

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Penn State Nittany Lions

James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Appreciate the opportunity to be back. It's obviously great to be in this venue, excited about the season, excited about the opportunity to get back to what we're used to in the Big Ten with the type of support, the type of fan basis, the excitement around the league. Obviously challenging schedule opening up on the road against Wisconsin, a team that we have tremendous respect for as an organization, as a university, tremendous history and tradition. So that will be great challenge to open the season. I think this is good for college football. I see a lot of this, not just in the Big Ten but across the country, so that there's tremendous games, what people would consider prime time-type games throughout the entire schedule and throughout the entire season. So I think it's really good for college football, we're excited about it. We have had a count down clock going on in our facility like we do every single year, but I must admit, having Wisconsin's logo up there, I think has really kind of raised the standard for our guys and they understand we better be ready to go, come the first kick of the first game of the season against a tremendous opponent.

Offensively, obviously, with Coach Yurcich. Got a lot of history with Mike. We go back a long ways. He obviously grew up in Ohio, but obviously most of his career, especially early on was in the state Of Pennsylvania. He coached and played in the same conference that I did and then has had a lot of success. So been tracking and pursuing Mike for a couple years. So I had an opportunity to bring him back and couldn't be more excited about having him with us.

I don't think you'll see things a whole lot different than who Penn State has been really kind of over our entire time at Penn State, especially the times that we were back in this facility and won the Big-Ten Championship. A similar style. We want people to defend 53 and a third, we want to be able to get our players in space, we want to be able to run with power and authority and I know Mike feels the same way.

Got a lot of weapons on offense. The receiver position, we were young last year, Jahan Dotson will obviously lead that

group. I think we probably have maybe one of the most talented, at least part of that argument is one of the most talented running back rooms in the country. Same thing at the tight end position. Really excited about what we can do at the offensive line position. And then obviously having an experienced quarterback like Sean Clifford who has now seen it all, two years ago won 11 games, won the Cotton Bowl with a lot of success. Obviously as an entire organization we had some challenges last year and that was an opportunity for all of us to grow and evolve and I know Sean has as well and looking forward to watching him play this year.

Defensively Brent Pry has been with me really from day one. We go all the way back, his dad was my college offensive coordinator, so we have he known each other and been together for a long time, he's been with me since day one, my first day as a head football coach, and our consistency on the defensive side of the ball is as good as anywhere in the country and Brent leads that unit. Obviously we got some guys that we got to replace across the defensive front. I feel like we have the ability to do that with the way that we have recruited. We're as talented as I think as anybody in the country at the linebacker position and probably have the best secondary that we have had. So there's a lot of pieces there that we're excited about. Obviously we got to go out and do it. And then Joe Lorig leading our special teams unit. We got all those guys back, tremendous experience, snapper, kicker, punter, field goal, all those guys are back and excited about what they're going to be able to do.

So there's a lot of excitement in our program, our leadership is tremendous, we have had a great summer, on top of that all the feedback from the strength coaches as well as from the players has been really good. We're hungry. I would say obviously we got a chip on our shoulder, had a lot of success at Penn State and excited to get back to that. So appreciate the opportunity, it's always great to be here, this is the beginning of it for all of us right, media days and looking forward to the season to get going. So open it up to questions.

Q. Curious what the NIL has meant for your program so far, how are you using it in recruiting and what can



it mean for Penn State in kind of coming years?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, for me I don't really look at it as something to use in recruiting. I don't really look at it as something for Penn State in the coming years. I think about it -- I look at it mainly as how do we make sure that we're doing everything we possibly can to support the student athlete. To me it's very simple, right, we're providing an opportunity for our student athletes to get an opportunity that every other student on the college campus has been able to take advantage of forever. Obviously there's a different platform and there's a different opportunity, especially when you're at a place like Penn State with our fan base and our alumni base, and we're trying to prepare these guys for life after football, right, and this is going to be part of that. For them to be able to use the things that they have learned, be able to take advantage of the network and the resources that we have, so we have embraced it, we want to be bold and aggressive in everything we possibly can do, but for me and for us it's really about the student athlete and making sure that they're going to have an opportunity to capitalize on this and then our guys have been really proud of because I think they have showed a very mature approach, obviously in the summer and the spring we want to be aggressive about this, but it is going to be something that we're all going to have to manage in season that it doesn't become a distraction and take away from what they're really trying to do, which is to get a great education and play great college football.

Q. How do you plan to manage the COVID 19 situation as the cases are rising rapidly?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, obviously last year we got pretty good experience in this and I think the Big Ten handled it as well as anybody. And I'm very proud of how we handled it at Penn State. The one thing that I would put out there is the one thing I haven't figured out yet and I don't mean to make light of the subject, but the reality is I haven't figured out how to wear a mask and glasses, because the entire game I was fogged up and that was challenging. But I say that because I took great pride in as the head coach setting the tone and setting the example of wearing that mask, which was mandated, and wearing that mask as consistently as any head coach in the country and making sure that every decision that we made was in the best interests of our student-athletes and making sure that everything we did was communicated and was transparent. Had a lot of zoom meetings with the parents to make sure that they were informed with what was going on in the northeast. And in Pennsylvania we took a very strict conservative approach with it and I think the success that we had in terms of specifically with COVID I think showed that.

So we're not going to let our guard down, we're going to continue to be aggressive with that, we're asking our fan bases and our community to continue to be diligent about it. I have a daughter with Sickle Cell disease, so it's something that's been, that's hit very close to home with us. I actually just reunited with my family a month ago during vacation. We have been separated for almost 14 months. So it's been something that we take very serious in our home, but also in our community. And what I challenge people is whether you completely agree with it or not, you're making a sacrifice for others that maybe don't have that choice. So we will take it very serious at Penn State and I know the conference will as well and I appreciate the question.

Q. Wondered, obviously a slow start last year, fast finish. What were the lessons learned that you're carrying into this season?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well I think what it did for me is it reinforced some things that I realized and that I already knew, but it reinforced it. I'm a relational leader, I always have been, I want to connect with people, I want to be face-to-face, I want to embrace, I want to hug, I want to scream, I want to yell. That's who I am. And having every meeting up until Game 5 over Zoom and not in person and with a mask on when people can't see the emotion and the connection and the love that I have for them, had an affect. We made a change after Game 5, there's no doubt about it. But I also say once again that you better grow and you better evolve and you better not say that we're going to go back to normal, because there's so many unbelievable lessons that we learned through this. And we better be, we better learn from this and we better grow from the experience, both personally and professionally. So I think at the end of the season we were able to get back to doing things in the way that we are more accustomed to doing, but we did learn some great things going through early in the season and taking some of those challenges and some of those obstacles and adversity and grow from it and learn from them as well. So appreciate the question. I think we'll be better for it. It was painful on all of us and I get that, but I'm excited about where we're headed and what we're going to do this year.

Q. You spoke a lot about your leadership on the team. What are the most important qualities that you see your leaders have?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So I think when you talk about leadership, not only within our program, but also throughout our organization and our campuses and our community, I think alignment is critical. So whether that is the coaches being aligned with the players and the players



being aligned with the coaches and us all being on the same page, from the leadership perspective and how we do things and how we go about our business, but really all the way up to the chair of the board, through the president of the university and the athletic director and all the way down, there needs to be an alignment that we're all working together to do what's best for the university. And that every decision that we make is in the best interests of representing the university and the community the right way and I just feel really good about that right now in our senior leaders and our young leaders as well that are growing and developing and again I think we laid a great foundation, right, over the last eight years and have done some pretty darn good things and making sure that we get back to those things and everything that we do aligns with winning and championship habits.

Q. Obviously this building holds a pretty special place in the history of your tenure at Penn State, but every player from that team has since departed. What would it mean to take this year's group back here?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, that's the goal, right? That's the goal for all of us is to get back here and play in a way and a style that's going to give us the best opportunity to win a Big Ten championship. And then having an opportunity to represent the Big Ten and Penn State in the playoffs. That's everybody's goal and objective. And we're fortunate and blessed and earned an opportunity to play in the Big Ten championship and won that opportunity. One of the better -- I'm biased -- but to probably play in one of the better Big Ten championship games that have been played, came down to a fourth down stop to win the game. So I think we understand what it takes to get here, but at the end of the day it's what have we done this year, what have we created this year, what have we developed this season and this game. And I think our approach is going to be very, very critical to that. But your point is really good, we can't lean on those experiences. We played in a bunch of big-time games, I think we have been in three New Year Six bowl games in the last five years and have done some great things, but at the end of the day it's about championships, it's about getting to Indianapolis and it's about being able to compete for a National Championship. And that's our objective and that's our goal, but obviously it starts with Wisconsin and being 1-0.

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