

Pitt Head Football Coach Todd Graham
Spring Football – Day 12

Opening Statement:

“It was an exciting scrimmage. It was the first time that we really game-planned against each other. There was naturally a lot more pressure from the defense. We wanted to put our quarterback in adverse situations to see how he would handle it. The defense dominated today – opposite of last weekend. It’s going back and forth, so that is good to see. The bright spot today was that we continued to get better at the snaps. The snaps now aren’t bad, but they’re in one direction one time and then another the next. We need to get them perfect, but the snaps were a bright spot in today’s scrimmage.

“We came on late in the scrimmage. I liked how the offense came back late in the scrimmage, they had a couple of big plays then. They had a couple touchdowns and one touchdown drive. The penalties were the big things we wanted to focus on today with the BIG EAST officials here. It was somewhat surprising; we had seven penalties – a couple of personal foul penalties on the defense, a pass interference down at the goal line, a block in the back on offense and a holding on offense. It was a great teaching opportunity for us. That is a big focus. Every Sunday I go over the penalties – who got what, where we are in the BIG EAST as far as penalties and where we are in the country. We want to be the best in the country, and as far as discipline, that’s the greatest measure of discipline. I’m surprised that we didn’t have more penalties actually. I expected more than that with running 127 plays, 130 counting the three’s. We only had seven penalties – that’s not very many when you scrimmage and are playing your seconds and thirds as well. I was very pleased.

“I think that the interior defensive line is very dominant and difficult to handle. **Chas Alecxih, Myles Caragein** and **Aaron Donald** have been impressive. **Justin Hargrove** is another name to mention too, he had a quarterback sack today. I thought that **Bryan Murphy** showed up and did well today too. **Eric Williams** made some plays. The secondary was solid today. I thought that **K’Waun Williams** played well. **Buddy Jackson** had a pass interference call, but other than that he just needs to continue to be more consistent. **Jarred Holley** has been a standout this spring, and I think that **Jason Hendricks** is becoming more and more consistent. It was definitely a win for defense today, but the offense came on late.

“I thought that **Anthony Gonzales** did a great job. If I had to pick an MVP on offense today it would be Gonzales. He did a great job managing the offense and moving the ball down the field. He tucked the ball and ran over for a touchdown and was able to get out of trouble. We took way too many sacks. I think that our first offense performed very well and handled adverse situations very well. It was probably the first time that they’ve seen a lot of the things that we did today. Gonzales was very impressive and did some really good things.

“At receiver, **Mike Shanahan** has been a big standout for us. He’ll be a big-play guy for us. **Salath Williams** had a good day today; he’s steadily getting better. We held **Devin Street** out for some minor stuff. **Mark Myers** did not play today because he had a small injury – he should be back on Tuesday, we just didn’t want to take any chances. **Ray Graham** had limited action. **Desmond Brown** got a whole bunch of reps, he is a heck of a walk-on who is doing a great job for us. We have to get better up front with protecting the quarterback. I think that **Jordan Gibbs, Lucas Nix** and **Chris Jacobson** have had really good springs and are going to be very consistent. **K.K. (Khaynin) Mosley-Smith** has been a bright spot because he’s really shown some great consistency at guard. **Greg Gaskins** has stepped up at left guard too and is really playing well.

“**Juantez Hollins** wasn’t able to be here today for personal reasons – he’ll be back Tuesday. That forced us to move some guys around. We have to improve at guard and as a unit. We have the center position settled, who we’re going to play at center. The right and left tackle have consistently been the same guys. Mosley-Smith has been pretty consistent throughout, and **Matt Rotheram** was back for the first time today. We have to get him better and more consistent now. The biggest improvement is at our guard positions. We didn’t protect our quarterback very well today, and that put a lot of pressure on him. We

scripted that somewhat, but I liked how they responded, it was very adverse. Things weren't going well then they come back and hit some big plays late and were able to get some momentum back.

"I was very disappointed in the kickers today. The bright spots in spring have been our snapper, our punter, our place kicker and holder. Today was very inconsistent – we were one-for-four on field goals. We showed inconsistency. We want our players to go out there and perform. We don't go out there to try not to mess up. We go out there to compete. If we're kicking a game-winning field goal, I want to go out there and attack it with confidence. Sometimes when you're doing very well, you can get a little overconfident. You get a little swelled up with performance, so we brought them back down to reality today and challenged them. They need to be more consistent. That was a big concern today."

On punting the football:

"**Matt Yoklic**, he kills it. He hits two and then misses one. He has been a lot more consistent, but he needs to become more consistent in his approach and do it the same way every time. I think that there is not anybody that has a bigger leg than he does, but consistency is important. We have to get the operation time down; I think it has a lot to do with the snap. We've been consistent with that up to this point. We had a bad snap on a game-winning field goal today and weren't able to get the ball off. There were some things that have not showed up all spring that came up today.

"**Kevin Barthelemy** has been very consistent as a snapper. I have a lot of confidence with him there. Today he didn't have any bad snaps with the punter, but he had a couple of balls to the left that he shanked. He had one bad snap. He is expected to be perfect. We are striving for perfection; we'll tolerate excellence."

On quarterback protection:

"We've spent most of our time on running the football, putting in our tempo and our play actions. We haven't spent a lot of time on just our drop-back passing game which is something that we'll really focus on. In the summer it's a lot easier for the kids to throw and do seven-on-seven stuff than it is in the spring. You can't work on running the football and things like that on a voluntary basis – it's impossible to do. We've got a lot of work to do. You can't take a sack. We are a timing team.

"What has happened is that **Tino Sunseri** hasn't seen a lot of the pressures that we put on him today and the timing caught up to him quickly. He took too many sacks; he has to get rid of the football. Our timing wasn't very good, that is 50 percent of it, and the other 50 percent is not picking up the pressure. If you noticed, we weren't blitzing seven. There were four just coming from all different angles and areas. We turned the defense loose today to do that, and it was the first time that we really turned them loose. I knew it was going to be tough for him. We took way too many sacks in the first group. We had 71 plays, and there were 20 plays that were negative, so it's very difficult to have success with that.

"You have to give the defense a lot of credit. We're doing a good job of progressing and teaching. It brought him (Sunseri) back to reality; we have a lot of work to do. We know from last week that they understand the tempo and how we're doing it. I thought today was really slow. We have to continue to get better. Today I took fewer breaks earlier on. We kept on going back and forth, so naturally they're getting fatigued. The number one thing before the fall will be our summer program – the conditioning. We have to make great strides in our conditioning to execute what we're trying to do, and we will. I have a lot of faith in our guys that they can do it, and they will.

"Most of the sacks were because we had a guy coming free and nobody was blocking him and not understanding the timing of our passing game. Our passing game is one, two, three then the ball is out. We definitely don't have a good grasp on that when we're getting some complex blitzes in the mix.

On working with BIG EAST officials in today's scrimmage:

“One of the things that we do when we have the officials here is to use them as a resource. In the fall they will actually come in and talk to the offensive linemen, make a presentation and tell them ‘this is how we define holding.’ We want our guys to understand everything. If we want disciplined, and not beating ourselves is big for us, so we use that available resource. Today the officials came over and actually demonstrated to the players why they called a particular penalty. When we take those breaks in practice that is what the officials are doing.

“There were seven penalties today, that was good that we didn’t have that many today. We had a spearing penalty with **Tyrone Ezell** and unnecessary roughness out of bounds with **Brandon Ifill**. We took both of them immediately out of the game, and when we had a break had the official come over and talk to them about the call.

“We’re going to talk about pass interference, and have our guys understand what the referees are looking for when they call a pass interference penalty. We have our defensive presentation about getting their hands up in the quarterbacks face. I think it’s very important, especially being new to the conference both as coaches and players, that we become familiar with how they call certain penalties. I think they are always going to be very protective with people targeting and people leading with their head – they should too, that is dangerous.”

On standout defensive players in spring football:

Shane Gordon made some big plays. It’s unfair to pinpoint one person because there are so many guys on the defensive line that really just stick out, so I would have to say the defensive line. I think that Gordon showed up. Then you have **Tristan Roberts** and **Jarred Holley** – those guys have really stuck out this spring and are buying into what I’m talking about.

“A lot of times, guys like Tristan and Jarred, who do everything right, and have great character, they don’t think that their character has to get better or they have to get better because everyone is yelling and screaming at the second and third team guy that is not ready or someone below them. You can do all you want with all that because it’s not going to matter. If you can get good players to be great then you did something special.

“We get them to buy in to the idea that ‘you need to get your attitude better.’ Holley has one of the best attitudes in this building. Our guys are starting to buy into that way of thinking and going out there and continually getting better. Tristan has been a guy that I’m really proud of. He has really stepped up big time in past few weeks.”

On players returning in spring football:

“We’ve had a lot of players not go through spring football or who have been limited, so they can’t do scrimmages and things like that. When we get all those guys healthy, come out of next Saturday with everyone healthy, and then we need to get to work training – getting stronger and faster.

“I expect (Mark) Myers to be back. **Brandon Lindsey** is limited – he can go but we’re not trying to push anything. Devin Street should be back, he just had a little knick that he re-aggravated. **Max Gruder** was back today; he played a few snaps. We’re very careful with him.”