

CFP First Round: Penn State vs SMU

Saturday, December 21, 2024
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA
Beaver Stadium

Penn State Nittany Lions Tom Allen

Andy Kotelnicki

Postgame Press Conference

SMU - 10, Penn State - 38

Q. Can you describe Dom DeLuca's knack for making plays at the right time. He's done it throughout his career. How have you seen that in your season here?

TOM ALLEN: What a testament to his grit and toughness in earning walk-on and earning a scholarship and becoming a really, really good player for us. You talked about the savviness. He's one of the smartest players I've ever coached. He spent so much time studying, preparing. He anticipates really, really well.

Obviously a huge, huge takeaway, two picks and one for a touchdown, that were just so monumental today. I just think you stay in the game, which he does. He has great awareness and just the ability to, like I said, anticipate. I think the film study helps with that.

More than anything, he's a gifted player, he really is. He's a guy that has come up big for us. He's been so consistent each and every week. I'm just so proud of him. He deserves all the credit he gets.

Q. Andy, you guys ran for 189 yards today, three touchdowns, Nick and Kaytron both had 6.4 yards per carry against one of the best rush defenses in the country. Why did that work so well for you guys today?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: We talked a lot in the past about their abilities and how hard they run and the way they've been complementing each other so well in the front on the run game. It starts up front.

I think James probably had commented in here these games, this kind of weather, you need to win up front. We need to have great O-line and D-line play. That's how



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we're going to continue to advance.

I think we did a great job blocking it. It wasn't always perfect, but as we started getting into the second quarter, and you can see those runs started to get a little bit bigger. We kind of talked at halftime, hey, listen, we're going to go in the second half here, and we're going to lean on them. If you're running the ball well, gains of two and three in the first quarter turn into gains of four, five, and six in the second and they turn into gains of 10 to 12 in the third and fourth, and that's kind of what happened. I was very pleased with that.

Q. When you decide to go for it on fourth and one at the 22 or whatever it was, what kind of message do you think that sends the offense? Then when you don't get it and the defense comes up with that sort of play, how big is that in the course of a game?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: Yeah, that's awesome. I think James talks all the time about playing complementary football. We've got to have each other's backs in this situation.

We talk about playing to win as opposed to playing not to lose. Those mentalities are two totally different. James meant to call the goal for it and make the call, doesn't work, sometimes it doesn't work. But then to turn around and have the defense get a critical stop to swing the momentum back, that's a huge deal. That's what complementary football is.

To answer your question, it's the mentality of playing to win. Let's not play on our heels. Let's not play reactive football. Knowing that when there is adversity, a championship football team is going to respond, really in any of the phases of the game.

Q. Dom DeLuca is the one that sealed the deal with those two interceptions, but what did it take for the secondary and even the front seven to kind of put it all together to confuse and help create those opportunities for interceptions?

TOM ALLEN: Total team effort. Just so proud of our guys. We challenged them this week to be the reason why. We

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knew this was going to be a game where the tempo is challenging, and they've given lots of people trouble. They've run the ball really well and thrown the ball really well. Score a lot of points.

They've got a lot of talented players, especially in the skill positions. The quarterback is tough to deal with. It started up front, the coaches said it. We challenged our D-line the whole week leading up to it, our linebackers to stop the run, and then pressure the quarterback. He's one of those guys, when you pressure him, you've got to be careful, what you get when you pressure him. It was about leveraging him and also leveraging him with layers.

If you don't have any layers, you're going to make that first guy miss most of the time. So proud of our D-line, got a few sacks, but constant pressure. And the secondary had to be able to do disguise and get some different looks, play some man, play some zone. Then you do that with tempo, it can be challenging. Somebody's got to get their cleats on the ground.

Just a collective effort all three levels. Just really proud of our guys. Just feel really blessed and very thankful.

Q. I know it will get a little overshadowed, but Grunk finally made his debut today, an interception on the first pass, but he came back with a completion. How do you feel he handled the moment, and how much comfort do you have in him moving forward?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: I think he handled the moment fine. There was no adaptation of what was being called. He was prepared all week to go into the game, like we would expect.

I think any time that you're the backup quarterback or the third string quarterback, you need to prepare like you're the starter, and I think he does that. I thought he went in and handled it well. You probably want that throw to be a little more on the body or handed off, but it happens.

So you go back out there, you get it out of the way, and you respond to adversity. It's a little bit about what I said before. It is football, this is playoff football, so it ain't going to go perfect, the whole game. You're going to have to respond to when things aren't going well. What he did in that to allow us to go out there and chew some more time up off the clock, it kind of really exemplifies kind of how today went, I thought.

Q. I was going to ask you about the other Penn State quarterback, Drew. Good defense you went up against today, conditions probably weren't optimum to throw the ball. How did you see him play today? It looked

like it maybe took him a little bit of time to get going. How would you evaluate Drew?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: Without watching film, and I didn't see statistically how it was, but in the second half we joked, I don't know if I hardly called a pass in the third quarter when he was out there. I think that one drive we ran the ball all the way down the field, which is awesome, and that's what you want to be able to do in a game like that.

So yes, weather conditions aren't great. They're not optimal, they're ripping around. It's playoff football. That's the way it is. There's no excuses to not really execute in any capacity. I will tell you one thing that's not going to show up in the stats is how many times he is our leader and the straw that stirs the drink how many times he puts us in the right play.

We had a lot of run checks in the game plan. For him to put us in the right play and get us in situation that's favorable that allow our guys to execute, that's a big part of being a quarterback as well.

Q. You mentioned playing not to lose, and James told us that all week he wanted you to guys to call the game aggressively. What does that mean for you to kind of have that opportunity, and was there any surprise or hesitation on that fourth and one when he's telling you, hey, we're going for this?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: No, zero. He was totally on the board with go for it, okay. It was that simple.

He communicates frequently throughout the drives of what he's thinking and when he thinks we might be able to go for it or not. That's something we practice daily honestly through practice and what we're doing and our game management meeting. So there was no surprise or hesitation or no, oh, oh, oh. There was none of that, no hesitation.

You could see our kids too, whatever, here we go. Another play, another opportunity.

Q. For both of you, just what you can say about the ride to get to where you are. You heard Coach Franklin talk about how this is a family and how they've worked together throughout this entire season, and they could play in any decade of Penn State football. What could you say being a part of this family and riding to this point right now and having a historic win in the College Football Playoff?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: I think -- you could get really deep in the answer here. First, to speak of the tradition of this

place, to have football as long as this place has had it, to have this stadium the way it is, and to do something that's never been done here, that's pretty frickin' rare, and it's pretty cool to be a part of it.

The comment that he made about being part of a family, that's totally true. Honestly, I feel like just a spoke in the flywheel that he's created here. The offensive coordinator is an important position, but he doesn't get enough credit for what he's done here consistently, honestly, and I feel like I'm just a spoke in that process.

I'm blessed to be a part of it. I'm having a ton of fun, but it's an unbelievable experience. All those things he talked about, they're real. It's a family. The guys love each other. They're playing for each other. We've had a ton of gritty wins this year. We've dealt with adversity and respond the right way. That's what being a competitor is about, and he deserves a ton of credit for creating this program.

TOM ALLEN: I would just say that just really blessed. A lot of emotions. Coach and I coached at the small college level, worked our way up through. It's been a long journey to get to a place like this in our roles, and just really grateful for Coach Franklin giving us this opportunity, both of us. I know we both feel the same way. We've talked about this quite a bit.

Just appreciate his leadership. So many great staff, people around us that work so hard, the players. I've been so impressed with just the work ethic of the kids and how much we demand of them and how much they give us. Over and over in the season. It's already been a long season, and they just keep showing up and working.

It takes a lot of people, and winning is hard. It's just been -- yeah, a lot of thanks to it. I feel really, really blessed to be here. Very thankful to be here. There's been a lot of lessons along the way, and I think this team has really kind of been forged by a lot of adversity during games. We've had to come from behind. We've had to be able to -- both sides of the ball or special teams have had to come up and make a big play that we're game changing. Very complementary football.

Each phase has to have -- when they have their opportunity, they've got to step up, and they have at different times. That's what makes it special. Really excited about where we are, but it's 1-0 mindset, and we've just got to continue to learn from the things each week like we did the last time we played and just keep getting better, and I appreciate it. We are.

Q. To follow on that, for both of you, first year in the program, to see how many people kind of showed up

tonight or today, especially with what was at stake, what was that like seeing that from the box? What did that look like? Was there a moment at all during the game that you were able to kind of like turn to the person next to you and kind of just say this is pretty cool?

ANDY KOTELNICKI: I don't know that in the heat of "battle" that you ever really get to enjoy it, to your point. Me and Tom actually, it's the only time we get to share these moments. He commented before, we weren't playing in front of these crowds when we were in the Division III playoffs, even though at Whitewater we had tremendous support and had great crowds there.

We laugh in the pregame probably is when it happens, in the production that ensues of getting our football team and the whole travel party to and from. We laugh -- I remember on Fridays before we used to play games, we'd show up in the afternoon. We'd have a walk-through and a meeting and go home and be home by dinner. Now it's hotel and this meal and this buffet and then this dessert and then this meeting. There's just so much production and grandeur to it, that I don't know you probably get to enjoy it the way you want, but that's the competitor in us.

We're both going to go look at the film and be very critical, even though you win the game, you know what I mean? We're going to be critical of the body of work to get better. That's kind of what we do.

No, I haven't spent any time in the press box and look at Tom, can you believe this crowd? It's more whatever. You see him over there getting pissed off about something. Tom, it was a pick six, it's all right. Or I'm frustrated. It's just you're in the moment. You're doing your job. That's basically what it comes down to.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, and I think -- during the game, that's accurate. You don't really have a time where you ever really let up. We shared just a lot of similar experiences in the past, and it makes you appreciate where you are, especially when you get a chance to deal with a guy that kind of knows you.

You're an equipment guy and responsible for different things, I was at the college level and high school level for many years. They've got someone for everyone here at this high level.

It just makes you really appreciate this experience that we're all involved in right now. To me it's about just not taking any of this for granted. We're blessed to be at a place that values football at an extremely high level, that creates a lot of expectations, which is what you want. You



want to be at a place that cares so much about winning and so much about being able to play at the highest level possible.

I think, when you have a group of guys that have been at different places along the way, they bring those experiences with them. But we do enjoy each other. We've got a great staff to work with.

But during the game, there's not a whole lot of time for that.

I will say that when you do what we do and the hours we put in and the families involved and how much the sacrifice by them, it's pretty special. So you really enjoy it. That's why these noon kickoffs are good. You get a chance to get a big win, and you can kind of enjoy the rest of the evening here in a different way maybe because you don't have to go back and watch the film within the next three or four hours. Then when the night's over, you can come back tomorrow and get back to work.

We're going to enjoy this for sure and keep getting better. 1-0 mindset.

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