

# Coaches Updates: B1G Media Days



CHICAGO — Following Jim Delany’s press conference that signaled the start of the 2018 Big Ten Football Media Days on Monday, seven of the conference’s 14 head coaches took the podium for roughly 15 minutes each. Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh was the last of the coaches to speak, and his comments can be found [here](#).

What follows are updates from the first six coaches’ pressers.

## **Scott Frost, Nebraska**

- Frost, who was hired as Nebraska’s head coach in December, on his mission at his alma mater: “Nebraska historically belongs in the upper echelon in college football. I’m just excited to start the process of getting Nebraska back where it belongs.”
- Frost, who was a part of two national titles as a quarterback for the Cornhuskers from 1995-97, said the reception on the recruiting trail has been better than he expected. He said the parents “remember Nebraska as Nebraska” but the kids don’t. He said that’s the coaching staff’s challenge, to make recruits regard Nebraska as an elite program again.
- Frost on former Nebraska head coach Tom Osborne, his mentor: “Coach Osborne is my hero in this sport, in this business. He’s a hall of fame coach and besides that, probably the best man I know.”
- Frost, who led Central Florida to an undefeated season in 2017, reiterated that he believes the College Football Playoff should be expanded to eight teams – the Power 5 conference champions, plus three at-large teams. “I’m always going to be an advocate for eight teams.” Central Florida claimed itself as national champions last season after it did not receive an invitation to the CFP.

## **Pat Fitzgerald, Northwestern**

- In his opening remarks, Fitzgerald welcomed Frost to Nebraska and said it’s remarkable that he’s the only coaching change in the Big Ten this year.
- Fitzgerald said there’s a lot of “positive momentum” with Northwestern coming off an eight-game win streak last season and 27 wins over the last three years and its brand-new state-of-the-art practice facility.
- Asked about sports gambling, Fitzgerald said it’s important for programs to educate the players first and foremost.

- In regard to a weekly national injury report being mandated, Fitzgerald said he's been "accused of being honest and less than honest" on his injury reports. "I'd agree with that," he added.
- Fitzgerald on the new redshirt rule allowing players to see action in four games: "I'm fired up about that." He said all players want to play, so giving them that opportunity without losing their redshirt is big. He believes it offers a best-case situation for teams and specifically their players, especially from the angles of health and safety.

### **James Franklin, Penn State**

- Penn State returns 12 starters, but only three on defense, which prompted Franklin to say, "We probably have more question marks going into this season than we've had the last two years. We lost a lot of production."
- Entering his fifth season as PSU's head coach, Franklin said the offensive line has a chance to be a strength for the first time since he's been there. "The game of football always has and always will start up front."
- Franklin on his defense: "Probably the biggest questions for me are at defensive tackle and linebacker." The Nittany Lions are replacing three senior DTs and Jason Cabinda at middle linebacker. Penn State also lost all starters in its secondary from last season, but Franklin said there are a lot of players currently on the team who have experience.
- Franklin then articulated how much trust he has in fifth-year senior quarterback Trace McSorley. "Trace is the first quarterback we've been with since the beginning in the recruiting process. All he's done is won. He's been highly, highly productive and is universally respected in our program." Franklin added that the veteran signal caller "will have latitude" in helping shape the offense and make plays.
- Franklin said he "loves what we've been able to do the past couple of years in laying a foundation" for the program, but indicated this could be somewhat of a rebuilding year considering personnel lost (Saquon Barkley, Mike Gesicki, Cabrinda, etc).
- Franklin said he likes the current CFP system but said it'd be better to have uniformity among conferences, such as same number of conference games and scheduling principles. He wants all conferences to "control some of the variables" with league schedules and nonconference FCS games. He, however, is not in agreement with Frost on expanding the CFP to eight teams. "I'm not on the same page with that," citing wear and tear on players possibly playing 15 or 16 games.

### **Jeff Brohm, Purdue**

- Brohm led the Boilermakers to a 7-6 record in his first year as head coach in 2017. With that, he said, "For us, last year was a success. We found a way to gain confidence as a team (including winning the last three regular-season games and then the bowl game). For us it's important to start the (2018) season the way we finished (2017)." He added that "we're excited that the expectations have risen, but I think our players will respond."
- Brohm on Purdue's 2018 schedule, which includes hosting Ohio State on Oct. 20: "Our home schedule is going to be difficult."
- Brohm brought both of his potential starting quarterbacks, David Blough and Elijah Sindelar (who replaced an injured Blough last year), to Big Ten Media Days. Asked why he did so, he said, "I thought it was the right thing to do. They're both great ambassadors for our program." Brohm said both QBs "are good enough to win with" when the season begins. The head coach added that he wants to let the competition play out into training camp.

## **P.J. Fleck, Minnesota**

- Fleck started at the podium by mourning the loss of former NFL head coach and Vikings offensive lineman coach Tony Sparano, who died unexpectedly on Sunday.
- Fleck said the theme for his young team this season will be “race to maturity.” The coach noted that he enjoys the “muddy water” years of building a struggling program toward a winning level.
- As he prepares for his second year in charge of the Golden Gophers, Fleck credited Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano, whom Fleck worked for with Rutgers and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, with the belief that you should “never sacrifice what you really want down the road for what you want right now.” Fleck said Schiano continues to be a “great influence in my life.”
- Fleck agreed with Delany that there should be a player availability report, though he said he doesn’t necessarily think reasons why players are unavailable should be listed. “I’m all for it. Now, not (providing a) specific reason why somebody is not playing, but (declaring if) somebody is going to be available or not available.”

## **Chris Ash, Rutgers**

- Ash, a former defensive coordinator and safeties coach at Ohio State, said he believes his team will be ready to compete for a bowl game in his third year as the Scarlet Knights’ coach. Rutgers went 4-8 (3-6 in the Big Ten) in 2017 and finished fifth in the East Division.
- Ash called his rebuild at Rutgers an initial “three-year plan” of improvement and described the current staff as the best he has had.

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