

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Matt Campbell

Press Conference



Q. Matt, now that spring practice is over, can you give us an overview of what you were able to get out of it and what do the next few weeks look like for you?

MATT CAMPBELL: Probably in a small way, I couldn't have asked for better circumstances today, right? Fundamentally, have we grown? You got have some precision and detail about yourself today in this kind of weather.

To be honest, it was great to kind of watch our guys execute out there. I thought we threw and caught the ball pretty well, had the ability to function in special teams really well, and the ability to have to be disciplined in the moment today. I thought that was a great opportunity for us to at least see where our growth and maturity is.

Again, I give our staff, our kids a lot of credit. The last 16, 17 weeks, there's a lot of change. To have the ability to I think really come together, feel like we had the ability to get a base offense and base defense, really understand what we are, evaluate our football team, those are things we feel very confident about ourselves.

The reality - we all know this - the next 16 weeks of summer, fall camp, they're going to be critical for this team to grow themselves forward.

I thought a really positive 15 spring practices.

Q. Other than some obvious guys on offense like Rocco, some guys you know, watching the offense, this spring specifically, who are a couple of guys on offense you feel like took a pretty big step forward?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I think at the skill positions, I think you saw James Peoples have a couple really good runs. I think he's really flashed. I feel like his spring got better and better and better as he went.

I think Q is one of the guys to me, the run he had in the red zone goal line-ish area, he is playing with a lot of confidence right now. To watch him get better, I'm so

excited for where he has the opportunity and ability to go.

The tight end room has shown up at times in camp. You're going to get Rapp and some of those guys back. Obviously Ben made a couple good plays today. I think Finn is a guy that continues to show up for this football team.

Then that receiver room, you kind of saw it today, there's talent. It's the consistency to keep growing. Koby had a couple great catches. Just got to continue to grow forward.

I think as a global piece of it, the running back room I thought had a great spring. The tight end room had a great spring. Then Connor Barry. I thought he did a good job today. For him to have to take all those reps, keep pounding forward, I thought it was really beneficial for all of us.

Q. Where do you operationally go after this the next few weeks? What does the next two to three weeks look like?

MATT CAMPBELL: The starting point, we kind of started it a little bit last week, is from nutrition, strength and conditioning, athletic training, our strength staff, every position coach.

Boy, we've got 17 weeks of, like, great evaluation of every young man in our program. Where are his strengths and weaknesses? They have two weeks to finish in the classroom with finals. Where is their gaps?

Knowing that the storm of a college football season's coming, how are we all aligned, everybody in our program, to what the communication style is going to be to every one of our players. We'll meet with every player Tuesday. We've already met on every player. Then on Wednesday through the finals, I'll meet with every player.

I think the key is everybody being aligned to where is the growth, what do you have to do? Then our coaches will go recruiting. When we come back at the end of May and all of June, we'll put a lot of time and effort schematically where does our growth have to go. What do we have to be prepared with as we come back July and August and really

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try to pound a way forward as we get ready for the early part of the season.

Q. You mentioned growth in the areas you need to grow. Where do you think this program needs to grow most?

MATT CAMPBELL: I still think the biggest growth we can make is our discipline and detail, to be honest with you, in everything we do.

Can we continue to have great discipline and detail in our academics and how we finish in the classroom? Can we have great discipline and detail in humility, myself and all of us, in terms of evaluating what we just did?

The end piece of it is probably most important. Like, the storm's coming. We're going to have adversity. Are we as close-knit, tight-knit of a football team that when the tough days come, we can fight through down 14, we can fight through adversity, a bad quarter, a bad half? All of that stuff's coming, right?

The key to our success is are we together enough to be able to fight through hard? I think those are great growth opportunities for us. We'll have to continue to pound through as we work through the rest of the summer and certainly fall camp.

Q. When you look at your linebacker group, what did the personnel accomplish this spring? What happens when Tony Rojas comes in? Alex Tatsch?

MATT CAMPBELL: We just talked about Alex honestly yesterday. I think Alex is certainly a little bit ahead of schedule in terms of where we thought he would be. You have to remember even by the time we get to fall camp, I think he'll still be limited because of when that injury occurred.

Our hope is, if he continues to progress, I think he'll be ready for the early start of the season, whether that's game one or game two. He's certainly on track where he needs to be.

Tony has done an unbelievable job. I don't know if I could be prouder of what his work has looked like, what he's done behind the scenes in terms of both his rehab and leadership in our football program.

I think the great gift is the rest of those guys got great reps. Totally different defense for some of the Iowa State players when you talk about Brezina and Kooper Ebel and Caleb Bacon. You're coming from a three-down front to a four-down front.

What's been fun to watch is that group really grow. Kooper, we felt like one of the best linebackers in the country coming back. I think he has really grown himself forward.

Bake is a guy that played a lot of football. I think those guys adapted. Trying to tailor-make what can those guys do.

Obviously then to get a guy like Tony back, to get those guys back, Tatsch, I think it will be a room we have a lot of confidence and really excited about that group and how can we play to their strengths as the season kind of comes their way.

Q. What have you learned about this Penn State fan base over the last five months? What have you heard about their expectations for this program?

MATT CAMPBELL: Well, let me start here. In a downpour today, to see this crowd and the amount of people that came out to support our football program, I just think every opportunity to show our young men in our program how special it is to play here at Penn State and what it means.

I don't know if it's anything that I learned because I think it's one of the things that I've been absolutely grateful for from the day that I've touched down here, is understanding it's bigger than me, it's bigger than our players. What we get to represent and what we are training to be able to represent every fall Saturday is really powerful.

Kids clinic last night was unbelievable. Almost 500 kids in our indoor, to be able to watch up and down, see and feel the energy walking into this stadium today. There's not many places that you get to be able to be a part of something like this.

Q. As you look at your quarterback room, you talked about Connor, curious about where you think Peyton's future is, with Rocco getting back into things, that room...

MATT CAMPBELL: Obviously when you get Rocco, I thought it's huge that he was able to get the reps he had. I probably would have been really nervous had Rocco not been able to get the reps that he got through the spring.

Really I thought by the last three weeks, I think he's really been, man, quality reps. To be able to work with our receivers, even to have Chase, to be able to have Brett back in some limited form and fashion throughout the spring, I think it was really big for that group.

Obviously Alex, and the good news of him coming back on campus, kind of trending in a really great direction for the start of fall camp, is huge.

I still don't think you can quantify to be able to play the game of football. So for Connor to get these reps in 15 days of practice, getting so many quality reps, to get Kase Evans in the game, see small town Texas to where he is today is a huge change.

But to work through that, to have to get these experiences, what kind of growth can he make from now till the start of fall camp.

I think Peyton is a guy that has shown up. We really kind of took the purple jersey because he's had some impressive moments in the spring where he can run with the football and do some different things. How can that guy help us down the road as we continue to move forward. Even Jack has done some great things.

I think in terms of where that room is, it's going to have to continue to grow forward, especially when you're talking about Alex missing spring. I think holistically we'll benefit greatly that those guys didn't get those reps and these young guys had to get reps and grow forward from where we are today.

Thank you so much.

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