

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: -- guys that have been out, trying to get as many of those guys back as we can, allow us to be able to be our very best in West Lafayette on Saturday.

Do want to say this from the game. Do appreciate our young guys continuing to work their tails off in practice. Just doing a great job for us. Defensive scout team player of the week was Andrew Turvy, offensive scout team player of the week Zack Merrill and James Bomba, special teams scout was Sam Daugstrup.

Guys continue to work hard. Really proud of our guys coming back yesterday and attacking the day. Obviously hurting and down, frustrated, but at the same time staying together. Just talked to our strength staff, the way they attacked the weight room, everything we're trying to do.

Just want to finish strong. Got one more week together for the 2021 season. Been very challenging obviously, all the things out there. At the same time special group of guys, appreciate them, love them. Want to finish strong with these guys and do evening we can to keep the bucket.

Questions.

Q. You mentioned trying to get guys back. Who is possible of getting back?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, trying to get Tiawan Mullen back. He worked out over the weekend. Will be practicing tomorrow. We'll see how that goes. We'll know more after that. Same with Stephen Carr, James Miller, trying to get those guys back. Obviously quarterbacks as well. Obviously it our last week. It's now or never in that regard. Still working with those guys to see where they're at.

Also Josh Sanguinetti, another one we've been working to get back. Those guys I mentioned have all been critical parts of our team in the past, need to get them if we can at all possible. They're working hard to do that with our training staff, strength staff, everybody involved.

Other than that, any specific guys you can feel free to a

ask. Basically everybody that's been out, trying to get them back. Some guys have continued to work. It doesn't look promising. Others it does. Each individual guy is attacking it the best they can, trying to get out there first team.

Q. Is it kind of odd, last year's game was canceled due to COVID, you had tremendous momentum last year, didn't play. This is the second straight one you have to play on the road. The dynamic of that, not playing last year, holding the bucket for two years even though you had only one win out of that.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it was unique. No doubt. Even last year, seems so long ago, leading up to that game, things started going south for both programs with COVID. Then we tried to reschedule it the next week, didn't play it. Ended up not playing the game.

Obviously two years in a row we'll play the game at Purdue, so that's just reality of what's happened. But bottom line is that's where the game's going to be, so that's where we're going to show up and play. So there you go.

Q. You and Jeff Brohm came into coaching here the same time. Both have dealt with ups and downs, ebbs and flows. During the course of time, how often do you run into him or how much do you pay attention to what they're doing?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, obviously probably the biggest thing we overlap with is recruiting. I don't physically get to see him that much out there. Occasionally on the road you might, the contact period where head coaches go out. Ran into assistants as I was out there this season as well.

Recruiting is where you really keep a close eye on things. Guys they are recruiting, offer or take. We're having those discussions as a staff, making sure we are seeing things, making sure we don't miss anybody.

A lot of respect. Like I said, we've both had our ups and downs the last few years. I've always respected him a lot, reach out to him at different times. They've done a great job this year. I know last year was what it was and



different things before that.

Just has always been somebody that I respect, guys that do things the right way. I think he's one of those guys. He's a tough, hard-nosed guy, works hard, good family guy, respect that. Just the way their coaches handle things. As we got to know some of those guys, maybe ones we have known in the past, ones we didn't, maybe got to know more.

There is mutual respect even though it is a huge rivalry, huge game for both programs. Obviously it is an in-state team. Not every program has in-state teams. I've been at other places that have that type of rivalry. It's very intense. Sometimes it's more ugly than others in those situations.

I do think there's a professionalism here between both universities, especially with the staffs in football. I know for sure there's just mutual respect.

Q. We reached the end of the season. Jacolby will enter the transfer portal. All teams will have that no matter what. What is it that you actually try to do with this team to talk to them after the season, the ones that are coming back, and the ones that are coming in? Was not a great season, there's no getting around that.

TOM ALLEN: Sure.

Q. You have to have those conversations. How do they go?

TOM ALLEN: First of all, open and honest. From our guys on our team, like I said, it's a very unique dynamic more so than ever because a lot of guys getting to the end, they've graduated, may have more years left. Those discussions, some have begun, some later after this weekend. Just to be able to have an honest conversation about where they stand with us, what they're thinking as well.

I think the biggest key is open and honest dialogue between both sides. To me it's about making sure that we have the guys that are all in here and want to be a part of this, want to help us fight through the adversity we've experienced, help us to get back to where we want to be.

Obviously this has not been anywhere close to a season we expected or wanted, but here we are. We can't sit here and make excuses or talk about this or that. It's about what are we doing to build for the future. That's all about the players that we attract to come here and those that choose to either graduate and move on or just move on or however it works for them.

Like I said, my biggest thing is I want the guys that want to

be here. That's the primary focus. That's about finding guys that fit with us that we would add to the team both either from high school from a transfer situation, finally guys that want to help us continue to build towards our goal of winning the Big Ten championship.

Q. The finalists for the Butkus Award came out this morning. Micah McFadden was not among the six finalists.

TOM ALLEN: I think he's a great player. I don't have any control over the voting for those awards. Obviously he's a special, special player, developed tremendously since he's been here. Awesome young man. Great family. Ton of respect for him. He's the leader of our defense, one of the leaders of our team. You see him play every weekend.

I think there's no question he's one of the best linebackers in the country. That's my opinion about him. I think a lot of others feel the same way.

But those awards are what they are. People vote for them, that's fine. It's not always indicative of an individual guy. Much respect to the guys that are on that list. A lot of great players as well. There's a lot of good players in this country.

Q. Defense is really solid early in the season, back half of the season, 38 to Maryland, 38 to Rutgers, 35 this past weekend. Because of injuries guys have had to play an awful lot of snaps. As a defensive guy, are you disappointed in them or are you understanding about the kind of struggles they've had? How do you approach that?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, to me very proud of the guys that are still battling every single day, that are still healthy to be able to be out there, fighting to stay out there. The depth has become a huge issue. I'm going to call it what it is, playing way too many snaps, which has led to even later in the game more fatigue, more mistakes. Just kind of wearing down physically and mentally.

That to me has been frustrating because I know how hard the guys are playing, how hard they work each week. It's been an unfortunate set of circumstances. You look at our roster, where we're at right now, based on how we started.

No doubt, football is a numbers game, always has been, always will be. That's why they have classes in high school sports, things working the way they are divisionally. When you have more guys that are bigger, faster, stronger that can make plays, that's what you want.

Unfortunately as this has gotten to the end here, we've



gotten decimated in spots, it's taken its toll. Unfortunately that's where we are. Got to fight through it, find ways to execute better in critical times. I thought there were some things even in the game this last week where third downs did not get off the field, third-and-longs, we really needed to. Breakdowns in guys that are, once again, playing that aren't quite ready to go play yet. But they have to be out there because of situation we're in.

So that is it. That is what we got to do. We have to find ways to get those guys ready so they can execute. It is not for lack of effort or lack of preparation with our guys working hard. We're just trying to keep it as simple as we can so those younger guys can still execute and make plays and try to get some of those older guys off the field a little bit early in the game, not have them play every single snap.

That's where we are. It has been frustrating because I know it's a special group of guys that I think have got a lot of good players in there. I know that they're frustrated as well.

But the key is they're going to battle this week, working really hard, try to find a way to get some of these guys back, even a guy or two would help, it would be huge to help us in that area, especially in the secondary, then some depth at linebacker.

Just trying to continue to do everything we can to fight through everything we're going through and help our guys have one more shot to play together and do something special.

Q. Just asking a little bit more about Grant. He's a local guy. From your perspective, walk-ons have different kinds of journeys, how they develop, some stay for a whole career, some decide for a couple years. From your perspective, what was his path to you guys out of high school and how have you seen him keep growing into what you ask of a walk-on quarterback?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, that's a great question.

Really Grant is a really special guy. Comes from a good family. Just his high school coach, other coaches from that area, that recommended him to us, was really kind of how it all started. Other individuals that have worked with him as a quarterback.

You come here, we actually have three quarterbacks in that group of guys that came here together. He may not have necessarily been the top of that group even when he first got here.

I tell you what, he evolved. Of our walk-ons that we've had here, he may have improved the most. Just really bought in. Just a tough kid, works hard, attention to detail. He's very smart, excellent student. He's what you want in a walk-on in regards to he does everything right.

On the field he does everything right, off the field. He's on time all the time there, smart, tough, dependable, a guy that is going to represent your program in a first class way, everything he does.

Here is the reality. If a young man is on our roster, he does something with poor judgment off the field, they say Indiana football player, so-and-so. That's how you're labeled. That's just the way it is.

Whether you play or don't play, you're a part of this football team. We got to make sure that all 130 guys are doing things the right way and representing our program in a first class way. He's one of those guys you never worry about that with him. He always does the right thing.

Obviously it's been awesome to see him be rewarded for that. He's gotten better and better every single week, every year he's been here. Just his reads, his understanding of the offense. Even as you've watched him play so far, the times he's played, very calm and just poised and just sits back there and does his job.

So that's where he's at. I know that he's very excited about the opportunity he's been given to get a chance to play. He's taking advantage of it.

Just really proud of Grant, the person that he is first and foremost, but now the fact he's out there making plays, doing what he can to help us get a win.

Q. After Saturday you weren't thrilled with the offense in particular. When you had a chance to reevaluate it, what did you find? What more did you see in terms of why some RPOs became runs when you thought they should be passes?

TOM ALLEN: I think a lot of those to me were just quarterback making a decision to run it rather than throw it. Whether or not that was the right decision or not, this is how we would say the next time we do this, this is the decision we think you should make. A lot of times they were decisions to tuck it and run it.

I think that's where we got to grow in that confidence to throw the football. You got to throw the football. Yes, there's no doubt you want to put the defense in conflict, make them have to give us the proper read. When you

give the player the chance to make that read, you just can't come down and say, Hey. You have to give him that freedom to make that read, right?

We got to make some better reads. We got to be able to know when to throw it, when not to throw, when to run it. Just a growth process we go through. I know we all know we got to throw the football. That's to me a big part of this. We got to be able to get better at this this week, work hard on that.

We've been doing a lot of good things in practice on that, but it has to transfer to the game. Didn't do it on Saturday. At least with Donovan since he's been playing. We have to improve in that. That is just every day is valuable for him, every meeting, every rep, every practice rep, every mental rep, everything we do to get him to develop as a quarterback in this program.

That's the ultimate goal, is to be able to every time he does what he does, every season he's in, whether it's the spring season, the off-season, during the season, that it's growth, continual growth. I know it's not always like this, it's never like that. But you got to be able to have that trajectory moving in the right direction.

To me it's teaching from that, film. I sat in those meetings with him going over the decision making things that happen in the game to try to make better ones next week. That's the whole goal.

He's young. We got to find a way as a staff to make it as simple as possible to help him be successful on game day.

Q. The depth issues at quarterback and running back. That has been an anomaly this year. In regards to the depth issues on defense, when you talk about that now, it seems like in the summer, fall camp, that you kind of felt like you had enough depth at all three levels on defense. It certainly hasn't shown during the course of the season that you did. Is that surprising to you? What is the reason for why that next group hasn't really played as well as you would have hoped?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think that's a fair question. I feel like some key guys early in the season have been injured. If you look at our secondary, we've lost some guys, even some young guys that were expected to be playing, either missed part of fall camp, got hurt early in the year, lost some of those guys for the rest of the season.

I know Josh, he played early. We got (indiscernible) hurt the first few snaps of the Iowa game. Josh goes in there and plays. He gets injured. They've been tag-teaming back and forth. Have not kept both of them at this position

like you wanted them to be able to go.

I think you go back and look at the corner position. We got guys there. Chris was starting to play, then he tears the ACL. Tiawan was injured most of the season. Linebacker, Thomas goes down, then James goes down. You got two guys that play a lot of football for us. Really didn't play. I know with Thomas' hip, we were trying to get him where he could at least give us some snaps during games. Then James has been up and down. He got injured.

You kind of feel like if you think each position had at least another guy or two you felt good about, then I thought Jonathan Haynes would come in here and help us. He got injured. He got injured during fall camp.

It's kind of been all those spots, we haven't been able to have consistent guys being there together. When one guy was healthy, the other guy was out, vice versa. Even with James Head, he got hurt in the off-season. He finally came back, actually sooner than we thought. That was not what we were expecting from him.

It's just kind of been one of those years. I do think these younger guys have got to continue. You have a group of guys that play a lot of football in front of them. To me those other guys have to continue to grow and develop.

I always think about just different players that have come through here at different positions. Some guys really elevate, when an older guy leaves, they have the whole off-season. That's what you have to have happen for some of these guys.

I feel like it's kind of just been different spots where guys that we were expecting to be a good, solid number two, you feel like you got a good number two, something happens to him, something happens to the first guy, he becomes a one, then the other guy has to elevate.

Hasn't for whatever reason been able to stay consistent. I know a year ago we stayed pretty healthy even though we had the COVID situation going on. That was challenging with who was there, who was out. We did not lose a lot of those guys for long periods of time if there happened to be a case.

But on that side of the ball, it's been a frustrating thing to be able to not keep our guys with us each and every week. Doing some new things as well on that side of the ball. When they're out, they're not getting those reps. I think that has a cumulative effect in a negative way which has hurt us.

When those guys are here, you got to get them ready. I

know I kind of gave a long answer to that. I kind of had the same way, going through each position and different things. You just got to -- we're going to have to do it as we go through, talked about this already, when the season ends, kind of rebuild each room, try to be able to go through and look at it this way, be able to maximize our guys, who we have, who is coming back, be able to address the needs accordingly.

That's the challenge and the opportunity we have in front of us.

Q. Saturday I asked you about Grant, he just looked comfortable out there when he was playing. Afterwards when we were talking to him, someone asked him about pressure. He said, Pressure is not real, he doesn't believe in it. There's the reason why he's so calm out there. You talk about the need for passing in the offense, you have to have that in order to win. Are the odds that we're going to see a lot more of Grant this week? A possibility he starts this game because he's been the only passer here of late?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, as I said, I think afterwards all options are open. We start practicing. We had our walk-through, do some things individually on Sunday nights. Really our first practice for the week will be tomorrow, with today being our off day.

Yeah, he is definitely going to be in there getting lots of reps. We'll see as the week plays on. We'll see who is healthy, who is also able to go. He's obviously going to get a lot of reps. I liked what I saw on Saturday, for sure.

Q. It seems like every year Jeff Brohm throws in a quarterback, thrown for 340 yards this year. Their passing offense in general, what makes it so difficult to stop? What is that challenge going to be like with your secondary being banged up?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so they've got a really talented quarterback. I know he went there, O'Connell, as a walk-on. Really has been impressive. I know he's had his ups and downs down, too. Starter, not starter, different guys have played. At the end of the day he's been the consistent guy. He's really played well as of late.

They got a lot of talented receivers. They got some good tight ends. They get the ball out fast enough, do enough things with that to take some stress off their offensive line. They've not been known for their running game, they're known for their passing game. They're one of the top passing teams in the country right now.

I think it's a combination of just they do a great job

schematically, got a really good system they use, then they stress you. They stress you vertically, horizontally, they stress you intermediately. A lot of different concepts they use to make you defend a lot of the field. Do a good job with that. Do it in a way to be able to create enough time for their quarterbacks to throw.

There's been a couple games that stuck out where they've given up some sacks, but overall they haven't consistently. I think it goes back to how quickly the quarterback gets rid of it. He just does a really good job with that. When you play these guys, you have to defend the pass extremely well. As is always the case, you can't let them run the football. That's priority number one, which is the case every single week for us.

I just know that they throw it well and we got to be able to have a lot of different variations to be able to have answers for that.

Q. Talking about Donovan, maybe sort of his struggles Saturday, understanding when to run, when to pass, having confidence. With a young quarterback especially, is there a lot you can do with him on the sideline when you see that happen? Is it where you need to get him more to the controlled environment of a film room, work through it slowly?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think the learning process of figuring out what mistake I made, how can I best process how to learn from it, get all that. It probably happens in the classroom, in the meeting room, which is what we do the day after the game. Then even after that to be able to teach and grow and learn.

There's obviously, even during the game, you're trying to talk through things. If a guy makes a mistake, get him calmed down, get him on the board, have them tell you what they see. A big thing to me is having them tell you what they saw. That tells you a lot. Are they seeing things they need to be seeing.

We talk about seeing ghosts out there. Are they seeing things that really aren't really there. They get spooked, thinking it was this coverage, it was really that coverage. That's a big part of it. It can tell you kind of where a guy is at mentally, his growth.

There's no question that there's a lot there for him to learn and grow through. Even with him out there when he's playing, this week we have to throw the football with him. We know that, he knows that, he needs to do that. He does it well in practice, he needs to do it well in the game. I know he can.

But we got to get to that point where that's happening consistently on Saturdays. That's really all that matters. Nobody cares about what you do in practice other than just the coaches and our preparation for all that.

Bottom line is we have to transfer what goes through on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, walk-through on Friday, to game day on Saturday.

Have a great day. LEO.

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