

Indiana University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 20, 2023

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Coach Tom Allen

Press Conference



TOM ALLEN: Just want to begin by congratulating our soccer team. Big win last night and on to the Sweet 16, so great job and wish them nothing but great things moving forward.

I also want to recognize our players of the week that do a great job working hard for us. Defensive scout Connor Hole, offensive scout Will Larkins and Declan McMahon, and special teams scout Lincoln Murff.

Really, really excited about this week, a great, great opportunity for our program with the Old Oaken Bucket. So much tradition. So much has been put into this game for so many years and so much pride in the outcome representing our whole university and fan base and state of Indiana here as we battle for a very prestigious prize.

Big opportunity heading into West Lafayette to take on the Boilermakers.

Questions?

Q. On that touchdown that Michigan State got right before the end of the first half, looked like Phillip Dunham did not make the play that you were looking for. He didn't play the rest of the game. What was your message to him and what kind of response have you seen from him in the days since that game?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, he chose to try to strip the football, which is something you do when you're the second or third defender at the point of attack, so obviously I think it happened about the 15-yard line, so should have had him on the ground, and then you battle to force them to kick a field goal.

Pretty big mistake there. Really kind of -- it's not what we teach and coach and inexcusable. Felt like Josh Sanguinetti has played well, so played him the rest of the way, and was definitely open and honest with Phillip about that. He needs to respond. We'll see how that goes this week.

Bottom line is that you've got to do things the right way, and if you don't, somebody is going to be there and take your job.

Q. When you have a roster that has a lot of transfers like this year, guys that weren't here last season, what do you do to teach them the importance of this rivalry and the history behind it?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, that's a great point. We started yesterday for that very reason with 51 to 54 based on we've added a few additional walk-ons here in the last couple months. As our season started, to add more guys that weren't here a year ago.

So with all the new faces, Coach Deal, Mark Deal does a phenomenal job. His one word every single year is "bucket." It's been that way ever since I've been here. He is the most passionate person that I know regarding this game, the trophy that we play for.

There's been eight victories by the Deal family, most ever in the history of Indiana University football that have been a part of winning the bucket, between his dad and his brother and himself.

He does a great job. So we started yesterday. He gives the whole history of it, all the way back to the beginning, where it came from, the farm it came from, got pictures of that, just all the different parts of it, and then just kind of giving our guys an education of that, and he obviously puts his own flavor on which is very, very emotional and passionate.

Every single day this week we are going to have an alumni video speaker that is going to challenge our guys about the bucket, and then with a video, as well. So just constant every single day just to continue to educate our guys and make them understand how big this game is.

Q. Looking back at some of the games here down the stretch, it seems like going into the half or at the end of the half really the defense has kind of struggled and given up a long drive that's really swung the momentum going into half or even at the end of the

game Michigan State scored that touchdown. What needs to be better about the defense finishing out a half, especially when it comes to carrying that momentum forward?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, it's absolutely what we emphasized yesterday. Obviously it's been pretty apparent in those last two games without question. Before the half and how you finish the game, had a chance to finish out the game with a win by just getting a stop by our defense here at this one.

The emphasis has been going back and evaluating the calls that we made in those situations, the execution of those calls, so first of all, making sure we're in the right call, and there's obviously things we go through, maybe you should have done this, should have done that, called this, called that.

Then we've got to make sure whatever we do call is that there's 100 percent execution of that call. No matter what they do, something we haven't seen before, something we have seen in the past, the concept that they ran on that last one was something they had done previously in the game.

So just still, it's always the little things too leading up to it. We have a chance to get a sack on that 3rd down that led up to the 4th and 3 conversion, which would have made it 4th and 10, which is a totally different call.

So it's a series of plays, series of efforts. We missed some tackles in that last drive. It's making sure we're getting our best players on the field and making sure the calls that we make, our guys execute at a very, very high level.

Obviously we have not done that, and really it's been unbelievably frustrating and disappointing. But at the same time, we've got one more opportunity this year. We've got to make sure it doesn't happen this week.

Q. Obviously personnel-wise Purdue is different than past years, but obviously they changed over coaching staffs from the teams that you've played over the past several years. What have you been able to see from Purdue and what differences do you see in the way this team operates?

TOM ALLEN: Well, different offensive system, different defensive system, so schematically quite a bit different. Obviously they've always thrown the ball well. They're running the ball really well lately.

Last two games in a row they've been over 300 yards rushing, which is very impressive. They've got two talented running backs and their O-line is being very effective in what they're doing. They've made adjustments throughout

the season.

Very talented quarterback, which has been consistent since I've been here. Hudson Card is a very, very talented player. He can beat you with his legs, beat you with his arm. He's an elite football player in my opinion.

Then defensively the scheme obviously, Coach Walters being a defensive guy and bringing that system they ran at Illinois so well there, and they do a really good job in lot of those areas.

Definitely a lot of changes, a lot of changes in personnel, as well, and new team. Just but same bucket, and that's really what this is all about, is getting back the bucket.

Q. I know you're kind of more of a naturally optimistic individual, but with the challenges of the last three years, how do you remain positive and optimistic about the future of the program?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I mean, to me you have -- continue to have some tough, close losses like we've had these last couple weeks and some tough -- last couple seasons have not been what anybody wants here.

So yeah, you just keep building. The very things you build this upon, you lean on that and the foundation of who you are and what you do, and you choose to find ways to keep making adjustments and finding a way to stay the course and continue to move forward and build.

That's where it's been frustrating, because we haven't seen the growth and the fruit of some of those things.

But there's also a principle that you don't grow weary doing things the right way. And if you just stay the course, you'll reap the harvest if you don't give up. We are going to continue to make adjustments, continue to adapt to the new -- you know, the new landscape of college football is dramatically different as a matter of fact. I was there pregame Coach Dantonio was out there with their staff with their situation there at Michigan State, and first words out of his mouth, man, has this thing changed in the last three years since the last time he coached. We both agreed it's a dramatic difference.

You have to build things differently. You have to adapt to those changes, and we have to adapt as a program and as a university for these changes. You've got to continue to work towards that to that end, and to me, I said this before, I'll keep saying it, I'm not positive because life is easy and everything works out for you. I remain positive because life is hard, and sometimes life is not fair, and we experienced that on Saturday.

You've got to find a way to just stay the course. You have a great foundation that you believe in, you build off of, and you don't waver from that. But you just battle and you fight and you just claw and fight and scratch to continue to build what you want to build.

We've got to keep getting better, and we've got a great opportunity this week to be able to get some momentum for the off-season.

Q. When you look at the schedule this week with Thanksgiving and everything, how do you manage that? How do you handle it with Thanksgiving dinner and stuff like that?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, so we've done it different ways here. Our guys kind of lean on them to what they really enjoy the most and feel the best is for them. We've found that we like to be able to -- instead of having a huge Thanksgiving meal together as a team, we've done that in the past, the guys would rather have a chance to go and be in someone's home, either a coach's home. Some players that live close enough are going to go home and take teammates with them.

We have a process we go through that we make sure every single one of our players has a home to go to for having Thanksgiving meal, whether it's my house or a coach's house or one of their teammates' houses or their house if they live close enough to drive there.

So we'll give our guys an extra hour of sleep each day on Tuesday and Wednesday, start a little bit later each one of those days, be a normal schedule on Thursday, and then have a practice on Thursday morning and let them go home and be with their families or wherever they are going to be for their Thanksgiving meal that afternoon and evening, and then come back on Friday morning. We will have our - and get on the bus and head to West Lafayette.

So Thursday is the one day that's different. And like I said, our philosophy is I want them to be in somebody's home having a Thanksgiving meal with either of a coach or a friend, teammate.

Q. You've had some very difficult losses over the past couple of weeks, and obviously they've been incredibly hard to swallow for the coaching staff and the players. What have you seen from the players in terms of their attitude when they're bouncing back from these losses, and how do you keep them battling despite not being rewarded with a win in a lot of those close games?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, you know, that's the challenge. That's what's really, really hard about this. What I did this week was talk a little bit about the game and some things that we feel like we needed to do better to give ourselves a chance to win, and then moved right on to Purdue and the bucket.

Really became what's next. That's kind of been the focus all along is, yeah, we try to correct things, but we get ready for the next one, and then try to teach them about that's how life has to be, as well.

Something really, really tough happens, maybe something that you caused, sometimes things that you don't cause, sometimes unfair things happen. Well, the response to that is really the key. We're just training them for that and talking them through the mindset that it takes to do that and how you approach that, how do you go about that.

It can be harder as every more difficult thing you experience keeps coming your way to stay true to what you believe in, but at the same time even though it gets tested and gets tried, we call this the fires and the trials of life, sometimes those have a way of strengthening us if you respond the correct way. They build a resiliency and a toughness and a grit and a fight that only difficulties can build.

We just never stop talking about that. But it is about what's next and focus on what's in front of us and not what's behind us and not dwelling on the past, learning from it and pressing on. To me that's the approach and that's what we're going to do again this week.

Q. I wanted to ask about recruiting and obviously you mentioned changes in college football. Obviously one of the biggest ones is the portal over the last couple years, how you balance that with trying to sign a traditional recruiting class and also going into the portal a lot of times when you're signing your class you may not know exactly what you need from the portal. How do you balance that when you're in an unknown area as far as what you need?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I would say that's definitely a challenge. In the past you had a very clear picture of what you were going after this time of the year. I will say this: A big focus for us is going to be with this team. We have quite a few guys that have more eligibility, even though they may be -- even a guy that was a senior here or has graduated.

So I think there's a lot of guys we want to focus on continuing to retain in our team, and we've got a lot of good football players that have time in front of them to play.

So that's going to be the focus, and then once you go through that, you kind of know where your needs are. We've got a strong high school class that's going to be coming in here. I still believe you have to have that foundation.

We're a developmental program here, and we've got close to 20 guys that are committed to us we're expecting to sign here in December, and guys are going to come here, many guys of that group I believe are going to come in here and help us right away because there's a lot of talented guys in that group.

I'm excited about the group that we've assembled, so we will have that as our core, and then use the portal -- and I see us probably having less portal additions just because of the number of guys returning on our team. We have a lot of guys back for next year, and that excites me as well.

Just got to go a great job filtering through that process as we go through -- the NCAA has created a timetable now for the Monday through Thursday after the regular season ends is now a dead period where we spend time with our current players, and then we'll kind of know where we're at from there.

And I get it. It's part of the new landscape we have and guys will make decisions and they got to do what's best for them, and it's a mutual decision-making process that we'll go through with them.

So yeah, it's definitely different, different than it's ever been before, and every year it's a little bit more modified. But you've got to adapt do that and figure out where you're at, what your needs are, but we're going to have a good, string high school nucleus that we will bring in, and then fill in the needs with the portal once we know what those exactly are.

Q. You mentioned speaking with Mark Dantonio about the changes in football the last couple of years. I'm curious, is there a larger maybe systemic reason why it's been difficult to maintain success at Indiana? You've had good seasons; you've had challenging seasons. Is there anything about Indiana or is it just more difficult now given the circumstances of college football?

TOM ALLEN: Well, you know, I think there's a real reality that you have to adapt to the changes as a program, as a university, and sometimes those adaptations are slower than they need to be.

The bottom line is you can just see the trajectory of where

we were going prior to the changes, and as things are right now -- so the bottom line is that the way the rosters are built now is different than it used to be, and the NIL piece is the biggest component that has made the biggest difference.

We have to embrace that in a full fledged way and a more aggressive way, and that is just bottom line being truthful. And that's the case for everybody. Everybody is in the same situation. Especially as you think moving forward with the new Big Ten we are about to get into adding four football teams that are very, very talented and very, very rich in both resources and what they expect to be able to do on game day.

Bottom line is we have to adapt to that. We have to step up to that. We have to make some obvious changes to that, and when you don't, you get run over. That's the bottom line is we've got to be able to -- just talking to Coach Dantonio, it's very obvious what's going on, and you have to be able to make those adjustments. To me, we have to step up in that area and we've got to do a great job of helping retain our current roster and going out and adding the pieces that are going to give you a chance, because at the end of the day, I learned this a long time ago, we're a lot smarter coaches when we've got the right players that fit with us and can help us and have the talent to be able to help us do elite things and do great things.

So we've got to be able to develop those guys here. That's the challenge, is you've got to be able to still bring guys in, develop them, and still be able to have the kind of team you have to have to be able to beat the quality of the teams we play each week.

Definitely more challenging than ever, but we at a place like this have to adapt to the new realize that we play by and the way that things are structured now.

Q. Is there anything that you can do or have done to make those adaptations take hold?

TOM ALLEN: Yeah, I feel like I want to be as aggressive as I can be with our alumni and boosters, and just being able to get in front of them and help them see the direction that these things are going and what we need to do to be able to help us make these changes because the bottom line is it's all in front of us.

We have to be able to adapt, and it's hard. There's no question, because it's different than it's been in the past, and sometimes it's a different way of doing things, and some people even like or agree with.

I think it's a matter of -- at the end of the day you've still got

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to build, and that's what I was talking to Coach Dantonio about. You've still got to build the best team. The best team wins on game day. And yes, you have to have the players to do that, but they also have to be a team that plays for each other and has -- it's still a team sport. We've got 125 guys on our roster. That's a lot of players, a lot of people coming together to be able to do that.

That component hasn't left us, but still, you have to do a great job of having the roster talent and the roster depth to be able to play a tough schedule every single week. You've got to come back and you've got to do it again and again and again and things happen in the course of a season, so that's why depth is such a big deal, and getting the right players here is the best deal, and we're doing the best we can to be able to continue to grow that.

I love our guys here, and like I said, we've got a lot of guys that I want to retain here that I feel like have a chance to keep developing, and you see some growth in some key spots on our team, and I want to continue to do that, but we've got to keep them here.

That's the other thing that people are trying to take your guys from you and take your players when they start to grow and have some success at places where they feel like they can do that because they can maybe out bid you for a guy.

The bottom line is that's all part of the new world we live in, which is totally different than it was a few years ago.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.