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Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: As always, appreciate you guys coming out and covering Penn State football. Quick Oregon recap. Turnover battle, obviously we lost the turnover at the end of the game. The explosive play battle we actually won. Did not meet our goal on offense but did win: We were at 10% they were at 7%. Third and fourth down battle we won. I was actually surprised when I saw that.

Again, I think it depends on how you look at it. Our third down percentage was better, fourth down percentage was better, but they went for it a bunch more based on sequencing where they were at on the field.

Sack battle, I think that was an important factor in the game. We weren't able to get in this quarterback. And on that note, I thought he played extremely well during the game and watching the tape I think he played really well.

They were able to get two sacks and we weren't able to get any. That factors to me, which was the storyline of the game which was first down. They were able to stay ahead of the sticks all night. Sequencing, which always played into the third and fourth down discussion we had a little bit, and weren't able to get ahead of the sticks. Created a ton of third and long situations, which are not advantageous for your O-line, quarterback, or playcaller.

Drive start battle, won that. Penalties, we won that. I think that could have been even more significant in the game. We didn't get any sacks. I also thought there was a significant amount of calls that weren't made that could have impacted that as well. But we did win that battle.

Middle eight we lost by three.

I thought our guys, when you went back and watched the tape, thought we played really, really hard for not only four quarters, but in the overtime. There came a point like I said after the game to you guys, back to the first down discussion, the time of possession. I think our defense ran out of gas. I think for three quarters they were on the field too much and that's a combination of them not being able

to get off the field and offense not being able to stay on the field.

But I saw a ton of grit from our guys. Saw a ton of resiliency from our guys. I think we continue to play consistent on special teams. I think that's been a positive for us. Opportunity for growth. Talked about first down. Talked about protecting the football. And not only protecting the football, but creating turnovers. We had an opportunity early in the game for a turnover we didn't make. Had a turnover late in the game that got overturned.

You know, to me, from what I saw, because I got this question afterwards, I didn't see enough to overturn the call on the field. Again, I wanted to just follow up because you guys did ask me that question after the game.

And then the other thing, just making sure that we stay as positive as possible. Don't allow one loss to turn into two. I think I got some questions about anger and frustration. Totally get it. Totally get it.

If you're not careful, that negativity can linger and we've had this issue in the past where one loss turns into two because there is so much negativity that it's hard to get the team over it and moved on.

So that's going to be really, really important believe I think it's also very telling and this was a message with our team, that the team in our conference last year that won the national championship had two conference losses during the season.

I think two of the Top 5 teams in the country lost this week, so I think college football is different than maybe how it's been in the past. You got to do everything you possibly can to put yourself in the best position to get into the playoffs, and then make a run.

So our focus is on playing UCLA this weekend. I'll get into that now. Obviously spent a ton of time last year on how to travel. I thought we handled it well last year. Going to needed to that again. Learned some things from last year. You look at, again, brought this up before, but you look at people's records. West coast teams flying all the way east or east coast teams flying all the way west, NFL or college,

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record is not very good. Magnified for east coast teams traveling west.

So making sure we're doing a good job handling that. Coach Skipper and UCLA, I don't know him very well. Met him a few times. He's an interim coach right now. He was the interim head coach at Fresno the year before so he has some experience. I was impressed watching these guys on tape at Northwestern. Thought they played hard.

Came down to the last drive. In that game Northwestern was able to get the W, but I thought they played really hard. Offensively, Tino Sunseri, who is a Pittsburgh guy dad, long time coach. Came from Indiana as the offensive coordinator. 11 personnel and 12 personnel team. I know there has been a ton of conversations in the offseason and preseason about their quarterback Nico. But he's impressive on film.

Makes a ton of impressive throws. Is mobile. Although he's a slight guy, he's tall and thin, he's a physical runner. I've been impressed him. Running back No. 6 Anthony Woods who's a Utah transfer; and wide receiver No. 3 Kwazi Gilmer, who has been a productive player for them.

Unusual story on defense. Their defensive coordinator, Kevin Coyle was at Syracuse two weeks ago and came in and took over the defense. So for us, watching the beginning of the season compared to now, there is value in that, but also what they did this past week, probably the biggest change we saw is a lot more man coverage.

If you listen to reports and read reports, came in manage and changed the defense. How much that is accurate I'm not sure. Maybe they just focused on a different style. I think they did limit the playbook to get the guys playing faster and more aggressive. I think that happened.

And I think by playing man coverage they can simplify things by saying, I got that guy, I got that guy. But unusual situation. I think a little bit of that is Coach Coyle and the head coach have experience. I think they were at Fresno together. That's where that comes from.

Talking about defense I would say they're a multiple scheme. Again, hard to speak on that in great detail. We did see a spike in man coverage this past week. Got a ton of transfers on the defensive side of the ball. Linebacker 32 Isaiah Chisom is from Oregon State. Safety No. 21, Cole Martin, is from Arizona State. Impressed with those guys.

D-tackle No. 99 Keanu Williams, a guy that's been there. Big guys, 6'5", 320 pound D-tackle. Safety No. 4, Key Lawrence who's an Ole Miss transfer.

And then another massive D-tackle, No. 58, Gary Smith, who is 340 pounds. Been impressed with him on tape.

Special teams, they do not list a special teams coordinator, you know, on their website. From what we understand, we think Bailey McElwain is the guy handling special teams for them. His first year handling special teams there at UCLA in seven years in his career. We been impressed their kicker Mateen Bhaghani, kick returner No. 22 Anthony Frias, and punt returner No. 7, Mikey Matthews who is a Cal transfer.

So really important that we got out there. We'll practice Thursday morning here and then fly out to California. Really important that we do a great job. That we get a win. And get back on a roll.

So appreciate you guys being here and open up to questions.

Q. James, you said last month that you thought this offensive line could be one of the best or the best in school history. I was just wondering, are they playing like that right now and how much responsibility do they bear for the struggles Saturday night being behind the sticks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think our O-line, like a lot of things on offense right now, were inconsistent. There are times where we look really good. Times where we don't. That's pretty much across the board on offense right now, inconsistent.

I think you saw how we were structured last year in terms of how we would like to manage the offense and be able to run the ball, be able to stay ahead of the sticks, create manageable third down situations, and also use that with the ability to go play-action pass and take shots down the field.

And until you're able to establish the running game, which we were able to do late in the game, which opened everything up from that point on, we have not been able to do it consistently. The O-line has, like a lot of things on offense, just not been as consistent and that's really been all year so far.

Q. Drew Allar, he's a better quarterback now than the end of last year. Could you talk about how you see that in your eyes? How has he shown that through four games to you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, when you talk about four games, again, back to the last question I got, we've just



been inconsistent. We've been inconsistent in the pass game. We've been inconsistent in the running game.

Again, this past week is not the ideal situation for an O-line or quarterback when you continue to get in obvious third and long situations. You know, obviously we talk about the inconsistency. It's all across the board on offense. I think you see flashes of brilliance and inconsistency. I think we continue to do a good job in terms of Drew when it comes to decision making. Obviously that last throw, that's a challenging route that people have a difficult time covering. But that was covered.

And we should have moved on or thrown the ball away to give us a chance to play another down and have a chance to win the game.

But I've seen his growth in practice. Obviously all these things need to translate to the game. Again, I think it's consistency issue as much as anything.

Q. You kind of referenced Ohio State's run last year, discussing the loss, coming back to win. Have you and Jim Knowles touched on that at all after Saturday night? Specifically to having like a certain still in front of you after an early loss?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah. I spoke with Jim about it. Jim talked to the defense about it. I actually was hoping he would speak to the whole team about it. He just talked to the defense about it. Probably follow back up on that as well.

He talked to the staff about it as well. So, yeah, I think that's been valuable. Obviously he's got good perspective on these things and a ton of information from that situation.

So, yeah, definitely talked to Jim about it on Sunday. We obviously had conversations before Sunday about it as well. I think that's an important message for our entire team to hear.

Q. You talked about not wanting one loss to turn into two and that maybe has happened in the past. Is it easier to coach the kids in that regard, or do they even need to be coached in that regard, given that one loss is not as devastating in the current format with the 12-team playoff?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I think you have to make sure that you're clear on that. I don't think a lot of people, including our players, recognize college football has changed. It's much more of an NFL model now in terms of records, in terms of the season, and how it goes in the playoffs.

So I think making sure that you talk about that. As you know, I put up games in our Sunday meeting as well. When you talk about three of the Top 5 teams in the country all having losses, I think that paints that picture as well.

And obviously the way last season went. So I think all those things are important things to discuss and important things to make sure everybody is clear on, but I do think it needs to be addressed. I think it needs to be addressed with the players. I think it needs to be addressed with the coaches. Those are the things that I can control.

So that's how we approached it.

Q. Just wondering, obviously after a huge game like that, a lot of opinions and I know you're a routine guy. You mentioned last week about how much recruiting you did during the open date. I'm just wondering, you know, is that a cause for reassessing that a little bit in front of such a huge opportunity of you spending more time, you know, with the schematics? It looked like it was a struggle on offense, especially early on. Just throwing it out there, wondering.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I get it. It's like the scheduling question. I get it. When you lose a game, everything is going to be second guessed. I get it. We lost to a really good team. We had a chance to win. We showed tremendous resiliency. We were able to get on the scoreboard first. But I would not describe us as starting fast.

So I get it. I get it. You lose a game we're going to be second guessed. We stay in and don't go out recruiting and win that game, but then next year we were not in the position we need to be in recruiting and don't have the type of season that should have we next year or the years after, then people say, well, you remember you didn't go out on the bye week? You normally go out and you fell behind in recruiting.

So I get it. Any time things don't go well, every decision is going to be critiqued. I get it. I totally get it. I understand the question. I understand where it's coming from. We try to anticipate some of these things.

But, yeah, I think we took the right approach. We spent a ton of time on Oregon. We spent a ton of time Oregon this summer. I think they did as well.

And then we balanced our week between recruiting and between preparing during the bye week for our next opponent.



So I get the question. I don't know if I necessarily agree with it. I also understand where the question is coming from and I understand after a loss everything is going to get second guessed. I get it.

Q. Drew seems to take these losses very hard. Is that a fair assessment? Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I'm not judging. I'm asking what -- how do you view that?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we all do. I think when you put so much into something and you're so personally invested, it should hurt, right? As much as I would like to say I love the winning as much as I hate the losing, that's not accurate.

So, yeah, I think Drew takes it very, very hard. I think there is a lot of similarities between the quarterback and the head coach because of the type of interactions you have, the interactions with the media, the fans. When things go well the credit you get, when things don't go -- yeah, I think he takes it very personal. That's why he's so driven and motivated.

I also think it's hard when you're a 17, 18, 19, 20 year old kid walking off the field and you're already disappointed enough and you're doing it in front of a fan base that's passionate and invested as well.

So, yeah. I think I would be -- I would probably be more concerned if it was the opposite. If he didn't take it so hard. I think we're similar in a lot of ways. I feel personally responsible for the players. I feel personally responsible for the staff. I feel personally responsible for all of it.

And I think our best players approach it the same way. I think Drew is like that. When things don't go well I think he takes an approach like I take and I think we all should and I think Jim talked about this a ton on Sunday. I know Andy did as well. Every single person in the locker room should start with themselves.

I think it's human nature to point in another direction. I think you have to be careful. You got friends and family trying to protect and you they do the same thing. If you're not careful, that's where your locker room can get divided.

Obviously we're not going to let that happen. I think he takes it very personal, like what I have seen from really good players who are invested not only in this team, but this community and program and everything.

Q. Based on the first four games and how this offense has performed, do you feel like this identity has to be

different than maybe what you -- this team's identity, offense's identity has to be different than what you perceived it was going to be at the beginning of the season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think that's a fair question because we been inconsistent in how we have been trying to run it.

I think that's a good question. I think that's a fair question. Those are the things I think we look at every single week. What do we need to do to be successful? What are we doing well? How can we build on those things? What are we not doing well? How can we either fix those things or pivot in a different direction to your point?

Then also think there is just a part of when it comes to players holding themselves accountable and coaches coaching them to get it done, we all got to own a piece of that.

But I think your point is a fair one. Just because this is how we did to last year doesn't mean that's how we have to do to this year. That's part of leadership and that's part of decisions that need to be made.

Q. Building off John's question, what do you feel like your offense does best right now? What are some things that have stuck out to you?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think when we're running the ball, I think our play-action pass is something that we have done well. I think when we can get Drew involved in the running game I think that creates a lot of frustration for our defense -- excuse me for defenses.

So a lot of the stuff that you saw on Saturday where we were able to run some of the read packages, option packages, however you want to look at it, with the speed sweep or quarterback power stuff, that's difficult to defend, right?

Whether it's the zone read stuff and getting him out the backside of the run to keep the defense honest is something that we haven't seen a whole lot this year. I think that's valuable as well. I think we've shown that Devonte Ross can make some plays. He's done it now in multiple games. I think Trebor Pena has done really good things and Hudson obviously has had some games as well.

So we got to continue to distribute the ball around. The other guy is Kaytron Allen is playing really well. You know, I think Nick, although the statistics would not say this, I think he's playing consistent, how he's played in the past. The difference with Nick is there has usually been one or



two runs where there has been a space, a gap, a hole, where he can rip off an explosive run.

He's been a guy that's been able to do that throughout his career with a 60 yard run, 80 yard run, that obviously changes the perception and statistics.

So I think, again, both questions I think are fair. I think when we're able to run the ball, our play-action pass has still been something we very he good to us. Been better in short yardage in the past but got to get to more short yardage situations and continue to distribute the ball around.

Kaytron Allen has had a really good early part of the season and we got build on that, too.

Q. As a junior, Drew was at 60% pass completion. All 12 regular season games, 65% or better in 11 of the 12. Since then, under 60% in 7 of the last 8 games, including the last three. This deep into his college career and the considering the continuity with his offensive coordinator and his quarterbacks coach, how do you explain this trend? And can your team accomplish its primary goals is this trend sustains?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, no, the trend can't sustain obviously. But, again, I think we have to make sure that we're not in run, in complete or another run and obvious passing downs where we don't have clean pockets, don't have open receivers. We got to make sure we're putting him in the best position as possible.

There are some easier throws that we can find for him, whether it is quick game, screens, whether it's move the pocket that we have to be able to do in these games to get him going like most quarterbacks.

You know, obvious passing downs or significant shots down the field, 20 yards down the field, those things are going to impact completion percentage as well. So all those things factor in. But, no this, obviously you can't have bad statistics and expect that to lead to a positive result.

Q. You talk about how hard you take losses and how hard Drew takes losses. Also the new landscape of college football and the way things are set up with the playoff, what's it been like for you to recalibrate in terms of situations after a loss and to get your players to recalibrate?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, again, I think the things I've already stated, already answered in terms of going through that with our team and talking about how last year played

out for other teams.

Also looking at what has happened nationally with other ranked opponents, highly ranked opponents -- or teams, excuse me. And then also be able to look at our season and what we have left. Again, I understand all the questions. I get it. I understand the frustration.

But there is a ton of football left to be played. I think we're still ranked in the top 10. There is a ton of football and opportunities to be played to go do some special things. I think last year for us is an example. Lost some games early on and then were able to get into the playoffs and make a run.

And we were, you know, a possession or drive away from playing for the national championship last year after losses that were -- you know, resulted in a similar frustration and anger.

So we got to bounce back and bounce back quickly. That's also why I moved the press conferences up to Monday, so that you guys can get your questions answered as soon as possible and that helps us, myself, and the team move forward and move on as quickly as we possibly can.

Q. When you talk about the defense maybe running out of gas toward the end, wanted to highlight three positions. I think Zakee and King took every snap at safety; at linebacker and defensive end, I think nobody beyond the starters took more than 20 snaps. I guess are you satisfied with how that rotation played out and comfortable moving forward with the depth at those spots?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, I understand the question. I mean, do we want to be in a position where a guy plays 82 reps? No. That's also why we played so many guys in the first three games, to create that depth and also to keep our starters fresh, knowing that we were going to take a different approach in this game.

There is also a difference at the safety position. Me and Dex talk about this all the time. You make a mistake at the safety position, it's very different than a mistake at defensive line or a mistake linebacker. Those mistakes go for touchdowns.

So, no, we got to create more depth. Got to be able to play more guys. But we went into this game knowing we were going to play our starters as much as we possibly could to win the game.

Yeah, I get it. First three games we could have played the starters more and maybe played more consistent, and then

get into this game and play the starters at some positions all, if not the majority of the reps, and then we run out of gas and that gets questioned. I get it. I truly do.

We have to work to create more depth. Where Dex feels comfortable putting those guys on the field. I think that's going to be important at linebacker as well. At safety I think we have some more options right now that we feel good it. Linebacker we have to develop and create some of those.

Again, I get the question.

Q. Wanted to ask about the last offensive play there in double overtime. Kind of getting the -- picking your brain of you and Andy, you have some time to pick out that play knowing you're going to double overtime. Wondering the philosophy of running that play to the boundary versus the field?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, if it you study that play of our time here, it's almost always run to the boundary. Probably can find some tweets where you loved it. We have run that play to the boundary, a similar variation of that, for probably the last 12 years. Most people run that play to the boundary.

We've had a lot of the success with it. They did a really good job of coaching it and covering it, especially when it complemented the run we been running all game.

And like I mentioned earlier, I think you got to give them credit. You got to throw the ball away or take a check down or run to give us a chance to play another down.

But, yeah, that play is typically run into the boundary. Again, you got give them credit. Again, I understand the question. A lot of times when you run plays into the boundary, whether it's the run game or whether it's the pass game and they don't work, that always gets questioned, right, because from a common sense approach the field has more space.

The issue with that is a lot of times when you can go FIB, formation into the boundary, or FSL, formation to sideline, however you say it, a lot of times defenses call field defenses, which creates more space, more angles, more leverage into the boundary.

So that's why some run plays are called into the boundary. Some pass plays are called into the boundary. Based on trying to take advantage of defenses playing field defense and a lot of times you can gain leverage advantages or, I know it seems strange, but space advantages into the boundary.

So I hope I answered that question fairly. But that's why.

Q. James, you talked postgame Saturday about the narrative around you and big games. What have the last 36 hours been like for you from a personal standpoint, and how do you personally handle that away-from-football stuff?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, we have lost to really good teams. We've lost to really, really good teams. I take that very hard and I take that very personal because I know how important it is to so many different people. I always start with myself and the things that I can control. That's why I take things so personal. That's why I take things so hard. When you do that, you have to be careful.

You try to tune out all the noise that you possibly can. Again, which is difficult in today's day and age. I try to insulate the players as much as I possibly, possibly can.

You know, whether it's Greg Kincaid or Chris or other people will send me cutups or examples of how maybe other coaches and other people handle some of these questions, and I think that perspective is good. Some of the way those things are handled at other places, I don't think would go over very well here if I got in up in a press conference and said some things I've seen other people say.

So I try to be as respectful as I can. I try to answer the tough questions that you guys give. It's not always easy to do. I wouldn't say I enjoy this whatsoever, but I also understand you guys got a job to do and these tough questions are going to come.

I will also say that I'm not going to allow one loss to define our season. I'm not going to allow a few losses to define my career and what we have done here at Penn State, because although I don't think a lot of people spend a ton of time on what we have done over our 12 years here, I get it. Nobody wants to hear this right now. There is a ton of positives.

So I say this as someone that's trying to look at the positives here and move this program in the right direction and take the steps that we need to take this week. So I want this to come off as me stating some positives to answering your question and not just focus on the negative.

Because I don't think that helps solve the problem. Screaming, yelling, pointing fingers, we're not going to do. Also there is a part of making sure that I represent this program, this university the right way, and do it with class

and integrity.

That probably shows up in times like that more than other times. It's not fun and easy when you care as deeply as we care.

Q. Question, we talked a lot about the offense obviously. How quickly or how long do you think some of the changes you suggested or you discussed today could take to implement in terms of is it a thing of next week on the field could look totally different, or some of the things you're talking about, ideas we've talked about, like what is the timeline of you think of a turnaround for the offense in that regard?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Sorry I'm smirking, because whatever I say, next week we walk in here and that's the next question. Oh, yeah, we're going to get this turned around now. All of a sudden, doesn't happen. If I say the opposite, well...

Q. I understand from that perspective.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'll still answer your question. You can rephrase. I'm going to answer it either way. I'm not just going to say that and move on.

Q. I understand. The time element of that being problematic in terms of getting to what the answer you might want to give is. So how challenging is it to make changes either schematically or personnel-wise in the middle of the season to effect the positive changes you want?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, sir. I'm not saying you were asking that question trying to put me in that position, but that's what it would've been, right?

Yeah, I think the reality is -- I think things can change quickly, right? There is the opportunity for that ah-ha moment when things just start to roll. A guy makes a big play and then the confidence and that momentum just takes over.

But that's not always the case. Sometimes it's a grind and you're going to grind this thing out and find ways to get ugly wins. It's interesting because as you know we're close to the Eagles and close to Saquon. One of the things that got sent to me today, not that I get to follow it as closely as I would like, but I guess their running game has been struggling and Saquon's numbers haven't been as big and people are asking why.

I think the answer from the offensive lineman that I saw with the accent is a massive human being with beautiful a

accent. How do you say his name?

Q. (Indiscernible.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you. What he said was he has a block -- one play that he wish he could have back and next play it's another guy or the tight end or a misread. You're close.

The fortunate thing for the Eagles is they've been able to do that and do that through winning. For us, we've been able to win up to last weekend, so then all these things become magnified. Now we're sitting here answering these questions and these questions and answers become more impactful.

So to answer your question, back to what I said: I think we could make a few plays, we could get a couple big runs and the light go on and the energies are good and the momentum is good and we start to roll.

Or we could grind through it. The reality is we're going to do whatever we have to do to win games. It may be pretty and I may be in here next week answering questions and it was a thing of beauty that got a win or could be painful and ugly. But if it gets a win, that's what we're going to do.

We got to find a way like I was just talking about the Eagles, is as we're getting better we're finding ways to win games and the opposite. At the end of the day -- excuse me, not the opposite. We're going to find ways to win games. Whether we're explosive and pretty doing it or ugly doing it, at the end of the day we got to find ways to win games and get better while we're doing it is what I meant to say.

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