



Penn State News Conference

Head Coach James Franklin
Media Day
Thursday, December 26, 2019
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



QUESTIONS FOR HEAD COACH JAMES FRANKLIN

COACH FRANKLIN: First of all, like always, I want to thank everybody coming out and supporting Penn State football and supporting the Cotton Bowl, our local beat writers that have traveled. We appreciate you guys being here.

Excited about the opportunity. The Cotton Bowl has been great. Dallas Cowboys have been great. The facilities have been phenomenal. The [Hilton] Anatole, where we are staying, has been great. And we are very appreciative of the whole experience. My first Cotton Bowl, been really cool. So wanted to take a minute and let everybody know how appreciative we are of this opportunity and being here.

Obviously, the game, we're excited about. Still have got a little bit of work to do. But excited about playing Memphis and really happy for Coach [Ryan] Silverfield and this opportunity that he's got. And looking forward to playing a team that's been very, very successful, not only this year but over the last couple years. And they're used to what everybody is dealing with in college football. It's probably been magnified for them in terms of turnover at the end of the season.

Coach [Joe] Lorig gives us a pretty good perspective. Coach Lorig was at Memphis for the last couple of years, so he knows their mentality and their personnel very well. But we're looking forward to that opportunity.

Q. How did you go about choosing Kirk [Ciarrocca]? And what did you want to accomplish? Everyone has -- when they make a change, they probably have a list of things they'd like to acquire in especially a lead assistant like that. What did you feel the OC needed? And what did Kirk give you that you really liked?

COACH FRANKLIN: I want to apologize. I could anticipate this press conference was going to be very little about the Cotton Bowl and about the most recent news. I get that.

So for me, a couple of things, I think. We wanted to get a proven play caller, a guy that's got a history of playing -- of calling plays but also somebody that our systems were similar, that there would be some carryover and then also someone -- it's a fine line because you go out and you hire someone because they've obviously been successful doing what they do but also the humility to say, look, Penn State is returning a bunch of starters.

And obviously as an offensive coordinator, an experienced offensive coordinator, an intelligent offensive coordinator, we're used to adjusting. So someone that would be willing to come in and



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say, Okay, what can we keep the same from a verbiage and terminology standpoint? What are the things that I have conviction about that I need to do in terms of calling the offense to be comfortable? So what's the blend?

What can stay the same with what Penn State's been doing? What do I have conviction about, what I've done in my career specifically at Minnesota? And how can we take the best of both of those worlds and blend them together that's going to be in everyone's best interest?

As you guys know, it's not like this process started when Ricky [Rahne] left. I'm constantly keeping lists. Michael Hazel helps me putting studies together and studying data and backing up some of our thoughts with data and who we want to be and where we want to go. But was able to narrow it down pretty quickly and then be able to hire Kirk.

I also think there's some people that probably believe in this, and there's some people who don't. I also believe strongly in hiring people that want to be here and Kirk really wanted to be here. He's from Pennsylvania. Grew up watching and supporting Penn State, and I think that's important. He's fired up about being here. His wife is fired up about coming back to Pennsylvania.

Obviously we have a top-ten program to offer, unbelievable support and fan base, recruiting going well. So it makes sense in a lot of different directions. But there's a lot of factors that go into it, but those were the main ones.

Q. Obviously Donald Driver came to practice earlier this week. I know you coached him for a while in the NFL. First of all, how nice was it to see him? Second of all, if your players can take one thing away from his visit, what would it be?

COACH FRANKLIN: Donald is my guy. I love Donald. I can't believe his kids are in high school now. It's crazy to me. His wife is awesome. Donald is a total class act, and I was fortunate because when you coach in the NFL and your best player is a great guy and sets the tone for the whole organization, you're blessed. And Donald was like that. He was like that with me. It was the first time for our players to get to interact with him. They have all seen the pictures I have of Donald in my basement.

But really when you got Brett Favre and Donald Driver kind of setting the tone for the whole organization, it's been phenomenal. And we've stayed in touch ever since. And obviously coming to Texas reached out to him and he was able to come back and watch practice and then visit with our team afterwards.



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So, I mean, the guy has got an amazing background. I think he played 14 years in the NFL, four Pro Bowls, all-time leading receiver in Green Bay history, was inducted into their Hall of Fame. I actually went back. Donald invited me back. I was back in Green Bay for his Hall of Fame induction. I'm very, very proud of him. And I feel blessed that I've had the opportunity to coach him and get to know him. He was great, as you can imagine, with our guys.

So I think it's really important. I was talking about it this morning. I show the guys a video pretty much every team meeting and try to give them a little piece of information. But I think studying successful people, what makes them successful, successful teams, successful organizations, so on and so forth, I think is really valuable. No different than learning from mistakes that people make. You shouldn't have to make the mistake yourself to learn from it. If a teammate makes a mistake or someone that you see in the media or social media or whatever it may be, you can learn from those mistakes without having to go through it.

But more importantly, being able to study successful people and organizations and try to mimic or steal some of their traits is important.

Q. Is there any team that Memphis reminds you of that you guys may have played over the time that you've been at Penn State? How much have you been able to lean on Coach [Joe] Lorig to try to get some inside information on the Tigers?

COACH FRANKLIN: Obviously Coach Lorig has been really valuable, obviously. My history in the state of Tennessee and knowing Memphis and what the city is like and what the university is like kind of gives me some perspective on it as well.

And then the last couple of coaches that have come through there, they really got it rolling and have supported the program extremely well, not only the university but also the community.

When I try to make a comparison to a team that we've played this year, I'm not sure if there's one that jumps out. Maybe Pitt in some ways. But I think it's going to be a tremendous challenge.

I've talked about it already. Offensively, they just find ways to manufacture yards and points. They're very good at the skill positions. The quarterback has got a really good feel and understanding of how to run the offense and how to take what the defense is giving. Their running backs and their receivers are as good as we have seen this year. Defensively, they are high pressure, they're aggressive. I think they're really good up front. I think their front seven is really good.



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And then special teams, they've had a history of strong culture on special teams for a while. When Coach Lorig was there, that has continued. After Coach Lorig has left, Coach [Pete] Lembo has done a nice job. I think we have to be ready in this game for them to take some risks.

We saw it in the biggest game maybe in program history in the conference championship game against Cincinnati. They started the game with a popover on-sides kick. I think that's a little bit how they're wired. And I also could see them doing those things against us. They returned three kicks for touchdowns.

Our kicker typically kicks the ball deep into the end zone. I could see them saying most people aren't going to be to bring the ball out six, seven yards deep in the end zone. I could see them bringing it out and things like that.

We are just trying to be prepared of showing our guys a lot of clips of things you see in bowl games, common themes that show up in bowl games that don't lead to success. Tried to show a bunch of those things.

I think we got a pretty good idea. We have a healthy respect for our opponent in Memphis. But our guys have been good. We practiced well and we haven't had -- I think our local media know -- we take a lot of pride in the discipline in our program. We seem to have always had a guy on a bowl trip that we have had to send home, and we haven't had that (knocking). We haven't had that this year. And I think that's a big part of the leadership.

The seniors had a player-only meeting to make sure we didn't have any distractions or issues like that. So I think that's a real positive for us, and I'm proud of that. But I think a lot of it has to do that we have a healthy respect for our opponent. But our guys have been really good at controlling the things that we can control.

Our practices have been great. Have gotten great feedback from the Cotton Bowl staff that our players have been very appreciative and well-mannered, which is very important to me and I know our Penn State community as well. So far so good. But at the end of the day, we need to find a way to get a win Saturday evening getting on that plane and flying back to State College.

Q. When you have a Group of Five team playing one of the best brands in college football like Penn State, they know that this is the biggest game that they've played in school history. How do you guard against your team maybe not looking at Memphis as one of the brands that they play in the Big Ten and something like that? That it might be bigger for a Memphis team that hasn't been in a game like this?



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COACH FRANKLIN: I think mentality in bowl games is critical. Mentality in bowl games is critical. You see it every single year. So I think the first thing is talking about it and discussing it. This is the biggest game in Memphis football history, in my opinion. I'm not sure if you feel differently. New Year's Six bowl game, all those types of things. We've discussed that. We've talked about it. I think mentality in bowl games is critical.

Again, that goes back to the healthy respect that we have for our opponent, not just our opponent but what you've just discussed. And, again, I think our guys have prepared well. But we better be ready for a dog fight.

And there's a bunch of examples of what you're talking about -- and we've shown that to our players -- examples of a Group of Five playing power conferences and some of those games not going as people anticipate.

At the end of the day for us, part of us preparing our players is not just the schemes, it's also making sure that they understand what they're getting themselves into. And this is a very good football team. This is a well-coached football team. This is an extremely prideful team and proud community as well. And we better be ready to play.

Q. This is your third New Year's Six bowl in four years for the senior class. If you think back four years ago, there was a senior class here that never even achieved a ranking. How did you, looking back on it, instill that program's success and winning culture? How does it sustain through the loss of all these coordinators and transcendent players like Trace [McSorley] and [Saquon] Barkley through the years?

COACH FRANKLIN: It's been a lot of hard work. A lot of hard work by a lot of people, from President [Eric] Barron to Sandy Barbour to staff to coaches to players, a lot of the players that you just mentioned there, to the entire community. It's been a lot of hard work, and we're very proud of it.

And I think that's one of the steps to getting where we want to go, is that consistency. When you're part of these types of conversations on a yearly basis, it gives you opportunity to keep chipping away at taking that next step as a program.

We take a lot of pride in it, all the things that you just mentioned. And I think the reality is you have to embrace what college football is in terms of staff turnover. In terms of players leaving for the NFL or whatever it may be, you better be prepared for that, you better have a plan, you better



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be thorough. But we're very proud. We're very proud of where Penn State was when we got here and where Penn State is. And I think Saturday is going to be an opportunity to take another step on that journey that we're on.

We're very appreciative, again, to the Cotton Bowl. We're very appreciative of this opportunity. We have a healthy respect for our opponent. And we want to make sure we go out there on Saturday and play the way our fans and our lettermen and our team expects to play. I think we all realize a win in a bowl game sends that graduating senior class out the right way with a real positive taste in their mouth.

Allows us to get bowl rings that say "Cotton Bowl Champions," which is significant. It is significant. They'll look down at that bowl ring for the rest of their lives and see "Cotton Bowl Champions." We get to bring that trophy back and put it in our facility, which means a lot. It also does a lot for momentum, going into spring ball, going into the off-season, recruiting, all of it.

So I think ten wins is a differentiator for a lot of programs and getting to 11 is a whole other conversation. So we want to be a part of those types of conversations at the end of the season and moving into the next.