

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Penn State Nittany Lions Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Hello. No better place to start our enjoyable journey ahead than Penn State, Beaver Stadium, September 2nd, renewing an old rivalry, Penn State-West Virginia. I know the fireworks are going to be there. I know 100,000-plus fans are going to be there. And I know this man is going to be there.

Welcome to the stage head coach James Franklin, entering his tenth season at Penn State, welcomes back 11 All-Conference performers, including 2022 Big Ten Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year Nicholas Singleton. He's also the only coach in the Big Ten I believe that's been impersonated by Keegan-Michael Key, which I find impressive. I think that's big time.

Without further ado, the man you're all waiting for, James Franklin.

JAMES FRANKLIN: How's everybody doing? Appreciate the opportunity to visit with you. Really excited about the upcoming season. I did want to take a moment and welcome and recognize our new commissioner, Tony Petitti. Could not be more excited about what he is bringing to our conference. It has been pretty obvious right from the beginning the leadership that he is bringing. We couldn't be more excited as a conference, head coaches, and athletic directors. So could not be more excited about that.

When you talk about our season and where we're going, obviously we open up the season against a really good opponent at our place, West Virginia, 7:30 national television. So to open the season with that type of opponent is exciting and has our team motivated.

When you talk about question marks leading into the season, to me every year when we come to this, that's kind of how I look at our season, is based on question marks. I think we probably have less question marks this year than we have in previous seasons.

Last year coming into the season I felt like we had better depth than we had probably since COVID. We're back to a

more healthy roster than we're used to. And now I think we're in a position to give us the best chance to compete in our conference as well as nationally. Just less question marks across the board.

You look at us on the defensive side of the ball, I think we've got a chance to be better up front with our defensive line. We are bigger. We are more athletic. We are physical. I think we have a legitimate three deep across the board. Linebacker was a big question mark coming into this season, a lot of unproven players. That is not the case anymore. I feel like we have a veteran linebacker unit that's experienced and ready to play.

Obviously the one question mark we have is in the secondary. When you lose a guy like Joey Porter and you lose a guy like Tig, who are tremendous players for us, that's probably the one area of question marks. But we played a ton of players in the secondary with experience, talent, and depth. So I think we're going to be in a good position there.

On the offensive side of the ball, again, it starts up front. When you get a guy like Olu Fashanu who decides to come back and graduate from Penn State, highest GPA on our team, and obviously a guy that's been projected as a high round draft choice leading the way.

When I got to Penn State, we were in a much different position. I think we only had five scholarship offensive linemen in the program. I think we're in a much better position now. Our depth and our talent is right where we need it to be. The experience that we got at the running back position last year and the production was impressive. We need to build on that.

Tight end, I think our tight end room will be as good as it's been. Wide receiver, just like the secondary, is a question mark. Trying to figure out who our third wide receiver is going to be in that rotation, but I think we've got a number of young people will step up and compete for that job.

Then everybody wants to talk about quarterback. We're still in a competition phase. Obviously there's a lot of people talking about Drew and what he brings to the table.



He was able to get a ton of experience last year, played in, I think, ten games.

So I understand why the excitement is there, 6'5", 242 pounds, can make all the throws, but Beau Pribula is a guy that everybody in the program has a ton of respect for as well. So that's going to be an interesting competition throughout the entire camp.

Then specialists, we have some competition going on there with some three departures in our kicker, punter, and snapper positions. So there's some question marks there as well that we've got to get resolved.

Appreciate the opportunity to be here. More than happy to answer questions, but excited about our opportunity here this year with Penn State.

Q. Back in the spring, you said the program was two years behind on NIL, but now the two biggest collectives at Penn State have merged. Where would you kind of pinpoint where things are at now?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think through Pat's leadership, I think we're continuing to close that gap and make really good progress. I do think to your point some of those decisions that have been made, I think have been helpful. So I'm encouraged by the direction that we're going, but there's still work that needs to be done.

Q. What was the reaction to Penn State's future Big Ten schedule? When it comes to Ohio State and Michigan, given that those rivalries have built up over 30 years, does that add anything to those games this year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think obviously the Big Ten has made some decisions that I think most people would agree, whether it's athletic directors or coaches, that we made decisions that we felt like were going to put the conference in the best position to compete for National Championships, and not only that, give us the best chance to get multiple teams into the playoffs.

I think you have to kind of really build it and look at it from that way, and I think our conference has made some decisions to do that. Obviously with any decision you make, there's going to be some give and take. There's going to be some things that are gained, and there's going to be some things that are lost. But I think for the most part, the benefits will outweigh those things.

You talk about some of the historical games and some of the exciting games that have been played and opponents, I think for the most part, those will still happen, but there will

be some times where there's different teams or a lack of a team on your schedule that you're used to playing.

Q. The people who have arrived on campus in the summer, whether those be incoming freshmen or transfers that were brought in from the portal, how have they been acclimating to life at Penn State?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'll have a better idea once we get into training camp, but the feedback from the players has been excellent. The interaction that we've had with them has been limited but good, and the strength staff has been impressed.

We've got all the numbers, all the data, whether it's 40 or bench press and things like that, to see kind of where they're at and how physically prepared they are to compete, but it's been good.

We were fortunate last year to get a number of true freshmen that were able to come in and impact our team in a really positive way. Hopefully we'll have a similar number of guys that are able to do that this year as well. Hopefully there will be some names that we're talking about in a couple weeks, or at least the halfway point through the season that we are not talking about today.

Abdul Carter is a really good example of that, a guy that was highly recruited, but probably wasn't talking a whole lot at this media day last year, and by the middle of the season, everybody in the country was talking about him. It should be exciting, but we're going to need some of those guys to factor into this either in prominent roles or as backups.

Q. We all saw your photo from St. Elmo's. Need to know your reaction, your players' reaction to the world-famous shrimp cocktail.

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, it was a great opportunity to go out and spend some time with our players. The owner is a Penn State grad, so we were able to have a really good time last night in fellowship. As much as I tried to coach them up on that process, my man Adisa Isaac was being well mannered and eating shrimp with his mouth closed. That root really kind of opened his nostrils up, and that was the end of it. Had one shrimp, and he was done after that.

But we had a great night. We had a great night, but Adisa knows very well about that cocktail sauce and that horseradish now.

Q. James, you mentioned being in a competition phase at quarterback. Obviously you haven't had a

quarterback battle in a long time.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Just to be clear, we've had one every year. Every year.

Q. Okay. It's the first year without an incumbent in a while.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, sir.

Q. What will you and Mike need to see from Drew or Beau in order to make that decision? And is there a time during training camp when you will want to have that decision made by?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Obviously the sooner the better, but we're not going to rush any of these decisions at these positions. We grade everything in every practice, so all the data will be there. Obviously you're going to trust your gut and your instincts on that as well, but you have the data to back it up.

I think at any of these positions the sooner the better. It's probably magnified at the quarterback position because you don't rotate and play the same type of way that you do at some other positions, but it will be obviously watching how they move the offense, the conference that their teammates have in them, and then obviously a lot of the data and analytics that go in it as well to make sure that what your gut is telling you aligns with what the numbers say.

Q. James, I'm wondering about -- it's a ways off, but the Michigan State game at the end of the year, moving it to Detroit and playing in an NFL stadium, what are the pluses and minuses for Penn State in that game?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think obviously the one challenge is it will be a Friday game, so you're talking about later in the season and you've got a short week. By that point of the year, you've got bumps and bruises and challenges with depth. So the Friday night game can be a little bit challenging, but at least it's a level playing field and we're both having to deal with that.

I do think there's a ton of positives. When you talk about that point of the season, being able to play in this venue, I think we'll pack this place. I think our fans will travel. I think Michigan State will travel extremely well. It's their home game.

It's going to be a great environment. And obviously being indoors that time of year, there's a real positive that comes from that too.

We've had great games against Michigan State. We're looking forward to that as well. But you're exactly right, there's a lot of time between now and then, which also allows us to prepare and be ready for it.

Q. Your two main, chief rivals in the Eastern division, Ohio State and Michigan, have built their offensive teams in very different ways. How have you structured your roster, your recruiting, your approach to take both of those approaches on.

JAMES FRANKLIN: For us, obviously it starts about Penn State and building our defense the way myself and Manny Diaz feel like it needs to be built. Offensively, same thing, Mike Yurcich and myself and how our offense needs to be built from a size perspective, from a talent perspective, from a speed perspective, whatever it may be.

So although you are going to factor those things in, your opponents and those types of things, more than ever, you've got to focus on your program and what you need to be successful running the schemes that you do.

We're obviously aware, we study best practice. We're aware what Michigan's doing. We're aware of what Ohio State's doing. We study those programs too. But ultimately, it's about us and what Manny Diaz needs to be successful in his defense and Mike Yurcich as well.

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