

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good morning. Feels great to be back in this spot, to be able to have our press conferences and be most of you in person, which is great, so appreciate you being here.

Just want to start by saying that had a great finish to fall camp with our mock game on Saturday, something that we traditionally do to be able to create game-like situations and game-like flow for our players and simulating where we're going to be at on the field for everything that we do from start to finish. And then to have a great practice of situational football in spider. So that was really effective, I thought, and very good and now ready to get into game week mode for our team.

So just really appreciate our players' focus and effort throughout fall camp and I thought that's been very positive. Now we got to get ready for opportunity number one.

Do want to announce our captains. We voted for those guys this weekend and we actually have six and I think it's pretty indicative of this team, just have a large number of guys, I think since I've been here it's the most we have had in terms of getting double digit votes by their teammates, just a large group of guys, even many that didn't get selected were very, were close and which kind of speaks to the depth of our leadership on this team and a lot of guys that are respected and guys that were voted on by their teammates.

Micah McFadden, Michael Penix, Cam Jones, Ty Fryogle Marcelino Ball and Peyton Hendershot. We had three on offense, three on defense and just really feel like it's a great group of young men that have been here for awhile and have bought in and have, as I went through and challenged our team when they were about to vote and just gave three things we were looking for and just a talking about guys that you trust, guys that live out LEO, not perfect, nobody is, but guys that hold themselves accountable and hold their teammates accountable.

So obviously a strong group of guys there that this team

has voted as the captains for 2021. And then really want to say how excited we are to open our season at Iowa and so much respect for Coach Ferentz and what he's built at Iowa for so many years and the consistency and such a great program. Great opportunity for this program to play on the road there in Kinnick Stadium and it's going to be great atmosphere, great to have the fans back and it's going to be a tough and challenging environment to be in, without question, and so, but just so much respect for their team as you go through and evaluate them. I know everybody's in the same boat, you're looking at 2020 film and projecting some things personnel-wise and schematically and everybody's in that same situation.

But defensively they're just so sound, do such a great job up front and how just disciplined they are. Physicality at the linebacker position and athleticism there. And then the secondary is really where their most experience lies in so many different guys back there, played a lot of football, and they just don't make a lot of mistake, they make you really have to execute at a high level.

And then offensively it just starts up front for them and excellent running game and quarterback that I know that played some really good football, especially as the season progressed and they expect and we expect him to take that growth opportunity, like we all did not have a previous spring like he did not and just a guy that's a highly-talented individual that has a big-time arm and a lot of weapons around him. They're always good at tight end and that continues to be the case and same at receiver, a lot of playmakers there.

Special teams really jumps out. They were the No. 1 special teams unit in the Big-10 last year overall and we were actually No. 2 overall. So that's going to be a play a big role in this game. And they're very talented and in the return game and at their specialist position.

So a lot of respect for this program and so we're going to have to play our best football. So excited for the opportunity. Questions?

Q. We have talked a lot in the last couple of years about your own growth and maturity as a head coach,

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but last year with this program being in the national spotlight a lot and taking that next step as you would have preferred this program that target path to be on, what have you learned from that that helps you get ready for this 2021 season and what may lie ahead this year as well?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think that the thing that you learned is just the true value of staying true to the process and how you get your team to perform. Because it's all about consistent performance and how do you get that. Whether that's through high expectations, low expectations or everything in between, how do you get your team to perform at a high level each and every week to be able to block out those distractions.

And in the past those distractions have been negative distractions, people telling you what you can't do and judging you based on your past. And now you have to be able to block out the positive distractions and people, maybe some people saying that they're expecting you to do more things than you've maybe done in the past. You still have those that continue to doubt, but that's a part of it and that's okay.

But I think just understanding how to address that with your guys. I think you don't shy away from it. I don't think that anything that's assumed and not addressed in both positive and negative situations I don't think creates a very positive outcome. I think you need to address things. So we have tried to address this and talk about it as a team and being able to allow ourselves to consistently prepare at a high level.

Because that's why Chase was chosen in 2021 at the beginning of the program and you don't just get better because you have a lot of guys back and you got to a lot of guys that are supposed to be playing at a certain level, it's what are you doing every single day. So I think it's just been just a confirmation of how you do that and I've been fortunate to be a lot of places that have had, been a part of turnarounds and then you have success and then you have to play to those standards. So not as necessarily as a college head coach, but definitely part of those staffs and then in high school as well.

So just, I think it's just the people, it's leading a team, it's building a team and those principles are consistent and the same, no matter what the level is. But I think it's the discipline to be true to who you are every day and not fall victim to listening to the outside noises occasionally. I think that to me is really the key to all this. And what time teaches you is to trust that, to not try to go out and reach for things that you think might be what they are. I think sometimes we over complicate situations and it's not easy,

but it's a simple process.

Q. You've talked about this a little bit, even going as far back as maybe spring, certainly media days, but with Ty, what were the conversations like with him when he was going through the process in terms of weighing up his decision to stay or go and I guess just kind of to what degree did he vocalize, I suppose, recognizing what he could get out of coming back for another year in terms of saying, this is where I know I can get better if I come back and this is where I want to aim and this is kind of what I have in mind.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think for Ty and his decision-making process and we treated him like we did all the guys, we go through and we have a chance to sit down with them. It was a little bit unique I think with Ty because he, if I just kind of would give you a transparent answer, it was like in the beginning I felt pretty confident that he would probably come back. Then in the middle I was like 50/50, I wasn't sure. And then at the end I was like, you know what, I feel, after meeting with him again, I felt pretty good that he had had that decision made up that he was going to return.

And I think it's a healthy process to go through. I think for him he was, from the very beginning, pretty realistic about where he stood. He understood that you kind of look at the two areas, you look at the pool of guys that are going to be entering the draft and how that affects you and where you kind of fall within that group and then you look at yourself and how much more do I have to grow and to improve.

So he looked at those two things and really felt from the beginning that it was probably be in his best interest to return. But the thing about Ty that I really really love, and I mentioned it last week, but, you know, and I've come to the conclusion where if a young man kind of gets in his head that it's time to move on, it's hard to kind of reprogram that back. I've seen guys come back and they're worried about getting hurt and they're worried about this and they start pressing, because they want to make more plays because this is like, hey, I came back for this. And they don't just let the game just come to them and they have a little bit different approach to practice. And I never sensed that from him and it was just, it was full speed ahead every practice, never ever looking for any veteran days off during spring ball or fall camp. I mean, that wasn't even part of his processing. Now you do a great job as a staff of taking care of him and he's obviously earned the right to be able to have maybe some of those things, but he wasn't ever asking for them, never expected them. I think that's a big deal. And he practices so hard. He just, he's physical, he's tough and I just been impressed.

I've done this enough to see guys all different ways and

sometimes when a guy comes back and doesn't have that right mind set it's almost like he probably would have better off if he would have moved ahead, because they were just not as good a football player. Because they got there by playing with an edge and playing just relentless in how they approached things and that's how you got to play at this level, that's how you have to prepare at this level. So we laid the facts out and Coach Heard did a great job talking with him as well, but I think he knew from the beginning that it would probably be in his best interest to keep developing and have an opportunity.

And obviously he has a close relationship with Michael Penix and with Michael coming back, so I think those things played variables as well for him in his decision making.

But really glad he's here with us another year and he got voted as captain, you know, which last year he wasn't a captain and so it's a tremendous honor for him to be viewed that way by his teammates. And he's a very quiet leader, without question, but within the receiver room and by his daily action, he's, his actions speak very, very loudly.

Q. These depth charts aren't set in stone, but Stephen Carr at the top of it at running back, are you, I guess, at this point ready to name him your opening day starting running back, if so, how did he win that, if not where is competition still going or are any other positions that you feel like you made a decision at?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think for him at that position it became pretty obvious. There's no doubt, he came here and knew and he had to earn that and I believe that he has. And so, but we're going to play a lot of guys at that position, always have, always will. But he will be the starter for game one and I feel like that once again it was really, from day one he came here with zero entitlement at all, know he had to earn the spot, ready to work, total team guy. Not just in his words, his words definitely were that way, but his actions, and that's what I look for and just body language and just how hard does he practice and how hard does he work on special teams and during those drills and those things that we ask him to do in those areas.

So, but a room that we really are excited about and he's elevated himself within that room. And love how he practices, just even watching him during our last couple days we have been going with some spider practices and just going full speed and finishing runs out. And so that's what you want in all the guys and that's the standard that Coach McCullough has set in that room.

But, yeah, excited for him and feel like that he is a guy that I think that even in that room and in all the opposite side of the football everybody would agree that he's earned it.

Q. We have seen Michael during camp obviously, he's still full go and how does he look the last week and then also how are David Ellis and Sio doing? Are they ready to go also?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so I would say that really encouraged with Michael's progress and I know we have talked about him for the last several months and probably every time I have spoken I've gotten a question about him and understandably so. But I think that all along it's always been about just constant progress, constant working for him and as a matter of fact I met with him this past weekend and met with several different guys and for different reasons and he and I talked about that and I really commented him on his just buying into that process and how hard it is. You're going through fall camp, fall camp is hard and he's doing more than he's ever done in regards to every time we had a special teams period or a different type of period he was always with the training staff doing extra work, with our both weight room staff as well as our medical guys, just doing rehab and strengthening and conditioning and just doing extra things and did that all fall camp. But even he did it last week.

So he bought into that. He understood that was part of it, it was a constant process to get him ready for September 4th. So very encouraged by his progress and he's right where we hoped he would be and he's a hundred percent ready to be the starter on Saturday and so that's great.

And then David Ellis is still progressing, so I would say just continuing to monitor that and every day we got several days now to get him in that position, so hopeful, but you never know.

And then Sio has been cleared and so he's ready to go and he'll be with us tomorrow out there at practice. So just there's going to be guys that are working through some things which is always the case, even this time of year, even though you haven't played a game yet and we got a few guys in that mode, so we'll, guys are ready they're going to play, if not, next man up.

Q. Have you used much of the extra time to look at Iowa and what are your takeaways of that team right now?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, a lot of time to watch them. Like I say, all three phases impressive. Just they, you have to physically beat them, they don't beat themselves very often. That's a key thing. If you think about just the fundamentals of this game, you think about how they have long-term success in a program and there's a toughness to their program that sticks out and that's a key too long-term

success. The special teams play sticks out. That's a key too long-term success. Consistent performance, they do a great job in that area. Very well coached. Don't make a lot of mistakes. You run the football well, you stop the run. That make it's tough on teams. They don't give up a lot of explosive plays schematically and by their discipline on defense.

So a lot of things all kind of add to the reason why they're good every year. So that's something that you look at. And their player development, they get guys, they kind of have prototypical guys at each spot per their height and weight. Different numbers maybe every year but similar results. So that's just a sign of a consistency there and a program that's been in place for a long time, a staff that's been in place for a long time.

So that's why I just, a lot of respect for my, from my, as the head coach at Indiana and what we're attempting to build here every single year and have a consistency that no matter who is out there each given year they play at a certain standard and that's what you see from them. So there's a reason why some are picking them to win the West and it's kind of seemed that way every year, they're always in the conversation. So hats off to them and we got to be able to -- we got to play really good.

Q. Two-part question. First you talked about attention on the program earlier, do you enjoy that, is this different than anything you've handled in the past and then have former players reached out to you at all ahead of the season just with any messages at all coming into it?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say there's been a lot of messages, a lot of excitement within our alumni base, about our program and where we are and the direction that we're going of the so, yeah, that's been super awesome to have that. Appreciate their engagement and their excitement. Guys that Vaughn Dunbar's a young man that came by last weekend and I knew who he was, he's a year older than me, knew him out of high school and comes here, but never met him before. And so just a great, great player here, without question. But just to hear him talk about the program and how excited he is and got a chance to see the facilities he hadn't been back in a while, and just talked about, man, would love to be able to be here at this time and be a part of what's going on. And then just even the locker room the way it looks it's so different than when he played and even the way the stadium looks and feels. And so just hats off to our administration for what they have invested in football.

So guys like that, but, yeah, there's definitely a lot of that and that's awesome and but, yeah, the expectations are

what they are. Like we said in the beginning, we came here with a vision to be able to change the expectations and create belief. That process is ongoing and so we're embracing it. But you got to be able to have those ear muffs and blinders, that part doesn't change, and to be able to create the focus that you want to be able to be an elite performer on game day.

Q. In a sport where interceptions have become less and less fewer of them I guess you would say, whether it's because of the pace of the play or shorter passes, your team was very good at that last year. Why do you think that was and how do you try and teach those kids the ball skills?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think you get what you emphasize. We emphasize so much about takeaways. We have three, we call it our DNA on defense, and we have a DNA for offense, defense and special teams. So the DNA on defense is takeaways, tackling and effort. And takeaways is the very first one. It's been that way since I've been here and I believe in that.

So we, man, we just work on it. If you come to our practice they're going to be doing something with takeaways every single day. We say we install that mindset every single day. And there's multiple layers to it. There's the pressure up front that you have to use to create those opportunities and quarterbacks, if they have time to throw and they get in rhythm and they can step up into their throws and do that on time they're hard to get. But if you can get them off their spot, you can get them to move around, make them feel uncomfortable mentally and physically so it's affecting the quarterback, that's a big variable.

So it's the pressure up front which affects the quarterback and then the mental affecting of the quarterback is how you can disguise your coverages, the things that you're doing in the back end. And then there's ball skills, you got to catch the ball. So we work on ball skills every day. So we tell them, they're not on defense because they can't catch, they're on defense because they're great athletes and they can create the takeaway. And we say they are created, they don't just happen by chance.

So I get it, certain years you get more than others and there's been years where we worked on them and we don't ever work on them any less, but definitely those were, and I'll take them anyway we can get them, whether they're fumbles or interceptions, we just want to get the ball from the offense and give it to our offense.

So I just think that there's a lot of reasons for us creating those and they're big and that's how you win football games. You got to protect it on offense and you got to be

able to create the takeaways on defense.

Q. Micah McFadden and Ty Fryfogle, they're your captains, they're All-Americans, they were also probably the lowest-rated recruits in their respective classes. How were they so undiscovered in recruits and what have been the keys to them to take that step?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it's probably, that's great question to ask as far as how were they not given more recognition in high school. I guess there's a lot of reasons for that. You got a guy like Micah who did play in a high-profile high school program. The benefit that I had was my son played with him so I got to watch him practice. When I was at South Florida the way everything worked in regards to my schedule, I had the Tampa Bay area as my recruiting area.

So that was one unique thing, I never left the state to recruit. I really hardly never left for recruiting for my area, I didn't leave the Tampa Bay area. And they practiced actually at night.

So what I would do is I would go and I would do my, because I was a dad, I was allowed to be there as much as I wanted to be. And so literally they would, I would go do my recruiting during the spring time as the DC there and then I would go at night and sit up in the press box with their video guy and watch practice. So just got to see him play a lot. I thought he was a really good player. I was actually shocked that he didn't get more highly recruited.

But I will say this, he was a guy that, probably my first year that Thomas was there, he wasn't getting to play that much, and which is maybe a little unusual for a guy that goes on to be what he's become, for sure. But then Thomas's senior year which would have been Micah's junior year it started to click for him. And what I noticed him on was special teams. That's where I noticed just a nose for the ball. Covering kicks, covering punts. And I think it's -- and I learned that from Coach Dullaghan years ago, there's two sides to that. So he used to always tell me that if you want to find out who your good running backs are, and we did this with our sophomores when they came to the varsity for the first time, we just kick them the ball and just see, see how they handle making people miss. And same way on covering kicks. You find who how out who your linebacker and safeties by who can cover kicks. I never forgot that.

And so I would watch him on special teams and you could just see who is got a knack to get to the guy with the ball. And that's why I say it's a simple game. So if you got the ball in your hands you got to make guys miss and go score. On defense you got to find the guys that got the football and get them on the ground. And I thought Micah had a knack for that.

So, and he just kept playing better and better and so, but still he never got a lot of, he was probably maybe a little undersized, you know, and so, but I didn't care, I knew he was good and we went ahead and pulled trigger on him and never wavered with it.

Then with Ty it was, he's from a really small high school in south Mississippi, not a lot of people go down there to watch him. Coach Heard had a chance to watch him, have him in camp when he was at Ole Miss and so he believed in him, even though he once again was not a highly recruited or ranked guy. And he took a little longer when he got here to kind of figure some things out but always had a really good ball skills and just kept getting stronger and faster.

And so I just think sometimes it's just a matter of having that gut where you think a kid's got something to him. And but you say both of them are tough guys, both of them are actually pretty quiet and they love to work. So I think you kind of get those core things you look for in guys. And they fit with us character wise and got to know their families and believed they were really high-quality young men that they were going to come here and do everything we asked them to do and they just bought in and they took off.

So I guess it's a great story it's a great testament to these young men and how hard they have been willing to work and to our coaching staff to kind of know some key things you want to look for in a young man and when you find that you trust your evaluation and you have to kind of not be, fall victim to the recruiting rankings. Sometimes they're right, sometimes they're not, but recruiting is not an exact science. Anybody that acts like they got it figured out, they're not being honest. It's hard to project sometimes. But you just got to trust your gut and press on.

Q. My understanding is that the rules this year allowed you to only have nine practices where you could tackle. How much of a factor do you think that is going into the first game especially and what might your biggest concern going into the first game be?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, interestingly enough when you looked at those rules we went back and look at our last two years of practice and we did not have to modify anything to meet the standards for those requirements. We have only ever had two full scrimmages since I've been here in regards to where you had a whole time of just live tackling in the scrimmage situation. And then the number of practices that we had that were considered tackle practices and portions of that.

So the good news is I think we have already, I've become a

believer in that, trying to keep guys up, keep guys healthy, we try to emphasize tackling either bags or tackling sleds or whatever things that you, different mechanisms you can use to. Especially last year, we were trying to even do that because of COVID and trying to eliminate the individual contacts of guys when we were kind of in the beginning stages of trying to figure out COVID. But even 2019 we kind of had a similar.

So I feel good about that, but I think you always are going to find that week one tackling is always a little bit of a concern, I think you always worry about that. And we, because especially when you're playing such a good running back and then some receivers that have some escapability on their team. But hopefully on our side we got that same benefit as well against them.

So I think that you just got to work on it as much as you can and within the rules that you got. Like I say, I feel good about what we were able to do compared to what we have done in the past. But to me, hopefully because we have more guys that have played -- I remember two years ago when this group was playing in 2019 our first game of the season we had way too many missed tackles in that first game there in Lucas Oil Stadium. And so, but I remember Micah was one of them, had a lot of missed tackles. So he was younger then, two years younger. For sure, but hopefully the experience and the reps and all the things we have done we have worked so hard to try, within those rules, of, because you got to be, the second DNA that we talk about on defense after takeaways is tackling. We want to be the best tackling team in America. So we just got to keep working on it and we'll continue to did that because we won't live tackle the rest of the season except on game day.

Q. Did you ever find out the origin of Jaren Handy's nickname, Stone, and kind of attached on to that. With him and Ryder we have asked you a lot about them going back to when they came into the program, but now as kind of the rubber meets the road you start thinking about actual game plans and where they fit in. What are those two guys going to bring your defensive line that maybe either it didn't have or maybe it didn't have enough of I guess last season?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think first of all really the maturity and leadership of Ryder is what sticks out. The physical maturity. He's a big man. Not only tall, but just he's thick and strong. And I think he's provided what I hoped he would when he came here and that was to a position group that did not have a lot of strong leadership in terms of just guys that were confident to speak. A lot of good guys, but none of them that were willing to speak up. And for him to come in here with a new team and it helped that he came

in in January, but so he's provided that. And then just steady play, just consistency and understanding football. And I just hope he that, the hope is that he just elevates that room and I think we have seen that and the in the preparation, but obviously it matters what they do on game day.

And then as far as with Stone, I mean it's just a athleticism that he has naturally. He, we actually had them by position groups come to our house over the summer and so we had the whole D-line over there. And we were playing basketball there in our driveway and fortunately we purchased one of those I think it's a Gorilla basketball, so it's very sturdy, I guess that's my point, with like a breakaway ring. Because if we had not, he would have completely destroyed our basketball hoop the way he dunked the ball so violently and athletically multiple times.

And so our goal survived, but I left there just kind of like, whoa, that's different. So, but he's still young and just trying to learn a system and it's new for him and everything, so, but I think that's rushing the passer, both those guys, is what you want them to bring, stopping the run, being physical guys. And they get, they got length, both of them are tall and long and Stone definitely really athleticism is what sticks out when you see him play. So that's something that we need in this program. We just talked about being able to affect the quarterback, that's the number one job that you want to do defensively and being able it physically do that.

So that's really where those guys, I need them to just keep buying in and playing hard and practicing hard and getting better every single week.

Q. You mentioned the extra work for Michael he's been doing, does that continue leading up to Saturday or does he have a normal workload now. And then part two is, I'm wondering I don't know how this works that naming him announcing him the starter I know it's kind of been assumed all along he would be ready, but until he's ready he's not ready. So was there ever a moment in practice or in the locker room where you announced to the team Michael's starting or just kind of let it go?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say more let it go. We definitely didn't announce it. I guess that, to answer your question though, it's a good question, about his, the process that you go through. Yeah, I mean, there was the expectation that he would be ready, but he had to get ready. So, and he's done that. So yeah, he will be the starter on Saturday.

So that was the expectation from the beginning, if he did

what he was supposed to do. Now there's no doubt it could have not been the case based on if things didn't go the way you wanted them to or whatever happens along the process. So there's no guarantees with that.

But as far as naming for the team, we never really had to say that. But at the same time we have had opportunities for Jack to take reps with the one's which he's done that consistently throughout camp and to make sure both guys are ready and then obviously getting Donaven McCulley ready as well, just because you got three guys there that I believe all have special skill sets. So bottom line is that Michael's been doing a great job and the things we have asked.

And to your question about throughout the season it's more of a maintenance part of that. So in fall camp there was a lot of conditioning emphasis and doing specific things to continue to rehab. So the rehab part of it, I think the main part, just like any other guy that's injured, you go through that. But from a conditioning perspective, no, won't be doing those extra things. But you just continue to maintain the exercise that you do. We do things, a lot of guys have that that they do. Oftentimes it happens pre-practice and post-practice which be will the same case with him. More of that probably than during practice. So but that will be a continuous part of his process like even other guys are coming back from either ACL surgeries or either, with Thomas and his hip surgery he has things he has to keep doing and will continue to do throughout the season.

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