

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Purdue Boilermakers

Coach Jeff Brohm

Press Conference



KEVIN WARREN: Good morning. Welcome back to day two of Football Media Days. Our first coach up to the podium is a very creative offensive mind and leader in college football. He's a great head coach, knows both sides of the ball, and he's been very active in the community with the Purdue cancer center and also being involved with the Tyler Trent Foundation, which is in honor of the Purdue super fan, Tyler Trent.

I can't believe that the season is almost here. That's why we're here today. I'm looking forward to see Coach Brohm lead Purdue against Penn State on September 1 in west Lafayette. So welcome to the podium head football coach at Purdue University, Jeff Brohm.

JEFF BROHM: Good morning. I want to first thank Commissioner Warren and his team for their leadership over the last couple years. I want to thank our president at Purdue, Mitch Daniels, our athletic director, Mike Bobinski, and their entire team for the work they do as well.

It's an honor to be the head coach at Purdue. We're excited about the future. We're excited about starting this year. I think that every year you're looking for ways to improve, you're looking for ways to get better, you're looking for ways to be a contender, you're looking for ways to be competitive and find a way to win a lot of football games. And we're going to definitely work hard to get that done.

I like our collection of guys on our team. I think we have a great group of young men who are hungry. They play with a chip on their shoulder, they work extremely hard, they're out to prove themselves, and those guys are a lot of fun to coach.

We did make strides last year. It's important we got that done. Getting better as a team, offensively, defensively, special teams, is what we're striving to do. It takes all three components in order to win. We know for us all of us can do our part better, but we've got to get better at all three components in order to have a chance to win and have a chance to compete in this conference for a division title.

We're excited to bring a collection of guys on our team. Aidan O'Connell is our quarterback who is here, tremendous leader. He's earned his spot as our starting quarterback over the years. He's earned it the hard way. He's a man of great faith. He's worked from the very bottom all the way to being our starting quarterback, and really the last half of the season played at a very high level.

We're looking forward to seeing him compete this year. He's getting married coming up on Saturday as well.

We also bring our starting tight end Payne Durham. Tremendous leader. He's vocal. He plays extremely hard. He was a lacrosse player in high school, really only played football for one year, but he's done an outstanding job just as a competitor. Gives us everything he has, and really loves the game of football, loves his teammates.

On the defensive side of the football, we brought Jalen Graham, our starting outside linebacker, nickel/safety. Had an outstanding year last year. He was a high school quarterback. He came in, we switched him to defense. He's got great instincts, great feel for the game. He's a competitor and wants to win. He's going to have to be the leader of our defense.

We also brought our starting safety Cam Allen, also a former quarterback in high school. He's continued to improve each and every year. I think he knows he's got to be the quarterback of the defense in the back there, get us in the right alignments, play aggressive in his approach and his technique and find a way to be a great leader and a great producer for our defense.

But excited to watch our team compete. We're fortunate enough to play a high-caliber opponent in week 1 on national TV on a Thursday night, which is going to make us prepare extremely hard in order to get ready to play. The last time we played Penn State a couple years ago, it was not a good day for us. They had 28 points before we could blink, and we had to fight just to stay in the ballgame.

We understand that they're well coached. They have great talent. They're going to be hungry, out to prove



themselves. We've got to play at a high level and execute and do a lot of small things right in order to win that football game.

Fortunately for us, we do have it at home. Our fan support has been outstanding the last couple of years for sure. They're looking forward to playing a great opponent, and we're looking forward to getting on the field.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Last year's strong season for you guys, how has that impacted your program overall? And specifically in recruiting. Seems like it's helping in recruiting. How did last season help you guys?

JEFF BROHM: Anytime you win, it's going to help a lot of things. We found a way to not only win football games, but we had some big wins. It showed our team, recruits, so to speak, our fans, that we had the ability to play at a really good level if we do things correctly.

I think that's exciting. You want to try to match that intensity and ability to play each and every week. We haven't gotten there by any means. I do think that we've got a hungry group. We're looking forward to trying to make strides this year and improve upon that win total, but it's going to be a challenge.

Q. How did the Charlie Jones transfer come about from your eyes? What have your early impressions been of him, and what role do you see him playing for you this year?

JEFF BROHM: Every year at the end of the season, we'll kind of assess the team and see where we're at. We want to develop our players and do a great job in recruiting. At the same time, there's always a few holes you might find a way to go into the transfer portal and help your team improve and get better.

We did lose our top two receivers, so we've got to replace some of those. We were fortunate enough to get Charlie Jones on our football team, who's played a lot of really good football. He's done great things on special teams. He's a young man who's coming here, he's been here all summer for us, and he's really a good football player. So I think he'll play a great role in our offense, playing on the outside at receiver, playing on the inside, and returning kicks.

He's just very smart. He understands. He's picked up things well. He's got a great rapport with our cornerback, Aidan O'Connell, who I think they knew each other growing up. So we're fortunate to have him. Really I think he'll be

a great leader as well.

Q. This is the first year since 2018 Purdue did not have a wide receiver on the watch list for the Biletnikoff Award. You talked about it with you lost two notable receivers. How much confidence do you have in your wide receiver room, and who are the guys that have been contributing early on?

JEFF BROHM: We've been fortunate to have great receivers at Purdue the last couple years. They've done a great job. David Bell played at an extremely high level for us. Really rose his level of play anytime we played good competition. We had Milton Wright as well, who was a really good receiver. Those two will not be with us.

This year we're going to have newcomers you may not have heard about as much. I do think we've built very good depth in that room, and we have a lot of guys I think can emerge and step up and hopefully play close to that level if they're playing well.

Broc Thompson stepped up in our bowl game. He was a transfer from Marshall that we took from Indianapolis. Had a great game in that bowl game on two bad knees. He had surgery, and he's almost close to being fully healed and ready for the season. I think he'll emerge as a big play receiver for us. We talked about Charlie Jones.

I think TJ Sheffield did some really good things for us as well, playing on the slot and the inside. He had ankle surgery, hurt it in the bowl game on a touchdown catch, but he's back 100 percent.

We added Tyrone Tracy as well, who's going to play at receiver and in the backfield for us, who's from Indianapolis, so he knows a lot of the guys on our team. I think he'll step up.

And there's probably three or four others that really will probably see the field, Elijah Canion, Abdur Yaseen, Mershawn Rice. So we think we have quite a bit of depth. It's just a matter of those guys haven't played a lot of football in games. They haven't shown to the world they can do it in a real game, but we feel they have good promise.

Q. Aidan was putting up numbers that rivaled any quarterback in the country last season. What was clicking for him the second half of the season, and what do you think he'll evolve into this year?

JEFF BROHM: Aidan has done a great job. It's unfortunate his head coach didn't start him at the beginning of the year, but we were able to figure that out. He's really

earned his spot from day one. He continues to work hard every single day. He's become a great leader (audio interruption). We were able to figure that out.

He's really earned his spot from day one. He continues to work hard every single day. He's become a great leader that all of his teammates respect. He's a man of great faith. He gives us everything he has. He understands what his strengths are. He understands what his weaknesses are.

I do think the last half of the season he did play at an elite level. He helped us win a lot of good football games. He put up some big numbers. He threw for a lot of yards. He did it against a lot of really good football teams. He's a very accurate passer. He has great poise and presence in the pocket. He doesn't get rattled. He understands our system.

If we can design some plays and spread the field out and give him a chance to make throws in rhythm, he'll do a great job. His ability to extend the play, obviously he has to work on those things, but we have to do our part as coaches as well and make sure we're utilizing his talents, but we want to continue to try to build on that and help improve the team around him.

I think he's a young man, if we can improve the team around him, protect him, dial up the perfect play at the right time, get our playmakers involved, he can do an outstanding job.

Q. Your defense was ranked 23rd last year in the red zone. So what expectations do you have for your defense going into this year?

JEFF BROHM: Well, that's been the key to our improvement is I do think we've improved the defensive side of the ball. We've tried to play more aggressive. We've tried to challenge our guys to guard things tighter and to be aggressive in our approach, find ways to get after the quarterback.

I think, in order to win at a high level, you have to be really good on defense. You have to play complementary football on offense, which means you've got to be great at what you do, but if you have to run the ball occasionally, you have to be able to run it. You have to find ways to control the clock occasionally, you have to find ways to do that so your defense isn't on the field all the time.

I think we got better at special teams. We still need to make improvements there. But I like the direction we're going in that aspect. I think our defensive guys understand that they can achieve and be as good as they want to be if

we allow them to do that, if we give them the proper package to help them be aggressive in their approach and help them take chances and play free.

I think our guys have really grown in that aspect. We have to play complementary football in order to win, but I have great confidence in our defense. I think we'll see more guys emerge. We lost George Karlaftis, who was an outstanding player, great leader, tremendous teammate. We're going to have to find ways to pick up the pieces from there.

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