

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Appreciate you guys being here today. Just good day with our guys. Focused on things we need to get corrected. Proud of our guys for the fight in the second half. Obviously dug a huge hole for ourselves that we couldn't overcome. But made some adjustments. Didn't make enough plays when we had to in the second half.

So 3-1 on the season, 1-0 in the Big Ten. Huge opportunity this week as we head to Lincoln.

I do want to recognize some guys that continue to give us tremendous effort on our scout teams. Jeff Utzinger was selected as defensive scout team player of the week as well as special teams scout. Proud of him and his development and effort.

Will Jontz and Luke Wigintin, offensive scout team players of the week. Mitchell Evans once again scout team player of the week as well. Those guys are doing a tremendous job. They're developing themselves but also helping us get prepared each and every week. Appreciate everything they give this program.

Questions.

Q. How is D.J.? We didn't see him come back. What happened and where is he at?

TOM ALLEN: So not a long-term injury, but he will be day to day this week. We don't know yet about Saturday. But definitely not long-term situation.

Just got to get him healthy.

Q. Big picture, the offensive line has been an issue for a couple years now, through a couple different offensive coordinators. Why do you feel that is? How do you go about improving the offensive line this year?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it's definitely a focus for sure. Didn't play the way we have to up front, without question. Some of the issues were collective. It wasn't just them. But

definitely they're a part of it as well.

It's something that we've worked hard on. We're going to have to look at adjusting maybe some of the five we play with, just try to find the best combination that we have to go with. That's obviously on the table, part of our discussions, trying to get the best five guys on the field each and every time we play.

The bottom line is they have to perform, be able to execute our run and throw game. That wasn't done consistently on Saturday. High priority for us.

To me, our guys are there. Losing Matt was tough. Losing Zach was tough. The other guys got to continue to step up. Younger guys got to keep being developed. To me that's part of it. Other positions, guys grow, develop, other guys got to step up when other guys go down.

For me, as we go through and adjust with this year's offense, try to help them be more successful. It continues to be a priority and it's something we're going to keep working on.

Q. The part about the offensive line, finding the best five. Right guard seems like you've rotated Tim Weaver, Josh Sales came in at right tackle after the sack. Are both of those positions open? Is right guard a position you want to rotate or do you want to find a guy?

TOM ALLEN: I would say just trying to give those guys the best chance to be successful. If a guy is not getting the job done, then we have tried to make those changes.

Obviously Josh got a chance to play. He's young but he needs to keep growing and developing. He's in the mix as well. Cleo has played well. We're trying to bring Cleo along, I think that has kind of been the rotational purpose for having him taking those reps with Tim. Just a dual purpose for that, to create more depth at that position.

Obviously trying to see if we can get Zach back, that's going to be a huge priority this week, how that affects us. There's definitely some movement options for our offensive



line. The bottom line is, whoever those five guys are on the field, they got to execute and give us a chance to be successful.

Q. Going back to Nebraska, a place a couple years ago, a totally different situation, but that win was very big for the program. Now you're going back there. It's a different situation. If you win, you're supposed to win. If you lose, looks bad. Going back in that environment, every game is the most important game, but it seems like these situations keep presenting themselves. Importance of how the season will lie out after that, how important is this game at Nebraska to get out of there with a win?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question that it's the most important game of the season because it's our next one. I believe that doesn't change. As you stated, the dynamics of last time we went there are different. But at the same time the magnitude of the game, they're a really good football team. Their offense is extremely talented, one of the best running backs will play the entire season. Talented quarterback, talented receivers, big offensive linemen.

Obviously they've had changes on the defensive side of the football. The head coach position, which is very unique situation that's been created because of that.

At the same time they're at home. They play really good at home. It's been their history in the past. They got a lot of pride in that program.

I know we're going to get their very best shot. We have to be at our very best, no question. We just got to grow as a team. Our first road game last week, we didn't handle the situation the way we needed to early for sure. That gives us a chance to be able to go do that again, have the same flow, same schedule in regards to the travel piece of it.

We're going to change up things we do this week with our guys to try to be able to create a faster start for our team. That is going to be happening on a daily basis.

But the bottom line is, yes, this is a great opportunity for our football team to be able to play our second Big Ten game of the season, a very, very important Big Ten game, for sure.

Q. We saw a lot more Matt Hohlt at linebacker Saturday compared to maybe the first three weeks. What do you like about what he brings to that group, specifically trying to stop the run?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I thought Matt did a great job. He

was productive. Smart, tough, dependable young man. Really good football player. Just a guy that physically gives us something there. He's got a really good moxy to him, understands the game, understands the run fits, really does his job at a high level every time he's called upon.

Excited for the way he performed. Just allow him to continue to grow and develop is going to be important for our defense.

Q. Curious about Lance Bryant. Obviously a guy that has been in the program for a while. What have you enjoyed most about seeing him develop over the years?

TOM ALLEN: Well, he's been here many years, so he understands who we are. He has a tremendous amount of love and respect for our program and our university. Will fight and scrap and do whatever he can do to help us be successful.

I love his heart, his consistency. He's playing I think his best football for us. Has had the best off-season. Really has kind of gotten comfortable in his role. A huge sack on Saturday, pressures. Saw that during fall camp, saw it during springtime.

I just think just to see him grow and develop, I think his urgency as a player, his preparation and his play has taken off. To me I think that's been a big difference for him, something we've been trying to get him to understand. I just think it's kind of clicked for him.

I just think when you got a guy like that, has this much experience, it means a lot to him, and he cares a whole bunch about his teammates and this program.

He's been a joy to coach and I'm happy he's playing the way he is. He has to keep elevating his game. We need everybody on this team to step up as we now get to full-time Big Ten play.

Q. You've been reasonably productive in other areas. How important is offensive line improvement to this team's chance of getting to a bowl game?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think it's always important to every team that we have. So to me, their development, their performance, how they play, is critical. I would say it's a very important part of that process, us reaching our goals this year, what we have as a team. That has always been the case and continues to be the case.

It's about personal responsibility for that group of guys, each position group to perform at a high level. Whoever



steps on the field representing that position room, they represent that whole group, everything that that entails.

To me it's a heightened sense of urgency, no question, and very important.

Q. The second half adjustments you made, but the difference between the defense in the first half and the second half, what you guys were able to accomplish?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think they had 70-some yards of total offense the second half. Nine possessions, six punts, interception, fourth-down stop. They got the ball on the two.

But proud of our guys to respond. We definitely made some changes and adjustments, made some different calls based on what we were seeing.

Had three plays the first half, that negated all that. You got to respond. You can't sit there and just let it continue to happen. Our guys did respond. We definitely made some changes and adjustments, schematic things you see, you figure out.

Just dug a hole for ourselves. It's unfortunate, but that's on us.

Q. Your one word for the season is 'build'. How do you feel like your program has built, set some building blocks so far this season?

TOM ALLEN: I think when you build, it starts with a great foundation. To me it's about building on top of that. It's being able to ultimately build men. That's a huge objective for us because of what they become as their part of this program. Matters a lot to me.

You also are building a program that you want to be competing for conference championships and a chance to play in the post-season, which those go hand-in-hand. That's the whole process you're going through.

There's no question that that is the expectation here and our guys understand that. But every team's a little different. Every team's unique. Every team has its own responsibilities, characters and qualities.

The core values of who you are - accountability, toughness and love - don't change. We want them to be able to build themselves individually and build the best team. That's the whole goal. The best team is the team that wins on game day.

We have been able to win three out of our first four. We

got to be able to find a way to win the next one. We got to continue to build in our confidence as we play on the road in a tough environment and be able to continue to build our football team to be able to perform consistently for 60 minutes and beyond, whatever it takes.

Q. A little bit off beat, but James Evans is a guy that had some kind of growing pains. Last year was his first year in college. Seems like he's been more consistent this season. Are you happy with where he's at, what he's giving you in the punt game? How did you see him attack coming out of last season?

TOM ALLEN: I mean, we brought him here because of his leg talent. It was obvious early, but he wasn't consistent, as you mentioned. That was his whole goal, off-season focus. That's the one word he picked for this 2022 season and year.

Very critical for that position. You've seen that, his performance has been at a higher level. He's done a great job for us. Continues to need to work on things, get to the point where it's automatic every time he punts. That's the ultimate goal.

But just proud of him, his work ethic. He's an extremely hard worker. Cares a whole bunch. You come out here any day in the summer, he's out here kicking. We went out and found somebody to pressure him and stress him, push him, give him some competition in Alex. Alex has done a great job doing that. Brought him here to be able to say, Compete for the spot, best guy's going to punt, whoever that might be.

I think that's helped him as well. I think everybody responds better when you got competition behind you to push you.

But his work ethic has been tremendous, high-character, trustworthy, always does what he's supposed to do, goes to class, excellent student.

He's coming from halfway around the world. Doesn't get to see his family at all. That can be difficult for a young man. Even in the off-season he got to go home once in the course of a year. That's not easy to do. But that's the choice he made by coming here. Getting a world class education and experience.

Really proud of James and the way he's progressed. It has to continue every week. We're counting him to flip the field, pin guys down or help get us out of a bad situation, which he did that a couple times on Saturday and did a great job. He's got to continue to be consistent and perform at a high level.



Q. It seems like with your guys' linebacker core this year, each game there's another guy kind of stepping up. With a defensive background like the one you have, what is it you see about that linebacker group that really allows them to step up and make those plays?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think it's a huge part of our defense. As I always have said, you can't have a great defense without great linebacker play.

Bradley Jennings I thought played his best game this past week, continues to grow in his knowledge of the defense and his ability to make plays. He's got a lot of natural talent.

I think the common core with all those guys is, there's good twitch and burst to the ball, good explosiveness that you have to have as a linebacker. They're good tacklers.

I think Aaron Casey has made the most growth. A couple plays on Saturday was impressive. Kind of like teach tape reads, reactions, fits, finishes on those tackles. He's really coming into his own. We need him to. He's big, physical, he can run.

The length of those guys are all pretty long guys. 6'1" plus, 6'2" range. Dasan is 6'5". They have short air quickness and good instincts. They're able to burst to the football and get guys on the ground, which is the name of the game.

You have to be productive, but you got to lead also. All those guys are growing in those areas. Cam has done a phenomenal job of leading by his example of being a verbal leader for the other guys in that room to see. That's a hard thing to do because you're putting yourself out there in front of the team sometimes.

But just a group that we need to keep developing, keep growing as the year progresses. They got to keep making plays because that's what linebackers do.

Q. You talked about what a struggle it was Saturday, kind of helped you point out the guys you needed to count on. With so many first-year coaches here at Indiana, what has it been like seeing their response to your first loss?

TOM ALLEN: Well, it's interesting you say that because even talking to some of our new coaches, they were anxious to see how our team would respond at half. They've all coached this game for many, many years. Different teams have different responses.

I wasn't surprised by the fact that our guys came out and fought and played well in the third quarter, gave us an opportunity two different times to have a chance to get it to a one-score game.

I think they're recognizing and seeing that this team, program, has a lot of character to it, a lot of grit to it, a lot of toughness to it. We just got to play smarter, we got to play better for the whole game.

I think those guys are seeing that. The attention to detail that's demanded for that. We're all responsible for it as coaches, making sure our guys are mentally and physically in every way possible ready to play their best football when that first whistle blows.

We have a lot of coaches that we've added that have a lot of experience. They've done this a lot of different places, a lot of different levels. A couple of them, actually three of them, have done it at the highest level. That's to me what allows these guys to be able to help this team continue to grow and develop.

It's part of every team as the season unfolds. You're going to have ups and downs, great wins, tough losses. You got to respond. So this gives us our first chance this year following a setback to be able to come back and show and prove to ourselves, the people around us, the people that matter most, that we can be trusted and counted on as teammates. That's what I want our guys to do.

Q. What is your read so far on how this offense is playing with tempo? Do you think this is ultimately a good tempo team?

TOM ALLEN: I want to say it's been more consistent. The execution piece is going to be, as we finish out drives, move the football consistently for the most part. Haven't finished drives. That's a big focus, it's got to be. You got to score touchdowns in the red zone. Obviously tip field goals at minimum.

To me, the focus, what I want to see more of is just consistency. You can see, we're putting a lot of pressure on the teams we're playing. Defend the whole field, which is what you want to do, for a lot of different snaps. That to me is critical. Our guys have bought into that, done a good job with that.

But not just enough points, not enough consistency in that execution. If you had to pick one thing, it's that execution. We went through and evaluated every play as a staff, go through and critique the exact reason for the breakdown, whether it was scheme, technique, just a guy not executing his individual one-on-one matchup that he has with the guy

across from him. It was a variety of those things.

To me you've seen glimpses of it. You've seen snapshots. That's what we focus on. Even defensively, are we doing everything the right way? When we're doing everything we have to do, when we execute at a high level, that is the product. We've seen flashes of that. If you don't win high-level games on the road or at home coming up, that's what you're going to have to do.

Q. Going back to Lance, what all do you remember from when you recruited him?

TOM ALLEN: I think two things. Number one, I always have been impressed how I think of guys, the way they're built. Always felt like he was really strong and he can sink his hips. You evaluate a young guy, you watch him on film. It remains to be the case. That allows guys to be able to have explosive power, burst, change of direction, sink your hips, get leverage, get around a blocker. The physical traits that he had, that's what stuck out to me. That's proven to be his strength.

Then the personality, the character, just a guy you can count on, that wants to be here, that we enjoy getting to know in the recruiting process. Really a fun spirit about him. Guys that you enjoy spending time with because you spend so much time with them.

I think that's important because those guys also become great teammates because they have that ability to connect with people around them. Guys want to be around them. He has a great influence on this team, a personality and character that attracts guys to him.

Those guys come in young, sometimes immature. But they grow and develop. He's been here now long enough to where he's matured into almost a man, by his age, where he's at physically.

He's been a joy to be around. He brings a great attitude every single day. It's been just a joy to see him grow and develop. I'm excited because he's earned what he's getting right now.

Have a great day. LEO.

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