

Indiana University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 1, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Head Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good morning. Just wanted to recap a few things here as we get started. Just continue to be disappointed in our outcome from Saturday's game. The guys took it hard. And a lot of emotion in that locker room afterwards. And the fight was there, just got to execute better.

Disappointed in our defense. Didn't rise up when we needed them in the third quarter especially after we took the lead. Not playing complementary football, which means when we score to take the lead, we've got to go out and get three and out, get the takeaway. Keep that memorandum going. Block a point, you've got to go get points. Didn't get any points after that. Got to be complementary of each other.

And then when we do make a play and get ourselves -- we do a fake punt and execute that and get about 25-plus yards on that and then need to good in and score a touchdown. So continue to work together.

But encouraged by some progress on offense. Thought our offensive line played better. Stephen Carr ran hard, did some good things. Donaven obviously played well. Played better in the fourth quarter than he did in the first quarter. He got better as the game wore on, more comfortable. Obviously set a record for yards for a true freshman quarterback in a game. And really proud of him, his preparation and his ability to rise up in a road game, which is always hard for a young guy. But encouraged by that. And not surprised though. I do think -- I've said all along I thought he's a really talented player that has a big upside. And his best football is ahead of him.

And Peyton Hendershot continues to play at a high level. Just gritty, tough, catching the football, blocking hard, playing hard on special teams. Matt Bjorson same thing. Playing his tail off. Tight end room has been a bright spot for our team offensively for sure.

And I want to recognize the players of the week doing a tremendous job working hard for us in practice. Jaquez Smith, special teams scout of the week. Offensive scout of

the week Vinny Fiacable and Brady Feeney, two offensive linemen. And then defensive scout is Joseph Daniels, just continues to be selfless and work hard and do a tremendous job helping us get ready each and every week.

Got a great opportunity this week to head to Ann Arbor, take on the Wolverines. That's going to be a tough test for us as we progress through our season and continue to seek after getting a very important win.

So questions.

Q. I recognize if there was a clearcut answer to this, it would probably be simpler. But when you talk about complementary football and have a defense that's played so well at times this year and then kind of on a day where the offense scores 35, gets about 450 yards, can't get those stops, are there sort of, I guess, more fundamental things that you can kind of diagnosis than maybe just scheme or fit or whatever when you can't seem to sync those performances up?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. The syncing the performances part is frustrating. I thought as we went through and evaluated Saturday's game defensively, really went through and evaluated whether they were scheme issues versus technique issues. And it really was technique.

There was a few scheme issues as far as just not executing the right scheme on those calls. But most of them were just within that scheme just executing the call and playing with proper technique. And I do know just being -- you know, third down stuck out to me as -- third and longs especially where we've got to be dominant defensively and have been in the past and were not Saturday.

And I think that -- you might have mentioned it, I think it is very true, you go back and look and you see just the number of guys playing lots of snaps, you know. Had two safeties play in 90s, you know. Our depth in the secondary with injuries has hurt us. It's made it challenging. And Jaylin Williams is playing too many snaps. And got to get those guys back to help us there. Josh Sanguinetti was out. He tried to warm up, tried to go, couldn't go. Hurt us



in our depth there. Just I think got to play more guys there even though there's going to be young guys just to be able to keep our guys fresher so they don't make those mistakes in critical times.

And so just a lot of those things come into play. But at the same time, just did some good things. You know, had a very dominant second quarter defensively, which was good, and we needed that after a tough start. And then kind of got everything calmed down and had a chance to take the game momentum-wise in the third quarter after we scored and did not do it.

But, yeah, I just think it's -- you go through, and there's the execution piece and there's the technique part of it. And this goes into just trying to continue to find a winning formula to be able to put it all together.

We knew we had to support our offense with a new quarterback and his opportunities there and the challenges that was going to create. I thought our special teams did that in terms of getting the -- the blocked punt was huge and then getting the fake punt, which was a big boost to our offense. But got to capitalize on that.

Even in both of those situations, it was a three-point game. And if any one of those you score a touchdown over that one field goal or you don't miss a field goal, then you have a different outcome. So frustrating. But at the same time, you just identify them and you don't make excuses. You just try to fix them and keep getting better.

Q. Coach, the team is up against it as far as the Bowl streak is concerned. You'd have to win out just to qualify. I don't know if that's something you use as motivation this week in progress that there's still something left to play for?

TOM ALLEN: They understand. They know. We don't have to talk about it a lot. The captains mentioned it when I met with them. And they understand what's at stake.

And so -- but this is just trying to find a way to compete at a high level and play at a high level and win Big 10 football games. So to me that's the whole goal. We've got to play our best football all three phases working together, complementing one another, playing our best on Saturday.

Q. Tom, I know you were asked on Saturday basically what happens going forward at quarterback, especially if someone gets healthy. I know you said it's going to be whoever is healthy and give us the best chance to win. Sort of going forward, how do you evaluate that? Are you the sort of person that has the rule that you don't lose your starting job if you get hurt? And

obviously these guys have, both Tuttle and Penix, have additional eligibility going forward after this year. What all goes into how you'll handle that if one of those guys is ready?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. Great question. You know, I think -- and they both continue to be, as I stated after the game, week to week. And we'll see how they progress this week. A little unknown as far as with Jack's injury. See how quickly he'll bounce back from that. I know Michael's throwing and moving around and doing things at maybe a better rate than we thought.

But at the same time, Donaven is the healthiest right now. And he is the guy that we're getting ready to play. And to me obviously showed a lot of positive signs of things that I expected him to be able to do. I know not everybody saw that against Ohio State. So that was kind of frustrating because I knew he was a different quarterback than he showed. But it was what it was, and that's how he played. So you have to just grow from there. But he did, and he responded. Yeah, to me right now Donaven's the guy and got to keep getting him ready to play better every week.

Q. In the same vein, we haven't really seen McCulley play too much. This was the first time we really got to see his skills put to work. What does he have that makes him the number one guy now? He's only 18. Had his first start on the road. What makes him such a special quarterback? And what kind of quarterback is he going to be for your team?

TOM ALLEN: Well, first of all, I remember back when we first saw him throw. He was here for one of our summer 7 on 7s that we had. He was the quarterback there for his high school team. And he was young. But just the way he naturally threw the football. I knew he was a three-sport guy at that point and proceeded to be his whole career and was just naturally -- had length even back then. He's grown since then. And just the way the ball came off his hand naturally. I thought that was impressive. And then just to be able to have athleticism where you can run it if you need to. And he's got size. He's 215 pounds. He's going to keep getting better. I see him to be up to a 225, 230 pound guy I would imagine. He's still young as you mentioned.

I think there's just a competitive toughness to him, you know. I think he has that. He doesn't back down. He didn't back down when he first got thrown in there against Ohio State. And he runs behind his pads. He doesn't run high. He doesn't run -- he doesn't play that way. He attacks things. And believes in himself. Has a pretty calm demeanor, you know, doesn't get frazzled. And that's something that guys that innately, you know. And he has

ability to just extend plays and find guys open down field. And if he has to run, he can run it.

So all those things. I love his attitude. I love the way he approaches things every day. He's a humble guy. He's a great teammate. And so he's a hard worker. So a lot of good qualities that makes you excited to have him. That's why we were excited to have him on our team and expected him to be able to red shirt and to have a chance to develop even more this off season. But things change. And he's now our starting quarterback.

Q. Tom, you mentioned the offensive line improved play. And having a young quarterback, obviously, he's going to need that. But going back and examining through the course of this season, they were one of the groups that you probably had the highest expectations of. And have you been able to figure out what has led to the not quite getting to where they need to be so far?

TOM ALLEN: You know, I mean, I think you continue to look at all those different things as you go through. And I think a couple individuals maybe didn't play as well earlier as they needed to for whatever reason. You know, different variables go into that for sure.

And wasn't bashful for myself to say that I was frustrated and disappointed in their performance and calling it what it was. You can see -- people can watch the game. You can watch the film and see you're not executing at a high enough level. But there is -- as I've always said, there's a chemistry to that group playing next to somebody. And the communication with that has to be repped out at a high level and over and over again, especially with the defense that we face up front and the talented defensive lines that we play against.

So I think as you just continue to allow yourself to get more reps and get better and try and find ways to help your guys be more successful and the play of the quarterback, his ability to get the ball out and make reads. And there's no question -- I think I've said this as well, quarterback play is pretty paramount. You know, I don't care what level you're at, you want to be able to be an elite offense, you've got to have an elite quarterback. And he has to play at an elite level and has to play at a high level of execution and getting the ball out and getting the reads. And I think that creates a lot of confidence with the guys around him too.

So I think there's multiple variables with it. Definitely a group that hasn't as the whole season looked at itself played as well as you would have liked. But we've just got to find a way to get better every week.

Saw progress last week. Got to build off of that. Going to face a better defense this week. So that growth needs to continue as they continue to give the quarterback time to throw and our running backs time to run.

Q. What, if anything, can you do as a coaching staff to help the receivers kind of build the rapport with -- when you have three different quarterbacks that all throw three very different balls? One of them left handed, two of them right handed. How do you help to build that rapport with receivers when there's so many different kind of quarterbacks?

TOM ALLEN: That's a good question. And I think that there's -- just like everything else in life, there's very few shortcuts for things like that. It's hard to fast forward that. There's a timing component to it.

I think the biggest thing we do is try to maximize our practice reps with those guys from a little more work on routes on air with those guys from a timing perspective in practice to help them make up for some lost ground as well and some post practice work as well without trying to put too much on their legs. With some injuries we've had in that room, that's kind of become an issue as well. But at the same time, that's probably the way we've been best dealing with it is the way that we practice and trying to -- because you don't have to be physical to get that timing down.

And so those guys have been working really hard on those parts. And that's really become a major part of our pregroup work has been the routes on air with both the tight ends as a group, the running backs as a group, and then the wide receivers as a group with their quarterbacks, with Donaven, because he does not have that rep base over the summer, even though he threw with them some but very little. And no spring football with him.

And as I said. Even during fall camp. He wasn't a 1 or a 2 at that point. So he got a few reps but very few reps to be honest with you, with the 1s for sure. I think it's just something we've had to modify in our preparation to get our guys timed up. And even in the game, the game reps become valuable. I think that last week's reps in the game become valuable for this next week to continue to help their timing and their chemistry.

Q. Coach, I guess kind of going off that point then. In the game, you kind of mentioned how well Peyton Hendershot played again. But also Ty Fryfogle, certainly seemed like he got more attention from Donaven McCulley in the offense. Was that a product of all the focus being on Peyton and him having such a good game that it opened it up for Ty? Or is that

something you guys kind of worked on in practice, really looking for those veterans and Hendershot and Fryfogle to help Donaven out?

TOM ALLEN: I would say, to answer your question, it was an emphasis to get him the football. Does it help to have someone else that they have to recognize and honor and leverage defensively? Yes. But without question, got him involved in the reverse, just trying to get him more touches. Talented football player. You can sometimes take a receiver, you can do things to make it hard on that guy. So that's where others have got to step up.

But, yes, we feel like he's one of our best football players and need to get him the football. So that was definitely by design. And that's what we want to be able to do. And Peyton's been -- he's been phenomenal. You think of how hard he's work and what he's overcome and where he's -- what he's become as both a leader and as a player, it's very, very excited for him and very proud of him.

Q. I guess one question leading to another one. Was Nick on the sideline Saturday as opposed to normally kind of up in the press box? And was that designed around just kind of having him being able to be more kind of one on one with Donaven as the game wore on?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. I was wondering if anybody would notice that. Definitely by design. Nick came to me and kind of expressed why he felt like he needed to be. And I 100 percent agreed. And it was really to just help Donaven give immediate feedback, you know, off the field, being able to talk to him face to face and just help him process everything and make adjustments and keep him calm and being his first official start.

So, yeah, that was by design. Then we put -- Kevin Wright was up in the press box. So they switched places. And I thought that was a very good decision to make and glad we did it. And I think it definitely helped Donaven. And it was really positive for our whole offense.

Q. Yeah. I know that over the weekend Kalia kind of hurt you guys with the pass. Now you're facing a Michigan team that is very effective running the football. Concerns about that? And kind of the physical challenge that the defense is going to have to play and maybe a different look than what you guys saw last week?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. There is no question they run the ball very, very well. Very big offensive line. Very physical. Two really talented running backs that have been very, very effective. Do have talented receivers and a good

quarterback that just seems to have a lot of moxie to him and toughness and moves the chains and makes a lot of plays more with his arm than his legs. And they play a second quarterback a little bit for some packages for him.

But bottom line is, yeah, they've established -- you can just tell from the very beginning of the season that was what they wanted to be able to do was establish the run game. And they've done a really good job of that.

And even in the game this past week, they really -- I mean, they had a lot of points, a lot of yards. They just -- Michigan State just scored more points than they did. It wasn't like they stopped them. But, yeah, very big challenge for our guys.

They do a great job blocking up front. Got some big old tight ends that can catch the ball and run well. So, yeah, it's a very different looking offense than they've been the last couple of years in the way they've -- kind of a little more back to what it was in a lot of ways before. And especially with the multiple formations and personnel groupings and different things and emphasis on running the football.

So less of a spread mindset, more of a two tight ends and multiple looks and kind of the way, like I said, they were in the past. But it's been very good for them.

Q. Just to go back to the offensive line. What made that specific move that you guys made work with moving Matt from right guard to left guard and bringing Zack in there? What did Zack do to earn his way in there? What made you think that Matt made more sense on the left side shifting over?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. I really felt that based on play the last few weeks and Zack was getting healthier -- he had something he had to deal with physically earlier in the season, so just getting him to where he was healthy enough to be able to be a guy in there, just felt like that he needed to be one of those spots. And so whether it's center, right guard, left guard, he can play all three of those. And just -- and then, obviously, Michael's situation.

So it was natural to be able to just get guys where they were most comfortable and just trying to get our best five guys there. And I think Zack is a really good football player. And I wanted to get him in there. And it just worked out that way because of Michael's injury. But at the same time, Zack was going to be in there somewhere. Basically, I just felt that was just what needed to happen. And that's the way -- direction that we went.

So I do think that there's a lot of interchangeable parts in

there. I think they can play either side. And so once we went with that combination and liked the results, we'll just continue it with that.

All right. Have a great day. LEO.

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