

B1G Coaches Teleconference: OSU's Meyer, PSU's Franklin Preview Saturday



Prior to Ohio State and Penn State resuming practice Tuesday, Urban Meyer and James Franklin addressed the media in the afternoon on the Big Ten coaches teleconference. Ahead of Saturday's 7:30 p.m. kickoff on ABC from Beaver Stadium in University Park, Pa., the head coaches discussed the latest.

Below are the top takeaways from the call, listed in bullet-form points with notes and quotes from Meyer and Franklin, four days before the No. 4 Buckeyes (4-0, 1-0) battle the No. 9 Nittany Lions (4-0, 1-0) in week five's prime-time matchup for Big Ten supremacy.

Urban Meyer

- For the first time since 2014, Penn State plays Ohio State without Saquon Barkley. However, through four weeks, the Nittany Lions lead the nation in scoring with 55.5 points per game — one spot ahead of the Buckeyes (54.5) — behind quarterback Trace McSorley and running back Miles Sanders.
 - "You have to give them credit because Miles Sanders pops right in there and he's an outstanding player," Meyer said. "We kind of saw glimpses of that last year, so a lot of respect for him. But the quarterback's the guy that gets this thing going and he's in a good scheme for what his skill set is. ... The thing that makes this whole thing go is his competitive spirit and that's what makes their offense so good. Their offensive line — I was just visiting with our defensive staff and they think this is one of the better offensive lines they've seen."
- OSU returns to Happy Valley for the first time since 2016 when PSU pulled off its 24-21 upset in the whiteout game, which returns for its annual slot in 2018 on Saturday and presents another challenge.
 - "It's just a very difficult environment," Meyer said. "If I remember right, we took a lead and they came back. We've had great games with Penn State over the years, well before I got here and Coach Franklin. There's going to be great games. It's just two great, storied programs and tough environments. When they come here (to Ohio Stadium in Columbus), it's tough. When we go there, it's tough. I do remember it, obviously, and we have a lot of

respect for Penn State.”

- Penn State’s defense features inexperience but talent, particularly up front on the Nittany Lions’ defensive line.
 - “There’s a bunch of new starters, but a very good, very active front,” Meyer said. “Schematically, they’re pretty much the same what they’ve always been, which is they can rush you from both sides and both edges of the offense. But they understand their scheme. ... Their defensive line is very active and play(s) great with their hands.”
- PSU is No. 82 in rushing defense at 172.5 yards per contest, which amplifies OSU’s importance get its running game going between sophomore J.K. Dobbins and junior Mike Weber.
 - “You have to stay on schedule,” Meyer said. “This is a team that takes pride in getting you off of schedule with their pressure. It’s going to be a move-the-chains type of game. Continue to get first downs and play field position.”
- Meyer discussed the College Football Playoff’s structure since 2014, dismissing the notion from a follow-up question that Penn State presents Ohio State with a challenge from a postseason standpoint: “There’s no issue with (keeping the Buckeyes focused). This is all about getting ready for a very good team.”
 - “I think they do a great job,” Meyer said of the CFP committee. “If you have six (instead of four), then there’s the seventh, eighth team getting unhappy — the eighth, ninth and 10th team are going to be unhappy. So I don’t know exactly. I know (athletic director) Gene Smith’s involved, but we don’t really talk about it. Our job is to go to compete and win games, and not worry about that stuff. So with all due respect, I just haven’t given it much thought.”
- Asked about the Buckeyes’ biggest pros and cons so far into the season, Meyer assessed the team’s overall progress.
 - “Giving up big plays, that’s going to be the issue,” Meyer said. “We’ve played solid defense, we just give up too many big plays. This will be a tough one this week because this is a big-play offense. What I’m most pleased (with) is we’ve survived a couple of injuries and went down to Texas and won a big game and we’re 4-0 and the attitude’s great. That’s what I’m most impressed with.”
- Sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins has emerged among college football’s best in September, which was no surprise to Meyer and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day.
 - “We all knew he was very talented,” Meyer said. “Has he exceeded? Not really exceeded because we knew he could develop with Coach Day and his relationship. But just management of the offense, that’s what he’s done a great job (with).”
- After sophomore linebacker Tuf Borland missed most of spring camp with an Achilles injury, he came back in time for OSU’s season opener and played increasingly in the subsequent three games.
 - “He’s playing good,” Meyer said. “He’s only played on pitch counts up until (now). He’s free to go now. So we’ve had him in a somewhat limited role and really watching him because a lot of the time, an Achilles injury, he wouldn’t be back until November, but he fits his name. He’s tough as steel and he came back. So he’s free to go play and we’re looking forward to him to play like Tuf.”

- Despite the Nittany Lions' loss of two-year offensive coordinator Joe Moorhead, whom Mississippi State hired as its head coach in the offseason, PSU promoted Ricky Rahne from within and produced a seamless transition in its play-calling style.
 - "I asked that same question to our defensive coaches and they said it's very similar," Meyer said of Rahne's scheme compared to Moorhead's style. "It's aggressive and very similar. I knew the coaches on the staff with Coach Moorhead, so (Rahne) does a really good."

James Franklin

- In contrast to former Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett, Haskins brings a different skill set to the table against Penn State. Franklin discussed Haskins' strengths in a "different" offense.
 - "They obviously different when it comes to the passing game," Franklin said. "Before, they were a quarterback-run-oriented offense. And now, he's able to distribute the ball and get the ball to all the playmakers that they've been able to recruit and develop all over the field. So it makes it difficult and challenging to stop them because they've got some really talented receivers and running backs and offensive line — probably the better O-line that I've seen at Ohio State since we've been here (starting in 2014). So they've got a lot of weapons and (Haskins) does a really, really good job of distributing the ball and getting the ball into all those playmakers' hands."
- When the Buckeyes face the Nittany Lions, the top two scoring offenses in college football take the field. Franklin shared his thoughts on how he plans to combat OSU's firepower on offense.
 - "I think the biggest thing is making sure our players understand that that's going to happen," Franklin said. "Both teams have the ability to make big plays. We can't get concerned about that. We've got to keep kind of chipping away at it, one play at a time, at a championship standard for four quarters. They're going to make some plays. We're going to make some plays I don't think there's any doubt about that. I think we've been tested a little bit with our App State game (a 38-31 overtime win Sept. 1) to start the season and were able to overcome some of that adversity. Three of the past four games against Ohio State have been (decided by) seven points or less. So it's going to be a tremendous challenge, but I think the biggest thing is making sure our players understand this is going to be four quarters and this is going to be a 12-round heavyweight fight with a bunch of really good talented players on the field and two teams with sound schemes. There's going to be plays made. We've just got to keep battling and keep swinging, and stay focused on the goal at hand."

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