

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

## Coach Tom Allen

### Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Excited to get spring rolling here. I just finished up a very good team run with our players.

I did want to say a few things. We've got obviously a lot going on this time of year and just want to congratulate coach Ray Looze and the men's swim and diving team on their Big Ten Championship and wish them good luck in the National Championships coming up here as well as the women's swimming and diving team as they prepare for that. I know they'll do an awesome job representing our great university.

Also want to wish the women's basketball team great luck as they begin their tournament in the Big Ten, and just all the sports we've got going on doing a great job representing our programs here at IU.

Also would like to thank Grant Heard for his time here and appreciate all he's given to our football program and wish him well.

Then also as we get ready for spring football, we have some objectives that we want to accomplish this spring, and I always kind of map those out. They don't vary a whole lot, but based on where you're at as a staff and different things you're doing, it can be tweaked a little bit. But fundamentals are going to be a priority without question, improving those.

We've got a lot of new faces, so being able to go through the positions and be able to find guys' strengths and weaknesses in those areas is going to be huge as we identify them, as we got some of those new guys.

And then just the whole schematic adjustments on both sides of the football, those are going to be key focuses. Which the end goal, the overall objective is that we finish as a better football team, and that's what our guys have been working hard towards.

We've been taking full advantage of the extra two hours that the NCAA has given us this spring and meeting times and walk-throughs, and that's been very valuable for our

guys in our preparation for spring football.

We'll start on Saturday and we'll be doing a little bit different schedule. We're not going to be going on Sunday. We usually go back-to-back days those first two non-padded days. We're just going to go Saturday and then Tuesday and then Thursday, and then we'll have our traditional spring break, which we haven't had here for a couple years in regards to a normal flow and coming back and finishing up our last 12 days after we return from spring break.

Then from a personnel perspective, I did want to announce that Jaren Handy has been dismissed from the team, so he is no longer with us.

Other than that, we've got a strong group of guys that worked extremely hard, had a really good eight weeks of preparation in the weight room with our strength staff, and as we said, with the additional work with our coaches once we got off the road recruiting, and excited to see our guys get on the field on Saturday and get this spring kicked off.

I'm ready for questions.

**Q. I guess in regards to Coach Heard, kind of a two-part question. With the timing were you a little bit surprised or caught off guard? Second, with it being so close to the start of spring ball, what's your timetable for getting somebody in to replace him as the wide receivers coach?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it definitely wasn't something I was expecting, so I would say the timetable would be very efficient. I do think obviously we'll not have somebody in place for Saturday or probably the first two -- the Tuesday, Thursday following that, so the first three practices I wouldn't expect that to be the case.

But the goal would be to have someone in place -- when we come back from spring break, once we hit the field, that practice No. 4, to have that person in place.

That's where I guess, yeah, the timing obviously is tough. It's not what you would want for sure, but at the same time



I think that window gives us a chance to be able to get some things squared away this weekend and then move forward.

But yeah, obviously have a short list of guys you're focused on, and feel good about that. The goal would be to have him in place ready to be coaching our guys when we come back after spring break.

**Q. Forgive the obligatory quarterbacks question, but I think this may be, in different ways obviously, but presuming Dexter is at or near full strength, about as healthy as you've been from a depth perspective at quarterback going into spring in a while. I know there's been different times where Mike has been dealing with an injury or somebody has been an early enrollee or whatever. Just how do you approach that position when on the one hand you maybe have some more to sort out, but on the other hand everybody is at or close to full participation?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, that is a great point, and I think it's a very true statement. Yeah, Dexter is back full speed, should be -- excited to see him throw. As you know, these workouts go -- leading up to spring practice, we're not able to be out there when they're throwing, but I know he has been fully cleared.

Like you said, having with Jack and Donaven and now you've got Grant has had some good experience playing in games, and obviously Connor is added to the group, it's a very strong group. Got good depth there and a lot of guys that have played football here for us in game situations. Obviously Connor brings in a ton of experience from another school.

If you go back and look at the history of spring ball since you've been here, we've had very few quarterbacks that were healthy to be able to have full participation throughout the spring. That's definitely a positive, and with having a new offensive coordinator, that's going to be critical.

We're really looking forward. That's one thing when you think about the spring and the competition ahead for that position that really excites me, and I'm anxious to see these guys. They've been working extremely hard. So yeah, it's a full room, a competitive room. Excited to see how it's going to make each other better.

**Q. The most common question I get from folks is about the offensive line, and going into the spring what you need to do to get that unit to step up their level of play. What are you specifically looking for out of that group this spring?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question, I agree, and that's definitely a huge focus for us. I think just from a fundamentals perspective that's going to be a key focus.

I know even with Coach Bell, he's going to be heavily involved, as well, during the inside run periods. That's just his personality; that's what he wants to do. That's how he runs things from his perspective and his personality and the way he wants things to be done and his involvement there.

We made changes in that area in regards to some things we're doing schematically and just trying to really do things we can do from that perspective to help our guys and then to also -- we've just got to create more depth. We've got a lot of younger guys here that it's a critical spring for them to be able to have an opportunity to grow and develop, and so to me it's about simplifying things, to be able to be more physical, more aggressive.

I've been really hard on this group throughout the whole off-season so far in the weight room and in our workout sessions, team runs and agility runs and all the things we've done with that group, so developing more toughness there.

Better execution is really the key. That to me is what it comes down to. We have to execute at a higher level and do a great job of creating run lanes for our running backs and then also being able to give our quarterbacks time to throw and be effective.

Huge focus without question. Got to have depth, got to have guys step up, and it's a group there -- we've really challenged some key leaders there. We've got several guys that we've been challenging and grooming as leaders in that group, to have them step up, as well, but yeah, there's no question that's going to be a big focus. It should be, and it is.

**Q. How important of a spring is this for the defense? And in particular you had some guys banged up; Tiawan obviously wasn't at 100 percent from October on. How is he physically and how important is it with a new coordinator with you being more involved to get that unit a little more cohesive in the spring?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think it's going to be critical. It's a big spring for us in all three phases, but especially offense and defense. When I think about our defense, just me, the involvement that I'm going to have now again -- I've always been involved without question, but just to a different degree.

Yeah, just to me, just to be able for us to fundamentally

play with better technique, to play with better finish, physicality is the way I would phrase that, and the ability for us to be able to execute at critical times. Getting guys healthy is going to be big. I get that part of it.

But to me just getting our swagger back, our edge back to us on defense. We lost it this year. Really fell off production-wise. Had the worst defensive season since I've been here statistically, and that's unacceptable.

Because of that, there are things we're going to do, but it's an important spring. It's always about having an edge about you, playing with a tremendous hunger and having relentless focus in the way you do things every single day.

The takeaways, tackling and effort hasn't changed, but the emphasis on certain things is going to be ramped up in the way that I know it needs to be, and so it's on me. I mean, I take that responsibility to get our defense right. Last year wasn't good enough. It was unacceptable, and we've got to be better.

I expect us to be better. Very important spring to reestablish some of those things and get back to basics of who we are and what we want to do and be able to play very fast, play very physical and create takeaways.

**Q. I wanted to find out what led to Jaren Handy's dismissal, and also to go back to the quarterbacks, what do you like about each of the guys that are going to be competing and what do you want to see from them individually in this spring practice? What do you want each of them to achieve in these 15?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so first of all, with Jaren Handy's situation, just a series of just disciplinary issues that we had to deal with, and dealt with those, and systematically had some suspensions involved there prior to this that led up to it, and you've got to be able to be willing to do -- I'd say it was more of a collective. It wasn't one thing, and that's really what culminatively came to that point, so made that decision and that's where we're at.

As far as quarterbacks go, I would say that just kind of going through the group, Jack is obviously the most experienced of the group from the guys coming back from our program, and just obviously getting him healthy was a big objective this off-season, which has been accomplished.

Then just being able to play at a high level of execution and confidence. He's got the arm talent. He's got a tremendously gifted mind. Work ethic has been phenomenal. Leadership has been really, really strong. Really pleased with that and really proud of him for that.

He's done a great job.

But to me it's just the on-field consistency and being able to put the team on his back and lead them.

When you think about Donaven, this will be his first spring football ever. He's never played spring football, never had a spring football in high school or college, and to be able to have him in there learning the things that we're doing is going to be very, very important, as well.

He's just one of those guys, he's such a good athlete and he's big and he can run and he knows -- he's one of our best football players, so that's a guy that I want to be able to see grow. He just has so many things to improve on as a quarterback because of just having limited time at that position to really be honed in an off-season. So this will be his first full off-season with us, so to me the fundamentals that he has and just learning the new system, as well, with a new coordinator. So being able to master that is going to be important, just playing with that confidence and being able to throw the football on schedule and to maximize the talent that we know that he has.

I just think a guy like Dexter, it's been so long since we've seen him out there playing. He definitely has talent, and great, great young man, has worked extremely hard to come back from his knee injury. So it was great to see him out there working and training and doing things. It's just learning the system and being able to get out there and play.

He's just once again, very young, hasn't played a lot of football for us and hasn't played any games, so just to be able to focus on mastering the fundamentals, getting very comfortable in the pocket and being able to learn the system and get that ball out fast and be able to help us be very, very effective.

And then you think about Grant just continuing to grow and develop. Like you said, he had a chance to start for us the final game and played throughout the last part of the season there and just continued to grow and get stronger and get faster and get better and improve himself in his fundamentals and just being able to run the offense. Just an unbelievable kid that's worked extremely hard and has gotten better as we've put him in position to even have a chance to play last year, so that has to continue. He knows that.

Then you've got a guy like Connor who's coming to us from Missouri where he was a starter there, and to me it's about -- I think more than anything, learning the system and being able to win the team just because you think he's just new; they don't know him. He's been here since January,

but just being able to -- they've never even been in a practice with him yet. Workouts, yes, and when the guys throw on their own, that's happened already, but to be able to do those things in a normal practice setting with our coaches there, with everybody there is different.

I just think being able to -- we always talk about the quarterback, and this goes through whoever becomes the starting quarterback has to win the locker room, and the guys' belief in them. That's something for a new player coming in is just a systematic establishment of that because to me that's really, really a big, big part of it and you can't force that. You can't manufacture that. It has to be authentic and real from the players. That's part of what you have to do when you come in to a program.

All those guys are in that mix of doing that, and obviously got to be able to give them all reps and they'll get those opportunities, and excited to see them compete and excited to see those guys do a tremendous job of improving their fundamentals and skills as well as learning the system and then being able to get on the field and take the team down, score touchdowns, and then get points on the board.

**Q. In terms of your early enrollees, how are they meshing with the kind of program that you want to run, and who has kind of stuck out to you in terms of who got here in January?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I'll tell you what, we did some things different to help accommodate that and expedite that. "Build" is our one word for 2022, and part of the reason for that choice was understanding the number of new guys that we were going to be bringing in to our program in January, which is 19, which is a record number, so how do you get those 19 guys gelling and meshing as a team, because the best team is the one that wins on game day.

That's our whole goal for the spring is to leave as a better football team.

Right now we've had accountability teams, so this last couple years the accountability groups were really more by position, and so now it's been by just a meshing of positions. Cross-positional, cross-class, so you've got guys from all different grade levels in those accountability teams. You've got coaches working with guys that aren't necessarily even on their side of the football. You've got guys mixed together, offense, defense, special teams on the different accountability teams.

It's been really good. They've been doing activities together, holding each other accountable. You have things you've got to do that creates communication.

So that's helped us once again help these guys mesh into a group that some guys didn't even know them when they stepped on campus. Other guys they might have had some previous relationships with certain of our guys but not very many.

So some guys that have stuck out to me, JH Tevis is a guy that was a starter at Cal-Berkeley and came here and just a really, really smart, tough, hard worker, just one of those guys that does everything you ask him to do. So I'm really excited about him.

I just think LeDarrius Cox is another guy, and PJ Lucas, just guys that came to us that man, they've really bought into working really hard, big guys that can move -- I mentioned three defensive linemen right there that I think are going to be critical for us to be able to continue to grow our defense.

Myles Jackson, he's probably -- we go through -- how about this, so we had the team vote as to who they would want to have on the leadership council. We obviously had the council in the past. I said I want to go a clean slate; let's re-vote. He was the highest vote getter of all the new guys, and it was by a lot.

To me that just kind of showed you -- and we did that obviously after they'd been here for several weeks, and the strength staff felt the same way. Very mature young man, really, really hard worker and to stuck out to me, and I just think that that matters to those guys getting his recognition and the other guys working hard.

I feel like that Jared Casey and Bradley Jennings are guys have come in here, as well, at the linebacker position and have had to really kind of learn some things and come to a new place, so just like how hard they work, and that's what stuck out to me.

I think offensively Shaun Shivers is a guy that really sticks out in terms of work ethic. Obviously haven't seen these guys play football here in person, but the drill work, the toughness, the fight through the adversity, he really has stuck out to me in a way that has been impressive.

I think Emery Simmons is another guy that has really shown me a lot in regards to just working every day. Doesn't say a whole lot, but just works. Got really good speed and just love the mindset that he brings.

Josh Henderson is another great, great worker as I mentioned. A couple running backs, receiver there. Just that ability to really truly buy into what we're doing.

We were talking about Connor, and the quarterback position demands two things, leadership and production. So seeing those things out of him, and that's where -- he's naturally kind of a quiet guy.

But I'll tell you what, the group of guys we've brought here, I've really been encouraged by them, encouraged by their ability to come in here as a new player. They have brought maturity. We obviously vetted them out as much as we possibly could to really make sure you're bringing in right guys in, and so far I think they've done a really good job for us and have kind of blended in well.

Time will tell, there's no question about that, but you've got 100-plus guys here already on the team, and just excited to see them now go through spring football together because you've got the practice piece, the things that happen during practice, post-practice, pre-practice, all the meeting time we get with our guys now as a whole group and you start building that team together.

It's obviously challenging to get new guys. I haven't even talked about the new freshmen. But those are older guys that came that's really -- the window of recruiting then was shorter. Some guys we knew before, which helps, and other guys we had to learn in a pretty efficient way.

I know I've spent a lot of time on that talking about these guys, but I'm excited about them, and we brought them here and it's time for them to compete and make this football team better.

**Q. I know spring is a time when you can kind of experiment with maybe trying guys at different spots. Any notable players moving to a different position this spring?**

TOM ALLEN: Not that comes to my mind. And if they do, we will mention those things as they unfold.

I will say maybe one here that's -- I don't know if it's a big change, but Brian Fitzgerald, we call him Fitzzy, but Fitz has played a lot of positions for us. We're going to start him at free safety, and he knows the husky position very, very well and can play that.

Noah Pierre has played multiple positions. He's going to start at husky, so we're just kind of moving those guys around a little bit to be able to give them some more time at maybe a position they haven't played as much to give them a chance, and they'll play other positions throughout the spring, but we're going to focus on those there and give them a chance to be able to -- I want our safeties to be pretty versatile and rotate guys around. It's awesome to have corners that can play safety and a safety that can

play corner. So obviously Noah Pierre has been one of those guys. And so even Jordan Greer, going to see him playing some husky and some safety, but trying to get him a chance to get some quality reps there.

That's probably the biggest adjustments. The rest of them I think are pretty consistent.

Caleb Murphy has been a guy that has played both sides of the football. He's focused on the offensive line now, and getting his body built for that position has been a focus this off-season.

Those would be the main ones at this point.

**Q. Do you have anybody that's not going to be participating in spring for any reason? And what's the experience been like working in two new coordinators? You've mentioned Walt Bell and Chad. What's that process been like so far?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, as far as the guys go, so right now -- every year you've got guys that come off some postseason surgeries, and the common ones have been labrums for guys. So we've got -- I know got a couple of those. I know that Randy Holtz had his shoulder, and so he'll be limited on some things he can do as well as Dasan McCullough limited with some of those things he can do but be able to do a lot of things, just not everything with all that.

Then as well as Devon Matthews, just trying to be able to keep him 100 percent healthy this spring.

And then Tiawan Mullen has some things with a lower, just trying to get that right. He and David Ellis are still kind of being able to -- we're just being very protective of those guys. We know what they can do.

I know David obviously has been injured quite a bit here, and he's frustrated by that. So am I, but our goal is to get him 100 percent throughout by the end of spring and ready to roll for the summertime.

Those will be some key guys that won't be getting a lot of reps because -- we know what a lot those guys can do. It's just about making sure they're 100 percent healthy for the summertime and for obviously ultimately fall camp.

But that's really not that unusual, giving some younger guys a chance to get a lot of quality reps. But we do have some guys coming back that as we were fully aware we had several injuries throughout the season, guys coming back from those, and for the most part most of those guys are at different stages of that, but those that can go will go. Those that are halfway and we've got some guys that are

kind of in between, still working through all that, but that's the benefit of maybe starting a little bit later in the spring.

Then in regards to the coordinators, just really excited about both those guys. Obviously Walt has been here a little longer than Chad has, but just -- Walt is such a sharp coach. Our players have noticed it. Several guys have come up to me and just love his energy, love his mind, the approach to things, very analytical in the way he does things and approaches things, has a really good perspective.

Obviously he's been a head coach, and that changes your own perspective on things. That gives you a much broader understanding of a lot of the behind-of-scenes things, as well, so just really -- the thing, too, that's really stuck to me about him, he's a heck of a recruiter. He was a recruiting coordinator in the past when he was at North Carolina, and just has a really good vision for that, understands it very, very well and has got -- that whole side of the ball, I think has even elevated that part of us in a very quick way in terms of the focus of that and structure of it for those guys.

I tell these coordinators, hey, it's your job; you've got to take ownership of recruiting on your side of the ball, and then Kasey is take ownership of recruiting specialist. That's where I think that -- in the short time we've been together, I think Walt has really done a tremendous job in that.

And then with Chad, it's kind of a unique situation on that side of the ball because my involvement with the defense, because he's just extremely organized, really good football mind, really just love his personality, who he is, his character and his leadership and how much he cares about our guys and is going to invest in them and just really capture those guys in a very, very meaningful and impactful way.

I just love the energy that those guys have brought to every day. You can just feel it from them, which is awesome.

And then Paul is no different, Paul Randolph. Really, really excited about the guys we've added. It's all about that, and we've obviously had some changes, and so you just bring guys in here and it can be -- sometimes it can be a really positive things because you get a chance to get some new energy, new thoughts, different things about that, but at the same time we've got to come together and play as one and coach as one. That's what the coach staff's objective is going to be.

Excited about our new guys and anxious to see them coach on the field, so we'll all be out there as a whole group here in a couple days. Let's have an awesome day.

Last thing, I do want to make sure, I don't want to forget this: I'm actually going up to the combine here in a couple hours, but really want to wish those guys great success. We've got Peyton and Ty going today and then Micah is going on Saturday. So I'll be up there to watch those guys and pulling for them, and I know they're going to do great. Wish those guys well.

Have a great day.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

