

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



COACH ALLEN: Good afternoon. Just tough game on stay night. Obviously got back late. Guys, chance to get back today and regroup. And have some good times together with them and evaluating everything, watching film, and getting ourselves physically and mentally ready for another big opportunity this week.

Scout team players of the week. Defensive scout Patrick Finley. Offensive scout, David Holloman and Peter Schultz. Proud of these guys. Special team scout, Liam Zaccheo, who has overcome an ACL injury a year ago. Works extremely hard and does a great job every day. Proud of our guys in that regard.

Excited about this weekend. Great opportunity for our program with the Michigan Wolverines coming for homecoming. And "Big Noon Kickoff" being here a lot of guys excited about that as well. Big week for us to be able to get healthy, get better and press on.

Q. I know you're without our top two receivers Saturday. Do you feel like the offense is getting a better feel for where to put guys to get the most out of them? I understand some of that has to get thrown in the trash when you don't have Cam and you lose D.J. in warmups or can't clear him after warmups. But do you feel you're getting a good enough command the guys in the offense, where to get them the ball, how to get them the ball, why they're getting it at a certain point in the drive to get the best of them too?

COACH ALLEN: I think so. And I think it's always difficult when you lose two guys that have been your most productive playmakers, but at the same time other guys have to step up. Other guys made some plays. I think we had five drops, which is something we can't have. We needed those catches in those situations.

And challenge those guys to step up in that. And that's part of the execution piece to help a quarterback out and help our whole offense out. But I do think that as everything progresses, you do figure out more about how teams are going to defend you and different things you can

do to get guys the football and try to maximize that.

As we saw with Jaylin Lucas, a guy we want to and need to and expect to get him the ball more. He'll be returning kicks for us now consistently. And then just trying to get him more touches without question because he obviously showed what he can do with the ball in his hand in that game.

And need to continue with that. But there's also just there's parts of that, there's pieces of that. As we get our guys developed each week and opportunities to be able to maximize the skill set of our guys on the offensive side of the ball.

Q. To keep going on Jaylin, what's been the hold-up? He's obviously not a big guy (indiscernible) pass protection. But what has kept you guys for getting him the ball more at this point and what do you have to be creative about or how do you have to be creative to get him in positive situations?

COACH ALLEN: I think there's some variables there with that. He's obviously a running back. And pass protection is a big deal. It's part of that. We don't sub guys a lot. You've got to be able to stay with the personnel grouping that you have in those situations.

So I think that's a big part of it because every time you sub, they can -- and they will, they'll come in at their own leisurely pace to be able to slow everything down. So that's schematically what you want to be able to prevent from how we want to operate.

And then just being able to grow. He's young, true freshman. But just continue to expand his knowledge of what we're doing and find creative ways, like I said, you can't just insert him for a play. That's kind of how maybe some styles of offense you can do that more, just being very transparent about that, I think it's obvious as you watch us play.

A lot of teams do that now. We played several teams already this year where they'll stay in the same personnel package so you can't sub. Or they'll do certain things on

third down so you can't sub in your third-down package. So there's that strategy going back and forth. And a lot of people are doing that.

But to be able to bring him along and get him more involved is definitely a priority for us right now. And as he continues to grow and develop as a player. And, like I said, you see what he can do with the ball in his hand and we know he can do that.

Q. How would you evaluate development of the offensive line over the last couple of years? Do you feel it's to the point it allows your program to consistently compete for bowl games?

COACH ALLEN: I would say that we played better this past week than we did the week before. But changed some guys around. No, I think it needs to get better. It's something I want to focus on in both recruiting and player development and continuing to evaluate that because you know you have to consistently have a group of guys ready to play.

Things happen. Injuries happen. And when someone goes down you've got to have another guy there. Josh Sales is going to be getting more reps. And that's something that's a positive thing is he's young and developing but continue to grow him and the other guys are coming along. Kahlil is progressing well and continuing to get better. Every time he plays he gets better and better, which is big for him, and for us.

I think that's an area we've got to make sure that -- I do like our young guys. I think we have some really good young O linemen that we're trying to bring along. And it's a position that takes two to three years for a guy to really be physically -- I know Matt Bedford was an exception to the rule to come in play as a freshman. That doesn't happen very often. But at the same time still looking at it, big picture-wise, we need to get better there.

Q. I don't think we've talked to you much about Louis Moore, another junior college transfer. Came up with that big play on the sack. What do you like about the way he fits in with your defense and just his play on Saturday?

COACH ALLEN: I think Louis did a great job. We're trying to find a niche for him within our system to maximize our roster. He came to us from junior college, as you mentioned, with -- really two-way guy there. Mostly was a receiver. Played a little defense just.

By doing our homework with him he pretty much practiced mostly on offense and just a little bit on defense. We knew

he had a high ceiling. We felt, as a DB, we took him as a defensive back as a potential nickel guy because he can play corner or safety.

And love his athleticism, his ball skills. The thing that was probably the biggest surprise early was how physical he was in tackling because we knew he didn't have extensive background at playing defense.

Although, he's from a high school in Dallas, Texas there that Mesquite Poteet, I know his head coach well. Recruited there for many years, produced a lot of tough, hard-nosed kids. I knew we were going to get a good football player just from doing our homework with that.

He's probably come along a little quicker than we thought. He might just because of his lack of defensive experience before we got him here and also the fact he wasn't here in the spring.

I just think that's been a huge plus for us and continue to use him as a safety and as a Husky and maybe even as a corner based on the needs of our team. We like to get those versatile guys that can play multiple positions.

Q. Lucas has been brought up, Josh Henderson also another guy. I know you can't predict the plays were called so quickly, but how can you guys scheme to get these guys in the position to get the ball in their hands more once we've seen that they've got some electricity sometimes?

COACH ALLEN: I agree. I think that's the big objective. And that was the big part of our discussion as a staff yesterday was being able to do that. I think you listed two guys there that have come on as the season's played out. And it's about getting playmakers the football and getting those guys the ball in space and the guys that can make somebody miss, give them the chance to do that consistently.

Those are two guys we're excited about and that just do a tremendous job. They're both such great workers every day, great teammates, do the little things right.

We've got several guys we feel we can get the ball to. And the challenge is to consistently do that within our scheme and within our scheme and how we're organizing ourselves.

Q. James Head was talking to us before about how he feels a lot of what happened Saturday was mental mistakes and some unforced errors. You and others keep talking about the offense needs to develop consistency. I guess, what do you do in practice to

develop consistency and address those kind of mental errors?

COACH ALLEN: I think, even defensively we gave up only five explosives the entire game. But there were some big ones that cost us. And so one was technique and one was communication. So to me that's -- I will say the challenge, especially defensively, you play a lot of guys which we want to do. There's going to be different guys matched up with different players and different situations.

It could be things that you have maybe read that exact same situation. Sometimes you did it during a walk-through or maybe it was a real practice rep. Sometimes it's different types of layers to that. So I think that increases the challenge.

At the same time that's how we know we want to play. So that's to me it's just continued reps, attention to detail and everything that we do. And I think our guys, we talked about that this morning as a team, just to be able to go through evaluate.

We won the turnover margin, we won the explosive-play ratio but we had some mental mistakes that were costly. The punt block was a huge play for them that really hurt us.

And to me when I look at, even offensively, our special teams and defense at times hasn't helped them. We've had -- our starting position was 15 yards less than theirs for average starts per series, which puts you at a disadvantage. We started on the 1 twice. Inside the 10 several times. Inside the 20 several times.

Everybody sees those stats where the percentage of scoring goes way, way down as you get, start further, further back. And it makes it tough on any offense. So we're just trying -- we dropped two interceptions, one I thought would have been a pick-6. We've just got to make those plays. And creating positive field position. And then those things that those mistakes have put us back, whether it's a penalty on special teams.

We've had more of those issues than we've had in the last several years. And it's been frustrating and some of it has been younger guys. But at the same time we've got to continue to teach. It's technique. It's execution. There's no shortcut to doing that. It's continuing to make it a point of emphasis in practice and focus on it, because we go into the fourth quarter tied 20-all and we've got to find a way to win the fourth quarter. We won many fourth quarters this season already and we didn't win that one it and cost us the game.

Those third downs you think about the defense. We did a

really good job on third downs until the fourth quarter. We had three of those in the fourth quarter and they won all three of them. That to me is really -- the fourth quarter execution, it's in practice, it's the attention to detail when your mind is tempted to wander in a meeting or in a walk-through and you're not the one in and you're standing off to the side and you're getting a mental rep. It's being able to be disciplined enough and making sure we hold those guys -- and we take pride in our walk-throughs and how attendant to detail we are, but obviously it's got to continue, because when you're not getting the product you want on game day, you need to make changes, which we'll continue to focus on the things we need to do to make that better.

And that's what we're going to do, just stay the course and continue to rep it and make sure the guys are in there that are ready to play that can help us be successful.

Q. You may have kind of answered this just a second ago, but 2019, 2020 you were 14-7. The past year-plus you're 5-12. What's the biggest difference between the program those couple of years and what's been going on the past season plus?

COACH ALLEN: I would say obviously last year was very difficult in regards to losing some of those early ones, and then you start having mounting injuries, which makes it really challenging, I think.

Consistency in our execution is probably the one thing that would jump out to me because that's how you finish games in those situations is to be able to execute better.

We obviously got some new faces from those couple of seasons. We have some guys that have been here during that time. But I think to me quarterback play, you know, when you think about the years, the two years before that, the last year we had inconsistent quarterback play, just inconsistent, keeping a guy healthy at that position, I thought was tough.

I think defensively we haven't set our team up for success with takeaways like we did in those two previous years. I think that's a huge, probably way bigger deal than you realize. And you think back, especially the 2020 season, that was a huge part of setting up the offense and giving them short fields and allowing us to be able to take advantage of those situations.

And I think special teams too. Even you think about the field position has been not in our favor like it needs to be. And it's not major things -- the block was obviously a major thing, the blocked punt -- but in the first five games it's not been major things, but it's been subtle things here and

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

there that have set us back. We get a return to the 35 and then we get a penalty that puts us back inside the 10. Things like that that are big deals.

And I think, to me, those small attention to details like that hasn't been as effective. And I think it's hurt us. And it's affected the outcome of the games, without question. We've got to find a way to get those corrected and give ourselves a chance to be our best, because now that's -- when I think about this game, those things showed up at critical times.

Q. We saw the defense get punched in the mouth and then really settle in as the game went on. During the fourth quarter Nebraska had a couple of drives that put you guys away. Is there any sort of element maybe just the tempo or fatigue on defense that kind of allowed Nebraska to pull away in that fourth quarter?

COACH ALLEN: In the second half for sure. We didn't stay on the field as an offense. And so I think that took its toll in the fourth quarter.

But it's about staying on the field. It's not tempo. If you're three-and-out you're three-and-out, whether you're going fast or slow. It's executing. It's staying on the football field as an offense and driving the ball. And that to me is the biggest issue.

And I think it snowballed. Obviously we had a big third down there in the fourth quarter that gave up the long touchdown that was really huge.

But at the same time, after that, I think the fatigue gets in to you a little bit. To me it's about offense in that moment. In that part of the game was we needed to execute, make contested catches and keep the chains moving so we can stay on the field, create momentum, obviously put yourself in position to score points, but also that gives your defense some more time to take plays away from what they can run.

Q. You were talking about Louis Moore before. And earlier Bryant Fitzgerald said one of the things that stood out to him was the energy he brings. Would you agree with that and how would you describe him?

COACH ALLEN: He's a super positive guy. Every day he's the same. He loves playing the game of football. You can tell. Some guys are just that way. They just enjoy life. They enjoy competing. They enjoy practice. He's one of those. He laughs a lot.

He and Fitzzy, you can tell they have fun together. And they have similar personalities. Fitzzy might be a little more

outgoing than Louis. But at the same time I just think he has a spirit about him that you want on your team, you want in your locker room, and you want guys like that, that realize they're blessed.

I'll tell you one thing, he multiple times has texted me and thanked me for believing in him and bringing him here. This is his dream to be able to play at this level. And he went to a junior college to be able to have that kind of opportunity.

Just feel like he was overlooked in high school. He was on a very talented team. Had a lot of guys that got more high recruited than he did. But it goes into his attitude. He's really, really thankful and appreciative for what he's been given and making the most of it, which is pretty awesome.

Q. Matt Holt, Coach Wilt told a story about how one of his first days on the job here, you were walking through the weight room with him and you pointed at Matt, said he's going to be a really good football player. Obviously his background is a little different. He's a walk-on. Said he basically didn't have anything offered. Wabash might have been his only other offer out of high school. Number one, how did you find him? I know Center Grove was probably a program you see a lot. But number two, when did you maybe first realize there was something more to him than the average walk-on?

COACH ALLEN: First of all, he kind of got victimized by COVID in his recruitment. I think that was a big part of it. He switched high schools and just due to all the different circumstances going on and trying to find the best opportunity in that situation because of the pandemic that we were all in. And so I think that definitely set back his recruiting. He did have some injuries in high school, would be another reason why he wasn't as highly recruited.

We liked his film. We were surprised he didn't have more going on when you start looking at the guy. What we do, we go through and evaluate guys for these preferred walk-on spots, which are really very valuable to us and we put a lot into it. Have a whole system we do to evaluate those positions and how many slots we're going to take for each position group.

And he was in one of those. And so honestly he's been better than I thought. And so once we started -- once we got him and we started practicing, I would say for him it was the scrimmages.

Every time we would scrimmage, it was, okay, this guy has a knack for the ball. And to play linebacker, it's about leadership and production. He just produced. Every time

we went live he showed up and made plays.

So there's just a grittiness to him, a toughness to him, and he plays through all sorts of whatever is going on, it doesn't affect him in a negative way. I just think as he's been here longer, I know you could tell through the fall camp this guy has something to him.

I'm excited for his growth and development. Making plays for us. And we'll definitely need that. Really proud of him. But like I say, I'm not surprised, now that he's been here, he's proven that to us and he's a good tackler and he's really good, he's smart, tough, dependable, three great qualities.

Q. Against Illinois in week one, Anderson had a couple of big drops. The one where the ball was tipped up for an interception. This week obviously he's really stepped up with Cam and D.J. out. How did he bounce back from those early drops and how comfortable has he gotten this season and how much has he progressed this season?

COACH ALLEN: He's obviously gotten a lot more comfortable. And those can kind of be tough on you mentally. You start second-guessing yourself sometimes and you've got to flush it. He's done a great job just putting it in his past. We always felt like as long as he's been here he has a dimension that we need. We need that explosive play-making ability. He's one of our fastest guys at receiver. Made some big plays for us on Saturday night. Continue to grow that and develop that. Other guys have to step up. I think it's just being mentally tough and just flushing whatever happens in the past and not making it a part of your, defining your future, to me.

That's really what it's about for him. And we talk about playing the next play all the time. And good or bad. Make a great play, flush it. Play the next one. Make a mistake, flush it, play the next one. He's done a great job at that, and I'm excited to see him grow in our program.

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