

Penn State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 13, 2025

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Athletic Director Pat Kraft

Press Conference

PAT KRAFT: Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for all being here. As we discussed yesterday's announcement, leadership change within our football program.

Let me begin first by saying James Franklin is a tremendous man, husband, father, mentor to countless student-athletes, and a good friend who has always carried himself with dignity and represented Penn State with absolute class.

Beyond the wins and the accolades, James has been a trusted ambassador for this University and a friend to the Penn State community. We are all incredibly fortunate to have had James Franklin lead our football program for over a decade, and we will be forever grateful to him and his family. We wish them nothing -- and I mean this -- I wish them nothing but success in the text chapter of their lives.

That said, at Penn State we hold all our programs to the highest standards in our shared pursuit of the excellence. My job is to evaluate everything and make hard decisions for what's in the best interest of our athletes, our program, and our department.

Football is our backbone. We have invested at the highest level. With that comes high expectations. Ultimately, I believe a new leader can help us win a national championship, and now is the right time for this change.

Terry Smith will serve as our interim head coach. Terry is a proud Penn Stater. He helped build this program as both a player and coach, and he understands what it means to wear the blue and white. I am confident and I can tell you he will pour his heart and soul into this role and our players, and fans deserve nothing less.

The search. We'll conduct a national search. Our next coach will be someone who embodies everything Penn State stands for: Integrity, accountability, toughness, humility, and an elite motivator.

We'll find a coach who can achieve excellence at the



highest level, doing with it confidence and conviction. Recruiting will always be a pillar here. We want someone who will attract elite talent, retain players in the NIL era, and make Penn State a destination.

This is also about the modern era of college football. Our next coach needs to be able to maximize elite level resources, attack the transfer portal, and can develop at the highest level.

This person has to fit Penn State. They need to represent the toughness, the blue collar work ethic, and the class that defines this institution.

We want someone who honors our tradition but isn't afraid to evolve; someone who understand the weight of "we are" and leads us forward with a vision of championships.

The right coach will rebuild the unity and pride that defines this historic program, and they will ignite this fan base around a shared belief that we're capable of greatness, and we're going to do it in the right way and we are the best program in the country.

We have made significant investments in this program. We compete in the best conference in the country and we have the best fans and alums in the country. With a renovated stadium on the horizon, I have nothing but confidence in our future and in our ability to attract an elite leader for our Penn State football program.

Finally, to our fans, alumni, and community, we all need each other. We all need your support. And all our focus -- let me repeat -- all our focus should be around the young men in Lasch right now who wear the blue and white.

We have a lot of football left. They deserve every once of our support.

At that, I'll open up for questions.

Q. Can you get into at all the structure of buy-out and how it could be paid out with James?

PAT KRAFT: No. And I knew that was going to be the first question. Look, I'm not going to get into the financials.



What I will tell you about the buy-out, this is an athletics issue. This is not the institution's issue. So we in athletics are covering all the costs. I just want that to be known.

So we are absorbing all the costs associated with this.

As it gets to structural, how it's paid, not going to get into the details of that and the financials either.

Q. Pat, when did you reach this decision? And considering your relationship with James, how difficult was it?

PAT KRAFT: Rich, I appreciate that. You know, I'm going to be very transparent with ya'll. This was extremely, extremely difficult. It's been a very difficult 48 hours. I felt after Saturday and sitting down and looking at everything that where we were and what was in the best interest of my kids, my student-athletes -- my kids, meaning you guys know I call our athletes my kids -- and where the program was going, that this time we just had to make the hard decision.

Look, as all of you know, as leaders when you lead an organization like this, when you've made the decision you have to make the decision with the whole heart and with conviction. So I was going sleep on it on Sunday, but I knew it was the right course of action for us as a program and more importantly for the team.

So that's kind of how it transpired. You know, you talk data, right, this is not three-game thing. This is really diving into where we were as a program, the trajectory of the program. And you all know, and I'm not shy to admit it, I'm here to win a national championship. I believe our fans deserve that.

I wake up every day trying to achieve that goal. So long winded answer, Rich, but that was kind of on Sunday, hey, this is probably the time.

Q. Wonder about doing this six weeks into the season, in the middle of the season.

PAT KRAFT: Yep.

Q. And particularly because you used the phrase in your opening statement, rebuild the unity and pride. Had this gotten to a point where you're looking at the football program and saying, this is untenable going forward? And what led you to that conclusion other than what is on the scoreboard?

PAT KRAFT: Yeah, no, I think, Mike, you're right. When you make these types of decisions, and we make big

decisions all the time. I make decisions that no one knows about our athletes and where we are going. Anything this significant just doesn't come on a whim.

You have to have scenarios, and we do. How is this going to go; what if this happened. But looking at where the program was and where it is and where we want to be as a program, I just felt there was no other course.

I felt it was time -- now, remember we're in a different era of football and there are a lot of things that come with this new era in transfers and everything. So that probably was down the road in the thought process, but I did feel like for our student-athletes and the staff and the program and our fans, there just wasn't a choice.

And by the way, look, when you make that decision, you make the call, I have to be the leader, I have to make hard decisions. So that's why we -- I felt like it was appropriate.

Q. Pat, thank you for doing this today. I was wondering, across college sports we've seen buy-outs and guaranteed contracts kind of exploding and the money continues to rise. How will you kind of approach that when you go about looking at a new coach and hiring a new coach, especially with that athletic departments across the country, including your own, having to mind their money closely these days?

PAT KRAFT: Yeah, it's a great question. You're right. When all these contracts were signed the use the money going rev share and all the other pieces that are involved, you have to process the financials in such a different light.

And so quite honestly, when you get into a search and start to have those hard conversations, hey, what do you envision this program -- how do you envision the program looking, how do you envision winning a national championship, the facts are the facts. You got to recruit at a high level. And now the transfer portal. You have to be able to recruit in the transfer portal at a high level, and so how do you use your resources in the right way to build a roster.

I am very blessed, and I don't have anything to do with this I don't believe, to be the athletic director at Penn State. We are blessed because of our fans, alums, and the support we receive that we can do more than most and that we have elite resources here. So that allows us to be able to have real conversations and put our resources to the test in the best direction.

Q. Obviously recruiting ramifications from this. What are you doing, you personally, to mitigate what's been

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going on, and how are you discussing with Terry and the staff how to handle the situation?

PAT KRAFT: Look, none of that is surprising, right. By the way, the recruiting role has changed. I mean, student-athletes are flipping and going everywhere. Look, I'm not going to be naive. I probably know that every Power 4 team has reached out to our student-athletes already.

That's where the industry is. Terry and I talked, and one of the reasons I was comfortable in doing this now is because of Terry. Terry is an elite recruiter. He has relationships with those kids. He and I talked about many things. That is a part of it. We have to continue.

I think what we will show is what we're such a big and historic all program we are going weather the storm. We have weathered far worse than this.

I think once Terry gets settled in -- now, let's just talk about me, and our coaches know this. I'll talk to the end recruit, whether it's fencing, football, wrestling, basketball, volleyball, I don't care, and I will continue to be active in that process.

For me right now I'm just going to be very honest, I am less worried about '27 kids and more worried about my kids in the locker room right now. That's my focus.

Terry has a great staff he will lead to deal with the recruiting issues. None of it is surprising. Right now I want to make sure we're prepared to go and get after Iowa.

Q. You said this wasn't a three-game thing. Three weeks ago you were in the Top 5; few months ago you were a play or two away from the national championship. When did you first begin to think this might be a possibility? And then how much of 1-18 versus top 10, Big10, opponents played into it?

PAT KRAFT: That's a good question. In this role as athletic directors and CEOs you have to be ready for anything. Did I expect to have to walk up those stairs yesterday at Lasch Building and talk to games I have James like I did and have that conversation? No. But you should be built ready to handle what adversity is coming and what you believe is the right thing for the program.

I weigh everything when I make a decision. The Ph.D. nerd in me is like, I do data, I do analytics, I look at everything. And when you start to look at where we're going, and yes, how this year has been playing out, all those things take -- you have to take into consideration.

We're all humans. James Franklin is a human being. This is a job he loved. People can say what they want about James, but James, like it's a small world we have and we're all friends. You cannot make decisions of this magnitude lightly.

So to say, oh, we lost to Oregon and UCLA. No. It's about where are we as a program and where are we going. How do I give my student-athletes the best chance to win. How do I continue to build this to a place that we are the best program in the country.

That's the motivation. And so as you start to put all those things together, you got to make the call. That's where we were. You have to be prepared. You have to be prepared for everything.

And so, yeah, I mean, that's the nature of the business. All of that plays into it.

Q. I know clearly it's an emotional time for you. You referenced the fact that the athletes are your kids. There is no question that you're closely -- always around the Penn State athletic teams, especially the football program.

PAT KRAFT: Yep.

Q. One of your kid's career came to an end at the end of this game. I was going to ask you thoughts on Drew Allar, his injury, what he's meant to Penn State, and just your thoughts on what he's done.

PAT KRAFT: Yeah, it's hard for me not to get emotional about that. He's just an amazing kid. I mean, I don't know what else to say. He's been through a lot and he is that. He's a kid. I think to see someone who's gone through a lot at a young age and anyone who ever doubts that young man's commitment to Penn State and Penn State football, you don't know what the hell you're talking about.

Sorry. I can't believe I'm getting this emotional. Drew is one hell of a young man. He puts up with a lot of crap. And I get it. The NIL era. He's still a kid. I can't have -- there is not a negative word that comes up when I think of Drew. I apologize. You got to understand these kids work so hard and they love Penn State so much.

I get to see them in a different way than you all do. I get to see them as, like I said, my children. It's so much bigger than like how many touchdowns -- I get it. I'm not trying to lie to ya'll. We all know we want to win. He wants to win in the worst way. He's working his hardest to do that.

To see it end that way, you never want that. No matter the



outcome of the games I want every one of our athletes to finish everything they start, in life and in games.

He's doing to be an incredible pro football players and ambassador for this program. And I got to be honest, the fact that he stuck with us is pretty awesome. I tell all our kids all the time I will have their back every second of the day and I will never stop doing that.

He's faced a lot of adversity here. I love the kid. I love him. He'll be great for us. Right now he's going to be great for Grunk. He works hard. Smart football player. He has an incredibly bright future playing ball at the highest level. Yeah, that's my take on Drew.

Q. You talked about weathering the storm; this isn't the worst one that Penn State endured. The fan base was pretty divided before the announcement and after. How does this fan base come back together when it feels like it's at a fever pitch?

PAT KRAFT: I think we got to be steady. I think we have been built -- Penn State is built for stuff like this. We have to come together. That's the unity. We were a strong, strong force, the most powerful department and university in the country. We stick together through this.

It's okay. I don't know about your family, but my family argues all the time, my two brothers, you know, that happens.

But we're going to do it with -- I would hope with class can dignity and get around one simple thing: The young men that this locker room. You can hate me, you can hate James, but like Drew, rally around them. They deserve it.

That's who Penn State is. That's who we are, and I believe in my heart of hearts that will continue to be what drives us to where we are going to end up.

Q. Pat, you mentioned Terry Smith and what he brings to this role. You mentioned the national search for the next head coach. Could those two things become intertwined? Is Terry Smith going to be under consideration?

PAT KRAFT: Absolutely. Everybody is under consideration. And I'm going to help Terry do everything he can to run the table. But, yes, he will be considered a candidate.

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