

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Appreciate everybody being here today. Do want to begin by our hearts are heavy and thoughts and prayers go out to the Idaho campus community as well as University of Virginia and the tragedies that have happened recently here and just a very, very difficult time.

So I know the football program there at Virginia is well affected by there and pray for Coach Elliott that he takes his group through that very, very awful situation. Tough, tough, tough.

Just want to comment from the game, really disappointed how we played, all three phases. Played a very good football team without question. But did see some younger guys step up and have opportunities to play against he an elite football team, No. 2 team in the country and felt like had a lot of positive takeaways from those guys.

Smith got a chance to play a lot of meaningful football for his first time and Dexter at quarterback and safety, and getting Donovan a chance to get a touchdown and bring those guys along, just continue to develop and grow those guys and build our program.

Also some young guys that did a great job during the week, our scouts, we have Cooper Jones as well as Jeff as defensive scouts of the week and then offensive scouts were Christian Moore and D.J. Harris and special teams was Reece Lozano.

Excited about this week. Not every place, not every program has the opportunity to play in trophy games and rivalry games and we have two trophy games that we have on our regular season schedule and we have both of those to finish out the season.

We'll continue to always tweak things and find ways to get us better and help us play our best on game day.

Q. With the different changes throughout the year and I know things changed and other things caused things to be different but with the quarterback position, how we've seen different guys play well, has there been any

questioning of maybe the talent is not being identified as early as possible like maybe Dexter Williams getting to play earlier what that could have brought to this team but to identify the talent that's there before it's actually there?

TOM ALLEN: Well, I think always when you talk about your team and who you decide to play and not play, and every position is different. Obviously the quarterback position, it gets emphasized with what that guy does at a higher level. I get that. You play multiple running backs and linebackers or DBs and it all flows.

I would say this that: It's always the case and for each guy, it's their responsibility to prove during practice that they are the guy at that position. So to me, some guys play better than they practice. You want to obviously see that that grow and develop. Some guys just play better. Bottom line is you go through and we'll have to see how everything plays itself out these last couple weeks but obviously you want to nail that, you want to be on point with that and you want to be able to project what a guy is going to do. Sometimes you're right about a guy. Sometimes he goes out there and doesn't perform the way you want him to and you look like you made a mistake making that decision.

Bottom line is that never stops and it's going to continue and that's why we grade and watch evident practice prep and I watch everything as well on both sides of the ball. Takes a lot of time and that's something I do, too. I want to see, hey, this is a guy that keeps showing up when we are doing certain things, whether it's watching the offensive against our defensive scouts or watching our own defensive against our offensive scouts. Hey, let's get this guy an opportunity.

Like what happened with Carter Smith, being able to identify him and see what he can do. I think that you can just continue that you and want to make sure that you're getting your best players on the field. We are trying to do that and however it plays it itself out moving forward is us doing our best to be able to get the best guys in position to help us be successful.

Q. I don't think D.J. was at Ohio State. What's up with



him and where are Bradley and Josh at and is there any update on Cam Jones?

TOM ALLEN: You just mentioned several guys. D.J. did not make the trip unfortunately. Tweaked his knee late in the week unexpectedly, so we are just monitoring that and see where that's at. It wasn't the knee he needed surgery on but at the same time it's hard. We'll see where he's at.

Josh, we hope to get back. Bradley Jennings, not sure yet. That will be progressing throughout the week but he had a lower leg injury as well.

And Cam Jones is continuing to battle to come back, and so definitely that's a daily evaluation of him. We'll do some tests today and see how that plays itself out with him moving around. Definitely love to have him back but want to make sure it's in his best interests as well.

Q. Dexter kept saying that he wished he would be more consistent with his throws. When you went and watched his film, did you feel like he was maybe misreading certain defenses or was it more a case where he saw what was there, just not making accurate throws?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I felt like it was rushing things a little bit, not getting his feet set a couple throws. I get it, you're out there and it's a big stage and he is young. I think that some of those misses were just, you read progressions, sometimes it's catching throws, sometimes it's reading the coverage and the different things we read through each concept.

I just think it's being able to process everything and then get your feet right and then make throws because obviously he has arm talent. That is the thing we talked about with him, is being more consistent in that area because as you continue to grow and develop, those things grow with you.

Q. Talking to Jalen earlier, he mentioned that he was kind of looking later on into the season to kind of develop a role in the slot receiver position. Have you guys really utilized him in that position or is that a plan to do that moving forward?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so that's something that we would like to be able to grow him into without question. Obviously a lot of variables with that, but I think there's no question that when you say, okay, there's -- find creative ways to get him the football, that's the next step I think for that, outside of him being a -- being a return guy, which is what he's currently doing.

So yeah, I'm all in favor of that, for that and obviously that's not just as simple as, hey, go over and play receiver. There's no question with his skill set and the way he has ball skills to match that that's something that moving forward, you'd love to be able to get him the ball.

Q. With Donovan, talk about his progression and where you see him from the beginning of the year until now?

TOM ALLEN: Definite growth. Want to see more of it and expected more of it. Want to maximize every opportunity he gets. Get the ball with confidence and go get that football. He's a big guy that's got length and athleticism and just playing with that confidence, I think that's something that he needs to develop with and it's growing, there's no question about it. Want to see him, you know, when I challenge him with is, hey, when that ball is thrown up, it's yours. Physically I want to see you be of that mind.

To me, there's definitely growth, but it's got to continue and I want to see him finish out this season really, really strong because he's a guy that we have big, big expectations for him, and I know he does for himself as well.

Q. When Dexter tore his ACL it was during practice so we obviously were not there from that. What do you remember from that and what do you see, going through the process and getting back healthy?

TOM ALLEN: I vividly remember it because it one of those where it was like, he did what? I just never, ever thought -- because he planted. I remember he was run to go his right and he planted and he kept to his left and that's when he popped it, and at the time we didn't know. He limped off but never thought that that would have cost that type of injury. Was a non-contact one, obviously wearing a blue jersey and didn't get hit. Obviously one of those, wow, I can't believe it just happened, once we found it was a torn ACL.

Pretty tough. That was the first time he's had something like that happen and to go through the whole year long process coming back. Yeah, definitely one of those, sometimes you see a guy and you're like, when you see it happen, you get sick to your stomach and think that it might be that. And then some you just can't even believe and that's one of those was not what we expected. But obviously that's in his past and he's learned to grow from that, and just continuing to keep getting better.

Q. The special teams for this year have more the most part been one of the bright spots of this football team and the guy that snaps the ball, Sean Wracher, tell us what you feel about that guy?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, Sean to me, one of our most valuable players, especially when you start thinking about most valuable players that nobody knows much about, but his value to this team is immense. He's so consistent and he's so dependable, kind of for gets he's there but he always does his job.

Great snaps, great location, durational punt. It's not like he snaps straight back to the punter every single time. There are different legs you snap it to based on where we are going to punt it. There's a lot more to it than might even appear.

Then he's the leader of that group. He's leader of the special teams unit. Takes tremendous pride in it and has high expectations. A lot of those guys do things on their own during practice and he leads that group. Invaluable to have his consistency. We went out and recruited him. He came and worked out for us at camp and we offered him based offer that work out. We knew, that's one of those skill sets where you have numbers that you get. We know how fast his long snaps are and short snaps are, and you can see his location you and chart all those things and then you try to find a guy that fits your culture and what you want here on your football team and he fit all those things.

Then, he's a baseball player. I like multi-sport guys. I just think guys that learn to compete in other sports. It matters. So I liked that about him. He kind of was a complete package of what we are looking for and he's been phenomenal for us and he's going to leave here with two degrees and he's a very sharp young man, excellent student and high, high character. Could not be more proud of him and like I say he's a guy that most people don't know much about but very, very valuable but he does and he helps our team in a huge way win games.

Q. This is philosophical, but when you have quarterbacks with different skill sets and thinking about Dexter's ability to break the pocket and run, thinking about his arm strength but also you might recognize with your staff at the beginning of the season, he may not be one or two, he may be a little bit further down the depth chart to start the season but how much do you want to build for somebody like that in the event they do have to play in terms of specific packages within an offense? I imagine you don't want to spend too much time on it but if for that player whatever reason does windup playing significant snaps, having a part of the playbook that really goes to their specific skills if that makes sense?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think that's a valid point and I think especially like you mentioned that you have got guys that

have different skill sets and that that is the case here and so -- but I will say, you know, he was, like you said, he wasn't the two, and so he was always with that group taking some reps, and doing all the routes on air and doing all the things with that group.

We did, for that very reason, we kept him with those guys. Knew that he had talent for sure, was young. The year that he missed set him back without question, and obviously it is a new system that they have all had to learn. I just think that the is always how much -- how many reps do you put into that guy that may or may not play much, and to be able to get that and then also, if it's different. So it is definitely a package, I would say. There would be a very precise part of the package to start with and you grow from there. That's how you manage it.

I do think there is a lot of between of having multi -- when I sit there and think about defensively and we come up with a game plan, if I don't have to change the game plan based on the quarterback skill set, you know, 1A or 1B, might not matter who the quarterback is.

But if you have a completely different quarterback that can change what you do schematically. There are some benefits without question that create challenges and you have to way those two against each other and at the end of the day we are just trying to find the best quarterbacks that we can find that we believe can help us win. Those guys are all a little bit different, and once you find who those guys are, you adapt your scheme to make sure those guys will be at their best.

Q. Dexter mentioned two of his closest friends on the team are Donovan and Jalen. How much does that cohesiveness play a role?

TOM ALLEN: I think any time you have connectivity with guys, it's positive. You know, I think that as you -- that's why I think it's ideal as you move forward and you have, you know, a guy that's the quarterback that's the leader of your team, the leader of that side of the football or the leader of the room and the guy is gravitating to him, that's kind of what you want.

And then they -- that's where in today's balance of quarterbacks staying places and moving around like happens every place, to be able to create that, you know, continuity and connectivity over time is challenging without question.

But hey, I think that's where -- I think it's like anything else when a guy feels more comfortable with certain guys he's going to look to when he breaks the pocket or is back in the pocket or reading a progression or not. We know that.

We always say, who does the quarterback look to when he needs a play. That's usually the guy we try to take away. There's no question that can be a part of those guys feel confidential with each other, playing well together and looking for each other when they are out there. You'd like to be able to build that within your team and hope that helps you score points and win football games.

Q. You mentioned the portal, guys have been going in since the season started but in a couple weeks it will really start to get going when the season ends for a lot of times. Have you identified any positions in December where you might try to get some older guys, or a veteran guy to plug a hole to bridge a gap to a younger guy?

TOM ALLEN: We definitely have gone through that already and have a list of guys -- not guys, but spots, positions that we are trying to address and so I think it's definitely, you know, amazing how quickly it's changed to where that number grows because of guys that, you know, in the twos and three spots that choose not to stay sometimes. So I just think that, yeah, that's definitely going to be something that's going to be a huge focus. We have already identified those spots and to me, you're going to have a base level of guys coming in and out of high school that, won't change but the group in the middle there that you have to continue to address and keep your rooms in proper orders in terms of the age of that group, that to me is critical. So yeah, we have identified it. Had two specific staff meetings regarding that already and we'll have another one here tomorrow. It's definitely a huge focus for us and it's ongoing in building this program.

Q. You had said last week that Dexter is a guy that's really well-respected in the locker room. What does he do specifically to earn that? I guess from his teammates or specifically you.

TOM ALLEN: Like everybody, and I challenge all of our quarterbacks to be this way is you earn it by your work ethic. Being a guy that is a hard, hard worker in that weight room, everything we do off the field and from a condition perspective, be a leader in those moments, be in great shape and be a guy that leads.

You know, we talk about that phrase, leading by example. It's base level. If that doesn't happen, then it's not possible to go to the next level of leadership but it can't stop there. And so I think because he's verbal, you know, he will encourage, challenge. He has a really, really -- he has a great personality. He's an articulate guy that's not afraid to speak and really loves his teammates and they love him back.

I think just in general, we have several guys on the team I would say this about but just a genuine, really, really good person that works really, really hard. I think they respect the adversity that he's overcome, and to come back and to stay here, being a young quarterback that has obviously showed that he has talent.

But those guys have to kind of wait their turn in. This day and age, it's not easy to do that. A lot of guys are not willing to wait their turn. The fact that he's stayed here and been true to us, I think the guys respect that about him and they enjoy being around him. I think there are certain things that you have innately that you attract people to you. He's one of those guys, and you know, I think everybody is just pulling for Dexter. That's probably the best way to say it, when he's coming back, just want to maximize what he's been given. He's a high-quality person. He's experienced some challenges off the field as well and at home and I think once again, that causes guys to just really rally around you a little bit. So he's just a genuinely good person that's worked really, really hard and has some really good level football talent.

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