

Penn State University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 22, 2025
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach James Franklin

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: Guys, how we doing? Hope everybody is good. Appreciate like always you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. We appreciate it.

Obviously just finished up a bye week. I think a lot of you guys covered our bye week schedule. We were all over the place. I know I specifically was all over the place. Me and Terry went out on Monday and got a ton of work done, then back in here for very productive Tuesday and Wednesday practices.

Left out Wednesday night, and then obviously as you guys know, football is changing, and with the staff size we used to do call it coordinators and captain's practice, but with the way staffs have changed, we pretty much had a coach at every position for Thursday's practice.

Did a little bit more full speed work than we normally do on that Thursday practice, which was good. Myself and Terry were out again all day Thursday; very productive with Deion all day Friday; very productive. With Danny O'Brien all day Saturday; that was good as well.

Then got back Saturday night and then Sunday we kind of have an expanded practice, because obviously we don't have the film to watch, so we take that meeting time and transition to about ten more minutes on the field and do some full speed work.

I don't want the quarterbacks to be in a situation where they haven't thrown full speed since Thursday, Friday, Saturday sat, Sunday. So we did that and it was good.

Getting into Oregon, Coach Lanning, got a tremendous amount of respect for what he's been able to do and for the Oregon football program and university as a whole. It's been impressive to actually watch what they have been able to do in a short period of time, number of different coaches, and with tremendous support.

So it's been impressive. Obviously Dan has a defensive background with his time as the defensive coordinator at



Georgia. Small-school guy that worked his way up, which I got a ton of respect for.

We were able to get some film. Obviously Montana State, Oklahoma State, Northwestern, and Oregon State. I know being on the road, me and Danny O'Brien were just talking about we were hoping that Oregon State game was as competitive for as long as possible so that we would have as much film to watch, so that turned out to be a positive as well.

Offensive side of the ball, coach Will Stein has done a really good job. Interesting, I didn't realize he was from Louisville. For some reason I thought he had a Texas background. Was Texas high school coach. Was very successful. Was at the university of the Texas. Got hired from the University of Texas San Antonio and done a really good job.

They're multiple is the best way I would describe. Multiple personnel groups, multiple tempos, multiple schemes. They're able to run the ball with power, spread you out as well.

You know, obviously they got a bunch of talented players. I think the tight end really makes them go. You know, obviously with what we were able to do with Tyler Warren last year, they're getting that out of their tight end position. He's a match up problem in the pass game. He's physical in the run game. Extremely explosive.

Mainly 11 personnel team, but they'll go 12 personnel, too. Dante Moore, young man we recruited the heck out of out of Detroit, Michigan. Was a five-star recruit. I think was a No. 1 quarterback in the country. Went to UCLA. Transferred there. Sat behind last year and now is playing really good football. No surprise there.

Their runningback, No. 27, very productive, very physical. Been impressed with him.

And then obviously No. 1, their wide receiver, Dakorien Moore, who obviously we're very aware of. True freshmen, playing at a high level. Quick, explosive, very, very good ball skills.



And then on defense, we talked about Coach Lanning. They're running a system he's familiar with from his Alabama days. Tosh Lupoi, as a well. Tosh has also got a similar background that Dan has. Has some NFL experience. Been a defensive coordinator at Alabama, assistant at Alabama, and obviously those two guys are hand in hand.

Multiple base front, four down, three down, a little bit of five down. Primary coverage they'll mix up between middle of the field open, middle of the field closed, quarters, cover one and some two robber. Playing a little bit of three safety stuff that obviously Coach Knowles has done a really good job with over his time.

We've been impressed with their outside linebacker No. 10; defensive lineman, No 52; outside linebacker No. 44; the transfer safety DB No. 31 from Purdue; and then inside linebacker No. 28 who has a great story. Local kid. Burlsworth Trophy winner and kind of seems to be the heartbeat of their defense.

So that's going to be a tremendous challenge.

And then on special teams, a guy that knows us very well, my guy Joe Lorig. He was with us here for three years so he knows our coaching staff, our personnel, our team very well. Was also -- I'll give him a shout out -- my old roommate in Idaho State in Pocatello, Idaho. We had a heck of an apartment there. Joe does a really good job. He is an experienced coordinator. Also works on the defensive side of the ball with the nickels, which is a similar role that he had here with us.

He is from Oregon. This was an opportunity for him to get back home, so happy for him and his family. Doing a nice job.

They got two punt returners, No. 2 and No. 1. Dakorien we already talked about, but also Gary Bryant. Those two guys have been explosive. Their punter is a Boise State transfer. He's another Australian who is doing a really nice job. He had a fake punt. I don't know if it was necessarily a fake or not. A lot of these Australian punters will roll and watch the rush so that the coverage team can get down as far as possible and they'll hold on to the ball as long as possible.

I don't know if it was a called fake or just he has the ability to take off and it's there, but basically no one was in his way for running so he took off and made a big play for them. He's an experienced vet.

Also their place kicker, transfer from Oregon State, No. 36 and has done a nice job. He's five for six on field goals

and 18 for 18 on PATs. You know, really doing a nice job.

So tremendous challenge. Tremendous opportunity. You know, obviously we need this place rocking. Need to have a distinct home field advantage. We always do, but I'm expecting this to be an environment like no one has ever seen. Urban Meyer always has kind of discussions and debates on what's the hardest place to play in college football. I think he usually says between Penn State White-Out at night and an LSU night game.

So we want to make it clearly obvious to everybody what's the most challenging and difficult environment to play in all of sports, let alone college football. I know a good portion of our fans like to sit down except for third downs and red zone and what they consider critical times of the game.

I'm challenging everybody. This is a four-quarter, one-play-at-a-time, first down, second down, third down, fourth down, punts, kickoff coverage, that we need to be on our feet, screaming a collective battle cry in the stadium.

So we're going to need everybody's help.

Open up to questions.

Q. How much different is the Oregon offense with Moore at quarterback instead of Gabriel, and what kind of problems does Moore present to you guys?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I don't think it's a whole lot different. He's a throw-first guy, very accurate, can extend plays. Obviously has a ton of playmakers around him. They both had the ability to extend plays. I would say that Dante runs a little bit more. You know, runs a little bit more than maybe they had in the past.

But the other guy was a really good athlete as well. So I think it's still very similar. I think that guy sitting -- Dante sitting behind that guy for a year was really valuable for his development.

It also shows a tremendous maturity of that kid. Five-star recruit. Could have gone anywhere and he would've pretty much been the starting quarterback the day he stepped on campus, and chose UCLA. Didn't redshirt his freshman year, so that became his redshirt year. It's been a real positive for him and them.

So I think very similar. They still function in a similar way to what we saw on film last year.

Q. I was wondering, off topic, I didn't know I was going to be batting second here, as a mentor and colleague, have you been in touch with Brent Pry, and how does

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the industry rally around each other when situations like this happen?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, as you know, I would prefer to talk about our opponent. I think you guys also know what Brent Pry and that family have meant to me and what I think about them, the, I have. Brent's dad was my offensive coordinator in college so we go back forever. We played against each other in college. One of Brent's first years coaching was at East Stroudsburg and then was with me the whole time at Vanderbilt, him and his family; watched his kids grow up. And then was with us pretty much the whole time at Penn State before becoming head coach at Virginia Tech.

So challenging situation. You hate to see it for anybody. I hate to see it for Brent and hate to see it Virginia Tech. But Brent is resilient and he's a darn good football coach, and he'll bounce back, as I know he will.

So got a lot of respect and a lot of love for Brent and his family. We have texted a bunch. Haven't talked. I know my wife and Amy have talked. Mainly texts between me and Brent.

But, yeah, I think the coaching community, and more than just the coaching community, as kind of friends look out for each other, it's no different than your friends in any other industry.

But I hate that for Brent and I hate that for Virginia Tech. So that's my answer. Was that everything he asked?

Yeah. He's got his finger up. I guess Neil is saying he gets two questions. Oh, no. You're saying okay.

Q. We were talking to Jim Knowles last week on the bye week and he had a chance to see this Oregon team and this Oregon offense twice last year. He was talking about the challenge of just trying to deal with their talent, tempo, all the challenges they present. He said in his mind one of the toughest things for him is it was critical simply to get the guys lined up in the right spots. He said against this team if you don't or you're not aligned correctly, you almost have no shot. Can you speak to that challenge? Even though maybe it sounds simple I'm sure it isn't. And how do you think your defense did last year against that kind of challenge?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so, again, when you have multiple wide receivers that can hurt you in a game, go the distance, it changes how defensive coordinators approach the game. And then same thing at tight end and same thing at running back and same thing at quarterback.

When you have multiple weapons, it becomes very difficult. Obviously what are offensive coordinators tried to do? Motion and shift to create confusion and to mess with your rules and try to get guys in favorable matchups.

I do think that's one of the advantages of going against our offense for him every single day in training camp because I think we do as much of that as anybody. I think there some value in that, our offense and defense going against each other.

And I think last year, in terms of your question about the matchup, I think we didn't have enough tools in our tool belt. What I mean by that is we were strictly -- probably not the best word -- majority a man coverage team. Sometimes they were able to get matchups that were in their favor. If we're not able to solve that issue with a sack or pressure, then we had some challenges.

Being able to play man is definitely one of our weapons, but also being able to have zones and zone pressures and a lot of those different things we're now doing more of I think is valuable.

As you know we've done it a bunch of different ways. With Bob Shoop and Brent Pry we were predominantly a quarter-quarter-half-cover-six team. Obviously when we went with Manny Diaz we became more of a man team, and that continued a little bit with Tom.

So being able to have more of a mix that we can challenge people with man coverage. When you do play zone, I think Jim does a really good job of emphasizing -- we've always talked about situational football. I think there have been times we have been in zone coverage but it's third and four and third and five and we are not challenging routes as much. We are too soft in our zones and things like that.

So it's been good. It's been good. He's an experienced defensive coordinator. There is a lot going on up there. (Indicating his head.) I think each week goes on where he's got a better idea of who we are. I think that's a big part in all of this as well. Andy Kotelnicki went through that last year. What are the strength of our people and challenges and weakness in our guys at this point in the season. How do you call a game to play to those strengths and maybe limit the deficiencies or matchup issues.

Q. You discussed the bye week, the schedule a little bit. Offensively what did you accomplish during that bye week in assessing where you've been successful and where you needed to get better?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First thing we do every year, which I



think is good, is I have the offense self-scout the defense and I have the defense self-scout the offense. Obviously we have the reports we run on either side of the ball and the analytic stuff we pay for, but if you can get one or two things from the crossover work that maybe you weren't thinking about, there is value in that.

Obviously spending time, we need to get better on both sides the ball on third down, third down/fourth down. So spent extra time on that during the bye week schedule. Spent a ton of time obviously on some tempo stuff, and then spent a ton of time on crowd noise, specifically on the defensive side of the ball from a communication standpoint, back to previous questions.

So those things are valuable, knowing what your strengths are, knowing what some of your weaknesses are, areas you need to improve. I've said this to you guys before: Tendencies are a good thing. If you have tendencies that means you're good at things. What you want to try to do is have enough of those tendency breakers to give people pause. I think those things are really important.

And then obviously the other thing that's going to be I think critical in this game is starting fast. This is a team that's started fast pretty much for the last couple years. That's going to be important in this game.

You look at some of the games like last year where that didn't happen for them, it changes things significantly. So starting fast is going to be really important for both our offense and defense.

Q. For your defense, first three games and the bye week, what's the most important thing you learned about your defense that you didn't know beginning of the season, and maybe is there something big yet you still want to see from them?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so probably the biggest one is probably some of our personnel, like Chaz Coleman. We have some young kids that you think are going to be able to help you, and you Chaz has made a move there. Daryus Dixon, as well. They are two young kids we weren't sure, and as they continued to trend, and some other guys as well. When you talk about defense, I think it's also just the level of communication that we have to have with our safeties and linebackers and Jim getting used to them and them getting used to Jim and the communication from the sideline or from the booth in how we communicate and call the defense; we have gotten better at that each week.

We put more on the players on the field, which I think is good, especially with the tempos and the change of

tempos that you're going to face. Obviously Dani has made his presence felt early and I think has earned Jim and a lot of people's respect in how he's playing.

I also am excited about Zakee because I think we all know the type of player he is and his ball skills and things like that in this new defensive scheme and tweaks that we have. It's taken him some time, but I think he is much more comfortable now in week five or four, however you want to look at it. I think you're going to see him make big plays for us moving forward.

I just think we're in a much different place in terms of the confidence and the execution that it takes to play in these type of games. Each week that we're able to spend time kind of working through it in practice and meetings, I think the faster that we get.

I'll never forget when Manny came here, Manny being surprised with the amount of speed that we had on our defense. I think the more comfortable our guys get in playing some of the tweaks to the new defense, that speed will start to show up again on a more consist of the basis.

Q. You have two guys on your defensive line, Dani and Zane, that other teams have to -- it seems to me other teams have to find them and figure out how to deal with them. So how can you leverage that maybe to find an advantage elsewhere? How can you use what other team have to do? If they take that away, something else has to be open, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: That's right. That's right. I think the first thing is playing those guys more, right? We've been a heavy rotational team the first three games and that was part of the philosophy, but you'll see a change this week in our ones will play more reps. Not saying they're going to play every rep in the game, but they'll play more reps.

So making sure that we have Zane and Dani on the field as much as possible. Also part of it is we want those two guys to obviously overlap. Then you'd also love to have a situation where they're not both of the field at the same time as well, right? Like when you have two veterans, you would like those veterans to be in with the younger players as well.

So I think some of those things we're going to have to look at in how we can create a rotation that allows them to play together, but also limit some of the time where they're both off the field at the same time.

That may mean we're going six plays with one and eight plays with the other or whatever it is in terms of being able to get them a blow. I think that's going to be as important



as anything.

Specifically on the defensive side the ball, we've been working hard to create depth. This isn't one of those types of games. We need our best players playing as many reps as we possibly can. Also making sure that we still have a chance to keep them fresh with the rotation of the depth we created.

That's part of it.

Then also just some things scheme-wise that we'll do, whether we put those guys on the same side in pass rush situations or splitting them up based on what we think they're going to do protection-wise to create some matchups we think are favorable.

Q. How is the team doing health-wise at this point of the season? Did the bye fall at a good time for the bumps and bruises that you kind of deal with through the course of the season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we're in a pretty good place. You know, we were able to get through the bye week with really no issues. The last couple games we really had no issues. Obviously getting a veteran player like Zuriyah back has been significant for us, so we're happy with that.

For the most part, we have some normal bumps and bruises, like you say, but we're in pretty good shape. We're in a pretty good place from that standpoint, and obviously we're going to need to have a physical week. Tuesday and Wednesday will be really important in terms of our work days and practice.

But we need to make sure that we have everybody available come game time. So there is a balance with all of that, right?

Q. You talked about the rotation, specifically at wide receiver, how many guys you feel comfortable playing on Saturday. Had anyone cracked into the Top 3 that's been building with the transfers, and Liam as a fourth?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we feel the same. Although you guys have not seen a whole lot of Tyseer Denmark and Koby Howard, it's not because we don't have confidence in those guys. We wanted to make sure we built the chemistry with our starters.

Again, now we're in a situation just like I talked about with the defense that we need to make sure that our guys are on the field for as many reps as possible with tap opportunities to guys that back them up that we have

confidence in.

Yeah, nothing has really changed. Maybe your question is based on perception; it's not that we don't feel like those guys can come in and contribute. It's more we've been using a rotation at wide receiver very similar to what we're talking about doing with the other positions in this game.

Q. The redshirt conversations, it was a month ago when you talked about the green lights with Daryus and Chaz. Anyone else earned their way on this list? If he hasn't, Yvan Kemajou, three for three, getting into games. How has his play, Chaz's play, and the fact you got Zuriyah is maybe changed the way you feel about your defensive end depth compared to a month ago?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we had felt like -- I think maybe you guys had more concern about the defensive end depth than we did. We felt like they were young but we were talented at that position. Yvan is a guy right now that we have a lot of confidence in. He's a smart guy. He's a physical guy. He's a trustworthy guy. So we feel like we can play.

Also didn't have Mylachi Williams so that factored into it. He had some bumps and bruises so that impacted Yvan's playing time. Obviously we have Mylachi back this week, which we're anticipating.

Yeah, not a whole lot has changed. Chaz and Daryus Dixson they are going. Yvan, Alex Tatsch, Jahmir Joseph are kind of that next group of guys that we'll play if we need to.

And then Koby Howard on offense.

So, yeah, we really like those young defensive ends, but also hopefully get Mylachi back helps with that, too. His strength is probably a little bit more in the pass game; Yvan is more in the run game. We would like to merge those two together.

Q. Going back to your kind of run game and the self-scouting that you guys have done, do you feel like Nick is at a good spot coming out of the bye week? Do you feel like you're getting what you want to get out of both those guys?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, just like I mentioned to you guys about Kaytron's offseason, I think you're seeing it, right? You're seeing what we talked about: His ability to go the distance, be explosive. His yards per carry are as impressive as anybody in the country, and obviously he's earned that. He's earned that right to be a guy that we

want to get the ball into his hands as much as we possibly can.

We also recognize what Nick Singleton has done over his career. I think we talked maybe a week ago just about Nick has worked really hard this offseason on some things in terms of open field running and some different tools and weapons.

But on Saturdays I want him to go let it rip and play fast and powerful and explosive, which is his style. He's a downhill, full speed back. On Saturdays I wanted him to do that.

I think you're going to see that from him as well. He's been too successful for too long here at Penn State. Had a great career. That will continue. I think it's a combination of him trying to be a perfect back and you're never going to be a perfect back.

I've talked about that with a number of our players. On Saturdays, just go play. Again, I got a lot of confidence and a lot of trust in Nick Singleton and what he's going to be able to do for us not only this Saturday but all season long.

Again, back to Kaytron, everybody is seeing what we talked about in the summer about his offseason and him looking different in terms of his speed and explosiveness.

Q. I think sometimes there is a conception among fans that when you play non-conference opponents you outscore by 100 points you maybe don't have to show all the tricks in with your bag, for example. How much of that is true? How much of that is a misconception? Can you open it up against a game like this against Oregon?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Is that the fans or is that the fans and the media?

Q. It can come into the media at times, too.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah. I think that's one of them long-term kind of questions, right? Are you saving things? Yeah, I think you're always -- I don't know if saving is the idea, but you've done some offseason studies where there is certain things you worked on during training camp that you're planning on using against certain opponents.

There are some things, yeah, could you have used early in the season, but didn't feel like you needed to? Yeah. I think that's always the case. It's not like offensive coordinators, defensive coordinators, head coaches you're going into a game saying, we're going to be conservative in

this game. It's not that. Or vanilla.

It's, okay, this is what we need to do in this game to win, to score points, to stop people scoring. It's all about the matchup and the opponent that you have there. But I guess it just depends on your lens. Do you call everything in every game? No, you don't. Obviously. It's impossible to do.

So there are packages and things that you're going to see in the Oregon game that you didn't see in the Villanova game. Some things you saw in that game you didn't see in the FIU game and Nevada and so on and so forth.

I guess the answer is a little bit of both, right? But it's not because we're taking the approach to be vanilla or conservative. It's based on what you think have to do in that game to be successful.

Q. Wanted to ask you, you've been in your fair share of White-Out games now. Curious how you handle the emotions heading to the field? And given I think this is the highest ranked both team have come into a White-Out game and the importance of this game, how do you stress to your players still to enjoy the moment pre-game and also lock in when game time comes?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that happens naturally. I don't think I need to tell them. They been hearing it all offseason. They been hearing it when they walk around campus. When they're getting the requests for tickets. I love I get these text messages. Hey, how we doing? I haven't talked to you in I don't know how long, and you are talking about all these other topics. I'm like, get to the point. The answer is no. You've waited to the last minute to request tickets. What are we talking about?

So I don't think it's anything that I need to address with them. It is a special deal and we're fortunate and honored to coach in it and play in it, but I don't think it's something that needs to be addressed.

They've all -- almost all of them were there as recruits. They've all -- the ones that weren't there as recruits have now played in it. So I'll take my eight seconds when we walk out of the tunnel and take it all in and feel the energy, and then once you kind of run on the field you're locked in and focused on the opponent and the challenge.

But I don't think it's something that needs to really be addressed.

Q. Jim talked about the other safety spot next to Zakee, that it's still an open competition at this point. How have you seen those other three guys handle that



competition and develop? We know Jim talks about how complicated that spot can be. How do you see those guys approaching this and definitely an in-season competition?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think King is an older guy. It's been impressive to watch how he approached it, and probably as much from a standpoint he didn't win the starting job during camp and never let it faze him.

I think some of the younger players, when they either lost a job or didn't win the job, I think they've let it faze them in terms of the consistency and the approach. It is hard, right, whether it's football or anything else in life, when you pour your heart and soul into something and don't get the return on your investment that you think you're going to get to show up the next day or rep and still be the same guy. That's a very important skill and trait to develop.

I think as young players they're still figuring that out. The good thing is both of them in Belgrave and Day Day (ph) are super talented, super talented. And I think they've very, very bright futures. It's like I talk about for a lot of these guys, it's about consistency.

Who can be the most consistent guy in practice every single day, most consistent guy in the games, that your teammates and the coaches can trust that you're going to do your job at a high level on a consistent basis.

And that's really kind of what we're looking for at every position. That's the challenge, whether it's our D-squad periods against our scout team guys, which do a phenomenal job for us, or whether that's the good-on-good work we do every week, you're trying to see who can do that on a consistent basis.

Whether that's jog-throughs, meetings, tests that you have. You know, kind of off topic but a little bit to your question, is Sexton, redshirt freshmen, offensive lineman. I used his example in the team meeting the other day. Coach Trautwein's test is as detailed and long of a test as I've ever been around.

I think they usually get it like on Thursday. Sexton's test was as good as I've ever seen. I know Traut felt the same way. Just the level of detail in his test was phenomenal. To the point I put it up in the team meeting body to learn from, right?

And these are kind of the preparation habits and behaviors we're trying to create. That's kind of what we're looking for at every single position, is each -- we have a process obviously as a team in how we prepare, that we want to be consistent as well.

But it's these players, too. It's them refining their process every essential -- single week. It's harder for a Nick Dawkins than Chaz Coleman, right? How do I refine my process and get better? Part of it is things as silly as during the White-Out, who handles your ticket requests so you don't have people hitting you up at the last minute; getting your tickets in on time. Your family not bothering you before the game or Friday night at the hotel. Getting all your schoolwork done so you can go to the hotel and focus on the game and responsibilities or assignments. Taking care of your body and doing stretching and supple line and massages and rolling out and pre-hab, not just rehab. Hydrating. Taking care of your body. Getting enough sleep.

All the little things add up. Typically the older more mature players are further along in that so they don't have things that impact their preparation. Whether that's mentally, physically, or whether that's emotionally. That's also why I'm so much a routine guy, because I think the players find comfort in that routine and they can lean into it that they know what this expect on a Tuesday.

Our Tuesday against Oregon is the same as our Tuesday against Nevada.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports