

Purdue University Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Ryan Walters

Press Conference



Q. To finish the year with a win and, plus, to keep the Bucket, it's always good to beat a rival; right?

RYAN WALTERS: Absolutely. You don't ever want to end the season on a loss, so I think positivity going into the offseason.

You know, one more time to play in front of Ross–Ade and take care of the home field and to win an in-state rival, and it's a trophy game. To keep a trophy would definitely be a positive moving into the offseason.

Q. You talked a little bit in the postgame Saturday about lamenting allowing a touchdown on the team -- on Minnesota's first drive, Northwestern's first drive. Just talk about that, and maybe, again, sort of address maybe what you think you can do to tighten that up and prevent that from happening.

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, obviously, like, the Minnesota week, what was it, four plays, touchdown, and then same thing this past weekend.

We tried different things. We had a start-fast period in the week. We were going to take the ball regardless if we would have won the toss. It worked out how we wanted it to with them deferring.

To see if that helped, and it didn't. We had two MEs that led to explosive plays and ultimately a touchdown where we didn't see the tackle over and get the front knock, so we had to open A-gap for the touchdown.

So we'll continue to find different ways to start fast defensively. I do think obviously they settled into it and played really well for a long stretch and then just had some mishaps towards the end.

That's really been the theme defensively the past couple of games where you play good for long stretches, and it's like three plays. The thing is on defense, if you have three bad plays, that's 21 points; right? Where offensively you have three bad plays, you're punting. So we have to understand

that as a defense, just the intensity and the focus it takes to play as sound as we can play for four quarters.

Q. Did you realize Purdue was No. 1 in the Big Ten in fourth down attempts with 27. Can you just kind of talk about that, and does that surprise you at all?

RYAN WALTERS: Well, I think it's probably because we've been in a lot of fourth and short situations. I think a lot of times some of those teams on third and two or third and one are getting first downs; right?

So you kind of take every game for what it is. It felt like this past week I made the same type of decisions that were made against Minnesota, and they ended up in touchdowns. This week we just didn't get in there.

Also knew that defensively we would be able to stop them and get the ball back. With where we were offensively with how thin we were in front and two new quarterbacks in there, just didn't know how often we would be able to get down there to put points on the board.

I was still going back and looking at it. I thought those were the right moves to make.

Q. Just now that you've had a chance to digest the film, what are your thoughts on the quarterbacks, Meredith and Ryan Browne, and how you used them? In hindsight would you want to use them any different? Would you maybe want to go with Ryan longer, or just talk about that QB situation.

RYAN WALTERS: I thought Ryan played a little more confident, and he adds a little different element with his ability to run and extend plays. So we knew going into the game that we would have to be able to run the football in order to put points on the board and give us a chance to win. I think that also catered to Ryan's strengths.

You look at what we were available from a roster standpoint up front, I was proud of the way those guys are battling. You have your backup center playing right tackle, your third string center playing left guard. Moussa came back, and he was supposed to be an emergency-only situation, but Ben Farrell goes through warmups, and he



can't go.

For those guys to go back-to-back weeks with 300 yards rushing, we knew that was going to be the way we have to play in order to have a chance to win it. We just didn't play clean enough or disciplined enough for four quarters.

Still had a chance to win it there at the end, but when your margin of error is that small, you can't turn the ball over four times. You can't have mental errors on defense that lead to touchdowns. You have to play cleaner.

That was to me why we didn't win the game is we didn't do enough from a discipline standpoint. I thought they played their tails off and played tough and physical, but didn't play clean enough to win that game.

Q. You talked about this a couple of weeks ago, but when teams are having the kind of season that you're having, sometimes the fan base drifts off, and you've had some great crowds this year despite that. How much does that give you a boost going into the last game knowing, hey, it's still going to be an electric atmosphere, the fans are still on board with this thing?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah, and that's one of the reasons why I love this place. You've got a passionate and emotional fan base that also has an awareness of sort of what's going on.

I get people are frustrated and disappointed, as are we; right? We're frustrated and disappointed. I was talking to my parents the other day. I'm, like, you know, I'm like the biggest LeBron fan, and I can't tell you how many times I've cussed him out on TV. As a fan, you get frustrated.

I feel like this fan base is sort of that way where they see what's happening on the field. We're in tight ball games. We have hit the injury bug like nobody's business. You are dealing with brand new schemes, offense, defense, special teams.

Still no excuses; right? There are plenty of games out there where I feel like we should have won, and that falls on my shoulders, but I do think that we are continuing to improve as a program and the way we're running things.

I promise you we're going to win a lot of games. I promise you that our coaching staff is going to hit the recruiting trail tough and precise, and we're starting to get the support we need from a resource standpoint.

So it will look right next year, I promise you. I'm looking forward to this weekend being a microcosm of what's to come in the future.

Q. Kind of going off that, the guys you do have, it's tough, especially for seniors, when a new staff comes in and most of those guys didn't commit to you. They committed to a different scheme, a different coach. Last game in Ross-Ade for these guys. How big have they been in hopefully turning this thing into the future?

RYAN WALTERS: They've been awesome. They've completely bought in, embraced the staff and the changes with open arms.

Obviously it ain't all sunshine and rainbows; right? Every individual has their personal opinions, but the guys that stuck with it and stayed and have really put their head down and went to work, they have been rewarded with opportunities on the field.

So they have helped us lay the foundation for the way we need to operate moving forward, and they've been a good example for the young guys that we have in our program.

Q. I want to talk about one of toes guys, Cam Allen, who I'm sure fans sometimes are frustrated, but also this is a guy that's got I think 13 career interceptions, and that doesn't happen by accident. He played a lot early. Obviously he seems to be a guy that's always around the football. Even a lot of tip balls seem to dismiss him. What has he meant just as a leader and as a guy that can get you a big turnover in a key moment?

RYAN WALTERS: Cam, his role from a year ago to now has changed just with the style of play. By nature, the ball can find him. With the personnel over the last couple of weeks, that's why his role has been a little bit diminished because we've seen more 12-personnel than we have 11 here lately.

He has improved as the year has gone on. I feel like he has trusted the technique, and as a result, his play has improved. His effort has improved as well. I think he sees the importance of buying in 100% in order to have success. That's why I think he's been playing better lately.

Q. Do you think this team has kind of flipped from -- nothing against Coach Brohm, but you are different personality-wise. Do you think this team has molded into more of your personality as the season has gone on?

RYAN WALTERS: I think so. We're still not all the way there yet, but I do think the guys enjoy being in the building because they know what they're going to get every day.



They know they're going to be held accountable, but at the same time we're going to treat them fairly.

You can't treat everybody the same because they're all different individuals, but they know what they're going to get from the staff and from the strength and conditioning program. We have done things to try to improve the environment and improve the way we take care of them off the field, and I think they have appreciated that as well.

The culture is great in the locker room, which is why guys have been fighting all year regardless of the record. I think a lot of guys are excited about what's to come.

Q. Zion Steptoe had any experience playing defense in high school or anything like that? How difficult has been the transition, I guess, and for him to elevate and get good so quickly at switching roles?

RYAN WALTERS: That's why I'm excited about his progress and his potential at corner. Another guy that puts the team first all the time. He is selfless, works really hard, and I think his skill set, it elevates on the defensive side of the ball.

I think we made that move three weeks ago. He played a little bit in the Michigan game. Didn't really play in the Minnesota game. Then you can kind of see the light turn on in term of understanding the scheme and why we're playing with certain techniques.

I thought he played his tail off against Northwestern. He's only going to continue to improve, and I'm glad he's in that room now.

Q. Then with guys like Nic Scourton, Hudson Card, is that a situation where you find out Thursday if they're good to go this week, or do you know now what their status is?

RYAN WALTERS: I would anticipate both of them being available, which is awesome. We need them. I was also very impressed with Khordae's production and what he was able to do on Saturday.

Q. Just with respect to Indiana, what challenges? The quarterback has played better of late. They've lost two close games here recently. What do you see in the Hoosiers?

RYAN WALTERS: Like you said, they are playing their best ball towards the end of the year. They have a lot of experienced guys up front offensively.

The quarterback is a tough, bigger guy that can run around

and throws a good deep ball.

Running backs are big, powerful, Big Ten-type backs. One is, like, 6'3", 240. The other one is 5'11", 225. Big bruiser-type backs.

They have a lot of length on the outside. Then they have a speedy slot/running back, No. 12. I think they do a good job of utilizing the personnel and getting into different formations that are unique within that personnel grouping.

Their run game and pass game complement each other, so you have to have your eyes in the right spot all the time, and their guys on the outside do a great job of winning the 50/50 balls.

Defensively they're multiple. They're aggressive. So they pose problems that way. They're long on the secondary as well, so it's a good football team. It's going to be a rivalry game. The atmosphere is going to be awesome, and so it's going to be a tough and physical game for sure.

To me it's how disciplined can we play, how clean can we play? That will be the telltale by the end of the game.

Q. Have you run into Tom Allen? Obviously you have coached against him over the years at Illinois, et cetera. Talk about him and what he brings to their program.

RYAN WALTERS: He's a great guy. He's very familiar with the state, with the high school background. Defensive mind. So I always pay attention to defensive guys.

I've been impressed with his career and what he's been able to do, but he's an old-school, hard-nosed, does everything by the book type guy. I've got a lot of respect for him.

Q. Tyrone Tracy went down late. Looked like his back. Any update the on him?

RYAN WALTERS: I think he will be fine. He is sore. Both him and Mock were sore after the game. That's two weeks where they've done the workload and have played really well. So they're just sore, like they should be, going into the last game of the season.

Q. We could talk after the game, but just peeking at December 4th, the portal opens. Can you just talk about maybe if you have already I'm sure evaluated maybe some areas of need that you would focus on there?

RYAN WALTERS: Yeah. Obviously I think we need to get

bigger up front offensively. I would anticipate us going to get a couple of transfer portal wide receivers.

Defensively we lose two interior D-linemen. I would anticipate us addressing that. Also, it kind of depends who is coming back as well on what holes we'll need to fill.

Like I said, we've gotten some donor support lately. I'm excited about the resources we have to be able to address the needs we have.

Q. Then as far as attrition goes, a lot of guys left last year. Any sense that there could be a lot of guys I guess leaving West Lafayette?

RYAN WALTERS: Every year there's probably a couple that surprise you and some others that don't surprise you. Ultimately, I've told all our guys, you have to do what's best for yourself individually at the end of the year.

A lot of guys see what we're doing and want to be a part of it. I anticipate the guys that we want to stay will stay, and the guys that want to leave will leave. It's nothing personal. I won't take it personal, but I am excited about the future. I know a lot of these guys in the locker room are excited as well.

Q. 23 high school commitments right now, class of 2024. How much do you see that growing before that early signing day begins December 20th?

RYAN WALTERS: Maybe by a couple of spots. I'm really happy with the high school guys that we have committed. They're all playing really well. A lot of them are still playing. They're going deep in the postseason, and that's a bonus when you get guys that are used to playing winning football.

A lot of those guys are leaders on their teams, so just from a psyche standpoint, they're hard-nosed and love football for football. Really excited about that group.

Right now the only couple that we might take would be difference-maker type potential high school guys. Any others that we'll take will be either junior college or transfer portal.

Q. You alluded twice to being happy with the resources that you've got. So as to say you're pleased with where things are at now with the Boilermakers Alliance?

RYAN WALTERS: There are some things that are happening as we speak. Yeah, I'm excited.