

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



COACH ALLEN: I appreciate you all being here. Just want to start by saying how proud I am of our players, once again, just going back and having a chance to watch the film and grade it all. Just the fight and just the toughness and the grit to be able to stay the course, even though we got behind. And even in the second half when they scored and we were down by 17 again, and our guys just kept battling.

Just a testament to their character, their just staying together. And tough physical conditions with the weather and a tough football team. Lot of respect for them, how hard their kids play, the talent they have.

Want to mention a few guys. We had some players of the game we want to recognize. Offensively Shaun Shivers and Luke Haggard, I thought Luke played his best game since he's been here. Shaun obviously had a big run for us, just the whole offense not turning the ball over.

Dexter Williams just protecting the football, running the football well. Obviously Shaun went over 100 yards. Dex went over 100 yards and ran for about 260. And offensive line play was huge and just a testament to those guys and Coach Bell and what he did with our staff to get those guys ready.

Defensively recognizing four guys as players of the game. Fitzy, playing his first game at linebacker. 14 tackles, tackle for loss, unbelievable. Tied Tegray Scales for that, which is just amazing because his lack of practice reps at that position has really been minimal. And just playing football -- eyes right, great tackler. Just really impressed with him.

Jon Haynes, thought he played his best game since he's been here. James Head just, he blocked the field goal there in overtime.

And then Monster just played tough and physical and just really proud of him and the way he led our secondary. With moving Fitzy to linebacker really needed him to step up verbally in the back end to be able to run things. And

so those four guys players of the game defense.

And then Jaylin Lucas and Noah Pierre our special teams players of the game. What can you say about Jalin, the only player in the country to have two kickoff returns for touchdowns this season?

And the whole unit, we call that unit the house call unit, and those guys all did a great job. And Noah Pierre just phenomenal play on special teams, caused a fumble -- we didn't get it -- but caused a fumble on one of our punts. And kickoff coverage was phenomenal.

And I'll also say this. Shaun Shivers covered six kicks, as a matter of fact he covered the very kick after -- just this whole week, missed, pretty much missed the whole week with an injury, didn't get to practice hardly at all, but played his tail off.

So just a lot of guys, Cam Jones right now, tremendous on the sideline. Locker room. Didn't play in the game. But, man, just huge value to our team.

And I could go on and on about the guys. Just really proud of them. And the scouts the week as well, their preparation, wish they could have been in the locker room with us. We actually did some pictures afterwards with those guys so they could be part of it with the Spitoon.

But Max Williams and Brady Simmons, offensive scouts of the week. And then we had Mitchell Evans, Liam Zaccheo and Drew Pearce, defensive scouts of the week. And then special teams scouts, Will Jontz and Liam Zaccheo.

So guys continued to give us tremendous effort. And I've said this, our team's continued to practice hard, didn't always show up on game day. Finally did. Their perseverance and toughness and fight showed up. And we had three fourth down stops by our defense. Those don't count as takeaways, but they really are.

Just huge momentum shifters, just the one takeaway which gave us three points which was the difference in the game.

So total team effort, total team win. Just proud of our guys and just staying together and continuing to fight.



Obviously this week is a tremendous challenge and opportunity to play the Boilermakers here at home for the Old Oaken Bucket. Just unbelievable passion for this game from our fan base and from our team and our players.

And we know that Purdue is a really good football team. A lot of respect for Coach Brohm and what he's doing there and how their team plays. And so they have a lot of talented football players in all three phases and have to come together and play our best football one last time here at home.

I have a great group of seniors I love and respect. Guys here that have played a lot of football for us and want to send them out the right way.

So we'll have to earn this one, just like you always do, but appreciate the effort this past weekend. That one's in the past now. Build off of that. Take that momentum into this week. Have our best week of preparation, have our best game collectively on Saturday.

Q. This senior group, in particular, is kind of your first group in a way. It's a lot of guys that signed after you got the job or were part of your first recruiting class, guys obviously like Bryant or Devon that have stuck around. Cam, I know, hasn't been playing but stuck around basically the maximum time. Just what is Saturday going to be like for you? And with this small number of guys, like Tiawan that, in theory, could have another year, when do you kind of initiate the conversation for them? Because I imagine at the same time guys will want to look at the NFL or maybe feel they've played a lot of football.

COACH ALLEN: First of all, just the senior class, it's a special group, like you said, some six-year guys in there. Been here a long, long time. Came in with the first class that was here that we recruited that whole year.

And just all the effort they've given us. They've been a part of the breakthrough in '19 and '20, and they persevered through a tough year last year and then this year's been challenging as well. So a special group of guys that I have a lot of respect for, tremendous love for.

It's going to be an emotional day, to be honest. But at the same time, we work together, fight together, cry together, laugh together. And I want us to have one awesome finish to this group of guys' time together here at Memorial Stadium.

Couldn't have a better opportunity than to play your rival

game at home with a group of seniors that have come here to create change and have been part of that change and want to finish off the right way, and a chance to win both of our trophy games would be huge.

So a lot of emotion there. The guys, like you mentioned, that have to make decisions, we'll do it like we usually do. They'll have a chance to hear from the NFL scouts and how they view them, get their valuation from them, and then we'll sit down with their families and talk that decision through.

A little bit different this year. NCAA has given us actually a dead week. Used to be we would be out recruiting Sunday morning after we play the game on Saturday. Now that week is dead. And really for the purpose of being able to be with you guys, meet with all the players. It won't be as urgent as far as meeting with them right away that first thing in the morning, like we did last year. But at the same time it will happen that next week and have a chance to sit down with families and talk it through.

But don't have the same number of guys in that situation, but do have a few. And so we always just want to make sure they know we want to help them make the best decision for themselves, make sure they have all the information they need. Then they as a family have to make that call. And we'll support them either way.

Q. During the seven-game losing streak, you guys were, in four of those games, either leading, tied or trailing by seven or fewer heading into the fourth quarter. Same situation this past week. How important was it for them to just get the win to change the attitude in the building for this coming week?

COACH ALLEN: Oh, yeah, I think you can't even state how critical that was and how big it is for us because you keep talking about it. You've asked me fair questions about how do you turn it? How do you get a different result? And I think the answer is, you stay the course. And you continue to look for ways to find different ways of doing things which we've done to get a different result.

But you've got to experience, talk about it. You've got to finally make those plays. Because it comes down to you've got to make critical plays in those moments at the end.

We went through today and just highlighted those critical plays, whether it's special teams. You talk about the Jaylin Lucas kickoff return. They had just taken the lead again. That was kind of -- shouldn't have given up that run the way we did any way. It happened. And so what are you going to do?

That unit made a game-changing play. Then we had some key fourth down stops, and the offense takes the ball and goes down and scores.

And Shaun Shivers pops that long run. All those things combined, guys making plays in those moments. You could talk about overtime, the emotions of that and coming down and getting that touchdown and getting the two-point conversion was massive for the psyche of our defense taking the field and just knowing we've just got to get one more stop. One more stop.

And it comes down to fourth down. And Noah makes a great play in the end zone. Just players, in those moments, rising up and making critical plays, whether it's on offense, defense or special teams.

And when you take for granted the four-yard field goal that Charles Campbell kicks after we get the takeaway. That ends up being a game-changer. You don't go to overtime if you don't have that field goal.

Every phase of the game came together. And that's how you have to win those close games. And we've unfortunately had our fair share of frustrations not finishing games out this season; and to be that close is just kind of sickening because you know you've got a good football team that just needs to keep fighting together, getting a few more guys back each week and try and get one more guy have a chance to make a play that provides a difference in the game.

Fortunately, we were able to do that. We feel very blessed, and it's just a great feeling to be able to know that these guys stuck together. Because you know what, in that environment, on the road, the weather the way it was, being down by the way we were at halftime, and then even in the middle third quarter, man, what character and resilience these guys showed. So really proud of them.

Q. The transfer portal and college football, quote/unquote, free agency has changed so much, really your conversations next week, roster top to bottom and such, how much does it help considering how tough these past couple of months for those guys to enjoy the euphoria of that win on the field and in the locker room and just to have a good taste in their mouth after a couple of rough months?

COACH ALLEN: I don't know that you could put a value on it that would justifiably explain it. I think we are in a different era. It's unlike anything I've ever experienced. Never thought it would ever become this, when you first start coaching. Probably even five or six years ago never even thought about anything like this.

Everything you do is just trying to find a way to make sure the guys that are on your team understand their role, their value, how we see them developing for their future. And you gotta be constantly selling that.

You didn't even think about some of those things in regards to that. You thought about it as a built in part of what you do, but to have a conversation with guys to try to keep them. Before you're always trying to meet them, map out the next step for them. What's the next few months going to look like when we come back after the season's over.

Now you have conversations about convincing them to stay. And sometimes it may be pretty blunt conversations. But at the same time it can't just happen right then. There's been a lot of things that built up to this. And you know it's been a hard season and guys get frustrated and everybody wants to win and I want to win as much as anybody.

But you just stay true to who you are, and you want guys who want to be here. And now they have an opportunity to move around more than ever before. And so I still want to -- it doesn't change. You want to keep the right guys here. And I want guys, like I said, that have the passion for this program and have the belief that we can do special things here together.

But, yeah, you've got to be proactive with it. We talk about it all the time as a staff. Doesn't make you -- I don't want it to make us hold guys less accountable. I don't want to ever change that.

But you also gotta make sure they don't assume anything. They need to know how you feel about them. They need to know the plan for them. They need to know exactly how you see them being a part of our future, because I think that's kind of what they want to be. And their families want to know that as well.

So, yeah, it definitely adds a whole new dimension to everything we do. Now used to think, hey, when the season finishes, you go out and recruit your class. Now the season ends and you do that and you have to recruit your own, which is a whole new -- it's never going to change. It will be this way from now moving forward.

Q. With how the season has gone and getting this unbelievable emotional win this past week, you go into probably the most emotional game of the season, how important is it to get a win at the end of the season to carry that momentum forward versus having that loss and having that taste in your mouth afterwards?

COACH ALLEN: Yeah, I think you've got to continue, as we said today to our players, I said this is the biggest game of the season. Why? Because it's the next one. I get it. We understand we're playing for a trophy and a trophy that means a whole lot to this university.

But every year this game has tremendous value and the stakes are very, very high. It's elevated because of the season we've had. And for us to continue the momentum we were able to generate last week and have one of the greatest comebacks we've had in our program in a long time -- first time winning in back-to-back games in East Lansing in 53 years, that's history that doesn't happen all that often.

Not many teams won both of those in the same year. It's happened only five years to win both the Brass Spittoon and Oaken Bucket in the same year. Last time it happened here was 2016. Did not get a chance to play for the bucket in 2020.

But the bottom line is that tremendously important game, but you know what? They all are. But it is not just the next game. It does have tremendous value. A lot of things that go into this. And our guys are going to understand that as this week plays itself out.

We want them to understand the history of the Bucket and they want to know exactly what it means, where it came from, why we have a Bucket. Because we have 40 new guys on our team that weren't here last year. And we have a new coach on our team.

Coach Diehl (phonetic), who is our staff historian, he'll do a great job. We started that process this morning. We'll have another one tomorrow and on Wednesday and on Thursday and on Friday.

But this is a great opportunity for our program. And we want to make sure that we send these seniors out the right way in their last home game at Memorial Stadium.

Q. When you talk about the culture of the program, and when you see what Aaron Casey did, what Bryant Fitzgerald did, how much does that reflect the culture of the program, what you're trying to get them to buy in? And obviously it also reflects their own character.

COACH ALLEN: I think it's a direct reflection of their character. I think that's the best way to start because that's where it all starts is the individual character of your players. And then that has to transcend into their buy into your program. And them wanting to do whatever they've got to do to find a way to get on that field.

When they get on that field, find whatever they can do to make a play to help this team be successful. Even a guy like Shaun Shivers, who has only been here a year, that guy refused to be taken out of the game after he ran almost 80 yards for a touchdown to go cover a kick and covered six kicks because he wanted to.

I could go on and on about the unselfishness of these guys. Sometimes guys get late in the year and the year hasn't gone the way you want it to go and you start thinking about your future, like I don't know. Cam Jones is busting his tail to play on Saturday. We still don't know yet if he's going to play. He's out there today trying to work through it.

But I'm telling you that's not normal. I've been doing this a long time. And that's special. And that says we've got a locker room full of these guys that care a whole lot about this program and this university and those who they represent and they love this team. And they are living out LEO.

That's where the culture piece comes in. You can talk about it all you want. But I don't care how much movement you have, as the portal creates it and all these different things with NIL.

It still comes down to, guys on your team that care more about the guys around them than they care about themselves. It's getting harder and harder to build that. I get it, for a lot of different reasons.

But to me it's still what makes a team special, especially in the sport of football. It takes so many people to make Jaylin Lucas have a chance to go 88 yards for a touchdown on a kickoff return. And those other 10 guys on the field have to do their job. Every single one of them.

If one guy doesn't do his job, it doesn't happen. And it's a great, great sport we play in football. And the culture is huge and the locker room is huge and I know it gets tested. It absolutely does.

But when you have strong leaders, you're able to withstand the tests that come and the storms that come because it doesn't say if they come, it's when they come in this life.

And that's why it's such a great teacher of that. A guy like AJ Barner, who has battled injuries this whole year. Makes two huge catches. Hard throwing the football and everything with the weather. And just wasn't -- we ran the football well. But anyway, he comes to the end and makes two massive plays. He had a tough year because he's really not been super healthy. And I'm just so proud of him. He's one of our leaders.

And I said there's many guys that I could say about that. Zach Carpenter, who broke his thumb or had issues with his thumb. And then now he's got to snap with his left hand.

I don't remember I've ever coached a guy that's been able to do that, in those conditions, and have good snaps. So just on and on, guys just exhibiting character and toughness and, like you said, it starts with themselves individually and then spills over into the team.

Q. Because of the weirdness of the last few years, you haven't hosted Purdue since 2018, I guess it is. I'm sure you've been asked this in the past, but because it's a weekend when the students aren't here, do you have a preference on maybe with Big Ten scheduling changes --

COACH ALLEN: I'm with you. I just want to have the best crowd we can. I hate it that they don't get to have a chance to do that. I don't have any say-so whatsoever in the scheduling.

But to me, you just want your rival game to be a game where everybody's here, all the students are here and everybody in full force. So that would be -- I'm all in for that. There's no doubt about it. You want -- I've been at other places where you had rivalry games and they've often fallen in this weekend. You have to find ways, different days we play on -- we played it Thanksgiving Day, when I was at Ole Miss. We played on Friday night at South Florida against Central Florida, so that was a big game.

So the place you've been -- I tell you what, you always go back, you think about rivalry games, the Monon Bell game between DePauw and Wabash is intense and is awesome and is as great as it gets.

But those games always being played this time of year, always going to have an issue with the calendar, maybe. Those games, I think of the crowds, the atmosphere and just the intensity of it just goes to another level. So you'd love to see it be there, whoever wants to be there be there.

Q. How about your team, your impressions of Purdue in particular, they're pretty banged up. Got some guys who are confirmed out for the season. Couple guys like Mockobee, who may play, may not play. What are your kind of early sort of thoughts on Purdue?

COACH ALLEN: One of the best quarterbacks in the country. So when you have that, you've got a chance to be really, really good. I think their defense has gotten better.

I think their O line is better. They do run the football way more effectively than they've ran it recently.

You've got a receiver who's got 93 catches over a thousand yards. He's impressive. Really good tight end. The defense plays hard and their special teams has been effective.

So we're all beat up this time of year. I don't think anybody has a full roster of guys. It's probably relative to this point.

So whoever is available, whoever is healthy is going to go out there. And Coach Brohm does a great job. Their kids play really, really hard and they're always well prepared and they have a lot of talent. So a really good football team. They've got a chance, based on how things play out, to still be in the mix to win the West.

So that is just a testament of their season and the way they've done things there. So obviously a lot of respect for them. A lot of good football players on that team. And we've got to fight and claw and scratch to try to find a way to win this Old Oaken Bucket game.