

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Terry M. Smith

Press Conference



TERRY M. SMITH: Hello, everyone. I thought our guys played really hard on Saturday. At one point we were down 13 points to the No. 2 team in the country in the second half and we battled back. The effort was there from start to finish. The guys played really hard.

Obviously we didn't finish the game the way we wanted. The offense had the opportunity to end it on our terms; we didn't do that. Then the defense went out in the two-minute situation and obviously didn't get that done as well.

Some positives, offensively we had six explosive, which is more than the last three games combined. I thought we did some things that no other team showed on film against Indiana; had some success there.

Some opportunities for growth, the middle eight, we had the turnover right before the half and then the turnover coming out of the half, which was ten points, which was critical to the outcome of the game.

Defensively positives, thought our guys played really hard. Thought our defense started to take form, started to look like our old defense. Guys are being physical up front. Thought we got some pressure on the quarterback. Got a couple sacks. We hit the kid all game. That was good. We set up a score as well.

Obviously the room for growth on defense was the two-minute defense. We played really good up until that point.

Special teams, overall I think our special teams continues to be a positive for us. We'll just continue to build on that.

The negative, we had the one penalty at the end on a false start, so get that cleaned up.

Looking forward to going up to Michigan State this week. Guys are hungry. There is no quit in this team. The guys are excited to have a new opportunity this week. We know it's going to be a challenge, but we're focused to finish the season strong.

Questions?

Q. Good afternoon, Terry. How are you today?

TERRY M. SMITH: Good, thanks.

Q. You mentioned the two-minute defense. The secondary seemed to play better overall than it did against Ohio State. How would you evaluate the secondary play and what could the DBs have done better in those final two minutes?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, I thought the secondary played extremely well throughout the game. They were really competitive. When you watch the game as a whole, we covered really, really well.

Even the two-minute situation, you know, Indiana made the plays. They were tough 50/50 plays and you had the one play on the sideline with Audavion Collins and then obviously the game-winning touchdown. So highly contested plays.

So it's tough for the outcome to be that way, but they made plays; we didn't make the mistakes in that sense. So I thought those guys played a lot better this week.

Q. Wanted to ask you about Ethan Grunkemeyer, young quarterback, just the response he had. He threw that interception early in the third quarter. I think it was the second play. He didn't hang his head. He made some plays down the field with his arm. What do you think it says about his response? What have you seen from him in terms of confidence from the three-game test you guys had at Iowa, Ohio State, and against the No. 2 team? What do you think the ceiling is for him the next couple games?

TERRY M. SMITH: I thought Ethan was big time in the second half. When you look at the adversity coming out of the half, he threw the interception and could have easily hung his head at that point. He battled back and made some big throws.

He started to throw the ball down the field and he gave us



a chance. You know, he fought us back into the game. I think his growth continues to get better. We have a quarterback for the future and we're going to continue to develop and push the ball down the field and give him opportunities to make plays.

We have to clean up a couple things. Couple screens we want to get the ball out in front as opposed to on the back hip. Just make it a little easier, catch-and-run type situations. Those are things we'll clean up in practice.

I thought he grow up big time in the second half.

Q. Wanted to ask about Pat Kraft. What has the past month been like working with him now as the interim head coach? What has he done to maybe help you ease the transition to this job, and how would you describe him as an athletic director from this new perspective?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, he's given me full support. He's allowing me to make the decisions that are necessary for the football team. He's been there. I meet with him weekly. He continues to support us. He's done everything that I could ask. There is nothing that we need outwardly.

He's done a great job supporting us.

Q. A lot of our readers have asked us why we didn't ask you after the game about using your last timeout with 20 seconds left, so I just want to ask you about that. Also, has the mechanics of managing the game changed a little bit with the coaching change?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, the timeout at the end, you know, we got the first down and we felt like we should take a timeout to maximize our plays. We were trying to get to three plays if we could. Once you get the first down the clock starts running, so even to spike the ball you're talking a three-second runoff is automatic by the rules of the game.

So we were just trying to maximize the number of plays we can get. Obviously we fell short no matter how it turned out.

But, yeah, that's about the two minute.

Q. You mentioned about how you thought your defense started to look like your old defense again in a sense, or got back to the way you expected it. Why now? What changes do you think happened to make that work like that, to make it look like that Saturday? And how -- what's the big key going forward with the defense starting again in Michigan State?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, it's a combination of things. One, we're deep into the season and we're getting better grasp of the defense.

Two, we have simplified some of the playcalling of the defense.

Three, we're drawing up a little bit more blitz packages to get the pressure and our guys are playing a little bit faster and a little bit looser.

You saw on Saturday they look like the old Penn State defense. They got after it. They were having fun. You know, we got three sacks and a bunch of pressures.

We have to turn a lot more of those pressures into true sacks. That kid was elusive on Saturday. I think our guys starting to settle into the defense and learning it and starting to master it, putting a couple caveats in there and putting a lot of pressure on the quarterback now. We want to continue that and build on it.

Q. You mentioned after the game about better decisions in some situations on third down. Were you talking about calls or Ethan? What was he looking for or what were you guys looking for on the third down before the punt? Was there something downfield that you rather would have instead of the dump off?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, you know, we had a downfield play called. We had a little bit of pressure and Ethan got off his mark and went to his check down, which is -- you know, right before the half we wanted to get some yards to try to score and get positive things going, and then worst case you punt the ball back. You know, hit the check down, and unfortunately we turned the ball over. Those things happen.

You know, then we just got to move forward from there.

Q. What sort of the strengths are you drawing from Haley when you're walking into these 100,000-seat stadiums and how much of a rock has your family been? I know how close your immediate family is to you.

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, Haley is my everything. She's my forever child. He's like the glue to our entire family. If the world had what she possess we wouldn't have any of these issues going on in the world. We wouldn't have war, a shutdown government, things like that.

She has unconditional love. She doesn't care that we lose or win. Every day I get the same hug and greeting when I

walk through the door as if it's the first time she's ever seen me. So that strength, it re-encourages me and lifts me up and helps me through the day and let's me know this is just a game.

Q. You said Saturday that you guys in the second half made the calls to throw the ball down the field. You guys made the calls. I guess why not do that earlier in the game? Or were you trying to set stuff up in the first half and second half you were able to take those shots?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, you know, honestly speaking, we just didn't make those play calls, and we went into halftime and we made it sure we made those calls in the second half.

Because obviously it gave us an opportunity to succeed in the second half, and then once we started making those play calls. That's why the run splits with Nick and it helps the run game.

So we have to grow and build on that, and we're going to come out at Michigan State and be super aggressive and mix with some play-action and run. That's our formula to success.

Q. You mentioned the simplification of the defense and how you made some changes going into this week. What was the process like in making those changes, and whose decision was it to make them in the end?

TERRY M. SMITH: Jim Knowles is in control of the defense. So he's running everything. We have conversations, some things that I would like to see. Just some points that -- to try to hit home. But he's control of the defense. As we talk through things and we talk about our personnel, getting our young guys involved, we know that the young guys can't run the whole playbook. So we have to simplify for those guys to have success.

Alex Tatsch is in the game at the very end. We can't have the whole playbook for him because it's just too much. So we have to put our guys in position to succeed and I think Jim is doing a good job with that now.

Q. Curious if you think that Chaz Coleman will be available this upcoming Saturday, and then another freshmen defensive end, Yvan Kemajou, has played quite a bit lately. How would you describe the progress he's made?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, Chaz is day to day. Hoping to have him this week. It's an injury so we are hoping to get

him back this week. He's a big part of what we're trying to build here.

Yvan is having an amazing freshmen year. This kid is going to be a major part of Penn State's future. He continues to play more and more snaps and love his development, love his work ethic, love his tenacity. He's a big, strong guy.

We are just going to keep growing with him. He's going to be one of our special players here in a year or two.

Q. When you were talking about Grunk you said we have a quarterback for the future here. Obviously the situation is not lost on him or you for what this may turn into. How has your relationship with him grown and how do you address the situation that he's in where this could all look a lot different next year?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, you know, my relationship has grown tremendously. The head coach and the quarterback, you know, you're partners in crime. We're going through this together. We're in turmoil together. His decision making, my decision making impacts this entire program. You know, things can change come December.

Right now we're just living in the present. He is getting better each day. He's preparing better each day. I'm doing the same. I'm trying to be better for him and to try to help him just have an ease in the pocket, have presence in the pocket, and deliver.

We saw the second half he really delivered that and gave us an opportunity, and I'm really looking forward to him this Saturday and seeing more growth this week.

Q. Ethan said after the game that after Singleton's long run he ran up to him and told him, this is you, this is the old you. Why was Nick able to unlock some of that on Saturday, and what did you see from him in terms of confidence moving forward?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, I think Nick is back full confident, starting in the Ohio State game for him. He had some good runs, some good performances in the Ohio State game. Then obviously a three-touchdown show this past weekend.

You know, hopefully we have the old Nick back for this week, so we're going to continue to try to get him the football as well as Kaytron.

You know, last week I think I mentioned maybe to you guys the goal was to get those guys the ball 35 times. We got them 36 touches and gave us a chance for victory.

This week we want to be 30-plus opportunities for those two, and if those guys are touching the ball, we got a great chance at victory. If they're not touching the ball, who knows what the outcome will be.

They're our two best offensive players, and we're going to continue to focus on those guys touching the football.

Q. Looking towards Michigan State and Nebraska, both their quarterbacks have a combined two starts this season. What are some of the unique challenges preparing for a quarterback that hasn't had a lot of film, at least at the collegiate level?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, worried about this kid from Michigan State. Just trying to dig up some film on him. Threw for a lot of yards last week, so we'll get some film. They have a tremendous receiver in the March kid. He's an all Big10 kid. He's competitive. He's big. He's strong. Seems like every week we're playing top level receivers, so it'll be a challenge because there is just not a lot of film on them. We do have film on all the other positions, so we feel like we can take advantage of their front.

You know, the key to our defense is pressure and we're going to bring the pressure this week.

Q. Max asked I earlier about the future of some of these guys. Are you or do you have conversations with them about, hey, what are you thinking? Do you plan to be here next year? I know James late in the year would have that dialog with younger guys. Have you worked that into your already busy schedule or is that something you'll get to in the next couple weeks?

TERRY M. SMITH: I've had some conversations with some players, you know, just talking about the future and what their plans are. You know, essentially the consensus right now is wait and see. We don't know. It depends on who the new head coach is. Then decisions are going to be made from there.

Because whoever that coach is, their style of play. What type of defense will he bring in? What type of offense is he going to bring in? Does it fit these kids?

So we're all in that wait and see, so we'll see how it all turns out.

Q. Last week you said to expect to see more of Koby Howard. We did see that. He made a couple catches. How would you evaluate his performance with some extra run out there, and what it means for the next few games?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, was pleasantly surprised. He's a better blocker than I anticipated, which is a good thing. Means he can be an every-down type receiver. He is super competitive. I love Koby. We played him more plays and he doubled his catches in the game, so he went from one to two.

But he's competitive, so we're going to continue to push him forward and try to get him more opportunities.

Trebor had a really big game for us and really needed that and want to continue to -- in that receiver room someone step forward each week and deliver a game like Trebor did last week.

Q. You talk about the future conversations with the players. What did you tell them about your future and what the future holds for you? Are you interested in a potential role here that maybe isn't on the field coaching and is more general manager type role, off-the-field stuff?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, we have real conversations. James used to say I'm the truth teller in the building, and so when the guys come up and ask me about my future, you know, the truth is I don't know.

I'm just like them. I don't know. No one has given me confirmation to say hey you're going to be here. We live in the moment, again, so I'm the head coach right now and making these decisions.

You know, I love Penn State. I would examine any position to stay at Penn State, but my concern right now is how do we beat Michigan State.

Q. We saw Daryus Dixon get a decent amount of run. For the first time in a while you have him out there in one of those late-game drives. What has his arc been like this season? How have you seen him deal with growing pains?

TERRY M. SMITH: Yeah, Daryus has always been a playmaker. At some point earlier in the season, you know, freshmen kind of hit walls at some points. He hit a wall and that kind of slowed down his progress a little bit.

But he's back on track now. He's a guy that's going to continue to play the rest of the season. When he's out there, he makes plays and delivers. So we got to get guys like that out on the field. He had the strip sack and unfortunately the ball bounced right back to the quarterback. He's a playmaker. We got to get those guys on the field because they have knacks to make plays and



turnovers change games.

We'll continue to develop him and get him more action.

Q. You guys went back to the original starting five up front on the offensive line with Nolan at right tackle and Donkoh at right guard. We did not see any of TJ. Was that an availability thing or has there been a change? I think we also saw Garrett Sexton for one or two snaps. Was there a change in the top group or was it an availability thing?

TERRY M. SMITH: TJ is still part of what we do. He was a little banged up and so wasn't quite as healthy. He was still available to play but was just nicked a little bit, and TJ will be part of the mix again this week.

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