Again, at the end of the day we got to do a really good job of putting our players in the best position to be successful, to be able to manufacture yards and points against those type of opponents.

And the reality is when you're doing things to stop the D ends, that creates more challenges inside. If you got more double teams on the end then you got less double teams at tackle. You can't take it all away. So that's where the chess game comes.

Not only is it the competition in terms of the personnel, it's the competition in terms of coordinators as well. All of it. So I think your point is a fair one. Yeah, I think the run game definitely impacts the passing game, specifically on third down and specifically on your ability to take shots down the field.

All those things go hand in hand, no different than on defense getting them off schedule is typically when our sack production goes way up and our three-and-outs go way up. Why? Because they're off schedule.

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