

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Good morning. Appreciate you guys being here. Just want to recognize some of our guys from last week. Just appreciate their continued effort. It's critical for our team.

Defensive scouts of the week, Jeff Utzinger and Ta'Derius Collins. Offensive scout of the week is Eli Jochem, and special teams scout of the week was Mitch Evans. Appreciate those guys and all that they do.

Just good news with our guys yesterday. Obviously just talking through their mindset, where we are, and obviously we've got to be able to continue to come together and fight, and just appreciate the guys and the way they've responded.

But obviously got to have a great week of preparation. It's very critical without a doubt, playing a very good football team on the road that has a lot of talent at all positions, all three phases, and a tough environment to play in. Great opportunity for our program to continue to grow and develop as a team. A lot of football ahead of us, so excited about the opportunity this week to come back and keep working.

Questions?

Q. Tom, sorry to hit the quarterback question every week, but how did you evaluate the way Brendan played, and do you feel comfortable standing on the idea that he stays there at No. 1 as he gets to move forward, maybe make some mistakes but stay in that role and grow into it?

TOM ALLEN: I do, and I think that he -- I thought he played tough. I thought he played gritty. I thought he competed. Just continue to grow and develop. I think he's got to continue to speed up some of his reads, but that's part of the process of growing and developing as a player.

I thought he did some really good things in terms of helping us move the football. Obviously got to continue to grow and develop as a decision maker in both throwing and

running, but the throw game, as well, we've got to do a better job of making some of those contested catches. I think that will be a huge plus for him.

But also just kind of speeding up those reads. I think he'll get the ball out a little quicker as he continues to grow and develop.

Felt like after watching the film and meeting as a staff, feel good about moving forward with him.

Q. Wins is obviously an important measuring stick for a program, but there's other things. I was curious, are there areas you can point to that you see as signs of progress or year-to-year growth from last year despite the similar results?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no doubt that's a challenge. You play a lot of really good football teams. The margin for error is really small.

We ran the ball better against a good defense, Top 5 defense in the country in total defense, 5.3 yards a carry. It's definitely progress for that group. I thought Trent Howland did a good job running the football and some others, as well. Just got to continue that. And I think even just protecting the quarterback, as well. Did some better things up front on the offensive line play. Definitely seeing progress there.

Then as an overall team, obviously a lot of new faces when you have a new group of guys, so you're just trying to continue to grow and develop them, and at the end of the day, we've got to win, and we're not winning enough football games, so that's what you do on game day and that's how you're judged and that's how it has to be.

The reality is we've got to continue to eliminate mistakes. The blocked punt was just a devastating huge mistake, costly, very, very costly, and then the muffed punt, gives up 10 points that you can't afford to give up.

So you just continue to grow and build and develop, and to me just offensively continue to build who we want to be, and it starts up front, so we're definitely seeing progress



there without question.

But playing against another great defense this week. So it's just continued working towards trying to find ways to move the football, get that ball in the end zone.

Q. Where do you sit in terms of the safety positions? Right now obviously it didn't look good for Noah Pierre, and Phillip Dunnam came off the field, as well. What's the status of those guys?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so Noah will be out for an extended period of time. He's been such a great player for us, great leader for us. Phillip, hopefully we'll get him back.

But other guys got to step up. We've got Louis will be back. He was obviously with the targeting call, so he'll be back for the first quarter next week, so that will be a plus for sure, and then Jordan Grier will be having to step up as well as Bryson Bonds will now have an opportunity to be able to play.

I feel like we have some depth at that spot, but obviously losing a guy like Noah for an extended period of time is tough, a tough blow without question, but he's going to continue to be a great leader for us and continue to get himself back as soon as possible.

Q. You mentioned you felt like there's been progress within the program. I know you've talked about tweaks and adjustments you've made with the strength and conditioning program. Do you still feel like there's room to improve there, and what kind of things would you like to see to improve that part of the program?

TOM ALLEN: Well, we've made a huge emphasis on the nutritional part of our program, and that's an investment piece that we have to do, and there's no question, just ways to continue to develop our guys' bodies and continue to allow them to physically grow and mature while they're here and gaining good weight and just continue to get them as big and as fast and as strong as you can possibly be.

I think our strength staff works their tails off with these guys and does a lot of work with them even mentally and getting our guys back each week and helping us in that regard. Coach Wellman does a phenomenal job.

But you're always working hard to find ways to get better and improve in to me just everything we do to be able to help our guys because those are the things as a developmental program we have to do really well. Guys get here, they come here, their bodies can be grown and developed, and that's what you want to do when you have older guys that are playing for you. That's really the goal at

the end of the day, and that's how you win in this conference.

I just think that's something that we're always looking at every possible way we can do to improve that area and keep investing in that part of our program.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Howland and Ferrell, Amare Ferrell, what you saw from them on Saturday and what you hope to get from them the rest of the way here?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, first off, with Amare, as a true freshman, he's a guy that even when you asked the older players once we started practicing, since he's been here, it's been, like, hey, this guy has got something different about him. He's a physical player. He kind of understands the game. He's a kid that's played a lot of football being from Florida where you have spring football, so he kind of brought that edge and confidence to him, so he had a chance to play an extended period of time on Saturday, which he was ready when called upon, and he's going to have to continue to grow in that role.

Really excited for his future. He's a guy that we made a decision even several weeks ago that we were not going to redshirt him because he was too valuable to us and playing on defense, as well, special teams. So really excited for his future.

Then Trent so me is a guy that's just really challenged about using his size and running with that kind of authority. Even though he's a big guy, he's always viewed himself a little bit more of a finesse type runner. That is not who you need to be. He's got great ball skills. He's a really good athlete. You should see him on the basketball court. He's an impressive athlete.

Just thought he had a chance to really be a good player, and he came here, had the knee injury right out of high school, actually heard that he was a really good basketball player in high school and he hurt that playing basketball, so he came here that way, so he's just kind of taking some time. But big, physical guy that just needs to take that ball and get downhill, and he's doing that now. You can see the benefits of that for him and for us, so excited for him and his development and the way he's responded.

Q. After you've had a little more time to watch the Rutgers game and the struggles that you had in terms of stopping the run, what did you see as some of those causes, and do you think some of those things are fixable?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's no question that I studied it

thoroughly. Just especially from the fact of just doing certain things that -- there's a physical toughness piece to stopping the run, and just felt like that we got mismatched at times with some of our perimeter guys. Just got -- physically was harder, just you've got to be able to step up and tackle big physical backs and take on those blockers if you're a safety or a corner.

But they do a good job of creating those situations formationally where those guys have to step up and make those plays.

But just disappointed that we weren't able to get some critical -- we had the 4th and 4 was a really critical play I thought. We had a 3rd and 7, as well, that we didn't get off the field, which would have forced a punt. Then we had the horse collar on the 3rd down play, 3rd and 8 that kept that drive alive.

Those things, they add up, and you think -- if you look at the sequence of plays, we had 41 snaps of defense in the first half, which is too many, but the problem was the horse collar caused six more snaps, and that was self-inflicted by the defense.

Then the muffed punt cost five more snaps. Now you take away 11 snaps you're at 30 snaps which is where you want to be. So it's like, wow, those things are -- obviously they're not small, but you don't necessarily talk about them, and yet they add up.

Then that gets you to now you're in the second half and you're playing too many snaps, and really it was because of some self-inflicted wounds.

We scored with four minutes to go in the second quarter, and we didn't get the ball until eight minutes to go in the third quarter, and now we're down by 10 by the time we get the ball back again.

Those are things that -- then within that sequence was the 4th and 4 that we didn't get off the field in that opening drive of the third quarter.

So that to me are the things that I focus on because they kind of snowball on you a little bit. Then you get and they wear you down when you're on the field too much. So everybody just points to that, sees that stat and says, oh, it's just all the offense. Well, it's special teams and defense, as well.

I just feel like we don't have a lot of margin for error in any of these areas. We've got to get off the field with that 4th and 4. We've got to get off the field in that 3rd and 7, that 3rd and 8 situation as well. I focus on that and just being

able to continue to find ways to take away what they do well.

We did some good things. I thought guys played hard. I thought our D-line actually played well. I didn't think our linebackers played well at all, and we talked about that as a team. That's players, coaches, that's nothing -- they didn't play well. That's where those guys have to in my opinion.

That hasn't been the case each week, but just calling it like it is. So the bottom line is that we've got to be able to -- yes, we can fix those things without question, but at the same time, there's a lot of little things that go into the sequencing of a game and how things play out in the end.

Q. You touched on it a little bit in that answer, but you guys went 2 for 11 on 3rd downs on Saturday and that obviously led to some of the difficulties you had moving the ball later in the game. What do you need to do to be better in those situations?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think you look at that, and there's no question, the execution on the throw game, contested catches, ball out faster, protected pretty well. They obviously pressured at times and you're trying to eliminate some of those opportunities for them to get those pressure units on the field for your offense.

I even think, too, in the first half when we had the offensive pass interference call, which was a bust in assignment, wasn't even supposed to be -- that person wasn't supposed to be there. They were supposed to be running a vertical route. That kind of just killed that drive.

Can't make those kind of mistakes.

But at the same time, it's the finishing our execution, both receivers on finishing their routes, finishing the plays, quarterbacks in his reads and finishing -- the running backs, protection, their blocking. Just got to keep working. You don't get the product you want, you make adjustments, which we continue to do in the way we do things, and at the end of the day, we've got to make plays and we've got to execute and we've got to find a way to stay on the field on offense on those critical 3rd downs.

It's going to be no different this week. We've got to find a way to get off the field defensively on those 3rd downs. Those critical downs, 3rd and 4th downs, really define outcomes of games, because it's possessions, opportunities for the offense to be able to stay on the field. So just keep working.

Q. You've kind of talked about it with some of the self-inflicted mistakes, but specifically on special

teams, is there something that you can do or something that film is showing as to why there's been some mistakes in crucial times on special teams?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, and this one with the protection, which hasn't been an issue, but was obviously in this game. Making some adjustments on that, how we can help our guys out, be able to be effective in that regard because you can't get a punt blocked.

Then just work so hard on catching punts and continue to do that, and just got to secure the football. There was less than a minute to go in the half, I think 28 seconds exactly, and just can't put our team in that position.

But to me, it's just continued reps and obviously if you've got to make adjustments personnel-wise, you make adjustments, which we -- in our punt unit we're going to do that.

Just got to make sure the right guys are out there that can get the job done at the critical times.

Q. You mentioned meeting with the team yesterday. I recall Saturday you said you kind of had to really -- I believe the words were "address it head on." What were the main topics of conversation in that meeting yesterday, and how did you see your team respond?

TOM ALLEN: Well, you come in there and it's a Sunday after they've already lifted, and they're obviously down, which they should be. I get that. Everybody is down and you're frustrated, you're disappointed.

So you just talk to them just open and honest about where we are, how we're here, how we got here, how we get out of here and how you handle adversities in life. I talked to them for about 20 minutes. It was a little bit of football sprinkled in there, talked about the game as we go through, but it was really more about your mind and how you approach challenges, how you approach hard things. How do you just persevere through the difficulties. Sometimes they're self-inflicted like they were on game day for us, sometimes they're not.

But how you respond to those things and try to say it different ways and using different methods. I just pray for a lot of wisdom to do that because it's hard, there's no doubt about it.

We all want to win, and they're frustrated and they want to win, and you're close to it but then you don't finish it out and you make mistakes that really make it hard.

How do you continue to -- instead of just saying the same

things over and over again, you try and say it in a different fresh way and also just bring up examples of things throughout the game and things that we can talk about, maybe some things that led up to it that you see that you need to address or things you need to encourage and say, we're right here if we just keep doing this.

We talked about the sequencing of the game and how those critical mistakes have a way of mounting and creating more negative opportunities for your team just because you have one little things that didn't quite -- wasn't executed in this particular way, offensively, defensively or special teams, and then obviously you break off and you get into the nuts and bolts of the scheme, issues or things that you had in all three phases.

But it's just the psychology of coaching is what you're doing.

Q. You touched on this in terms of against the run game, but they had 11 situations where they needed three yards or less for a 1st down, short-yardage situations. Is there a limit to what scheme can do in those spots, it's more individual -- like defensive line, linebackers, bow up, you mentioned physical and toughness. Is it those are the determining factors, especially when they're running interior runs --

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, there's a toughness piece in there, kind of mashing you schematically. The answer is stay out of them. When you talk about winning the early downs, they were having too much success on 1st downs, which created the 3rd and mediums and 3rd and shorts.

Statistically speaking, I don't care what level you coach at, 3rd and shorts are obviously harder to stop for the defense and they're a way higher percent for the offense, and then it flips completely when you go to 3rd and 7 plus.

That's what we're trying to stay out of those. You get in a lot of 3rd and 1s, 4th and 1s, it's tough. You can create a negative play every now and then and get those knocked back, and statistically we've done well in those situations during the season, but you don't want to put yourself in that spot, especially if that's where they hang their hat, that's what they do really well.

Trying to stay out of those is really the best answer, and then when you get in them, boy, you've got to fight, claw and scratch, try a find a way to create a negative play or get a stalemate.

That's hard to do with big strong Big Ten opponents, without question.

Q. Out of left field, asking about targeting more generally, I think it's about 10 years it's been a rule now and there's been a lot of debate basically about the merits of it, is it too punitive in some ways, should there be levels of targeting, especially if you're going to go to review with it. As a coach, have you seen positive impacts from at least the concept behind it, the motivation behind it, and do you think there are ways that maybe you could tweak it where you somehow make it less punitive in certain situations, even if it's still a penalty?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, great question. We've had many discussions about this as a staff and even as Big Ten head coaches. First of all, I do think the targeting rule has been very good for football. I think it's reduced a lot of those shots that we don't really want to be a part of our game where guys are getting injured. I think it's made our game safer, and I think it's a good thing for everybody. Player safety is at the top of the list. I think that's good.

Where the discussions come, after we've had this for many years, is should there be a targeting one, targeting two, in regards to -- this is my personal opinion, and I've voiced this with our coaches, Big Ten coaches, and that is that from my perspective, hey, if a guy just launches at a player and leads with the crown of his helmet and you can see that on the review, that's a targeting call, and I think that's an ejection because that's not how we want to play the game. You can control that.

But when you're as a defensive player, when you're tackling a guy and he just lowers his head, sometimes it's hard to avoid the helmet-to-helmet because by definition it is a helmet-to-helmet collision. It is kind of what happened with Louis Moore. I get it, by the letter of the law, so it wasn't some big argument or anything; I understand that. But bigger picture-wise, does that really deserve an ejection.

So if you want to give a 15-yard penalty, that's fine, but I think most coaches would agree those kind of collisions are hard to prevent if you're a defensive guy and you're not trying to be malicious, you're not trying to cold cock a guy that's not looking and he's running the ball right at you or at an angle and you go to tackle him and there's going to be helmet-to-helmet contact at times.

I just would personally like to see a distinction between the flagrant launching at a guy with the crown of your helmet. I think that should always be an ejection. Then if it's just a collision that happens because of the nature of playing football, they need to be able to review that. I think we can. We've got the technology to do it. Still, if it needs to be a penalty, that's fine, but don't kick him out of the game.

That's how I feel about it. We've had a lot of talks about it, but that's my opinion.

Q. So many of your scoring drives have featured a lack of big chunk plays. That hasn't been a big part of this offense. What can you do schematically to try to create more of those opportunities because you've taken some shots but they haven't --

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I think that's a great point and it's definitely been trying to create those with some of those shots. We feel like we got some receivers that can do that. It's ball placement on the throws. It's coming down with them. It's being able to continue to work on those in practice, without question, because there's no doubt, the more chances we have to create a chunk play, the higher percent you have of scoring points.

That's why explosive plays are a big stat in winning football games.

To me it's got to be a continued point of emphasis to be able to allow ourselves both schematically and execution to be able to have more of those opportunities. I think we have some guys that can do that, and I want to see us do more of that. So that to me is going to be a continued emphasis, to be able to take some pressure off your offense so you don't have to drive the ball 13, 14 drives and 80-something yards. That's definitely what we want to be able to do.

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