

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: All right, good morning. Appreciate everybody being here. Just a few comments from Saturday. Just continue to evaluate everything, and met with our guys yesterday, and obviously as with our staff exclusively, and just trying to go through, and obviously guys are playing hard and just got to -- obviously got to keep working hard to get better in a lot of key areas.

I thought the defense did some good things, but consistently got to eliminate some of those big plays, long run, long pass, both set up touchdowns. I think the thing that stuck out to me there defensively was three of our touchdown drives were in 12 plays and then 58 snaps were in the other ones that led to field goals. So just trying to eliminate those chunk plays, big plays, and when we're doing that, we're doing some good things.

Not enough, and then offensively obviously struggled in the passing game predominantly and really struggled in that area, and got to get our receivers the ball, get them more involved and get our tight ends more touches, as well, especially 86.

Very disappointed and frustrated, as well, but guys came back today, ready to battle, refocus, and anything we can do to get our guys in position to get ready for Rutgers coming in this week.

They're a very physical football team, play hard. Coach has done a great job there getting those guys and changing their whole mindset and how they play and how they compete for 60 minutes. So know that that's going to be the case this week. Very important for our guys, and they understand it.

We talked a lot yesterday about how we finish. That's how you're remembered as a group, and it's going to be important for these guys in that area, as well.

Recognize some guys from last week on the scouts, Cooper Jones and Pat Finley, defensive scouts for the week, both freshmen; and then we've got Jordan Jusevitch, offensive scout, just an unselfish guy that's come here and

hasn't got to play as much as he wanted to, but he's been on special teams, but went on the other side of the ball and helped out in every way possible last week, and just got an amazing attitude. Appreciate him so much.

Then Eli Jochem, the special teams scout of the week is one of our receivers, continues to give us great effort, and Eli does an awesome job for us.

Questions?

Q. Obviously with a bowl game off the table at this point, do you make more of a point to try to get younger guys action? If so, to what extent? If not, why not?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think the objective is to win the game, so if those younger guys were in position to help us do that, then they'll be the ones that are going to play. Obviously that's our whole objective is to continue to help this team finish strong and due to injuries you're probably going to have a lot of younger guys have opportunities because of that. Those will naturally probably happen for the guys that are in position to help us do that, and so we'll progress accordingly.

But the number one goal is to beat Rutgers.

Q. I know you've been here for five years now but this is still your first major college head coaching job. With this being the first year with your program has taken a step back, I was just curious who are the people that you talk to, whether it's for advice or people who have experienced these types of things you're going through with the program before? Are there people you reach out to for that kind of information?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there are, and guys that I've worked with and that I know and trust. Some are football, some are not football. Yeah, there's no doubt this has been a major disappointment and frustration, way different than any of us ever expected, thought, even imagined would happen.

But here we are. That's what I talked with our guys on



Sunday is that when things don't go the way you want them to, how are you going to respond. Then you fall back on what you believe and you get tested. Right now we're being tested in a strong way, and these testings, they try you and they shape you, they form you, and you've got people that you rely on and you talk to, and they encourage a lot of guys, send me a lot of things encouraging us, and I appreciate that. Guys that you believe have been where you've been and have had those experiences, as well.

Bottom line is you've got to -- just like I said, it tests who you are and what you are and what you believe and really truly why you believe it. I think that's why these times are very, very difficult, and they're not a whole lot of fun, but they're part of life.

Q. You mentioned the struggles in the passing game. What are the root causes of that this year? I know some of this has to be the quarterback turnover, but is it beyond that?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, quarterback play in general to me just -- even before that, just not -- for whatever reason, different variables involved with that. But obviously not where we want to be, need to be, and it's been a frustrating thing for all of us. A group of guys that we had high expectations for, and they did themselves, and I know they're frustrated, as well, and I understand that and I don't blame them for that at all.

Just going back and looking at the different variables, there's things that probably stand out like everything else. There's never just one single thing. But getting ourselves in a position to have better quarterback play is really the key in my opinion. It starts up front, and then obviously those guys getting open and being able to finish plays when they get to that position.

Obviously not been anywhere close to what we expected, and so a lot of variables go into that, so that's a part of just the whole evaluation process you've got to go through when this is all said and done.

Q. Stephen Carr went out early in the game; any update on his status this week? Also any updates on Mike and Jack?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so Stephen Carr definitely went out, did not come back, and got an ankle injury that he's going to be working back from. Nothing broke there. Did have all the X-rays and MRIs with that over the weekend. Just working hard to get him back, so don't know where that stands yet, don't know how it's going to affect his ability to practice at this point. We'll obviously have to look at all

those options that we have at that position.

Then as far as Michael and Jack, they're both going to practice this week, have progressed from last week. They've been involved, but they're going to be more involved, and so that's positive news for sure. Just trying to get those guys healthy, and we'll see how this week progresses with that, but yeah, we're going to have all three of those guys out there taking reps.

Q. This week you have a quarterback that has taken the No. 1 reps and will be starting Donaven McCulley, who you did not expect to be playing right now, and now these teams are going to be game planning for him, as Michigan did. With these next two games coming up that are more winnable than some of the prior ones on the schedule, what can you do to get the offense to a point where these games are more manageable?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think the bottom line is whoever the quarterback is everything is built on their strengths and the things that they're able to do and to give us a chance to win and put the ball across the goal line eventually and create 1st downs, stay on the field, and that to me is the objective is to be able to possess the ball and score points.

To me, whoever that is, going to have to build that. Obviously those are decisions that we have to make, and the opponent has to figure out. Whoever is in that position, it's going to be based upon what they do best.

Q. A quarter of the season left, obviously a disappointing season, but how much do you lean on the seniors, the older guys to really still create a sense of urgency for this team because you do have the Old Oaken Bucket to play for; you do have the opportunity to finish the season on a high note. How much do you lean on those guys to kind of set the tone for everyone else?

TOM ALLEN: It's huge. To me that's all we talked about yesterday is how you finish. This team -- I know they're hurting. Obviously they are, physically and mentally and all of the above.

I think that that's where your leadership has to come through very strong, and that's going to be -- going to meet with some more of those guys as the week progresses and just rely on that. We need those guys to step up, and it is truly an issue of what you're made of on the inside and how hard you're willing to prepare and to be able to be at your very best because the bottom line is you're playing Big Ten football every single weekend, and it's going to be a dogfight to find a way to win these football games.

But love this team, love our guys, proud of them for the way they've continued to fight, and that to me is what we're going to rely on is that leadership, leadership of our coaching staff to be able to help our guys.

It begins with me, to be able to have our guys prepared and have the right physicality, the right mindset to be able to finish.

Q. As you talk about Mike and Jack being able to practice again, I recognize maybe nothing is certain in terms of their availability for Saturday, but does the possibility of retaining Donaven's redshirt kind of come back into your mind if one or both of them is available kind of going forward? He's only played the four games. Or is that basically just kind of in the trash at this point?

TOM ALLEN: No, I mean, it's something we discussed yesterday. It's all based on where those other two guys are at and what their health is like. To be able to put that -- because you've already got he's played for so that's the limit and if he plays at all Saturday you know what that means.

Once again, the whole objective is number one, whoever is in there is going to need to be able to be healthy, and not going to put them out there if they're not. But number two, it is what do we got to do to be able to help us be successful on Saturday. So that's part of it.

But those are discussions we've had to make, and it's all based upon the health of those other two guys, and we're going to let these guys prepare this week and we'll see what happens.

Q. A couple guys went down during the game, Luke Haggard, Jaren Handy. Where are those guys --

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so Luke played three snaps and then was injured. Hope to get him back. We'll know more tomorrow. But the plan is for him to practice, but hope to get him back, yes.

Jaren Handy still is probably going to be out for a little bit, so he obviously was injured during the game, so yeah, that one is -- I would say he's not going to play this Saturday.

Q. Just to follow back up on that Donaven question, with the way the transfer portal works now and everything, does that sort of change your mindset as to whether or not you might worry about Donoven's availability in 2024 or not? Or does that change the overall big picture of that process?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think there's no question it's changed it because basically the ability to -- I guess it's even the amount of individuals that you have, I guess you could say, access to or have the opportunity to bring in has completely changed now, and then the fact that a young man can play immediately when he chooses to transfer. In the past he would have to sit out a year so that would affect that.

I think there's no question. And just even the whole landscape of everything, you think of quarterback, guys come here, they have success, oftentimes they'll leave after three years or if they have a redshirt year as their fifth year and they're still here, their fourth year, and they still choose to leave.

I know I think it's probably unusual that a guy would be someplace at that position for five years, so it happens, I'm sure, but yeah, I think all those variables together kind of make it a little bit different thought process that you might have. Yeah, you definitely want to maximize your roster, you want to maximize your player development and all that, and there's no question that was the initial plan with him. We all understood that clearly, and he did, too.

But obviously things have changed, and so at this point it's about who and what situation, what combination gives us the best chance to be able to win on game day, and if we can keep an extra year for a guy doing that, then that's awesome. But if not because of the transfer portal and the way the roster management is kind of looked at now, I think it's probably, yeah, different than it was in the past.

Q. Talking about just roster management also, with the running back room now, if you potentially don't have Stephen Carr, I know it's uncertain at this point and hard to answer that, but looking ahead to this week, is this a chance to kind of evaluate what you might have next year in the running back room given you're potentially starting a walk-on this week and Carr is not going to be back next year, so what kind of goes into planning for the --

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think there's no question, so you've got the guys that are in that room. They're going to get their opportunities definitely this week in practice, and we'll have a chance to have all of them rotating with the ones and twos that are in that room, and we'll see who rises to the top, and you'll get a chance to see exactly what they've got, and then some of them are going to get a chance to play on Saturday that maybe didn't play in the past or haven't played as much based on what happens with Stephen.

Bottom line is there's no doubt. Anytime -- at every position you get a situation where guys in front of you get injured, you've got some younger guys that are there, they're going to get their shot, and they're going to get an opportunity just like we had at receiver and different things like that, different positions.

We'll be able to have a probably much better feel for that as this week plays itself out and even to the next couple weeks, and that will help us for our future evaluation and once again be able to utilize the resources and the options that we have to be able to bring in guys for those positions to be able to help us be where we want to be as we move forward.

Q. I know there's been a lot of talk about offensive struggles, but the defense isn't playing at the same level that it was last year, not getting the takeaways that it did. What's been the biggest difference between this year's defense and last year's defense because you have a lot of guys who are back that played a lot of football. What has been the biggest difference there?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think it's a fair question. You know, the takeaways, and then you go back to, okay, why are you not getting them. But I think that's -- if you look at even the stats of games and you go through and evaluate, that to me is the biggest -- that's the difference is taking the ball away.

We gave up some yards last year. We gave up some drives, but we got a lot of takeaways, and those negate a lot of things and they make you forget about a lot of things.

But that to me is different for sure. I think sometimes there's certain years they go your way, but we haven't changed the emphasis. I know that for sure. It's always been a massive emphasis for me, and that will never change.

Just haven't had as many. I think pressure on the quarterback is part of it, too. Those pressures I think create a lot of those takeaways. They create errant throws and as you hit the quarterback as he's throwing. We got four sacks against Michigan and they had only given up two the entire year.

Did some really good things in that area. We got the takeaway late, but it really was inconsequential in the outcome of the game.

That to me is when you go through it, we've got to continue, and I know we've had years here where we've gotten more than others, but that's the whole goal. That's why you see when you get takeaways it changes

everything, and that's never going to cease to be a huge priority for us.

You look at our whole team, we turned the ball over on offense, especially early in the year, and it cost us big time, and we're not getting the takeaways. Those are things we were able to do a year ago. Not turn it over on offense, create them on defense, creates a whole different outcome for your team, especially in these close games.

That's been the frustration without a doubt. We've got to continue to go back and look at it and evaluate it and make sure we're doing everything we can do to help us. I know we're still continuing to play a combination of man and zone and vision coverages and match mans like we've always done, so that part hasn't changed dramatically. The system hasn't changed. It's tweaked a little bit every year. But yeah, to me it's just not getting takeaways. That's the biggest difference.

On offense it's been quarterback play. On defense it's been lack of takeaways are the two biggest things that stick out to me as far as what's been lacking for us.

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