

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate you guys being here. Just briefly, recap a couple of things from Washington and then move on.

Positives, we found a way to win the game but also thought we got better. I thought that was important last week.

We went into the game saying we needed to eliminate running back No. 1, who we had a ton of respect for going into the game. He ended up with 24 yards and 2.2 yards per carry. He was averaging 103 yards per game.

No. 12 had two catches and 35 yards, zero touchdowns. He was leading the Big Ten in receiving touchdowns with nine. They were two guys we went into the game feeling like we had to be aware of those guys and limit their production.

I thought that the staff and the players did a great job of managing substitutions and situations. Having all those timeouts at the end of the half were important. Led to 14 points in the middle eight.

And I think probably the two most telling stats in the game, one, dealing with the line of scrimmage. Our defense had five sacks and nine tackles for loss. And our offense had zero sacks and zero tackles for loss.

And then third down was the other one. We were 77 percent on third down. They were 30 percent.

Areas for improvement, ball security. Can't work on that enough. We just have so much respect for that statistic. So making sure we're doing a great job of that. And then just making sure that whoever goes into the game plays up to the same standards.

That was kind of just some things I wanted to cover from the Washington game with you guys.

From a Purdue perspective, Coach Walters, obviously know his background really well, really kind of got on the scene as the defensive coordinator at Missouri. And then



did a really good job there and then did a phenomenal job at the defensive coordinator at Illinois.

Now he's been the head coach there since 2022. And obviously they've been aggressive in the transfer portal. I think they've gone and gotten 34 players out of the transfer portal.

Some of the things, I think, obviously, you guys are aware of, but Coach is calling the offense. And as a defensive guy, you know, I think that's impressive as well as challenging.

I think a lot of it has to do with the defensive coordinator was with him at Illinois. And I think he probably has a lot of comfort in that guy because they worked together for a number of years. So if he was going to jump in and help it was going to be opposite of that guy that he had the most confidence in.

But he's calling the offense right now. They are based out of a (lost audio) a little bit of 12 personnel. We've been impressed with the Texas quarterback transfer, Hudson Card. The running back, feels like he's been playing there forever, Mockobee. Has been very, very productive back over the last couple of years. And then their tight end, No. 86, Max Klare, those guys kind of stand out to us.

On the defense, led by Kevin Kane, again, who was the outside linebackers coach at Illinois and came with Coach to be the defensive coordinator. Guys that stand out to us is safety No. 31, Dillon Thieneman; No. 4, D end/linebacker Kydran Jenkins; and defensive end, No. 15 Will Heldt; and No. 10 Kyndrich Breedlove.

For you guys that are familiar with Illinois on defense, this is a team that is going to match your personnel probably as much as anybody we have played.

Where they're different than a lot of teams they'll go four down and five down. Usually you see four down and three down. They'll go five down. Had a lot of success with that at Illinois, and that scheme is still with them.

On special teams, Chris Petrilli, their special teams coordinator, and their punter we've been impressed with,



Keelan Crimmins, he's another Australian punter, a transfer from Mississippi State. And he's averaging essentially 45 yards per punt.

The last thing I'd say before opening up to questions, I think the staff's done a really good job in the players understanding of what we're trying to do but of managing the four-game restriction on redshirting. So you'll start to see some guys come available and play on special teams and offense and play on special teams and defense over these last couple of games.

Some will be ready to go right now because they've only played one game. Some will probably wait until the next game to use because the big reason for that is on special teams it's hard for Coach Lustig to get a guy ready for one week and he's not playing next week.

We'd rather be able to have him for three games in a row or two games in a row and then hopefully the postseason as well. So that is the plan is try to work some of those guys in that have games available in the regular season.

**Q. How have you seen Drew (lost audio) of the younger quarterbacks develop and progress this year with Andy and Danny?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think a really good example, Drew's a morning guy, right, so he's in there watching film this morning at 6:30 a.m. Bo's in typically for a number of hours in the afternoon.

I think Grunk has really turned it on here recently. And hopefully Smolik will be available again to us very, very soon and looks great.

But I just think it's just a combination, right? It's a combination of most of these guys -- or all of them, excuse me -- are a year older. They're a year older in their college experience. They've watched a ton of film. In some ways playing in multiple schemes is helpful. It's funny, I was listening to Jay Reed talking about it the other day, and the reality is there's things that Brett Pry did very well. There's things that Manny did very well. There's things that Tom Allen does very well. And there's things, like for a guy like Jay Reed that can learn from all of them, right?

So I think if you look at quarterbacks, there's a lot of similarities there in terms of what Danny's been able to do in his evolution as a coach as well as the players.

Andy's obviously done a really good job, and I think one of the things that's attractive to our quarterbacks, as well as the quarterbacks that we're recruiting, is it's probably more of a pro-style system in terms of the huddle, in terms of the

play calls.

Now, that's changed, right? A lot of NFL teams are running spread schemes right now, so it's kind of more of a combination of all these different things, whether it's two backs or heavy sets or no backs or whatever it may be.

But I just think they're a year older and I think they're more comfortable and confident. I think they have a better understanding of how to watch film and how to prepare.

I think when you're a young player, you kind of still watch the game as a fan and just kind of follow the ball. And I think we talk weekly about just kind of their process evolving over time. And I think Danny and Andy have obviously helped with that.

So I'm pleased with their maturation. I think Drew looks consistently comfortable and in control in the games. I think probably the biggest thing for him that I've noticed is his mobility. I think it's been a huge factor for him and for our offense, especially vertical, vertical scrambles up in the pocket. Stepping up and climbing the pocket has been big.

And then I think obviously the development of the positions around him, too, have played a major role in that too. I think Danny, Andy, the quarterbacks, the other positions have played a part in it. But I've been very pleased with their development and the direction we're headed.

**Q. The depth in your running back room has been tested this season. How is that group holding up physically and mentally at this point?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think good. I think if you just look across college football and even the NFL, you better have depth at that position especially if you're committed to running the football like we are.

There's going to be bumps and bruises that come from that. We had two young backs that I think you guys knew we were excited about. And I think early on there was a lot of talk about Quinton, and deservedly so. But I think in the Lasch Building, there was also a lot of excitement about Corey, a different style back than probably the other three. But it was great to see him get in there.

And the long run, it's probably what everybody is excited about, although he took hell for it in the team meeting yesterday and with his teammates.

The run that was probably most impressive to us is his first run, his first play as a college football player. The patience he showed, his ability, and a little bit of a dirty read to get vertical. He's still got to put on some size and do a great

job in the weight room, but he stuck it up in there and had a really, really efficient run.

So that's good. Those guys are being developed. I think we have talent at that position. I think they're holding up well. I think both Nick and Kaytron are really good complementary pieces to each other. And we're going to need all of them as this season continues.

**Q. Wide receivers, it seemed like they not only were more productive in the Washington game but also were targeted more -- maybe you won't agree with that. But if you do agree with that, how come, against supposedly one of the best pass defenses in the country?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's kind of what I've been talking about from the beginning of the year. We want to get as many guys touches as possible. How do you do that? You be better on third down. We were 7-of-7 on third down, manageable third-down situations, and every time you're successful on third down you've got a chance for at least three for plays.

When you're 7-of-7 on third down in the first half, that's going to lead to good offense and that's going to lead to more touches and more opportunities for different guys.

I think Washington had the No. 2 pass defense in the country. We have a ton of respect for them coming into the game. But again, I think the answer is what I've been talking about all year long is when we can be better on third down. It's going to create more plays. It's going to create more opportunities to score. It's going to create more opportunities for touches. It's going to create more opportunities for explosive plays. Just chuck it down the field.

**Q. Your running game just looked better. To the naked eye, Nick and Kaytron, I don't know, almost looked faster. Do you have any thoughts on the running game, in particular, those two guys and their performance Saturday? And can you give us any type of insight into Nick's physical condition going forward, shorter term, longer term situation, anything?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Short term, you guys will obviously have a better idea come practice. I know you guys will be out there at practice, but short term, yeah, in terms of that, I don't know. Those guys come ready to practice every single day, ready to work.

I think you guys know Nick's had some things lingering on and off kind of throughout the year and has battled through them.

Kaytron is a workhorse. And they complement each other really well. Even on the kickoff return it was a shame that that got called back. And I think it was a legitimate call.

We clearly held the guy, hands outside. And I'll be the first one to admit that that was a great call. That was a good call. That was a fair call.

But in terms of the run game, I just think, again, it's going to be a boring answer that you guys don't want to hear, just like the targets for the receivers, the more we can stay ahead of the sticks, which, back to the stat I said before in terms of tackle for loss, we didn't have any in the game. When you're able to stay ahead of the sticks and stay on schedule, then it just creates more opportunities.

For us, we're going to be committed to the run and being balanced and continuing to try to be as explosive as we possibly can, but continue to feed those guys the ball.

And I think our offensive line had a little bit of a chip on their shoulder. Tight ends as well. Coaching staff as well. And we're going to need that moving forward.

But I think Andrew Nelson, I think you guys know our sports scientist, has done a really good job of getting the team feedback and giving me feedback in terms of how to adjust practice and where we're at based on the game we just played. And there's a lot of things that kind of go into it.

Kind of off topic a little bit, but I feel for Washington a little bit, right? We play a 7:00 game and they probably didn't get back to Washington until probably seven in the morning, and then they've got a Friday game. I don't really know if that's in the best interests of the Big Ten, those types of things.

But Nelly gives us great feedback on how to adjust our practices to make sure our guys are fresh and they're fast. And there's times where we've got to push and work and there's times where we've got to cut back.

Again, I think it goes back to the depth a little bit when you've got two young backs like Quinton and Corey, allows you to cut a little bit of reps from Nick and Kaytron from practice, because I think they can handle it.

I'm not saying anything dramatic, but two reps a period less than they normally would take, it adds up over time. It also allows those young guys to gain some experience and hopefully put us in a position to be as fresh as possible on Saturdays.

That's the challenge. It's always been a challenge in college football. It's more challenging than it's ever been, specifically in the Big Ten, with the travel that we have to handle as well.

So, it's challenging. That's why a lot of these changes that have been made over the last couple of years and that are coming, I think are even more challenging for the Big Ten. We've got to be very, very strategic, really important discussions between head coaches and ADs and the commissioner, that we put our conference in the best position to be successful long term.

**Q. A.J. Harris, at what point did you guys know he was going to be as productive and as good in a man-to-man situation and everything that he's done for you guys so far? When did you kind of know he was going to be that kind of player for you?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think A.J. has done a really good job. When you think about the history and tradition at Penn State -- and we've got as good a history and tradition as anywhere in the country -- but probably the corner room, there was less examples of that over time. And I think Terry has changed that dramatically. That's no disrespect, I don't mean it any way disrespectful, but Terry has just done a really good job taking a position -- and you talk about draft picks and you talk about All-Conference players and those types of things, and at a position specifically and how the conference has changed -- a lot more spread offenses, a lot more throwing the ball around. Terry's done a phenomenal job.

Whether it's high school guys that we have developed or whether that's going out to the transfer portal -- as you guys know we're not a big transfer portal team -- but look a little bit at junior college recruiting used to be, go out and fill an immediate need, or just bring some veteran leadership into the room.

A.J. is a little bit different because you're talking about bringing a guy in as a redshirt freshman, which is unusual, typically, from the transfer portal. But obviously if you look at Kimber as well as him, Kimber played a ton of football in the SEC.

And then we talk about A.J., just a very high (indiscernible) recruited young man that we were involved with out of high school, but once he showed up on campus, he bought into everything we asked him to do. Tested really well physically. And then just embraced the competition in that room.

So it was probably early on, because one of the first things we do is baseline testing and kind of check all the boxes

from a measurement standpoint, and then he was able to pick up the scheme.

The thing to me that's exciting is I don't think he's scratched the surface. I think there's a ton left for him -- and I think he's playing at a high level -- but I think there's a ton left for improvement there. And I think Terry is the right guy to coach him.

As good as he's been, I think he's got a chance to get a lot better. And I think that room does in general. I've been very, very pleased with how they're playing, but Terry deserves a ton of credit. So obviously the young men in that room as well.

**Q. You touched on this a little bit, but relative to the injuries and length of season, are you purposely cutting back the time of practice much at this time of the year?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we always do. So we start to cut back in terms of the type of equipment we wear at practice. We make modifications there.

In terms of the type of drills that we run in practice, typically they go hand in hand with the type of equipment you wear, the amount of reps at practice, the amount of time we have at practice, and then also the amount of full-speed reps compared to jog-through reps. All those things gradually get adjusted over time. Nothing dramatic, it's just gradual reduction.

As you know, at the end of the day, you still need the reps to make sure you're prepared to play the game, but there's also cumulative effect that builds up over time as well. So we gradually make adjustments.

Those adjustments -- one of the things I constantly challenge Nelly on and Chuck on is that everybody's got to make adjustments. So I've got to make adjustments with the practice shell. Well, the strength coach needs to make adjustments in the weight room. The coordinators need to make adjustments, the position coaches need to make adjustments.

We need to make adjustments with the veteran players who played a ton of football with the high-rep guys from the previous game. All those things factor in. And as the head coach, what I have to make sure is happening is that everybody's doing that.

Because what happens is that position coach doesn't want to give up any of his time. He wants the strength coach to reduce it. The strength coach doesn't want to touch any of his time, he wants it to come out of the position individual.

And so on and so forth.

So everybody's gotta be on the same page and coordinated that we're doing what's in Penn State's best interests and what's in the players' best interests.

**Q. You talked a lot about Hakeem Beamon and everything he's been through and overcame. Is there anything you can share with us with respect to him no longer being on the team? And how do you think that position fared without him being there against Washington?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's no longer a part of the program. I love Hakeem. Love his mom. It's been probably over seven years from the high school recruiting process and ups and downs and twists and turns and smiles and tears and everything in between. Graduating from Penn State, we're very, very proud of that for him and did a bunch of good things on the field. But he's no longer a part of the team.

In terms of the room, I thought guys stepped up. It was really cool to see some guys in there, whether it was Vicky Mupoyi or Kaleb Artis, really cool to see those guys be able to get in there and get some work, guys that have worked really hard.

If you are talking about some other guys that we've had discussions about, Xavier Gilliam is a guy, just looking at the chart here, I think we tried to hold so that we would have the ability to be able to play him moving forward, but he's a guy that we've got a lot of excitement about in the program.

I think Alonzo's impact, a guy that we weren't exactly sure what we had, but continues to trend in the right direction as he's getting more and more healthy and playing himself back into shape. I think at one point he was about 325 pounds. I want to say he's about 305 right now and moving really well. So good.

I think obviously Dvon and Zane kind of lead us in there. Coziah is a guy we didn't have last week, which magnified it. Coziah was out last week. We expect to have him back. But that magnified it.

So they are three veteran players that have played a ton of football for us. We are going to need them to continue to play well as these other guys continue to grow. But I would also view Alonzo as a veteran player for us.

So we've got four D tackles. That's really kind of the position you want to be in, to have four guys that you feel really good about, and then a battle for that fifth position

with some young developmental guys that are hungry.

**Q. You talked about getting some freshmen some more playing time over the last three games. Does that change at all, the green light/yellow light chart? And who are some of those true freshmen that you feel most confident playing a decent amount?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: The way we look at the green/yellow/red. Green, you're trying to burn. Yellow, you're trying to hold the redshirt if you can. And red is a guy that's most likely going to redshirt. And all those things can change based on injury.

What I'm saying is we manage this that we now should be at this stage, a lot of these guys be able to play and still be able to keep their redshirt.

I think Max Granville is a good example. We had decided, I guess, in some ways to green light him in terms of if we needed him to win, he was going into the game. But we weren't just going to put him in if he wasn't necessarily needed.

We were fortunate over the last couple of games to be able to get through those games and not have to play him because what I'm very sensitive to is you put a guy in for three plays, like once you're going to play a guy, there's got to be a commitment throughout the program on special teams with the coordinators and the position coach that the kid and the parents feel at the end of the year it was worthwhile, it was in everybody's best interests.

So some guys that I would say fall in that category right now are Corey Smith and Tyseer Denmark, Eagan Boyer and Donnie Harbour, Xavier Gilliam, Max Granville, Jaylen Harvey, Anthony Specca, Belgrave-Shorter, and Woosely (phonetic) and Mitchell.

Some of these guys it will be this game. Some of the guys it will be next game. But the guys that have only played in one game, they're good to go. The guys that have played in two games, we'll probably try to hold them for another game.

I think Terry is a pretty good example with Kenny and Jon, he rotates them every other game. And last week it was Kenny's time to be ready to go if the game presented an opportunity. So he was able to get in there. He's played two games.

Jon's only played one. So this will be Jon's game. Now Jon can play the rest of the year. And then next -- not this game, but the next game, Kenny will be in a similar situation.

**Q. At the linebacker position, outside of late when you brought in a lot of your younger players and reserves, seems like it's been very geared towards Kobe, towards Tony, and then obviously Dom that he's got more. I know the depth cultivation is something we've discussed. But we haven't really seen that take place in games. Is that something where, with some of the younger guys like Specca, that you hope to maybe reach the end of the regular season in a better spot feeling better about depth than how you feel about it in this moment?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Specca is a guy, again, we were trying to redshirt if we can. It may not play itself out like that. We'll see.

Kobe is just playing really well. And obviously it's a little bit like a quarterback position. It's hard to take that guy off the field because he runs your defense. That's magnified a little bit because Tyler Elsdon's had some bumps and bruises. So that's factored into it. Ta'Mere had some bumps and bruises earlier in the year. So he's missed some time.

But we need Ta'Mere really to start coming on right now. He's shown some really good flashes. We've got to get Tyler Elsdon healthy again.

So all those things kind of factor into that and Ta'Mere, both at the Will linebacker position as well as the Mike linebacker position.

DeLuca is another guy, you know exactly what you're going to get with him. We're creating some depth because he can play both outside linebacker positions. So what we didn't want to do is he comes off the field every time we're not in base. So being able to create the flexibility that he can go to the other side, that helps with that.

I think DaKaari has done a really nice job. Started some games for us, has done some good things for us as well. But we don't have great depth there. We're developing it but we've had some bumps and bruises along the way as well. But I think once we get to the point where Specca is available, that will help.

But a lot of it just has to do with Kobe playing very, very well right now and some of the other guys having bumps and bruises at a position that that happens, very similar to what we talked about at running back.

**Q. You mentioned Saturday night that you had thanked the administration for making sure it was a night game. Spent a lot of time in the summer the**

**factors that go into it. I know some of it is out of your control. But the past three years the games have been pretty lopsided. When you look back, how comfortable are you with that selection process and how it's ended up recently?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you guys know, we spent a lot of time talking about and working towards, as players and coaches, controlling the things that you can control. So I'm not going to spend any energy on time, on things that are outside of my control.

I think our football program and the administration have made it very, very clear in what we'd like to do and how we'd like to do it. And that's all we can do. That's all we can do.

I do think part of the reason the games have been a little bit lopsided is because of the crowd and because of the environment. That plays a factor. Home-field advantage is a real thing. And when that's the white-out, it's even more so. It creates a real challenging environment specifically on offenses.

But we'll make our case with what we'd like to do and how we'd like to do it, but we're going to need cooperation from others to make that happen.

**Q. With the training table in and the stadium and now with the dorms coming in across the street on University Drive -- and you've worked really hard to make a lot of these things happen -- are the big pieces in place, the big picture things that have taken 11 years to happen? Are there any big pieces that you're still looking forward to in the years ahead?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, what I will say is, number one, I'm appreciative of all the work that's gone in over our 11 years. One of the things I'd like to show you guys at some point is we've taken before-and-after pictures of everything, and I think back all the way to standing on that turf practice field and my back was up against the fence and you guys were asking me questions -- a lot of the same people in the room were asking me questions about facilities. And that was a battle when I first got here.

The turf, we weren't allowed to use the turf because it hadn't been replaced in 10 years, our turf field.

So I'm very, very proud of the progress we have made. I'm very, very appreciative of the board leadership over my 11 years here. I'm very appreciative of the presidents over my 11 years here. I'm very appreciative of the ADs.

I will say this: In the last, I guess it's probably been three

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

years with Neeli and Pat and Matt Schuyler and pretty soon Kleppinger, it has changed.

And, again, very appreciative of the support we've gotten over 11 years, but I would say in the last three years it's been different. And I would say specifically in the last year and a half it's been different because the first year and a half, when you get on campus, you're just trying to kind of figure it all out. And once they were able to figure it all out, we are getting the type of support at a level that I think this place demands and should have.

But we are getting the type of support in the last year and a half through those people that we have not had here. So are there still things that need to be done? Yes. Yes. We'll be saying that for the rest of our time here because you guys know it's constantly a moving target. But I think that was the problem, right?

When you stop trying to get better on a daily and a yearly basis and you're not bold and aggressive with those things all the time, you can fall behind and you can fall significantly behind.

So, yeah, there's still a lot of things that we have to get done. But we are closer -- not even close -- we are closer than we have been in my 11 years, not even close from a support standpoint and a commitment standpoint.

And, again, that is a credit to Neeli Bendapudi, Matt (lost audio), and clearly Pat Kraft. Clearly Pat Craft, walk-on linebacker in the Big Ten who approaches his job like that every single day. And I mean that with total respect.

**Q. We've talked a lot about depth and playing freshmen and things today, but I'm curious, from the way that you've played games so far this year, there have been plenty of lopsided victories but the game flow hasn't really presented an opportunity for like a third quarter to get a bunch of players into the game and, more importantly, get your starters out of the game earlier. I guess from that perspective of the number of reps on offense and defense, how do you feel your team is positioned heading into the final three weeks of the season and beyond?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think good, but like that's kind of like where all of this has become challenging, right? The Big Ten is not the Big Ten that we always remember. Like, the SEC is no longer the SEC that we all remember.

When you bring these teams in and you increase the competition week in, week out, this is not your grandfather's Big Ten. This is not your father's Big Ten and the same with the SEC.

So you're not going to have these lop-sided games that you've had in the past. It's going to be more like the NFL where a lot of these games are one-possession games.

The interesting thing is now that becomes magnified because we've just increased the competition, we've just increased the talent, but then we're going to reduce the roster sizes.

So this has become more challenging than it's ever been -- reduce the roster size, transfer portal, NIL, travel in the Big Ten. This is a very different challenge than it's ever been. And that's where this type of commitment and this type of support is important.

I'll give you a perfect example, what you guys know. I had Kevin Threlkel doing an ongoing study throughout the season of West Coast teams that have traveled east and East Coast teams that have traveled west, what's their win percentage, what was their travel plans, how did they travel, where did they practice, where did they stay, all these things.

And it's critical. And then you better have the support to be able to do it from your athletic administration. You better have your support on campus as well in terms of when you can travel and how you can travel.

There's so many things that go into it. So I think we are positioned fairly well right now because we've been very, very strategic. I know you guys get probably sick and bored and talking about red, yellow and green. But I think again those conversations are more important than what they ever have been.

I think the four-game decision was one of the better decisions the NCAA's made in the last 10 years. I think we will probably get to a point where there will be five years of eligibility because if you're going to reduce the roster size, I don't know how you do that and still redshirt guys.

And then it also takes away the problem that you're seeing in college athletics and specifically college football where guys are coming in and telling you they're redshirting. If you have five years of eligibility, that takes away that dynamic for the player. It takes away that dynamic away for the coach.

And I think that's something that's going to -- that's been something that's been talked about for a long time in college athletics and specifically football. But I think that's going to come to a head here sooner rather than later, in my mind, in the conversations that I'm a part of in the Big Ten and with the AFCA.

