

Indiana University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 13, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Head Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: (No microphone.)

Is that better?

Just a great atmosphere that the fans created for us. So really appreciate that. And obviously need that again this week. So thought our performance was very solid.

Special teams really stuck out. As we saw in person and as you go back and watch the film, just really proud of Coach Teegardin and the job that he's done there. And Ryan McNerney is his quality control guy that does a tremendous job working together and came up with a great game plan. And the guys executed it. So creating explosive plays in that area of the gamely is really, really important for us moving forward.

And to be able to set up our offense and defensively tackle well, ran to the football, played physical. Made some adjustments there as they got a couple drives on us late in the half and early in the third. And offensively being able to get some more guys involved I thought was very important for us to be able to do that, some different guys. And getting Michael to continue to grow and develop and comfortable with his situation.

So just a very important game for us. Now we turn our full attention to Cincinnati. And just really impressed with their football team. Had a chance to spend the last couple days watching them. And, really, Coach Fickell's done a tremendous job there in both recruiting. The last couple seasons, they've won a lot of football games. And a very, very talented quarterback. And a lot of good speed and skill guys across the board and in the back field and big men up front and defensively very, very disciplined, very sound. And don't give up a lot of things. And really do a good job tackling and keeping things in front of them.

So really, really good football team. They're ranked what they are for a reason, and they've earned it. So just very excited about the opportunity that creates this weekend and excited for our fans to be there in full force. I know it's already a sellout. And just really means a lot to me that the

fans are getting behind us. And we understand the opportunity that this presents. So really excited about this coming weekend and ready for questions.

Q. You got a taste of those Top 10 rankings last year and such and your schedule, and the Top 10 rankings now look very similar with four of your opponents there.

But with an opportunity with Cincinnati coming in town this week and especially with how the first opportunity at Iowa didn't go the way you wanted, how much of a sense of urgency do you feel in this weekend's game to make more of a statement than you did in week one?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think a sense of urgency is probably a good way to put it. I think there's no question that's what this situation creates. I think that, just like you mentioned, you know, you have opportunity week one, and we're going to have many opportunities as you see the polls out as the season unfolds to be able to be able to play against top teams in the country. And our schedule is full of them. And this is the next one.

And so as we told our team yesterday, it's the biggest game of the season because it's the next one. And our guys understand that. But you asked what opportunity presents itself. And the chance to be able to just go out there and prove yourself every week. And that's really what it comes down to. I think that's what we talked about, you know, even before two weeks ago and leading up to that, just being able to understand that it's about earning it every single week. And when you play such a schedule like we do, then you are blessed with the opportunities to be able to play elite teams consistently.

So no matter what happens in the past, good or bad, you've got to flush it and you've got to get ready for the next opportunity. And that's what this one presents. So definitely one we want to make sure we're fully ready for.

Q. You mentioned at the top talking about Mike and seeing his comfort level improve a little bit. I wanted to see if you could elaborate on that a little bit. When you had a chance to watch him again, how are you



seeing him progress in terms of getting more comfortable, in terms of play calling perspective, and creating rhythm for him. How much closer do you think he is to looking like himself at this point?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. I thought it was an important next step. Definitely have more work to do, but I feel like it was important to get the run game going with Stephen Carr. He was our offensive player of the game. And I think that's indicative of how their offensive line blocked and the perimeter blocking and tight ends blocking and he and all of the running backs running the football well.

But I just think getting that established and then being able to have good sound protection. A couple things in there that we didn't -- going back and watching the film, meeting as a staff. Just continuing to help him feel comfortable with even just the progressions and play calling and everything that we're doing.

I did think, though, there was one where he was flushed out of the pocket, got a facemask call, and then ran and slid. The decisiveness of that decision was good. And just to be able to get back there and play football and not overthink things. And that's part of it you're just working through. And that's where I think he's got to continue to play.

So I think it was definitely a very positive step in the right direction for Michael. And just getting more comfortable every single week. And like I said, during the week, it's not an issue because you're just -- you know the situation and you'll be able to know what's going on around you. But I felt last week's practice was better for him than it was the week before. So as we continue to help this process move forward, I think you're just going to see him getting better and better.

Q. Wanted to ask you about the status of James Head and Jaylin Williams and then some of your impressions of Desmond Ridder, a big QB who's got some NFL potential obviously?

TOM ALLEN: We do expect Jaylin Williams to be back this week. James Head I doubt will be. He's still coming back from an injury. He's progressing well, doing more and more every single week. I think he'll be back hopefully in the near future.

But in regards to Desmond. He's a special player. The thing about it, he's a long guy, six-four. He's big. He's 215-plus pounds. Runs a lot. Runs really, really effectively. And as we all know, that puts challenges on a defense when a quarterback can do that. And he stayed healthy. He runs the ball a lot but has to be able to stay

healthy. And that's a tough thing to do at this level.

Really, his passing just keeps getting better and better. You go back and watch in years past, which we've done that when we you go through. And obviously, as a team, we spend a lot of time studying over the summer as well and look in previous years and see his growth as a quarterback. And he's just really throws the ball down the field with a lot of accuracy now. Just really has a really talented receiver core.

So very, very good football player. Definitely future NFL guy. Yeah. You have that kind of guy leading your team, that's a very, very good formula for a lot of success.

Q. I know the secondary has been pretty banged up through the first two weeks of the season. What's your assessment of the back end so far? What are you looking for next week against Cincinnati?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. We have been a little bit. Devon Matthews, we'll know more about him later this week. But we also did find out that Chris Keys tore his ACL in the game. So he'll be out for the season, which is disappointing for him. And I really feel bad for him. He's worked really, really hard. So Noah Pierre is probably going to be elevated from his -- move him from playing mostly safety to playing corner.

But that's just part of going through the season. And getting Jaylin back will be big for us. And just got to continue to develop our younger guys. That's where it's going to be big.

And hoping to get Jonathan Haynes back in the mix this week as well. So that will help us as we get Devon, a/k/a Monster, get him back with us as soon as possible.

But, yeah, every year seems like maybe a certain position has a little more challenges than others. And that seems to be our spot for this year. But guys are working really, really hard back there.

Obviously, their role is going to be huge this weekend because our secondary is going to be tested by a very, very talented receiver core and really elite quarterback. So just expect them to be -- just play a little better this week than we did last week. That's the whole key.

Defense made a lot of growth in some areas last week -- or week one to week two. And because of that, Micah McFadden and Ryder Anderson were both our defensive players of the game. Those guys, their leadership and production continues to be at a high level. So just really encouraged by the secondary. I know they caught some

passes on us underneath. A lot of that was leverage and positioning and different things. But just got to continue to get better. And I know we will because our guys are really, really motivated. We've got a great staff.

Q. Getting back to the offense, getting them going. That starts and stops with the offensive line, the progression there. It's a veteran line. So thought it would maybe be a little further along. They gave up back-to-back sacks the other night in a sequence that probably didn't make you very happy. But where are they right now? How far along are they to getting both the passing and running games going?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. To me, need to continue to develop there. Two plays that you alluded to. First one, got beat on a TE stunt, which shouldn't happen, was a mistake in communication. That's what I talked about before.

I think that's the part you have to continue to work through when you have the guard/tackle working together. With Luke back, those guys have another week to be together. There was poor communication on the one side. And then Luke just got beat one on one off the edge, which can't happen. But those were the two sacks that we gave up.

And, yeah, definitely, I just think every single week you just go through. And I felt like there was -- even in the run game, there was some improvement for sure. And I felt like that -- and as I mentioned before, they're two inside guys who are very big and strong and talented guys and just really guys had to really strain and work and finish, which is good. And so felt like that we were on the right people more even than in the past. Stayed on guys. I thought we had better effort up front, better finish up front. Still got to make sure we don't misread with our backs. That happened a couple times, which affected some runs. We'll continue to get better with that. I think as a collective group with Stephen Carr, he is new working with those guys, with our system, learning, more and more reps. Obviously wasn't here over the summer -- or, excuse me, wasn't here in the springtime. So you just continue to get everything you've done from fall camp on.

It's just a group that has continue to mesh. And to me, that's what we say, teams are made during the season and every single week, the work that you put into it and everything we do in practice.

And one thing we're doing a lot more of this year is we're doing more good on good during practice to be able to create a better look for each side of the football to be able to really do a good job of preparing our front because that's the key on both sides to be able to work against high-level guys that can give you the proper resistance, proper

movements. And you have to execute technique at a high level to be able to get that.

So that's something we're really working hard on. And the O-line needs to keep coming together. They have to play really, really well because it definitely starts and stops with them.

Q. Returning to Michael for a second. I think the word you used was instinctive, talking about just a couple of the things that he did on Saturday.

TOM ALLEN: Who was that?

Q. Michael Penix.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah.

Q. I guess as you sort of evaluate how he can get better and improve from these two weeks, how much of it is technical in your mind and how much of it maybe is just more finding that timing, that rhythm to where he's doing things almost without thinking, where everything is just kind of, as you said, instinctive for him?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. I think it's more rhythm. I think it's more timing than technical. I think it's being able to do what you do. Fundamentally sound at a high level, you know, with being live. And I think that's the key. And just the whole dynamic that that creates and the part of it.

That's where, like I say, you only get that on game day. You're not going to do that during the week. The timing you do, those different things. But doing them when it's live, when there's full pressure and everything is full speed, tackle. That's where you just -- that's why the games are so critical and just being able to even in the game Saturday to keep him out there as long as we felt we should and needed to to be able to get what we wanted to get out of that was very important. And still be wise in how we used those reps. And get a chance for Jack to compete and play at a high level.

So, to me, that's really important that he's able to do that. And I feel like that the more he plays, the better he's going to get and the more of those natural things, those instinctive things that he does and has built inside of him, those keep coming out more and more each week. And that's what we expect to happen. And even as the competition increases and intensity increases, you have to play at a high, high level.

Q. What are two or three points of emphasis that you'll throw at your guys before this game against

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Cincinnati?

TOM ALLEN: You know, I think number one, it's just continued focus on just the relentless attention to detail. I just think that that has to be how you perform in those pressure moments. We've had a chance to play a really, really good football team week one and that exposed certain things. So now to have to be able to -- another opportunity to play another top 10 team and to play them and have the execution of our offense, execution of our defense, execution of our special teams at an elite level, the attention to detail and those things in those moments against that type of competition. That's the focus. And that's the way I want our guys to prepare and how we ultimately are going to play. So that's step number one for me.

And number two is just -- I think it's to be able -- it's the fundamental things. And even though as the games get bigger throughout the season, the emphasis on fundamentals doesn't change. To be able to fundamentally position yourself with footwork and hand placement and how we're going to tackle and the angles we're going to take and where our eyes are going to be. We're continuing to teach those things because those are fundamental things that don't go away and they are part of what you do. So much a part of defense is eye discipline and making sure we made a huge emphasis on that. That's going to be another huge point this week.

And the third is communication with our guys working together on the offensive line, working together with our defense. Everything that we do with our quarterbacks and our running backs. The different things they have in protections and the receivers and the things that they're doing together.

And then our secondary with the linebackers and linebackers with the D-line. So those are just things to me that just -- you know, things show up. They come out in big games when you have crowds and noise and you have to have the ability to make sure you're on the same page.

It's just one miscommunication here or there can be the difference in the game. That's why those things in a game like this when it's going to be so much -- every play is going to have so much on the line, which is what I see in games like this where you have to be able to be at your best in those moments and have those executions that you're looking for.

So, to me, that's what you emphasize. And it's the process that you go through to continue to get better at that. And every week you want to see those mistakes continue to diminish each and every week.

Q. You touched on this a little bit after the game, but the student section and how it was packed and how they got here early and how they energized the team just how important was that? And just how important is that to continue?

TOM ALLEN: Well, to me, it's really important. And that's why I've talked about it multiple times and did right after the game and went over there afterwards to thank them for being there early and just encouraging them to come back next week. And, yeah, for that to continue.

Because, to me, you just create a culture. That's just what our section looks like. That's what the student section looks like when you come to a game at Indiana. And that hasn't always been that way in the past.

But they have been awesome, and I appreciate that. That's why I don't want them to ever think that we take any of that for granted whatsoever. So just need -- just know that our players, they talked about it and they were interacting with them too on social media about it and just showing their appreciation and thankfulness for it.

So, yeah, crowds energize. That's why home field is an advantage for a reason. And part of it is the familiarity of your routine, but the bigger part of it is crowd noise and the energy it gives the home team.

And then the distraction it can become to the visiting team. And the ability for them to have to struggle in communicating. So when they're on offense and it's third down and, man, our defense is on the field that it's just deafening to where they can't hear anything. Everything has to be silent count, communication with hand signals and gives us an advantage in the jump, on the snap. And all those different things that go into play when you play with that behind you.

And so that's why -- just the energy that they bring pregame and during warm ups, just everything that goes into that, to the psyche of our guys. So, yeah, it's important. Very, very much appreciate it. And really excited for it to continue the rest of the season.

Q. We've seen two very different versions of your football team the first two weeks. Just curious as to what team are we going to see in week three and going down the rest of the season? Are we ever going to see what we kind of saw against Iowa again? Or is it going to be more of what we saw against Idaho?

TOM ALLEN: Well, certain parts of that game I hope we never see again, you know. But, obviously, we played a



different opponent week two. So what you're looking for is consistent performance and consistent execution. Consistent energy.

There's power in consistency.

And we challenge our team all the time about embracing the boredom of that consistency. That's a powerful concept of how you stick to the process and become great. And it's something that we teach a lot of time to our guys. Even though we've got a lot of guys that have played a lot of football, you just have to maybe rephrase it in certain different ways to be able to emphasize it so it doesn't become stale, but, at the same time, that's what you want. It's consistent performance.

And so to be able to execute things I've talked about answered in previous questions about to be able to do the fundamental things the right way, critical moments of the game and being able to execute offense, defense, special teams in those moments when it counts the most and when the game is on the line and when there's a lot to play for.

But that's where you want guys to get to where that just becomes the norm. This is how we play. This is standard. The opponent doesn't drive that. The clock doesn't drive that. The circumstances don't drive that. You drive that and you control that, your focus and your attention to detail.

So that's what we're trying to get to as a program, as a team. And that, to me, is where you want to be able to have just that steady, that's who we are when we play. That's what we talk about our DNA on each side of the football, offense, defense, special teams. That's who we are. That's what we're known for. And when you see us play, that's what you think of and that's what we want. And we talk about those things. They're plastered in every single room. We talk about them every single day. And we want that consistent performance from our guys. So that's the expectation for this program is to be able to perform in those moments at a high level.

Q. Almost following up on that. Would some of those expectations that you talked about -- I think this game against Cincinnati was scheduled in something like 2014. You weren't here yet at the time. Seeing the evolution of both programs on a larger scale, is this a game you expected five, six years ago to be a nationally relevant game like this? How have you seen both of these programs develop to the point where this is a game that matters at a national level?

TOM ALLEN: I would say if you think back -- I don't know

exactly when the game -- I know it was scheduled before I got here, and I got here in 2016. So if it was scheduled in 2014, I mean, back then, you know, I know we played them when I was at University of South Florida in 2015. And they had the number fourth ranked offense in the country. And they were a really good football team.

But at that time, Indiana was building and was not in that situation. So, yeah, to be able to predict it 2021, I think that probably would not have been part of what anybody thought at the time. So I think it's even been written about even in the summer about the upcoming game, in anticipation of this game, the two programs that are in a different spot than they had been in the past, even though Cincinnati was a successful program at that point. They weren't top 10.

So, yeah, they've elevated their program and we've elevated our program. So definitely different than what it maybe would have been projected when it was contracted all these years ago. But that's what makes it awesome and exciting and great opportunity for both programs to be able to play in these types of games that people are talking about and they're interested in. And that's how you build your program. You get those opportunities and a chance for them to be put in a certain position. And when those come, you've got to take advantage of it.

Q. Going back to Mike again. Changing direction a little bit. But when you look back at how you handled him at camp, you obviously were very careful. Do you look back at that any differently? Would you do it any different in hindsight? It doesn't seem like you'd allow contact in any way. But do you think there's anything more that you could have done to put more stress on him to get more comfortable or do you feel like you did what you could to do that in that scenario?

TOM ALLEN: We've gone back and talked about it. I don't think there's anything we would have done different physically. There's no question he would have never gotten hit. That would not have happened. And we did do a lot of things to stress him and like -- during all of his -- when we did special teams work when usually a quarterback would do certain fundamental things that were maybe not physically stressful, he was conditioning. He was doing everything rehab wise and strengthening and running and working with our strength staff and just really stressing his body in a big, big way.

But I think that the actual -- it's like when you have a young player. It's one thing you can't do is simulate a game and being able to have all it involves in that and how you feel in that moment. There's no game simulation machine for that.

But I just think, yeah, we still did a lot of things mentally and different things.

He's got to go play and work through it. And that's part of what we're going through right now. I think you're seeing growth. But, yeah, you go back and you look back at different thing you can try and do better. We'll continue to do that as we talk to him.

I think every situation is a little different too based on the injure and the person's past and just what position they play and different things. So it's just obviously one of those where -- it was not a point where you would say, hey, we wish we would have had our guys tackling him during fall camp. That wasn't the case. And you would never do that.

But here we are. And he's growing and getting better and feeling better about it. So that's what you can do.

Q. Luke Fickell is a guy that has a Big 10 background, a defensive background. Have you had any encounters with him maybe over the years in recruiting and so forth? What kind of defensive personality do you see that kind of rubs off on their team?

TOM ALLEN: You know, he's one coach I really don't know very well. I don't know that I've -- I've shaken his hand a few times but really not spoken to him or not sat down and talked ball.

But just a lot of respect. He's a wrestler. That's one of those guys -- a lot of respect for that. I love that. But just tough. Those kids play hard. They're physical, disciplined. Everything that we want to be as well.

So when you've got defensive-minded head coaches that are former wrestlers, you kind of get that same toughness emphasis and just guys are going to play with a lot of grit and fight and just be relentless.

So those are the kind of things that I see from their defense and the consistency, no matter who the coordinators have been. You kind of get changes there, but you're going to get the common denominator is him and his personality and how hard they play. Just a lot of respect for him and what he's built there. He's done a great job of recruiting. He's done a really good job in the state of Ohio and convincing kids to stay home there, which is important now they're moving into the Big 12 and that will just enhance that for them. But that's just part of building a program. So he's done that and definitely -- but I don't know him that well for sure but have a lot of respect.

Q. Cincinnati ranks tenth in the FBS in passing yards allowed and only allows third down conversion rates 33 percent of the time. We haven't seen too many scrambles by Penix thus far. Are you looking to get that going more to open up the passing game going into this week and combatting that third down conversion rate?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. I think just any time you have the ability to move the pocket around I think is a positive thing, just to be able to make it more difficult for them to pressure him. But once again, as we've stated before today, just starts up front and our ability to truly protect him.

But also, you're right, just like we do with different parts of our scheme, you want to be able to change certain points so they can't just target whether they -- it's the coverages run on defense and the way they look and present it and whether it's your punts and your pockets and all different things that you do football wise.

So I think that's just a part of the continued growth of him because he's definitely -- he can run. You've seen him run around. That's not an issue at all. He's 100 percent with all that. So it's just a matter of him being able to continue to move around and play football. Whenever people are stressing us, just extend the pocket if we have to, slide in the pocket, move around and get the ball down field.

Have a great day. LEO.

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