

# CFP Semifinal at the Capital One Orange Bowl: Penn State vs Notre Dame

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Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

## Coach James Franklin Coach Marcus Freeman

### Coaches Press Conference

**JAMES FRANKLIN:** We are honored and blessed to be here, obviously to represent Penn State University, also the Big Ten, honored to compete against Marcus and his Notre Dame football team. Got a ton of respect for Marcus. I've followed his career for a long time. We have friends and coaches in common. Gerad Parker was on both of our staffs. He's now the head coach at Troy and doing a great job, and him and Marcus are very, very good friends. But just excited to be here.

It's been a crazy college football season, not only for Penn State but really across the board, and we couldn't be more excited to be here and playing in the Orange Bowl, such a historic game. Penn State and Notre Dame got great history together, as well, two storied programs. So just really honored to be here and represent Penn State and the Big Ten. So thank you very much.

**MARCUS FREEMAN:** I want to thank the Orange Bowl committee for the welcome yesterday. This is my first opportunity to be a part of this game, and as I said last night, your reputation precedes itself. We appreciate the welcome to South Florida for our families and all those that traveled. We know the work that's put in to put on one of these games, and we are very grateful for it.

Looking forward to a great opportunity tomorrow night versus an extremely good football team. As Coach Franklin said, I have a lot of respect for him and the job he's done in college football, and this football team is a very good one that we have to continue to prepare for. We've got to use these next 24 hours to finish our preparation in anticipation of this great opportunity that lies ahead.

We'll do that, but again, we'll understand that we'll do that with being grateful for this opportunity that we have ahead



of us.

**Q. With the future generations looking back on this 91st edition of the Orange Bowl, what do you hope they see in this moment beyond this just being the first Orange Bowl in history between two Black coaches, and what pivotal decision or experiences in your journey do you believe prepared you for this moment?**

**JAMES FRANKLIN:** So I had mentioned earlier in the week, got asked a similar question, and I remember being the offensive coordinator at Kansas State in 2007 and working for an African-American football coach in Ron Prince. The defensive coordinator on that staff was Raheem Morris. Ricky Rahne was our offensive graduate assistant. He's the head coach at Old Dominion now. Scott Frost was the defensive graduate assistant. He's the head coach at Central Florida now.

I remember that year, the Super Bowl with, if I remember correctly, Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith. There was just a lot of talk within the profession, two African-American coaches coaching in the Super Bowl, and that was a big moment. We felt like that was going to have an opportunity to maybe create some change or create some opportunities for guys that had earned the right to sit in those types of rooms.

If you look at that time, Tony Dungy ended up becoming the coach that won the Super Bowl, and I think at that time, there were six coaches in college football as head coaches.

At that time I think it was 127 Division I schools, and it was Sylvester Croom, Karl Dorrell, Turner Gill, Randy Shannon, Ron Prince, and then Tyrone Willingham, and now there's 16 coaches of color in these positions.

I do think it had an impact. I hope a game like ours could have an impact, and really just looking for an opportunity for guys to be able to get in front of some search firms and ADs and get opportunities that they earned.

I don't take it lightly. I really don't. I've gotten a ton of



messages from people all over the country that I've worked with or know, but ultimately it's about Penn State, and it's about Notre Dame and our teams going out on the field and competing and representing our schools and our conferences -- or our conference, excuse me, and college football and the Orange Bowl, and really presenting a great game and a game experience for everybody to enjoy.

But I do -- I don't take that lightly, that responsibility, as well.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I've thought long and hard about this question, and I know you probably didn't ask it directly, but again, you're grateful to be a part of this opportunity and you're grateful anytime your name is mentioned with being the first.

But you don't want to take away from how we got to this point, and that talks about your team -- I'm talking about your team and everybody that put the work in to get your program to this point, and those that have come before you.

There's a lot of people in this coaching profession that have come before me that have given me this opportunity.

But the other person that I think deserves a lot of credit is our former AD Jack Swarbrick, because he's the one - and our president John Jenkins at the time - that made the decision to hire a guy that was 35 years old and had never been a head coach. He made that decision.

So Jack Swarbrick and Father John Jenkins deserve a lot of the credit for having courage and for making a decision to hire me at that time.

I want to make sure I recognize them. And again, this isn't about me. This isn't about one person. It takes a team. It takes a program. It takes a lot of people committing to something bigger than themselves to put your team in a position to be here, and I understand it, and I'm very grateful for it.

If this creates more opportunities for other coaches, other minority coaches, great. It's great. It is great for the future generations of coaches, of college football coaches, of leaders. I am all for it, and I'm grateful to be a part of that.

But at the end of the day, the attention on one person takes away what really gives your program a chance to get here, and that's team, and that's committing to something bigger than yourself. That's important to me.

**Q. James, following up on what you said Saturday and just reiterated here, that 2007 Super Bowl and the**

**impact of that on you, why did it take another 17, 18 years for college football to reach this point where you guys are?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I can't speak on that and haven't really spent a whole ton of time thinking about it, kind of like Marcus just mentioned. All of my time is focused on preparing for a really, really good Notre Dame football team.

Like I mentioned before, if this could create some opportunities for other coaches to get in front of search firms, athletic directors, then I think it's a positive. There's a ton of tremendous and qualified coaches out there that deserve the opportunity to get in front of these people.

We'll see how this plays out, but I haven't spent a ton of time on that. Notre Dame creates a ton of challenges, scheme-wise and specific skill-wise that we've spent all of our time being prepared for.

But I understand the question and I appreciate the question, but it'll be a great game, and we're really, really excited about competing.

I'm looking over here at Marcus -- and how old are you now, Marcus?

MARCUS FREEMAN: 38.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I mean, look at the hairline on this guy. I'm envious of his hairline in a lot of ways. But Marcus has done a phenomenal job. Obviously he is the leader of one of the most storied programs in college football history.

So much respect for him and his career and his staff. He's got a great staff, got great leadership, just like we do at Penn State now.

I think his comments about the decision making and the leadership and the courage it takes to make these decisions, I feel the same way with our administration. That's one of the biggest changes at Penn State. Neeli Bendapudi, our president, has been phenomenal when it comes to athletics in general and specifically football.

And then Pat Kraft, having an athletic director who played football in the Big Ten I think has been significant. I wanted to take a moment to recognize them, as well.

**Q. What kind of week did Jeremiyah Love have in practice in regards to the knee, and how has Jadarian Price improved throughout the season and what did you see from him against Georgia when Love went**

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out?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I'll start with Jadarian. He is a young man that has put a lot of work into the point that he's gotten to right now. He constantly gets better. Jack, you've heard me talk many times about you have to earn that trust in practice from your teammates and your coaches way before the media in the world sees you.

Jadarian is a guy that continues to do that, and he takes advantage of his opportunities. He's getting more and more opportunities.

J Love, Jeremiyah, has had a great week of practice. We have to be smart in terms of how much we're asking him to do in practice. We've got to get him ready for the game. But he's confident.

And nobody, I think, feels 100 percent right now. We're in week, I think, 15 or game 15 -- 16 maybe for you. Nobody feels 100 percent. But J Love will be good to go.

**Q. Coach Freeman, it's pretty well-known, but maybe in your own vision, can you explain some of the pros and cons of being a school that isn't affiliated with a conference?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. We view it, I view it as a pro. We'll continue to look at it that way until and unless something changes. We get to play coast to coast. You play multiple different times from multiple different conferences. You started off the season in College Station, you ended the season in LA, and we're in New York twice.

We get to really view our program as a global in terms of a national program, in terms of how we play, and the audience we play in front of.

Now, it's not much different than the Big Ten now with UCLA and USC and some of the West Coast teams being in it. But again, we view being independent as a positive thing, and we sell it to our recruits and our players as a positive thing.

We know we can't play in a championship game and we can't have a first-round bye, but we continue to use not playing week 13 as our bye, and that's the way we view it.

In terms of the finances and the TV deals, I'm sure that people can go into further details about that, but obviously I'm sure that's another positive that we view being independent provides us.

**Q. You both have former power conference head**

**coaches as your defensive coordinator. What are the ways that that benefits your program, both in preparation and on game day, and what are maybe some of the intangible components of that?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I just think at the end of the day, we'd like to get as many qualified and experienced guys on your staff as possible. We've been fortunate to be able to go out and get former head coaches that are able to come in, obviously use those experiences, those leadership experiences, those organizational experiences that they've had, and then also get back to doing what we love.

I love being the head football coach at Penn State, but there's times where I would love to be back running an offense. I think today's college football, if you're not careful, can pull you further and further away from why you got into the profession in the first place.

Being able to have guys on your staff that got tremendous experience -- my special teams coordinator has been a head coach, my defensive coordinator has been a head coach, my offensive coordinator will be a head coach, and I've got a ton of assistants like that, as well.

Just the more guys you can have on your staff that have tremendous experience -- I think sometimes when you go back to being an assistant after being a head coach, it makes you a better assistant. I think it makes you a better coordinator.

If you know Tom, Tom has just been awesome. There's not a better guy in the profession. His humility is impressive. His faith is impressive. But he's been awesome. He's jumped right back into this thing and is really doing a great job, and I think his family is enjoying it. I think Tom is enjoying it, and we're enjoying having him. We feel blessed to have Tom Allen and his family and really the rest of my staff, too.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, for me, when I hired Al Golden three years ago, it was for two reasons. One, I believed he had a great defensive mind and could do great things with our defense, but two, at that point we did not have a former head coach on our staff, and I thought it was important to get somebody that had experience where I had none on our staff.

The growth we've made in three years has been tremendous, right, the growth of our defense. And our defense is doing really great things right now, and Coach Golden gets all the credit, and that staff and the players.

But there's times I have to -- I'll ask him things about his



experiences, and at some point you've got to make a decision of what you believe is best. But it's good to have some of those guys that have experience in areas that you don't.

I've never had experience in a playoff, so I spent some time talking to Coach Golden who had in the NFL, Deland McCullough our running backs coach who had in the NFL, and some of our other coaches that had experience dealing with the playoff in terms of the mentality, in terms of how we practiced, and some different things.

I believe in them. I believe in trying to gain wisdom from other people that have experience. That was a huge part in the decision making of hiring Al Golden.

**Q. Coach Franklin, this is your 16th game of the year; Coach Freeman, I think this is your 15th, and you're looking for one more after this. I guess this is filed under a good problem to have, but what is the challenge of the longest season that either of you have ever been part of? How do you manage practice? How do you manage recovery? How do you manage all those things when you're basically now playing an NFL-length season?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think you're going to have to be open minded. You're going to have to be creative. You're going to have to be flexible. And we have tried to do that. I think the sports scientists that everybody is using now, we are fortunate to have a young man by the name of Andrew Nelson, Dr. Andrew Nelson. Went on and got his doctorate.

Nelly played for me at Penn State, went on and got his doctorate in sports science and has come back and has done a phenomenal job. He does a really good job of tying it all together, the coaching, our trainers and doctors, as well as the strength coaches in making sure that the complete plan makes sense and what we're doing in the weight room complements what we're doing on the field, and the same thing with the trainers and the doctors. I think that's been really valuable.

Subtle changes that you can make to your practices or to your lifting schedule that can keep the guys as fresh and healthy as possible, I think that's a really important piece in all of this.

I think another thing that I would say is how important depth and development in your program is. You've got to be willing to play guys, and that's been something that we've done all the way back since my time at Vanderbilt, trying to create depth by playing guys.

Some assistants on your staff are better at it than others. You talk about it, and some guys won't rotate them in the way you want, and you've got to have tougher conversations.

But I will also say this: I think it's something that we're going to have to look at in terms of what's best for college football, what's best for the student-athlete experience, what's best in a university setting, because I don't know if this is really what it was designed to be. It's turned into that.

I know a lot of times when coaches talk like this people roll their eyes, but I think when every decision that we make is based on finances, then we're not making great decisions that's in the student-athlete and the game of football's best interest.

I think there's been conversations about -- obviously you talk about just the differences between our two programs and conferences. I think it should be consistent across college football.

I think, again, this is no knock on Coach or Notre Dame, but I think everybody should be in a conference. I think everybody should play a conference championship game or no one should play a conference championship game. I think everybody should play the same number of conference games.

Now, as a head coach in the SEC, I've been a head coach in the Big Ten, I was in the SEC when the whole conversation was whether to go to eight or nine conference games. We voted -- all the coaches voted against going the nine games. The commissioner agreed and kept it at eight. I think it was one of the better decisions the SEC made.

The Big Ten went to nine games, and I was not a math major at East Stroudsburg, but just the numbers are going to make things more challenging if you're playing one more conference game.

I just think things need to be consistent across college football. I think we need to look at the calendar; should we open up a week earlier in the season to take some of the pressures off the end of the season. I think there's just a ton of things that need to be discussed and looked at, and I think we need to do it with people that do not feel the pressure from their university or their conference.

I was on a call the other day with Nick Saban, and he wasn't real happy about me promoting him for the commissioner of college football, but I think we need that. I think we need somebody that is looking at it from a

big-picture perspective, and whether that is Nick Saban or whether that is Chris Petersen or whether that is Dave Clawson, who I think is a really, really smart football guy, I think having somebody in that position would be valuable for our sport and for our student-athletes.

MARCUS FREEMAN: How we got ready for the season, how we're adapting, is you have a plan, you have a team, you have a sports performance team that you listen to and you talk through some different scenarios, and you've got to be adaptable. You've got to be willing to adapt based off the unpredictable things that can happen, and that's what we've been able to do, and I feel like our guys will be physically ready to roll.

**Q. James, how has Abdul Carter progressed over the last week, and will he be able to play tomorrow?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I was going to ask you guys a couple questions about the health of the Notre Dame team. I was hoping you guys would ask for more so we could figure some of that stuff out.

Yeah, we anticipate Abdul playing. He's doing everything he possibly can to play. His approach has been awesome. He's lived in the training room. But it'll be a game-time decision, and we'll see.

Just like the guys that we're looking at on the Notre Dame roster and concerned about their impact on the game, Abdul is one of those guys, as well. I get the question and I understand where it's coming from, but Abdul has approached this the right way.

He wants to play. He's put a ton of, like, cryptic messages out on social media, which you guys have probably seen those. I learn as much from those as I do from our trainers.

But we are hopeful and expecting Abdul to play, and we'll see how that plays out.

**Q. Why is running the football and stopping the run a big part of your team's identity?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I think for us, it's what we do well and what we have to do to have success with this current team. It's really, as you look at the course of our season, it's been a big indication of the outcome of the game, our ability to run the football and our ability to stop the run. It's a mentality. It's a mindset.

Just from our defensive coaching background, when you can't stop an offense from running the ball, it can be demoralizing. That's why we say we have to do it now.

We're probably ranked higher in the pass efficiency part of defensive statistics, but still, the mentality of stopping the run is so important. As you get later in the season and you play better teams, it's going to be important, the same as the turnover margin and those type of things.

But as you look at Penn State, if you are not able to do a good job at stopping the run and trying to run the ball you're not going to have success and you're not going to get the outcome you want. That will be important as we get into tomorrow, too.

**Q. James, Michigan obviously won the national title last year. Before that, 19 of 20 national champions have been from warmer weather or southern schools, most of them in the SEC. Three cold weather schools in the semifinals here. With NIL, the portal, the 12-team playoff, do you believe there's something happening that will allow northern schools like Penn State and Notre Dame to compete at the very top of the sport maybe even more effectively than in the past two decades?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, you described us as a cold weather team. I don't know if I necessarily would describe us that way in recruiting. We don't really sell it that way.

I will say this: I was a little apprehensive this year for the first year we had our mid-year guys come in early, and it's turned out to be a real positive. I'll be very comfortable doing it moving forward.

I think we had three guys from Florida show up, and we have gotten more snow in the last two weeks than I can remember in a long time in Pennsylvania. So they're kind of looking at me right now like this isn't what you sold us on.

But I think at the end of the day, you look at college football and you look at the history, and obviously a place like Notre Dame and Penn State, tremendous history. I think there are some changes going on right now. What that is specific to, I'm not necessarily sure. I don't know if there's enough datapoints and enough information to make a strong statement on it.

But as we all know, there's been a ton of changes in college football really over the last five years, probably more so than maybe in the 25 years before it, and the programs that are embracing that, the programs that are being creative and aggressive, and I also think a really important word is being bold, bold and aggressive, which is what we're trying to do, then I think it's helping. Those guys are showing up.

You look at the playoffs right now, College Football Playoffs, there's a ton of teams. I also think it's good for college football that there's more teams represented, there's more parts of the country represented, and it's not kind of the same old story.

Not exactly sure. We'll have a better idea maybe a couple years from now, but I do think it's a good storyline for college football right now.

**Q. We were talking to Tyler Elsdon the other day; he's a guy who had a starting job and lost it. He could have left; could have tried another school. He's stuck around for five years; gets degree after degree. Is that kind of going to be the dinosaur now? Is there room for that kind of player left in big-time college football in the future?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's a good question. I sure hope not. I worry about the 105, impacting that, because you look at Dom DeLuca on our team, Dom was a walk-on. Was the Pennsylvania Player of the Year senior year, tore his ACL, comes to Penn State as a walk-on, earns a scholarship as a captain for us playing really well. Is there less of those stories now because of the 105, your point with Mr. Elsdon and NIL kind of impacting that.

I sure hope not, because I think they're the stories that make college football so special. I do think that's where it's really important to recruit your own state and to recruit the footprint, because there's going to be some kids that come to Penn State just because it's special and it's their dream school and it's a place they always went, which I think will allow you maybe to create some of those scenarios that we have in the past, no different than there's young men all over the country that grew up wanting to go play at Notre Dame.

I hope those things stay a part of college football because I think they're important. They're just great stories. I cannot express the impact that Tyler Elsdon has had on Penn State football and our locker room. He is beloved in our locker room because he's earned everybody's respect, and he's done it the right way.

**Q. James, on the need for uniformity. Marcus, as the coach of a program that prides itself on independence, does that need to happen? James, do coaches really want that to happen in terms of your interactions, to have it be the same or as much of the same, even though the sport is kind of celebrated for being different at different places?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, you know, Coach Franklin

has a lot more experience, one, being a head coach in college football, and even just being in college athletics where you can formulate a strong opinion.

For us, whatever you're going to tell us, we'll make the most of. We pride ourselves on our independence. If they come out with a decision we can't be independent, then we'll make it work.

I don't have a whole bunch of opinion on it. I'm a guy that just, tell us what we're doing and let's go and move forward and let's make the most of it. Not the answer you're probably looking for, but I'm not strongly opinionated about it.

I love where we're at right now, and Pete Bevacqua and our Notre Dame administration will continue to make decisions that's best for our program.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think in a very eloquent way, Marcus just called me old --

MARCUS FREEMAN: Experienced.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I guess what I would say, the reason that I feel that way is I look at the College Football Playoff committee, and I just try -- most things in life I try to look at things from both perspectives. I just try to sit here and say, if I was in that room and I'm getting criticized about who makes the playoff, whether it was four or now 12, and everybody has got an opinion, I just think, how do you put those people that are in that room to make a really important decision that impacts the landscape of college football and they can't compare apples to apples or oranges to oranges.

I think that makes it very, very difficult. Strength of schedule plays a factor, and obviously Notre Dame plays a great schedule every year and have forever. I get the understanding and the impact of independence on their program.

I'm just talking about it more strictly from the College Football Playoff committee sitting in that room trying to make decisions. How do you make decisions when every conference is different, schools are different. I think it puts them in a very, very difficult position, and I'm just really speaking on it more from that path.

**Q. Marcus, you opened saying that you guys still have a lot to do in the next 24 hours. You guys had essentially two less days to prepare for this game. So I'm curious, what specifically do you guys feel like you want to accomplish over the next day, and is it different from a typical final day before a game for**

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you?

MARCUS FREEMAN: I think for both programs, we figured out who we're playing at the same time. At the end of our game we knew we were going to play Penn State, and they didn't know exactly who they were going to play, so the mental preparation time has been the same.

For us, it was just a normal week. It was a Saturday to a Saturday, as we look at it in terms of game week.

I think the coaches, we probably were a little bit behind to start just because of the travel and in that aspect, but physically our guys were good. Our guys were good, and we're going to be ready to roll.

But we've got to utilize, as you just said, every minute we have from now until tomorrow night at 7:30. That's the mindset that we all have, is every minute we've got to utilize.

We didn't have two extra days, so let's utilize this time that we have physically and mentally to make sure we're prepared to go tomorrow night.

**Q. I have a question for each of you. I'll start with Coach Franklin. Defensively speaking, how do you scheme differently against a dynamic running back like Ashton Jeanty and a running QB like Riley Leonard? And for Coach Freeman, do you design your game plan differently when facing a defensive front with monster edge rushers, or do you just let your quarterback be who he is and do what he does?**

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think kind of back to what Marcus mentioned earlier as a defensive-minded head coach, guy who's been a defensive coordinator, I think it always starts with trying to make people one-dimensional and to try to take away their strength.

Last week we had a tremendous challenge in stopping or reducing the impact that Ashton Jeanty had in the game. In my argument, one of the better backs in the history of college football based on his production and what he was able to do.

To me, we look at it similar. Notre Dame does a phenomenal job with their running backs, what they're averaging per carry, how they play up front, but now you're also having to factor the quarterback into it, which creates another challenge, which creates more stress, and how do you do that.

At the end of the day, our focus is still on trying to defend the run. Notre Dame does it in a little bit different way than

what Boise State did last week. But it's still the whole philosophy of trying to make them one-dimensional as much as you possibly can, but also understanding that the quarterback is going to make plays, their running backs are going to make plays, and you're going to have to flush it and move on to the next play.

This is going to be a four-quarter football game, and we're going to have to be prepared to compete like that. Stopping the run is priority number one.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, each week you have to tactically prepare for the strengths of your opponent. Obviously you mentioned rushing the passer, and their D-line is a huge strength of their defense.

Now, they've got guys across the board that can present issues, but you always start with, hey, let's try to figure out how to have a plan for what they do well.

Again, every week you tailor what you're doing to address that. So this was no different. We understand that they have a really good front, but they've got a really good secondary and some good linebackers.

This is a tough defense that we're going to face offensively, but we'll have a plan, and then it's about adjustments. This game is about adjustments, and we've got to be ready to make the adjustments necessary.

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