

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



COACH ALLEN: Good morning. Just want to start by saying that had a really productive bye week. Really encouraged by our guys' mindset and approach to last week, and two goals were to get healthy and to get better. And so the health part of it is guys recovering, guys getting some injured guys back, and those that are have been out, and some guys to be able to get a time to get their bodies recovered as well.

Guys been playing a lot of snaps and put a lot of emphasis on fundamentals and technique, some scheme work, gotta jump on Michigan for a couple days, practiced on Wednesday and Tuesday, and coaches headed out to recruit Wednesday afternoon and all day Thursday, Friday. So got a chance to watch a lot of high school football games.

And then also just as we prepare for a very good Michigan football team, you know, obviously playing as well as anybody in America right now and playing with a lot of confidence and a lot of experience on that team, on both sides of the ball, and a big physical team that is playing at a very high level right now.

So tremendous opportunity and challenge for our players as we come together this week and continue to improve our team.

Q. Probably the obvious sort of first storyline, but Rod said the structure can't change. You can't just sort of uproot the whole thing and replace it root and branch, but what do you want to look different offensively, maybe what does he want to look differently offensively, what have the conversations been like between the two of you in terms of when you've been able to sit down and say here's where I think we can get better, here's where I think we can change now as opposed to --

COACH ALLEN: Sure. I think a little bit of fine line. Obviously we're not going to sit here and divulge everything that we're doing for our opponents moving forward. But for obvious reasons, we made a change. So

there was not getting the production that we need in scoring points. That's the major focus.

So obviously you go back and you evaluate, what have you done well? And you go back and you look and you use the bye week to be able to evaluate the things that our guys do a good job with and feel comfortable with and within the structure of our current system, as you mentioned, you just can't wholesale change things at this point. But obviously a bye week gives you a chance to make some subtle adjustments. So we're in the process of doing that.

Basically you're trying to, now that we know who we are and the things we do, do well, emphasize, continue to grow those and then obviously address the issues, the not being able to finish drives and our red zone efficiency and being able to get those, you know, third and shorts in the score zone, red zone, to finish out those drives and to change the way everything feels when you score a touchdown versus having to settle for a field goal or less. Just, to me, continuing to build off of that, and I think that to me is a big part of it to be able to maximize.

That's one advantage of having Coach Carey take over is the fact he's been here with us. He knows our personnel. He's been here for a couple of years now overall. Obviously didn't work with the offense a year ago but really had a chance with some of -- knew our guys, the strengths and the things they can do, to be able to match that and just be able to, like I said, the whole goal is we've gotta score points, and that's the objective for our offense and that's the charge he's been given, be able to take our current structure and improve it.

Q. I know the bye week is obviously a big recruiting week. Did you change because of the season, the last few games not playing well, did you change at all this week to focus more on the team maybe a little less on recruiting, or is it similar to how you've done it in the past? If so, what was behind that?

COACH ALLEN: I think, first of all, there's a component of the bye week, I think, that's really important for your players, and that is when you address things and get some fundamental work in. They do need a mental break, our



players.

We talked about, hey, do we go ahead and do something with our guys on a Thursday and then go out and recruit after that. But as we discussed it and I even met with our captains and trust those guys and where they're at, and just trying to help our players fully benefit from some time away. And I think that's important to do.

So you kind of balance that. So that allows us time away for them is time for us to go out and recruit. So you still try to do a little bit of both, but we were able to make some changes in that regard to help us spend a little more time with our guys here on campus.

But I do think that it's important, those in-person evals are really important. I don't get many of those during the season. The bye week is the main time to do that, to go watch a young person, prospective player either playing in a game, practice or lift weights, whatever they do.

Some teams even one team played on a Wednesday so we got to watch them the day after their game and do their post, the day after practice, that kind of thing.

I just think trying to balance that, without question, but recruiting is very critical. Thought we made some headway with key guys by going out to see them and being able to talk to their coaches and being visible at games and making sure they know the priority they are. So I think it was a good balance for our guys.

Q. Despite Rod taking over midseason you didn't put a interim tag on him; you put him full time. What's the comfort and trust for him to not only be able to turn around the offense now but also the future of your program?

COACH ALLEN: There's continuity piece. There's an understanding of the philosophy of what you want to do with that area and the trust factors you mentioned. And just feel like that those are things that we're looking for, and obviously with the flexibility and the ability to move forward and make some good, positive changes to our offense. So I just feel like we're aligned in the things we want to align in.

And obviously needed a new voice in that room and that's the change we made. And I just, having spent enough time with him here the last two years working with him closely, especially a year ago when I was calling the defense and he was in there with us, and you kind of get to the mind of a coach and how he thinks and how he sees the game and evaluates things and communicates with a group of individuals, both players and coaches, especially

the coach piece in that role.

And obviously last year had a chance to see him work with our offensive line. So had a chance to see him physically coach, because as a QC you can't do that, but as an on-field position, we replaced (indiscernible) the O line spot last year, got a chance to see him in front of the room and run the meetings and just see that group respond to him.

So those were variables that kind of played into this decision as well. So just understanding the big picture of recruiting and what that means for guys. And understanding what, to give him a clear picture of the direction we're going in the future I think is important as well.

So just to me it was the right decision to be able to create that decision to make that change and to go that direction. So that's what we're going to do together. Because there's such a rapid flow from the season into the portal window as it opens and just how it affects recruiting and affects your current roster and your future roster, those different things. There's a lot of different variables that goes into that.

That's the bottom line. We feel we need to do that and get ready to finish strong this season which is the expectation. And then be able to rapidly go into the next phase, which is once your final regular season game is over get ready for postseason preparation and you get into recruiting.

Q. I think I asked you about this after the Maryland game with the defense and just some of the breakdowns and the big plays you've given up. As you were able to do that self-evaluation you talked about during the bye week and go through the first however many games it's been, what sort of trends are you spotting in some of those big plays you've been giving up and what do you think needs to be corrected defensively?

COACH ALLEN: I think especially in that game, which was really, there were some unusual breakdowns that we hadn't had before. I think you look at the previous couple of weeks, the quarterback containment was kind of a bigger glaring issue. I think we may have overreacted to that in some ways and then set us up for some other issues that I think, that created, unfortunately.

Because really it wasn't characteristic of us to do some of the things we did in the first quarter. You can't spot a team like that 21 points, and to their credit they executed but obviously we did not.

So just trying to prevent some of those things from happening. We made a couple of calls that we agreed as

a staff may not have been the best position to put our guys in in that spot. But at the same time I think it was a good week to evaluate and just kind of get back to the things that, once again, you go back defensively, what have we done really well?

Our guys, what's their comfort level, how will they be able to play? If we feel good about where we think that is and we want to get back to doing that and help our guys and do a really good job of disguising our coverings and making the quarterback have to consider things with the reads and then do a great job of still continuing to improve on containing them because we still have another athletic quarterback this week that can run it.

J.J. McCarthy is a very, very athletic quarterback that has really good speed and can beat you with his arms and his legs. So that doesn't change this week.

But I do feel good about the time we've had together as a staff to discuss the things we do well, because I do think we feel a good group on defense that can play at a hot level and I expect them to. And we have just got to learn from and flush what happened there and move forward.

Q. You mentioned there spotting Maryland 21 points in the first quarter. Pretty much three games in a row you guys probably haven't started the way you wanted to, and obviously everyone knows it's important. Don't really need to know that, but what do you think it will take from the players on your team to start having those better starts and what does your staff as coaches really need to instill in them to have those better starts?

COACH ALLEN: I think we've got to take ownership of that too as coaches. That's on me as a head coach. We're going to change some things we do in practice. Once again met with our captains. Talked about this very thing. We talked about things that we felt like -- and I just wanted to get their input on some things.

We'll make adjustments in how we practice and intensify the good on good opportunities where we're going against -- still going to go against our scouts. We're going to do more work, you know, offense versus defense and just trying to create the intensity and create the look that we need to get.

Those are just things, we're going to do try to do some other things as well. I'm not going to sit here and say just gonna come off a bye week and it's just naturally going to improve. And we're going to have structural changes in our schedule and the way we do things, how we practice, the way we do what we do, when we do, what we do to get

our guys off to a faster early start and get that urgency going right away, because we can't afford in any of these games, these last several are going to be critical that we play well for four quarters.

Q. I know Cam Camper might have been a little bit banged up after that last game. How is he doing physically?

COACH ALLEN: Bye week was really good for him. He took full advantage of it. I like where he's at. Definitely was not where he needed to be. We're always going to take care of our guys and not put them in that position if they're not ready to go. But, yeah, he's definitely progressing in a very positive way.

Q. I think you've talked about this I guess. Two questions, first of all, just to clarify something. Coach Carey was a defensive analyst last year, but was he offense this year?

COACH ALLEN: Yes.

Q. So he flipped over?

COACH ALLEN: He flipped over. So last year, basically what we did, he would go through and do all the pre-analysis of our opponents and would come and present all the different phases from base downs to red zone to third downs and would give his breakdown.

He spent all his time with the defensive staff. And working on studying our opponents' offenses. And then this year we flipped that to where he was now working with our offense, yes.

Q. And then second question, I recognize you may not want to talk -- you've talked a little bit about this in different ways -- you may not want to talk about specifics, but we saw a quarterback change. I imagine anytime there's a coordinator change some emphasizes will change maybe different guys will come to the fore. How much are you comfortable with, if you want to call them position battles, or just generally speaking, where guys are in terms of 1s and 2s, quarterback and other positions, how comfortable are you in a confined window are you in opening that up?

COACH ALLEN: I think obviously you make a change there in the leadership piece. So that's the focus. We want to be able to do a great job there. Tayven is our starting quarterback. I want to see him play better. He and I have talked. He agrees with me.

And also I think we've got two good quarterbacks. I want all our guys to know that every position, we've all got to play better. Offensive line has to play better -- running backs, receivers. Tight ends -- the whole offense, the whole defense.

But I just think we've got new leadership, new opportunities, per se, but not going to make massive changes, even in personnel. But at the same time guys have got to perform. And performance-based assessment. We talk about that even as a team what that means, what that looks like.

Everybody has to perform. Coaches, I have to perform. It's my responsibility for this team. Buck stops with me with me and I have to make the hard decisions. And players have to play and they have to play well. And it's my responsibility, it's our coaches responsibility to put them in the best position to play their very, very best.

We didn't play well the last time we took the field. So that's something that has to change without question. And excited about the adjustments we've had offensively and the leadership. And just excited to be able to see our guys respond to that as a football team, and our leadership guys stepping up and helping our team, special teams and defense to prepare well this week and play our best on Saturday.

Q. To piggyback off Pete's question about Cam, what about the rest of the guys that have been dinged up here for two or three weeks. Do you think you'll have everybody back this coming week?

COACH ALLEN: I wouldn't say everybody. I would say hope to get several back, yes. And so some guys that have been out, and won't get into details of guys, but obviously the bye week was, one of the goals was to help get some key guys that have been out for a little bit to get those guys back. And hope to do that as well. Don't know for sure on all of them.

Feel good about several at this point but not all of them. So we'll use the availability report on game day to be able to say exactly who is out and who is questionable. But we do expect to get some of those guys back, yes.

Q. One more thing. Michigan has been so dominant this year defensively especially but their offense has taken off as well. Are there offensive and defensive lines, have they just improved that much?

COACH ALLEN: They're really good. They were really good last year. I think they got voted the number one offensive line in the country I think two years in a row.

They do have some new faces on the O line. I do think you can see the progression. They've played better here I think in the last couple of weeks than they did earlier on in the first few games.

But there's no question that they do have some new guys. Obviously they had their core positions of running back and quarterback, and they've got a really talented tight end, one of the best in the country and really good speed wide receivers, a couple of them, really special.

I think their O line is playing at a high level right now, very dominant, physical, knocking people off of football and just establishing, just wearing people down as the game progresses.

Similar to what they've been in the past in regards to how they were last year. And obviously they were one game away from playing for the national championship a year ago.

So very impressive football team, and I think had Georgia maybe not played the way they did, they could be No. 1 in the poll this week. They've definitely earned that discussion, for sure.

So a lot of respect for them in how they're playing right now and very well coached at all positions. But up front is where, their D line and O line, is where they've really established themselves. And they're physical and they're well-coached and they're technically sound. Good combination for them.

We've just got to find a way to slow down this offense and give ourselves a chance. They haven't turned the ball over very many times. That's something, obviously takeaways are a huge component of every game. It will continue to be both sides of the ball without question this week.

Q. You mentioned earlier you know who you are offensively. What is your vision for the brand of football you're trying to play on offense right now?

COACH ALLEN: You want to be physical. And there's never a, hey, we're going to run the ball for this many reps or whatever. It's what do you have to do to be able to score points.

But there's a balance piece to this. You need to be effectively throw it and run it. When I say know who with you are, you have to know the strengths of your team at this point -- teams don't just wholesale change after five or six teams. You're, like, okay, this is what we do well, let's continue off of that.

And the guys that you have that are making plays and can make plays and obviously get some key guys back is always important.

But at the same time, I think for me it's a physical football team that executes well and has high-level quarterback play which I think is an area of focus. Obviously we have two talented quarterbacks that I want to see to continue to develop and play well.

And to make a team feel they've got to defend the run game and throw game. And that's where our offensive line is making progress and we'll continue to grow off of that and continue, we did some good things running the football last time. But at the same time just gotta continue to grow. We're going to be more challenged than ever with a defense you're going to play. Give up five points a game. That's not many, but it's crazy. But at the same time that's what you are going against. And it's at their place.

So I think just an offense that gives you an opportunity to win the game. You can't win the game without scoring points. So our defense needs to do a really good job of getting off the field on third downs and creating more takeaways and setting up our offense.

The same with special teams. Can't have them drive 75, 80 yards each time. So one time we had that opportunity early, we got a big kickoff return and you go down and score. Need to get a touchdown. We had a third-and-2, need to get a first down, need to score touchdowns in that situation. But that's what I want to see our offense do.

Q. Revisiting last week, I believe McCulley was your leading receiver. I know at the end of camp you mentioned he was rapidly rising. I'm curious right now where you feel like he's at. I want to say he played a career-high 10 snaps out of the slot. Is that something you feel like he can maybe shine in throughout the remainder of this year, and then kind of as --

COACH ALLEN: I see his role expanding. You know how I feel about him. He's a very talented player. I want him to be a guy that we just rely on, depend on, expect to be consistently playing at a high level each week. A guy they gotta double cover and know where he's at all the time, whether you play him inside outside.

His length and athleticism is definitely his strength. And his ball skills just continue to increase and his consistency and his preparation. It's just the confidence of just running great routes and getting open and making plays. And he made some good contested catches and a lot of good extended catches.

He has such a big catch radius. He's a good safety net for the quarterback. Didn't have to be perfect.

But at the same time I think there's more for him to go to. I really believe that. I challenge him consistently and believe in him at a very high level.

And getting Cam back to full strength is going to be important. And those two guys can be a very big weapon for us.

Q. Getting back to recruiting, I know it's really tough to answer with the portal and roster changes, but as you sit here today you're almost at 20 commits right now. Kind of what are the priorities between now and the December signing period? Ideally, how many would you like to take in the traditional high school...

COACH ALLEN: We're there, you might add a guy or two. But I don't see a lot more. You know I'm thinking in the 18 to 20-ish range is where you're at. And once again the portal becomes utilized to offset any departures you might have that you either expect or didn't expect and to be able to keep the rooms balanced.

And we have certain positions where we say we need to be able to get this many high school guys to develop those guys and have the right distribution of age within a position group.

So I think we're really close to where we want to be from a high school number, which is higher than a lot of people are choosing to go right now.

And just going out and sitting with high school coaches. That's the first thing they're asking me, where is this going, how is this going to change? Is it going to continue to be as it is where high schools are getting less and less opportunities?

So I say it's every program is a little different in how they approach that. But I always want that to be our foundation so we can develop and bring guys here and develop them. Some of our best players have been guys we brought here, developed here, those are the ones that have played the best for us.

We have some good transfers this year, more than we have in the past. But I just want to have a good balance with all that. Like I said, I don't think there's a set number you can say every year because I think the portal for us is going to be more based on guys who "a little bit older than me" may choose to go a different direction.

But we'll continue to develop our guys and maximize the

opportunities they have here and then shoot them straight when it's all said and done about where we see them being and how they want to be able to reach their goals so they can all come together and both sides can feel good about where we're at. But it's always about recruiting and player development.

Q. I wanted to ask about Dexter Williams. You tabbed him as somebody that could possibly come back from injury midseason. I know he's listed out but we see him warming up every week in full pads and everything. When he comes back, first of all, where is he at with his progression in terms of rehab, and when he comes back, where does he factor into the quarterback situation?

COACH ALLEN: He's getting closer. Every passing week, even this past week, was another chance to continue to get closer and closer to be able to allow him to play.

That will be good discussion for us as a staff and to kind of make that opportunity. So I'd like to be able to ease him into that opportunity as well. So we'll see how that plays itself out. But he obviously got -- once he feels, the doctors feel and he feels he's 100 percent ready to go, then we're not going to put him out there until he's 100 percent ready to go. But he's getting closer to that, which is good news for everybody. And I know for him he's worked extremely hard to come back, and it's been a real battle for him. And it's not that easy. It's been a long process to go through especially a second time. Takes a lot of mental toughness to do that when you know how hard it's going to be. I just love the young man and his grit and toughness and everybody respects him on our team. And he's one that everybody just wants to see come back and do well. So that day is getting closer, and we'll continue to evaluate when that day comes and how he'll be utilized. So I believe he can help our football team win games.

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