

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: All right. Just want to start by recognizing some of our guys from the game, our scout team players that work so hard throughout the week. We actually recognized our entire defensive line in one of our meet evenings prior to kickoff. But Race Stewart was our defensive scout team player of the week, defensive lineman here, local young man from Bloomington north, doing a great, great job for us. Offensive scout team players of the week Jack Greer and Brady Simmons, two in-state guys that are working really, really hard. And then special teams scout of the week is Jackson Schott.

So appreciate those guys' efforts, all that they do for us and helping us prepare each week, really just getting our guys back, refocused and ready for a big challenge on the road. Coach Schiano has done a great job there, his culture and his toughness and the way that they play. And obviously every road game is a tough challenge, so looking forward to this.

I also want to address the news we had this morning that was released with the Jack Tuttle situation, just so we're all on the same page with that. Jack and I met last week and had a really, really great time together and just open and honest conversation about him and appreciate everything he's done for us. And he's going to leave Indiana here with two degrees. And most recently he'll be getting his MBA from our Kelley School of Business. So doing everything we can to help him finish up that way. But has a desire to want to play his final year. So doing everything I can to support him in that. He's been a great leader for us. He's been a great teammate. And I don't expect that to change. And he and I are on the same page with that. And I think that a lot of love and respect for Jack. Appreciate all he's done for us. He's going to finish out with our team and do everything the right way, as he's always done. And I don't expect anything to change along those lines. We have a unique situation for sure, but I think it also speaks to his character and to what we're about here. And I want to help him be able to do the things that he'd like to do in his future.

Questions.

Q. I guess following on from that bigger picture with these portal windows now and kind of this idea of maybe building a little bit more structure into transfer recruiting, do you see this being something that could become a little bit more commonplace, almost like a free agent sort of announcing they're going to opt out of their deal or something? It's not like they're leaving the team, they just announce that at the end of the year they're going to --

TOM ALLEN: I would think that's a pretty fair analysis and comparison. We're not used to this kind of thought process necessarily collegiately. But for guys that have already graduated and gotten their degree, I can see that being the case. And I get it. I do. And so it's definitely different.

But we had -- like I said, it was -- he came to me and we talked it through. And even just from his -- because of the program he's in, there's also a different timetable, different calendar for that masters program compared to even a normal semester for our undergraduate students. That creates some challenges as well that we're willing to work with him and help him be able to accomplish that. So, yeah, I do think moving forward you'll see more of this. It's kind of the reality of the new world that we're in with college sports.

Q. Hey, Coach, you know, not trying to ask you to give too much away, but with this announcement, does it change how you guys view the backup quarterback position going forward?

TOM ALLEN: No because I trust Jack. And he and I have talked that through and not at all. I believe that he's always been in the past ready when called upon. And I don't think that's going to change.

Q. We talked a little bit about the -- about Monster's unsportsmanlike call on Saturday. That's obviously I think two in two weeks for him. Is that a concern at all or just a situation do you look at Saturday's and say that's really ticky-tack but you've got to --

TOM ALLEN: It was costly. We obviously addressed that.



And he and I had a good conversation Saturday night. And he was just disappointed, you know, really frustrated that it happened. But he's one of our leaders. And I just thought he made a really good play, you know. Just, to me, just sub with your teammates and don't look down at a guy whatever. To me that was -- I said what I said after the game. I still feel that way. But at the same time, you just play the next play, you know. It was costly. It was a costly penalty.

Q. Kind of sticking on a theme with the defense. What did you necessarily see after you went back and looked at the film and what do you need to rectify going forward?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. Tackling got to me. I just -- I know they got a lot of good athletes. That makes it more challenging. I get that. But too many missed tackles. I thought that was huge for us. And especially there at the end, got the lead. And I shared with our team, I felt like that, I get it, you can't turn the ball over. But we had the lead in the fourth quarter with a chance to finish it out and didn't do it.

So it's about finishing plays. Still continue to play a lot of guys. Those guys have got to execute in those situations. But it really wasn't so much of that. It was just more of just making plays on guys when we got a chance to be in a position to do that. And whether it's proper leverage and being able to near foot in your shoulder, a technique we use all the time, work on every single week and multiple times a week and just getting guys on the ground.

I just felt like that hurt us with the quarterback for sure and being able to get him corralled. He's very elusive, does a great job. But just that and just execution. To me, there were a couple things communication-wise got to continue to work through and get guys ready to roll. Doesn't matter whether we have true freshmen -- which we had some guys out there in that situation, guys that are young, just got here and not played a lot of college football. But the tackling to me was really the thing that stuck out.

Q. Tom, obviously, the two turnovers hurt, put the defense in a tough position. But the offense seemed to pick up the pace this week a little, a little bit better play on the offensive line. The defense continues especially in the secondary to not be able to really stop teams. Are you able to put your finger on what's going on there?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. That's been a big disappointment for me. You know, I know we've got some guys dinged up back there but still got some younger guys that need to step up and make those plays. And to me when you -- and

we played a variety of coverages Saturday, a lot of different things that we do and tried to do because of their scheme and their talent level.

And so just felt like a couple times that we really just didn't come up with a play. Just got to make a play. Critical situations and whether it's a breakup or whether it's just -- we had the ball on the ground twice, don't get the football. That hurt us. Those would have been huge. One was following our first offensive turnover to start the game, we had the ball on the ground, guy's hands on the ball, didn't come up with it.

And just also feel like we tried to make a couple adjustments on certain things. And it just -- yeah, I've been -- yeah, it's been -- to me, that's a team -- a unit that I wanted to be the strength of our defense, especially with Cam being out now, those guys got to keep stepping up even more to be able to take some pressure off the linebacker core. So that group needs to continue to rise up. We've got a lot of veterans in that group. Good Lord willing, we're going to get Jalen back this week. That's the hope. That will definitely help give us more depth there. But at the same time, there's enough guys on that field that played enough football to be able to finish out.

I just -- yeah. Just really, really frustrated by that, sick about that because I felt like that's really where we let the game slip away. We didn't finish them off on our defensive side of the ball. And I told our team that this morning. It's on the defense.

Q. Tom, you just mentioned finishing. And I think on Saturday you said how that can also be like a mentality that's built in a team. How can -- I guess maybe when you look at teams in the past, how did you build that finishing mentality? And at this point in the season, how can you try to apply that to this --

TOM ALLEN: We've got to flip the script because we started out the season doing that and then these last several games we have not. I know, obviously, you're playing really good football teams with good players. But at the same time, it starts at practice. We actually showed a clip. The very play that they scored one touchdown on was the exact play, exact formation, same part of the field, same everything that we did a walk through rep on the day before. And we didn't execute it. We didn't get off the field in that situation or stopping the touchdown.

It's got to translate from the practice rep, the walk through rep to the game rep. And so, to me, we're going to continue to evaluate, making sure we're keeping things simple enough so our guys can execute, a lot of guys can execute, whoever is in that combination. Because as the

game wears on, you get different -- you got a guy like Jalen's out, now his backup is playing and then his backup is behind him and those guys are playing a decent amount of reps. So that's really your third guy. So those guys have got to be communicating. They've got to be able to execute the call, whatever it happens to be, doesn't matter. We're just trying to continue to find ways to simplify that for those guys so they can finish those plays out because it does, it becomes an expectation when you do. And it becomes a source of doubt when you don't.

And that's where you got to -- I think we got too many guys that are just a little unsure maybe. And we've got to eliminate the uncertainty of them and making sure they're playing with that level of confidence because it shows out in those critical plays at the end of a game.

Q. Sticking with defense. Just midseason, how do you fix some of those issues where just getting guys to the ground on first contact and guys making stops one on one? Outside of watching film and all that, are there drills that you can do just to make sure this group gets to the standards that you --

TOM ALLEN: Yeah. That's the thing. I tell you what, you go back -- and I knew. I watched it live and then I watched it again that night. But, man, there were so many times we had guys right there, you know, and that's where I'm like, guys, we've got to finish the plays. We've got to get them on the ground.

There was a key third down where we had three guys missed them and three of our better players, you know. So that -- so what we're going to do -- to answer your question, even this week, we're going to be able to do not full bore live, but we're going to tackle people. And we've got to be able to -- we're always working on our technique and drills with everything we do with the mechanisms, whether it's a sled or a pop-up dummy, whatever it is on the crash pad. We're going to do it with bodies just to be able to -- the movement, the twist, the ability to be able to do that and get the thud up and squeeze the elbows, run the feet. So we're going to change that. We just feel like that's necessary. Don't really like doing that during the season, but we feel like we've got to do it just because I want to make sure I eliminate those because we've got to get them on the ground.

We work too hard to get those guys in that position. We've got to finish those plays out. We knew on film that he was a very difficult quarterback to keep in the pocket. And we missed him several times. But that, to me, is still once again continue to work on that and angles and anticipation where the guy is going to roll to and move to when he breaks containment because guys usually have habits of

how they avoid or evade you in the pocket. So just continuing to -- probably the answer is more physical bodies tackling, you know, by our own -- our scout team, receivers, tight ends, running backs in those drills to be able to help us improve that here this part of the year.

Q. Coach, you've talked about how in the face of adversity you learn, like, who you really are. I guess you guys are kind of in some adversity now losing four in a row. Have you liked what you've seen the way the guys have responded in that adversity? Is there things you haven't liked?

TOM ALLEN: Well, yeah, I would say, you know -- and, obviously, today was our day with our guys. Our off day is Sundays. And they do things voluntarily in recovery mode and with our medical staff. But, yeah, I just think that -- obviously, we have practice tomorrow, so I'll have a better feel tomorrow. But I think up to this point, there is a lot of maturity from our team. There is a lot of hurting guys right now, frustrated guys right now and guys that want to create change, you know.

So, to me, it is -- I mean, you -- the foundation of who you are gets exposed when things go wrong. And it also gets strengthened I think. And so it's an interesting process that you go through when difficulties arise in life and to a team. And so the very core of who you are, that has to be the foundation that you hold onto. That's your anchor when things are hard and when things are rough and when things are going against you.

And so that's where you've got a chance for the character of our players, the character of our team, the character of our whole organization, the culture we have here at Indiana to be able to just stand strong. And just like families do, you get closer together and you get tighter and you rely on each other more instead of, you know, breaking apart when things get hard.

So that's where the stronger the foundation, the better chance you have of staying together. Doesn't make it any easier, doesn't make the difficulties go away, without question. But, yeah, I do like what I see. Even Cam. Cam continues to lead. As hard as it for him to be on the sideline and not being able to help us physically, he continues to lead and addressed the team even again this morning.

And so just going to continue to build off of those things and those guys and those leaders on our team and continue to help really grow the younger guys because they've not been through this before, our guys that have been other places in the past, teach them how we stay together during those difficult times and stay together and

battle and play hard for each other. Still a lot out there for us to play for. Our guys understand that. And bottom line is, we've got to be able to continue to learn from our mistakes and press on.

We did some positive things on Saturday night but not enough. I think our guys recognized that. And we're going to continue to point those things out in a very appropriate way when whatever intensity is necessary to get the result we're looking for. And obviously you want to create change, you've got to change something you do everyday. So we're changing schedules, changing this, going to change game day. We're going to change things up, continue to try to get the best physical and emotional response out of our guys.

Q. At this point in the season, just past the halfway point, how would you assess Connor's play and what he's brought to your offense?

TOM ALLEN: I would say even Saturday's game, the two costly picks, you know, and, obviously, there's many variables that go into those, but that's a negative thing without question. We all know that. It was very costly. But outside of that, he played really well. And so you can't just throw everything out because you make a couple mistakes. But you obviously got to understand, those mistakes can't be made.

And it's not a one-person mistake in some of those. But at the same time, that position demands that, you know. So -- and I think that's kind of been, you know, the way he's beginning to -- I think we've seen improvements, all right. But I also want to make sure that we're doing a great job of protecting the football.

I think that's one thing we've always said. And that's why we work so hard on ball security for every other position on offense. And that is having the ball in the proper hand when you're running up the sideline to the -- if the sideline is to my left, the ball is in my left hand. That's a fundamental thing we emphasize all the time and didn't do it. But for Connor, to me, it's continuing to show tremendous toughness, just being able to be so steady in those areas. But just got to continue to grow. And I see him, you know, make some adjustments with us and get better and play better and do some good things and give us an opportunity.

The thing about it is we've had opportunities in every one of these games to be in the position in the fourth quarter to go win a game. Even you think back to the Cincinnati game where we dug such a big deficit, we still had a chance to go score to get it to a one-possession game in the fourth quarter. So every game has been that way. And

so -- whether it's been on the road or at home. So he's given us those opportunities I believe.

At the same time, you know, we've got to now -- we've got to finish better. We've got to eliminate those kind of mistakes. So I would say that there's definitely been the good and the bad, you know. But at the same time, you know, we're growing together. And we've got to continue to get better. And we've got to finish. Got to finish as a team, got to finish as an offense, got to finish as a defense.

Q. We probably asked you this before in some context, but with Rutgers specifically, they're coming off a bye week. They've also got a new offensive coordinator. I'm sure they're not going to make wholesale changes. But how do you parse getting ready for a team when there's a lot of film out there and they've struggled offensively recently, but trying to figure out essentially what they might do differently?

TOM ALLEN: That is the challenge. So we seem to be getting many opportunities to figure that out, you know. And, so, yeah, you don't really know. So you got a new -- you can't just change your whole system. We get that. But they do have a bye week, like you said, this happened to us in the past this year. So there will be some new things for sure you're going to see.

Quarterback position for them has kind of been there issue. And then just keeping guys healthy and having certain guys in there. So don't really know who that's going to be. That's probably the biggest question mark. So you kind of go back and you've got to have some different thoughts about each guy and what his strengths are and what he brings to the table.

So you're kind of going through that process right now figuring out what do you think they'll do to maximize those guys in those roles when they're behind center. So that, to me, is the biggest challenge. So, yeah, it's a lot of unknowns.

So, once again, the first couple series are going to be big. We're not really 100 percent sure what we're going to see. So we're going to have to be able to be really, really good coaches and adapt and adjust on the hoof and put a game plan together that has the ability to do that adaptation for our guys from the sideline when the game gets going.

Q. Coach, seems like over the last few weeks Emery Simmons has been a little more involved. I know that's because of injuries and DJ being out, they kind of play that same spot. How big has he been? And how have you seen him grow as the season's gone along?

TOM ALLEN: It's been encouraging. He's playing the way I expected him to play. As we all know, he's a guy we recruited the first time around, wanted him here several years ago and finally got him here. And just his confidence continues to grow, made some big catches for us, big plays. I just love his mindset. He's just such a worker. The way he is every rep is exactly how he practices every single day.

And guys have stepped up in that room. And DJ is getting healthier all the time. So that's a very positive thing for us. And just trying to get those guys healthy in there and ready to roll. And Cam is getting back to health again, made some big plays for us obviously. But really excited for and happy for Emery. He's just a great young man that I really have a lot of confidence in. And he's now playing at the level that I expected him to.

Q. Coach, we talked to Connor. He said the difference about this team is that they know they're good. Is that kind of the attitude you've seen after --

TOM ALLEN: I do. And I know people can -- whatever you think about it. We've obviously lost four in a row now, which is not positive. But you get to decide how you think. And each person gets to decide how they respond to adversity. And I do believe our team thinks that way, you know, which makes it more frustrating without question.

But at the same time, if you don't believe in yourself, why should anybody else. And so our guys understand that. We put enough on -- have done enough good things each week to recognize that. But it also comes to the point in time you've got to say, okay, we've got to find ways to finish out, guys, you know.

But I do feel like that when you look in their eye and you watch how they prepare and you watch how they approach the weight room today, which I think is a pretty telltale sign on a Monday morning after a tough loss and you come in and see how are they going to work in that weight room with our strength staff, I use that as our litmus test in a lot of ways.

I'm with them first before we go into the weight room, and we do it separate. So offense and defense separate. So you don't always get a great read when you're just talking to them that first time. You can tell some things. But that, to me, is really the key. And that just showed me that these guys understand what's in front of us. And they're a resilient group. They're a very tough minded group. We've just got to find continuous ways to play better, to finish.

You're playing against really good people. I think the Big

10 has always been good since I've been here. I think it's the best it's been. I think the East is the best it's ever been since I've been here. It isn't even close. Everybody we play is really good. We played one of the teams that is going to have a chance to compete to win the West.

And then you played a Cincinnati team that's top 25 program that played in the playoff a year ago. So you play a lot of good football teams. So your margin for error is not very big. You get a couple of guys dinged up, the wrong guys, and it hurts you. But you've got to have other guys step up.

I think our guys recognize who we are. They recognize what we can become. And, obviously, the clock is ticking. So that's where you just understand that there's a brevity to this and the guys recognize that. We've got a lot of guys and we're trying to individually challenge them, and they've responded. We've just got to stay together, keep fighting and finish this thing off right.

Q. Coach, kind of a two-part question about James Evans. One, how did you guys originally find him? And he had talked about how basically transitioning to the U.S., like, one of the things that was difficult for him was driving on the other side of the street. I guess basically how have you seen him last year especially just transition to being in the U.S.?

TOM ALLEN: The simple things of life, right, which side of the road you're supposed to drive on. Yeah. That's right. But, no -- and he makes us all laugh even when he's not even trying to because things like that. America was just different for him, you know, in a lot of ways.

But the way we found him, we have Prokicker Australia is a group of guys that formed years ago. And I got connected with them. And they help place kickers from that part of the country to America to kick. And especially the area of punters. And so through that organization, he's the third one we've gotten from them. And they've been awesome to us. They kind of know the culture we're looking for. They know him way better than we do. It's kind of unique when you recruit, you always have to figure out who they are. But when they're halfway across the world, it's really difficult to really know them. You can't go visit them, that kind of thing. I got to trust them that they know what we're all about here, what we're looking for academically. We want an academically focused young man as well as a guy that's going to work the way we want him to work and handle his business off the field the way he needs to do that and care about the things we care about.

They told me when they had him, they said, he's raw but they think this kid's got NFL potential leg strength wise.

We've seen that. He's playing more consistently now, which is the word he chose for this whole year for himself personally. He had a strong leg. What they do is they send us video and we go through and have all these different angles and different things because you've got to be able to tell the drop and the hang time and the distance. And they have a whole systematic way of presenting that to us so we can see it with our own eyes as we watch the video. And once again, there's trust involved.

And I believe that he's actually the -- because you don't even know who they are so. It's not like you're saying is that really going to be the guy -- the guy that we watched kick, is that the one we're going to get sent? It's kind of like you put your order in over the internet.

But at the same time, he's been everything they said he would be. He definitely had to learn. I mean, he had to figure out how to wear pads. He had to figure out what it was like to kick a ball with a helmet on. They do practice with a helmet on. That's one thing they do in their training. But wearing all the pads and getting people running at you and trying to block your kick, you know, that's totally new to him. And the game itself is totally new to him. But, yeah, just an awesome young man that has a very live leg. And we're seeing more of that each week. And that needs to continue. We need him to be able to help us flip the field and do a great job of being a great special teams player. So that's kind of how we found him. And he's not disappointing.

Q. All right. Thanks, Tom?

TOM ALLEN: Awesome. Have a great day.

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