

Purdue University Football Media Conference

Monday September 3, 2018

Jeff Brohm

Press Conference

JEFF BROHM: We're looking forward to getting back on the field Saturday. This weekend was a loss that stung us. It should. It was disappointing. I know our guys are a little bit angry, which they should be. We have a lot of work to do. Without question we need to get better in a lot of ways.

Definitely helped us identify where our weaknesses are, where we need to improve. We're going to work hard every day to improve that, go back to work.

We're playing an Eastern Michigan team that plays good football. They won their game big last week. Last year they beat Rutgers at Rutgers. We lost to Rutgers at Rutgers. This team is capable of beating anybody. With our team, if we don't play well, we're definitely capable of losing to anybody. We have to concentrate, refocus, come out and play extremely hard, find a way to win.

Q. Can you update us on Smiley?

JEFF BROHM: Yeah, Smiley had a freak deal where he collided actually with one of our players going across the middle. I believe he actually has a visor, as well, either hand got stuck underneath his helmet or his helmet pushed it. A couple lacerations on top of his eye, had to get that stitched up. May have been slightly concussed as well. We'll take that day by day.

Q. Did the visor break?

JEFF BROHM: Not that I know of. I think the helmet may have just twisted in a way. Normally you would think they'd be better fitted than that. I don't know exactly how it happened. It was kind of freakish. He has a good wound around his eye.

Q. I imagine he needed stitches?

JEFF BROHM: Yes, stitches and it definitely puffed up.

Q. If you don't have him, who moves into nickel?

JEFF BROHM: We're looking at some options right now. He was definitely our most experienced and best nickel. Right now there's a couple options. Blackmon is a guy that could step in and play it. We might possibly look at Kenneth Major at the nickel. Right now it's going to be something we're going to have to get the next guys up, ready to go, figure out what the best avenue to go is in that manner.

With that said, I think we have to make sure that even Tobias Larry is able to come in, play that outside linebacker/nickel in certain situations.

Q. Can Elijah Ball be more of an option?

JEFF BROHM: He's in the mix, as well. We have a couple guys that have not played, there are true freshmen in the mix. We want to make sure there are guys that played before that are able to go also.

Q. Sticking with the secondary, Antonio and Cason played in the second half, how do you evaluate what they did for you?

JEFF BROHM: Well, I think our secondary for the most part played an average game. I think that our tackling was suspect in the first half in the secondary. That was probably the most disappointing about the secondary was the tackling.

As far as other than a blown coverage once or twice, I think for the most part our secondary played okay. We have to get better there, a little bit tighter in our zone coverages, challenge some routes, throws behind the line of scrimmage, which wasn't all in the secondary. We have to have linebackers expand out for that when it happens. That did not take place.

It looked like we were a little soft in the secondary, when at the same time the inside backers have to be able to expand when things happen and balls are thrown by the line of scrimmage. That wasn't happening early on.

Q. After the game you were asked about the defense in the first half. You said they didn't play hard. Going back to look, was it that or some other things going on there?

JEFF BROHM: I think going back and looking at the film, it was even more evident that we didn't play hard in the first half. Really I think a lot of it has to do a lot of guys in there didn't play, didn't know how hard you had to play in a game to win, how hard you had to go, the speed it was going to be at, the way to finish, fly around, not take a breath at one point while the play is going on. That happened quite a bit with a lot of our guys.

I think our linebacker positions were not playing downhill with the young guys, were not attacking when the balls were thrown, were not breaking quick enough. They were sitting there, taking a second before they moved. That can't happen.

Our D-line has to play a lot better, I mean a lot better. I didn't see the effort in the get-off and the intensity and the toughness, ability to get after the passer, actually influence the play. That was the most disappointing. That we're going to work extremely hard on to get better. That will be more than emphasized this week. The front four has to be able to affect the play. We have to get better there.

Q. In your mind did that change in the second half?

JEFF BROHM: I think it was better as far as the effort. I didn't think our front four played great the entire game, but it was better. We had to go a little more man. We wanted to the second half, to tighten things up, which was effective. You don't want to play man every single play. You have to find ways to get some pressure and some penetration, get after the quarterback a little bit and affect what he's doing, at least his timing, with your front four, possibly maybe an extra linebacker every now and then. That was not happening one bit. He had all day to throw and more.

Q. After you looked at the Lorenzo Neal penalty, what were your thoughts on that?

JEFF BROHM: To be honest with you, still feel the flag at that point of the game -- according to the ref, he told me he thought our player body slammed him. I did not see a body slam. If that's what he's calling it, I don't agree with that.

Did we go a little beyond the whistle? We probably did. We are trying to strip the ball at that point in the game. I think Lorenzo tried to strip, kind of turned and flung the guy around, trying to get the ball, which the ball did come out. I can see why it was called. Doesn't mean I agree with it.

Q. What is your plan for the quarterbacks this week?

JEFF BROHM: I think both quarterbacks are going to play in the game, I can tell you that for sure. Then we'll decide who starts towards the end of the week. Both will play meaningful minutes.

Q. As you review their performance, what comes to mind?

JEFF BROHM: I'm disappointed, Elijah is disappointed in himself. He's taking it hard. He's going to work hard to improve. Really it's forcing plays. Sometimes he threw the ball well. He does give us a vertical threat, can throw the ball up the field. Has to know when things aren't covered, you can't throw it. I think if he does that, his play really could be outstanding, be effective.

But we knew going into the game we had to beat them at their own game, which was playing harder, which we didn't do. Not turn the ball over, which they did not, we did. It affected the outcome.

You have to understand that every pass we design may not be able to get out super quickly, have to take a few shots up the field. When they cover, you have to throw it away, run it or take a sack. You can't throw it to the other team.

Two of the interceptions I'm extremely disappointed in. The other one, the guy made a good play. Still, you'd like to be able to see that and that throw it where only we can catch it. He'll learn from it.

I think David came in, gave us a spark. Make a few more plays with his feet, savvy, moxy in there, does a decent job.

Still like to be able to throw the ball up the field and see things. We just got to continue to work at it. It wasn't efficient play at that position. We got to get better at it.

Q. Did you want to get the tight ends involved more or was the plan what it was?

JEFF BROHM: Well, that's been discussed a lot internally. You know what, the way they were playing, everyone was kind of loaded in the box, giving you the outside throws, which we took early on. Went back, caught at least 15 plays designated for the tight end. Whether they were all packed in there or we didn't get open, or when we did, we didn't have time to throw it. When they're packed in, they're sitting on the short routes, which they did.

You have to get to the second level. Two things happen. We didn't have time to throw the second level, or he wasn't open or we ran out of there too soon.

Looking back on it, we could maybe throw it to them in the flat real quick. Other than that we caught every route combination up the field, in-cut, sail cuts, over-routes, crossing routes, seam routes. You name it, we called it. We did not get the ball to the tight end.

Q. You went to Rondale more a lot. Is there more he can handle, a bigger look load for him coming up?

JEFF BROHM: Rondale did a great job. Like I said, I knew he can be a special player. We want to make sure we don't give him too much. I think he performed outstanding the first half. Second half we couldn't get him the ball as much. We'll continue to utilize him. At the same time we have to make sure we utilize the others. He definitely showed what he can do on the playing field.

Q. Eastern Michigan's quarterback is a guy from Iowa. What are your impressions of him? How

big of a challenge is he going to be in the pocket?

JEFF BROHM: They had a good first game. Scored a lot of points. He's a big guy that will stand in there, throw it. We have to find ways really to get after the quarterback, put some pressure on him, not let him stand there all day and let him throw it. That will be the challenge.

Anything pressure-wise we can do, that has to happen, line movement has to happen. We have to have more intensity up front from everybody that's in there. It's going to be important to affect the quarterback, not give him all day to throw because I don't care who you have in there, who is in the secondary, you're going to complete balls if you're not able to affect the quarterback.

Q. To clarify, you will not have Smiley this week or is that still being decided?

JEFF BROHM: That's my assumption, but that hasn't been decided yet. We're going to let the week play out.

Q. Offensive line play, how did they grade out as a group? You went with the five guys pretty much on every snap. Could we see more combinations this Saturday or were you pleased?

JEFF BROHM: I think you'll see more guys play this Saturday as far as the offensive line. In general, it was better than we performed up front. A lot of times in the run game it was just an extra apex guy we couldn't get that was making the play.

Passing game, we were fairly decent when we had to push it up the field. At times we got beat around the edge. That we've got to get better at as the wide and rushing along the edge.

I think they did improve. That's something we can grow upon. Do we need to find ways to throw the ball vertically and protect longer at times? Yes, we do. As far as knowing what to do, at least trying to be physical and playing hard, I thought they did that.

Q. Is that about your tackles being on an island too much, or is it just them getting better?

JEFF BROHM: I mean, we have to find ways to do what we can to him help. Sometimes you have to get more guys out than two or three. They just got to find ways to improve. But I do think they did play harder. They were into it. I do credit the effort they gave.

Q. Wide receivers not named Rondale, how did they grade out?

JEFF BROHM: Jared Sparks was in there with productive plays hard, he goes hard, is competitive. Did a very good job. Isaac Zico improved from last year, competed. Didn't get many balls thrown to him, but he was going hard, into the game. Even Terry Wright was more physical, played hard. I think the receiver position in general got better. We have to figure out ways to continue to spread the ball around, make big plays that help alleviate the long drives.

I do think that position played better the first game than we had last year at that time.

Q. From your freshmen, do you anticipate, now that they've seen what an opener is like, you can get more newcomers or freshmen on the field this Saturday than Thursday night?

JEFF BROHM: Well, I'm hopeful that we can start to play a few more and go from there. As of right now, there's not going to be more than just a few that are going to go in this game because they're not ready. We're going to continue to work hard to get them ready.

At the same time there's some redshirt freshmen, guys that haven't played a lot, that played for the first time that will be playing a lot, our starters that need to get a whole lot better. We have to work

extremely hard this week to get that done.

Do applaud our effort in the second half. That improved. We found a way to get better. But this week, we've got to crank this thing up. Our guys have to learn how to practice as hard as they can, give maximum effort so when it comes game time they're able to do that. I think that will be important that we make progress there. That will start with the guys we have on the field right now. They have to get much better.

Q. We saw what David can do running the ball himself. Just the threat of him in the game, does it affect the way the defense defends the run? Does it help your running game?

JEFF BROHM: I think it helps us. He can do some things with his feet. He's got some moxy and savvy, like I said. I think he can still throw the football. We can move the pocket with him. We can affect the running game a little bit more with him in there, do a few more things, spread the field a little bit more, let him hand the ball off or pull it and run it if they're not honoring that. I do think he can be effective in that manner.

Q. You made an interesting comment after the game. You said this year you feel like the margin for error is slimmer than last year. Can you elaborate on that?

JEFF BROHM: Well, I think we have a very good schedule this year. I think based on what I saw the first game, we've got to play a whole lot better. The defensive side of the ball, we have to get the front seven to play a whole lot better and to play a whole lot harder, to be much more effective and disruptive, play with tremendous energy and toughness. That has to happen. We have to tackle better in the secondary. We got to be able to do things on defense, know guys are going to go hard, be able to come off the ball and figure out a way to create penetration.

On the offensive side of the ball, I think we can do some things. But we can't beat ourselves. We're not going to beat the teams on our schedule if we have turned the ball over three times and they have not. It's not going to happen. We cannot do that.

I think if you look at the last three games we won, against Iowa, Indiana, the bowl game, we didn't win by a whole lot. We won those battles. We don't win those battles, we don't win those games.

Right now overall we don't have the experience we had last year, so the margin for error is less. We've got to concentrate on the small things, play extremely hard, play for 60 minutes, play to win, but at the same time we have to win the turnover battle, we have to play harder than the other team.

Q. About the defense, gave up 31 points in the first half, but shut them out in the second half. Big turnaround. Which defense do you think we're going to see on Saturday, the one that gave up 31 or zero?

JEFF BROHM: We'll see come Saturday. I know that we did play harder the second half. I know sometimes when an offense has a lead in the second half, you don't do as much. You're not as aggressive. That plays into it, as well. Don't let the zero points fool you.

But for us, I don't care what the score is, I want to see a defense that plays hard. I want to see guys getting off the ball, attacking, finishing plays and flying around. I want to see guys on offense that are doing the same things, that are finding ways to make plays, that are taking care of the ball, playing tough, playing physical. That's just how we have to play. Doesn't matter who we play, we have to play that way or we're not going to win the game. Our guys have to understand that.

You guys watched some games this weekend. Some of the games you watched that are very good, talented teams, they play fast. It's noticeable. I went home, caught maybe a series or two of the game last night. They're playing fast, all right? We have to play fast at all times, play attacking, aggressive, cut it loose. That's going to be important for us, that we do that each and every game.

Q. (Question about trick plays.)

JEFF BROHM: One didn't work. Let me think. Actually we called two. That one didn't work. Probably didn't see it because it wasn't very effective.

These guys actually, even in our short yardage situation, they had a safety 20 yards deep. When teams are playing the tricks, you got to be able to do some other things. If safeties are going to be deep, a lot of tricks aren't going to work. We have to figure that out, I agree.

Q. It seemed like coming out of pre-season camp you and Nick (Holt) were most concerned about the pass-rush being inexperienced. Sounds like you're frustrated with the lack of effort. If there were aggressive mistakes, that would have been understood. Is that more or less what I'm getting out of that?

JEFF BROHM: I think you're half correct. I think the first statement is half correct, as well. We were concerned about the defensive ends. We still are. Those guys have to play better. I do think they can play better if they play hard. If we have that mentality. It's a combination of both.

We've got to create some competition there, make sure those guys understand that they can play better because they're better players, but not going at that pace. I think our guys will work hard this week to get that done. Hopefully we'll see improvement.