

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

## Penn State Nittany Lions Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference



KEVIN WARREN: The next football coach we'll welcome to the stage is from Penn State University. Coach Franklin and his wife, Fumi, established the Franklin Family Educational Equity Scholarship program, which is so incredibly powerful. It funds a full scholarship to Penn State to provide opportunities for individuals who have been less fortunate and to create a more diverse environment.

Not only is he a great football coach, he's a great person, and I'm excited that he's in the Big Ten and will remain in the Big Ten. Looking forward to a great season for Coach Franklin and his team. So we welcome to the stage the head football coach at Penn State University, James Franklin.

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, truly appreciate the opportunity to be here, represent Penn State, represent the Big Ten. Always look forward to this opportunity every single year visiting with you guys.

We're really pleased with our summer. I know every coach in America is saying that right now. But all of our testing numbers and catapult data and things like that have been great. We've had a fantastic summer, and we're excited about going into training camp.

One of the things that probably stands out about our team right now is I love our overall depth. I think our overall depth is as good as it's been in a number of years. I think a couple of the things that have factored into that is obviously we had a very well-regarded recruiting class coming in, a combination of some transfer student-athletes, not a lot, and a junior college player. In this class, what we've been able to evaluate since they've been on campus, is there's probably a larger number of those young men that we feel like are going to be able to impact our program and our organization earlier in their careers than probably normal, in our normal recruiting classes. So we're excited about that.

Kind of going through our roster, you look at the quarterback position, obviously returning an experienced

player at the quarterback position, a starter, a guy who's been a captain for three years. But this year our depth at the quarterback position with four quarterbacks that we feel very, very strong about, we feel great about the competition in that room.

I put our tight end room up against any other program in the country. Feel great about that room. Same thing with our running back room.

O-line is the group that we come and talk about every single year, and I tell you this is going to be the year for the next step at that position. I'm not going to do that this year. I'm going to let them prove that to you on the field, but I've been very, very pleased with that unit and the depth that we have created.

Wide receiver, obviously losing a young man like Jahan Dotson as a first-round draft choice is obviously impactful. But again, our two deep and our three starters I feel like have a chance to be as good, if not better, and our three starters we're going to put on the field.

Feel very good on the offensive side of the ball with what we're able to do, with our offensive coordinator, Mike Yurcich, being year two for him.

On the defensive side of the ball, it starts up front. We feel very good about our defensive line. We've got a young man representing us today in PJ Mustipher, and another guy that's obviously been in the program and been in the program for five years, using the COVID year, and excited about what he's going to be able to do in leading our front. That's a position of strength for us not only at defensive tackle but also at defensive end.

Linebacker is the question, right? I'll get that question throughout the day. We feel really good about our two outside linebacker positions. At the middle linebacker position, we're going to have a competition that will go deep into camp to see who is going to lead our defense.

Then in the secondary, we feel like we've got a chance. This has been kind of a year-to-year routine. We've done a great job in the secondary in recruiting and developing. I



feel like that has a chance to be a strength for us.

On the specialist positions, Chris Stoll, obviously, our long snapper, another guy that's using the COVID year to come back from a leadership standpoint and consistency standpoint. Jake Pinegar is a young man that people probably aren't listing as a starter, but was a starter for us for two years, before the last two seasons. So here's a young man that's been in our program for a long time and has a chance to contribute and do some big things.

We're excited about where we're at. We've had a great, great summer. We've had a great off-season. Really looking forward to coming into camp.

It's really interesting kind of watching some of the other coaches in some of the other programs talk, obviously some week zero games and they started camp today. We will start on Sunday and looking forward to that opportunity.

One of the things I did want to address is obviously some of the reports that were made with Sean Clifford and the Big Ten improving athlete benefits. One of the things I'm very, very proud of is the relationships that we have with our players at Penn State. It's something that I truly believe in, and having these open discussions and dialogue with your players is important.

Pat has got on campus and has jumped in with both feet and has done a really good job in a very, very short period of time at developing those relationships as well, and to me that's the nature of college athletics and college football right now, that you'd better be willing and able to have discussions that maybe we haven't had in the past. There's been more changes in college football over the last three years than probably the first 25. Those are great discussions and dialogue.

I'm blessed and fortunate to have a team and an administration that's willing to have these conversations. At the end of the day, our players and specifically Sean, want what's best for college athletics, want what's best for Penn State, want what's best for the Big Ten. So I couldn't be more proud of them.

But any of the details and specifics that we have dealt with kind of behind the scenes within our family, within our organization, I'm not going to get into them today and obviously happy about moving forward and talking about our season and the upcoming opponents.

The last thing I would say is we're going to blink and we're going to be getting on a plane to travel to Purdue. We open the season on the road at Purdue Thursday night, national television. I think the game is a blackout. Got a

tremendous respect for Coach Brohm. Got tremendous respect for Purdue University and what they've been able to do in night games and specifically blackout games. So that will be a tremendous challenge to open the season.

We've had pretty good practice over the last nine years of opening the season in the Big Ten on the road, so we're looking forward to that opportunity. Again, appreciate the opportunity to be here today and look forward to answering all of your questions.

**Q. A couple months ago you seemed dissatisfied with your pass rushing unit. After adding Chop Robinson in the transfer portal and a few freshmen coming aboard, how do you feel about your edge as practice kicks off?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I don't know if I would describe it the way you did, but when you have three defensive ends that make All-Conference over the last two years and you lose that type of production, obviously through recruiting and through development, you need to replace that production.

So every year you're going to have that, and whether it's players in your program that are moving up into more prominent roles or whether that is through recruiting and now, which we don't live in this area a lot, but the transfer portal is able to solve some problems as well.

The young man that you mentioned, Chop Robinson, is a young man we recruited out of high school, so knew him and his family extremely well. I think that helps us. We're typically a program, when it comes to the transfer portal, we would rather be in a situation of being involved with a young man that we already have a preexisting relationship through the recruiting process out of high school. I think that's helpful.

Obviously he's got a chance to come in and make an impact. He's come in and tested extremely well, very athletic, as a guy who's all about ball, which I love.

I think he's got a chance to be a high-production, low-maintenance guy, which is what we want. But the other thing is having a guy that we did not have available last year in Adisa Isaac back. There's a number of guys that are going to be competing at that position that we feel really good about now.

**Q. You've had an interesting path with Indiana the past two seasons. They beat you in 2020 in overtime at Memorial, and then you don't let them score any points the next season. What are you expecting out of Tom Allen and the Hoosiers as you head back to Bloomington in November?**

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JAMES FRANKLIN: I like Tom a lot. I've gotten to know Tom over his time obviously in the conference, done a really good job with that program.

There's a little bit different pressure associated with this game this year because our athletic director is an Indiana grad. Obviously he's going to have some opinions on that as well.

But they've done a great job, and it's a big-time program. Obviously when you look at our conference, that's the challenge, especially in our position. It's week in and week out, you'd better be ready and prepared.

We open with Purdue. I try not to get too far down the schedule. I try to keep our guys focused on the task at hand, especially when you're opening up with a conference game. But got tremendous respect for Coach Allen as well as the Hoosiers as a whole, and we appreciate them allowing us to come into the state for this.

**Q. I think it was this spring you mentioned PJ Mustipher maybe wanted to come back and move faster in his rehab process than he should. He's with you here today. Can you update his rehab process? How is he feeling? How has that gone? Do you think he's ready to be in line by week one?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Obviously everybody that covers Penn State closely and covers the Big Ten closely understands how important PJ Mustipher has been for our program over the last four years and specifically last year.

A lot of people talk about the game of football. You want to be strong up the middle, very similar to baseball and having a nose guard like PJ Mustipher to set the tone is really, really important. He's back and excited and ready to go.

He wished that he was ready for spring ball. He wasn't. But the most important thing is he's ready for camp. We went out to dinner last night. We went to have a steak at St. Elmo's, like a lot of people, owned by a Penn State grad, I want to say. One of the most impressive things that I've ever seen is PJ ate one of the biggest steaks I've ever seen in my life, biggest piles of mashed potatoes, ate the shrimp. I didn't tell him about the cocktail sauce beforehand. And then also ordered a full separate meal of two lobster tails that are massive. And he crushed it all.

He said he was kind of enjoying himself because he's passed the conditioning test. He is celebrating the fact he's passed the conditioning test. That's behind him. He'll never have to run the Penn State conditioning test again.

He's in great spirits. He feels both mentally and physically 100 percent back because I think that's a big part of this, right, as well as not just the physical aspect of it, it's the mental aspect of it as well.

PJ is a football guy, and he's been an unbelievable representative of our program and our conference for five years now. PJ's brother is a center with the Chicago Bears. His dad played at West Virginia, comes from a football family. We are blessed and fortunate to have PJ back as a leader of our defense, and I think you guys will see big things out of him this year.

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