

# Penn State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach Terry M. Smith

### Press Conference



TERRY M. SMITH: Hello, everyone. I thought we played with great effort on Saturday oops. You know, first half kind of played out how we imagined to play. We didn't execute the game plan in the second half in order to win the game.

Some positives offensively, you know, we won between the snaps. We had great communication. You know, the crowd noise wasn't a factor for the game. We had two red zone scoring touchdowns. Obviously the second one we capitalized off a turnover from the defense.

Opportunities for growth. Up front we have to continue to strain in our blocking in the run game. The second half that became an issue. And then also pass protection was an issue in the second half as well. Then obviously pushing the pass game down the field.

Defensively positives were I thought the defensive line really played stout. For the most part they were good in run game. They put a lot of pressure on quarterback, 15 pressures. You know, and then we also set up a score right before the half.

Opportunities for growth. The ball continuously went over our head. That was a point of emphasis that it couldn't happen and it did. We didn't actually get home to get any sacks as well.

Special teams we were penalty free. Gabe had a tremendous day flipping the field, and then we eliminated their kick return team with some touchbacks.

Opportunities for growth. We continue to have some decision making issues with the return guys on the kick return.

We have a great opportunity this week to play a great Indiana team. Curt Cignetti is a friend of mine. He reached out to me when all this went down, so I am appreciative to him. He's a Pittsburgh guy and we go way back from his dad being a coach at IUP, and I know the whole family.

It's a great relationship, and just looking forward to being home in Beaver Stadium in front of our fans.

**Q. You mentioned the defensive line. On the game sheet that we got, there was only one quarterback hurry, so I know you said -- you mentioned all the pressures; 14 sacks in eight games compared to 44 in 16 last year. Why do you think you haven't been able to get a consistent pass rush this season?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, there is a couple different reasons. You know, it's a completely different defense. This defense is more gap control. Last year's defense was more vertical push up the field.

It's just a different philosophy.

Another reason is we don't have Abdul Carter as well. That's a major factor.

And so we felt like we got a lot more pressure this weekend. We have to continue to develop that and get more pressure on the quarterback.

**Q. You talked about it in your opening statement. You talked about it after the game. The Ohio State wideouts had a monstrous day. You called them maybe the two best wideouts that have ever come out of Ohio State. Also mentioned the pass rush has to help as well. But you really built this corner room. You've been developing it for years. You talked about the ball going over their heads consistently. Why do you think that happened when you made it such a point of emphasis? And how are you going to try and approach fixing that with an offense like Indiana and their passing game coming to town?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, we definitely got get it fixed this week. Those two receivers they have in Indiana have more touchdowns than the Ohio State guys, so it doesn't get any easier. Very similar in their style and approach with RPO, play-action, take a shot.

You know, it's my job to get back more involved with the corner room to make more points of emphasis. I think one



of the reasons it happened is our guys, the style of play that they play, they were sitting on routes a little bit too much.

You know, some will say a lack of respect for who their opponent was. But when you play guys that can run routes and have speed like these guys, you have to get more into your pedal and stay on top of receivers. We have to make sure we make a point of emphasis of staying on top of those guys.

**Q. As far as you mentioned pushing and being able to push the ball down the field a little bit with the pass game. How at this point until the season, what kind of changes can you hope to make to help that? We were thinking, you know, the young wide receivers, but Koby Howard, Tyseer Denmark, they didn't play a whole lot again on Saturday. Is there some changes with personnel you think could help? Especially with the receivers, what can help at this point with getting the ball down the field?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, we're continuing to exam that. You know, you also sound like a broken record, right? We keep saying that.

It's my job to make sure it gets changed. It will get changed this week. I'm talking with the offensive staff. We're going to push the ball a little bit further down the field. Obviously the stat that's running around is we had I guess 102 YAC yards from the game, 145 or so total, which means the ball is still going horizontally.

We have to develop the play-action, we have to develop the intermediate game which is that 12- to 18-yard range and just take more shots there. And then obviously you got to take selective five, six, seven shots vertically down the field. I have to get it fixed. We will throw the ball down the field this week.

**Q. Late in the game Caleb Downs had what looked to my like a pretty violent dangerous hit Khalil Dinkins; the type of thing you would expect to see a brawl result from it. Do you think that should have been targeting? And were you surprised that your guys didn't react for maybe in anger to that?**

TERRY M. SMITH: You know, the referees get paid to do a job. You know, from our naked eye it looked like the definition of targeting.

In regards to the reaction of it, we play a violent game and hits happen all the time. That's called discipline. We're not going to react to what type of hit it was. You know, you got to lineup and play the next snap. Let the referees referee.

**Q. You just talked about -- you said, again, we will throw the ball downfield this week. With regard to that, how would you characterize the situation in the quarterback room with Ethan Grunkemeyer essentially being your lone healthy scholarship quarterback?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, Ethan continues to grow. I think he's getting better. I thought he was better game two than game one.

We have to give him more opportunities. He did miss a dig one time to Kyron Hudson that came open there. Those are the type of throws we have to have him make.

He also threw a couple critical third down plays. So he's continuing to grow. We just have to give him more opportunity to show and develop.

**Q. I wanted to ask about the betting rule in pro sports now for college athletes. I know it's on hold right now. How would you advise it with your players? Have you had any conversations with your team about it?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, the simple conversation was the rule was supposed to pass this past week and it's delayed, so obviously if anyone is thinking of, you know, placing bets, don't do that right now.

We just continue to educate these guys on the pros and cons of things, and if they're choosing to do that how to go about doing it so it doesn't affect their career.

**Q. I think there is a video going around of Vega helping one of the equipment managers push equipment up the tunnel. I think about all the adversity you guys have faced in the last couple weeks. How have you seen your team pull together and maybe some of those leaders who have stepped up to help guide this team through a very difficult chapter here?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, I am super proud of this team. Super proud of the leadership. These guys could have packed it in weeks ago. They could have laid down and quit. They refused to that.

When you see what Vega did coming up the ramp and to jump across the banister and help out like that, it just -- it's a testimony to the guys that we have here in this locker room, it's a testimony to Penn State. It's a testimony to the program of how things are run here.

So we have got a locker room full of guys like that, guys willing to do things like that and just do things the right way. Obviously we're going through some tough times right



now, but doesn't change our character.

**Q. Guy who shot that video was a hack. He's not very good.**

TERRY M. SMITH: (Laughter.)

**Q. You've been around a lot of receivers and a lot of young receivers who have made an impact. We've heard so much about Koby from players and coaches. What is it that's holding him back from seeing more snaps? What has prevented him from seeing more snaps to this point?**

TERRY M. SMITH: The challenge with any young player, especially freshmen, is learning the system completely. You know, we have tons of plays with a ton of different options off each particular play, so a lot of times with young receivers they may run routes short or they are not quite where they're supposed to be where the quarterback wants them.

So a lot of times the coach doesn't have confidence to put them in because they may make that mental error. You know, what Koby does best is he competes. This guy loves football. You know, he got in this week, got in last week against Iowa.

You know, I think his two catches might be the two longest catches we had in both those games. We got to get him an opportunity to get out there and shine.

You know, that's my job, and Koby is going to be on the field on Saturday.

**Q. You guys obviously have a ways to go to be in the conversation with it, but have you as a staff, as an administration, had talks that if this team would make a bowl game is it better to not do that? Have you had those conversations?**

TERRY M. SMITH: We haven't as a team, but my mindset is we're trying to win this week. As we continue to win, why wouldn't we want to play football? This is what we signed up to do.

We want to take advantage of every opportunity in front of us. We clearly will talk with the players as well. My feeling based on how they're performing right now, if we win enough games to get to bowl eligibility, I think they would play. They haven't laid down yet.

**Q. How would you evaluate the job Andy Kotelnicki has done as a playcaller in the two games you've been head coach?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, obviously whether or not you look at statistics being there is always room for improvement. That's what we're having conversations every week about, how do we improve the pass game, get the ball pushed down the field.

You know, I think our perimeter pass game is pretty good. Obviously 102 YAC yards. That's an extension of run game. But I think obviously I've said before, we have to continue to figure out ways to push the ball down the field.

He's aware of that and we're making conscious efforts to get that done this week.

**Q. Going back to Koby and Tyseer, I know last week you said you were looking for them to inject some life in the pass attack. You just stated you expect to see more of Koby this week. Was there a disconnect in terms of how much those guys saw the field versus what your anticipation was in pre-game warmups?**

TERRY M. SMITH: No. There is -- you know, the challenge is with how we do things on offense with personnel groups, right? So there is 50 different personnel groups and it's certain guys you want for certain plays, so you just can't plug-and-play.

Once again, to my explanations earlier, the young guys don't know the entire playbook. You have to be selecting what plays they can handle, and that's the challenge with those guys.

So we have to do a great job of tutoring these guys and giving them some added meeting time to get them caught up to speed so they're available for more opportunities.

**Q. With the fifth straight loss and the uncertainty, have you started the process of recruiting your own roster to stay here potentially in the portal? When there is so much uncertainty, especially around the coaching staff and yourself, what do those conversations look like?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, they're very difficult. Reality is no one knows who is going to be here. When the next head coach is hired that person could wipe the whole building out.

We just try to stay grounded, keep our feet on the ground, and be professionals. The young men in the locker room, they deserve that. They're showing up to work every single day, so us as coaching and as a staff, we have to give our 110 percent for these guys.



That's what we're going to continue to do, and focus is on trying to beat Indiana this week.

**Q. What were your thoughts on Liam Clifford's usage as a gadget player on Saturday, and do you expect that role to evolve whether in its usage or who is running that kind of play?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, you know, I thought it gave us a little bit of a spark, a little bit of a different look. I thought he caught the one third down ball based on that personnel group. Just gives us some variety. You know, we're going to continue to try to be creative. You know, just trying to figure out ways to move the ball down the field.

**Q. You mentioned Curt Cignetti in your opening statement. Someone who has seen Indiana over the past dozen years with its ups and downs, what has stood out about how he got this program to this point so quickly?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, he's an outstanding coach. His entire family, they're just all men that have been coaching. You know, he has a methodical approach to things. He's a player developer.

You know, he runs a great program. Obviously at JMU and all the places he's been, Elon, just everywhere he's had success. Guys buy into the program, and once you get buy-in and trust, you go do some special things.

That's what he's doing right now. He's got those guys playing as good as anyone in the country. I respect everything he's doing and he's doing it the right way.

**Q. Wanted to ask about some of the personnel decisions you did make this past weekend after the buy week. Anthony Donkoh at right tackle, Alex Tatsch saw the field, and it seemed like Andrew Rappleyea had a bigger part in the offense. I don't know if that was game plan specific or if that was a decision. What led to those decisions, and then how do you think played out on Saturday?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, in regards to Tatsch, we want to get him more involved. At the linebacker play we just didn't have enough depth, so we put in a couple personnel will packages for him to get on the field more; thought he did a really good job against Ohio State.

And then with Rapp, we just felt like we wanted to go a little bit more bigger bodies. Rapp is a big, strong, tough guy, so wanted to get him involved a little bit more.

Then up front, we do have six or seven guys we can play

up front that we can move around. Just wanted to take advantage of that.

**Q. Out on the wall there is a plaque for each year. 1991 they finished third in the country and one of their captains was Terry Smith.**

TERRY M. SMITH: Uh-huh.

**Q. You're experience back then, many people thought Penn State would be in that position heading into this game. What would you take from that team, program, chemistry, intangibles and inject into this team right now?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, that team lost two games during that season, you know, so wasn't a perfect season, you know, but I would inject the finish. We finished that season great. I think we went and won the Fiesta Bowl that year I think against Tennessee.

But we have to just press forward. Again, I keep making this statement: We're in the storm. We can't run from it. We have to embrace it and we have to fight it and the only we can do it is together.

I feel like our locker room is till together. Sooner or later this will turn and this too will pass. So it's a great group of guys in the locker room.

I have so much respect for the players and how they're handling this. We're going to play hard again on Saturday and we're going to try to do a couple things differently to create a different outcome.

**Q. Seems like tight end production this year has been down. Obviously it's hard to replace Tyler Warren. Leading receiver at this point is Luke with 213 yards this season. Is there a plan to get that room more involved in the passing game this season? Have there been conversations about that?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, been conversations. You know, is it's a strong room, that we need to get them guys more involved. That's part of the play-action game. The run game has been the best part of what we're doing and we want to continue to run the football.

Nick Singleton got going a little bit on Saturday. Kaytron had a good year. You know, it's time to develop some of the play-action off that and hit those tight ends with some crossing routes and things like that.

It is a point of emphasis. We just got to get the passing game as a whole, those guys included and going.



**Q. You made it clear at this point you haven't considered any staff changes or even a change in playcalling. What would you need to see in terms of a decline in on-field production to change that?**

TERRY M. SMITH: It's not as easy as saying I want to make a change. When you make that change it's going to flip things upside down again, the players, their camaraderie, their belief, their trust, and you have to have answers, solutions beyond that.

So it's challenging. I am examining that every single day, losing sleep because I'm just trying brainstorm how to fix it.

With the staff, you know, right now I just don't feel it's necessary. We'll continue to examine it and make the best decision possible.

**Q. Sometimes you have Nick back on kick returns; other times you're rotating through other guys. Why is that? Is there in consideration to keeping Singleton back there full time like you used to do?**

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, so Nick is the return guy. He started the game and that's what we wanted. If they were going to have returns, we would like to get it in his hands. It's another opportunity for him.

As the game wore on and how it played out, we wanted to get some younger guys opportunities. You know, obviously there was two kick returns that we kind of made bad decisions, and two young guys that we would like to see what they have and their ability, and sometimes that's what happens with young players.

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