

Big Ten Football Media Days

Thursday, July 27, 2023

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Indiana Hoosiers

Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I want to welcome the head coach of Indiana, Tom Allen.

COACH ALLEN: I would like to welcome Commissioner Petitti to the Big Ten. The short time we've worked together, I've been very impressed and looking forward to his leadership in the conference.

I'm honored and blessed to be representing Indiana University here today, and I'm very, very proud to be an Indiana Hoosier.

I'd like to begin by honoring the memory of Vi Taliaferro. Last month we lost a very special member of our Bloomington community. In 2001 the Big Ten created the George and Vi Taliaferro Fellowship in honor of this amazing couple.

One of the players we brought here today his name is Aaron Casey, a linebacker. He wears No. 44 in honor of George Taliaferro. We decided to come up with a new tradition of selecting a player each year that will wear that number that best represents the work ethic, dedication, integrity and perseverance that George Taliaferro displayed.

And Aaron Casey is a perfect representation of this honor. Aaron's a graduate with a degree in financial management. All-Big Ten linebacker. One of the best returning players in that position in our conference and has become one of our best players and one of our best leaders. So excited to have him here today.

Also Noah Pierre, a very versatile defensive back is with us. Noah is a special, special young man. Came to Indiana, had to earn his stripes the hard way. Took a few years to play on special teams and probably not play as much as he wanted on defense, but, man, he stayed the course. Tremendous perseverance and grit, and was rewarded a couple seasons ago to have that opportunity. He's been a starter ever since.

Also a graduate with a degree in kinesiology, awesome,

awesome young man.

And also running back Jaylin Lucas is here with us today. As a true freshman he became an All-American, first team, as a kick returner. As was also mentioned, the Big Ten Return Specialist of the Year. As special as he is on the football field he's even better off. A 3.2 GPA, a tremendous worker, leader, humble and a great representation for our program.

I'm extremely excited for the upcoming season. Our word for 2023 is "toughness." We define that as a mental and physical strength to persevere.

We had eight games last season that were decided in the fourth quarter. So for the past seven months we've been building our toughness and developing this football team to be able to finish in those opportunities.

We have a strong nucleus returning, and we had great success in the portal. We've been very focused on identifying young men across this country that were the best football players that fit our culture, that wanted to be at Indiana.

Obviously a compressed window to figure that out. So therefore we focused a lot on guys we already knew, had recruited previously or coached -- may have coached at a previous school or had a chance to be able to get to know a coach on that staff that was with them every single day. I think that's very, very important.

Also really excited about the three new staff members we have on the field. Bob Bostad, our new offensive line coach, brings tremendous experience in identifying and developing offensive linemen in the Big Ten Conference, as well as Matt Guerrieri who will be coaching our safeties and co-defensive coordinator who will be calling our defense.

And finally Anthony Tucker, our new wide receivers coach that brings tremendous experience, once again focused on identifying and developing players at his position.

So excited about this program. Obviously have a



challenging schedule ahead of us. Very excited about the future. Gotta build it, keep growing every single day.

Q. Is it difficult to build confidence with such a young team when your first game of the season is against a powerhouse like Ohio State?

COACH ALLEN: You know what, I've been blessed here. I've been head coach for seven years. Five of those seven years we've opened with a Big Ten opponent. Very familiar with this process. My first season was the Ohio State Buckeyes back in 2017. So, challenging, yes, but I would say it forces you to grow up real fast.

So the urgency that the offseason is impacted by this reality of who you play September 2nd to open the season, I think it helps you. It helps you grow. It helps you have that attention to detail at a high level.

Everybody's excited about the start of the season, but I think when it's that kind of opponent it all gets raised to another level. Our team knows that. We understand that. There's an urgency that our staff has because of it, and fall camp is affected by that in a very positive way.

So it's a challenge we embrace, without question.

Q. The wide receiver group seems to be more diverse in body types and skill set and stuff like that. Is that something that Coach Tucker brought in? Is it something that you discussed with the coaching staff to change the room to make it a little bit more dynamic?

COACH ALLEN: I think that it was something that we as a staff collectively identified trying to create explosive plays. You go and you think about the game of football, and there's two real -- stats are stats, but there are two that really matter, and that to me is can you protect the football on offense, can you create takeaways on defense, so that turnover ratio is one; and then explosive play ratio, how many can you create on offense, how many can you prevent on defense.

We're not creating enough on offense, and it's hard to drive a football 75 yards on the defenses in the Big Ten. So wanted to get some more receiver body types to help create more explosive plays. That was by design, and even in the portal mindset, to go after that as well even as we're recruiting guys in our current roster.

So definitely by design as the staff to be able to try to create more explosion by our offense.

Q. Regarding Ohio State and opening with a Big Ten

opponent as often as you have, I guess what have you learned from those experiences in terms of how you build week one prep when you've done this so many times before, having to start with not just a Power Five opponent but a conference opponent?

COACH ALLEN: I think that, like I said, just fast-forwards everything. It just causes you -- I get it, certain opportunities you have a chance to slowly build up to a game like that.

We don't have that luxury, and so everything is geared around that. So I think once you get through that process and you have a chance to prepare for that type of an opponent and that situation and knowing it's going to happen, because you know you think about this, our sport, we don't have any preseason games and you have two scrimmages that you have against your own teammates, and then you have -- we do a mock game the week before. So that's just simulating situations, but you're not playing somebody else.

So to be able to have it where you go from that to having to play such a high-level opponent immediately, it's challenging. When you have some young guys, you have new guys, you've got to mold them together because the best team wins on game day.

So just trying to build that best team. So as we go through you've got more probably focused on game-lag situations than ever before and that window of time.

But like I said, once you get through that and you have that opportunity, man, it really allows you, I think, to have an advantage weeks two, three and four.

Q. In terms of the quarterback position, when you eventually do name a starter, how important is it to you and your coaches that the starter is a dual-threat quarterback? We saw how Dexter Williams opened up the offense with his ability to run last year towards the end of the season. When you name a starter, how important is it that they can also threaten in the ground game?

COACH ALLEN: Well, I just think, I'm a defensive coach by trade, and I just know what gives us trouble -- anytime a quarterback can extend plays. It's usually those when it's not scripted, when they can be able to create, elongate, put pressure on your secondary, be able to beat you with his legs. You have to account for him in your pressure, whether you've got a spy, or whatever you need to do.

Moving forward that's what we want to have at that position to be able to extend those plays. I think it's a variable for



sure.

But at the same time once you pick who that individual is, you've got to make sure you're building everything around them so they can be at their best and be able to be comfortable. Obviously whoever is going to be is going to be a younger guy that's going to have to grow up really fast.

But I think that ability to extend plays, I think, we've seen that at the NFL level how valuable that can be. You keep that guy healthy, it's obviously an extra weapon that's very effective.

Q. I'm curious, you mentioned with your defensive background, now you're bringing in a new position coach that's going to call the defense for you. What goes into that decision for you?

COACH ALLEN: For me, I chose to call it a year ago because I felt that was best for our program at that time, but I've not called it obviously with all the different things that are going on and with the portal and the NIL and just the complexities you now deal with, even at a high level in that position.

I felt very strongly as we went through that process -- and I'm glad I did it -- but obviously feel like in order for us to get better and move forward, I wanted to bring somebody in to be able to call that. I'm really excited about Matt. I've known him for a long time. And Coach Kets (phonetic) is the one that brought him up from a GA to position coach to his coordinator there in their program for many years. Very close with them. And that was a big influence on me.

But I feel like it's important for me to become the best head coach I can be, the best game-day manager of the entire game, both sides of the football and special teams, for me not to be focused on calling the defense.

I'm excited about that. I think it makes us better. I'm excited about what he's brought to our program. But this is a situation where he came to learn what we do. We have a system we believe in and we'll make sure we stick with that, which we will, because our players believe in it. It fits our personnel, what we do.

I think he was a great complement to that. Brought some ideas, for sure. But I also want the ability and flexibility to be in that offensive meeting time as well, making sure all three phases is being where we need to be to be our best on game day.

Q. You mentioned hiring Bob Bostad this offseason. How confident are you that he can bring significant

change to that group this upcoming season? And with having so many guys that similar personnel as last year, what do you think it will take for those guys to kind of improve in the upcoming season?

COACH ALLEN: It was a huge focus, for sure. Bob has been a tremendous track record in our conference. I already feel like we've gotten better, certain things that he's brought.

And getting Matt Bedford back is huge. Losing him week one was a big blow to us; he was our best offensive lineman. He's back now 100 percent which is exciting. I'm very excited for him. I think the whole group needs to be able to mesh with them. He's been with them all spring, being able to bring in his thoughts and ideas, the toughness he brings, the attention to detail, the way he coaches them, and just the relentlessness of the way he approaches offensive line play.

It's a huge part of our team. I know that. We know that. We understand that. It's been something we addressed obviously and those guys have to step up. Got several guys that play a lot of football at that position for us. I'm excited for that group to lead us on our way on offense.

Q. Another year where the starting quarterback for week one is kind of up in the air, but regardless, you have guys like Jaylin Lucas who kind of broke out at the end of the year. How do you see yourself implementing more plays and getting those guys more touches?

COACH ALLEN: It's going to be by design without question. Getting Cam Camper back, losing him last year was the big blow as well. Having him back healthy will be huge to take some pressure off a young quarterback.

And the backfield as well. Josh Henderson, excited about him; Christian Turner, another player we brought in through the portal; that I think we have a very, very strong running back room and have flexibility, some different body types there, different body types at receiver, as was already mentioned, to be able to create those explosive plays and take some pressure off us having to drive the football.

But we want to do a good job of having a system where our guys feel comfortable and, whoever that quarterback is, that they can maximize their strengths.

At the end of the day, it's being able to take your roster, maximizing those guys' skill sets where they can play their best football and be very, very productive.

At the end of the day, we've got to score points, score

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

touchdowns in the score zone. We've got to do a great job of staying on the field and playing team football.

Q. Landscape of college football seems to be changing hourly, but one of the big things was the elimination of divisions in the Big Ten. How does that, one, give you the opportunity to play new opponents, and, two, what was your first reaction to that news?

COACH ALLEN: I think when you look at bringing in UCLA and USC, that's exciting, that's awesome. 2024, UCLA comes to us; 2025, we go out to California and play USC. Last time we played the Trojans, O.J. Simpson was the tailback.

Bottom line is new opportunities, great time to be in this conference. You're going to see equitable schedules where teams are going to be playing teams more equally across the conference, which I think is a great thing, that excites me as well, and playing some different teams on a more consistent basis.

But you look at it, though, there's a lot of great football teams in this conference. Everybody's schedule is going to be tough, and I'm excited for the future of the Big Ten Conference. Have an awesome day. LEO.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports