

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 13, 2025

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Terry Smith

### Press Conference



TERRY SMITH: Good afternoon. First off, I would like to thank Coach Franklin for an incredible 11-plus years of service, dedication to this program, to our student-athletes. I've known Coach a long time. He brought me here. We entered this year in year 12 together. I learned so much from him as a parent, father, coach, how to run a world-class program.

It was a tremendous opportunity for me to have worked with him. I'm fortunate that I played for Coach Paterno and now I played for another very successful coach here at Penn State in Coach Franklin.

As for me, I appreciate the opportunity from Pat Kraft and administration that they entrusted me to lead this program forward. Penn State holds a dear place in my heart. I'm a third generation Penn Stater. My dad sits up top. He's a '68 grad; I'm a '91 grad; my son is an '07 grad; and my daughter graduated here recently.

I call this place home. I love this place. I love the blue and the white. I'm proud to be sitting in front of you.

For our program, we need to stick together, stay focused, keep the standard the standard. Nothing changes when it comes to the expectation, as Pat alluded to earlier. We need to get back to enjoying ball, being tough, gritty, and passionate.

Our players and staff will respond with great energy this week as I'm excited for the opportunities to lead everyone in the Lasch Building. The players, staff, and myself are going to continue to represent Penn State with pride; we will continue to do it the right way.

With that, I'll open up to questions.

**Q. Terry, thank you. Appreciate this. Can you describe your reaction when you learned about Pat's decision? How did you find out? Have you spoken to James since?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, found out Sunday afternoon. You

know, we had a team meeting scheduled at 1:45. Probably found out 1:20-ish. I was stunned, like most people in the building, most people around the country.

I was fortunate to speak with Coach Franklin last night. It was a heartfelt conversation. I just wanted to express my gratitude and thankfulness for him and all that he's done for me, my family, and this program.

He took us out of a darker era and got us to be a relevant program again. We don't take that for granted.

**Q. Over the last 24 hours we've seen players past and present sharing their emotions and feelings on James' firing on social media and otherwise. How would you describe the temperature of the team and of the locker room, and how do you guys move forward from that?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, the temperament is, you know, there is guys that are shocked that it happened. You know, we didn't anticipate this. The staff, we didn't anticipate this. But it has happened.

And so every person that's in the Lasch football building, James Franklin brought them there. From the coaches to the staff to all the personnel in the building, he brought everyone of us there. So there is an attachment to him. There is a sense of loyalty to him.

Now it's my job to press us forward. It's my job for us to be where our feet are, be grounded right here, and be able to represent Penn State in a proud fashion.

We have got to get our grittiness back, our toughness, our swag, and most importantly, we got to go have fun, enjoy playing the game of football.

**Q. Just wanted to ask you obviously about the recruiting front. You do a lot of things for Penn State in the recruiting aspect. Now that you're the interim coach, how does that affect what you do for the recruiting? How do you approach it with James gone?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, I have my work cut out for me. I probably recruited almost three fourths of the roster, and a lot of committed guys, I recruited those guys.



We're just going to continue to press forward. We're going to continue to recruit. We are going to continue to get in front of these guys.

One thing that hasn't changed is Penn State is Penn State. We all know the expectations of being here. Pat made it clear: We're going to be successful. We have always been successful. It's the only way we know.

So we're going to recruit the young men that want to be here, and when we suit up come 2026 with a new roster, they will be equipped and ready to go.

Recruiting is going to work as-is. We're just going to keep our tedious approach and keep contacting those guys and try to get them on campus to visit and just remind them how beautiful of a place this is.

**Q. You mentioned that you have a lot on your plate right now understandably. Do you view this in any way as a chance to prove that you can be the guy that's the ultimate full time head coach at Penn State?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, I'm thankful that Pat and the administration chose me. They could have chose anyone in the building. I'm just thankful. I love Penn State. All I want to do is help Penn State be successful and win, all right? I'm sitting in this press conference because we didn't win enough, and whatever I can do to help this place win is what I'm willing to do.

I would be remiss to say if the opportunity didn't put itself out there for me to be the head coach permanently, absolutely I would love that opportunity.

**Q. You were the corners coach a couple days ago; now you're the interim head coach. Just wondering, you haven't had a lot of time. Are there going to be any, A, staff changes, or will you change up any responsibilities on the staff to maybe get things more streamlined for the second half of the season?**

TERRY SMITH: Not immediately, other than have to replace my corner back position. Jordan Lucas will take that role. There will be no other staff changes immediately.

This first week I want to get my feet underneath me and understand all the roles of being the head coach and the CEO of this program. I will take a deeper look each day as to where I see that I can help us improve.

**Q. Can you say how James took it, and has he had an opportunity or will he be able to talk to the team? How does that work?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, so fortunately for him, he was able to address the team. He let them know. As you could imagine it was emotional. Those kids love him. He went into each and every one of their homes and brought them here and their families entrusted, him so there was a lot of emotion in that meeting.

James is a great guy, man. He's done so much for all of us that we're just thankful. We're going miss him.

**Q. You mentioned the loyalty to James. Was there any hesitation on your part to take the interim role out of loyalty to James and what was his reaction?**

TERRY SMITH: James has always told me that if something happened to him, he would recommend that I be the next person to lead. So he understood. We're all under contract. We have to press forward.

You know, we're dealt a certain hand in life, and whatever that hand is you have to play it. This is the hand that I've been dealt to lead this program. When I woke up yesterday morning I had no idea I was going to be the interim head coach of Penn State University.

Today I'm super proud to be that. I will lead this program to the best of my ability and we're going to get it back on track.

**Q. Can you kind of talk us through -- obviously there is a learning curve with Jim's defense these guys are working through. Are there things you think you can do to simplify this defense the rest of the way to get these guys playing faster and more aggressive, which is what James had told us had been an issue?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, on the defensive side the biggest thing for us is we have got to get our defensive line to be in sync. Everything starts up front. So the true things that we have to fix this week is the offensive line, defensive line. And not that they're problems, but they got to be able to control the line of scrimmage. You control the line of scrimmage, you control the game.

Those are the two things we're focusing on this week, and it goes back to part of my original statement of toughness. We got to be tougher up front and that sets the tone for what everyone else does.

**Q. You guys were a two-point conversion away from being the No. 1 team in the country three weeks ago. How do you explain what happened the last three games? And do you have an update on Drew, his injury and recovery outlook?**



TERRY SMITH: Yeah, we were, like you said, a two-point conversion away from beating a top team. I don't really have an explanation. You know, losses, when we look back at last season there were so many close games that the ball bounced our way.

We go to UFC and we are down 20 to 7 and the ball bounces our way; we go to Wisconsin and the ball bounces; we go to Minnesota, the ball bounces our way. This year the ball is not bouncing our way, so we have to persevere and press forward and keep grinding to be better.

As for Drew, I don't have any other updates other than that he's out for the year.

**Q. You talk about Penn State with so much love and you always have. We've seen this program overcome some incredible odds. To look at where you are today and trying to bring everyone back together, what do you think is most important for people to know about why you love Penn State so much and why they should?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, Penn State has done so much for me and my family. Like I said, my dad graduated in '68. He set a tone for us. He moved us out of small town Aliquippa, Pennsylvania and showed you will a better life through his education here.

You know, then I graduated in '91 and now I'm supporting and taking care of my family. It's because of Penn State and all the lessons I learned here. I just want to give back to this community what it's always given to me and my family. It means everything to me.

I don't see working here as a job. I love waking up every morning and showing up for work and trying to make us better.

**Q. Now starting quarterback, Ethan Grunkemeyer, how has he responded since Saturday evening? What have you learned about him this season that can lend you confidence moving forward?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, we have every bit of confidence in Ethan. He has a strong arm, he is athletic, super smart kid. We're entrusted him. He's been thrown in there just like I've been thrown in there, so we got something in common.

He's going to be ready. You know, we're going to rep him all week and drill him all week and put him in class on grass, and we're very confident we're going to have a

game plan for him that fits him.

Super excited to see him go out there Saturday night.

**Q. You inherit a .500 team, especially after the expectations coming into this season, maybe a fan base that is divided, you mentioned the temperament in the locker room. I am curious when the season is all said and done what you would define as a successful second half of the season, and how you hope to achieve it?**

TERRY SMITH: Success is the team pulling a rope the same direction. When you watch us play you guys will come in here and your questions won't be effort. Your questions won't be they look lethargic.

If we lose, it's going to be because that team beat us and they were just better. We won't answer questions about how we lost the last three games. There is not one of those teams that we could arguably say was better than us, including Oregon.

So I promise we're going to put a better product on the field that every Penn Stater will be super proud of.

**Q. Two personnel questions for you. AJ Harris, only played 18 snaps; I believe the last one was after the touchdown over his head. Was he taken out of the game? Was he injured? Is there anything you can share with is about Cooper Cousins after he was out last Saturday?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, AJ, unfortunately for him, he was put in a position and got to beat on the touchdown and we made a decision at that time to just play some other guys.

AC, Audavion Collins, and our other corner, Elliot Washington, those guys rotated all year and we just felt like we had a better chance to have success with those guys.

As far as Cooper Cousins, he's a week to week process and we will get to practice tomorrow and figure out where he is and hopefully he'll be ready.

**Q. Terry, you mentioned a couple times whether it's swag, having fun, grit, determination, some of the things you said you want to get back for this program. What do you think led to losing them in the first place?**

TERRY SMITH: There is a number of reasons. You know, we're this a new era of football. Like Pat said, you have to navigate everything about it: NIL, money, the locker room of bringing 125 guys together as a team, bringing



individuals like a hand and making them collective. That's my job now. And I've got bring everyone together to see the benefits of how we can all succeed as one.

You know, it's not going to be easy because these guys love Coach Franklin and some of them were torn up. We got to rally the troops and become one.

**Q. When we have in-season coach firings in today's era, sometimes it's a commonplace to see some players decide to redshirt, sit out the season. Six games in you don't have to deal with that quite as much, but by my count you have 31 players in that situation. How do you address that dynamic within the team?**

TERRY SMITH: I'm glad to know it's 31 so now I have something to look forward to. That's another dynamic that I have to manage now.

I've talked to a few players personally today. My message to all of them is, you signed up to play football. We love the game of football. Let's keep the main thing the main thing. You only earn opportunity through production on the field.

If you're not productive on the field, doesn't matter where you go, sit out, who wants you next. You are not going to make the Monday you think you're supposed to and be drafted where you think you're supposed to be drafted.

My message is we have an opportunity to come together, win the season, shock the world, and we all can have success together.

**Q. Terry, thanks for your time this afternoon. Along those lines when you talk about message, what have the conversations been like with some of these recruits? What's your message to them and their families as they're trying to make a decision for them given what's going on here?**

TERRY SMITH: Yeah, you know, it's a twofold question because you got your '26 class and '27 class, which is a whole year and a half out. Those guys are going to be directly impacted by the final decision of who the head coach will be.

Our message is, remember all the reasons you chose Penn State. This is still a great university. Offers a first class education. You know it's going to be first class football. We play in the Big10 at the highest level.

No matter who the next head coach is, Pat and Vinnie and the administration are going to bring an outstanding

candidate here. It was always the message that we would give these recruits in the past about consistent coaches. There is always going to be a great leader here at Penn State University.

That standard is the standard. As Pat said, whoever the in next head coach will uphold that standard and they'll be in this good hands.

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