

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good morning. Just excited about the start of fall camp. Had our pictures this morning as a team. Going to progress through today and get our guys in some meetings and preliminary work tonight, then start our first practice in the morning.

It's been a great summer. Excited about our players, how hard they've worked, how our staff has worked with them in the ways that we could football-wise, and then also you're strength staff and all the things they've done with our players on a consistent basis in the weight room.

Excited for this fall camp. Ready for questions.

Q. How different are maybe guys' bodies, guys' athletic measurements, coming out of summer weight lifting, conditioning, all that, when you don't have nearly as many restrictions on who can be together in groups, who can work out when? Basically how much fitter do you feel like your roster is right now?

TOM ALLEN: It's a completely different feel than it was a year ago. Everybody I'm sure is going to say the same thing.

But at this time a year ago our strength staff hadn't been hardly with our guys at all in person. Very, very challenging set of weeks leading up to fall camp a year ago. Now you had not just the summer but also January and February and March and April going into spring ball. We had eight weeks prior to spring ball. You have three weeks of spring ball time period there of working out as well. Then the couple weeks right before summer. Then you had the nine weeks in the summertime.

Really love where our team is at physically. I think the guys on the line of scrimmage, that was really hard for them, especially offensive linemen, to be in shape a year ago. So getting their body compositions leaned up was extremely a high priority for us. I think that's been very, very successful this summer.

That excites me more than anything, is just the physical

condition of our guys. Just from the speed perspective and lean muscle mass, explosive power, all those things that we really emphasize as a strength program, I would say as a collective group it's at a very high level for our team, which is much needed.

We got a lot of players that played last year. They were coming back this year. We just want them to continue to grow and develop physically. I think that's what's happened with our strength staff. So very encouraged by it.

We had a meeting with them a couple days ago, talked about all of our players, went through their numbers, just the thoughts from our strength staff who spent every day with them in the last two months. Excited about where we are.

Q. With camp starting tomorrow, any positions on each side of the ball you're anxious to see because you're wondering where they're at or you have high expectations for them?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think we got some new faces on the defensive line. I want to see those guys. I'm looking forward to seeing that group take another step. Some of those younger guys that I think have had some good off-season work, I want to see how that translates to the field.

On the offensive line, as well, once again, kind of a similar theme. Got some new faces, but got a lot of younger guys that you want to see have a great off-season. I feel like they have done that. I want to see that translate to the field.

Those would be the two that stick out to me.

On the perimeter we have some talented skill guys that you just want to see continue to elevate their game. Nobody to me on our entire roster did not have the expectation of elevating what they do, whether it's certain areas that we focused on with them individually or what. It may not all be the same for each person, but a collective improvement of our guys in their knowledge of the game, for some of these

guys, but also it's the physical part.

Q. From November through spring and summer and such, the questions we have to ask about ^ Michael every time has been, come the 1st of August, you'll make the determination as to how much he can do. Hopefully he would be close to 100% if not there. Today on August 5th, can you tell us where you stand with him, what you want to try to accomplish with him in the next four weeks?

TOM ALLEN: Yes, I've been asked that many times for sure (smiling). I understand why.

But I feel like as you go through this process, we have other guys that are coming back from season-ending injuries. You're just constantly progressing them through their rehab. It's about strengthening the muscles in that area. It's about the change of direction. Any time it's a lower-leg injury, lower-body injury, you're talking about can they accelerate, can they slow down, can they move the way they need to move. Those are all cyclical. You have a progression you're looking for.

We feel really good about where he is. Does he need to continue? Yes, it's a process to be able to go through and say, Okay, this is the goal date, September 4th, is to get him to be 100% for that date.

As you move through fall camp, we got a good plan for that. You go through. Obviously he'll be fully practicing, doing everything with us. Nobody is going to be hitting him, as is the case with all our quarterbacks. Be in blue jerseys like they always are. Probably maybe a heightened sense.

You get guys that trip or fall or whatever in different drills. You want to eliminate all that threat, but continue to develop.

I think he's right where I kind of expected him to be coming into fall camp, where I hoped he would be coming into fall camp. Expecting him to be our starter on September 4th. To me that's really the most accurate part I can say in regards to that. I feel good about where he is mentally and physically. I know it's been a long haul for him. He's once again responded and stepped up to the challenge.

Q. You mentioned the word 'expectations' which has not been said with Indiana football for a long time, but it is now. With the totality of the transfers, the player development, everything that is going on right now, what are your expectations? Where do you think this team really needs to finish this year for it to have achieved what it can achieve?

TOM ALLEN: We've been pretty clear on our goals. Haven't shied away from it. We finished second in the Big Ten East last year. Our goal is to play in the Big Ten championship and win the game. There's a lot of things that have to happen before that occurs.

Right now the next step is having a great fall camp. You mentioned there's been some transfers. Those guys have to come in and mesh with our team. Everything you've done in the off-season is individually driven, some player practices, that's the biggest part we've done together. We're not out there for those as coaches. This will be the first time these guys have been around us in the football setting as far as the new guys.

How well this team comes together is going to be a major factor. How well we perform on game day. How hard are these guys willing to work? We have our first team meeting tonight. Last night was kind of to make sure everybody is back. Tonight really starts fall camp in my mind in regards to that.

There's going to be very specific challenges with our guys. We mapped out what we expect them to do. To me, how they buy into that, how hard they work, how focused they are in meetings, taking notes, paying such an attention to that process. What we've been challenging them is chasing greatness every day. How do you get 1% better every day. You have to be determined every day.

Do we have talent? Yes, we have a lot of talent. Do we have a lot of good players? Yes, I believe we have a lot of good football players. And I love our coaching staff. But how well this 2021 team meshes together, the chemistry we create, how hard we play for each other, with each other, how well we perform each and every day.

The thing is to me you got to get better every week. If those things all happen as they are, I'm excited about what this team can become.

It's really up to them, it's up to our coaching staff. That to me is a challenge we have to address every day. Yeah, I got high expectations for this football team. I haven't shied away from that. I believe we can have a very talented, effective offense and defense. I think we have talent on special teams. But special teams is an area where everybody is involved. The buy-in to those drills we ask them to do, how hard they play, the opportunities they can create, the field position that's put on those plays, will be a major factor in this season.

A lot of expectations. That's been the challenge, is to go from believing, and I believe we have a team that believes,

to now expecting a certain outcome on game day.

Q. You just alluded to the chemistry. You have 17 starters returning, then a bunch of potential impact transfers. How has that meshing process gone?

TOM ALLEN: I think it's a great question.

I think the way I look at that is we don't vary the process we go through to recruit guys, whether they're transfers or out of high school. So getting guys that fit with us, that to me heightens the opportunity for the mesh.

When guys understand the LEO culture we've created, within that culture, I don't care who gets credit because it's not about me. You bring in guys that it's all about them, they want all the credit, that will fracture your culture, that will fracture your locker room. That will not allow us to be our best on game day. The best team wins on game day, not the best group of individuals.

That to me is the key part. That is really yet to be determined because it is a new group. Every year you have that. Your previous year, no matter what happens, good or bad, that group will not be the same. There are going to be new guys. There will be new coaches usually in certain spots.

Bottom line, that's the key. Last year's group had a great chemistry, they played well together, they found a way to make critical plays at critical times. That's what the great teams do. We got to continue to elevate that and keep chasing greatness.

To me, the focus is how can these guys buy into the culture, to make this about each other and not about themselves.

Q. About Jaylin Williams going into fall camp?

TOM ALLEN: Right now he's fully with the team, gone through all the processes we need to go through with him off the field, handled that as a program. So he's with us today and will be with us moving forward.

Q. One of the more interesting battling coming into camp is at running back. Several talented guys. What are some of the most important things you're looking for as you try to make a decision in who starts? What is important for you, what you want to see out of that position in camp?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it's a critical position for us. Obviously you have some talented guys there. We've had the guys coming back. Sampson, David, Mr. Baldwin. I just think

Tim showed in the Maryland game what he can do at this level. Sampson has shown in the past what he can do. David has, as well.

Then you bring in a guy like Stephen who hasn't been here. Once again, it's all got to be earned. We gave it a quick little challenge last night, their résumé that we evaluate, the way they present themselves every day in the weight room, how those coaches feel about them. That's part of it. That's part of the evaluation process. It's kind of Phase I of the fall camp piece.

Now you get into fall camp, see how they handle the day-to-day when we start practicing. All the things that makes them become a complete back. Picking up pressures, being good in pass pro, being a complete guy. Can you catch it out of the backfield? Can you obviously make a guy miss when you got the ball in your hand? Understand the playbook. All those little things it takes.

We'll obviously have multiple guys playing at that position, which is what you want. You need a lot of depth at that spot for sure. We feel good about that depth there.

How the order is going to be, that's up to them. I tell our players it's their job to convince their position coach that they deserve to play. That's on them. That's their responsibility. So film doesn't lie. We'll watch the film closely, grade everything, grade every practice, have a lot of meetings.

That's one nice things about fall camp, it's constant. No academics right now, just two and a half weeks of pure football, being able to focus on that.

We'll find out who the guys are. I have said this many times: Time and pressure reveal, okay? It shows who you really are. Time and pressure. So in fall camp, we'll create both of those. It can be a grind. Last year they didn't really experience fall camp. The length of time was very segmented, isolated, controlled, we're in, we're out, we didn't have meetings at night. It was a way different feel.

We're back to that flow again, so we're going to find out who is going to be ready, who can be counted on in that position room to be put on the field on game day.

Q. You have essentially a record number of kids that have been recognized pre-season on these watch lists. It says a lot about Indiana's program, the rise in this program. How are you dealing with that? How do you feel about having all these kids being recognized?

TOM ALLEN: Well, first of all, I don't have any vote on any of them, okay? They're all pre-season. It is what it is. You

can talk about it. It's a great talking point. Doesn't really mean anything.

But the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, okay? They've used those on people's past, how they've performed, those predictions are put out. Just like pre-season polls, they don't really mean anything. We talk about them, you ask questions about them.

But you have to earn the right to get put on a list. You don't show up and get put somewhere because of a certain name usually. So I guess it's a positive thing, for sure, that you get a chance for your program to be recognized, that we have players that people perceive to be some of the best at their position. So that's a compliment to our coaching staff and to what the program is building.

But at the same time it's the earmuffs and blinders. Can you filter that, not let that become a distraction? That's where I said, that phrase is positive and negative. You have to be able to understand both types of situations. Maybe somebody can feel slighted when they get left out of certain things. That may motivate you.

The other side of it is, people start telling you how good they think you're going to be, you let up in your preparation. That's the whole rat poison phrase that Coach Saban has made famous.

The bottom line is, it's maturity. Can you handle it? I think it's important that you talk about expectations, about certain things, because I think if you just ignore it you don't really do any benefit to your players. At the same time it's just like the position room I just mentioned: you got to earn it. That is earned in every game.

Yeah, pre-season things are great. It gives you some positive momentum, helps in recruiting, shows you where you're at, but it doesn't mean anything on the field. You got to prove it every time you take the field. That's what I'm exciting about getting into fall camp.

Once this starts here tonight, all that stuff is all behind us, and it's about proving that you deserve to play. I love the competition we've got in each room to be able to say, even though one of those guys might not be on that list, he has to fight for his position because if he doesn't, somebody is going to beat him out.

That to me is the way it ought to be. That's the sharpening the iron concept that we preach so much in this program. I know that's what helps you get better.

We're all motivated by wanting to be the very, very best. But I just like the way a lot of those guys that have been

listed, I like the way they've been working this summer. That just shows me they're motivated and they know they got something to prove on the field.

Q. One of your obvious goals is to improve the rushing numbers. When you look at this team, how can you make that happen? What makes you optimistic that that can happen?

TOM ALLEN: I think it starts up front. I think when you look at our offensive line, I look at the way they've worked this off-season, that excites me. The meetings we've had with our strength staff about those guys, talk about each one of them individually, that is encouraging. I feel like the experience that they have. Some young guys we expect to step up give us depth there, is going to be critical.

I think that's step number one.

I think step number two is your running back room, as well. You got a group of guys, we've already addressed that group, you got talent in that room. You have to have talent. I've always said this: the good Lord decides who the great running backs are. It's a god-given talent to be able to make a guy miss in space, do something special with the football. I really believe that.

You can get stronger, tougher, faster along the way for sure. That's part of it. Schematically, being able to do some things. We made a big emphasis on that this summer, this off-season, to be able to make that a priority for us. So we have.

To me, you take those three things together, I believe you're going to get a different result. But we got to go prove it. Doesn't matter what I say, right? It's got to be what our players believe, how hard they're willing to work and what they prove on game day.

To me running the football is a critical part of this. There's no certain number you have to get in my opinion, it's about you got to be effective. You have to be able to run the football when you need to run the football. Whether it is starting a game, closing out a game, being able to keep them off of your throw game, all different things, it's about that balance that you want as an offense where you feel like you can do the things that you want to do, based on the scheme, what they're giving you.

That to me is a huge priority for us, absolutely. I expect us to be better in that area.

Q. This is the second off-season where you've lost a coordinator to a head coaching job. Do you feel like you get better as you go through that in terms of

basically how to deal with that when you're losing a guy you probably don't want to, but you understand why he's going, but finding a way to kind of work through that? Specific to the new face at coordinator this year, what do you think Coach Warren will bring that's a little bit different to that defense, philosophy, attitude?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think you get better. You do something more than once, you learn from it. Obviously both those guys that have had opportunities to be head coaches was a great thing for them. I was happy for them, I genuinely was. You hate to lose great guys, I get that. But that's part of having success.

I think that even shows you as you bring guys here, Hey, this is what the guys that have been here, this is what they've been able to do. That is a great motivator for attracting high-level coaches that want to have that same opportunity in their future, just like I did.

When you think about the defensive side of the football, we have a system that we have here. It's a little bit different than the offense. When you bring in a defensive coordinator to come in, it's not like he's just bringing his system. He's going to learn our system. Obviously there's things that they're going to put their personality on, we made some adjustments for sure like you always do.

At the same time to get more specific about Coach Warren, his attention to detail is just impressive. I think the military background was a big attraction for me, the way he commands the room by personality and by just tone and structure and his discipline that he has is impressive. That's a leadership quality that he has.

I think he's really strong. Just being able to bring some different ideas, some different things. We're all looking to grow and change every year. That's the case with this group.

He'll put his own personality on it. But I'm going to continue to be in every single meeting. That's where I say the difference between offense and defense for me, that's always been the case, that will always be the case. I'll sit in the linebacker room predominantly, he works with those guys. So I'll be with him a lot.

But trust him. Look a little different, for sure, but not a lot. We have a defensive system that we believe in here. Our kids believe in it. But do we got to get better? Yes. We did some great things in 2020, but there's some areas we knew weren't good enough. We got to get better.

We've addressed those. Obviously during fall camp it's

going to be a major emphasis on that. But right now it's a matter of getting as many guys as we can at a high level understanding they have to execute and play our tails off for 60 minutes.

Q. Is there more of a sense of urgency starting out the season against a Big Ten opponent?

TOM ALLEN: Absolutely. I think that's one of the biggest differences. We've had both situations since I've been here. There's without a doubt a built-in, natural sense of urgency that's created by playing a conference opponent. Now, this is the first time we played one on the road since I've been here.

Just an opponent of their caliber, as good as they have been for so many years, are going to be again this year. It's going to be tough. It's going to be very challenging, without question.

What I do believe, I said this before, that the process you go through, everything gets heightened. I think it allows you to get even better than if you're maybe playing somebody different to start the season. There's always excitement about game one. That will always be the case. But it's cranked up a few notches because of where we're playing and who we're playing.

Q. I know you discussed the players involved, you have a better running game this year. We have Nick as your offensive coordinator for the second year. Deland McCullough coming in as the running back coach, NFL experience. Will we see a lot of different kinds of things going forward this year in the running game, a different look, or no?

TOM ALLEN: I think you hit on a good point. You think about a football team. You always talk about how much you improve from game one to game two in the season. Well, I think as a coordinator, I think about myself and my growth. I was a whole lot better the second year than I was the first year. Coach did a great job last year in a lot of areas.

Yeah, things definitely he and I talked about he wants to work on. But I do think he'll be better. It's another year doing it. You can't replace that experience.

Then you add a guy like Deland. There's no question where he's coming from. We're a product of the people that we're around. That influences us. That's one perk of going to the NFL and coming back to college. I've seen a lot of guys do that and be able to bring a lot of good things back, could be schematic things, drills, organizational things, about the way we're doing things scheduling-wise

we made some adjustments based on things that he was around with the Chiefs, how we go through fall camp schedule. That's a benefit of bringing guys like that to your staff.

Yeah, I'm not going to give you too many specifics, but you'll see week one in Iowa City what the differences might be. But without question we got to get better in that area, so I expect it to be something that's focused on fall camp.

Q. You mentioned defensive line as one of the more important position groups. How big of rotations do you want? What do you want more out of that group as a whole than a year ago?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think you go through -- I don't think we have, Hey, we're going to play this many guys. You're going to be rotating two deep for sure. You can do the math on that. But, yeah, you got to have a whole bunch of guys. I would even go as far as to say you have to be almost three deep to be able to rotate those guys in. They're under duress on every snap. That's always been our philosophy here. A lot of places do the same thing. Getting a whole bunch of guys that can play, obviously you need 10, 12 guys you feel good about.

But at the same time, looking back on last season, last year was a little different than we've had in the past. If you just go through and look at the production, I did like an eight-year study of this, different places beyond being here within the system, and our D-line wasn't as productive last year individually as they have been in the past. To me that's the challenge of that group, to make more plays. Jerome Johnson was very productive, but he kind of stuck out in regards to tackles for loss, sacks, creating negative plays. There's some other guys that weren't near as productive, even guys that played his same position. That was very obvious statistically.

To me, I want to see those guys. The scheme is designed for the guys to make plays that are able to make plays. Everybody's got a free opportunity to be that guy. Like I even think one game we had multiple sacks that we missed. We had contact on the quarterback and didn't get him on the ground. I think we left a lot of plays unfinished on the defensive line.

To me, talking about finishing better, playing more aggressively with that group, more fundamentally sound, guys being a year older, being stronger, being tougher, that's what the weight room gives our guy. That toughness piece to me, I want to see us be tougher there and make or plays.

If they ain't going to make them, the linebackers and the

corners are going to make them because that's kind of how we roll. Our safeties are very, very active as well. It's basically sic 'em, the first guy there gets rewarded.

Q. You have a lot of returning starters on defense. How confident are you going into the season having that much experience coming back? Aside from wanting to get shutouts every single game, what are some of the expectations that you have on the entire defense as a whole?

TOM ALLEN: You sit there and you think about your team, you look at them and you know. I've always said this: if you want to have a great defense, you have to have great linebackers. That's a room for us that we're excited about. A lot of production out of that room last year. They're all back, every one of them. Getting Thomas back from injury.

To me, the whole defensive side of the football is a group I have high expectations for. I want us to be a top 10 defense. We've talked about being a top 25 defense. We were last year. We were number one in a few categories nationally. I want us to be a top 10 defense.

To me it's continuing to raise the bar. We talked about first years here being a top 25 defense, what that means statistically. Then to be able to keep elevating the level of play.

You don't ever stay where you are. If you don't have that edge about you, if you don't have that sense of urgency in your preparation, we're playing against such great competition every week that you'll take a step back if you don't. So we have to have that within us.

Like I said, last year doesn't mean anything to this year other than the experience. That does add value. You mentioned the number of guys we've got coming back. That's a big deal. That's why when the people go through and evaluate a team, the number of guys you have coming back, does make a difference because that experience does matter. We have guys experienced on all three levels of our defense.

I have high expectations for these guys and for this unit. I want us to be the best if not one of the best defenses in the Big Ten. That to me is clearly the standard we set for our guys. You want to go win the Big Ten, you better have the biggest defense in the Big Ten, so that's the goal.

Q. Are you moving anybody? Are you taking somebody else's position, putting somebody else in a different position than they played a year ago? Do you have anybody that's going into camp that is like Mike Penix held back a little bit, dealing with an injury that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

he still has to overcome?

TOM ALLEN: We have a few guys. I'm not going to get into specifics at this point. We have some guys that are coming back from surgeries. They're at different levels of recovery. Whether they'll be ready for week one or not we don't know yet. That's somewhat typical.

He's the one that everybody talks about. Marcelino Ball, going through his progression. Feel good about where he's at. He'll be ready for September 4th. But some other guys, too, that have had some of that situation.

I think the biggest thing for us is making sure that we get all of our guys ready. Wherever they're at. I do know that could vary based on their past circumstances.

The first part of your question about position changes, none really come to mind. As we do those, we don't think about it, if we've done it earlier. Last year we made a change where Raheem Lane went from corner to safety. Pretty much everybody knows he's there. That would be a change from last time he played. He did not play last year.

The rest of the guys on defense are pretty much in the similar spots that they were. I don't see any change there. Offensively kind of the same thing.

We obviously have on the offensive line, guys can play multiple positions. That's the case, which is what you want, especially if a guy is a guard, he can play center. Rarely can he play guard and tackle. There are a few that can do that. Don't see any significant changes there.

I like where we're at physically. The guys that we do have to get squared away, get them in position to get rehabbed properly, we'll keep doing that.

Q. Could you touch on the depth at the running back spot.

TOM ALLEN: To me I feel like there's several guys that have the talent and the ability to be a very good football player in this conference. I think there's more than a few, okay? So how that plays itself out, I'm excited to see.

That's one of the positions that I look forward to watching throughout fall camp and evaluating. I guess you would say it's a good problem to have. There's more guys in there. There are several walk-ons that are very talented players, that have come here, have just busted their tails, earned the right. They got a lot of reps in the spring because of some guys coming back from some injuries, just the depth there.

To me that's a position I want to see those guys be involved in special teams, too. That's where they help you. Those guys are 200 pound-ish guys that can run. Should be some of your best football players on the football team. I like that room and I like our tight end room. Those guys are special teams guys. Big bodies. Those are even bigger, taller, longer guys, heavier guys that can run and move around, should help this football team get better because those special teams, whether cover units, return units, man, that separates us now.

You talk about wanting to do special things as a program, you got to be elite on special teams in both your specialists and as a collective group. That's a huge priority for us. We make a big emphasis of it. To me that's going to be a big key that we don't talk about, but I think it will be a big key of us having success in 2021.

Have a great day. LEO.

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