

Indiana University Football

Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



COACH ALLEN: I just want to welcome everybody here today. And once again very proud of our football team. And continue to find ways to win and finish out games. And just really proud of Charles Campbell. Named the Special Teams Big Ten Player of the Week. And rightly so with four field goals and the obvious one at the end to win the game in overtime from 51.

And just his mental toughness and didn't kick well last week, and just came right back was clutch for us and has been for several years now.

But I also, in our team meeting this morning, got a chance to recognize Sean Wracher. I said, Sean, did anybody carry you off the field or get any pictures with people after the game.

He said no, I said there you go. I said you were the key to the whole thing. Without that snap there would be no kick. But he understands his role. But he does phenomenal job. He's so consistent.

And as well as James, the holder. All those guys, the protection up front, everything matters. Everybody focuses on the kicker, which he obviously has to kick the ball through the uprights.

But the best team is who wins on game day and so those guys did a great job being great teammates and doing their job and allowing us that opportunity to be able to get that field goal.

So just proud of our guys, and just to be able to show some grit and fight. And that's a huge, huge thing.

But just also want to recognize our players of the game. We had Caleb Murphy, offensive player of the game. That's something that our staff felt strongly about. And just because he was not expected to play like he did in terms of his reps. But with Carp going down during warm-ups and being able to allow him to play all the snaps on offense and did a great, great job. So really proud of him.

And defensively, Aaron Casey was our defensive player of the game. Really proud of his progress, and just his development as a player, as a person. Already talked about him last week. But just played his best football game, I believe, since he's been here.

Cam Jones continues to play at a high level and very, very productive. Again, huge takeaway that he caused.

But just felt like that Aaron had earned that. And I think Cam was the first one to congratulate him. So just that kind of a team we've got, which is awesome.

Special teams with Charles Campbell. But also Jaylin Williams was also the co-special teams player of the game, with a key block of their field goal in overtime, which was massive.

He also was the one that downed the ball on the 2-yard line to pin him down, in exchange for playing very good complementary football. We were able to get him on the 2-yard line, force him to punt inside the 5. And then going down scoring touchdowns. So he was a huge part of that. And also just his special teams play in general, on all those were huge.

Just proud of those guys for competing at a high level. And gotta keep getting better. We all know that. But huge to be able to be resilient in late games, to be able to play our best football when it counts the most.

Really excited about this opportunity this week with Cincinnati. Coach Fickell has done a tremendous job. Just impressive what they built there. And we're playing a playoff team at home.

So great challenge. Great opportunity for us to be able to be on the road for our first road game of the season. And just impressed with what they've done. They've got a lot of guys back on offense. A lot of new faces on defense. But still playing at a very high level. Really good system. Good scheme they have.

The players have been developed, you can tell. The guys stepping in. They've got some transfers stepping in as well

and making a lot of plays for them. It's just a very very good football team. Saw that when they went and played Arkansas. The film is very obvious.

Really have to play our best football. Have to play a complete game from start to finish and beyond whatever it takes. So appreciate that.

Q. Talking about Caleb, postgame a video of him he looked pretty emotional. What does it mean for him, being from generally this area which doesn't produce, particularly where he's from, a ton of Big Ten-level talent. On the other hand, how does it elevate an offense, whether it's on the field in the moment or when you're able to kind of go back and view it later, that a guy steps in so late notice like that and plays like he did?

COACH ALLEN: I think it's just a huge thing. And as you saw, his emotional response was very genuine and real. It means so much to him to be part of this team. Be a football player here at Indiana, being from so close and representing his whole community and just the pride he has and being from there and being able to just come here and just work his tail off to get in this position, move positions, from defensive line to offensive line.

And he was a third-string center a few weeks ago. And with Cam going down. And then obviously with the situation that happened on game day. And that was nothing that anybody expected. As a matter of fact, I was kind of shocked to hear it when we were in the locker room there getting ready to come out.

But that's what you get ready to do. We use that as an example. I talked to our whole team about that this morning. Just a few weeks ago he was thrown in the depth chart and now he's playing every snap and special teams because he's part of those as well.

Just a great testament to him, how hard he's worked and how much he cares. But you can win a lot of games, but guys that are smart, tough, dependable and have a high, high care factor, and it means something for him to put that jersey on and represent his whole community. And that's pretty awesome thing.

Q. How did Zach hurt himself? What is his injury and what's his prognosis and what's his situation?

COACH ALLEN: Something with his hand. Still getting evaluated trying to figure out what it's going to be. Not season ending, anything like that, something we have to deal with. Obviously since he's a center, snapping the football, it's something with his hand he's got to deal with.

But not anything that's, like I said, super serious, but definitely for his position and what he does, could be something we'll have to make adjustments with.

Not expected. Very freaky, I guess, would be safe to say, freak accident. That doesn't usually happen. I've never had this happen before in my 30 years of that type of thing and that type of warm-up because he just did the same thing we always do.

But it happened. And that's why you've got depth and that's why you develop guys. So hopefully we'll know more here soon getting him back with us. And just kind of a freak thing.

Q. How did you find Caleb Murphy at a 1A school like West Washington? How did that happen?

COACH ALLEN: He came to camp. He was a guy that we had to project positionally. I think we always felt like that he's a jumbo guy, we talk about jumbo defensive end, big guys can play tight end, he played offensive tackle for them. He was a high school wrestler. He's at one of those schools that didn't have wrestling. He's the one that got it started, which is crazy, then did really well.

But so, yeah, it's a little bit of a tougher evaluation because of an interior guy or guy on the line of scrimmage playing at that size of a school sometimes it's hard to tell where he's at.

But he comes to camp. We liked what we saw from him. We weren't exactly sure what he was going to be yet. But that planted the seeds. I met with his family and him in my office. I just knew, we didn't offer him right away, but I knew he's what we're looking for. Just the passion, the toughness, the fight.

Talked to his high school coaches and the people there in his community, which we do. And you just had those internal qualities of character and discipline and the high care factor. You kind of thought what you were going to get to him, it meant so much to me. He got emotional in my office about how much he wanted to be here and play here. I didn't give him a scholarship right away, the first meetings. Let the weeks go by. Actually had him in another camp.

He went to a camp up in the Chicago area. We had our coaches there. Had to take a second peek at him. We offered him in that exchange there.

But I think it was just more of a gut feel that he's our kind of guy. And like I said we started him on defense. And I think

that's probably where he would have preferred to play when he first got here. We always have those conversations. But he's like, Coach, I'll play wherever, whatever you want me to do.

So that kind of guy. But you always felt like he's a good athlete, that the center position kind of you thought would be a good projection for him one day. And just like I said, the tough, smart, dependable guy that position demands, really fits his personality.

If you talk to anybody on our staff, it was unanimous that he would be the player of the game. Everybody loves him. You can't question his passion for this program and his love for this university.

It's neat to see guys like that be rewarded for their perseverance, even though he's still young. But I wasn't surprised that he played so well because he's going to give you everything he's got, for 60 minutes and beyond.

Q. Looked like Western Kentucky got a long touchdown in the first half after blown coverage in the defensive back field, and looked like you had a passionate response after that play. What was your message to them and how did you see them respond in the second half?

COACH ALLEN: Just a little frustrated, without question. But just didn't communicate with what we had called. So I had guys -- they said they thought they saw one signal. So we had some guys playing one coverage, other guys playing another. So that was frustrating.

But at the same time, it was just -- we've just got to calm down and they're going to go fast and just make sure you know the call. For all 11 guys are playing the same call, then good things happen. If half are playing one call, half are playing the other, that's usually not a pretty good formula for success.

But, yeah, they did -- you knew, you watch film, that's what they do, they get people in those situations and they switch things up and they make you have to react to those kind of things. But the tempo is really a big challenge, even though we see it all the time. And still you've got to defend it.

But didn't think we -- didn't communicate as well even on the second touchdown, the trick play that they ran was just like poor communication. I could see it. I'm trying to scream and yell to get them to see it. And they should have because of the way they have to line up to run that. Just didn't think that was really high enough level, without question.

So just gotta get -- and we try to get those things cleaned up and get it fixed throughout the game and let our guys play fast.

Q. With Cam Jones, I know you've talked about his leadership before, but what makes it -- how uncommon is it to have that type of singular force as a leader where a lot of guys want to be a leader. Not everyone can be one and be one where he's fine with taking charge himself if he has to.

COACH ALLEN: I think it's pretty unusual in this sport when you have this many guys on a team, 125 guys, and to have that one guy that really has become the spokesperson is unusual.

So but, man, he's so -- I guess there's a reason he's a three-time captain. I guess shouldn't be surprised. But I do think that he has embraced it. And that's the part that has been so neat to see. Because some guys really kind of fight it because it's not really their comfort zone. It's hard. Leading is hard.

It takes energy. It takes mental drain to be able to make sure -- and we go to Cam and have him talk to certain guys about whatever. He did that even this last week.

And he texted me late last night and wanted to say something to the team. I trust him so much I didn't even ask him what he was going to say. It's all good stuff. Just challenging guys.

But he just is always in tune with everything that's going on. And he seems to know what to say, when to say it. And that's a unique quality, I think.

Sometimes guys talk too much when they're younger, and I understand that. And sometimes they don't say enough. And he seems to have a good balance. He doesn't talk too much, by any means. Because he's naturally pretty quiet. That's what I'm saying, he's embraced the challenge I've given to him years ago about being -- and even this year -- that was the whole thing, he had a decision to make about staying or going to the NFL after last year.

And my challenge to him was I felt he needed to develop some more things as a linebacker. We talked about that. But also it was about leadership. And Micah was going to move on and go play in the NFL. I said now you assume that role and you take your leadership to another level. And he's done that.

And that's sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. You can't make them. And it's frustrating when they don't

respond. But, man, it's been amazing.

He's earned the right to speak, which is part of the process you go through. And just really excited for him, and he's continuing to -- I even shared this morning, he's not just talking and leading verbally, he's leading physically. He's making plays. He made huge turning point in the game to get that takeaway and our offense goes in and scores. So he's backing it up with his play and his words.

When your words and your actions align, you've got a powerful combination. That's what he's doing.

Q. Connor has told us this week that he feels he's been really maturing. He's taken all the lessons he's learned at Missouri and translating here for your benefit. How have you seen him mature on the field from when you first started looking at his film?

COACH ALLEN: I think for me, and it is, he's had to learn a new system. And that process is still ongoing. I think from things from Saturday, just continuing to keep getting better.

But I just think the ability to, the decision-making, that's where I see the growth in and being able to distribute the football to a lot of different guys, which is key for us and the way people have to defend us. And just being able to -- if he needs to get yards with his legs, he's able to do that. Even continue to work on some of those things. We could have had a couple better reads in those areas.

But I just think it's just maturing of the offense, it's just confidence in the people around him and developing those relationships. And just being able to continue to develop as a verbal leader and say what needs to be said to the team in those moments on the sideline. And when you're out on the field, you're ready to take the field.

We don't huddle anymore. It's not like a lot of communication goes on the field because of the nature of how the game is played. But I just think that you can just see the growth. And just, almost just the confidence in both himself and what we're doing and the guys around him and it's mutual.

So that doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. And I just think that he really, he played at a really high level his first year as a starter. And didn't have -- had good production but not quite as good the second year. I think you just grow. You learn. And he's able to handle -- he's been in a lot of big games and he's been able to handle that as situations be -- against some of the best teams in America and playing on the road or at home and big crowds.

I just think his experience has showed itself big in the two games we won in the last seconds. And obviously those touchdown drives that he's generated and led as a quarterback have been massive.

So I think, like I said, they don't just happen overnight. It's been years in the making. We're reaping the benefits of his experience and what he brings to our team.

Q. Tom, Western Kentucky ran the ball pretty effectively against your defense. Are you still having the issues with missed tackles, run fits and that type of thing?

COACH ALLEN: Yeah, I felt -- that was in the second half. They had 33 yards rushing in the first half. I'll say I'll take some of this because we made some adjustments to try and give us some help in the pass game that I thought we needed. I thought it hurt us in the run game.

Didn't think it would hurt us to that extent. We had four runs that really kind of gave them their, 80 percent of their yards. And so there were some big chunk runs that we -- and they get you all spread out so you lose some of your layers. But I felt like I kind of overadjusted some things at halftime to try to get some help there and it didn't work.

So I'll take the blame for that. We did have some missed tackles that I wasn't happy about, especially I think in our perimeter guys. Our DBs need to tackle better, especially some of our 2s.

Saw some of our 1s tackle better. I thought Monster had a really good tackling and Fitzzy as well. But some of our guys that we're going to play, because we play a lot of guys, those guys gotta step up their game. We're going to emphasize that.

I think it's a combination. It wasn't as much. I think the last time, especially against Illinois, that a lot of them were just, the fits weren't where they needed to be. It was more of a combination of some things schematically that I felt probably put our guys in a tougher spot.

So that's on me. But, yeah, to me I feel like just continue to work on tackling, continue to work on our run fits the and things we have to do. And every week is a little bit different when you put together a plan together. Everybody we play runs the football effectively, so you gotta keep improving those.

Q. Against Idaho it was Shaun Shivers in the running game. Last week it was Josh Henderson, both in the rushing game and outside on the touchdown before it was called back for an OPI. Are you guys looking to

build kind of a two-headed monster in the backfield or is it riding the hot hand?

COACH ALLEN: It's a two-headed monster. It's a 1-2 punch with those two guys. They're two different guys. They're both very talented players.

Not really surprised by Josh. I saw him practice. He didn't come in with as much hype or fanfare, maybe, but really good player, good balance, hard to tackle. Great out of the backfield, made a great one-handed catch and got a bunch of yards.

We had over 100 yards with the running backs out of the backfield, getting them the ball. It's a huge part of what we do. And I just love the way he sees the field.

I think he and Shaun need to be great together. And they are. They have great chemistry. They really respect each other. And then you've got Jaylin. He's another guy we'll continue to get involved in and get him some touches.

So I like that group. I like that room. They're really unselfish. And definitely want to maximize them all.

Q. I know I asked about Aaron Casey last week. But when you were going through and deciding who was going to wear No. 44, who all was involved in that conversation and what all do you remember from that?

COACH ALLEN: It was the whole coaching staff. We had some new guys, they don't know him as well. They were in the meeting but probably didn't have as much input. But I think even off the field guys, we have our support staff, strength staff. I want everybody that's around our guys on the field, off the field, to have input in the decision-making process. And so I listened to a lot of people's thoughts. And it was pretty obvious that he was the guy.

But to me, you know, when you talk about what's a guy like every day, you know? In recruiting you try to figure that out. Even when they get here, who's around him all the time. I want to talk to the academic folks that see him in that setting and the people -- doesn't matter what avenue they're at on this campus, we want to make sure we have a good holistic perspective of who they are. And over time, you're going to show who you are, good or bad.

So he's so highly respected by everybody. And just like you said, we saw the qualities. I mentioned that before. But it was a collective effort by our whole staff, not just on-the-field coaches but everybody in our program that are able to be around our guys and know who they are on a consistent basis.

Q. Myles Jackson obviously came up with a couple big takeaways last week. How well has he fit into your defense and how did he get acclimated coming from UCLA?

COACH ALLEN: He's been actually one of our pleasant surprises, really liked him as we recruited him. Didn't know him as well as I did these other guys. Didn't know him out of high school.

But just through that process, it was just like he stuck -- the maturity kind of stuck out to me and just the fit with what we care about now -- and to me. We did our homework with those that we know, where he's coming from.

But also, it was pretty obvious when he got here that he made immediate impact. So he confirmed everything we thought about him. And then you start practicing in the spring and it just continued to grow.

I will say this, too. When James Head went down a few weeks ago, we had to move him around a little bit. I thought it set him back. He was rolling as the bowl position.

And then he moved over to end. Now he can play both. Had a little bit of the growing pains of learning two different positions. I thought it made him not quite as aggressive. But he got back to this this past week. I didn't think he was that way a week ago. Tried to solidify him in some spots.

So he's been big for us, and I think that position, either, strong enough to play strong side in and athletic enough to play both, and got the big interception there, which is a massive play in that game.

So just got the fumble recovery as well. So two huge takeaways. And just we have a phrase in our program, "The ball finds energy." So he would be, if I had to say, Cam Jones is phenomenal, but the next guy that I would say practice effort is him. I mean, his practice effort is awesome. And it's that way every single day.

As a matter of fact, we used him as an example several times in the first few practices of, hey, this is what -- he's a new guy. This is the way we're supposed to do skelly, we bring our boys down for skelly, he was just chasing the ball, 250-pound guy flying every snap.

Just really great motor. And those kind of guys make plays. Especially the longer they're in the program and in the system and learn it better and know it better.

We need him to step up and keep making those big plays for us and getting us off the field.

Q. So LEO is the program culture. You made a point in press conferences making sure that players get recognition. What is it like to see that in action, in big moments, when everyone is running up to Chuck to give him a hug after he makes that kick? And in the locker room when you bring him up and the whole team is chanting his name, what's it like to see the culture in those huge moments with a team like that?

COACH ALLEN: I think that's when you get a chance to really see who you are, especially the moments leading up to that, when you don't know the outcome. And you just have so much energy on the sidelines, so much positive belief that we're going to find a way to win the game, and the guys just stay together.

And then them, they get rewarded for that. A guy like Chuck, who has done such a great job for us for so long. And he wasn't his best last week, and then he responded. So that's life; you've got to learn to do that.

So to see the guys just embrace each other and care about each other and not make it about themselves. And I think that's neat to see. Like I said, that's what you want. You want a group of guys, they're so tight and connected. And that's why I think you get in this sport, it's what makes you special as a team. You've got to have great players. I get that.

But the individuals have to come together and they have to buy into whatever culture you have that gets the team to be the focus.

That's challenging to do, I get it. But that's the objective. That's what we've been trying to do. That's how we phrase it and package it. But we also appeal to the heart of the young man and how he's going to be developed and how these qualities are going to allow him to be successful in life. Whatever he's a part of.

So I think Chuck's just an example of that. And the other guys have stepped up to make big plays. They will be as well.

And like you said, even when Aaron Casey gets recognized and Cam's the first guy there to be recognized and it was well earned, even though he played great himself.

So I just think it's a whole team full of guys and coaches that don't care who gets the credit. Because why? Because it's not about me.

Q. I know every game is the most important game, but

there is no doubt that certain games have more value, I guess, I would say. Cincinnati, a team that plays in the college football playoffs last year, beating them on the road, the value of that win for this team, I would think, especially at this point, would be pretty high. Talk about that, please.

COACH ALLEN: I would place a high value on it, without question. And you know, my approach, it's been this way ever since I've been here, it's the biggest game of the season because it's the next one. And that's how we're going to discuss it tomorrow.

We'll approach it that same exact way. But I do understand, road games are always big and they're important and they're hard. And to play a playoff team, it's an awesome opportunity.

So our guys understand that. And they understand each week's a big deal. And the key is how much better can we get from the last time we took the field to when we take the field on Saturday. And that's the focus.

And to me that consistent improvement, the attention to detail at a high level had everything to do, whether it's the walk-through on the field today, the lift, the meetings, the practice tomorrow, the meetings afterwards. We have an evening and the things we do every single day, who is going to really understand that those things get intensified each and every week as the season progresses.

Now we play such a great schedule that all these games are big, big games and important and are going to be played in a packed-out stadium. It's going to be loud and raucous. And it's going to be awesome.

Our guys are excited about that. They do understand that. Our preparation has to reflect that. It's on our team, the leaders of this team. Talk about guys in those roles right now and that leadership has to elevate itself this week as we continue to grow.

And this will be our first road game, which is an important thing for us to be able to show we can handle that environment and handle the trip to be able to be at our very, very best.

So, yes, big game for us, biggest game of the season because it's the next one.

LEO. Have an awesome day.

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