

Indiana University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 20, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good morning. I just wanted to start by continued thoughts and prayers with Andy Hipskind's family. Just such a huge loss to Indiana University. Meant so much to so many people. Don't know if I've ever met a more selfless individual. Kind, compassionate, just awesome in every way. Heart breaks for his wife Angie and their family, and continued support for them, and that will never stop, and he will always be remembered here for all that he gave to his university. I know he viewed it that way, and he's really, really special.

Just really wanted to make sure we don't ever forget him.

Also update, Michael Penix had an X-ray and an MRI on his non-throwing hand, and so both came back good, so he should be fine physically from that.

Still continue to be disappointed, not discouraged but disappointed in the way we did not finish the game on Saturday. Did a lot of good things but did not finish. Made enough mistakes, and we talk about protecting the football at a high level, and we've not done that in the two games that we've lost.

Created a couple takeaways, but if you count the non-converted 4th and 1, we're minus 3 really situationally in the ball placement in those situations, and being inside the 10-yard line three times and having zero points, that's not how you beat a top-10 team.

Obviously saw glimpses of what we can become and what we need to be and what I know we can be, and just got to be consistent, and that's what's going to be the focus this week and moving forward with our guys. Had some good discussions yesterday, very open, honest discussions like we always do on Sundays, and taking responsibility for where we're at.

We know where we are. We know where we want to be. Just continuing to move through that.

I do have guys I want to always recognize, our scouts of the week. I don't think I did a good job of that last week. I

forgot to get those guys, and I want to make sure I do that because they work so hard, they've earned the right to have their names read and all that they do for our program behind the scenes.

On defense our scouts for the week are Matt Hohlt and Andrew Turvy, two in-state guys, and just really proud of their effort each week. They do a great job getting us ready.

Then the offensive scout team players of the week, Connor Delp and Ricky Tamis, and then our special teams scout of the week was Maurice Freeman. All those guys are young guys that have come here, and we think all those guys have a really bright future in our program. Appreciate their work this week.

Excited now to head down to Western Kentucky. Have not played down there for a while, but have played there in the past. I know it's going to be a good environment. They'll have a great crowd there, being a night game, and very, very good football team.

No. 1 passing offense in the country right now, No. 1 in 3rd downs, as well, and those two kind of go together. They throw the ball as well as anybody in this country right now, and so very talented quarterback, receiver corps, new offensive coordinator, and very athletic on defense.

We have played them twice in my coaching career and both times really good football teams. A lot of athletes on both sides of the ball, and have always had really talented skill guys. I think their offensive line is really big and really impressive for a Group of Five offensive linemen, one of the better ones we've seen.

Definitely a very important game for us that we continue to get better and that we improve and we moved towards where I know we can be.

Questions?

Q. You obviously mentioned Mike, just to start with him. After you had a chance to see it on a rewatch, there seemed to be some good moments and some



rough ones. When you had a chance to evaluate, where did he grade out and what was your thought about his performance?

TOM ALLEN: I think it's like anything else, you always have to go back and evaluate. I said we would and we did, and you said it, he made some really good plays, made some really good throws that not many guys could make. But the mistakes were costly. It's about protecting the football, and he knows it.

What I saw, what I really felt like I saw, and we have had several discussions as a staff, was just I think pressing in those moments, just trying to do too much. End of the half there, just take a sack. There's 30 seconds to go in the half and we're up 14-7, and obviously they got momentum with that touchdown that they got late, and you don't want to give them any more momentum. We got that 1st down and we got a catch and you move it a little bit, so just don't make that throw. Don't have to. Don't do it. We're inside the 10-yard line, it's 3rd down, we're in field goal range, got a chance to get points, just -- I don't have a problem with us trying to score, but if it's not there, don't put the ball in jeopardy. Just make a better decision.

There's multiple factors. You go through and look at the film, we had several drops which were uncharacteristic for some of those guys, but they dropped it. They did not catch the football well as a group.

I thought our protection still wasn't good enough completely across the board. That's O-line, running backs, tight ends. Those are variables that go into those -- he was under too much duress in my opinion.

But I didn't feel like it was worrying about anything other than just trying to do too much, and you just can't in that situation. There's times where he made big throws in the past under duress, and even in this game he took one of the biggest shots of the game, the 3rd down throw to DJ Matthews across the middle, which was huge play, great throw. He got hit really, really hard, and dove, ran, got a key 1st down and ran out of bounds and got hit as he was going out of bounds on another key situation. So he's showing growth and progress in that and confidence in his knee. So to me it was just better decision making. Got to take care of the football.

You turn the ball over that many times against a top-10 team, you're not going to win. That's the thing, we still have the ball with five minutes to go in the game, down by six, obviously on the 2-yard line, fumble the football. Just didn't finish. You can call it what you want. You want to beat a team like that, and we did some good things but we didn't finish. He's part of that. He's got to finish, as well,

and that's going to be the focus is consistent performance.

Next?

Q. You said you were going to review the targeting penalty after the game on Saturday; what did you see, and did you hear anything from the league or the officials on that?

TOM ALLEN: I did review it, and I totally disagree with the call. It's unfortunate, and yes, we've turned it in and still in the process of going through that evaluation. But yeah, don't agree with the call at all.

But at the same time, we had other opportunities, and a guy like that goes down and you lose him, somebody has got to step up and make a play. He's obviously a huge part of our defense and does a phenomenal job, makes plays, creates a ton of pressure, and it hurt us not having him without question, but other guys got to step up as a whole defense we had other opportunities to still finish the game.

Q. What did you not agree with?

TOM ALLEN: It wasn't targeting. You can go through and evaluate it, and yeah, it's just not -- I've got my ability to make judgments, as well. I've coached this game for a long, long time. So yeah.

Q. If you disagree with the premise of this question just tell me you think I'm stupid, but do you see any kind of, I guess, physical difference in Mike in terms of maybe there's just things that maybe he can't do as well as he could before the most recent injury and maybe he's almost kind of struggling to kind of find his current level, his current baseline compared to his old baseline, or do you think it's more -- I don't want to say in his head, but the intangible qualities of getting comfortable again?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I do think it's getting comfortable. You go through -- like you said, honestly these are evaluations ourselves we go through. I couldn't have answered this question right after the game because I hadn't had a chance to watch all the plays and watch them over and over again, really evaluate and just see how he's moving around, doing things. So to me, I felt like there was a lot of times where he looked more like himself than he did even the first two games for sure.

But then when you have those moments and you go through the mistakes and the interceptions is really basically what we're talking about, but I don't think there's any question, when you haven't gotten off to the start that you wanted to get off to as a player, that affects your

confidence a little bit. I don't think that -- just feeling comfortable in the pocket and other things, he definitely feels more comfortable with his knee. I think there's no question about that. You take hits, you get up, you run, you get tackled, you do this and you feel better about it as you go through.

But I think there's no question. They're hard to come back from. I get it. Been thrust into two pretty high-level games early on. But no, there's no question in my mind that Michael is a great player, and he believes in himself, and we believe in him, and we just -- we're 1-2, and when you're 1-2 people ask a lot of questions, and deservedly so. You've got to perform.

There was high expectations for this team, and to me those haven't changed. I have a lot of high expectations for this football team and how good we can be, but we've got to prove it; we've got to do it on game day. It doesn't matter what I think, and that's why we've just got to keep getting better.

But I do feel like there was growth and progress, but obviously the mistakes were costly, and you do not -- we won the explosive play ratio. We created more explosive plays than them by quite a bit, but we lost the turnover ratio. You cannot turn the football over. If you do, you'd better get a whole lot more takeaways than you're giving up, and we did not.

We have to protect the football. We can't fumble the ball on the 2-yard line. We can't give up those interceptions. We've got to do a better job of that. But I do think to answer your question, it's every week you just keep getting better and it's about what we do every single day, and we're going to continue to stay the course. It's about grit, perseverance and passion towards a long-term goal. That's what you've got to do: Stay the course.

Q. We didn't get a chance to ask you about the kickoff return, the 99-yarder. What happened there, and also wanted to ask you, we didn't see a lot of James Miller after Micah went out. Was he available or not?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so the kickoff return, just a devastating play to be honest with you. Just got momentum, big scoring drive and were able to take the lead, and had -- our backside safety was out of position and got nosy, got too aggressive, and he's the cut-back player, he's the half field safety on that side of the field. You don't want it to get to him, but if it does he should be right there to make the play, and he was not. That really was the reason why it was a touchdown.

Had a couple guys that were supposed to -- when you

have your lane, they got out of their lanes, and the two guys next to each other didn't do a good job of playing with technique. We're going to make some personnel changes with that group.

Unfortunately we had a lot of twos in the game at the time, twos on the kickoff cover unit, and just due to guys getting lots of reps and a lot of our starters on defense are on that, the first group. Felt like we had probably too many of those in one setting, looking back at it and evaluating it. But still, those guys got to make plays. They're twos for a reason. They've got to be able to -- they're just one snap away from being a one. Better execution is critical; the kick wasn't the issue. Actually the opening kickoff was a worse kick. It's not where we wanted to be, and the coverage was excellent. They only had two returns where they brought him out; that was one of them. Yeah, that was a huge mistake on our part and cost us big time.

Q. Saturday night you had mentioned just how well you were dominating completely on defense early; now that you've had a chance to watch the film, what stood out at you as to what happened afterwards in regards to what went wrong with the nearly 300 yards they had after that?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, you know, you're right. They were struggling. They were making it really difficult. They couldn't run the football. They were struggling on 3rd downs. It was very lopsided. They had gotten one 1st down to that point with four minutes to go in the half. We played several snaps already.

You know, I don't -- you don't want to -- it was almost kind of like there was a little bit of emotional blow with losing Micah. I don't want to see it be that extreme because he's just one player, but it definitely affected us, and we've got to work on that. We cannot be where, hey, he's not out there and he obviously does a great job for us, and he's very disruptive and he's a great, great player, and he's the heart and soul of your defense. I get that.

But at the same time other guys got to step up, and I just feel like we got no more takeaways at that point. We needed one more really to kind of be the defining opportunity to win the game.

Just didn't see guys playing with the same -- I wouldn't say -- we still played hard. I don't want to say we didn't -- they played hard, but I think you've just got to have -- guys got to get off blocks better and make up for the impact that he makes, the plays that he makes. We missed that.

It just shows you how fine a line it is, a guy here and a guy there making a play, creating a 3rd and long. They

struggled against -- even beyond that they struggled on 3rd downs the whole day, even when he was out.

But just creating more 3rd and longs because that's the ones where they really were struggling, and just didn't obviously change the calls that we were making, but just getting off blocks better and being more dynamic in space, which is where they play the game -- obviously they're going to make adjustments, too, but it gave them a huge boost going into halftime getting those 10 points and kind of changed the whole trajectory of the game. So there's no doubt after that call the game changed. You can say what you want, but the game changed.

So that's just what makes it that much more unfortunate.

But at the same time we can't let that happen. We can't let one guy and that become -- other guys got to rise up. We talked to our team yesterday about guys got to step up. Other guys got to step up and fill the void when a guy like that goes out. But yeah, it was definitely different after that.

Q. Understanding the reason for the rule, the targeting call, coaches or whomever goes in to make the rules, is that rule just not too severe of a punishment for a player, especially something that's probably inadvertent where it ends up costing a team or changes the outcome of a game on one inadvertent play?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question. I'm all about player safety, so that to me is totally the focus and should be, but to get more specific about it, yeah, there's no question.

I think a lot of us coaches, we talk about this a lot. There's a lot of agreement that the rule right now needs to be evaluated. The ejection for something like that is not what it needs to be. So if they want to go targeting one, targeting two, and whether it's flagrant, just kind of like the basketball, flagrant foul thing, I think that definitely needs to be -- just me giving my two cents here, I think that's what needs to be done. It needs to be done soon because you can watch multiple games, not just our game, where that keeps happening, and it's just not the way it should be. A kid to get ejected from the game for something like that that's a judgment because it's not even called on the field -- I didn't even know. I was totally caught off, like what are they reviewing? Just no idea. It was just like -- so gets called from the booth and that's the kind of throw -- in my mind, yes, they need to evaluate the way it is implemented in regards to the ejection piece, and I just don't think it's fair to the kids, it's not fair to the teams to have a guy ejected for something like that.

If they want to by the letter of the law -- whatever they decide to do, but I think that will be looked at, I'm assuming. Common sense will say it should be, and I hope that that's the case.

Q. Saturday's loss wasn't as much about a talent deficit as it was self-inflicted mistakes. Does that make a loss like this more frustrating than it would have been a couple of years ago, or are you encouraged that your program is at the point where it's about polishing yourself as opposed to not having the horses?

TOM ALLEN: Well, it's still a loss, so it stinks. It hurts. I hate it.

So I don't know if it makes you feel different. There's no question that we can't make mistakes, but you know what, they made plays, so that's what you've got to do, you've got to make plays, and we've got to protect the football and they're trying to take it from us. That's the objective of the game. But yeah, it definitely feels different in some ways, but at the same time it still hurts just as much.

I believe in this team and I know we have a chance to do some really special things if we just continue to get better and eliminate the mistakes. That to me is the focus. Like I said, we're disappointed but we're not discouraged. This team has got a ton of character and toughness and grit and fight to it. Yeah, we're 1-2; it's not where any of us wanted to be. So what are you going to do? Feel sorry for yourself, because I guarantee nobody else is. So we're going to bow up and we're going to fight; I promise you that.

Q. Has Michael shown any sort of wavering in confidence, and how have you worked with him to make sure he sticks to his game plan and what he does best?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I just think that, like I think I mentioned that a few minutes ago, I think any time you don't play to your certain level, you're not going to feel better because of it. It's going to affect you in some ways. But at the core it cannot, and I think at the core it has not.

Yeah, there's no doubt you've got to work through that. If you think through just even him as a player, so this is probably the most adversity he's faced in terms of on the field, and coming back and playing again. He's had those season-ending injuries but then you're done playing, so now you've got to learn to work through it.

If you go back and look, he threw one interception his

whole senior year of high school, so that's not been something that he's had an issue with. You've just got to go through, and yeah, you've got to -- it takes a lot to be put out there in these positions and you have expectations and then those aren't met and then you have to stand up and give account.

That's not easy to do, but it's part of growing up, and it's part of -- as I always tell the quarterbacks, and I do, I share this with them when I recruit them and we talk about it, the head coach and the quarterback, they get too much of the credit when things go good and they get too much of the blame when things go bad, but that's part of it. That's the reality being in that position, and that's what you've got to accept when you become in that role.

I'm no different. I've got to stand here and give account, and so does he. So that's the reality of playing quarterback. That's what you've got to do.

You've got to be confident in who you are and you cannot let circumstances and things around you cause that to waver, and that's what we're going to be the challenge to him. But once again, we're just teaching him and growing with him and helping him through this because he's still growing and maturing, too.

Q. You mentioned Saturday Stephen was a little bit dinged up towards the end. Can you give any update on his status, if that's anything serious. Also, how is Monster's progress and how close was he to being available on Saturday?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so Monster is progressing well. We expect him to play this week. As a matter of fact, he practiced with us last night, which is great. Yeah, I expect him to be fully back and ready to go, which will be great for our secondary.

Stephen is fine. Definitely a certain number of reps you have and different things throughout the game, but yeah, he's going to be full bore for this week, as well.

Q. You talked earlier before the season started just about Ty Fryfogle coming back and his decision to come back, but he's kind of been a non-factor early in the season here. What's been lacking from his game?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, you know, going back, and obviously you saw it while it was going on, but he had multiple drops in that game, which is not him. I don't know, he's never had a game like that since he's been here. We talked to him and sat him down because he's really practiced awesome. I've told you that. He's had a great mindset. Really kind of caught me off guard.

I get it; everybody is kind of keying on him. They're going to double cover him and make sure they do that, and I get that, and I understand why they would. DJ made a bunch of plays, which I expect him to do, and that's great, and that's what we have to have. But yeah, he just needs to make those plays. There were several catches that would have been a difference in the game. He knows that. To me he's a very confident guy, but we sat down and we talked it through, and he doesn't need to press, just go play ball.

I think that's the -- when you come back and people expect certain things, you've just got to learn to relax and just let the game come to you, but you've got to make plays, and that's what he's done since he's been here. That's why he's in the position he's in right now and why people are talking about him and the accolades he received last year is why, because he made those catches that he did not make on Saturday.

So I know he can and I know he will. He practices well. He practices hard. To me that just was a hiccup for him because that's not him, and it's not like he's had an issue like this in the past and had to overcome it. It's been one of his strengths is going and getting the ball. I don't expect that to be anything moving forward, but he just needs to rise up and relax and just be Ty Fryfogle.

Q. You talked about not wavering, Mike not wavering in his confidence. How about your confidence in him and the team's confidence? You're not wavering in him, are you? Is he still your quarterback?

TOM ALLEN: Absolutely not. Michael Penix is our starting quarterback and I believe in him with 100 percent of my heart and know that our team feels the same way. Again, we're going through this together, and that to me if you falter in times of trouble, how little is your strength. That's a phrase, a proverb that I believe in, and I think it's all the more true right now than ever. You've just got to stay together and you've got to be strong and you've got to be tough and believe in who you are, but you've got to keep watching the film and addressing things honestly and openly and working hard every day to fix them, and that's the key.

Q. For quarterbacks who are struggling at times, the tight end is always a bit of that safety net and Peyton had a great game Saturday, six catches and hit some nice runs after the catch, too. It seems like he's someone that can be relied on a lot. Do you see him and even the other tight ends in that room maybe even being more involved than they have been so far?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think you bring up a great point as a matter of fact as we go through and talk about certain areas that didn't perform like they have in the past, that was one that was really, really strong. Peyton had a great day, not surprised whatsoever. He's transformed his body, his work ethic I think I mentioned this before, our strength staff said they'd never had a young man have a better eight-month period than he has in the off-season, and he's worked extremely hard to get better, and he looks faster and he's just in great shape, and he's worked hard on improving his blocking and the whole room, AJ Barner, Matt Bjorson, all those three guys are our top three right now. Love that room, they're guys we can count on, we trust them. AJ is still growing and developing for sure, but they've both shown they can make plays.

Yeah, I agree with you. I think the tight end is a huge part of our offense. I want it to be. I've not bashful about telling our guys that. I know what that does to a defense and how that affects the run support. All the guys that have to account for those guys are supposed to be making tackles in the run game and the play action off of that can be huge, and Peyton is a weapon with the ball in his hand, and he's big and physical and can get the ball in the end zone.

So yes, and that's where the challenge to our offense, hey, we have weapons, we have a lot of good players, just let the system work itself and utilize those weapons and let those guys as the defenses are giving us those guys more and more each week, then take advantage of them.

We have the guys there, and we showed it on Saturday, as well. We've just got to don't give the ball away. That's really the bottom line.

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