

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: -- needed one more to try to create an opportunity for ourselves. Obviously offensively not getting the job done. Got to protect the football. Not doing that. That's costly, been very costly again. Not scoring in the red zone.

Special teams, still feel like our punt team was not what it needed to be, quality of the punts. Missed a chance to down the ball inside the five. Thought we were going to, didn't. Kind of mishandled that. That changes drives. That was a field goal drive for them, started on the 20. Should have started inside the five.

Those kind of things, that's how you win games like that, close games that come down to final possessions, being able to get the job done there.

Just spent a lot of time the past couple days here working on that. We'll not stop. Excited about the opportunity we have coming up. Great football team coming to Bloomington, night game. Love that type of atmosphere. Excited to have the stadium packed. And our guys are going to be ready and we're going to have a great week of practice. Welcome this challenge with an excitement and intensity that I know it's going to demand.

Questions.

Q. You mentioned the offense. What more did you see on a rewatch, how Jack did in his first start this year?

TOM ALLEN: He did some good things. The two picks were costly. One was pressured, one was not. Got to protect the football. Even when you're pressured, sack is not a bad thing. Got to punt, got to punt. Defense is playing at a high level. Just protect the football. That's the biggest takeaway. Decisions, he made some mistakes. But first time starting this year.

Still at times looked like he was a guy that hasn't played a lot of football collectively, which he has not. But still expect him to play a little better than he did. He's got to rise up. He'll learn it from, play better.

Had open receivers. Didn't hit at times. That hurt us even in the red zone. Some of that was protection, but mostly it was getting his eyes to the right spots.

Solid performance, but not good enough. He'll get better. We have to coach better, give him some better options. We got to do a better job. I got to do a better job. The buck stops with me.

Q. Ohio State is obviously an incredibly explosive offense. How much of a test is that for your defense? What is the one thing you feel you need to take away in terms to have success?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, they create a lot of issues. They're just so explosive. Their receiver core is different than you usually will see. They got three receivers that are as good as anybody you're going to face in the country. So that puts a lot of stress on you. Talented quarterback. Talented running backs as well.

But I just think not allowing those explosive pass plays to me is really... Just get guys so wide open it seems. It's tough. Puts a ton of stress on you. But obviously you got to stop the run, there's no doubt about that. Just giving those up, that's where they can really pile it on, score fast, be able to make it difficult on you as well.

I think that core concept of pressuring the quarterback, being able to do things there with stressing him out mentally and physically is going to be key.

Q. Forgive me, I'm sure you're not going to break it down in specific X's and O's. We've asked about the offensive line in different ways. You feel like you're getting more or less your best five out there at this point from a health perspective. What from your vantage point are you trying to do that's not working consistently enough to give you that platform to keep pressure off the quarterback, stay on schedule offensively, execute in the red zone?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I mean, I think just continuing to work. I mean, we got to find some ways I think schematically to

take some pressure off to give them the ability to execute.

When you go through and look and evaluate, the phrase that came back to me was 'consistent execution'. That to me is where we continue to get better at times, but not good enough. I think the end was kind of glaring because that's what you remember, the finish. That didn't give us a chance to be able to get the ball down the field and make the throws we needed to make.

But I feel like you got to look at the big picture of it all to try to continue. There's certain guys you might say, Hey, we're going to try to put a guy in, get him some more reps with that unit. That's a possibility for sure. But just to continue to find ways not allow the defense to be able to gang up, tee off, have faster reads. Be able to cause pause in those reads to me is something we really want to do a better job of as an offense.

But it starts up front. Did some good things, but not good enough. It's got to be consistent. More timely mistakes, miscommunication, ability to not pick up a twist here or there at the wrong time when it really showed up. Sometimes those things can happen and it doesn't create a game-changing negative play. It seemed to happen more frequently in this one when those things did occur.

But still just not to what we have to be. Obviously we know what the objective is. We got to score points. We did move the football. But especially in the first half. 46 snaps, 46 plays, nine points, it's not good enough. Got to score points. Can't be kicking those field goals as many as we did. Glad we made 'em, but at the same time you knew it was going to need more than that. Obviously we didn't.

Q. You don't like to talk about injuries and availability. The Ohio State receiving core that you mentioned. Can you at least give us an idea as to whether you think Taiwan and Reese will be available for Saturday? Also talk about the depth in that secondary, Noah, Josh.

TOM ALLEN: I would say hopeful with those two guys. It's one of those situations where we don't know for sure. I don't know right now today. Definitely need 'em. Want to get 'em ready. Whatever we can play, have them play. Will be huge for us. They're two very talented players.

Just working every day, man. They're working their tails off. Our staff is doing everything they can do. Like to at least get one of them if we can.

Then Noah Pierre really sticks out to me. As a matter of fact I mentioned him yesterday, nine tackles, huge interception at the end. No question they were going after

him. So proud of him. A few weeks ago he was playing a different position. He has played multiple positions in our secondary, third down package.

Just a tough, a hard-nosed kid we loved when we saw him out of high school, thought he was a competitive guy. Knew he was a little undersized, but loved his heart, loved his passion of the way he played the game, how physical he played the game. Just thought he was always a competitor. That's proven to be true. Did a heck of a job for us. Made plays for us the previous week, this week he was called upon.

We thought Reese was going to be able to go a lot more than he did. Wasn't quite ready yet when he tried to get out there and play. Put a lot of pressure on him.

Josh, the same thing. He's showing up all over the place, different situations. Got a huge pick. I think those guys, we needed them. He had to play early in the season. Now he's playing a more expanded role on third downs, moving him around, learning different things, trying to make adjustments.

Those guys have to continue to show up. We need more guys to do that at other positions as well. That's part of recruiting guys. We need 'em. This team has to rise up. Everybody has a role to play, everybody has got an opportunity. Opportunity is created because oftentimes injuries from other guys around you. When this opportunity comes, we're going to see who is going to step up and take advantage of it.

Q. We got to see Donaven McCulley a little bit finally. Are you trying to manage that four-game redshirt situation with him or are you going to try to be more aggressive?

TOM ALLEN: We were going to. Now we're not. When Michael went down, we had to make the decision that he's going to have to go. But before that, that kind of was the thought. We just use those four games in a judicious way. Now he's the number two guy, training to be the next guy in.

Expect to see him more. Really kind of even thought we might use him a little bit more Saturday. Then I wanted to see us do that, and we will. Just try to get -- obviously that was his first time ever playing in a game collegiately. Did some good things. Just got to get him to be able to get out there and play football. Very talented guy.

We have to maximize our roster. To me he's one of the guys that can make plays with the ball in his hand. That's the decision we had to make when Michael got hurt.

Q. Obviously one offensive touchdown in three Big Ten games. What do you see as the big issues there? Why do you think the numbers are what they are?

TOM ALLEN: To me, we're turning the ball over. You can go through, look at those games, that's number one. Number two, the red zone issues. To me when you get down in there, I know you can go ahead and say what you want about those three Big Ten teams, but they have really, really good defenses, all three of them. They're really good in the red zone.

You get in that area of the field, it's even harder to score on those really good defenses. At the same time that's reality, that's what it is. You just got to be able to do some things.

I will say this. You talk about Saturday's game, we had three opportunities where receivers were open. I thought wide open. We needed to get them the football for a variety of reasons. That's where you have to execute. You talk about to me that's really what it comes back to, consistent execution at critical times. Obviously the red zone is a critical time.

Whether it's the fact you get a long drive, we had several of those, you have to be able to finish through that drive and execute when it counts the most. Right now we're not doing that. You have to evaluate why. You look at those things, play calling, the scheme, the guys executing. It's a combination of everything for sure.

At the end of the day players have to make those plays. We got to put them in position to make those plays. You make those plays when you're confident and decisive. That's what we got to get to. That's the part, the numbers are what they are. You see them, I agree with it. Definitely a huge emphasis, going to change some things structurally, how we practice, the things we do down in there. A huge point of emphasis, no question.

Q. Ohio State is a fabulous team, ranked top five. They're a young team. How do you feel playing a young team like that will work to your team's advantage?

TOM ALLEN: We are at home. That's a positive thing. There's no question they do have some youth, some very talented youth, mind you. But it is youth. Youth is youth. I think you play on the road, expecting a big crowd, a loud crowd. The intensity and the energy, like we had this past Saturday, like we had at all of our home games, which has been awesome. That plays into that.

That's the best part of it. We got to be able to in that

moment play our best football. There's no doubt that's the objective, that's the goal. That's what we're going to do everything within our power to do that against a team that is very, very talented, has a lot of really good football players, and they're very well-coached.

Q. Six games left. Knowing you have to win four of those to become bowl eligible, I know you go week by week, that has to be in the back of your mind. Offensively, you mentioned some possible schematic changes with Donaven. We saw Purdue over the weekend use a three quarterback rotation, which was odd. Can you expound on the potential differences we may see?

TOM ALLEN: Not too specific just because for obvious reasons. But at the same time, yeah, to me you got to do everything you can do to be able to maximize this opportunity in front of us against Ohio State. Whatever we got to do to be able to help us score points, how many quarterbacks we use, how we use them, how we scheme things, design things, has to be with that objective in mind.

There's no question we understand the big picture, but the bottom line is it's total, absolute, 100% focus on what we got ahead of us. This is the biggest game of the season because it's the next one. Just happens to be against Ohio State.

Obviously we know who they are, what they have done in the past. But we're playing the Ohio State team that's on this field in 2021. That's the group we're attacking, that's the film we're studying. It's a great opportunity, great challenge, one I expect our team to be fully prepared for.

Q. Back to Donaven. You said you're not going to give updates on Mike. Especially when you sort of evaluate Donaven's role, do you almost put yourself in a position where you think you have to be prepared for Mike to be out for a more extended period of time, therefore we have to look at a young guy like Donaven and get him ready rather than maybe thinking protecting him?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, because I really do. Being honest in the fact that we don't know the length of time. When you don't know... We've been told it could be shorter, could be longer. We don't know that right now. It truly is week to week.

I think because of that, knowing he is the number two, he is the next guy in the game if something happens to Jack, you have to prepare him as such. To me you have to have a long-term mindset with that, how we scheme, develop things. Not think we're still going to try to protect him for

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

those four games. To me you take that out of your head and you just assume that would be the case. If Michael is back sooner, that's great.

At the same time he has to have that mindset. We want him to have that mindset. That's the way we're approaching it. We want to make sure he's ready. We're also doing things to him allow him to be successful on the field, gain reps, get that valuable experience, also in a way to help us find a way to score points and win games.

Q. You mentioned Noah earlier. He was a guy that played a lot of safety. What told you in the first place you could move him over there and what is the transition for him, what's made him good?

TOM ALLEN: With Noah?

Q. Yes.

TOM ALLEN: I just think the first quality that stuck out to me for him, like I say, was his competitive toughness. He's got a very good football mind. He's able to play multiple positions. That's what's allowed us to move him around.

Some guys you move them from one position to another, it takes too long for them to pick things up. He's not that way. Has a really high football IQ, understands the game, anticipates. What he might lack in size, he makes up for in toughness. Very good tackler. You saw that on Saturday.

Tough kid, physically tough, strong, showed up on special teams all last year. To me that's always a great indicator of how well they're going to play if they're a young guy in our defense moving forward.

I think if a guy like Maurice Freeman that's a true freshman right now. We're going to find more ways to get him involved on special teams. A guy like that that shows up in practice, when you go live, just has a knack to make plays. That's how Noah was.

We're always trying to find -- we had those corners in front of him that were pretty good players. You are like, Okay, let's move him to where we have a chance to get him on the field. We had him at husky position, he has played safety position, does things on third down.

He came here as a corner out of high school. Hey, now when those guys were out, we had to move him back to corner. Josh is the same thing. He was a guy that came here as a corner, moved him to safety. He's a guy you could move back to corner if you had to for certain situations. You try to get as many corners as you can, and the guys that outgrow that position, move to safety.

That cover skill set that you like, the toughness it takes to play that position, they got the size to grow into safety, that often happens. In recruiting that's what you're trying to do that helps you with your flexibility of your positions. When things like this happen, you got a guy you can move around.

The nickel position, what we call a husky, falls in line. Kind of a bigger, thicker corner, that allows things we're trying to do. That's where it helps you as a football team defensively.

Q. You've talked about Donaven's role a bit. He played three snaps in the first half. What was the plan you initially had for him in the game? As the game progressed, how did that seem to change?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say as you go through the feel of the game, just kind of -- obviously the tightness of the game creates a certain type of situation you have for a young guy like that.

But, yeah, I'd like to see him play more. I know we will. I really do believe that. Just kind of grow him as a player. He was nervous. We talked about that yesterday. But now he's got that first snap out of the way, wasn't a very accurate throw, had a couple decent runs.

Just want to be able to do that, he's a quarterback, he can throw it, he can run it. That's what we wanted to see him do. To me, yeah, I expect that role to grow, the things we can do with him to expand each and every week, we'll see where it goes from there.

Q. You've had to face off against some of the top teams in the country already this year. Another one coming this week. Punch after punch. For you guys, most importantly for the players in the locker room, when those punches keep on coming, for you as the coach, how do you change their mindset to keep them fresh when it feels like you're taking these blows?

TOM ALLEN: You keep punching yourself. I think that's key. We're swinging hard. This team believes in what we're doing. There's a lot of toughness and character in that locker room. Yeah, they're hurting after that game Saturday, as well as myself and the whole coaching staff.

I will tell you what, there's a toughness to this group. It's got to start with us as leaders. Yeah, it's a bit hard, there's no doubt about it. Not what any of us expected or wanted. You find yourself in it, what are you going to do? That's where you keep on swinging. As you're swinging, you got to make adjustments, you got to go through and get things

corrected and fixed, not just keep doing the same old thing.

At the same time when you talk about the team, that's where you draw on your leadership, the guys on this team. I went around to all the key guys after the game, after responsibilities with the media, talking with guys one on one, getting in their head. Same thing yesterday.

That's one thing I will say, you don't know obviously how the season is going to play itself out. We made a change where we went to Sunday as our off day to Monday as our off day. Thankful we did because I needed to be with this team the day after these close losses as they continue to put us in a tough spot. Just to be able to be in front of them, I think that's been critical, very important.

I've loved the way our guys have responded. Even they come in feeling a certain way in the early afternoon, I want them to leave when we're done at 7:00 that their mindset is where it needs to be. We had a chance to be with them, we have lifted, been on the field, meetings. Just got to pray for wisdom to be able to know how to say things to them to be able to.

When you know you're team, you're connected with them, that helps. At the same time this is tough. That's part of it. Our guys got a ton of grit. Grit is perseverance and passion towards a long-term goal. It's going to take a lot of that for this team to be able to stay together, keep fighting, playing our best each week.

Even when you fall short, you got to keep persevering, fighting, working together, staying together, keep believing, and just stay the course. That's what we're going to do. To me you just don't blink. Talk about it all the time. Earmuffs and blinders. Have to have them on heavily at this time and do not blink.

Q. We didn't get a chance to ask you about the two-point conversion you missed. Huge ramifications not being able to tie it up. Was it executed right, the kind of play you wanted?

TOM ALLEN: To me you had several options on the play. They brought pressure up the field. To me we got one of our polars got stuck on the tackle which allowed them to have an extra guy for the shuttle pass. You basically had several different things. Usually you want several different options.

Felt like Peyton Hendershot is a guy we're trying to find a way to get involved, get him the ball. He's a big guy, can lean forward, get tough yards. Don't have a lot of big, big backs.

At the same time, it wasn't executed to the level it needed to be to get in the end zone. You don't ever know what your going to call, they don't know what we're going to call. Something we had worked on and felt good about. Just got to execute it. Those plays are tough.

Most two-point plays, it's usually some kind of a pass. You don't really load up on the run on those. Usually a defensive minded person. You look at people as they do those things. You like to get pressure up the field. If that happens, you can dump it underneath and sneak in behind the guy and be able to get him in the end zone. Didn't execute it. That was huge.

Obviously we knew we needed to go for two. Had a plan. Talked about it way before the drive was going. When we score, make sure we go for two, to feel good about the call.

Once again, execution at a high level, critical times, that's how you win those close games.

Q. Childers and Ervin-Poindexter, how did they respond to their increased roles? What do you see them adding in the running game?

TOM ALLEN: They made some plays. Both had some solid runs Saturday that we needed. Opportunity has been presented to those guys, they've done some good things. Obviously they have to keep getting better, working, executing. They have to be able to pass protect, be able to pass the football, run the football, read their keys.

Especially Chris has done a good job of reading the keys and runs possibly. Davion at times has hit some good ones, gets a little bouncy, needs to stick to the reads. Just feel like that room where you obviously had to have guys step up. Still need some other young guys to continue to be brought along, whether it's David and Trent. Those two guys continue to work with the ones and twos. Keep rotating them in, let those guys develop as well.

Want to make sure I don't forget to give out our scout team players of the week. Those guys played a critical role. Defensive scout was Race Stewart, offensive scout team player of the week was Charlie Spegal, the special teams scout was Matt Hohlt. Three in-state guys that have come here from high schools here in Indiana, working extremely hard for us, helping us get ready. Excited for those guys' futures here.

Q. The Donaven decision and such. You as the keeper of this program, you have a long-term contract, you have goals for this team contending and winning Big Ten championships. How much thought went into the process of how much can Donaven help us

contend for a Big Ten title in 2025 as opposed to how much he can help us right now? Is that factored in in any way?

TOM ALLEN: Well, it definitely is. I feel like first and foremost you have to say, Okay, can this individual help us win games right now? If he's in a position to do that, then that's what you need to do.

Bottom line is that situation occurred, we got one of our other quarterbacks on scholarship that tore his ACL in Dexter Williams last spring. He's not available. When Michael had his injury, that leaves you those two scholarship guys that are healthy. That's the position we're in, the situation we're in.

Other variables. That was the reason why initially the thought was to strategically use -- we actually were going to use Donaven in the Idaho game. No, let's keep that to use those four games more judiciously moving forward where we may need him in the Big Ten game, to be able to give us whatever might be needed at that point.

But then when Michael went down, now he's the number two, you just got to say, Okay, you know what, in an ideal situation you like to be able to keep that redshirt, but at this point before we're at, that doesn't appear to be the case. We'll see what happens with Michael, how that all plays itself out. That could change in the short-term. As a mindset that we have, we just kind of say, Hey, we got to plan and get him ready, have a scheme and plan ready.

I do think, there's no doubt, a big picture view of everything we do here in recruiting and roster management, which has dramatically changed in the last couple years with how you view those things with the transfer portal, the way things are. It's a very different landscape than it used to be and continues to be on a consistent basis, daily basis. That's where you have to always be thinking about your current team, first and foremost, but also with the future in mind.

Q. Circling back to Noah Pierre. I think he's been around four years. I think this is probably the most we've seen him on defense obviously. He's a defensive player. What does a guy like that mean to your program at a time when obviously sort of ease of use of the transfer rules, a guy that sticks around, maybe sort of performs the way he did Saturday when he gets his opportunity? What does that mean for your program?

TOM ALLEN: It means a lot. It always meant a lot. Doing this a long time. A kid rewarded for persevering. He came here, he wanted to play. Especially after you're here for a

couple years, you really want that. I think last year he accepted that role on special teams. Wanted a more expanded role, like they all do, but stayed the course.

We had a lot of good conversations. I don't know that it even dawned on him. We never had conversations where he was talking about... Some guys sat down and talked about things like that. Just trying to help them with their future, where we saw them in our program.

I think it speaks to his commitment of who we are, his belief in our program, him wanting to graduate from here, getting a degree from here, being able to finish what he started. I respect that so much. I know it's become a different mindset for some guys. Understandably so in some situations, I get that.

I just feel like it speaks volumes to him believing in us and what we're doing here, then just the value of a guy like that staying the course. All those reps that he was taking in the past, whether it was a backup or in spring football or fall camp, when he would probably get more of his reps, and now this is his moment to be able to step up at critical times to be able to make game-changing plays, just consistent plays.

I just appreciate him so much. That's why I recognized him yesterday. Had nine tackles in the game. Commended him for his perseverance and passion towards his long-term goal, which was to find a way to get on the field and help us win games.

Have a great day. LOE.

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