

**Penn State Football
Media Day Press Conference
August 7, 2021**

Joe Lorig | Special Teams Coordinator/Outside Linebackers/Nickels

Q: Special teams coordinators often get the first chance at playing with some of the new toys, some of the new returners, that kind of thing. Any particular person you're really excited to see out there on the field?

A: No, I wouldn't say anybody in particular now. We've got a bunch of guys back, a blend of guys back that I'm excited to see their development from spring football into what Coach [Dwight] Galt [III] and his staff do in the summertime and really see their development.

I wouldn't want to specifically name any new guy because I'm excited to see all of them. A lot of them will have different pieces of possibly playing on special teams for us, so I always get excited about the new classes. Definitely excited about the new specialists because they're guys that I specifically got to recruit and it's unique because a bunch of guys coming here, practice one was yesterday, so I've seen them now but there were a bunch of guys that came in here that I've really never seen kick or snap or punt in person which is very odd because typically you would have seen those guys that at their games, you would have worked with them at numerous camps and so we had guys that I was pretty much taken people that I trust in the industry's word, as much as anything else. So, excited to see those guys. The first day's always a little bit, everybody's all hyped up and the freshmen are nervous and scared. So, I don't make too much of an evaluation on that first day, but certainly excited to get to work with those guys.

Q: Is Jaquan Brisker is still going to get a shot to return kicks? Is he still lobbying you? Is that still in the works?

A: Yeah, Brisker is Brisker and he is definitely in the mix. He's a guy that obviously is very capable, he's got tremendous skill, he's got good ball skills. He's a great decision maker. When we look at those positions, it's not always going to be the most dynamic person, necessarily, because our goal is very clearly stated throughout the program, is to own the ball, which means not give up any possessions and make great decisions and then not have penalties on special teams. Really the genesis of that is, we're not going to hurt ourselves, right? So it doesn't mean we don't want to be good in the return units, we led the country in punt return last year. So, that's a byproduct of being good at those things.

The number one thing is going to be decision making. I say that not to say that Jaquan doesn't make good decisions, because he does, but I say that because he is one of the candidates but there's four or five or six guys back there. Really we're going to put them through a bunch of situations this Fall to make sure that we have the guys back there that we trust will make the best decisions based on, what the kick is, what the field conditions are. So certainly, he's a guy that I could see winning the job. And in my experience with special teams, specifically in the return game, you can't just have one guy. Guys get tired. Depending on the situation in a game, whether you just scored or got scored on, a guy could have just been on the field for a long series. So, we're gonna need to have at least four that we feel really confident with. I think we've got a really good group. I'm looking at the depth chart here, we've got eight, seven of them have experience, so I feel like we'll have a really good opportunity to get four or five guys that we feel very competent in.

Q: Jordan Stout, how is he different? How has he changed like over the summer since last season?

A: He's really developed since last season. I know he was disappointed with his punting. He didn't punt as well as what we see at practice. Not trying to make excuses for him, but it was his first time doing both. It's his first time kicking off and punting. I don't remember the specific game, but he came off and he's like that he was all nervous. That was the first time he'd ever punted in a college football game.

I think anytime you get more and more experience, just like every other position, that pays off. I think sometimes people think specialists are different. Like, that's all like people say, that's all you do. But it's no different, really, it's not as complex necessarily, it's certainly different mentally, but it's not different than a receiver as a freshman or a receiver in his first start or quarterback in their first start. I think you're going to see growth and development. And I know he's hungry. He's hungry, he's constantly bothering me. He wants to start at kickoff, he wants to start on field goal, he wants to start at punter. He wants to be the best in the country. He wasn't put on a preseason awards list, which he was excited about, kind of got a little chip on his shoulder about that. And I like that he's a competitor.

Then, we have other guys that are going to, that we brought in that, are going to push him. Again, just like every other position, I think the more guys you have pushing you, if there's chance, you're going to lose your job or a chance you're not going to win that job, it's a motivator for all of us. And so he's very motivated. He's bigger, stronger, faster than he's ever been. We did punt yesterday and he was hitting 52 yard punts, four or five-plus hang was his average. But that's like really, really, really good. But he was doing that last year in practice, and it didn't always translate into the game. So, what we've got to do now is make sure that again, we have a healthy competition, and we're pushing him to be as good as he possibly can.

Brent Pry | Defensive Coordinator/Linebackers

Q: With Jesse (Luketa) being used at defensive end for at least part of camp, where does that leave you at middle linebacker? Who's behind Ellis (Brooks) and what's your confidence level in the linebackers right now?

A: I'm excited about Jesse having a dual role in our defense. As far as linebackers, Jesse's still training there. It's still a one-two punch with him and Ellis at the middle linebacker position. I am pleased with the development of Tyler Elsdon at this point. Tyler is a good young linebacker. He works very hard at it. He had a great spring, got better practice after practice. I expect him to have a good camp and to be in a position to help us if he needs to.

Q: We found out from James (Franklin) that you're likely going to be going without Adisa Isaac for most of the season, if not all of the season. What as far as contingency plans right now are you excited about at defensive end?

A: That's some information that we've had for a while, so we've digested that and worked on a plan. I think when you hear reports of Jesse Luketa, that's part of the plan. But we're also very excited about Nick Tarburton. I'm a big Nick fan. He's had some unfortunate circumstances with some injuries over the years that kept everyone from knowing what we know about him. He's not just a very good defensive end prospect, but he's one of the best leaders in our unit. We're looking for a big season out of Nick.

I'm very excited about AK [Arnold Ebiketie] and the transition he's made. He's not just a talented guy, but also an intelligent football player that has picked up our scheme and our system very well. And the guy that I'm probably most excited about from camp that's just made great strides between spring and especially this summer with Coach [Dwight] Galt [III]

and his staff is Smith Vilbert. Smith has similar qualities to Yetur Gross-Matos. He has a basketball background, is very athletic and has good size. Smith's finally turning the corner and really he's a football player for the first time, not a basketball player playing football. He's got tremendous size, tremendous length. When I watched Smith Vilbert play basketball in high school, you talk about me and [Sean Spencer] coming out of the gymnasium excited. We couldn't get over the way he could move at that size. We're excited about what Smith can do this camp to put himself in position to be a productive end for us this fall.

And then obviously we talked about Jesse. Jesse's always had very good rush ability. If you go back to his film and look at the snaps where he's blitzing for us, he's hard to block. He has a good low shoulder rush. I consider his rush ability to be a real positive for him. And then I don't want to discount a young guy, Zuriah Fisher, that we took as an inside linebacker. He's made the transition to defensive end. Zuriah's very athletic, has a great motor and he's very eager. So I think we've got a pretty good group. It has us excited.

We just recently decided Amin Vanover, a guy that's got great size and is a physical player that we were comfortable moving inside, we've decided to move him out. He's a little bit of a swing guy in my mind. Amin plays reckless, he's physical. He's just got to continue to soak up the position and learn it, but he's a guy we're excited about, as well. We've got a really good group.

Obviously, it's unfortunate about Adisa. I was excited about him as much as anybody. He's a tremendous athlete and a tremendous young man. I look forward to his return. But we've got a good group. Like I said, we've digested this. It's part of the game. We've all been around it. It's full steam ahead and the plan is to continue to get better.

Q: Along the lines of position changes, did anything change from the spring with Keaton Ellis. Do you expect him to go back and forth between corner and safety? Is Marquis Wilson over on offense right now?

A: Keaton is primarily playing free safety right now. Keaton's a guy we feel like we need to train at either/or, boundary or free. We've got a lot of respect for Keaton. We're excited about his abilities at the position. He's a guy that if we need to are comfortable putting back at corner. This wasn't about him not being good enough at corner. It was about his best position potentially being safety. We've got good depth at corner right now.

Marquis is primarily working with us, but is expected to have a role offensively. Marquis is a guy that, as a freshman, made a huge play in the Cotton Bowl. He's a guy that we know is a talent and a ballhawk.

So we've got good depth there that should allow us to train Keaton at safety. But at the same time, we've got some other guys that are mixing it up. Jonathan Sutherland, who plays the safety spot, is also playing some Sam for us. Jonathan's a guy we've got a lot of respect for that's played a lot of ball here, a special teams captain. It's our job as coaches to maximize guys' abilities and minimize their liabilities. We addressed a lot of that as spring unfolded, discussed it some more in the summer, and now there's a plan of action for a bunch of guys.

Mike Yurcich | Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks

Q: Since your first impression in the spring of him, now you've gotten to know Sean [Clifford] quite a bit better, what are you most excited about with him? Where has he made the biggest strides that you've seen so far? What are you looking forward to seeing from him most this month?

A: Any quarterback that has his demeanor and attitude and willingness to learn and understands every day that there's something more to attain, his ceiling is very high. I think

he can get a lot better. So that's my job to help him along and to guide him and to give him the information that he needs and to continue to press upon the things that he has to improve upon and apply pressure where it needs to be in practice. Give him difficult looks, allow him to fail and figure it out and then continue to build his confidence up. I think that's the process of learning. He's a tremendous leader. Sean's all about helping this team win. He's willing to do whatever it takes, so therefore, you just got to try to help him. You have to guide him and help him get where he wants to be and he wants to be great so whatever that takes - detail in meetings, technique work, watching all the film we can with him and getting him prepared for each game plan.

Q: What have you learned, or what have you seen, from Ta'Quan [Roberson] and Christian Veilleux since they've been here? Where do they still have the most room for growth?

A: They both have the talent necessary. Right now, the play, typical of young quarterbacks, is just inconsistent but trending in the right direction, there's improvement there. Over the summer you can't really watch them throw the football at all, so this will be a big fall camp for them.

Growth-wise, we saw a big increase from practice one through practice 15 in the spring game, so we need to continue to see that growth. But the maturity is there on both the young men. Understanding what it takes to be great, whether it be extra meeting time, extra film time, asking the right questions, not being afraid to take a risk in the meeting room. I think they're learning that and they're getting better at that and I think those are the things that it takes to be great.

I'm not big into putting any labels on guys because I've seen guys change dramatically. Some guys it's different, some guys it's the initial six months, some guys it's 12 months, some guys that second year it clicks. I think if you try to put a guy on a shelf and put a label on him you've got to coach them all and try to bring out their best attributes and try to make sure that you're trying to optimize their ability to make plays and do what they do best and to help them be tougher, help them be better thinkers, clearer thinkers, I think those are all the challenges from each quarterback that plays the game of football.

Q: You've been known in your career for being able to hurt defenses over the top, hurt them deep, and then exploit the whole field. How would you assess your wide receiver crew as far as their ability to do that?

A: It's interesting, anything in football is relative really. Success with the deep ball, if you're able to throw it vertically, it means that you've got the defense to respect your run game. And so I think that's a very important aspect of that, not to be overlooked. I don't think it's all on a receiver to just, hey they've got to win, they've got to go vertical. At times, surely, they have to win a one-on-one matchup, we've got to get off press coverage and we've got to win down the field, but along with that comes the ability as an offensive unit to establish the run, to set yourself up for success, that's the key.

Now where are we as a receiver room - not where we need to be, none of them, I don't care which individual you look at on our entire offensive unit, we're not where we need to be yet. We're always going to have that mentality. We have to continue to improve regardless of what last practice was, regardless of what last game's result was, there has to be an attitude of relentless pursuit to get better and to improve.

This is a very humbling game and once you think you've arrived, or once you think hey, he's really good, he's where we need him to be, you're going to get caught from behind. So we're going to continue to drive our fundamentals, our skillset, our mental approach, our psychology, our nutrition, our strength, it's everything, it takes a village. We have that support all around these players and we have to continue to have that attitude and work.