

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL MEDIA CONFERENCE

September 19, 2023

Head Coach James Franklin

University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Press Conference

JAMES FRANKLIN: So, like always, appreciate you guys coming out, covering Penn State football. We appreciate it.

This will be our 17th White Out, which is really cool. First one was in 2007 against Notre Dame. We need the fans to arrive early and be loud, have a full stadium before kickoff. Very similar to what we did at West Virginia.

Do you not agree with that? Your face is...

Q. (No microphone.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: So I got bad information is what you're saying (smiling)? It's going to be interesting.

The loser between you and Kincaid has five push-ups.

Q. That press release is wrong.

JAMES FRANKLIN: The press release (smiling)? You got five push-ups either way right now. The question is, is it five or 10?

We're welcoming CBS to Beaver Stadium for the first time since 1990. Trace McSorley and Grant Haley are captains, right now in the weight room getting a workout in. They're beloved in Penn State history, in my opinion. I know they are in our building.

You talk about the Illinois game, just some kind of thoughts on that game, some statistics we talk about every week.

We won the turnover battle, which is really the story of the game. We did not win the explosive play battle. We won the third down battle. Excuse me, we did not win the third down battle. The sack battle we did win. Drive/start battle we won. The penalty battle we did not win.

Players of the game, on offense Hunter Nourzad, on defense we gave it really to all the turnover guys, Dom DeLuca caused the fumble, Kobe King, Abdul Carter, Daequan Hardy, Johnny Dixon and Cam Miller.

Special teams was Malik McClain, who has really, really done a nice job and has been impressive on special teams. Is making an impact and a difference there, which is huge for us.

D squad players of the week, offense Dom Rulli and Jake Spencer, defense Khalil Dinkins and Winston Yates. Special teams Ethan Black.

Some overall notes from the game. Positives, went on the road and found a way to get a win, a Big Ten win on the road. Again, we're experts at that. Five turnovers on defense, four interceptions and a fumble recovery. Everybody is talking about that. That is deservedly so. But also the fact we had zero turnovers on offense is just as important.

I think the fact that we're playing a lot of guys I think has been very important for us. Getting a lot of guys in games. We had 62 guys play in that game. I thought we did a much better job compared to earlier in the season of handling our business on offense and defense from a game management standpoint.

Having all three timeouts at the end of the first half was huge. We were able to use two timeouts on defense to get the ball back for our offense and had a timeout available, went down and scored a field goal right before the half, which was big.

Third quarter shutout, not only third quarter shutout in that game, but we have not given up a point this year in the third quarter.

Audrey? Just checking my facts (smiling).

I thought really good complementary football offense, defense and special teams.

Areas for growth. We got to eliminate the penalties. I don't really like any penalties, but specifically the ones that we focus on the most are the pre-snap penalties, which to me are focus penalties, then the post-snap penalties that are discipline penalties.

There's going to be penalties that happen during a play. I don't really like any of 'em, but you can live with them. The pre-snap focus and the post-snap discipline are ones we got to eliminate.

Starting fast, something we did really well the previous games, we got to get back to that.

Points off turnovers was good, but I think we can be better there. We need to score more touchdowns, especially with the field position that we got.

Then obviously we got to be more explosive.

Kind of moving on to Iowa. Obviously a ton of respect for the University of Iowa, their football program, the history and traditions there. Coach Ferentz has been there forever and done a phenomenal job. 34th year at Iowa, 25th as the head coach, which is very, very unusual in today's college football, so it's cool to see.

The offensive coordinator, Brian Ferentz in his seventh year as the offensive coordinator there. A multiple pro style system. Multiple personnel groups, multiple formations, motions and shifts.

Guys that we've been impressed with, the running back, No. 4, Leshon Williams. Running back No. 9 Jaziun know Patterson. Then the guy we're familiar with, the tight end, No. 83, Erick All.

Defensively Phil Parker, again another guy who has been doing it forever. The level of consistency is impressive, is really impressive. His 12th year as the defensive coordinator, 25th year at Iowa overall.

They are a base defense. They do what they do and they do it extremely well and have been doing it a long time. There's obviously some subtle changes, but whether it is 2023 or whether it's 2014, you put the tape on and it's Iowa playing Iowa defense the way they play it. Again, at a high level, been impressive.

Guys that we're impressed with is Cooper DeJean. I really, really am impressed by this young man. Not only how he plays on defense, but also the impact that he makes on special teams as a returner, as gunner, or bullet, depending on how you term it. He's an impressive football player.

No. 13, Joe Evans, the defensive end. Logan Lee, defensive tackle. Linebacker No. 34 Jay Higgins. Safety, No. 30, Quinn Schulte. Those guys are playing at a really, really high level.

Then you talk about special teams. Been impressed with their punter, Tory Taylor, their kick returner, No. 21, Kaden Wetjen. Then their punt returner, again like we've talked about, No. 3, Cooper DeJean.

Looking forward to the opportunity to play the University of Iowa. Looking forward to practice today, as well. Should be another great game between two really well-respected historical Big Ten programs.

Open up to questions.

Has anybody fact checked yet?

Q. (No microphone.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: We're not counting that. You keep saying that. Full stadium White Out.

Q. (No microphone.)

JAMES FRANKLIN: (Coach Franklin doing five push-ups.)

I got to do five because I got to own it. I should have fact checked it. Everybody is accountable around here (laughter).

Q. James, with Drew starting his first White Out, how much do you think last year's experience of him playing a couple drives against Minnesota, then the West Virginia game, how much might that help him handle some of the pressure that could come along with the environment and the atmosphere?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we're really done with the whole first time stuff. First stripe out, first helmet stripe. We're done talking about that stuff.

He had a first start. We're past that. He had a first road start. We're past that. First home game. We're past that. Now he is no longer kind of going through the firsts.

We are very appreciative of having one of the best environments in all of sports, and we're very appreciative of the White Out and what it means for this community and the state, really for college football.

I want our players and our fans to take 30 seconds in the beginning and take it all in, but after that it's all about execution.

Whether it's an Orange Out, a Black Out, a White Out, at the end of the day it's going to come down to football and executing plays and playing well.

I understand your question, but we're past that. We're past the first for Drew and we're now kind of taking the next step in terms of let's go out and consistently play well as a team.

Q. You have talked a lot about explosive plays. You mentioned you need to have more. Two runs of 20-plus yards in three games. What do you have to do to increase the number of explosive plays and what do you have to do to get more than the two runs of 20-plus yards that you've had?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think a couple things. I think most importantly we got to consistently show people that we can throw the ball over their heads because right now there's no doubt about it, although I think Drew has shown what he's able to do and what he's capable of, I still think people are going to say to themselves that we can't allow Kadron and Nick to beat us. I think that's the approach you got to take based on just more evidence of that.

So based on that, people are game planning and saying, What do we have to do in every formation and in every personnel group to have the numbers to give us the advantage? Once we prove on a consistent basis if you're going to do that, that we can take advantage of it by throwing for a high percentage, by making people miss and creating explosives on the perimeter. Then obviously being able to also, like I said in the beginning, throw it over their heads, now people are really having to make a choice because there's enough evidence of both. They're still going to have to make a choice of how they're going to defend us.

But right now I think it's been very obvious that over the first three weeks people are saying their defensive game plan is going to be based on stopping our running game. That is a combination of wide receivers, quarterbacks, tight ends, O-line protection, running back protection. That's all of it. So that we can show that we can consistently be in the passing game and cause real significant problems if you choose to play that way.

To me that's an exciting thing. That's an opportunity for us in the passing game. We've shown signs of it. We got to do it more consistently.

Q. How has Nick Singleton responded to having fewer opportunities for those explosive plays? How do you assess his first three weeks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think those guys have been great. I also think in the Big Ten you look at statistically, we play good defense around here. There's going to be games where

we've got to grind it out. You guys know Iowa. This is probably going to be another one of those games where we're going to have to grind it out. It's going to be a four-quarter game.

You look at their defensive coordinator, what he's been able to do historically, then the style of how they play on offense, it's going to be one of those Big Ten, ground-it-out games.

For me, I'm not really overly concerned with that. We got to find ways to win. There's going to be weeks where we're super explosive based on the opportunities the defense gives us and the plays that we make, then there's going to be other weeks where we got to grind it out and do it a more old-fashioned sense, that old-fashioned model, I may put some fullbacks out there.

Got a reaction in the back of the room (smiling).

I think that's one of the things I've been impressed with, is the maturity of this team in understanding that's how football works, major college football.

A perfect example is not just the running backs but the tight ends. We had that one week where they didn't get many touches. I didn't hear a word out of the tight ends. They know if we do our jobs, those opportunities will come.

There's going to be some weeks where they have 20 catches, and some weeks where the running backs have 30 carries. It really just depends on the week and how the game plays out.

With team success comes individual recognition. I think during the meetings as well they see how people are trying to defend us. They go against a really good defense, our defense practices every single day. I think our coaches and our players understand that.

Do our coaches want more? Do the players want more? Yeah, there's no doubt about it. I think most importantly is are we finding ways to win. There's going to be a ton of different ways we're going to have to do that throughout the season.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your pass-rush.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Are you a gel or a mousse guy?

Q. That would be gel.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Nice.

Q. Mousse was 1980s, I think.

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you can tell, I have no reference on the dates of when things were relevant for hair product.

Q. No use for either, right?

JAMES FRANKLIN: None (smiling).

Q. Pass-rush. Your top edge rushers, Chop, Dani, have half a sack between them. Are those guys doing what you expect or are the numbers misleading?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think we're playing really good team defense. Typically what happens is the five turnovers, most of them are a result of quarterbacks getting the ball out of your hands quicker.

Typically you're going to have one or the other: you're going to have sacks or turnovers. Again, no different than the questions about the running game and things like that.

I think our defense understands and respects, and I know our DBs respect the fact that most of those turnovers came at a result of pressuring the quarterback.

Again, for us it's about what do we have to do to win games. Sometimes that's going to equate to gaudy statistics at one position or another. We'll come in another week and you're saying we had six sacks but we didn't have any interceptions. Why not? Again, these things are usually complementary pieces, if that makes sense.

Do we want a perfect game where we have it all at the end? Yes. But I think our coaches and our defense do a good job of talking about and explaining and respecting what it takes to win. The stats are usually used to reinforce what it takes to win or areas that we need to improve, it's not about the stats as an end all, be all.

I think the other things our guys have understood that we spend a lot of time talking about, as well as had some NFL scouts talk about, true football people, the stats are important but they're watching how you play the game and are you doing your job.

How many times does the defensive end get a tackle for a loss because the D tackle spiked and got penetration in the B gap? The D tackle may get no credit in the stat form, but everybody knows that that D tackle created the tackle for a loss for the other D tackle or for the defensive end.

For us, it's studying football and understanding how did you grade out and how well did you play. Some weeks that's going to equate to a ton of stats, some weeks that's not.

Sometimes you're going to get a sack, and you didn't necessarily do your job. You spiked into the B gap and you were supposed to be in the C gap. Is that a good play? It's a good play when you make a sack, it's not a good play when the ball finds the C gap, the gap you're supposed to be in.

We go for it on fourth down. Is that a good decision? If we pick up the fourth down, it's a good decision. If we don't, it's a bad decision.

It really matters how are you looking at the game, how are you viewing the game. That's where you have to be careful because whether it's PFF or whether it's somebody grading your tape, that's hard to do if you don't know exactly what's being asked.

It's amazing how many times we'll do that when we're breaking film down. You're like, Wow, this is an unbelievable blitz they're running right here, running two guys through the B gap. That's a challenge for us because that goes against rules. Well, is it a great scheme they're running or did they make a mistake, and they benefited from the mistake?

It's just a fine line for us. For us, we want to play good, sound, clean football. If the stats come with that, great. If not, again, back to the statement I made earlier: with team success comes individual recognition.

Q. This is a little off script, but it's something that I'm genuinely curious about your reaction to.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Good, I'm excited about it.

Q. The best football player in the world right now, at least according to me and a lot of people, is a guy that you coached. I wonder how you think and how you feel about what Micah has become, not only as a player but just as a competitor, just an unbelievably relentless force in the game.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, the first thing it does, it makes me think about I wish we had him for that third year rather than canceling the football season. But I'm proud of him. I'm really proud of him for a lot of different reasons. Football is one of them, but it's a small one.

He came and spoke to the team two weeks ago, I think, and just did a phenomenal job. He talked about the game, but talked specifically about Penn State and this community. He sent me and Brent kind of out of nowhere the other day a beautiful, heartfelt, thoughtful message.

I think there was a stat that went out the other day, I think he's in the top 10 all time sacks for the Dallas Cowboys in year two or whatever it is. But he gets very little credit for graduating from Penn State in three years.

I see on social media how frugal he is. I love that. I used to show the guys videos of Ochocinco, one of the most brilliant things ever is he wore fake jewelry the entire time he was in the NFL. Why? Because when you're in the NFL, you wear fake jewelry, everybody assumes it's real, and he's not wasting money on things that don't really matter.

I worry about that a little bit in today's day and age. I'm a supporter of NIL, very much so, but I also worry that it sets up unrealistic expectations of how hard it is to earn a dollar. A lot of times when you're the head football coach and you talk about things like that, people don't want to hear it from me and people in my position. But I worry about that.

I hear stories about our guys wasting money on haircuts or turning down NIL opportunities that they don't think pay enough. I worry about it. I worry about unrealistic expectations of how hard it is to earn a dollar in our country and in our world now. I want our guys to appreciate that.

I think Micah's a great example because I think part of our responsibility as college football coaches that I take very serious is that when our guys leave here that they're equipped and ready to take care of themselves and their families for the next 40 years.

I think NIL can be a positive in teaching them lessons about how to manage your money. I think Micah is a great example of that. He's got more money than most people will ever dream of, but he's complaining about how much a haircut costs on social media.

I'm super proud of him. I'm super proud of the young man that we recruited really from ninth grade, that took us on a roller coaster ride during his recruiting process. We had some tough love when he was here. And he looks back at all this stuff with such appreciation now. He's always been super thoughtful. I loved how he embraced the whole Penn State experience.

You would not find a bigger supporter of our wrestling program because he loved how competitive they were, what Cale has built here. He worked out with those guys.

I don't know if you guys know this, but he's passionate bowler, believes that he can be a professional bowler. Loves to play chess. I'm proud of him. He's growing up to be a really well-rounded individual. Although he's having a ridiculous amount of success when it comes to football, I think that's going to be just a small part of Micah's story. I'm very proud of him.

Q. The three interceptions your cornerbacks had were kind of special plays. They weren't gimme balls that were thrown to them. How much of that is innate ability and how much of that is coached into them?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think a couple things. I think number one, those guys are playing at a real high level. I also would say if you look at most of those guys, most of those guys during the recruiting process and in high school were guys that played both ways.

We talk about the importance of recruiting guys that literally, if you watched on tape, you'd say, This guy could be recruited as a wide receiver, like offensive linemen that we recruit should be dominant defensive linemen.

I also think what Terry Smith specifically and Anthony Poindexter have done in recruiting, coaching and developing DBs is second to none. Penn State has an unbelievable history, not only on the football field with winning and success, the NFL Draft, All-Americans, but for whatever reason that was a position that we had not had a real strong history.

Terry specifically and Dex have changed that. They have changed that. So to see our guys playing the way they're playing right now, making plays on the ball, being a part of the run game and the run fits, playing on special teams. A ton of guys are now playing in the NFL. I think that's harder than people realize.

To change kind of a historical data, and to change a narrative, I think is harder to do than a lot of people realize. Terry's been able to do that. He's really done that from the beginning.

Again, we talk about coming to Penn State at a tough time. We were able to change the narrative of how people were talking about Penn State at that time. Terry has been a

part of all of those things. He's a great coach. He's a great recruiter. He's a great husband and father. He's been a great sounding board for me.

He coaches his guys hard, but I think does it in a way where he never crosses the line, and has their respect. It's amazing how much honesty there is in that room. I mean, very blunt, direct honesty that he has created that culture in that room, not just from him, but player to player, which he's created that culture in that room, which I think is probably more important than ever.

I don't see as much of that in today's day and age where the players will have honest conversations with each other. They all want to be leaders by example, not necessarily have honest, truthful conversations with each other.

It is great to see. The players should get a ton of credit, specifically talk about Cam, Johnny and (indiscernible). Obviously coming into the season and really throughout the season, as well.

Kalen, that's a whole 'nother conversation we can have with the fact that he has earned in this conference, but also nationally. But there's a ton of credit that goes to Terry Smith as a letterman and a constant on our staff here at Penn State. Then also Anthony Poindexter. Those guys have been awesome and have been great complementary pieces to each other.

Q. You mentioned in your opening statement about Iowa's experience at coaching. You've seen Iowa a lot. How does the juxtaposition work out when you're game prepping for a team you've seen a lot and they've seen very little?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, it's almost like opening on the road in the Big Ten. We played Iowa more than anybody. Maybe you could make the argument part of maybe the best team in the west over our team here at Penn State. You could make that argument.

Again, we love that. We're appreciative of the Big Ten for that. I know it's random - random - but I think at the end of the day Manny and Mike and Stacy have had an opportunity to not only see them from playing them but also we got a ton of film.

I would also say specifically with Iowa, they are who they are, and they take tremendous pride in their identity and doing it well. So you know what you're going to get from them. Again, I mean that as a major compliment. They're going to have wrinkles that are going to cause you challenges every year. But they do what they do and they do it well. It aligns with their identity.

I don't think it takes very long to get accustomed to who they are and their style of football. I think there's enough film and evidence out there for our coordinators, as well as the rest of our staff.

Q. Lambert-Smith, how has he done from a consistency standpoint this year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, real well. Obviously we all saw it was an opportunity to get him an explosive play and a touchdown on Saturday. When you go wideout with your

running back, you're going to get your touches in our offense. But if you can get that one explosive play, if not two explosive plays, a game, it changes everything, right? It changes the complexion of the game, it changes the stats, which you guys are big on stats in this press conference today. It changes all those things, right?

I just have been really proud of KeAndre, his growth on the field, on game days, his maturity, his growth daily at practice and how he works and how he leads by example, how he makes plays consistently, how he is with contested catches going against some of the best DBs in the country every single day. Iron sharpens iron. How he is off the field in terms of his grades and graduation.

I've been very pleased with his consistency as a young man and as a football player. Again, I think you're going to continue to see him make big plays for us and have a big year.

There's no doubt about it that, whether it's the tight ends you guys mentioned or whether it's KeAndre or our running backs, we got to get those guys touches, and as many touches as we can, because when that happens usually good things follow.

We go into it each week with that mindset, that we got to get these guys touches. Again, based on what the defense does, our plan was to get was it game one where Theo didn't get a lot of touches, am I right? Our plan was not to not get those guys the ball, our plan was to get them the ball. That creates opportunities whether it's KeAndre or somebody else. That's how the game goes.

But for us, I think when you look at the end of the season and take the whole thing into consideration, he's going to make his plays and he's going to get his touches. That's important to us and that's important to him.

Again, I also think KeAndre has gotten to a point where he's mature enough to understand how it all fits together, putting the team first, what the NFL scouts and the GMs are truly looking for, what Iowa is evaluating when they watch tape. Those are the things that matter the most.

Q. You kind of segued into tight ends not from a usage standpoint, we love to talk about. This program for a while has produced guys who have long NFL careers. Is that an emphasis that you had on that position group when you came here or has it just kind of worked out that way?

JAMES FRANKLIN: No, I'm a big believer in the tight end position having a chance to be a differentiator for you in college football now, especially when the true tight ends that are able to be used in both the pass and the running game, so people can't put 'em in the categories, they've become mismatches there.

I think if you look at the guys that we've had at that position coaching, I think Ty is a great example of that, have done a great job of continuing to build on that.

I think when you talk about spreading the wealth and statistics, I think last year with Brenton Strange and Theo and Ty is a great example of that. You talk about stats, impacting a game.

I would say that Brenton Strange could have been in a situation where he had a few more touches, but we played three tight ends, and I think Brenton still ended up getting drafted where? What round? Second round.

Again, I think the stats are helpful and they're easy to find, and they're kind of a cheat sheet. But again, if you're studying football, real football, what Brenton Strange brought to our offense in the run and the pass game, that is valuable. That's valuable at the college level.

Having a room like that I think is going to be important to us. It's allowed us to be balanced in the run and the pass game. It's allowed us to be multiple, which can be really challenging in terms of being able to get in the heavy sets and be able to get in the spread sets.

So, yeah, it's part of our big picture plan and model here. That's why we're always going to recruit that position hard and heavy. Not only do they help you on offense, they help you on special teams as well. I think we've had a model that's worked for us, but also worked for young men, as well, in terms of their careers.

Q. Another kind of big picture question on that. Iowa has been doing what Iowa does for a long time. We talk about that every year. You've been here for 10 years. You have guideposts and things that you believe in for program building.

JAMES FRANKLIN: What was the term you said?

Q. Guideposts, things you want to do with your program.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I just didn't hear you. I know what it means.

Q. I'm also an over-communicator.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Over-clarifier as my wife would say.

Q. How do you change things up enough that you're not going into Iowa and playing them the same way you played last year and they're playing you the same as last year?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think something that's really important, whether it's self-scouting your offense, defense, special teams week to week, but also self-scouting your program. Say okay, we're going to have some tweaks and off-season studies and things that we're going to do to grow and get better, is really important, especially when you talk about kind of where we have been, taking that next step, those things are really important.

Those things have to align with your culture and they have to align with your identity and what you're trying to do because I think what happens is sometimes people say, Okay, we need to make these things, but they don't align with your culture and they don't align with your identity, and now you have problems. The bullets don't match. You

can't connect the dots. It seems inconsistent to the players. That's where I think you can have some real challenges and problems.

I think that really starts with two things, and that's hiring and recruiting, making sure that you're hiring the right people in the building, and recruiting the right people into the locker room, and that you're transparent with them on what they're signing up for.

Then saying, Okay, they have to understand how to blend within the culture and align kind of with the identity, but then also allow a Manny Diaz to be Manny Diaz and play to his strengths and allow his strengths and experiences to add value to our overall organization, be able to have Drew that we talked about, bring him into our organization. Like we talked about maybe a week or two ago, not put restrictions on Drew that it limits his development and his ability to be a unique player.

Those things are really important. Does Drew fit our culture and does he align and agree with how we do things and what our identity is, and then do we create an environment that allows the coaches and players to become the best versions of themselves and thrive in this culture and thrive in this identity, which is really what we're trying to do, and I think everybody is trying to do. Every organization is ultimately trying to do that. That's that fine balancing act between the two.

Seems long today or is it just my answers are long (smiling)? Usually if I talk long, it seems like less questions.

Q. I asked about the offensive line on Saturday. Now that you had a chance to go back and watch the film, what did you think about the way they played, particularly in the first half?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think, number one, I think we're doing some really good things and we're playing a lot of guys. There are signs of being a really physical unit with the offensive line and tight ends.

I would also say, going back to the film and really in the week leading up to the game, we had a ton of respect for Illinois and their front. I would say after the game we felt the same way.

I think they got a real front seven. I think they got some guys up there that can cause a lot of people challenges. So it was a really good opportunity for our O-line and tight ends to go against that. I think we're going to go against similar fronts throughout the year.

I think it's probably a good - trying to think of the right term for that...

Q. Litmus test.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Pretty good litmus test, thank you, for us to see kind of where we're at, we've improved, where we need to grow, what are our strengths, what are some weaknesses, because we did have a ton of respect for them coming into the game, and felt after the game the same thing.

As you guys know, Iowa is built in a similar way. I would say if you look at Illinois, specifically Coach Bielema, he's from that Iowa tree, so there's going to be a lot of similarities this week as well.

But, yeah, I think it was a good litmus test for us, a good opportunity to learn from it and build on.

Q. How is Kaden Saunders, redshirt freshman version, different than last season? Moving forward beyond the punt return role, what can he add to this offense and grow within this offense?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, so I think he's really starting to build the confidence and acquire the strength. I think the big thing for him as a true freshman is he was an under-sized guy, but was also needed the time in the weight room to develop and get stronger. Now he's an under-sized guy, which is fine, but he's got the strength and the confidence to go out and play the way we need him to play. I think that will just continue to grow throughout his career.

I think the way he catches the ball right now as a punt returner is one of those things that no one's talking about. That's under-appreciated. Catching the ball in traffic the way he is, with such confidence, with such poise, there's a ton of value. That ball gets to the ground, it rolls another 12 yards. That ball gets to the ground, it hits one of our players.

I think it's a really good starting point to build on.

Then on offense, he's shown signs as well in games and in practice that that role will continue to grow. But we're very pleased, we're very pleased with Kaden. He's been a really good teammate. He's got a huge smile on his face. He's taken a very important role and growing in it.

I think you're going to see he's going to make some big plays for us as a punt returner as well. I think the first important thing is someone that's going to be a great catcher of the football as a returner, but also a great decision maker, as well. When do you catch it? When do you run up in traffic? How do you communicate the short kick so other people on the field are aware as well? He's done a really nice job of that so far. Again, I think that's an under-appreciated thing that's going on on our team right now.

You watch college football, I watched a play last night, whether it's kick return, punt return, where decision making, we're going to show that play from last night to our team today. That's one of those things that's under-appreciated, in my opinion.

Thank you.

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