

Purdue University Football Media Conference

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Coach Ryan Walters

Press Conference



Q. Obviously it's been a while now since you played. Just how valuable was the bye week to reassess where this team is and get healthy?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, hugely important. Much needed physically and mentally just to sort of get some time. From the players' perspective, we -- I'll just take you through the week. We had Monday off; Tuesday, Wednesday was straight rehab, recovery, rejuvenation from a physical standpoint for the guys that have done most of the playing.

We practiced the non-travel, guys that are in backup roles that travel but haven't played a whole lot. Got a scrimmage at the end of those practices and seen the guys, which was good, exciting.

By that time of the schedule in practice we had the older guys out at practice to cheer them on. Energy was awesome. Had a more of a walk-through tempo, jog-through tempo practice on Thursday for the older guys to get some early down, Nebraska intro.

Then as a staff, we were on the road recruiting. Gave the players Friday and Saturday off, again, just to relax, watch some football, and come back rejuvenated, excited for the next five games.

So Sunday had really, really good practice. The energy was awesome. The buy-in is exactly what you want it to be. The guys that were dinged up are starting to look like themselves. The guys that are done for the year, are done for the year. That's not changing. But guys that were dealing with nicknack injuries and were sort of on the day-to-day plan, you know, were able to practice and practice at a high level.

Q. Looks like it was a valuable week recruiting-wise, too. You talk about the buy-in of this team, but it's also the buy-in of the guys you're selling the future of this program to.

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, we're really excited about the class we put together and getting into the '25 class.

Excited about the guys that we targeted and that we got committed to us.

What's exciting for me is to see those guys playing well. All the guys that are currently committed are playing at a high level in their senior season, and so definitely looking forward to the future.

But really looking forward to the last five games with this current roster.

Q. You know about the environment at Nebraska. What are these guys in store for on Saturday?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, you know, 91,000 plus that are a sea of red. My history with Nebraska started at a very young age. Obviously grew up a fan at Colorado, my dad playing there, and that was the hated rivalry, right? And so you remove yourself from that as a coach, and the first time I got to play against Nebraska again was in 2021. My first season at Illinois. I just remember them running out of the tunnel in Champagne and the feelings just come back, right?

It's like, man, I really can't stand that color. Don't like that N on the helmet. And so definitely this has been a big week. We've explained to the guys how crazy it gets out there. They are die-hard fans, win, lose, or draw, so we're looking forward to a great venue to play a competitive and tough football game.

Q. Last thing from me. Ben Farrell is a guy that came from a small college, and obviously a different level of competition. How has he progressed and adapted to what he's faced this year versus where he came from?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, thank God we got him, right? He's obviously big and athletic and bought into the culture, and like you said, has progressed throughout the course of the season.

I think Coach Johnson has done a good job mentoring him and getting him to play at a high level. So we're definitely glad we got him. He's actually been playing well for us in the times he's been in there.



Q. You talked a little bit about the young guys getting a chance to do some scrimmage work. Any names for guys that may have stood out during those sessions?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, Ryan Brown did really well. We made him live, which typically you don't do with quarterbacks, right? But he's a big, physical guy, and I knew he would be open to that and accept that challenge.

George Burhenn also got some scrimmage reps. As a result, I think we'll get more playing time just to see what he can do in live situations with his frame and speed, athleticism.

You know, defensively, Drake Carlson stood out. He played well. Some of those younger guys in the secondary, Zion Steptoe, who we moved from receiver to corner is improving. Really looking forward his progress and his future at that position. I think it fits him, his style, his personality, and what we do schematically I feel like he can accomplish.

So definitely beneficial to see the young guys go work and the guys we are counting on to make plays for us, to get them back healthy and excited both physically and mentally.

Q. Just some of the issues Nebraska's quarterback poses, big guy, likes to run it. Just, again, you had some issues dealing with those types of running quarterbacks. Talk about him and what he brings to the table.

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, you just hit it on the head. He's big, physical. Nebraska, they make you play with all 11, right? So we'll definitely have to adjust the way we play, adjust our game plan a little bit.

They run a ton of different run schemes, both zone and gap schemes. Their window dressing is for a purpose usually, and you got to be able to account for all 11. Definitely excited that we had a week to prepare as a staff, and excited for the two bonus practices really. I think those will be beneficial for our guys, especially in the run fits.

But it's going to be a tough and physical game, and I think we'll be as healthy as we can be at this point of the seen going into Saturday, which makes me feel good.

Q. Talk a little bit about the kicking situation a little bit, maybe how you'll handle that this week.

RYAN WALTERS: Freehill is healthy, and so if he's healthy and ready to go, he'll be our kicker.

Q. And Hudson Card, obviously the time off helped him. Do you think he's been as healthy as he has been all season coming into Saturday?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, Hud looked like himself yesterday for the first time since that second or third series after Illinois, so he's back with a bounce in his step. Ball is coming out of his hands with some velocity. It's pretty when it's in the air.

Saw him run around a little bit, which was exciting. Just feels like he's back to himself, so that will hopefully bode well for us.

Q. Do you feel any urgency, five games left?

RYAN WALTERS: Absolutely. Absolutely. We are in playoff mode right now. Definitely set the tone and the temperament in our team meeting on Sunday, and as a result guys went to work.

That was as energetic, as fast a practice as we've had since I've been here, so I think our mindset is in the right place. I've been honest and open about what needs to happen the last five games and what we're capable of doing.

So because of that, everybody is holding each other accountable to those standards. I'm excited to see what that looks like down the stretch of the last five weeks.

Q. What have you seen with Matt Rhule taking over Nebraska and the new identity he's trying to make?

RYAN WALTERS: My history with Coach Rhule goes back to his Temple days. When I was at Memphis we were able to play them. You just see his teams, they are tough, physical, they're smart. They don't beat themselves. That's exactly what you see on tape.

Like I said, they make you play with all 11 on offense. They're really physical and try to dominate you up front on defense. They get creative with exchange in gaps with their front seven, and do a good job of disguising and mixing up coverages in the back end.

So it's a tough, smart football team. That's pretty much his M.O. and has been since I've got know him as a coach.

Q. Mershawn Rice appeared on the field I think for the first time maybe against Ohio State. What all went into that? Was he making a move in practice? You trying to extend your rotation? Him getting healthy?

RYAN WALTERS: You know, I don't know if that was the

first time he's been in the game. First time he got extended snaps. That's a result of practice habits, of the need to rotate at that position, and just also like he's a bigger guy, and I think that is sort of what we needed out on the outside with what we're trying to do.

Like I said, his attitude and his practice habits and the production he had in practice led to more playing time. I'm hoping that is a continued trend as the season goes.

Q. Just one personnel one, Ryan. Mahamane Moussa, was helped off the field against Ohio State. Is it a long-term thing? Day-to-day? He's on the depth chart still. Just wanted to ask about him.

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, that is accurate. He's still day-to-day, but we're confident he'll be available and be ready to go by Saturday.

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