

Pitt Head Football Coach Todd Graham
Spring Football, Day 2
March 16, 2011

Opening Statement

“Day two: today was a good day. One of the things that was encouraging was that I felt like the first day the defense had the upper hand then today I felt like the offense responded back so I’m very impressed by that and the kids are really competing. Today they had a little bit better understanding of what it was going to be like. The first day seemed kind of like a shock about how fast it was and we were a lot more efficient today. The other good thing about today is that now we get to put some pads on and that’s what it’s all about Saturday. So we’re looking forward to Saturday with the pads on. One thing that really encouraged me that most people don’t focus on is (Matt) Yoklic and (Kevin) Harper – two big legs. I’m really excited about what their potential is on special teams and I really have a lot of guys that can run on special teams. We’ve got a lot of promise there and that’s really encouraging. So, the second day was another good day.”

On intensity with putting the pads on:

“It can get a lot more intense than it is now. You’ll enjoy that. Well go at it pretty hard. We have a way of starting practice that you’ll enjoy that’s pretty intense. You shouldn’t be late because we’ll get after it at the very beginning. Everything we do is high octane, fast tempo and everything we’re doing is about being physical. It starts with our mentality. You’re always encouraged in shorts, but now let’s put the pads on and see how we do and that’s what we’re fired up to do. I can’t wait until Saturday.”

On Aaron Donald:

“We are a multiple three-man front. We play with a three-technique in a no shade. He plays the three-technique position – sometimes we’ll slide out over the tackle a little bit. Him and KK (Mosley-Smith) both look very explosive at that position. We’ve been working Chas (Alecxi) out at the five-technique position. Those guys are so athletic – I’m very impressed up front. They all can get off the ball and Donald is really impressive getting off the ball and making plays, and he’s had a really good first two days.”

On playing with two tackles

“Our ‘Panther’ is a hybrid outside linebacker/defensive end. Sometimes you’ll look out there and it looks like a 4-3 and sometimes it looks different – we’re multiple on how we line up, but we like standing that guy up because we like having that speed on the field and athleticism.”

“I think the odd front is confusing. I think if you ask most people they would rather see just a conventional 4-3, so every time they line up on us, there is a guy head up with the center or two guys head up with the tackle or one guy kicked down over the guard. We’re able to be very multiple and simplex. We’re kind of left and right as far as how everybody lines up, so we’re pretty simple about what we’re doing. The key is the attacking. It’s our relentless effort that we’re putting in and the kids have bought into that. Saturday will be a big day to evaluate where we’re at. I always grab the coordinators as we’re walking in and they’re very encouraged. We have really good young people. I’m so impressed with how they’ve responded and embraced our system and how we’re doing things. We’ve got good leadership, senior leadership, with guys that have been here and been in the battle. Kids know if you care about them, and they know if you know what you’re talking about and they have

really adapted well to the system so far, but we're actually going to play football on Saturday, not run around with a helmet and shorts on, so that's going to be exciting."

On senior leadership:

"Defensively we've got a lot of seniors and I'm really impressed with all of them. We've asked them to adopt what we call 'the Pitt way' – how we do everything that we do. It's about doing the little things right, it's very intense. We ask them to allow us to coach them with intensity and coach them hard. Now, we coach and treat them with respect, but this is a tough, violent sport and only the tough survive. Tough people come out of tough times, so I've been very impressed with the leadership."

On perfecting the little things:

"Some of that stuff (mistakes) is expected, but not tolerated. Coach Norvell says 'we're striving for perfection, but we'll accept excellence.' So that's pretty much what that snap stuff is going to be. People take those things for granted. Everybody wants to draw up plays, but you have to get the ball from the center to the quarterback and the quarterback to the running back with efficiency, and that's something we have to work on because we haven't shot gun snapped as much as we have now. We're also giving reps to four different quarterbacks, and once you start repping the same guys every day, all of that stuff is a feel about what you're doing. Right now, we have a lot of people to train, we want to take a look at the videos, and give everybody an opportunity and chance, so we're repping a lot of different people and that's one of the things that got messy at times on day one. Day two got a little bit better, but both days have exceeded my expectations from how our guys went out and practiced. Both days, as a staff, we came in and said 'we're encouraged.'"

On putting the quarterback under center:

"Different years we do different things. We'll go into a game and if we have 80 snaps, there will be 15-20 (with the qb under center) and sometimes less, sometimes more. Sometimes we'll even do a sugar huddle, but we do get under center."

On injured/limited players:

"There's a lot of guys right now out due to injuries and surgeries, but they're all participating in some form or fashion in the training. Nobody is out there standing around. Some of them we are being cautious with and they probably won't do a lot of contact stuff, but they are going through individual drills and things like that. We do have a lot of them right now, and I wish we had every one of them that could go through everything, but every single person out there has got to be engaged. That's what we challenge them to do. It's hard when you're not practicing fully to really be engaged and learning, but it's important that we're doing that."

On Todd Thomas:

"We're still evaluating where we're going to put him. It's hard to do that when we're not going full pads. He'll be a strong safety type hybrid for us. But he's not moving, he'll stay over there (on the defensive side of the ball). As he comes off that surgery, we just want to stay cautious with it. He won't do any contact drills or anything like that, but we'll try some limited agility stuff, but we're taking it slow."