

Big Ten Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Penn State Nittany Lions Coach James Franklin

Press Conference



JAMES FRANKLIN: Good afternoon. Appreciate the opportunity to be with you. I'd like to start out by recognizing our Commissioner Tony Petitti for his leadership and guidance as college football continues to evolve. He's done a phenomenal job. Proud to be associated with him.

I'm grateful for the alignment we have at Penn State with our president Neeli Bendapudi has been phenomenal, and our athletic director Pat Kraft. We're entering year 4 together. Year 4 together with Pat and Neeli, and that leadership has been incredible. This is, I think, the third president and third AD I've had, so that relationship has been critical, and their leadership has been phenomenal.

I'd like to thank the media for all your work in helping to elevate the game, Penn State football, and for telling the stories of our great student-athletes.

Fortunate today to bring three of our student-athletes in that we're very, very proud of: Drew Allar, senior starting quarterback, third straight year as a starter, is on track to graduate this fall. Since 1956 he is one of two FBS quarterbacks with 800-plus completions, 50-plus touchdowns, and 10 or less interceptions. Done a phenomenal job of protecting the football in terms of touchdown to interception ratio, and we expect that to continue this year.

Nick Dawkins, a six-year senior, who won the 2024 Wuerffel Trophy, continues to lead on and off the field, already has two degrees is in a position to get a third graduate degree this season.

Then Zakee Wheatley, a fifth-year senior who's also set to graduate this fall. He's had his hand in nine takeaways in his career. He's a ball magnet, the ball loves Zakee, and we think he's going to have a foe nominal year this year.

Excited about the additions to our staff this season with Jim Knowles and Stan Drayton. Two veteran coaches with head coach and championship level experience. This is the best combined personnel that I think we've had at Penn

State, and when I talk about personnel, I'm talking about players and staff, from a depth, from a talent standpoint, and from an experience standpoint. So we're very excited about that.

Talking about our staff in a little bit more detail, pretty unique and something that we're very proud of, we have 19 former Penn State football players, lettermen on our staff working in a variety of roles that are doing a phenomenal job for us. When it comes to player development, we expect to have anywhere between 10 and 12 guys drafted this year. We've averaged over five draft picks per year in my 12 years at Penn State, a stat that we're very, very proud of.

You look at the development really since we arrived, in 2016 we won the Big Ten Championship, but we only had one guy drafted that year. So you look at the production and the development we've had in that area, and I'm very proud of what we've been able to do. That one guy was Chris Godwin.

We added eight guys from the portal this year. We're not a big portal team. We'll go out and make some moves and make some adjustments to fill maybe a gap that we have in our program, very similar to maybe programs in the past used to use junior colleges or developmental program. We embrace that. But we will go out and make moves in the portal where we need to. We've got eight young men that we're excited about the impact they're going to be able to make for us this year.

As I enter my 12th year at Penn State, it remains a tremendous honor to lead this program and this remarkable fan base. Beaver Stadium will look a little bit different. I think you guys know we're in the middle of a stadium project that will not be done this year. We'll have another year we'll have to get through with that, but we expect Beaver Stadium to be rocking like it always is.

I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to be a head coach for 15 years, 3 years in the SEC and the last 12 at Penn State. I do think that experience -- I think myself and Coach Bielema have that experience there. I think that experience in both conferences has been really valuable



for my time at Penn State.

Appreciate this opportunity as always. Appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you and visit, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you guys may have.

Q. I wanted to ask you just about Drew Allar and the leadership style and what have you seen in him, how has he been able to grow over the course of time up until this season in leading this football team?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm just proud of him. Drew has made tremendous growth every single year, all the way back to recruiting. I don't know if a lot of people remember, but Drew, when we first started recruiting, was a three-star recruit, kind of a throwback recruit. Kept getting better, kept moving up the charts. Depending on which recruiting service you follow, some people had him as the No. 1 quarterback in the country before it was all said and done.

Showed up on campus, was a backup quarterback for us as a true freshman behind an NFL quarterback, and has gotten better every single year, really in every single area. He's 6'5". He's now 235 pounds, can make every throw on the field, has shown that he can hurt people with his feet, and has really, really made tremendous strides as a leader, holding himself to a high standard and willing to have tough conversations with his teammates as well.

He's made significant leaps every year. We expect him to take another significant leap this year. Most people had him projected as a first round draft choice last year, and he decided to come back to school, unfinished business collectively as a team but also as an individual.

I'm a big Drew fan. You guys get a chance to get around him, you'll feel the same way. He's really what it's all about. It's team, team, team. It's community. It's Penn State. He does things the right way, and I couldn't be more proud of him.

Q. You mentioned that you feel like you've had the best personnel this year that you've ever had at Penn State. Does that add pressure for you guys to feel like this is your year to go win a championship?

JAMES FRANKLIN: The way I would describe it is this, right? There's a ton of conversations that are happening nationally. We embrace that. We've earned that based on what we've been able to do and what we've got coming back. There's a lot of people that are excited on a national level talking about us.

The reality is, when it comes to the Lasch Football Building or when it comes to local, these are always the

expectations at Penn State. We had what a lot of people would consider a really good season last year. We were a game away from playing for the National Championship, and you could actually make the argument a drive away from playing for the National Championship, but it didn't feel that way, right? Because the expectations at Penn State are really high.

We embrace that. I came to Penn State understanding that and knowing that. Our players did as well. So I think the conversations that you're talking about nationally are happening, and we appreciate that, but it hasn't really changed close to home, and it hasn't changed internally in our program because these are always our expectations.

Let's also be honest. It's a great conversation, but who really cares about preseason rankings? They mean nothing. It's a good argument to have and everybody has fun with it, but the only rankings that matter are the ones that happen at the end of the season, and that's what we're concerned about. The only way we'll do that is by handling our business today.

Q. Tyler Warren was such an integral part of your offense last season and just impacted games in so many ways and won games in a lot of instances. How do you replace that production? I assume it's spread out over a number of people, but who are some of the people you're going to be counting on to pick up some of that slack, I guess?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Tyler was a special player, right? It's interesting because two years ago I sat in a meeting room with our tight ends and we had two tight ends, Theo Johnson and Tyler Warren, were deciding what was going to happen and who was going to come back and who was going to declare. Theo Johnson decides to declare, ends up being a second round draft choice with the Giants. Tyler comes back and obviously has an unbelievably memorable season, an all time season in Penn State history and really college football history.

We kind of had a unique situation at running back this year. I thought it was going to be the same deal. I thought one of those guys would decide to declare for the NFL and the other one would come back. They both decided to come back.

So when you talk about taking some of that production, we've got two great running backs. You know as well as anybody Penn State from a historical standpoint at the running back position, been a ton of really good players. It's amazing to me that both Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen have a chance to be the all time leading rushers in Penn State history, 1 and 2, and they've been sharing

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

carries their entire career. Obviously they're going to play a big role in that.

Our tight end room, we've had as much production out of our tight end room as anybody in the country. Khalil Dinkins is a guy that not a whole lot of people are talking about, but I think should be. Obviously Andrew Rappleyea, who was in position to play a bunch last year and then had a season-ending injury, and then Luke Reynolds. They're three guys that we think will be very productive in the tight end room. Our tight end room has been as good as anybody in the country the last five years.

Then at wide receiver, that's obviously been the big conversation. We went out into the transfer portal and brought in three really productive players in Pena from Syracuse, who was a captain, in Hudson from USC, who was a captain, and then when you talk about Ross, Devonte Ross, who made a bunch of big plays and had a ton of production at Troy. For me, I've got a lot of respect for the University of Iowa and how they play defense and special teams, and being able to watch Troy and this young man have a lot of success.

So what we hope to do to answer your question, long answer, but is to spread that ball around to all those people. In a lot of ways, I think it makes us more difficult to defend when there's more guys on the field that we think can impact the game at any moment.

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