

Big Ten Conference Football Championship Game: Oregon vs Penn State

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

Penn State Nittany Lions
Coach James Franklin
Dvon J-Thomas
Drew Allar

Postgame Press Conference

Oregon - 45, Penn State - 37

JAMES FRANKLIN: Like always, I want to thank the media, the Penn State media, that came out and covered us. We appreciate it. Also want to thank the fans who came out and supported us. We truly appreciate that and don't take it for granted.

First thing is you've got to give Oregon and Coach Lanning credit. They did a really good job. Created some challenging situations for us on offense, defense and special teams.

But I'm proud of our guys. We played the number one team in the country and had a chance to win the game at the end.

One of the things I talked to the guys in the locker room about is this is a new college football. And especially to veterans like Dvon, you have to understand that this is new college football. And there's a 12-team playoff, and our season has just begun.

And we'll find out tomorrow whether it's a home game in 16 inches of snow or whether it's an away game on the road. We'll be excited about whatever opportunity comes and we'll be prepared and ready because we have two losses this year, two top five teams. Had a chance to win both of those games. Learned a ton from it. Same thing tonight.

I kind of looked back at the game before I really study it in detail. Early on the four penalties were significant. Four



penalties for 15 yards. We had another penalty for 15 yards. And you can't do that against the No. 1 team in the country and expect to win giving those type of yards away. Penalties are one thing; 15 yards is another.

I can deal with the face mask penalties. They're going to happen sometimes when you're just playing. That's going to happen from time to time. The other things we've got to get eliminated. And then the turnovers, two turnovers to zero.

We won pretty much every major statistic besides that. But since the beginning of time, turnover ratio is significant, maybe the most important stat in all of college football.

We also won the second-most important stat in all of football which was explosive plays. But at the end of the day, we didn't do enough to beat the No. 1 team in the country.

But I'm proud of our guys. We're going to learn from it. We're going to flush it. We're going to move forward. We're going to get better because of it. We will get better because of this. And we'll be ready to play whoever they tell us we're playing Sunday.

Proud of these two guys. They've been awesome. Dvon's been awesome for all 11 years that I've had with him at Penn State. He's been with me the entire time. I'm proud of him. And Drew's been phenomenal, too. Great leaders for us and great players.

Again, give Oregon credit, but more importantly, I'm proud of everybody in that locker room and how we competed tonight.

Q. Can you take us through that last play? Was Trey (phonetic) the primary on that? And can you take us through that from your perspective?

DREW ALLAR: So the primary was Trey, trying to get the ball down the field. Moricki (phonetic) was the strong safety. I saw him hold and not get any depth and tried to give Trey a chance. I've got to do a better job of him or nobody. I've just got to see the leverage with the DB and



give him more of a back shoulder, around the body where it's going to be him or nobody and move on in the progression. But that's what I saw in that play.

JAMES FRANKLIN: And give their kid credit, he made a heck of a play.

Q. Can you comment on the defense? And also what was your thinking on the two-point play?

JAMES FRANKLIN: First of all, again, we knew that was going to be a challenging team. Three wide receivers, a quarterback that's played a ton of football and won a ton of games. So we knew it was going to be a challenging match-up.

And, again, I think early in the game we didn't start out the way we're capable of starting out and the penalties didn't help.

I think we had a face mask penalty, a face mask penalty again, which those will happen. Then we had a personal foul and then unnecessary roughness. So that made it hard.

But they've got a challenging scheme. They've got really good players that -- we knew going into the game, 15 was going to be a problem. Tez Johnson, had ton of a respect for him. He ended up having a heck of a game.

I thought our defense really came together there in the second half, gave us a chance there with a big stop to win the game at the end. But we weren't able to get it done.

The area that probably for both offense and defense, which I think was a critical point in the game, was the start of the second half. We've been great in the third quarter. We gave up points on defense, and we didn't get any points on offense. That was a really important segment of the game that we didn't capitalize.

Then the two-point play, we spend a ton of time on the analytics. We were having a tough time stopping them. We knew we were going to have to score points, and we wanted to try to win the game in regulation.

So going for two to give us the best chance to win in regulation, we thought was the plan that we needed to take and the approach that we needed to take. When you don't pick it up, obviously that's going to get criticized. I get it.

The next one, you could make the argument, you go for two again. But if you don't go for two at that point, then you're a two-possession game at the end. So going for one the next touchdown allowed us to put ourselves in a

position, one more touchdown allows us to go for two, send it to overtime and go from there.

But the strategy is about winning the game in regulation. We felt like we needed to be aggressive. So that was the strategy we took.

Q. Do you feel like you've earned the right to host a game this week, on Saturday? And would you be surprised if you don't?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm going to be honest with you, I don't spend a ton of time on that. We literally spent the entire week on Oregon. And for me to sit here and feel like I can understand or predict how those things are going to go when you got all those people in that room and all those personalities, I'm not sure.

I'm fairly confident that we're going to be in the playoffs. I can speak on that. And I know these guys and myself and the rest of the guys in the locker room will be excited about the opportunity that comes.

Do I think our resumé matches up with anybody in the country? Yeah, I think it does. Again, we lost by one possession to the No. 1 team in the country. And I think earlier in the season we lost to the No. 3 team in the country at the time, if I remember correctly. Is that correct? And a one-possession game as well.

So I don't think there's anybody in the country that's got that type of resumé in the Big Ten, arguably the best conference in all of college football.

So, again, I'm not in that room. We don't make those decisions. We'll be waiting eagerly to find out who we play and then we'll take all the necessary strategies and planning to put ourselves and our team in the best position to be successful.

And wherever the game is, we're going to need our fans. If it's a home game, which would be phenomenal, we're going to need that place rocking like it's never rocked before. And we'll go from there.

Q. Dvon, what did Oregon do so well that made it very difficult to stop? Anything in particular that you could put your finger on, offensively?

DVON J-THOMAS: To be quite frank, they sped up our defense. That's a credit to their offensive coordinator. They did an incredible job of speeding us up.

To be quite frank, we also just made a lot of mistakes. That's a credit to them. When you have such a talented

team and you're playing at an elite level, the margin of error is very, very small.

Coach Franklin alluded to that after the game, the margin of error is so small, so slim in these games that it makes all the difference.

I feel like defensively that we made more mistakes in that game than we've made in almost any other game. And you know it's up to a great team to capitalize. I feel like Oregon did that today.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Let me speak on that, too. Again, you've got to give them credit. They do a really good job of making it a space game. They got three wide receivers that are challenging -- 15 is really challenging in space. They've got a really good running back. And they've got a quarterback that is poised and confident, distributes the ball.

Then to Dvon's point, they do a really good job of changing up tempo -- going fast at times, then slowing down. Then look-look, see what we're in defensively, look to the sideline, check the call, and then we're trying to check the call. It was a chess game the entire time.

Again, give them credit. But some of the things they were doing to cause stress and their athleticism also created some of the mistakes and challenges that we made.

Q. You mentioned the first sequence out of the first half. Did you consider going for the fourth-and-5 before the missed field goal? And what was the thought process there?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, if it would have been fourth-and-3, everything that we discussed ahead of time we would have went for it. We talked about that on the headset in terms of sequencing, how to call it.

But when it was fourth-and-5, I thought the field goal was the right approach to come out with points. Barker had been kicking really well all year long. You make that field goal, you're in a much different situation moving forward with a chance to win the game.

But, again, when you don't pick it up, I get it. I get the question. When you don't make the field goal, then everybody says should have gone for it. I get it.

Q. Drew, did they do anything specifically to take Tyler away from you a little bit more in the second half than the first half?

DREW ALLAR: I mean, on third down specifically they

tried to bracket him a little bit. Honestly, it kind of opened up our backside progressions. There was a couple early in the game where I hit Trey on a third-and-15 in man coverage where the strong safety just bracketed Tyler.

So they tried to take him away as much as they could. But, I mean, he still had a phenomenal game in the pass game and the run game. So he had a great game today.

And they tried to do a couple different things, but when you tried to focus solely on one guy, it creates opportunities for other guys. And I thought the receivers did a good job of stepping up and making plays when they had their opportunities today.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I thought they did a good job on third down, specifically of bracketing. It's hard to do it on normal downs. But I thought they did a good job, like Drew said, he did a good job distributing the ball and it created opportunities for other guys.

Q. There were a couple different timeouts where you were speaking with the officials on the field. Looked like you were a little aggravated. I was wondering what those interactions were about. And how you would assess that area of the game tonight?

JAMES FRANKLIN: There was a couple calls that we didn't get that I thought we should have. One of the calls that I thought was a critical point in the game was the two-minute drive with a catch on the sideline to Omari, I thought was a catch. And looking on the Jumbotron, it looked like it was a catch.

I get you're going to miss some calls, but it's two minutes. So everybody says, okay, well, slow down so they can review the drive. It's a 2-minute drive; we can't slow down. In a critical game like that, in my opinion, they should have buzzed down and checked that.

We'll watch the video of it. Maybe I'm wrong. But what I saw on the field and on the Jumbotron, that was a catch. And you can't miss those calls in these types of games, especially when you've got replay. Just buzz down. It's too important.

So I thought we could have got a couple of those calls. There was a time late in the game where I thought they needed to protect Drew where he was hung up in a pile and kind of got slammed down late. There was another time where you're not supposed to pull people off the pile.

It is what it is, but the catch on the sideline, to me, that's a critical moment in the game and it was close enough that it should have been buzzed down and at least reviewed.

It is what it is. We'll control the things that we can control. And then obviously that's not one of them.

I was being asked if you want to challenge it. In a 2-minute drive, it's hard to do that. It's hard to stop and burn a timeout when you need those timeouts at the end of the game. To me, that should be managed by them.

Q. James and Drew, why were Nick and Kaytron so productive today. You ran for almost 300 yards?

DREW ALLAR: I think it starts with the type of players they are. They're two special backs. Obviously they're special players but they're special teammates and humans in general.

But I think that's the credit to the offensive line as well, especially getting the engine going on our front side of our, just mid-zone to outside zone plays, and allowing Nick and Kaytron to not get hit until they were on the second and third level.

And when they get momentum going, they're really hard to bring down. And there was a couple times where they bounced off guys at the line of scrimmage and made something out of nothing.

I think it's a credit to the type of players they are and then also the offensive line having a really good day up front.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I would say, to your point, Oregon entered the game 22nd in the country in rush defense, giving up 112 yards per game. And we rushed 292 yards today on them. Kaytron averaged 8.9 yards per carry and Nick Singleton averaged 10.5. Both went over 100 yards.

Like Drew said, it's a credit to the O line and tight ends and obviously those two young men. I also think it was the balance and our ability to both run and pass throughout the game.

And then you've got to give Coach Trautwein and Ty Howle, Ja'Juan Seider and Coach Kotelnicki a ton of credit as well. That's a very well-coached team. And we found a way to manufacture yards and points.

Again, we just made it harder than it needed to be in the first quarter of the game. And it's hard to do that against this type of opponent and expect to win.

Q. The four passing touchdowns by Gabriel, the most by any quarterback against a top 10 pass defense, one of the highest efficiency numbers as well, what were they doing to keep him that efficient and in particular

in the first half and their tight ends?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Again, he's a really good player. He's started as many games as there is in college football. He's been very, very successful. He's very efficient. I was very impressed with him on film watching how poised and relaxed he is.

He gets the ball out quick. He's decisive. He's got three receivers that can make plays and have made plays against pretty much everybody.

They got one of the better tight ends in college football as well. And they do a nice job. You've got to give them a ton of credit, which we have. And obviously there's some things that I think we could have tightened up as well.

I think the other thing that factored in is we weren't able to get as many sacks and tackles for loss in this game that we're used to and get them off schedule. I'll be interested to watch that film as well, and with Abdul Carter and Dani Dennis-Sutton we've been able to produce sacks and pressure, as well as Dvon and the boys inside.

And I could be wrong, but there wasn't one holding call in the game. That will be interesting to watch. And I don't want this to come off the wrong way: I give Oregon a ton of credit, but the penalties were pretty lopsided, and I have more of an issue with the ones that could have been reviewed. The nonreviewable ones, they're going to happen. But the ones that need to be reviewed, need to be reviewed, in my opinion.

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