

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, just wanted to congratulate Cael and the wrestling program. Was fortunate last week to go watch a practice, and then this year we didn't have a conflict. We've always had a conflict with spring ball. Also happened to be in Philly, so was able to go down and be a part of it, which was awesome.

So obviously Cael and our wrestling program continue to do unbelievable things, so wanted to give them a shoutout.

Getting into spring ball, just briefly, obviously we have some new and moving parts that we're working through, so these 15 practices will be very, very important.

We had a really good winter workout period. I think the guys are in a really good place. Been very, very pleased how the staff has handled some of the adjustments. It's been a grind, as you know. Just like on offense, the time we have to spend on defense get everybody on the same page, staff first, players second, has been good.

There is still a ton of work that has to be done during spring ball and over to summer the training period before we open the season up against Nevada. So look forward to answering your questions and open up for questions.

Q. Kobe King, how do you go about replacing him, not just the position itself, but as a leader of that particular group?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the Mike linebacker in a lot of ways is like the quarterback, you know, of the defense. You've heard this before obviously.

Then also when there is a guy that's been doing it for several years and a guy that has such a good feel in the box of defeating blocks, slipping blocks, anticipating runs, playing downhill, just a very, very productive player that really ran that position.

So it's going to be a heck of a competition. We got some guys like DeLuca and Rojas that have a ton of experience. Well, I wouldn't say a ton of experience, but a lot of

experience. And then some guys like Wylie who's coming off an injury that we're going to need to get evaluated. Got Ta'Mere Robinson that's ready to take the next step.

Specia is a young player that we're expecting to take the next step as well. You got Arrington, you got Dee, Tatsch, who has been impressive since he showed up on campus, him and Arrington. Kari Jackson is a young guy ready to take the next step.

So there is a number of guys, but right now not sure how it's going to play out. One of the things that I think helps is we're probably going to go back -- I think you guys know this -- go back to my Vanderbilt days, and some years we been here a little bit more than others, but we will probably? Base more out of 4-2-5, which I think also helps with that.

That doesn't mean we still won't go subpackage and go to a 4-3 when it makes sense, when it puts our defense and our team in the best position to be successful. But we were always a 4-2-5 coming to Penn State, and then you get to Penn State and you got really good linebackers and it's LBU.

Then some years didn't necessarily make sense doing that. Obviously with some of our youth and lack of experience at linebacker, this is a way that I think fits our personnel this year, and also fits with what Jim has liked to do in the past. Obviously these were a lot of our conversations before him coming here.

Q. Curious, how will you approach the workload for your kind of established veterans, Drew, Singleton, Allen, Dani, those guys? Guys that know what they can do, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Is that a question or a statement?

Q. Maybe a little bit of both. How would you approach those, your veterans?

JAMES FRANKLIN: What was the last thing you said?

Q. You caught me.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, very similar to what we've

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always done in the past with our established guys. You guys saw it with Olu Fashanu. Like with our established guys who have played a lot of football, we will modify their reps. That's a fine line because they still need to get better. That's why they came back. So we need to be smart about that.

I also think it creates an opportunity for the guys that are behind them that are competing for more significant roles. It gives a better evaluation on those guys as well. For our established guys we talk about it as a staff. We go around, each position coach talks about his plan for each of his guys, make sure we're on the same page how I see it as well as how they see it. Then we'll implement that during spring ball.

Did the same thing with Tyler Warren last year. So I would say there is probably about one, if not two guys like that at every position that will have some form of a modification this spring and really in training camp as well.

Q. I do want to ask you about Drew Allar if I may. So your senior quarterback, what is his next step in development, particularly with this spring? What are you looking for from him, from Drew as improvement, or just how can the spring, do you think, help him the most going forward specifically?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so a couple things. I think No. 1, I get this question a lot about a lot of players on our offense and defense. A lot of times it's not like one thing.

I would say that's the case with Drew. He needs to take another step this year, which we think he's done every year he's been here. He needs to take another step when it comes to his mobility. He needs to take another step when it comes to his leadership. He needs to take another step in it terms of his completion percentage. Needs to take another step in terms of his touchdown interception ratio.

It's really all of it. There are some things we've had some conversations with Danny O'Brien that those conversations will stay between us, but I would say just being transparent, I will say I don't think it's one necessarily specific thing. It's all of it.

The thing that's exciting about Drew, and you guys see him, he may be 6'5", 235 pounds but he has a lot of growth and development. He's a young kid. He has taken significant steps every single year as you guys I think are aware. He puts in a ton of time and knows how to prepare the right way both mentally and physically. I think Danny does a really good job with him as well.

I think the room challenges him as well. When you bring in

to new pieces the two new wideouts, that puts him in a position to coach and get those guys ready.

So all those things. I wouldn't say one specific area that I'm looking for him to grow in this.

Q. At the wide receiver position, Devonte Ross, Kyron Hudson, redshirt freshmen, how do you think they took to winter workouts from your conversation with Marcus, and how do you and you Marcus feel about that room, that group going into spring ball?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, as you know, you guys have saw the competition winners and things like that that we post on social media. But, we don't have footballs really involved. To really judge a wide receiver before you've seen them at practice and running routes and creating separation and one-on-ones and making contested catches and catch percentage and radius and those things, it's hard to say.

It's hard for me to say that.

In term of their attitude, their work ethic, their demeanor, in terms of fit in our locker room, all those things have been really good.

You know, in some ways I would say recruiting guys like Ross out of Troy and schools like that, a lot of times those are exciting because, no knock on any other school or place, but we just have a little bit more resources.

So those guys have a chance to develop a little bit more than when you go get a guy from a similar type program. So it's been interesting to watch those guys grow. They've been awesome.

I know they've been a hit with their teammates in terms of kind of just how they've been in the locker room. So we'll have a better idea, you guys will have a better idea after today. We'll talk about that at the end of this press conference. We'll talk about that in more detail.

But we'll all have a better idea after spring ball.

Q. Wanted to acknowledge we have an empty seat back there were Lou'd (phonetic) usually be. He'll be missed in this room?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I agree. I'm glad you brought that up.

Q. He was always monitoring all have all of us and it was fun to have him here and he'll be missed.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, sir. I appreciate you saying that.



Q. Tell us about the ability of Rojas and Rapp and Donkoh for the spring. I saw Rojas was in a sling and the other two guys weren't available for much of last year.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I don't want to speak in terms of the length of spring ball because I don't know exactly how that will play out, but they will not be fully available in the beginning of spring ball.

We'll just see how that goes. Hard to say. Everybody kind of heals differently and at a different pace in how they attack and those things. Obviously our doctors and trainers have basic guidelines about how long certain injuries take to heal that they go by, but it's hard to say.

They're not completely available to start spring ball. There are some things they'll be able to do and some things they won't.

Q. I wanted to go back to Ross and Hudson a little bit. What kind of initially excited you guys about both of them as you went through the process? What are some of the traits or attributes that stood out?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so Hudson, I'll start with him. Like he's just a guy comes from a great high school program. Played at a big time college program. Had success at this level already.

But the other thing I will say about him is like oops whoever you talk to from his high school, whoever you talk to from his previous institution and on our current team, everybody just loves the guy. Tremendous work ethic. Obviously made some big time plays. Everybody saw the huge catch against LSU, the one-handed catch.

So it's done it at this level before. Obviously I think there is also an aspect when guys know it's their last year, I think there is a motivation that comes with that as well.

With Ross, very different scenario, different body type, different school he came from. I will tell you one of the things that really jumped out at us is I have a ton of respect for the University of Iowa's football program and what Coach Ferentz has been able to do there, specifically on defense and special teams.

And that young man, I think Troy was beating Iowa at the half at Iowa, which we know that's a tough place to play. In that game I think he had two touchdowns on offense and one as a punt return on special teams.

So for him to do it against that type of opponent on this

stage gave you a lot of confidence that that could translate to us.

So I think that game carried a lot of weight with us, again, specifically because we have so much respect for what they do on special teams and what they do on defense, and he had a ton of production in that game.

Q. You mentioned the 4-2-5 defense earlier and leaning more into that again. With that fifth defensive back, what do you want that that look like and come from, and what's the archetype for that position?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, again, I think -- you know, we've talked about this before, whether it's on offense or on defense, the value of being able to hire really experienced coordinators. If you look, our coordinators on offense, defense, and special teams, the amount of experience that our guys have: Knowles has been experienced for 17 years. Kotelnicki has been a coordinator -- experienced for 19 years. Lustig, 20 years.

I say that because where that experience comes is you've been doing it long enough that you know there is a lot of ways to be successful.

I think early on as a player or coach you feel like it's got to only be this way. I'm an 11 personnel guy. Well, my second tight end is better than my third wide receiver, but I'm an 11 personnel guy. Like those things don't make a lot of sense.

So where that experience helps is Jim's been doing it long enough to understand we got to get our best 11 guys on the field. At Oklahoma State and other places that may have been three safeties. At Penn State that may be three corners. That may be three safeties.

Back to the conversation we had earlier, if we had three killer linebackers we may play more true 4-3 base, whatever you want to call it, than maybe he's played in the past.

That's a little bit of that process and why spring ball is important. It's going to give Jim the ability to not only install some of the changes we're making on defense, tweaks we're making on defense, but also to evaluate our personnel to say, how are we going to play at our best?

Obviously last year we really did it the same way, right? We started the season before we lost K.J. where we had three safeties on the field and I think we would've been very, very difficult to deal with if we would have had those guys all year long.



So that's going to be the process this spring, is saying, okay, where are those nickels going to come from? I would say our list right now is coming from both the corner and safety room. Again, just based on the argument how do we get our best 11 guys on the field and play to their strengths.

Q. You said in February you would see yourself making some modifications as you get ready to start spring practice. Where you are on the path to the Blue & White game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First thing I'm going to say is I've been at Penn State now long enough to understand the impact that Penn State football has other than this entire community. I think everybody is aware of that, right? There needs to be give and take with this. We need to work together. A successful Penn State football program helps everybody out. Bars, restaurants, hotels.

So for me to at any point sit here and say we're not going to have a spring game, I don't think that would make sense for a ton of reasons. The university schedules a ton of fundraising events around the spring game. A lot of people are in town. It's like a homecoming for the spring type of deal.

So that's going factor in always into our decision making process.

There are some things that we will not do. The game will not be televised for some of the reasons we discussed and you heard other coaches maybe talk about. And we will have a spring game probably more similar to what we've had in the past. At least right now as we go through these 15 days. That could change.

But I could see it being maybe a little bit shorter. One of the things I don't think we'll do is a halftime. There has been years where we'll have 75,000 people out there. Halftime for 20 minutes and the parking lot becomes more attractive than the second half and the tailgating. So we will probably condense it down, maybe a little bit shorter quarters, maybe no halftime.

But also I know we have some real, real football people in our fan base that want to watch and evaluate our roster, get excited, and have discussion at the barber shop, at the water jug discussing what Penn State football will look like next year.

I also think it's valuable for you guys. So for all those reasons, we'll still do it, but it'll probably be a little bit less plays and probably be a little bit shorter amount of time.

It also probably won't all be live. It'll be a mixture of some live and some thud. But back to the question I got early on, when you're trying to modify, we got so many players that decided to come back, there will be a lot of players that we're going to modify from live reps.

But I wanted -- I want it to be enough that you guys feel like it was worth it and our fans feel like, hey, I got a pretty good feel, idea of what Penn State football is going to look like.

I also think, again, back to that point, Jim being in the stadium for the first time and calling it from the booth and those things are important to get these reps and for him to evaluate our staff and for him to evaluate our roster. All 15 of those days are like gold.

Q. Looking back just a few years ago there was a conversation about whether you could have a spring game because the offensive line numbers. Now you have people across the country saying you might have a deepest offensive line in America. Curious from your standpoint, what does that make formula for spring ball look like? Phil Trautwein is trying to figure out who is the real option, where they can be an option, trying to get enough guys reps where they feel comfortable. I know you got the spring portal window. What is the game plan for working through the opposite of a numbers issue at offensive line this spring?

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's interesting, because you guys know this, but when I got here I think there was a kind of an NFL philosophy feeling with how to handle the sanctions and reduced numbers, and really took like an NFL model where we had five starters and a couple swing guys, and we barely had that.

I think for a lot of us, whether it's your professor mine you get scarred by those experiences. This was pre-portal so couldn't solve problems quickly. I'm a big believer that you got to develop and recruit up front on the O-line and D-line, and you really don't ever want to come short in recruiting of those positions.

The other thing is a lot of times those positions take time. We talked about it. The closer you are to the ball it's a man's game in there. Age and strength and size is a major factor. So we worked very hard at building those numbers, and Traut has done a phenomenal job.

So, yeah, I think one of the things we talked about in the past is, okay, you're short on the O-line. How do you schedule practice to make push the quarterback is still getting development or running back gets his



development?

That would really be at any position. If you're short at one position it can screw up the development on this side of the ball as well as across the ball. So making sure the guys get enough reps is really important.

We been a big two-spot team. Whether we're practicing full speed two-spot or whether we're doing the install periods in two spots, we will make sure everybody has a chance to learn and get reps. To me you learn best by doing, not watching. So we'll do that as much as we can.

Then may be some periods where we say, okay, we're not comfortable going live with the ones and twos, but we've got a bunch of threes and fours that we need to evaluate. Some of them are just young guys, so may go live with them and do some scrimmage periods with those guys.

Just see how it plays out. But being able to evaluate all those guys, being able to develop all those guys at every position is important.

To your point, whether you're heavy or short at a position you got to make sure that it doesn't stunt guys' development. All those things factor in. That's why we spend a ton of time on planning out the practices. I typically plan them out with Ben Kerr and Nelly, our sports scientist. Then get together with the coordinators, go through it with them, see if they have any recommendations or suggests. And then the whole staff.

As you know, we pretty much have all 15 set, but then we'll tweak them as we go based on what happened the previous practice, what we need more of, what we need less of, those types of things. But we're in a good position right now. I like the plan. I'm excited about what we're going to do, how we're going to approach it.

But it's going to be an important spring ball for all the reasons I already mentioned, specifically on the defensive side of the ball.

Q. As you know April 7th Judge Wilkins is going to probably approve the NIL agreement. I know you're a big planner. Have you already or when will you let guys know what their number is that they're going to get? How close are estimates for your quote-unquote payroll being around \$16 million of that new money for football next year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think this is the challenge, right? One of the things -- it's crazy. It's like having the transfer portal open during the playoffs. Doesn't make a whole lot sense, right.

It's the same thing. We're playing our season, having to make plans for NIL and the transfer portal like everybody in the country, and you had to have those deals done before the transfer portal closed because that affected people's decisions.

But then also you didn't completely know or understand all the rules of engagement and how it's going to work out because it was still being worked through in court.

So this is a challenge all over the country. A lot of coaches are talking about this. A lot of ADs are talking about this. A lot of commissioners are talking about this.

It's challenging. I think moving forward after you get through year one of revenue sharing, you know, you'll have a structure that you used in previous years that went well and you want to build on it or some things you want to tweak and get better.

To your point, that's why this is so challenging, is you're having to make decisions and having to move forward really before you have all of the information and all of the guidelines. Decisions are still being made today, not only in the courts, but also with commissioners and AFCA, and all these things.

So very, very challenging. I think your question is a good one. Obviously not going to get into the specifics and the details, but that's what's made this so challenging, is it's not like right when we decided we were going in this direction that all of rules were mapped out for everybody and the guidelines. They're still changing as we speak.

So it's been an interesting year for everybody.

Q. (No microphone.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: What I already stated is I won't get into the specifics. Right now obviously all these things are still being worked out through the courts. Yes, I think I already answered that question.

Q. James, your pass game as opposed to run game, most of the offensive line, running backs are returning. With your passing game, a lot of Tyler Warren's production and your receivers left this off season. At this point, how much have you planned or how much of the offense do you know like what iteration it will be this year, and how much did you still have to learn through spring football to know who is going to be a part of that and maybe where some of those targets will go this year?



JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, good question. Again, that's similar to what we talked about on the defensive side of the ball, is figuring those things out. To me, I look at it as an exciting time, and if I'm a wide receiver or a tight end, I'm excited, because Tyler Warren had how many catches last year?

Q. 102 I believe.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Those catches have to go somewhere, right? If I'm wide receivers, I'm excited. If I'm tight ends, I'm excited. That production needs to go somewhere.

And I think that's -- we talked about this a little bit in the past. Like the interesting thing is the wide receivers need to understand they're not just competing with the wide receivers. They're competing with the running backs. Like who is going to get the touches.

They're competing with the tight ends. Who going to get the touches. You know, the tight ends are doing the same thing. Competing with the other tight ends and also competing the other rooms, receiver room, running backs for touches.

At the end of the day of day we got to make sure we're getting our best players the ball. I think the other thing that we're going to have to do is make sure we have enough of those people. You know, obviously you got two proven commodities in the backfield behind the offensive line to your point.

Well, who is going to be guys that step up in the tight end room, step up in the wide receiver room. And that's going to be very, very important for the development of our offense, development of our team, and for us to take another step this year.

It's a fine line because Tyler Warren made it very obvious that he should get the ball. But I would also make the argument if you had a Tyler Warren and wide outs, then that's going to be even more difficult to defend. And we had some really good wideouts who did some really good things.

But what I'm talking about is guys that everybody in the league are concerned about and scared of. That's going to be important for our development. I think we're going to have to do that through development of the wide receivers, through development of our scheme, through development of our quarterbacks.

Obviously a big part of that is going to come off our play-action pass, which should be a strength of ours that

puts the defense in conflict. They're concerned about our running game. So those things help, and they need to be complementary pieces.

The interesting thing is we've had years where K.J. Hamler was the guy we were going to get the ball and Jahan Dotson was going to be the guy and DaeSean Hamilton. These guys need to touch the ball a certain amount of times per game.

So we've had it in years past. We need that again. Whether that's three wideouts or two or whatever it is, we need that with the tight ends.

Obviously we have a similar conversation at the tight end room. That room has produced pretty consistently. Still a big question mark when you lose a guy like Tyler Warren. That's what spring ball is about, installing all these things we have in our offense and defense and try to have an idea by the end of spring what our identity could be and should be going into the fall, and making sure as coaches we are not forcing the identity that we want to have on our team and on our positions.

Q. When you look at the \$50 million dollar investment from West Shore Homes into the stadium and the way that Pat Kraft talked about being fully committed to revenue sharing, whatever that ends up looking like, what confidence level do you have in Penn State's ability to compete as college football continues to change? Do you feel like that alignment is still moving in the right direction?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's -- obviously there is challenges with all of those things, right?

But I think Pat has done a magical job of pushing and being aggressive, like I talked about, a Big10 linebacker. But also having all of conversations and showing respect for all the parties out there with some challenging and difficult decisions.

But having relationships that we have developed with people specifically like BJ and West Shore Homes goes a long ways, and the fact that we have alumni that believe in what our university is doing and believe in what our athletic department is doing led by Pat Kraft, and then our football program.

Those things are important. When you have a \$700 million project going on at the same time that you're trying to get a roster put together with NIL and -- there could be some challenges, you know, of where that fundraising goes.

Those things are challenging. So I think things have been

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handled really well now. Again, doesn't mean it's always smooth, but I think from my lens and the things I've seen, things have been handled really well, and making sure we're showing everybody the respect that is needed and deserved, while also making difficult decisions that need to be made and moving the program, the university, and athletic department forward.

Challenging, but from my view, it's been handled very, very well.

Q. So in the past you've been a big proponent of doing split squad practices. I don't know if that's a spring thing or just a fall thing.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Spring and fall camp.

Q. Okay. How does the 105 rule change how you functionally practice now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so right now it doesn't, but in the fall it will when we have to be at the 105. It's interesting. One of the discussions I'm going to have to have after spring ball -- we already talked about the 105. Our team is well aware of it.

One of the things that's going to have to happen, it's going to be different. You look at last year, if our number was 105 I think we had 16 guys we lost during the season. So now you get 16 guys that you lost during the season who you're not allowed to replace under the 105 rules right now. So how are you going to practice?

Interesting thing is I think there was a study done, and the 105 number game because I think a lot of the people were talking and a lot of commissioners and ADs were saying, well, the NFL does it with 53. You should be able to do it with 105. Well, that's not accurate. The NFL, the number that I have seen that's been studied, their average roster throughout the entire season in terms of signing, practice squad guys, cutting guys, being able to replace guys, is about 110 players throughout a year.

So with that, with us not able to replace players on your roster, that's where it's going to get interesting, and guys are going to have to understand we may be doing some offense servicing the defense, some defense servicing the offense.

Essentially, guys that are going to need to be on scout teams that have not been on a scout team maybe in two years. So we've been fortunate with our roster numbers and our development of our preferred run-ons or walk-ons, however you want to describe it, we've had really good practices and had really good guys taking a ton of pride in

their role on scout team.

So that's going to be challenging. It's like anything else, right, can't be stubborn and just say, this is how we've always done it. You're going to have to adjust and embrace the new rules. Part of that is getting our players to understand this is going to be a different season than they're used to and everybody is going to need to embrace and understand that.

So that'll be a discussion, something we'll talk about at the end of spring ball so everybody understands this season will look and feel differently. It's going to be interesting. There will be some people in that 105 that have some real challenges, and you're not able to solve that challenge.

I remember a few years ago I think Maryland had lost four quarterbacks and had taken a linebacker who played quarterback in high school and were playing him at quarterback.

As we all know, the TV contracts and TV deals factor into this. Well, if you get a couple teams that had too many injuries and the product that we're putting out isn't as good because of the 105, does the number get changed, because TV pushes back and says, hey, we got to make sure the product we're putting on TV and we are paying for is quality. And the quality has been really good.

So these are all the things that will be interesting. Just like Mike's question about revenue sharing and the court, this is the first time we're going through it, so we can have plans and ideas how we think this is going to go, but until you actually go through it, you know, there will be things that we're learning and adjusting on a day-to-day basis.

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