

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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## Penn State Nittany Lions Coach James Franklin

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Our final coach of the day is Penn State's James Franklin. Coach Franklin, we'll begin with your opening statement.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Thank you. Appreciate the opportunity to be here. I want to thank the commissioner and congratulate the commissioner. I think he's done a phenomenal job of positioning our conference in a position of strength in a very, very challenging time in college athletics history, so many changes. He's done a really good job and a great job of communicating with the head coaches, with the ADs, and with the presidents.

I want to welcome the four new teams to our conference. What an exciting time in college football. What an exciting time for the Big Ten. Going to create some really, really exciting matchups that I think our fans are going to enjoy, but also obviously going to create some challenges as well.

Some of those challenges are magnified for Penn State, being one of the most northeast schools without an international airport. For the media that's been to Happy Valley, you know some of the travel challenges that exists there. So we spent a ton of time talking to NFL organizations as well as college programs that have done East Coast to West Coast travel during the season and what are the best practices for that. So put a lot of time into that, and we're excited about those opportunities.

You talk about the season, I think one of the big story lines for us obviously is three new coordinators, which is unusual. Andy Kotelnicki, who we hired as our offensive coordinator from the University of Kansas, has been great. I got a ton of respect for what they were able to do at Buffalo as well as what they were able to do at Kansas. I got a ton of respect for his former head coach in Lance and have followed those guys closely for a long time.

I think the big thing was was this going to make sense for him and us? We're not starting from scratch, so are you able to come in, study what we do, what can stay the same and what needs to change. I think the big thing obviously, did a ton of good things on offense last year, but we were

not explosive enough. Coach Kotelnicki and what they were able to do at Kansas the last two years, extremely explosive and just did a really good job as a relational leader, coming in and building those relationships with our staff and players.

On the defensive side of the ball, a name that you guys are all familiar with in Tom Allen. Was a head coach in this conference for a long time, so got great perspective there. And Tom was in a position where he did not really need to take a job. So spent a ton of time making sure that Penn State was the right fit for him and he was the right fit for us.

Had about a two-week interview process with us actually in Happy Valley during bowl prep, and that went really well. Tom's done a great job. Obviously a little bit different situation depending on what metric you look at. We had arguably the number 1, 2, or 3 defense in college football last year. So Tom is stepping into that position and has done a really, really good job. Excited about how he has joined our staff and impacted our players.

Then Justin Lustig, our special teams coordinator. Justin has done a great job. He's from Pennsylvania, is widely regarded as one of the better special teams coordinators in the country.

Really impressed with what those guys have done, as well as our team. We had a great spring. We had a great summer. Obviously we've got an important time ahead of us with camp starting here very, very soon.

Appreciate the opportunity to be with you guys in year 11. Also, I want to take a moment and thank and show respect for Coach Ferentz and what he's been able to do at Iowa. It's unbelievable. In some ways, it's sad that 11 years has become the exception in college football, but what he's been able to do at the University of Iowa is super impressive, and I wanted to congratulate him in all his success.

**Q. Coach, in all your years, you look back at the Vanderbilt year where you guys had a record-breaking season. You look at the year you made it to the Rose Bowl with Saquon and everything. How close do you**



**feel like this team is, and how much do you feel like they mirror the character and the identity of those teams? And this being your 11th year in the conference, how good does it feel seeing the influx of African American head coaches not only just getting jobs across the landscape, but the Big Ten pretty much leading all other conferences with the number of African American head coaches that are currently present?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'll answer the second part first. I love the fact that Big Ten, the Big Ten is one of the leaders in this space. I think that sends a very, very clear and loud message that people are going to be judged by their work and their production. I think the Big Ten is a great example of that.

Obviously something that myself and Mike Locksley and a bunch of guys have taken a ton of pride in and done a ton of work on as well, and hopefully that becomes more of a trend across college football as well as the NFL.

I just spent some time the other day with Raheem Morris, who's one of my best friends. He was the defensive coordinator at Kansas State when I was the offensive coordinator. He's now the head coach at the Atlanta Falcons, getting a second chance, which is also not common. So that's powerful.

About our team and maybe some of the similarities to some of the teams we had at Vanderbilt and over our time at Penn State as well, I think it starts with the three gentlemen that we brought with us to this event, guys that are experienced guys, guys that have had a ton of success on the football field. They've handled themselves the right way academically on and off the field, and have won a ton of games.

They're guys that embrace that we're at a place like Penn State where we've been able to consistently, for the most part, win 10 or 11 games, but that's not the expectation at Penn State. They chose Penn State just like I chose Penn State, to compete for championships, and we embrace that.

But we are one of the few programs in the country you can win 10 or 11 games and people are unhappy. So we embrace that, and we're excited about those opportunities, and it starts for us at West Virginia in Morgantown, which is going to be a challenging opening game.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Abdul Carter, him changing positions from linebacker to defensive end. How much do you feel like that will strengthen your defense this season? And also, how does that placate**

**as far as throughout the locker room, as far as taking that type of role being a leader in the locker room?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think first thing is he'll play both. We have the flexibility to play him at both positions. He's one of the unique athletes that was playing linebacker at 250 pounds. You never know how that transition is going to go, playing in space at the linebacker position compared to moving up to the line of scrimmage and having to go against the offensive tackles. He made the adjustment pretty quickly.

At the end of the day, you're talking about one of the more explosive, physical athletes in all of college football. We think he has the ability to make a significant impact. Week to week we'll decide where he'll have the most impact for us, whether it's on the line of scrimmage at defensive end or in the linebacker position. This spring he stayed mainly at defensive end to get comfortable with that, and then after that we had a really good conversation, and he's open to doing both.

That will also put us in a position where people can't game plan and know exactly where he's going to be on the defense. So we're excited about that.

But he's really grown up. I'm proud of him and his development academically, as a student-athlete, as well as a football player. We need him and expect for him to have a huge year for us.

Got a very, very close relationship with him and his father, and I'm proud of him and excited about what he's going to do this year.

**Q. You got Julian Fleming as a transfer from Ohio State. How excited are you to have him? What kind of impact do you expect him to have for a receivers unit that wasn't all that explosive last year?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: He's a veteran guy that's played in this conference. He knows what it's all about. Obviously you know we got a ton of history with him and his family, recruited him very heavily out of high school, but he's thriving. He's very comfortable. He's very confident.

He really came, got on campus, like most guys should do, kept his mouth shut, worked, earned everybody's respect through that first, and now is really developing into a leader for us.

His improvement from the end of spring to now, he is healthy and lean and explosive and fast right now, and just from the feedback from the players over the summer, has really done a nice job. Looking at all the metrics and the

numbers from our strength staff, he's in a really good position. I think he's got a huge chip on his shoulder and excited about the opportunity at Penn State. He's really turned into one of the leaders in that wide receiver room.

So we're happy to have him and expect for him to do big things for us this year, and appreciate the question.

**Q. You mentioned earlier about Southern Cal, Oregon, UCLA, Washington joining the league. After the 2018 Ohio State game, you had your, what I refer to as the epic good to great to elite rant. So with these teams coming in, where do you feel Penn State stands in the pecking order? And a follow-up, if you don't feel Penn State is quite at elite, what do you think the Nittany Lions have to do to achieve the elite status?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I would describe it as a speech, not a rant, first of all. But, no, I think, again, back to the comment earlier, you're talking about a program that you can win 10 or 11 games and people are not happy or satisfied. That's inside the Lasch building and that's outside of the Lasch building. We totally get that and embrace that.

I think our players understand that when we recruit them. Our staff understands that when we hire them. And as the head coach, I embrace all those things as well.

I think week in and week out the Big Ten is arguably the best conference in all of college football. I've been fortunate to be a head coach in the SEC as well as the Big Ten, so I think I've got good perspective on that.

And like you mentioned, adding the four new schools makes it even more challenging. We'll have the opportunity to figure that out and figure that out real quick starting at West Virginia. We're fortunate to play most of those teams that we discussed. We want to play those teams that you discussed, both that have been in the conference historically as well as those that have been added.

For us, we've got to play our best when our best is needed most, in the biggest games, at the biggest moments. I think, if you look at us specifically last year, did some phenomenal things. That's the step that we need to take, and having a returning starting quarterback obviously helps with that. We're a quarterback-driven game, whether it's in the NFL, college, or high school, and having a returning quarterback at that position that did some phenomenal things -- I think he was second in touchdown to interception ratio. I think he broke the national record in completions without an interception. So did some phenomenal things.

We've got to build on that. Then I think the pieces of the puzzle around him -- tight end, running back, and then receiver -- has been the big question mark really since last year. We've got a ton of confidence in that room. Those guys got a huge chip on their shoulder.

Back to the question earlier about the addition of Julian Fleming as well as the guys in that room, they had a great summer, and we've got a ton of confidence on what they're going to do this year. We're going to have to play well early on, build confidence, and carry that confidence throughout the season.

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