

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess a lot of people are out of town for Thanksgiving. Kind of light in here today.

Always appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. Just a couple things to kind of close up the last game. Positives, obviously we overcame a lot of adversity on the road and found a way to get a big time Big10 win, which is tough to do.

You look across college football, you know, that's hard to do. I thought our guys did a really good job of maximizing -- we talk about kind of one-moment opportunities. You prepare all year long for certain opportunities to come up. I thought the fake punt was a perfect example. We been repping that all the way back since training camp and Dom Rulli did a phenomenal job of being the quarterback if that and getting us into the right call at the right time or checking out of it. He's done that all year long, and that was great in that situation.

But there are also things in that like if you had a chance to go back and watch the play, DaKarri Nelson's block is like a clinic block. Like he pancakes the guy on it.

Tyler Elsdon on the front side gets his hands inside, gets a beautiful block. He may have a pancake as well. So really cool that you work all year for something and then when the time presents itself, the guys are able to take advantage of it and maximize. So really cool and really proud of the guys for that.

Two-for-two on field goals. Not a whole lot of people talking about Barker right now and that unit, but that's been big for us. I think he's 10 of 11 since he got started for us and is doing a nice job.

You know, I think the situational football stuff that we talk about all the time has really showed up this year. If you look at two-minute drives, you know, this season, whether it's before the half or at the end of the game, we've scored points in West Virginia, Bowling Green, Kent State, UCLA, Washington, and Minnesota, so take a lot of pride that that's showed up.

Then four-minute drives at the end of games, West Virginia, Washington, Minnesota. So all of those things were really positive.

Then maybe my favorite play of the game was what we call surrender. We call a play on offense. Now we're able to call surrender and we signal surrender. It means once you get the first down you go down or once you're about to score you go down before scoring. It's kind of a perfect example of who we are.

I also think it's a perfect example of Tyler Warren. You know with that catch he has a chance to score and be the all-time leading scorer in Penn State history at the tight end position and he falls down at the one yard line. Easily could have scored; goes down.

It's the best thing to do in terms of managing that situation and winning the game and not having to kickoff again, ending on our terms. So just really, really cool play and not surprising that Tyler Warren is going to put the team first.

I'm a big believer in that. The more you give to others and pour into others, it comes back to you ten times. Tyler Warren is a perfect example of that.

Opportunities for growth, obviously the blocked punt, that wasn't a scheme issue. We had three guys rushing. We had three guys to block. The guy got a little bit on of the edge and the punt was kicked a little bit wider than normal and he got his hand on the ball. That was a huge play in the game.

The field goal was a fluke deal. We haven't done that for, I don't know, 11 years. For whatever reason, we block out when we've always blocked down.

But we obviously got to get those things cleaned up.

And then the start of the game was disappointing. Three and out on offense and then a 70-yard drive resulting in a touchdown. So not the way you want to start the game. So we'll get those things cleaned up.

And then two last points is we got to be better creating



YAC yards, so that's after the catch YAC yards, that's after the carry YAC yards, that's after first contact.

To me, the scheme and the other ten players are responsible to get the ball carrier in position to be in a one-on-one situation. Then you got to win that one-on-one situation. Got to be a little bit better there.

Then what we call the quick kick with Tyler Warren, obviously we don't want to shank the punt and we've been working that all year long.

The bigger picture thing I talked about with the team is when you're in a sky punt situation, so typically where we were on the field, whether it's a quick kick situation or whether it's a sky kick situation, we would never call timeout there.

So it was a good opportunity to talk about it. We talked about it as a team. Sometimes the quarterbacks are not in that discussion because it's a special teams conversation. But we never call timeout there.

You're in a plus territory punt situation. If you get a five yard penalty for delay of game, no big deal. Back up five yards and you're still in a really good situation. That was a good opportunity to talk through that.

Most importantly we found a way to get a win on the road against a good opponent. When you get into Maryland, obviously got a lot of familiarity with those people. Was there for eight years, five years and then three years as offensive coordinator, head-coach-in-waiting there. So got a lot of history there.

Me and Locks coached together for a number of years together there as well. Know the area. Got a ton of respect for the university. Ton of respect for the area, the DMV, the high school coaches in the area, high school programs.

You look at their roster, they've done a good job of building their roster between high school and transfer portal Cal. They got 14 players from the transfer portal on their roster. Obviously Locks has a background as an offensive coordinator and from what I understand, Locks is calling the offense right now.

Josh Gattis, the offensive coordinator, was on our staff here at Penn State. I know Josh very well. Got a ton of respect for him, too.

They're an 11 personnel team primarily. They'll go into some other things like 12 and 20 personnel, but they're predominantly an 11 personnel team.

Passing offense, they're first in the Big10. Total offense, sixth until the Big10. Quarterback Billy Edwards has done a nice job there for a number of years as a backup quarterback and this year doing a really good job when you talk about throwing the ball for yards and touchdowns.

Roman Hemby has been playing there for a while. Very, very productive back that we got a lot of respect for. And then Ty Helton I think is leading the Big10 in receiving, catches and yards. He's got 92 catches for over 1000 yards, and a guy that we got a lot of respect for on film and we'll need to be aware of. He'll be a big part of the our defensive game plan.

Defensive coordinator, Brian Williams, also known for a very long time, all the way back to his time as a high school coach in Florida. Brian does a really good job. Multiple front. Multiple scheme from both three-down front and four-down front.

You know, skies that we're impressed with, linebacker Ruben Hyppolite who we also recruited; safety Dante Trader, No, 12; the defensive lineman No. 7, Tommy Akingbesote. I hope I said that right. Please.

D-lineman No. 8 Jordan Phillips, who is a Tennessee transfer; and then linebacker No. 44, Caleb Wheatland. Guys we have respect for.

On special teams, James Thomas and their punter, No. 34, Brian McPherson, who is a Notre Dame transfer and punting very well right now.

Excited about the opportunity. It's also Senior Day for our guys, so a lot that comes with that. That's been a little bit challenging for everybody in college football right now with the COVID years and things like that.

It's made it a little bit whacky over the last couple years. You got sixth year guys, you got fifth year guys, you got fourth year guys; some programs have seventh and eighth year guys. That's been different.

But we look forward to having the opportunity to celebrate the seniors and what they've done for our program. Obviously we need to play well and be 1-0 to put us in the best position to be able to continue playing as a family as long as possible.

Open up to questions. I know that was a little bit longer than normal. I apologize. Open up to questions.

Q. Good afternoon, James. How are you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey, Rich.

Q. In the last two days, have you...

JAMES FRANKLIN: Rich, Thanksgiving press conference. We got a tradition around here.

Q. Okay, white meat.

JAMES FRANKLIN: No. I got all my questions written down here. Yeah. Actually, I think you missed that one, white meat or dark meat. Add it to the list.

Turkey or ham?

Q. Turkey.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Turkey. Is there a reason why you justify your decision?

Q. It's called Turkey Day for a reason, isn't it?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay. And what part of the turkey do you eat?

Q. White meat.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Do you use gravy.

Q. Yes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Do you eat the turkey and gravy alone or do you take a little bit mashed potatoes, a little bit of stuffing, little bit of corn? How do you do it?

Q. I take a little bit of everything.

JAMES FRANKLIN: On one bite?

Q. Sometimes. I don't really think about it. I just want to...

JAMES FRANKLIN: When you eat the turkey do you eat it on its own with gravy or do you include other things in that bite?

Q. It varies. I don't really -- you know.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're a madman, Rich.

What we got?

Q. In the last two days, have you learned anything more about Anthony Donkoh? Is it a long-term injury? Secondly, how did Nolan play in his place?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, Anthony is a long-term injury. We felt like Rucci played well. I think our offensive line as well as Rucci, I think you could watch 20 plays and be very impress and you could watch a couple plays and be frustrated.

I think that's not just coming from me. That's coming from the line coaches, the players themselves. Like always, right, we got to take responsibility for that and you also got to give Minnesota some credit for that. Minnesota had an extra week in preparation and I thought they had a really good plan; it showed up.

Yeah, I think we were pleased with Rucci, and we sure are glad he's on our team. We felt like that all year long. We're going to need him to have a really good week this week in preparation as well as on Saturday, and have a lot of confidence that he will.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving in advance.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You too, Mark. How you doing?

Q. What do you got for me?

JAMES FRANKLIN: All right. Here we go. Pumpkin or sweet potato pie? I know the answer.

Q. I'm going to go sweet potato.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Mark, my guy. My guy. And you'll have that at Thanksgiving this year?

Q. No, I will not. It will not come up. I should make one actually. You inspired me.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Are you saying you go with sweet potato pie because you're not a fan of pumpkin?

Q. I prefer sweet potato. It's better. That's just not a thing we do. Maybe you inspired me. I might have to make one.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You can make sweet potato pie?

Q. No.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm confused by...

Q. I could try. I absolutely would try.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So what are you basing your sweet potato pie. Is it because you just don't like pumpkin or...

Q. No, I like sweet potato. It's just...

JAMES FRANKLIN: When was the last time you had a sweet potato pie and where did you get it?

Q. I am going to say, because one of the guys that's going to follow me is a sweet potato pie connoisseur and he ordered it and it's pretty darn good.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Who is that?

Q. Frank.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I should probably save this for Frank then. All right. What do we got?

Q. You mentioned earlier about being able to play well Saturday in order to keep playing together this season. One of those options is the Big10 title game if you beat Maryland and some other things happen. What would be the pros and cons of playing in that game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: To be honest with you I haven't spent a whole lot time thinking about that. I'm literally completely focused on the Terps and the University of Maryland, and after that game there is a lot of other things I think that have to happen.

But that is a possibility. For us, we want an opportunity to compete as many times as we possibly can this year. If that includes a conference championship game, we would be very, very excited about that opportunity.

But, again, all we have to do is focus on playing Maryland this week and if we're not focused on that, is then a lot of these other things that everybody else wants to talk about, then those things become questionable. Those things become challenging. Those things become different.

So Mark, I honestly -- we have not talked about it in the Lasch Building once. We are focused totally on the University of Maryland and sending our seniors out the right way.

Got a ton of respect for the University of Maryland and the talent they have on their team every year. Totally focused on that, Mark. Anything that happens after Saturday we'll be excited about those opportunities that we've earned.

Q. Good afternoon, James.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hi, Mike. I got one for you.

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Fried turkey or roasted turkey?

Q. You know, I've never had the fried turkey so I got to go roasted. Maybe that's a lame answer, but...

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's not a lame answer. You can't answer because you haven't had.

Q. True, it's reality.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Would you be open to it?

Q. Absolutely. I like turkey. I like turkey generally, but it's always been the roasting thing in the oven for every Thanksgiving that I remember.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What part of the turkey?

Q. I'm a white meat guy generally speaking. Yeah, beyond that, what do you mean beyond that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, breast meat, white, dark meat legs, thighs?

Q. I'm more white meat, although I understand the argument for dark meat, which is that it's...

JAMES FRANKLIN: More moist.

Q. Fattier. Yeah, I understand that. I like turkey generally.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's 2024. Can I challenge you to look into deep fried turkey?

Q. Yes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're open to it?

Q. I accept that challenge.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I love it. Let's go. What do you got?

Q. When you were deciding to pull the trigger on the fake punt on Saturday, I know what the outside world thinks can't factor into your decision of course, doesn't enter the process, and I guess I'm asking you this more as a human being than a coach. Was there any instant where you were thinking, man, if I do this and it doesn't work the critics head's are going to explode? Do you think of that? Does that ever cross your mind?

JAMES FRANKLIN: At the moment, no. After the case when everybody is sending messages and saying, wow,

great decision. That was awesome. I love it. Why? Because it worked. If it didn't work, Mike, you wouldn't be having fun with me talking about the fried turkey or the roasted turkey. You would be roasting James Franklin.

I totally get that. But, again, when you got Dom Rulli as your quarterback and you have Luke Reynolds carrying the ball and you have DaKaari Nelson and Elsdon and Cooper Cousins and we have repped it 1000 times and I've called it probably six times this year when we checked out because it wasn't the right look, checked out because it wasn't the right look, checked out because it wasn't the right look, and we have had a ton of reps at it, it gives me a ton of confidence because of the young men on this unit and how they've executed it every single day at practice and the trust that they've built with me in terms of we're not going to run it into a bad look.

Dom Rulli has done a great job of that all year long. So at the time I did not think like that because, No. 1, we were trying to win the game. Felt like it gave us the best chance to win the game.

No. 2, because of how these guys have repped that and handled that in practice and all year long.

So Dom Rulli has earned that right to allow me to call that play based on how he's conducted himself not just this year, but over his time at Penn State. He's been awesome.

If you haven't watched that play watch DaKarri Nelson's block on that play. It's a thing of beauty. I think you guys have probably seen the belt and it says BMF on it that the guys wear. That's an offensive award for the best block of the week. I made the argument that DaKaari should have been a part of that award because it was such a beautiful block.

So, yeah, I get it. I've said that to you guys before. When we don't go for it on fourth down and people think we should have, you know, everybody has an opinion. When we go for it on fourth down and don't get it, everybody has an opinion. When we do go for it on fourth down and it works, you're smart.

I get it. I get it. The announcers on TV, I would love for them to have opinions on it before the play. Everyone has opinions after the play. For me it just comes down to trusting my staff, and most importantly trusting the players that it's about executing what we call.

So I hope that helps, Mike.

Q. Good afternoon, James.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Hey, Frank. How are you?

Q. Yes. Can you tell me where your love of sweet potato pie goes back to, the origins?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Aunt Lawanda, Aunt Romane, Aunt Melba Dean, my mom, Jocelyn. We always had sweet potato pie from as long as I can remember. My grandmom, Leotta. We always had -- I never had pumpkin pie unless it was at elementary school in the cafeteria.

Sweet potato pie is my favorite. I don't get it very often. My wife got the recipe from my mom who got the recipe from play grandmom, and I love it. I love it. It's one of my favorite things.

So some of the players parents bring it to me, which is cool. People say, well if you love it so much, how come you only have it around the holidays? I get it. That's a fair deal.

Either way, I love it.

You're not going to flip the script here. You think you're slick by asking me. You ready?

Q. Yeah, sure.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thanksgiving dinner or whatever the time you eat, whatever time it is, lunch, dinner, a linner, that's fine, but Thanksgiving dinner or the leftovers?

Q. Wow. Well, dinner, No. 1, because it's the best dinner of the year to me. So the best dinner of the year has to have great leftovers, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. You can't split the fence though. Is it the dinner or the leftovers? Which is better?

Q. Thanksgiving, you have a big meal so you have lots of leftovers. I guess I go with the leftovers because they go longer.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Then you just led me to question two. How long will you eat the leftovers? When is it time to move on from the leftovers? How many days after Thanksgiving are you still eating turkey-stuffing sandwiches.

Q. All right. We'll break it down.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Neil is trying to jump in here.

Q. Yeah, I know. So turkey, couple days. Stuffing,

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mashed potatoes, those can go for what, three, four, five days. Sure.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Is there a reason why mashed potatoes with butter and cream can last a lot longer than turkey?

Q. A little touchy on the meat, right? Got to get that done first.

JAMES FRANKLIN: All right. What do we got?

Q. So back to injuries. Alonzo Ford, is he something that's long-term? Do you guys know at this point? Staying with D-tackles, can you talk about how good Zane Durant is playing right now, his impact right now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so Alonzo Ford is long-term. When I talked about adversity that we faced at Minnesota, there was a lot of reasons for that, right? Alonzo is long-term as well.

Kincaid, make sure we follow up with something we didn't talk about last night.

But Zane I think is playing really good. I think -- I made a big deal on Sunday out of it with our team. He's just the same guy every single day. He is mentally tough, physically tough. He loves, not likes football. He loves football.

He understands and is willing to do the things that football takes, the sacrifices he has to make to be a great player. He is the same way in the weight room, at practice, on game day. To me, he's what you want, what you're looking for in terms of the whole package.

I've been very complimentary of his parents and how he was raised. His high school did a really good job developing him.

He showed up here with the mentality he was going to play as true freshman, which is very unusual as a defensive tackle position, and he's done that.

For the young guys in our program he's a really good guy to model behaviors, habits after. Big, big fan of Zane. Also a guy that will speak from a leadership standpoint. He'll speak the truth to his teammates.

I just I'm a big fan, and I think from a leadership standpoint a lot of guys want to be leaders by example and they're not willing to be verbal and he is. I'm a big fan of his.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving, James.

JAMES FRANKLIN: High, Neil.

Q. I think this is the most entertaining press conference of the year, so I'll stay in the spirit. Diane makes a great apple cranberry pie, so that's our -- maybe that beats you to your answer.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Apple cranberry pie? Nice attempt to use your own answer and question. Neil, I have a question.

Q. I still have one then.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I get it. I've never had, is it apple cranberry pie?

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Never had that before. If I would be willing to pay your wife to make an extra apple cranberry pie, would she be willing to do that >because you got me curious.

Q. You know what? She'd probably donate one to the cause.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, before you say yes without ever talking to your wife, I don't want any problems at the house, you can send a message afterwards.

Q. All right. She'll be all in for that.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Listen, do not sign your wife up for something or agree that causes work for her before asking her first. I don't mean to any problems in the Rudel household.

Okay, watch football -- what takes priority, watching football on Thanksgiving or watching the parade?

Q. Watching the football.

JAMES FRANKLIN: That trumps the parade?

Q. Yeah, you don't bet on the parade.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Whoa. Neil, you just -- you went in the direction we're not supposed to go in, Neil. What about the mummies? Do you like the mummies?

Q. Yeah, it's cool.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Your voice said no. All right, what do

you got, Neil?

Q. How about the team Thanksgiving plans? Does it include ping pong at your house? And also, are you saying that Warren was supposed to sky punt that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all about the punt, no, not necessarily sky punt. When you're not the full-time punter your punts are sky punts, right? Look, you don't punt it very far and you don't have to. The whole reason you quick kick is nobody is back there. You get it out there and let it roll type of deal so it falls into that category is what I was saying.

There is no returner back there. Whole reason for a quick kick. Kind of let it punt about 25 yards and let it roll for another ten.

Thanksgiving plans we changed a little bit this year. So we'll have our Thanksgiving meal as a team Wednesday night and then Thursday morning have our practice like we always do, and then instead of having a Thanksgiving meal afterwards, just trying give the guys as much time as possible.

So by having it Wednesday night, we'll still have like a light lunch for them to go in and grab if they want to after practice. It just allows the guys to have more time on Thanksgiving to either go to my house, their position coaches house, for some of the local guys, possibly go home.

A lot of the guys, as you know when we have home games, a lot of families just come in early and they come to practice and do Thanksgiving and then stay for the game. When it's an away game that becomes more challenging.

That is the plan.

Q. Glad you brought up fried turkey because I don't think people are talking enough about fried turkey. I know the people in this room appreciate it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: There has also been a lot of issues with fried turkeys.

Q. I've done fried turkey, so I know.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm talking about burning garages down.

Q. I've not that. Come close.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. Because if you don't get that temperature of the turkey down first, you drop it in frozen,

that's a big mistake. Or you don't have the right amount of oil in and you drop it down and the oil comes everywhere. A lot of issues you got to be careful with.

Okay, here is the question. And remember people are going to be listening to this.

Q. I'm prepared.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Help cook the dinner. Not just the turkey in the driveway, help cook the dinner or help wash the dishes?

Q. My wife will laugh at this.

JAMES FRANKLIN: That's why I said some people are going to be listening.

Q. Cook the dinner.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're willing to help cook the dinner?

Q. I am going to cook the dinner.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're going to cook the whole dinner?

Q. The whole dinner.

JAMES FRANKLIN: The entire dinner?

Q. Except my father-in-law will bring stuffing.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So give me the menu you're going to make.

Q. I will do -- I am not doing fried turkey because there is not it a lot of the time to prepare for it. Turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy and asparagus.

JAMES FRANKLIN: And then your father-in-law brings the stuffing?

Q. Yes. And then if my wife wants something for dessert, I'm not a dessert guy, we'll just go buy it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So list that again.

Q. Turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, asparagus, stuffing from the father-in-law, and then dessert probably bought somewhere.

JAMES FRANKLIN: No macaroni and cheese?

Q. No macaroni and cheese.

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JAMES FRANKLIN: No mashed potatoes.

Q. Mashed potatoes and gravy.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Oh, you said mashed potatoes. Does the gravy go on the mashed potatoes and the turkey, or both? And the stuffing.

Q. Eater's choice.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Your choice?

Q. I'm not a stuffing guy, so mashed potatoes and turkey?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No corn?

Q. We could throw corn in there if somebody wants it. There is already a lot of stuff going on?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No collard greens?

Q. No collard greens.

JAMES FRANKLIN: And no dessert unless somebody brings it?

Q. Exactly.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Nobody in your family eats dessert or you don't eat dessert?

Q. I don't eat dessert.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So if you don't eat it you don't make it? You're a selfish cook?

Q. No, that's not true. I don't eat asparagus either.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Why, because what it does to your pee? You're blushing.

Q. With Rucci elevating, who else might get an opportunity to do some of the things that he was doing, maybe coming in as an extra offensive lineman or being that extra offensive tackle in the rotation?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so obviously a guy that you guys know we have a ton of respect for, played a bunch of football for us is JB Nelson. JB's role will increase and he's earned that. JB had some lingering injuries this year that have affected how much we been able to use him, but JB's role will increase.

I would also say Cooper Cousins's role will increase. Eagan Boyer's role could increase. And J'ven Williams' role will increase.

So all those guys will take on some of those reps and take on some of those roles. Part of it will be also how they practice this week. It's still early in the week to say those things.

But all those guys have played this year already, so that group will make up those opportunities. But also it's still early in the week. Haven't even had a game plan practice yet.

Q. I'm ready for my questions. What do you got?

JAMES FRANKLIN: All right. Kind of deciding between a couple here.

Q. That's fair.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Creamed corn or Brussels sprouts? If neither one are an option, I'll go to another question.

Q. My mom will probably make Brussels sprouts, which is fine. I'll eat them, but I don't feel strongly about either.

JAMES FRANKLIN: We'll go to another question because you don't really like either. Dinner rolls or cornbread?

Q. Cornbread for sure. Nobody wakes up on Thanksgiving and says, I can't wait to have the dinner roll, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: There are people that disagree with you in the room.

Q. That's a controversial...

JAMES FRANKLIN: Do you have cornbread at Thanksgiving?

Q. Depends. Probably this year because I'll be home. If I'm somewhere else their family might not?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Your family does cornbread?

Q. Typically yes, but then there are rolls because of the leftovers, because you got to make...

JAMES FRANKLIN: The sandwich with the rolls.

Q. Yeah, exactly. Got to be mini rolls for the sandwich.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like Hawaiian rolls or what?

Q. Yeah, not Hawaiian rolls, but the same size.

JAMES FRANKLIN: The ones you get at the grocery store that come in a bag and a little box and you pull it out and out the whole thing and warm them up in the oven?

Q. Yeah, we don't warm them in the over.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Whoa. Interesting. I won't judge. Okay, all right. What you got?

Q. The cameras caught with the sky kick. You went over to Drew. Obviously he was frustrated on the sideline and you talked to him. Looked like you maybe calmed him down a little bit. What do you think maybe that moment and how he responded says about him and his maturation this season? You told us the fourth and one play to Warren, that he was like, hey, I feel strongly about that play and felt like he has the ownership to have a voice with you guys on that give and take. Maybe we saw some growth from Drew there. Do you agree with that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The play you're talking about, fourth and one, he was discussing a couple different options on the headset and he felt strongly about that call and we went with it. Obviously him and a bunch of other guys in that unit made it work in a play that probably didn't play out exactly the way we had drawn it up.

That's great, because as we all know things aren't going to go as you have them drawn up in a controlled environment.

To be honest with you, I think a little bit miss interpreted. I think the people thought the frustration was with the quick kick. The frustration was with he was offset and Dawkins couldn't hear him. He was frustrated that he's trying to get the snap off and the ball is not be snapped.

Drew does a great job managing the clock and he saw we were about to get a delay of game. That's what I was talking about at the beginning of the press conference. If we get a delay of game there, no big deal. We were quick kicking or sky punting or whatever it may be.

So his frustration was more with the ball not getting snapped to Tyler so he could quick kick it, and then obviously it did while it looked like he was walking off the field, which is really just part of the whole play. No?

I'm just saying that. I think that was miss interpretation a little bit what his frustration was about.

Either way, it was an opportunity for us to have a discussion and then another discussion and then another discussion. And to me, that's exactly how I want it to be. I want him to be fiery. Obviously like anything, you don't want to live in the extremes. I want him to be fiery. I want him to play with passion and emotion.

That was an opportunity for him to do that, and what was great is we were able to have a conversation. He gave me good feedback and I gave him good feedback and went out and played really well.

I followed back up with him again because of just some things that kind of I thought it was important for him to hear from my perspective.

To me it was perfect. I expect there to be fire and emotion and I'm totally okay with that. I encourage that. We work too hard, we sacrifice way too much. I think Drew is a great example of that.

I'm glad he is showing that side of his personality. We have seen it. I don't know if necessarily everybody else has seen it. Yeah, I think it was great.

Q. Hey, James. Waiting for you.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm going to go with -- this is a good one. Cranberry sauce from scratch, which I think if I remember correct, last year may have been -- was it Fitz.

Q. Two years ago Ben Jones.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Two years ago Ben Jones bragged about his mom's and brought me some, which was delicious.

Cranberry sauce from scratch or the jellied sauce from the can?

Q. This may be controversial, I don't like cranberry sauce.

JAMES FRANKLIN: We're going to move on. It's interesting, because I loved the can. Like you shake it out and got the lines in it. One year my sister decided to start making fresh, which was awesome, but the can was kind of nostalgic.

Let's move on then. Mashed potatoes or stuffing and why? You have to choose one or the other.

Q. Stuffing. You can have mashed potatoes any time of the year. Stuffing is a Thanksgiving thing. Just

makes everything better. And you got to mix it all in, too.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Fair. Fair. I like your argument for your answer, too.

Tell me how you eat it.

Q. I mix everything together on the plate.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What's everything?

Q. Turkey, mashed potatoes, corn, gravy, all of it.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay. One last question: Is it homemade stuffing? Stove Top? Is it Pepperidge Farms? What are we going with?

Q. That I have no idea. That has been up to my mom for three decades now and not something I mess with.

JAMES FRANKLIN: How old are you?

Q. 29.

JAMES FRANKLIN: By the time you're 30...

Q. We got three months.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So you got three months that you got to start understanding how to make these things.

Q. See, I'm still local, my wife and I both are, so we can go home for Thanksgiving. So we are going to ride that out for as long as we can for those meals.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay. What did I just say? You got three months.

Q. I hear you.

JAMES FRANKLIN: All right. Thanks to your mom. That's awesome.

Q. So we have talked a lot about Jaylen Reed at safety this year, maybe not as much about Zakee Wheatly. How would you evaluate how he has played this season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We got two of the better safeties in college football, and I think you guys know with K.J. that is as impressive of a group of guys you could have that created a lot of diversity for us in what we did and how we did it.

But Zakee is just playing great right now. His tackle radius is really impressive. His ability to make plays, whether it's causing fumbles or interceptions, hasn't made as many of them this year as maybe I anticipated, but I know he's got the ability to do it.

He's one of the more natural playmakers we got. And just his football IQ and him and Dex's relationship, how well they work together. I think he's playing at a very, very high level. I think he's got a really bright future.

You know, Kyle Schmidt was his high school coach at Spaulding High School. Did a phenomenal job with him. Kyle played for us at the University of Maryland and has done a great job at Spaulding High School. Kid came in here ready and prepared to compete and just got better every year.

This past year probably made the biggest jump just in terms of all the different ways that we can use him, his confidence, understanding his strengths and weaknesses, playing to the strengths.

Probably one of the better tacklers, just pure tacklers we have on our team. He's got length. He's got athleticism. I'm a huge fan. I'm a huge fan of his. His maturity, just really has grown. Just really grown. I'm very, very proud of him.

I think he's got a very, very bright future for the rest of his career here at Penn State and then afterwards.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Happy Thanksgiving.

Q. What you got?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Getting low on the list here. All right. Some of those I don't think are appropriate. All right, pecan pie, apple pie? And then I got kind of a branch question off it.

Q. I don't usually have either often, but Thanksgiving I'm going with pecan. Yeah, with a little whip cream on top maybe. Maybe vanilla ice cream if we have it in the freezer.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It is pecan or pecan?

Q. Yeah.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Very nice. Which one is it?

Q. I am going to go pecan. I say pecan because I



guess I'm lazy with the pronunciation.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Isn't it all based on where you're from?

Q. Could be.

JAMES FRANKLIN: But you don't really eat either?

Q. No, it's not like a normal Saturday night let's get the pecan pie out of the freezer.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I am talking about on Thanksgiving. You'll have both?

Q. I'll eat as much as I can on Thanksgiving.

JAMES FRANKLIN: But you'll have both as part of your meal?

Q. Yeah, after the meal have a little bit of both, sure.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What I'm asking you is will you have, will it be part of your Thanksgiving meal? Will both of those pies be present?

Q. Yeah, wife is making apple pie. I don't know if pecan is going to enter the equation. I would love it if it somehow showed up. I will not be making it myself.

JAMES FRANKLIN: So really after this long -- the answer is apple, because you don't have even have the opportunity to have pecan pie.

Q. In a random Thanksgiving setting where you're presenting me both, I'm picking pecan. In my reality Thursday, I'm not having pecan pie.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Okay. What we got?

Q. Nick Singleton the last few weeks seems to -- I think from our vantage point seems to be operating at a higher level than he was for a point of the season. His yards per carry the last three weeks are up from where they were the three games before that. Is that something that you're also picking up, where maybe Nick Singleton entering this stretch is in a better spot than he was mid-season health-wise?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, the reality is he's healthy again. You guys know what a healthy Nick Singleton looks like. He wasn't that. But I also think that is a credit to Nick, and I also think that's part of the maturation process of a football player.

When you play in the Big10 and you play in the Big10 that's not playing ten games anymore or 11 games, talking about 12 games and the possibility of 17, the reality is in major college football or the NFL, there is very few people that are going to be 100% all year long.

That's not the reality of college football. So you play with the things that you can play with and manage -- the doctors and the trainers will step in when you can't. Nick went out there and played the best he could under the circumstances, but he was not 100%.

He's back closer to 100% than he's been in a while. So, yeah, that's great. I think obviously I think Dani is in a similar situation. He's played a couple weeks not being 100%.

And again, that's the nature of college football. Our guys understand that and they embrace that, and those types of decisions I think have allowed us to get to where we are right now.

The medical staff with Wayne and Dr. Billy and Andy Mutnan and the whole group have done a phenomenal job of keeping our guys healthy and getting our guys healthy.

Then our guys have taken a mature approach of coming in and getting pre-hab or rehab even when it's not mandated just trying to get themselves in the best position to be as health use as they can for as long as they can throughout the season, which is hard to do.

Yeah, Nick is looking closer to full speed and 100% than he's been in a couple weeks. And we need that. He's an explosive player. I think when the defensive coordinators see that, when the defensive players see that, it changes how they defend him and how they defend us.

If you make one mistake, it could go for 80.

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