

Pitt Head Coach Todd Graham Spring Football – Day 13

Opening Statement:

“Today was a helmet day. We have three helmet days that we have to get in – we had two the very first two days. We saved this one to give their legs some rest and let them get their feet back underneath them. I felt like it was real productive. We worked a couple of situations today – a two-minute and four-minute situation. In the four-minute situation we were ahead, and we have to run the clock out. We got some good work done there. The biggest thing that I’m pleased with this spring is that I feel like the guys are buying into how we do things. I feel like we’re coming together as a football team. We’re excited about Saturday.”

On slowing down and limiting the contact:

“We call it our four-minute offense; a sugar-huddle. We work the clock. We have means of snapping the ball within five seconds of when they spot it, or when there was only one or two seconds left on the clock. We wanted to work those situations. When you’re going really fast in our two- or four-minute offense, even though we’re still going at our regular speed, it’s important that we know what’s going on with the clock so that we can coach those situations. We have modes of being able to do that real easily. We wanted to work on improving our modes of communication.”

On slowing down the game to run time off the clock:

“We’re going to do whatever we need to do to win games. If you have a three-point or four-point lead with four minutes left in the game, you need to get the football and go. If you want to win games consistently you have to be able to do that. It’s a statement that you have to make. If you want to win a game, you have to go out there and make three first downs. Those are the things that we were talking about. We have to be aware of that.

“There was a situation today that we were behind by two, it’s a two-minute offense situation and we’re down there in field goal range. I don’t want to kick a field goal, I want to score a touchdown. We’re going to be smart with the football though – if we can score a touchdown then let’s score it. We had to hurry and spike the ball with around seven seconds left. The guys haven’t been in that situation a lot so it was a little bit unusual. We’ve worked just about every situation we could coach this spring. We’ve worked with overtime, first overtime, second overtime, third overtime.”

On the progression of the run game:

“We have most of our run game in, besides our special stuff. We have a perimeter run and inside stuff in. We haven’t been very advanced with some of the stuff that we’re

doing because we have just wanted to establish the zone play and establish our gap schemes.

“I feel really good with how we have moved the football in the run game this spring – that is going to be the key to our success, how we run the football. The inside-zone will still be the bread and butter of our system – it’s the key to everything we’re doing. It’s direct runs. If you want to be a physical team, you have to run the ball straight down. That’s the inside zone and power.”

On the accomplishments made through spring football:

“We’re mentally way ahead from where I thought we would be. The number one goal was to come in and build trust – that’s something that takes time. I think we’re well on our way to do that. We’ve strained them, coached them hard and put them in the situation where they’re really not in shape to go at the pace that we’re going at. We talked to them and really coached them through when they got tired. I think we’re way ahead of where we want to be right now.

“Naturally, in the spring, the coaches and I emphasize about keeping it simple. In the fall it won’t be as simple. The key is getting these kids to buy in. If you get them to buy in, they’ll do what you coach them to do. That’s the key – get them to do it right the first time. The key to our success is discipline. I was impressed with last Saturday’s scrimmage, we didn’t have many penalties – we had a few stupid penalties, but most of those were from guys who have not really played and are inexperienced. It shows that we made progress with our discipline.”

On comparing his first spring football experiences at Rice and Tulsa to Pitt:

Spring at Rice – there is no comparison there. We were going from the Wishbone to the Spread, so it was a little more chaotic. Coach Randolph, I believe, was the only coach here that was there with me. It’s wasn’t near as experienced as a staff. We’re way ahead, there’s no question. When I went into Rice, what gave me great confidence was that we had a really good quarterback, and even though he wasn’t well established we had a big difference-maker wide receiver. Each year is different.

When I went into Tulsa it was more like here – they’re very similar. We had a fifth-year quarterback, returning starter coming back – we have a returning starter coming back here. We didn’t have the speed that we wanted at that time, and we didn’t have it at Rice either, but we developed. I feel, and I’m pretty much in the moment most of the time, but I feel better about where we’re at now than I did at both those place. The difference now is that we’re playing tougher opponents.”