

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

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## Head Coach Tom Allen

### Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good afternoon. Just want to start by just saying we're very thankful to be 2-0 and proud of our guys for responding in the second half.

Go through the players of the game, as we always go through and talk about those guys, scout team players that give us such great effort each week. Defensive scout player of the game, Kaiden Turner. Offensive scout team player of the week, Ricky Tamis. Special teams scout of the week, Mitchell Evans. Offensive player of the game, Shaun Shivers. Defensive player of the game Dasan McCullough, and special teams players of the game both James Evans and Anderson Coby.

Once again, just thank Coach X is doing a great job there and told him that after the game. Just want to make sure that understand our guys understand where we're at and what we have to do. Pretty clear about that after the game.

Bottom line is we're excited about this opportunity coming up against Western Kentucky coming up to Bloomington. Tyson Helton has done a great job there. Number one offense in the nation last year. Won their bowl game in a dominant way.

Play really aggressive on defense. Have a lot of athletes. Do a tremendous job. Got a really talented quarterback transferring in that's won a national championship in his pedigree and a lot of talented receivers and running backs and a good offensive line. Really good group up front, without question. Very well-coached defensively. Causes a lot of take-aways, a lot of disruption.

Really excited about having a noon kickoff. We've had two late night games that makes for a long day for our guys. I know our guys are excited about that as well and excited to be able to be back home again for a third time in a row.

Appreciate those that withstood the weather to cheer us on and support us. Much appreciated. Need a big crowd on Saturday to be able to help our guys play a really good football team and play our best. We have to be able to put our best effort together for four quarters from start to finish.

Questions.

**Q. I feel like we asked this immediately after the game. When you do get a game where maybe you feel like your team's intensity wasn't where it needed to be, focus wasn't where it needed to be, but you get the result ultimately in the end, what as a coach do you want to see in the next 72 to 96 hours in terms of whether it's closing the book on that game, whether it's responding to something specifically like what do you want to see from a team, whoever the next opponent is in terms of maybe self-correcting some of that?**

TOM ALLEN: I think what you want to see is tremendous focus. It wasn't an effort issue, but tremendous focus. I thought I saw that today during our walk-through and our lifts and meetings. Just understanding the situation as far as how we kind of recapped it to our team and emphasized the things that we did well, emphasized the things that we need to correct.

Then come back on Tuesday and have a really, really physical high-energy, highly-focused practice and then do it again on Wednesday.

To me that's the way you want your team to respond because those opportunities are a great chance to learn. Yes, fortunate to be able to learn after a win, which doesn't always happen. I think that's where your player-led piece comes in. The leadership of this group, challenging those guys and being able to pull those guys aside.

I do think they're going to respond in the correct way. Excited for us to keep getting better, and that's the key.

That's what you want to see. It's a daily thing. It can't just be you show up and there's no magic switch that you turn on, no. The switch had to be on today, and it's on again tomorrow, and it's continuous to allow our guys to prepare at a level for us to play our best football from start to finish.

**Q. As far as maintaining that focus, does it make a difference that you are playing a Western Kentucky**



**team that gave you trouble last year, and what is the same and what's different about them? Obviously, they changed coordinators.**

TOM ALLEN: There's no question. Your point is well-stated. That's obviously my emphasis as well. Our guys understand fully who they're playing.

Last year was a dogfight down there at their place. We were fortunate to come out with a win. The system has stayed the same. Head coach is now running the offense.

So don't expect to see a lot of different things schematically. They've got some different personnel, got a new quarterback. Very, very talented player. Kind of found a very similar guy in terms of the way he is able to run that offense and just playmakers everywhere.

They're going to play, we know, with a certain level of tempo and the way they're going to stretch you laterally, vertically, all the different things that their system does.

Boy, they gave a lot of people -- we went through and tried to find different games from the past season, and really nobody really slowed them down. They had a lot of points and a lot of yards in every single game, which is the reason why they're the number one offense in the nation in about every category.

I just think you are going to see a very similar style. They've done some things a little bit differently maybe in the run game this year, but at the same time they have their system, they believe in it, and they're going to play it to a high level.

It's impressive to watch. There's no doubt. Coach Helton has done a tremendous job.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Aaron Casey. I know he was selected to honor George Taliaferro this season. I guess simply what does he do that made you feel like he was the right guy to have that honor?**

TOM ALLEN: I think that it's his character on and off the field. I just think he is the kind of person that has a sense of knows who he is, knows what he believes, stays true to that, is consistent in what he brings every single day.

He is a great teammate. Whatever role he has been given, whatever he has been asked to do since he has been here, he does it with tremendous effort, toughness. He is a mentally and physically tough guy.

It showed up in the game on Saturday night. Just want to make sure that we give it to a young man that just

embodies that spirit that George had and just what he brought to this campus when he came here and just a guy that's a tough fighter that just believes in his heart certain things and isn't going to be strayed by that.

Just appreciate Aaron Casey and everything that he has done for our program. I'm excited for him to be able to -- he is playing his best football and has done a great job for us and stayed true here and has continued to battle.

He didn't have his best season a year ago and responded to that by having a great offseason. I just felt like he embodies all those persevering qualities that made George Taliaferro so special.

**Q. Saturday was the first game in a while without Matt Bedford on the offensive line. How do you think the group as a whole responded to that loss, and also, specifically Parker in his first game.**

TOM ALLEN: I thought they responded well. We ran the football a lot better. We needed to. As we always say with that group, there's a chemistry involved, so not having Matt we knew was going to be challenging and create some issues that we have to learn to work through, but I thought they played well together, ran the ball well, gave our quarterback time to throw and did a good job.

I thought Parker did a nice job. They had some defensive ends that we were concerned about athletically that could create some issues and did so the week before as well and their ability to disrupt was what we were concerned about. I thought the guys did a good job covering them up and creating some creases for running backs to run through. They ran for 239 yards and 6.6 yards a carry, which is really important for us to be able to do that.

So that starts up front, and they get, obviously, all the criticism when it doesn't happen, and they should be given the praise when it does.

We have to keep working hard together. We're going to face bigger, more athletic groups as we go the next several weeks. They have to continue to gel and mesh and work together. Parker to me is a smart, tough, dependable guy, so I expect him to keep getting better.

**Q. I wanted to ask you real quick about D.J. Matthews. Obviously, coming back off that ACL tear last year against Western and being able to just be the person he is as well as the player he has been so far for you guys this season. I know he has also been a father off the field, balancing that, being a student. What can you tell me about him?**

TOM ALLEN: He is a special young man. He and I spent a lot of time together and just trying to help him grow as a man. I've got so much respect for him. He does have a lot going on.

Just the way he has battled through all that, the ups and downs of that, the recovery. A long, very difficult recovery that that injury entails. Then as a speed guy, you rely on his quickness and his ability to get out of breaks to make him special. So that's, obviously, a big part of that type of injury, coming back from that.

I thought in the game on Saturday night he, obviously, made some visible plays, but just his leadership and just his desire to step up and get this thing going, and we needed him to and make those big plays.

The catch he had on the sideline, there was pretty impressive. Then he followed that with a one-handed catch after that. That's what has to happen. Your best players have to step up when the team needs someone to make a play. He was the guy that rose to that occasion.

I just have so much respect for what he has been through, the way he stayed the course. There's a grit piece to him. There's a toughness to him even though he is not big in stature that makes him who he is, and I think there's the obvious skill set talents that he has that are pretty unique and his ball skills and just his understanding of spacing and being able to kind of maneuver around defenders and catch balls the way he does is impressive.

I love his heart. I love his passion for what he does and his family and what he has been called to do. To me it's just trying to help him continue to grow because things are never easy throughout life and just trying to help him maneuver through that and guide and direct him. He is one of those that wants that.

He has been great for me to be able to spend a lot of time with because he is really appreciative of that and wants it. I just love who he is as a man, and, obviously, he is a gifted player that we need to continue to step up and keep leading this football team.

**Q. A few familiar faces on the Western Kentucky roster this year. Specifically Davion Ervin-Poindexter. What are you expecting to see from him and that rushing attack as a whole?**

TOM ALLEN: Davion, really so proud of him. When he was here for us as a walk-on and just worked so hard and had to play last year and just tried to help him find an opportunity to go and get a scholarship. He was able to do that.

I just really appreciate his work ethic, his perseverance. He has some of the same qualities I was talking about with D.J. Just worked his way. He was a really good high school player and developed himself into a really good college player.

He has made some really nice runs. He is one of their leading playmakers on offense. That's exciting for him. They've got several running backs they play with. Like I said, they have some expanded run games that they really didn't have as much last year schematically that they're now utilizing, so that makes him have more things to stop and scheme against.

Yeah, they've got three players that they rotate in there. They play them all pretty equally, and they're all able to catch and run and block and do the things they need to do.

Really proud of him, and yeah, now we have to go find a way to stop him.

**Q. You talked about the offensive line, but specifically, I have seen Luke Haggard is grading really highly in terms of pass blocking nationally. What have you seen from him so far, and how important when you have other spots in the offensive line in flux, how important is it to have a veteran presence like that?**

TOM ALLEN: I just think every position, leadership matters. Veteran leadership is even more valuable. I just think that's what he brings. It's the consistency and the toughness and just the steadiness there.

Even though you may not be a real verbal person, but just to play speaks for itself in so many ways, and at that position for sure. That consistency and just the strength and the size and the length and all the different things you have.

To me I just think that we talk so much about the culture of our program and just the culture in each room, and that's a big thing. We use the phrase "11 Strong." You have the ten positions on offense, ten on defense, and then specialists are the 11th group.

Everybody has to understand that that culture is the responsibility of each position coach, and each position coach within that group has to develop those leaders. We have leaders from each group that's on our leadership council by design. We talk to those guys by those groups by design to be able to get that to take it back to the group and be able to infuse the leadership within those guys and then affect the whole side of the football and ultimately the whole team.

Just trying to get that. I think it's critical. The more older guys you've got that are strong in their daily habits and work ethic that they bring every day and guys are consistent, that creates, hey, that's the standard.

When the young guys come in here, they get pulled into it because they understand that, hey, that's how it's going to be expected for me to practice here, how I'm going to lift here, run here, and train here, and how I'm going to study film. He does a great job of that.

**Q. Evaluate the defensive side of the ball after two ball games at this point. Did you cut back on the missed tackles on Saturday? Were you more pleased with that aspect of it? Then, I know you were not pleased with a couple of late scores in the ball game and some things that happened there, but just an evaluation there.**

TOM ALLEN: That kind of really soured my perspective on how we played, to be honest with you. Especially the last one. We definitely cut down the missed tackles. There were much fewer of those, which is great.

I thought we played really hard. We were trying to find guys that weren't bursting to the ball in every way.

What we did, though, was we had some execution mistakes that I thought was lack of focus. That to me was not acceptable, and a couple of them are older guys. We gave up two touchdowns that were just blown assignments. We can't do that.

That was frustrating to me, but that goes back to the mental side of it. It wasn't a physical mistake. It was more not getting your eyes in the right spot, not executing, and eyes just not being locked in.

I think we still have to work hard at our run-fits. We did better, but here's the thing for us, we're not a traditional run-fit type system. We do things maybe a little unique in some ways.

The new guys that are with us now, I think they're still getting better at that and still getting and understanding how we do that and how that's supposed to fit up.

If one guy doesn't do it the correct way, it goes from where you can really smother them to get some leakage there, and we've had some of that leakage that we have to keep working on. We worked on it again this morning.

I think it was some progress with that, but also not quite there yet. Every week we have to keep getting better. We talk about take-aways, tackling, and effort. The effort was

phenomenal.

It was the take-aways didn't come, and that's a big negative. We had one that we lost because of the penalty, which would have been a huge one, but didn't get the take-aways. I just didn't think we had that same edge about us mentally that allows us to be a step ahead of some things.

We have to be that way, and that's where I was disappointed in that and told the guys that, and we pointed them out. As a matter of fact, we showed clips. This is what we have to be able to address and fix and clean up. Then we went out and did it on the field today to correct some of the things, the mistakes that we made, and don't expect those to happen again.

But progress, without question. Just don't like giving up those -- those last two touchdowns, to me we should have shut them out the second half. That was my whole goal coming out at halftime, and that's why I wasn't happy. Still not.

**Q. Asking about Dasan and without wanting to put the cart before the horse. I know it's only been two games. Just his blend of I guess the physical tools, the length, the wing span, and also just maybe his mental approach to the game, is there anybody in your past he reminds you of in terms of where his potential is, the way he can affect the game from a number of different positions on defense?**

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would have to say that he is pretty unique. I've not coached a player who I would say -- we had one at Ole Miss I think that could play the bowl position and play linebacker. His name is C.J. Johnson, but he is not as long as Dasan. Really the only one that's been probably close to that type of a skill set that can do those different things.

It's a unique combination of length, athleticism, and what I consider is a high football IQ mixed in with a really strong work ethic. It's a good combination.

Just have to keep bringing him along. Like you said, it's only been two games, but he has done a good job at progressing each week. Like I said, I feel the way I do because of how he prepares. I expect that to continue to grow and develop each week as he grows as a player, and that was only his second college game he has ever played in.

You can kind of see the twitchiness and ability. Because of his arm length, he is able to get his hand up on balls and grab people, and they don't get away from him once he

gets ahold of them, even though he is not 250 pounds. He is 225 pounds or in that range. He has good core strength to him.

That's exciting. He has a lot of hard work ahead of him, and he knows that, and he has to keep humble and hungry, and that's going to be his focus. I know it is for him, but I'm excited to have him in our program and have been ever since he decided to come here and really knew he had a chance to be a good player. He has to keep building every week.

**Q. You talked about Shaun Shivers' South Florida attitude after the game and also mentioned Walt Bell in that same aspect. I was wondering if you could elaborate on Bell. What is it about him that kind of gives off that attitude, and was there a time where it kind of clicked that you knew that he was the guy you needed on offense?**

TOM ALLEN: I think the thing that really sticks out to me about what he brings is just there's a lot of confidence that he has in what he is doing and understands the system, the adjustments, the things that you can anticipate that people are going to try to do to you.

There's just belief. It's core confidence. That's probably the key phrase is core confidence in what you are doing, in your system and the way you decide to attack things. That rubs off on the coaches. That rubs off on the players. It rubs off on everybody in the program.

I just know that there has to be that belief that that individual is going to be able to put us in a position. Now, players have to make those plays. I felt like we had some previous week just go to the other side of the football. You say, Hey, you've made some good calls. No, the guys made good plays. If they don't execute the calls, it really doesn't matter, right? We didn't execute some calls that should have been, I thought, good plays on Saturday night and ended up in some scores. The opposite happened a week ago.

Same on offense. The guys have got to execute. When they believe that you are going to put them in the right spot, then it creates a whole level of confidence that they know, hey, if I just do what he tells me to do and I play really hard, then good things are going to happen.

I think he brings that to our guys. Part of that is just having answers for things. Not necessarily verbal, but schematic. I think he brings that.

I feel like that was a quality that stuck out to me going against him. I think I said this before. I know I have, but

when you defend somebody as a coordinator and you study them and you call plays against them during the games, it gives you a chance to see a lot. You also see a history, a pattern, a style of certain things.

That to me is what stuck out about him even though I didn't know him really personally before the whole process started to be able to get him to meet with us, but at the same time I knew him as a play caller and what he was able to do with that.

It's like everything else. We have to continue to grow each week, and our offense has to continue to get better. We have to continue to be more consistent, and we have to start fast and finish strong and play consistent football from start to finish.

We're not there yet. Haven't done it yet. Haven't played four quarters yet as a team, and that's what's going to be demanded next.

**Q. You talked a few times about how this year being more player-led and that focus on things, and a lot of the guys who are stepping up into those leadership roles are guys who were here last year. What have you seen from them trying to kind of keep that focus and keep them away from losing that focus that you have talked a little bit about that kind of plagued you guys against Idaho?**

TOM ALLEN: I appealed to those guys even at halftime and challenged those guys because it is the key. I do understand it's challenging to be that locked in all the time.

There's emotional responses that you get as a human in this sport, especially football. It's hard to be up here all the time. But the mental side of it has to stay, and that's the maturity that comes in, and trying to rely on our older guys to bring that.

So even in a week like this, like you say, you're playing a team that gave us fits last year, so there's a sense of, hey, those guys on this team last year, they experienced what we did down there and how hard it was. They know that.

I think that that's where you rely on those guys to really rise up this week and help our guys. The film is pretty obvious that they do some great things, but we also lived it out as well.

We say player-led. It's such a huge part of any great team, and every team has its own personality. Every team has its own characteristics and qualities that they have about them, and that's definitely one of the strengths of this team, but it needs to continue to be that way. That's a big

responsibility that I have to be able to make sure those guys understand that.

Whether it's our captains, our leadership council guys, they've been put in those positions for a reason, and we expect them to verbally and physically lead this football team no matter what the situation is. The good, the bad, the ups, the downs, whatever it happens to be. That's what we're going to continue to rely on.

**Q. I'm just asking about Aaron Casey again. I guess are there just any favorite stories you have that speaks to who he is? I mean, you talked about him being a good teammate. What specifically does he do?**

TOM ALLEN: To me it started on special teams. I think he was behind a really good player last year. As a matter of fact, there was a couple of guys that rotated maybe ahead of him the last several years.

When you have a guy like that that just doesn't waiver, he is not the guy that's over here complaining about not getting this and not getting that. Now, he doesn't speak a whole lot. He is really quiet. At the same time I just saw his performance on special teams. To me that's really where the selflessness comes out.

Other than a specialist, you're not even listed in the program as a guy that plays special teams. You're listed as a linebacker or receiver or running back, whatever. Yet, it's a huge part of our team.

The special teams drill work, I talk a lot about that with our guys. He showed up in those things. Really that's how -- like, even a guy like Anthony Coley that played well on special teams Saturday night, well, he was phenomenal during the drill work. That's to me what Aaron Casey did for a couple of years before he ever got a chance to really play.

Noah Pierre, same type of pattern with that kind of mindset to be able to just do whatever you have to do to help this team be successful.

The story for me is, hey, he did this when nobody was really watching. Nobody was really talking about him. Nobody was really, hey. He didn't come in here with a bunch of hype as a recruit. He came in here as a really good football player that had a chance to develop.

He is doing that. He takes care of his business in the classroom. He takes care of his business on the field, off the field. He is so steady.

Special teams is where he showed me that he had the

qualities it was going to take to be great in this game and then someone we can count on as a great teammate.

Appreciate you guys. Have an awesome day.

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