

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Really setting about camp and the way that our guys worked, all that went into that. A lot of individuals that make it happen and just effort and the work and getting all of our new faces integrated into our program.

So it's been a very, very good camp for us. Excited to open the season on Saturday here at home against the Ohio State Buckeyes. It's a 3:30 kickoff on CBS. Should be an awesome, awesome day. Looks like the weather is going to be nice as well.

Q. Coach, I know you've been asked this a few times throughout camp about what positions you feel best about, maybe ones you have some question marks. Now that camp is over and you're going into preparation, kind of where do you feel most comfortable with your team and maybe some areas where you're still kind of wait and see until you get on the field?

TOM ALLEN: I think throughout camp, as you guys have asked and we've talked about different positions, I think an area that kind of sticks out numerically is our defensive line and just having some new guys there and the way those guys have performed during camp. So just excited to see those guys play. I think that's going to be one of the strengths of our defense.

Then our receiver room has a lot of depth to it. I like that room a lot. I feel the same way about it and getting those guys through camp and working through injuries. Nothing serious there, but just everybody has pulled things along the way that you work through. Feel good about where we're at with those guys and those positions.

And I need a big week this week. Obviously we're still in game week mode or preparation for that, just continuing to build our offensive line. The depth there is always big. It's always important. I like the progress those guys have made, but we'll continue to work in that area as well and keep building.

I think the biggest question mark is just a lot of new faces

in the secondary, and they'll be tested at a very, very high level right from the get go. Definitely excited about that.

The kicking battle is an ongoing thing. Guys have made a lot of progress there. Excited about where we are. I feel way better about that than I did a couple of weeks ago. Those guys have performed very, very well in our mod game situation where they get a chance to really -- all their kicks are game situations for them. So I thought they responded well there. Special teams was crisp and sharp.

Got to play our best football right out of the gate.

Q. Do you have a starting kicker?

TOM ALLEN: We do, yeah. Those guys know all that. We're not going to post anything, but I feel good about that. I do feel like we have options, which is good. We've got guys that have different skill sets and different strengths and things that they do in the kicking game.

Obviously both of our kickers are inexperienced in regards to field goals and on college Saturdays, but in regards to the reps, I feel really good about where we're at with that. I think they're ready to roll.

Q. I just wanted to follow up. I know you split kickoff/place kicking before. Would you split place kicking maybe based on distance or anything like that, or do you want the person handling place kicks and extra points to be the same person no matter what?

TOM ALLEN: I would say Chris Freeman is going to be our kickoff specialist. He was our specialist all last year. He's done a great job with that. He's done really, really well all fall camp.

The field goals themselves is where we're still kind of working through. I think it could be a situation where it's distance driven based on certain parts of the field, different areas where guys are better at, even locations, hashes, and maybe more probably distance than anything.

But at the same time, we've got some new opportunities here, and I feel good about the multiple options we have.



Both Chris and Nico have really done well. I feel like those guys have put themselves in position to be ready when called upon. We'll probably let the situation dictate that.

Q. Tom, the Big Ten announced the initiative on Friday to announce lineups two hours ahead of time, among other things. What are your feelings on that? What input did the coaches give on that? Just kind of generally, what have been some of the things you've been doing within the program to counter some of the concerns about sports wagering with it being legal here in Indiana? That's it.

TOM ALLEN: It was obviously discussed several weeks ago within the Big Ten at our meetings. Obviously we were expecting that to happen, so that was really driven by our leadership and our conference.

I think the coaches were -- we had some questions at first, just how it was going to look and work, but I think it's pretty -- it's not real specific. Obviously if a guy's out, he's out. That's one thing where if you list him as out, he cannot play. That's one thing that's different. Instead of saying, hey, this guy is probable in these situations. And the second category is a guy who could play, may not play.

So I think it's good. It's good for all of us to have that clarity and that openness about it. There has been a couple of teams over the years that have done this. I know Wisconsin did this, and has always done this for a while since I've been here. The couple times we played them, they would put theirs out.

I think in regards everybody knows why they're doing this. So I think it's something that's good and we're all on the same page. We kind of wanted to be the leader on that as a conference. Our new commissioner really, really pushed for this, and I think he was right. I think it's the right thing to do.

And I think our guys -- it doesn't affect our players. We'll have a systematic way of communicating that and putting that out before kickoff, and I like the fact that everybody's doing the same thing.

Q. Given your inexperience and all the new faces, has that made any changes to game week? Have you thought through that kind of trying anything different or different approaches given kind of the different roster you've had versus past years?

TOM ALLEN: It has. It's affected some things we've done in practice. It affected the way we did our mod game, just having so many new guys, just making sure it was probably more true to a real game than it's been since I've

been here just because of having a number of guys that are new with us that are going to be playing.

A lot of times you get new faces, but those guys aren't playing as much. But I think you're going to see there's a lot of new faces that are going to do a lot of the playing. I think it's important to do that.

And even as this week unfolds, yes, it's our first true game week. Obviously to be able to go through the schedule and flow and all the things we're doing and being very prescriptive about that with our guys and our coaching staff and the meeting time with our players.

I just think, when you have new individuals, even when you have a few new coaches as well, so just making sure there's no game day things that haven't been covered thoroughly. I want to make sure we're really, really on point with all that to allow them to be able to be in a routine and be able to play their best and function at their best as a coaching staff.

Yeah, I think there's no question that the newness of a lot of guys has caused us to really be kind of very, very purposeful in everything we do. We always have been but even to a higher degree for sure.

Q. Obviously whoever you go with a quarterback, you have a redshirt freshman who's been thrown into the fire against Ohio State, one of the top teams in the country. How do you make sure they go with the right mentality, they don't feel the pressure of kind of a tough challenge? And whichever guy it is, what do you need out of that position against Ohio State on Saturday?

TOM ALLEN: It's preparation. Preparation creates that confidence. There's nothing you can do. You've got to play the game. There's no other way around it.

I think experience has taught me that. I think it's somewhat obvious in a lot of ways. In that position for sure, you've got to be in the fire and be able to have those opportunities.

But preparing every possible way. I think that's the big emphasis I've seen in almost every single quarterback meeting and every fall camp. Just the work they're doing and even how we think about, well, Monday's an off day. Well, it's an off day for everybody but the quarterbacks. That's how they operate. That's the way they think. And the way they study film and prepare and all the work they do together is huge.

So I think it's just you prepare and you leave no stone



unturned, the confidence that you have in your position and your skill set and what you're doing and running the offense. I just want them to be confident and play with decisive decision-making.

You try schematically to help in that regard. You want to make sure you set them up to have the best success possible, but they've still got to get in the fire and play against a really, really talented defense that's big and fast and physical and has really, really good coaches, and they're going to be very well coached.

Yeah, to me it's just a matter of preparation. That's the best answer I can give, and it's going to be key. It's going to reveal itself, and we've got to do a great job as coaches of putting them in the best position as possible.

Q. Coach, you kind of alluded to it a little bit earlier talking about the young defensive backs, but going up against a really talented Ohio State wide receiver group. What are you kind of looking for, expecting from that group, and maybe how the meetings kind of transpired a little bit going into this week?

TOM ALLEN: I think it's -- all you've got to do is put the film in and watch it for a little bit. They've added some new talented receivers to the group that was already very, very talented.

But I think it's like anything else. We have to play extremely well within our system. We have to do what we do well, and they're going to have some catches and get some yards. You've got to be able to do a great job of preventing the explosive plays. I think we all know that. But saying that and doing that is not as simple as it might sound.

But at the same time, you've got to play your system, and we've got to do a great job of -- like we always do within our scheme of disguising things. If they know what you're in, it's not usually good for the defense. They've got such talented players.

They're going to have a new quarterback, whoever it might be, and I'm sure we're expecting to see them both. To be able to adapt to that -- but once again, it goes back to what I even said with the quarterbacks. It's preparation. It's confidence. It's playing at a high level of, you know what, they make a play, we've got to flush it and play the next play. We make a play ourselves, we've got to flush it and play the next play. So having some maturity.

Some of these guys have played football quite a bit. They may be new to us, but not new to the game and not new to college football. But we do have some young guys who

are going to play more than they have played in the past in the secondary. Yeah, they'll be tested without question. They'll be put in a situation where they're going to have to play really, really well, and they're going to have to have a really bad memory. If something happens, you've got to flush, and you've got to go.

We respect them without question, but we've got to play our game. We've got to play to our standard, and we've got to play really good football on defense.

Q. Throughout the last four weeks or so of fall camp, can you point to a few players that you feel like maybe have improved their stock the most or kind of are maybe pushed for more playing time than maybe you would have expected?

TOM ALLEN: I think Amare Ferrell is a guy that sticks out to me. Been here since January, true freshman, really good football player. Really he's a guy that we've said, you know what, we've got to get him involved on special teams, and he's risen on the depth chart.

Jordan Grier is another one that has elevated his status on our team and I think really improved a lot as a player. Then in the course of the spring, I expected that and wanted that from these guys, especially a guy like Jordan who's been here.

Like Amare, you really don't know. It's his first fall camp he's ever been in, and he had spring football as a high school athlete from the state of Florida. But being here and being here all summer, just changing his body through the off-season coming through the summer and just being a guy that, when you put the pads on, just shows up. I think that's a really good thing. That's what you want.

I think Lanell Carr continues to be a guy that is playing with a lot of confidence right now with regards to what he sees in practice. It needs to translate to the game without question, but he's a guy that's been playing at a higher level maybe than we even expected in the beginning. So I'm really excited about that.

Those are guys that need to do that at a high level for sure. I think Donaven McCulley continues to elevate his game, and to me that's something I really challenge him about. He's worked extremely hard this off-season and just being able to be a guy that can make game changing plays, which is what we need on that side of the ball and need to create explosive plays on offense to be able to allow us to move the football and do good things in that regard.

So those guys stick out to me.

Q. Tom, can you talk a little bit about the respect you have for Ryan Day, the job he's done, the consistent excellence that he's done?

TOM ALLEN: There's no question. It amazes me, sometimes when you hear people's comment and whatever, and all he does is win a lot. You just go through, and you study what they've done offensively, it's impressive. And the way they continue to recruit. Obviously he took -- he was obviously given a great situation without question, but that's hard to take it and elevate it.

They were one makable field goal away from playing for a National Championship. I have a ton of respect for him. He's done a helluva job there. I think he's a first class person. I think he cares about his players. I think he does it the right way. I just think he's special, I really do. So, yeah, a lot of respect from my end for him and the way he does.

Obviously being a defensive guy and he's an offensive guy, and he calls their plays, so I just think that he's sharp and really maximizes. Obviously they have great players, and that's part of it too, but also has a system in place that puts you in a lot of conflicts defensively.

Yeah, he's done a tremendous job. That was a lot of pressure. They're expected to do certain things every single week. Some people look at that and they go, that's hard. That's hard to maintain that and then elevate it. Obviously the expectation for them is to win a National Championship. Until you do that, you get questions.

At the same time, you can see it, and they just keep continuing to get better and better. They may have their best team that he's had since he's been there.

Q. Tom, we've asked a lot about, I guess, the uncertainty around your team, position battles, things like that. How do you prepare for an Ohio State team? You mentioned the new quarterbacks, a couple of new tackles, obviously a change at coordinator even if Ryan Day is going to continue calling plays. How does it change the way you think about them even though you've got to single out things that aren't really clear yet?

TOM ALLEN: That's a good point. You think about those -- the tackles, the center, and the quarterback. That's really kind of the triangle of how things operate for an offense. Once again, talented players.

We've been through this before where they have a new quarterback and it's -- whoever it's going to be is going to

be a very, very talented player. They're going to have new guys at other positions, but they're going to be very talented new guys even though we haven't seen them play a lot for Ohio State.

But the unknown to me, when you think about quarterback-wise, we've had -- I think it's not very many times that we've had a quarterback that we don't really know a lot about. So there's not a lot. You have to go back to high school film for a lot of these guys, for both of these guys. So I think that makes it unique. They're also different quarterbacks as well. They have different skill sets. Both can throw the ball extremely well, and one's more athletic than the other one is. From a running perspective, both can elude things.

That creates challenges without question, but we're playing for that, but we're preparing for that. We're preparing for both. They have a standard of how they play, and you've got a consistency in what they're doing offensively. So that's going to make it very -- you've got to go out and out compete them for balls and for plays and for making tackles.

We've got to tackle extremely, extremely well. They get you in space. They've got great athletes, and that's where they put a lot of pressure on you defensively.

But from a position perspective, that's going to have to be in game adjustments. We'll see how it unfolds, who they're using and how they're using them, and how they use it to modify what they do. Their system is what it is, and they do a really good job. At the end of the day, you've got to stop it.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit about the offensive line. Have you seen the progress that you hope to see in fall practices? I know you haven't seen him in a game against somebody outside of yourselves yet, but have you seen the progress that you wanted to see in this fall?

TOM ALLEN: We have. I think it is hard to tell, though. You mentioned it, we haven't played against anybody else except ourselves for spring and fall camp. But I do feel like our defensive line has some different players than we've had in terms of just the mass and the talent level. So that helps give us a true picture of who they're going against.

But I feel like we've made progress. I guess we'll know for sure on Saturday. Obviously it's a tremendous test. I've been here, this is going on my eighth season overall. Running the football against these guys has never been easy, whatever year it's been, even the year when we've had a chance to be in -- one year, first year, we had a

chance, third quarter we were in striking distance. And in 2020 came down to the final possession. Even in that year, we threw the ball well but didn't run the ball very well against them. That's been a challenge consistently every year we've played them.

I do feel like our O-line has improved, but at the same time, they've got to show it on game day. It's got to be a consistent thing we see each and every week.

But I know the work they put in. I know the work our coaching staff has put in. As we know, it's a huge part of the game just being able to run the football, protect the quarterback, and do a great job of playing great defensive football up front.

Both line of scrimmage are going to be huge on Saturday, and that's not going to be any different this weekend.

Q. You've mentioned sitting in on the quarterback meetings, but this is the first time just today you said you did all of them in fall. I know that informed kind of how you looked at the competition, but just in general, did you take anything else away from that, feel for the offense? What did you get out of those and kind of sitting in and being able to participate in all of them like that?

TOM ALLEN: By not calling the defense, it allows me to do that. I was able to do that in the past when I wasn't calling. It definitely gives me a better feel for them individually, interactions with Coach Bell in those meetings. Just their ability to stay locked in and focused during that time is important.

And the feedback you get from them, you kind of get the feel for what they're thinking when they make a decision, what their process went through, and that helps me a lot.

The others, no question, just a feel for the offense. Obviously you go against it in the past, but now you're in the meetings more. So that's a bit of positive without question. So it just adds to further make the best decision possible even as we move forward.

I think it's just time on task with the very critical position of the quarterbacks has been helpful for sure.

Q. Tom, when it comes to Donaven McCulley, what's been his growth in terms of last year obviously he was in learning mode, switching positions. This year he has a year under his belt. How has that helped him? You said you challenged him. How much has that affected the way you've approached him as well?

TOM ALLEN: Sure. I think the number one thing is just learn how to be a receiver. Whatever your perception of the position is, it takes more than just being a good athlete. There's a lot of technical sides of running great routes, and how do you get open and how do you separate? How do you understand the coverage that you're looking to read and evaluate? That's all been a growth process for him.

I just think the more he's done it, and he's obviously had a chance to have two really good receiver coaches, one's now in the NFL and now Coach Tuck does a phenomenal job. I think it's been neat to see that.

My challenge to him is just go out there and play with the confidence and the belief that you know you have to be in as the lead receiver. When the ball's in the air, it is your ball. I don't care who we're playing against, what coverage you're in, I don't care about anything else. When that ball is anywhere near you, you come down with it, and you have that edge about you, that swagger about you. He's big, he's long, he's athletic, and all those things you see.

That's what we're starting to see is he's playing with that same kind of confidence. You can't guard me. It doesn't matter what you do. I just think that being able to have that core belief that this is how we're going to play no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the conditions, no matter what the coverage, no matter what they try to do to you.

Just really love the kid. He's an awesome young man. He works extremely hard and cares a whole bunch. I just think he needed to grow in his confidence as a receiver and as a playmaker in that role. I think we've seen that. Now he's got to go do that on game day.

Q. Coach, you don't have a ton of experience at quarterback, but you're playing one of the best teams that you're going to play all year right off the bat. How much can it be a positive for them to be thrown right into the fire? This is among the best that you're going to see -- for them to maybe grow from, starting at such a high level of play?

TOM ALLEN: I think that, as challenging as it might appear -- which there's no doubt there is. I think we all acknowledge that. But I think when you prepare for and get a chance to play against the very, very best, number one, that's why you come here. Number two, I think it really accelerates your growth, I really do.

I think there may be some growing pains through all of that. We get that. We get that. But I think there's nothing like being tested by the best. Those that are elite competitors, they thrive in that. They want that. They can't wait for

those things to happen.

Even though it isn't the easiest way to start something out, I think it also can be the best way for you to become who I believe you can become. When you're going against that high level competition right out of the gate, the urgency, the focus, all of it, it's just -- I thought yesterday's work and walk-throughs were just extremely focused and the high intensity of just the mental side of things, which is demanded in that situation.

The quarterback's obviously no different. When you do that, everything accelerates in a positive way. To me, it's how do you handle the adversity that's going to happen in the game? Because it's going to happen. No one knows what it's going to look like, but how you respond to that, to me, is going to be big and how a game like this plays itself out.

I'm excited for that. Gets a chance to get a lot of questions answered without question right away and a chance to be able to go against the very, very best from week 1 on. So I'm excited for our football team, and we will be ready.

Going to have a great week of preparation, and we coach till kickoff here at Indiana. Can't wait for Saturday. It will be soon. Go Hoosiers!

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