

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good afternoon. We're back. Another season is here. We do have a unique opportunity to open our season with a team that has played and we did not, so last weekend got to see Illinois play, like everybody else did, but just impressed with what Coach Bielema has done there in the short time he's been there, immediate impact, even last season, and they had seven games that were one-possession games, so so many close opportunities there.

Just physical football, what kind of sticks out to me, the way they play defense, the way they run the football offensively and a lot of respect and the job he's done there and the team he has.

Have a chance to welcome them here to Bloomington to open our season and also open up Big Ten play. When I think about their offense, obviously their running back Chase Brown is really special. Great season last year and showed it again on Saturday. Big, physical offensive line, and new quarterback in Tommy DeVito that really seems to be a great fit for what they're doing schematically, and Isaiah Williams is a very, very talented receiver. I really like their tight ends. And they had a lot of receivers, a bunch of guys who caught the ball Saturday, so that gives you a lot of things to defend.

New system that they obviously didn't have to show a lot on Saturday, but we'll have to be prepared for a lot of things that we don't know about yet.

Then defensively, Coach Walter has done a tremendous job turning the defense a year ago and has continued. A lot of guys back from that group, good length in the secondary. Just really impressed. The Brown twins, one on offense, one on defense, really, really good football players, physical, athletic, and very, very active.

So just impressed with their linebackers, physical D-line. They make it tough on you up front and try to keep the ball in front of them. Good system on both sides of the ball. Good special teams, as well. They got a new punter, had a really talented one a year ago and got another good one

and started the game with a big kickoff return. Strong on special teams, as well.

Big Ten football, it's what you expect. Really good football teams every single week, and a tremendous challenge, great opportunity. Excited for our players to open our season.

Tired of hitting each other. It's been a long fall camp, a little bit longer than normal because of the new format, but guys have been busting their tails and doing a tremendous job of buying in, and got some new faces and excited to see these guys come together and play and doing it in front of our fans opening night on September 2nd.

Questions?

Q. Philosophically for you, new quarterback, probably new starting running back, even some guys maybe that are going to be starting for you that have been here but not been in such prominent roles in the past. As you think about it as a head coach and you think about what the growing pains of week one might look like and sort of figuring things out on the fly, is this as much uncertainty as you can remember facing in your career in week one?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say probably the most number of new faces, without question, that will be playing opening night with such a high-caliber opponent and not having any preseason games or anything other than our scrimmages. So yeah, definitely a lot of unknowns.

So I think that that can be exciting but also can be challenging. But I think that's what you've got to do, and that's where we're at, and that's in front of us. Yeah, I'm excited. I'm excited for our kids to play.

But yeah, there's things you don't know for sure. A lot of different positions, some new faces there, and I'm excited for those guys that will be in those roles, and anxious to be able to see our guys go out there and compete and play in front of our home fans and our home stadium.

I just think, yeah, it definitely creates a lot more anxiety for



the coaches, but at the same time a lot of excitement, and I can't wait. I wish we were playing tomorrow.

Q. How did you guys come through preseason camp health-wise? Are there any key guys that you're expecting not to have on Friday? And also obviously a major decision at quarterback, just how the first week went with an established guy.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say first part, relatively healthy. I'm not going to say we're going to have every single person that we hoped to have, but I would say it's going to be a high percent. Different than a year ago for sure. That's been a real focus, that balance of being physical and being able to prepare ourselves, but also keep our guys healthy.

Today was a very physical practice, full pads, a workday, Tuesday for us on our game week prep mode, and so full pads and really, really physical today, which is awesome. I love that, but also you try to balance the two guys of that, as well. I feel good about the health of our team at this point.

So we've had a chance to be able to last week have practices with our -- the starting quarterback in place, and then obviously again today, and we will the rest of the week. It's been really super positive. It's been great to be able to have those kind of reps and have that kind of flow.

I'm anxious to see those guys go out there and compete on Friday night.

Q. Not that you have any choice in the matter, but would you rather be playing a softer touch out of conference to start the season, or are you okay with starting with the Big Ten?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, you know, I would say that -- the one part there is probably the biggest piece, and we've got no control over it. I'm one of those guys I try not to dwell on the things I can't change.

But I think just from being in this profession for 30 years, you always feel a little better if you have a preseason game to go through, whether it's a preseason scrimmage which we used to always have in high school, or when I was at the smaller levels in college we always had a scrimmage that we would go and play against another team. It felt like a real game but it just didn't count. We always had those and that was always nice and you felt a whole lot better going into week one with that.

There's no question, there's always kind of a desire, if you could just pick a perfect scenario you'd like to just continue

to grow with your group. But that's not how it is. You just look back and you don't focus on that. We really, truly don't. I'm being very transparent with you.

But I think there are definitely advantages to opening with such a high-caliber opponent and a conference opponent. There's no doubt that that creates so much positivity towards your program in so many different ways.

So that's what I really like, and that's what we embrace and that's what we focus on. You've just got to just work through those kinks in the first quarter and second quarter rather than working through them in the previous week.

Q. Because you don't have that softer touch this week, are there ways you have to approach this game different than maybe you would have if you did have a different opponent?

TOM ALLEN: You know what, I don't know other than the fact that we've really been working hard to create the preseason feel in practices, the game-like feel. When I say preseason, I'm talking about a preseason game.

Even in today's practice, just the physicality of it all, you're just trying to simulate those things that you get from a game situation, and going into the stadium and being under the lights like we did last Friday night, which was really, really important to do. Just going through all that to me to try and just kind of create that situation for your team and from a mental perspective, from a physical perspective.

As a matter of fact, we did some mock games with our staff just to be able to simulate the time and the decision making and the data that we collect because we've got new faces, new guys in different spots. Even as simple as -- I know people don't think about this, but we've got four brand-new GAs, because all four of our guys from last year's staff all got full-time jobs, which is awesome for them, but new faces for us, so those guys are guys on game day that we count on heavily.

Just the guys in the press box and working through all that, we've done that. Yeah, I think there's no question you try to do all those different things, but nothing is like playing a real game. I get that. But you do everything possible to get as close as you can.

Q. When talking to people about Cam Jones, it seems like the consensus is that he's a really, really good person. Are there any memories or stories that kind of stick out in your mind where you just were like, man, Cam is a really good person?

TOM ALLEN: Well, there's no question. I always think back on -- you do this long enough, you know a lot of young men that you coach, and gosh, I don't know if I've ever been around a more genuine individual that just cares about people, cares about his teammates, cares about his family, wears that heavily on himself. He's just selfless.

I guess to me, it's just -- the first person that noticed it, brought it up to me was Coach Wellman, so this was even a year ago.

In between our special teams work and different drill work, but he's obviously part of all that stuff, he's getting all the equipment off the field to help the managers. Most players are either getting water or totally just focused on something totally different, and we're talking like the real big heavy bags, things that take effort.

It's just like -- I never paid attention to it because I was getting ready for something else, too, but it was just like -- he's just so selfless. It doesn't matter what it is, something so small like that that nobody would ever notice and the way he leads this team and how much he cares and all the times we've spent together. He's just an other-focus person.

He's a tremendously talented athlete, but he's going to be great in whatever he does, in football, outside of football. I'm just so proud of him and so excited for him to be a guy that he's going to be voted I'm sure here a three-time captain, which hasn't happened here very often. It's pretty special, and he's a special young man.

Q. Were there any guys that were maybe further down on the depth chart at the start of fall camp that really impressed you the last few weeks that have a chance to contribute on Friday that maybe you didn't expect?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think there are some guys that have come along. I think Bryland Lanier is a young man that has really stepped up, and he comes here new and doesn't have a chance to have a spring with us and so gets thrown into a lot of things in a short amount of time, and I think he's really elevated his play in a huge way, which is really important for us.

I think Josh Sanguinetti is another one who just continues to get better. Even today, just thinking about watching him out there moving around and finishing tackles and being able to be able in position to do that. He's a guy who's obviously been with us, but he needs to step up, needs to elevate himself.

I think at the receiver room, Andison Coby is another one that continues to just really flash for us, and excited for him

and his opportunity he's been given in our program, and I think also James Bomba is a guy that continues -- thought even today some things he did from a physical perspective were impressive. I know he cares so much and has a tremendous work ethic and toughness.

Guys like that to me have really elevated themselves.

I think Kahlil Benson is another one that has really started to come on. I think he needed to have a tremendous summer; he had a phenomenal summer. It's always amazing how that's usually a precursor to a great fall camp, the way they approach the summer and the mindset that he had and the workouts and the way he was doing things like that, and that's a guy we needed on the offensive line to really step up and help us and be the kind of player we knew he could be.

Several others, but those are the ones that jump out to me at first.

Q. After all the practice sessions that you had this year, can you get a feel for the character of this football team and how it will carry out through the year, or is it something that just has to play out on its own?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think from all the years doing this, I think it probably manifests itself more clearly as the season unfolds, but I think -- because you can't ever simulate the highs and lows of a season and how they're going to respond to that. But you have clues. Yeah, we brought a guest speaker in, he said something that kind of stuck with me. He said, "greatness leaves clues." So you get signs of a team's character and the qualities and the little things that they do.

There's a lot of things about this team that excites me in those areas to where I feel like we have a strong group of leaders that care a whole lot and are going to make sure things are done the right way, and that little things are attended to, and Cam Jones is a massive part of that and his passion that he has for this program and it's infectious for the guys around you, and multiple guys -- I would say Monster is that way and Tiawan Mullen and J-Will, Jaylin Williams, and James Head and Matt Bedford on offense, and AJ Barner has elevated himself and all the guys on that side of the football that I feel like have just really, really busted their tails.

I know how hard Jack has worked, and you bring a guy in here like Connor and what he's brought into our program, and then Shaun Shivers, who has not been here that long, just is highly respected and just works so hard and just brings such an energy to everything he does.

Those are things that you really like seeing, and I think that's super positive for our guys, but at the end of the day, to answer your question, probably I think the season has to kind of unfold, and the guys have chance to live out and respond to the good and the bad and the ups and the downs that the season always brings you.

I think that's where that true character -- it's interesting, because kind of as the season unfolds you see certain personalities of them as they're playing and sometimes they're good qualities and they just continue to keep showing up and sometimes the negative things kind of haunt a team, kind of sometimes don't seem to go away, either.

That's why you've got to address those things early. When you see the good things, you want to elevate them, and the things you don't want you've got to be able to try to work through those and create a different outcome. But yeah, I think every year every team is a little different.

Q. This year with the advantage of not having anything on tape for Illinois to look at, Illinois played first, but how much pressure does that put on the offense to use that advantage to succeed in this game with the importance that it lays?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I mean, I think there's always pressure. We've got pressure on both sides and special teams. I think that this first game of the season is a Big Ten game, so I think that they're expecting to play well and they need to play well, and in order for us to win, that's what's got to happen on both sides of the football.

Yeah, I think there's always natural pressures that happen because of the start of something new and expectations for that and what you want that to look like, and the biggest key is that we just play our best. You don't want them to play in a way that they have to -- you don't play fearful of making mistakes and trying to be perfect. That's not going to happen. But you've got to let it rip.

We've got to attack them offensively and attack them defensively and attack them on special teams, and that's really an emphasis that we want to have for this week. With all the new faces and all new things and new pieces that you're going to have and some new things that you might be doing, that's going to create definitely some added pressures, right, but at the same time it is game one, no matter how you want to slice it.

So you've got to be able to recognize that and understand that as we tell our team it's the biggest game of the season because it's the next one, and that's the important part of

that, and that will always be the focus and that has to be the focus.

We do have a lot of guys that have played a lot of football. Even some of the newer guys that have joined us have played a lot of football on both sides of the fall for those new faces, so it's not like you're starting with a bunch of new freshmen. But that does make a difference, as well, but they are coming together as a team to play for this university for the first time together.

Definitely exciting, as well, but there will be things that are going to happen that you don't plan for, and you've just got to respond to it and react in the right way.

Q. What was your reaction when Illinois named Tommy DeVito starting QB? Were you preparing as if that was going to be the case, and what did he show you Saturday in order to prepare for this Friday's game?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I guess the backup wasn't in spring ball, so I guess in my mindset we were just preparing for him. I guess I really wasn't surprised. I think he's a really talented player, and when you watched him -- we studied them all, last few years at Syracuse and then what he did in the spring game, and then obviously had a chance to watch him -- we kind of expected that, to be honest with you. I'd have been surprised if he wasn't.

But really -- I think he's a good player. Ball comes out of his hand, and you can just tell that he's got that moxie to him and he has that charisma about him, and it showed up in the spring and it showed up Saturday. So yeah, he's a good player, and you want that out of your quarterback, and that guy has got to be a great decision maker and get the ball in the hands of the playmakers.

I think it takes the pressure off in a lot of ways because of the way they run the football. I don't think they just rely on him to just kind of put it all on his back, but I think there's obvious reasons why he won the job, and I think he's really talented.

Q. I know you had Marty Clark in for practice and stuff. What has he meant to the program and his impact over the years.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, he's one of those guys that -- very unassuming, very quiet in a lot of ways, just treats people in a tremendously high level of character. That I appreciate him about him. He's always kind. He's just a genuine guy that you can count on and trust and has just got a great heart, great heart for people. It breaks your heart, rips your heart to see him go through this and his

family, and just seeing him yesterday was awesome. Great having him with us at practice.

But man, just a high-quality person that's just been here for so long, so much a part of our history. I didn't even know that he had started the tradition with the little medallion eyes that we give to all the coaches and players, even though I've gotten several since I've been here, did not realize he was the one back in 2001 that came up with that idea and shared it with Coach Kim Cameron.

Just kind of one of those that -- because he isn't directly over just football, Mitch Gudmundson is our guy, so some of our guys don't get to spend as much time with him, so I really wanted them to get a chance to see him yesterday and give him that award or that plaque which was really special. Just, man, great, great man. Unbelievable person that cares about this place, cares about people, and he's easy to root for, and err just going to continue to pray for him and love him and support him all we can.

Q. I'm wondering if you can elaborate and talk about how you've developed as a coach year over year.

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I mean, I think you try to -- you study other coaches and you spend time with people, you work on different staffs and you grow, and you want to be able to get better, learn, and been blessed to be with some really, really quality men that I've coached with and learned from.

To me, it's always about trying to create an environment where you can make a difference in these kids' lives. That's always been to me -- if I wasn't doing that, I'd do something else. If I didn't feel like I was helping them become a better man and helping them become the person I believe they were created to be, if this was just all trying to spend all these hours just to try and win a football game, it wouldn't have the meaning that it does to me. That's always been at the forefront.

I've always cared about relationships with our guys, always cared about who they are and how they represented us and the way they learn to play the game and develop as a man through the process of preparing and all that this sport teaches you.

That to me, you just want to grow in those areas. I always wanted to surround myself with guys that care about those same types of things and learn from them, and how can I do a better job of that and balance all the different challenges you have, and you keep growing as a coach.

To me, it was always -- when I was a young high school coach, I would go and watch -- I started in the state of Florida. I'd go to Florida and watch them practice and

spend time with their coaches. I did the same thing at Florida State. I'd drive up there and sit in their offices and watch film and watch them practice, and when they would bring things up, I'd kind of try to listen into what they were saying, and Coach Spurrier was at Florida and Coach Bowden was at Florida State, so I was pretty blessed to have two of the greatest in our profession at that point in time.

Just being around these guys, and you then you come up here, and I was a high school coach in this state, and then you come here and I came to Purdue -- I spent a lot of time at Purdue and a lot of time here on those staffs and just growing and learning. People always ask me what do you -- I says, go, go meet with them and watch them and sit down with them. I liked to sit there and just watch them correct practice film with their coaches, and some would let us do that, which was great. Some would not, but most would, especially the two here in Indiana and Purdue when I was coaching high school.

So just growing and learning and working camps and just trying to be around them, and you just grow and you learn, and I've just learned probably the best way I've learned throughout the years is just going and doing it, going and coaching at the smaller level and working our way up, and ended up in the Big Ten and the SEC.

So just a matter of surrounding yourself with great people and being willing to go wherever you've got to go and read and study and dive into it, and like I said, just try and find guys that I wanted to be like and spend time with them.

Q. Again, I'm sure you've been asked, the decision to go back to calling the plays on defense, exactly when did you decide to do that, and what was the process that led up to that decision?

TOM ALLEN: You know, I'd say at the forefront was just a frustration with what we were able to do a year ago and just, as you have coaching changes, you just feel like if you can solidify the key area that you feel the most expertise in, I guess would be the best way to say it, on defense, I want to make sure that that was right. If we played really good on that side of the football, then we had a chance.

So I just felt like we just kind of got away from some things that I believe in, that I want to make sure we're always doing. So I definitely feel like I grew as a coach in the three years I didn't call it in terms of as a head coach, and feel better about all that, and the game day flow of everything. But I guess just to answer your question, it was just more of that's the area that I really feel is my strength as a coach, and I want to make sure that area is right.

If it's not getting done the way you want it done, then you do it yourself, because the buck stops with me. Really at the end of the day that's what it comes down to.

We've got a great staff, great assistants to help me, and Chad has done a great job of -- I like the balance that we have. I don't feel like I'm having to do all the things I did when I was calling it the first time, but yet it's still the scheme that we want and the calling it the way we want and the way we organize everything.

But you've got to have great people, there's no doubt. I've got to trust them. I give our guys a lot of autonomy to be able to do some things. We've had defensively some defensive coaches that have been here a long time with me, so that's a positive thing without question.

Yeah, at the end of the day, that's what it came down to, but we've all got to do it together, and the guys got to play at a high level defensively because that's what's demanded in this league.

Q. Obviously going back to the concept of just opening up against a Big Ten opponent, last year you guys traveled to Iowa, a really hostile environment. This year you get to host that game at home. What kind of an impact is that and how big of a difference is it to get to host that game?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I'm glad we're home. I think it makes a difference. I think that's a tough environment to play in. I had never coached there before, and it's very, very challenging without question, and the way it started was probably the worst-case scenario for us.

So just being at home is important. I think that's -- once again, I don't pick those, but I am thankful to be home.

But I think anytime you have the familiarity of playing in your home stadium, I think just the hostility of the opposing crowd and all those different things that play into that are obvious things, but I think just for your guys and their comfort level, and we do all of our scrimmages in the stadium and we do our mock game in the stadium and we get a lot of reps in there, and the guy love playing at home in front of our fans. So I think it makes a tough situation better when you open with such a high-caliber team.

Just to me, I think you go through the process, and we've had more of them here than we've had away as far as the openers that we've had that were Big Ten games, so that's been a positive without question, and we see the benefits of being able to have a great first game.

But yeah, I'm very thankful that we're home, and just excited for our players to come and compete and play at a high level in front of our fans and begin 2022 in the way we want it to start.

Appreciate you guys. Have an awesome rest of the week.

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