

Indiana University Football

Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



COACH ALLEN: Good morning. Appreciate everybody being here. Just follow-up from our game on Friday. Just solid performance by our guys. Thought it was a good next step for us. Build off the positives, correct the mistakes.

Feel like our offense got in a good rhythm. And, so, move the football and score points. Did have a lull by both units in the second quarter that I already addressed. Not happy about that. But I thought the guys responded well in the second half.

I thought that effort was what you want. Just gotta stay locked in and focused throughout the course of the whole game, in regards to that. But I thought our guys did some good things. Obviously cleaned up the penalties. Went through and evaluated each one of them.

When you talk about the aggressive nature of some of them and also just the elimination of the two running into the kickers, unacceptable, can't happen. They were stupid when I mentioned it the other night and they're still stupid. And then kicking the ball out of bounds, that just can't happen. So that will be corrected.

And then just playing aggressive, physical football is the key.

Just also wrapping up the game, think about our scout team guys that give us a great look each week. I like to recognize those guys each week. Finn Walters and Aaron Stewart, our defensive scouts of the week. Josh Witt and Jackson Wasserstrom were the offensive scouts of the week. And Jaz Boykin was our special teams scout player of the week. So those five young men and many others continue to help us get ready each week.

Players of the game. Omar Cooper was our offensive player of the game. Really, encouraged, excited, not surprised, really good football player, and he had an opportunity to break out, make a lot of plays and be rewarded for doing things the right way each and every day.

Defensively Lanell Carr and Nic Toomer were our defensive players of the game. Lanell continues to make explosive plays and be a dynamic run stopper and pass rusher. And Nic obviously with a very important interception there in the red zone on fourth down.

And Nick has really continued to play well for us. And really encouraged by his progress and learning our system.

And special teams players of the game, Jamison Kelly, really excited about what he brings to us, our cover unit. His athleticism and effort and toughness and tackling ability is really important for those. And Sean Wracher, just steady, does his job, leads our special teams units and did a great job with that.

So just excited about the opportunity we have with the Louisville Cardinals coming up here in a neutral-site game, Lucas Oil Stadium. Love that venue, great place to play football.

And obviously familiar with Coach Brohm and his staff, coaches that we coached against these last several years when they were at Purdue. And so a lot of familiarity with them both personally as well as in what they do.

And so really good football team. A lot of talent. A lot of athleticism, physical football team. Played really hard and they're coming into this game 2-0. And excited about the opportunity we have this week to continue to develop as a program, grow this team and continue to get better.

Obviously we've made a decision with our quarterback, you go through, like we said in the beginning, and you go through this process. And it has been a process to go through and did not feel like we had a distinct individual at the end of fall camp. So made the decision to go into the first two games.

And so have had a chance to do that, evaluate all the film, be able to go through this and be able to pick the one that we feel like is going to allow us to be able to be our best on game day.

And the one thing I will say, said it earlier, continue to say it



even after the second game, we've got two quarterbacks that I believe can both successfully lead our program and do great things on game day.

But Tayven Jackson is going to be our starting quarterback. Excited for the opportunity for him. And excited for Brendan to be able to be in this role and together they'll do great things for us in 2023. Questions.

Q. You've kind of grouped them together kind of throughout the fall and you talked about them. But what specifically, especially in the last -- you said there was a distinction after the first game -- what separated Tayven? I know you mentioned his moxie, but what else sort of made the difference to you to give him the job?

COACH ALLEN: Well, I felt like we needed to get to just full game evaluation because it was so close and to be able to see, okay, who moves the ball down the field and scores points. That's really what it comes down to at the end of the day, and there's a field presence you have during games. Practice is important. We know that, and we evaluate that and how you handle things.

But there's nothing like the game, the ebbs and flows of the game, motions of the game. I felt like there was just a poise to that part of it and an ability to move our team down the field.

At the end of the day, that's really what it comes down to, being able to score points. And I think both guys can do it at a high level, I really do. I think you saw that from both of them. Obviously two different opponents we're playing, but at the same time I think at the end of the day you've got to make a decision.

And I'll say it was close without question, but at the same time this is where we are. I'm excited about the decision moving forward.

Q. I remember you talking about Peyton and Mike Penix both this way at different times, but were there things you saw from Tayven maybe the game brought out of him, I guess, the game atmosphere as opposed to practices and scrimmages, things that maybe you saw him elevate or change a little bit when it was live game action?

COACH ALLEN: Actually, I think he plays better than he practices in regards to even some executional things. Some guys are like that, when the lights are on and the pressure's on and you've got to make those throws and you've got to make plays and people are in your face, you're getting hit.

But I thought it was pretty telling. We had a situation where he got hit. He had to come out. Brendan comes in, throws a strike. Throws a great pass off the bench.

So just that ability to be -- then we brought Tayven right back in. So he got the wind knocked out of him. But at the same time, I think just being able to be in there and we saw both guys needed -- they both are young and needed to play. They got the opportunities.

But Tayven, just needed to have the game-day poise and execution was critical. And gotta do it on game day. That's where the final piece of the evaluation for me since they had not had that experience in the past.

So that was a little bit different than in previous competitions we've had. You had two different guys, both of those times, that have played more or less than the other guy, where now you have both of them that did not have game experience at all.

So that's where I feel like Tayven was able to separate himself there.

Q. At any point did that become a clearer decision for you? Did that occur over the weekend sometime after something you saw on film? When did that kind of crystallize in your mind?

COACH ALLEN: I would say on Saturday, after you had a chance to go back. I always want to make sure, you know -- I wasn't going to make a decision when we walked off the field. I wanted to be able to see the film, see everything, take a deep breath, evaluate it, and just make sure we were all on the same page, which we are.

So Saturday was the day you make that decision. And both players, yesterday, told them together, face to face, at the same time. Because we've been this way since the beginning with these two.

So we told them -- we first made the decision about playing each one of them, did it together, and made this decision with them and talked them through it together.

Excited about the way they're handling it because I know they both want to be the guy. I get that. You're competitive. You want to be in this position. But Tayven knows he's got to perform, and Brendan knows he's got to be ready. That's the reality of competition and performing at an elite level. Saturday was the day the decision was made and we communicated it yesterday.

Q. I wanted to ask about Marcus Burris. He's a guy,



he's a transfer but still a young player. Didn't play a lot before he got here. Got his first sack on Saturday. Looks more like a 3-type, but I know you're using him at end. Talk about his developments as he's got here, how high of a ceiling he has going forward.

COACH ALLEN: I think Marcus Burris is a very special person, and is going to be an elite football player. And you mentioned it already. He can play two different positions. He can be a big end or an athletic 3 technique. And we're going to play him at both, without question.

And I think his upside is really, really high. I think he's got a great future and can play this game for a long time if he stays healthy. I love his mindset, love how he works, love how he practices. He's just a big guy that cares a lot and gives great effort.

So I think his ceiling is really high, and I expect him to keep being developed.

I know Coach Randolph does a phenomenal job with that group, and Coach Wilt does a tremendous job as the co-DC that's over the front seven. And between those two guys he's getting excellent coaching and preparation in. And I think Marcus is going to be really special.

Q. Louis Moore isn't the only guy you have that's come from JUCO. The last couple of years since you've had him where's he growing in the secondary both on and off the field?

COACH ALLEN: He's a guy, I was asked after spring about somebody that I expected to take a big jump or really be a player for us that maybe nobody knows much about. He was the first guy that I thought of.

And interesting background. He's from Mesquite Poteet High School, which is a school I recruited in Texas for many years before I got here. And know the coaching staff there and a lot of respect for the players they produce -- tough kids, well-coached, just know how to work year-round.

He was a dual guy. He played both sides of the ball. Really was predominantly a receiver, and then played a little bit of defense. Then went to JUCO, was a guy on the team that was really, really good. Ten or 11 Division I guys on the team. Got a little bit lost, according to his coach, in that recruiting process.

And so went to junior college and actually did the exact same thing where he played receiver predominantly, and on game day would flip over to play defense, which is it's really hard to do when you don't get much fundamental

work.

I thought I loved his mindset. Got to know him through the recruiting process. Loved his family thought he great fit with us. Loved his athleticism, his ball skills. I thought he had a lot of growth because he had had very little defensive training in his background, but has really good moxie, understands the game.

Just need to get a little bit bigger and stronger. Had him for a year. I think that free safety position is perfect for him because of his range. He can really run. And he's a good tackler.

That's something you don't always have when a guy has been predominantly an offensive player through his career. The tackling part is usually something they have to really grow with, but he was a very natural tackler. We noticed that right away when we got here.

I was high on him after spring and I'm still high on him and he continued to grow through fall camp. He's playing really well right now. He's all over the field. He and 6 are everywhere.

Just gotta still get better, still young in what they're learning and doing. But I think what we do schematically, I think those are two really good safeties that I think are just going to keep getting better and better.

Q. You've put a lot of trust into Matt Guerrieri with your defense. We've talked about it in the offseason. With a couple weeks under his belt how would you grade how he's doing as a play caller in handling the defense and as a whole? What are your impressions of him so far?

COACH ALLEN: I do trust him, and I think that's probably the best way to start. That trust is earned. I trust him as a person first, which is why I hired him. I think he's a high-character guy that is a hard worker, is going to do things to represent us in a first-class way on and off the field. That means a lot to me. Talking ball with him all these years, I knew he was a good fit with us in that regard.

And, honestly, when I had like two or three things I was looking to add to our defense, when I was going through the interview process, and he was able to bring some of those with him as we talked at that point and now to bring them into what we're doing schematically.

I wanted to bring someone in to learn our stuff and then add to it. And that would allow us to really take this where I knew I needed to take it to.

I just feel like he's very, very thorough, extremely bright, humble guy that listens to his assistants. I sit in on most of the meetings, between that and offense, going back and forth.

But I feel like I can walk out of there and he'll update me on what's been either added or adjusted or whatever. And feel really good about it and I can bring things to him. He always does a great job of articulating exactly why we're trying to do some things a certain way.

But it's been a real good fit so far. I think he's great on game day. He's a great communicator. Does a good job -- he's up in the press box with several of our coaches -- but making adjustments.

They do a good job of identifying things. Even during that long drive we were able to make some adjustments and things we've got to be able to do to get off the field. They were doing some good things schematically on a couple of things against us.

Just gotta keep building it, getting the guys to play hard, getting guys to buy in. I think our back end as a whole group, corners included, as a group give him credit for that. It's got to continue. And Coach Shelby has done a great job.

He's a really good teacher and he's a really good -- has the ability to capture the whole room and make guys feel a part of it as a staff, which is critical in that role.

I think that I have high expectations for are our defense, and it all starts up front. But I think he's doing a good job of taking the skill sets of the guys we've added to our team and trying to highlight those, and that's what we're going to continue to do.

And obviously got a big, big test coming up this week. So feel good about where we are, but we've got a lot of work to do and he knows that. We've got to keep elevating our defense each week.

Q. Having coached against Jeff Brohm before, how much do you refer back to some of his past Purdue teams versus, I guess, just watching the first two weeks of Louisville? And I guess what similarities, if any, do you see maybe schematically or just what the identity they play with?

COACH ALLEN: First of all, he's an excellent play caller. Followed his team for many years. He's one of the best in the whole country.

And the good play callers usually they have a great feel. It's timing of when to call things. And he has a system, and they're not gone away from that. But obviously adapts it to the personnel each year. It's always a little different based off of that.

And they've got a really, really talented receiver corps, two really good running backs and a good quarterback that knows the system. Obviously recruited him to Purdue. Plummer is a big athletic, quarterback with a big arm. And they love to stretch the field vertically, and they also stretch it horizontally.

And they're running the football a lot better in these first two games than maybe they have in the past places he's been, which puts more pressure on your defense, without question.

So you're looking at both. You're trying to go through and figure out, matching personnel. You obviously put a lot of stock in the first couple of games, but at the same time it's holistic. It's big picture. And it's trying to teach concepts because you don't really know, have a whole lot of data for this year yet. You have one game and maybe half of a second game to really look at to be able to see this is where they want to be able to do things. But going to be a lot of in-game adjustments for us.

But just gotta a ton of respect for Coach Brohm and the job he does offensively. He's a special play caller.

Q. Lanell and Nic are two pretty new faces for you around here. Obviously year one in the program. Whether it's them, Andre, Kobee, whoever it may be, you have a lot of new faces playing at a high level now. What do you attribute that to and how fast they've acclimated around here?

COACH ALLEN: I would say I put a ton of work, prayer just to get the right guys. I knew when the season ended we had so many guys who had been here for so long, especially on defense. We're going to get a lot of new faces on the back end and a couple linebacker spots, and how critical it would be to get the right fit for your program.

So a lot of homework on these guys and the whole goal was to find somebody that is with them every day that can really tell me the truth. Some of these guys, we knew Nic Toomer, we knew really well in regards to recruiting him for the first time. But still hadn't been with him because it's different when you're a young man coming out of high school. And the opposite would be if you have come from another university playing college football, you have a better understanding of how they have adapted to college life, the schedule of being academically, physically, the

football part and the weight training piece of all of that.

So you find somebody that knows them really well to try to get the best fits because that to me, there's a talent piece, and there's a culture-fit piece of guys that are going to buy in to play within your system as hard as they can possibly play and care more about the team than they care about themselves. And that's a challenge. There's no doubt about it.

I give our staff credit to find the right guys that we felt like coming here be a good system fits for us schematically and culture fits for us to be able to do the right things on and off the field.

I like our guys. I've said it for a while. I love our team. I feel I got some early signs that this group could come together. They are showing signs even though all these new faces you just mentioned, and we've got them in all three phases.

But it's still, I mean it's an inexact science. You don't know how many times they're going to mesh with you until you get them here. I think we've hit on some guys that I think can really do some good things.

And you're seeing it already. Obviously the season's young. We have a long season ahead of us, but it's one week at a time. That's all we focus on. Right now it's about us getting these guys to come together and play their best football on Saturday.

Q. The receiving tandem of Cooper and McCulley, what are you seeing from them? What do you hope to see from them, including how well do they block?

COACH ALLEN: You take these two guys that, two Lawrence North products, and obviously Don was throwing to Omar in high school. And just I think two really good football players that do block. I mean their effort in blocking is, to me, that's the character test. That's the buy-in test. That's the, "hey, this guy gets it" test.

And we brought in an individual from the NFL to talk about that, to say what are you looking for in a receiver. Big part is are you willing to block, are you willing to play special teams, are you willing to do all the things it takes when you're not catching the ball.

Everybody loves to catch the ball get yards and score touchdowns. I look for what they do when they're not. They're unselfish guys. Yeah, they want the ball. When you think about last week, Omar didn't have much production, and then, boom, over a hundred yards and a bunch of catches.

I made a big deal about that. He stayed the course. I'm sure he wanted to catch more balls last week but at the same time every week is a little different. Same with Donaven. Donaven is a gifted player, and once again continues to elevate his play at receiver. And that's got to continue to grow. Expect it even more this week, continue to become a complete player, both of those guys.

They love to compete. They love to play the game, and they're really talented guys that just I love having with us. Not surprised they're doing well. Expected them to. And want to continue to see them grow and develop within our system and just keep bringing it every single week.

Q. Another week, another appearance of the turnover belt. Is it something that the guys have been getting a little more juice with? Obviously the defense really heating up, have you noticed kind of a difference with trying to force takeaways and things like that?

COACH ALLEN: It's a takeaway belt. That's the proper term. You know, that's something that -- actually Noah came to me over the summer, and he was kind of the spearhead of it.

He got with Declan McMahon and obviously we've got the WWE connection with that. It's pretty cool. When they brought it to me, I was like, holy smokes; it's legit. It's heavy. It's big.

But anything -- the guys love it. But more than anything, as you guys know since I've been here, it's a huge emphasis, takeaways on defense. That's how you win games. We only got two. So not near enough we had our team meeting yesterday gotta get more takeaways.

They didn't put the ball in harm's way Friday night but we've got to create more takeaways. But that's just another way to have some fun with it. The guys enjoy it, without question, and it is a pretty cool little thing.

Q. Just following up on what you said. You kind of told the quarterbacks together. Had you ever done that before? What kind of spurred that decision to do that. I know you mentioned the relationship, but unique kind of circumstance?

COACH ALLEN: I've not done it that way before. I've always done it separate. I just wanted crystal clear understanding that they both are the exact same message.

And that way there's no, well, coach said this to me or coach said this to me. No this was what you were told together. To me, I just wanted to make sure. I know how

important it is that these guys stay together and that they complement each other and they encourage each other and they challenge each other and hold each other accountable and they're going to be there for each other and we're going to need them both. That to me is a huge part of this. And just to be able to, whether it's within the game or season or whatever, no one knows what the future holds.

Just felt like we've done it that way the first time you talked with them and just wanted to do it that way again. Glad we did it that way, and it was just a decision that I made and with coach Bell and feel like it was the right way to handle it.

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