

Indiana University Football

Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference

TOM ALLEN: Good morning. Appreciate everybody being here.

Just want to begin by congratulating our guys on the ability to bounce back after a tough loss the week before to a top-10 team, be able to get refocused, go into a tough environment and play a good, solid football game against a good team that played really hard, was physical.

Just really encouraged by our guys' ability to stay the course, make enough plays on defense. Offensively just really 35 first downs is just a great way to control the game, stay on the field. Michael continues to play better each week. Offensive line blocked better. Gave him time, ran the football.

Stephen Carr did a great job. Peyton Hendershot had over a hundred yards receiving, first time since 1985 we've had a tight end do that. Just the ability to do a great job as a football team.

We emphasize special teams so much here. Charles Campbell kicking four field goals, going four for four, what a weapon he is, just his consistency has to continue. Real proud of him and the way he stays locked in. Feel like we kicked too many field goals.

You want to get in there and finish the red zone drives. Six for six in the red zone, want to get more touchdowns than field goals. To me those are things we continue to work on and work through as a football team.

I want to recognize our guys throughout the week. As we know, it's really a huge part of our preparation, the way the guys buy into practicing hard. Our scouts do a tremendous job each week.

Defensively, defensive scout team player of the week was Nick Grieser. Offensive player of the week, Jaquez Smith and Andy Buttrell. The special teams scout was Trent Howland. Those four guys continue to work hard.

As a team, offensively Peyton Hendershot and Stephen



Carr were the offensive players of the game. Defensively Micah McFadden and Tiawan Mullen. Taiwan played his best game of the season, played the way I expected him to. Just as all over the place, knocking down balls. I don't think he gave a completion up all day.

Micah just was excellent, flying around and leading the team. I thought his leadership on the sideline was on the highest level I've ever seen it from him. He's a pretty quiet guy, but feel like that's something he's really growing in, it showed.

Had to do a lot of things, make a lot of adjustments. Their offense creates a lot of issues. Charles Campbell was the special teams player of the game. Proud of our guys.

Got a tremendous opportunity this week. Obviously got in late Saturday night, but getting the guys mentally and physically refreshed and ready to go. Had a really good day with them yesterday. Very important week of preparation. Great challenge against Penn State, a very, very difficult environment at night.

Excited for it, though. I know obviously a really good football team, top five team in the country right now. Coach Franklin does a tremendous job in both recruiting and player development and the way their team performs. Tremendous challenge and opportunity for this football team this week. Excited to be able to get back together tomorrow and get ready preparing for the Nittany Lions.

Questions.

Q. I know you've alluded to the Maryland game before as a turning point for the program. Last year against Penn State, what did that win do in terms of the perception of the program, knocking off one of the powers in the division?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question that it was a big win. I think that's been stated many times. When you beat a team of that caliber in regards to their tradition, the way they've won, how good they are, being a top-10 team at that point in the season.

Just have been close with them before. Being able to find ways to finish. We all know how that game played itself out. To be able to come back there in the end on that final drive, win in overtime, it just gives a tremendous surge of confidence to your guys.

I think the ability to experience that whole situation as we've gone through and talked about many times, being backs against the wall, playing well at spurts throughout the game, then seeing it slip away at the end. Finding a way in the final drive, the execution that took place by a lot of different individuals, then being able to find a way to finish. I just think those are parts you build in your program.

You mentioned we had some road wins along the way. They're critical. Road games are hard. The environment to play in is tough. Now the next step is to get one of those big road wins where you do beat a top-10 team or ranked team on the road.

Just building your program step by step, day by day. It's building belief and building expectation. When you experience it, it elevates those things and you just keep growing and building.

Q. You talked about Mike last week, saying you looked especially at his interceptions, felt like you were seeing different kinds of interceptions. Was there any part of the process where you or Coach Sheridan sat down and almost asked, What is in your mind when you're seeing this? What were you trying to do here? How can we meet what you tried to do with obviously what we're trying to do?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question that was part of the process. That's what helped me kind of come to the conclusion that I came to.

I sit in on Sundays with the quarterbacks during their meetings. You go through and watch the games together, the plays, you talk through. You ask those questions: What are you seeing here? Why did you make this decision? That to me helps me.

Then you have one-on-one conversations with coaches and players. That's part of the whole evaluation process. Even linebackers. What did you see here? Guys have to make communication, sometimes you use different verbal communications, sometimes hand signals. That way you can confirm that both sides understood that.

You have to ask them, What did you see here? That helps you figure out do we need to do something different to help get a better outcome or this is exactly what we need to do,

this is why, therefore keep doing it.

I think that's all part of communication with each other. That helps you as a coach make good decisions moving forward. You always got to know why.

I felt like what I saw and watched and observed and talked and figured out as a staff, I felt good going into last week knowing that I thought there was progress.

I feel like coming out of this game this week against Western Kentucky, there was progress with Michael and his play, decision making, different things, different throws.

Still got to keep getting better, continue to improve. I expect that to happen. That to me is all part of each and every week, every position. But the quarterback position is very, very critical obviously because it involves so many different things that determine the outcome of the game.

Q. Is there an update on D.J.? And if he's not going to be available? How would that change the offense?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, D.J. Matthews has torn his ACL, so he will be out for the season. It's a tough, tough blow for us and for him. I hurt for him. He's had an amazing attitude, even the night it happened. We weren't 100% sure at that time, but it was confirmed yesterday.

But, yeah, in regards to our offense, other guys got to step up. As you mentioned, we got others, the different way we use our guys, different ways guys step up and make plays. Reese Taylor in the return game for punts. That will be back into his plate fully.

Tough break, but got to be able to fill the void and press on.

Q. Saturday night you mentioned you talked with Michael and Ty both about sort of blocking out those expectations that were around this program in the pre-season. With the first national ranking in 52 years, 'Winning the Big Ten' signs in your facility and such, now that we're a month in, do your expectations at all change at to what this team is capable of after four weeks?

TOM ALLEN: I don't believe so. We've talked about as a team everything we want to accomplish, this team has set down to want to do is in front of us. We now begin an eight-game Big Ten slate. As you see, as you look across this conference, every single week it's going to be a dogfight. The margin for error is very small for everybody. It's the team that can execute the best each and every week, find ways to protect the football, play great on

special teams, do a good job of winning that game. Just take them one at a time.

I think there's no different focus from the beginning. There's no question that I think we've had to work through handling all those different expectations and what does that feel like in the season. It's one thing in the off-season, it's different during the season. I think guys have continued to work through all that.

To me the goals have been set. The vision has been set. Our guys are chasing after being our very, very best. We talk about chasing greatness. That's our one word for 2021, it was picked for a reason.

I think that the process has helped each of our guys just focus on being your best. Every time you practice, every time you take the field, try to learn to just live in that moment and be in that moment.

Like I said, I think those things have been emphasized in different ways, different ways of presenting it. At the end of the day you have to learn how to play with those in front of you but be able to really block it out, so to speak. That's easy to say, hard to do.

I think this team has a tremendous amount of character and a lot of players that believe in themselves and believe in each other. It's about coming together and putting all your energy into this one week. You just block each week off and you focus on that. That's all you do. Everything is about being our best at 7:30 on Saturday night at Penn State. That's the whole focus.

When you get in that moment, it's every single snap, every single series, every single quarter, every single half, then you focus to finish the game. That's where this team is. I know our guys are very excited about continuing to focus on getting better as a football team.

Q. David Ellis went out early. Related to that, who are the young guys that you think could step up for D.J.?

TOM ALLEN: You look at the whole receiver core. Jacolby Hewitt is a guy I see continue to grow, be more involved. Expect him to, want him to.

When you say younger guys, Malachi Holt-Bennett is a young man that has shown really good flashing throughout fall camp. He's a true freshman. Jordyn Williams. Those guys are probably going to be the two that we'll look to to be able to give us some more depth at that position.

We have a lot of guys that are older that will still be very, very involved. To ask about the younger guys, those are

two that come to my mind. I expect them to be able to have some practice opportunities for sure, then we'll kind of see how they respond to that.

Still have a lot of talent in that room. It's like anything else, it's tough for D.J. We've had this happen with other players in the past, last year, the year before. It does create an opportunity for somebody else. That's part of life. You have to be able to, when called upon, rise up and seize the day.

Q. David Ellis?

TOM ALLEN: I hope so. It doesn't appear to be serious, but it's kind of a lingering thing. We're trying to get some answers on that to see if we can get and figure out why it keeps re-happening to him. He's a tremendously talented young man that I have really high expectations for, hopes for. I know he does for himself as well.

Really need him to be able to get healthy, stay healthy and help this football team.

Q. Is D.J. eligible for medical?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, actually because he never redshirted before, so we fully expect him to be able to have an additional year, yes.

Q. The next man up. Is Jacolby the slot guy?

TOM ALLEN: If you noticed in the game, different guys played it. Miles Marshall has played the slot, Ty can play the slot. It will be different guys as we kind of figure that part out.

Jacolby is the guy that can play inside and outside. Most of our receivers are pretty versatile. Coach Heard has built it this way, recruited guys that have that ability to be flexible. That's why I think you'll see a lot of guys in inside and outside roles as well.

I think the younger guys for sure, we're anxious to see those guys rise up. It's a deep room of guys, so we just got to see how it all flushes out.

Q. You've played in two road games now. What has changed as far as expectations compared to especially in Happy Valley in 2020?

TOM ALLEN: The good news is we played on the road. Obviously Iowa was a very hostile environment, then had the chance to play a night game here this weekend down there. It was a great environment that they had. I knew they would. It was loud. It will be louder this weekend. I

think those things prepare you, for sure.

Once again, experiencing that as a team is very, very important. Definitely a lot different feel than a year ago, without question.

But that experience, we have a lot of older players, some younger players, too, that had an experience to experience both of those. You learn from that. Does nothing but help us.

This is one of the toughest places to play in the country. That's exciting as well. I've coached in a lot of these types of venues. It's why you do what you do.

Q. I know Western Kentucky's offense is a different animal than you'll see in the Big Ten. What do you need to see from the defense to get them back to playing to the standard that you've seen as opposed to what happened in Western Kentucky and the second half of the Cincinnati game?

TOM ALLEN: I would say more the execution piece to me is really critical and is going to be the focus of this whole week, to be able to handle the different things they do from a tempo perspective, different looks and things they show you, the things they do that you haven't seen. They had a bye week before we played. Do some little different wrinkles, different things. Be able to adjust better on the sidelines.

That to me is what I want to see, the communication piece, the execution piece, continuing to not cut a guy loose or play with proper technique and leverage. The one touchdown that was second-and-19. We bit on the double move. That's football 101: you just don't that. You give up the five-yard hit, five-yard out, play the deeper ball.

That to me is something, the last drive, fourth-and-seven, we're playing too far off. Even if we would have made the tackle when he caught it, still would have been a first down. Those key executions at those times, I think we got to do a better job.

I just know those experiences continue to grow and develop. We as a staff have to do a great job of cleaning those things up. I was not pleased at all with the way we performed in the second half Saturday night. I feel like we're better than that. We have to prove it on the game day.

Q. Obviously football, contact sport, injuries happen. It seems like there's been a lot of injuries so far this season. Is there anything you're going to change, things you want to work on now?

TOM ALLEN: I mean, you look at those two knee injuries, both when they planted, non-contact, ACL injuries. I mean, if anybody ever figures out how to prevent those, they'll be a very popular person in sports.

But there's no doubt, you go back and look at and evaluate what you do from top to bottom. We've had several of those. We've had some foot issues. Those are also difficult ones to kind of, like, what are you doing. We don't really train our feet. We don't have exercises for our feet, the bones in your feet, the ligaments in your feet.

Probably some unique things to figure out a plan to prevent, but it doesn't keep you from evaluating every possible thing you're doing to train your guys, prepare your guys to be able to.

I saw ACLs this whole weekend in the NFL level, our level. It's just an unfortunate part of this game that we play. It is a contact sport.

But everybody saw that one. His foot got stuck in the turf when he dropped the punt. It is what it is. Kind of similar with Chris.

But, yeah, you go back and always we do an injury report, analysis from a strength and conditioning perspective as well as our medical staff perspective, things that we're doing to get our guys rehabbed.

We just got to figure it out.

Q. The passing game in general, what are the processes maybe of the conversations with pass catchers, maybe opening the floor a little bit to say is there anything either from play calling or from timing with Mike, whatever it might be, that we need to be doing better for you guys in terms of delivering the ball, getting in different route combinations? Was that the process after the first three weeks?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it was. Like anything else, every season's a new season. Every group's a new group. Like you said, especially with Michael coming off an injury, everything had to be modified. Even over the summer, he threw, did a lot of stuff with the guys, but did not take as many reps in the spring. You just work through that.

You get into fall camp, I think offense is such a timing, spacing side of the football, so much emphasis and time spent on that. You can't do it over the summertime with coaches there with the ball. We follow those rules. That's the way the rules are, that's what we do. They can do it on their own, but the coaches aren't there.

I think you get in there, you continue to work. Once again, that's all good, that stuff works, but then you got to do it against live competition. Once again, it doesn't happen during the fall. I think you continue to work through that.

There's no doubt having the injury, having that time away, hurts that because you're spending the whole off-season getting yourself physically back, you don't get all the other reps.

I do feel like Coach Sheridan, Coach Heard, our passing game, and Coach Wright with the tight ends, trying to work so hard. And now it's about ball placement, allow the run after catches to increase. That affects where the ball is placed based on where the defender is.

Prime example, there was a catch by A.J. Barner where you want to be able to create a first down opportunity instead of fourth-and-two. Looked like he froze the frame when he first caught the ball, he would get the first down. Where he turns as a receiver or tight end, to be able to turn and get the first down... Little stuff like that. Those are big.

Fourth-and-twos, we end up converting on those, which is a good conversion. You have to get those. Back in Big Ten play, those things make a big difference. That's part of this process. That's why I feel like it was great for our offense to do what we were able to do. Still got to keep working. Not where we want to be yet. But the progress I think is there. It needs to be just built upon.

Q. The concussion protocol with Jaylin Williams? And takeaways, how would you evaluate where you are?

TOM ALLEN: Yes, he's progressing well through that process. That's totally our medical staff that handles that. I know it was a very good initial prognosis for him, which was positive. We'll see how that plays out the rest of the week.

Disappointed in the lack of takeaways. Has not been enough for our standards. Our goal is three per game. Didn't get any. Didn't see us raking and punching at the ball like I want us to. I know the ball was coming out fast, two-point whatever. Quick release to get to him. The balls were thrown a lot of times. There were some broken up balls, for sure.

Just got to create 'em. We emphasize it ruthlessly here in this program. That will not change. Going to continue to really emphasize creating 'em. We have circuits we do for that every single week that will not change on both sides of

the ball.

We didn't turn the ball over on offense, which was huge, big emphasis as well. That will always be a huge emphasis for us. Not getting enough of those. Again, they come in spurts. We're going to keep persevering with that. Takeaways, tackling and effort. Three of our DNAs on defense. First one is takeaways.

Q. You said you're more of a morning practice team. I think this is going to be your third night game in five weeks. How much of an adjustment is that?

TOM ALLEN: It actually is. Oftentimes it's the noon games that everybody has to get figured out, don't welcome as much, whereas we're the opposite.

I will say this. Our players love playing at night. I mean, that's just kind of -- even as a player I know I felt the same way. To coach, I love this last Saturday night. I love playing at night. Our guys are jacked.

But the schedule is what you have to get squared away. The good news for us is we've now done it twice, tweaked it a little bit from this past weekend, a little bit more to get things the way we want them because obviously this is another road game.

You figure out how you want to handle all the time you have. That's the negative part, is just the wait. It makes for a long Saturday waiting to go play.

I feel good about the flow we're creating, our guys, the rhythm we're getting into. This will be our third one. There's been years where we haven't played this many in one season. That's kind of how it's worked out.

It's going to be an awesome environment, a great opportunity. Once again, we're adjusting. I think our guys are getting pretty comfortable with it.

Have a great day. LEO.

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