

**Pitt Head Football Coach Todd Graham
Sprig Camp Day — 9**

Opening Statement:

“Today was exciting. As we went out, our focus today was to take care of the football on offense and be able to execute. We had enough of our offense installed to be able to really set more of a game tone and mode – the offense dominated today. That was a great sign today. Last Saturday the offense was totally dominated, and today it was the opposite. I’m very impressed. The biggest things offensively was if you take the bad snaps out of it – Chris Jacobson is doing a great job at center, I feel good about that – and the illegal procedure penalties, we were able to see what it is going to look like. Tino Sunseri did really well today – he ran the ball well. He looked really nice today. The defense fell back a little bit today, today was just the offense’s day. I was excited.

“Last Saturday was decisive on defense. We were having success – today was the opposite. There were a lot of positive things defensively today, our offense is just very difficult to defend. We’ve got enough of our system in, they understand what we’re doing and they’ve gotten better. I think that’s the way it should be – it should go back and forth. That tells you that you have a good team out there. I need to look at the film to evaluate more of that.

“I was encouraged today. The first time that we did the kickoff return, Buddy Jackson took one to the house. I wanted that to happen, I was glad that he did that – that was big. Andrew Taglianetti and Kolby Gray looked really good on kickoff coverage. I thought we had fun today – we competed. I liked when things weren’t going well, because it allowed me to see how the defense responded. It let me see their body language and how the leadership was out there – your true character comes out during those times when things aren’t working just as they should be. There were a lot of good signs. I was very pleased today. There’s that time when the button goes off and you can see that ‘these guys might get this.’ That was our offense today. All of a sudden you just created a monster – Tino looked like he had command of everything, and then Mark Myers was out there throwing some good balls. Then you also have Anthony Gonzalez out there being very efficient. We scored 40 points – it was very impressive. Our field goal kicker, Kevin Harper, was pretty impressive. He had a 52-yarder, he made 100% today, every field goal. If we had a step back on anything today, we didn’t punt the ball very well.”

On Chris Jacobson at center:

“He hasn’t played center since fourth grade. He has a little thumb problem. He probably had 70-75% of his snaps today that were perfect. Naturally, when the fatigue sets in and he’s trying to reach and step – it’s going to be a process. He’s getting better. When I watched him on tape at guard he was pretty solid at guard. When I saw his footwork and ability to block at the center position on that tape, I thought that he is going to be a remarkably better player at center than at guard. We have to get the snaps, that’s the problem.”

On Zenel Demhasaj and the guards:

“I think that’s where he’ll end up. I think he’s doing well. He has a handful going up against Chas Alecxih and Aaron Donald. I thought our guards got whipped today. Our inside people – Myles Caragein, Alecxih and Donald, they are hard to handle. Khaynin Mosley-Smith has to get in shape – he plays about three plays, then takes a couple off – we have to get them in shape. These guys aren’t trained to do what we’re doing so there is a fatigue factor. For the first time today, I told them that ‘the first fatigue is mental, you can fight through it. The second fatigue is mental, you can fight through it. I will let you know when you’re fatigued – fight through it.’ They’re starting to do that. The idea is to get to the point where we don’t get fatigued.

“The advantage for me isn’t guys who know how to run the spread, but guys who know how to run the power and inside zone. What’s hurt him (Zenel) is that he’s a little bit behind that group. We have three

guys up front who are the key for us – Jordan Gibbs, Chris Jacobson and Lucas Nix. They are really key for us.”

On left guard:

“We have several guys that aren’t practicing. Matt Rotheram. At guard right now you have Arthur Doakes who we think right now has a lot of potential, Rotheram has a lot of potential there. If anything else changes, Lucas Nix could play inside if he had to. Juantez Hollins has had a good spring – he’s very young and raw at tackle. Greg Gaskins has been steady at tackle. He has gotten better. If he continues to get better, where he can handle right tackle, then we could kick Nix down. Nix is a really special player”

On Shayne Hale:

“From day one, his body language exuded no confidence. That has totally changed. He has a chance now. He’s really working hard and having fun. The offense put in some things to counter the attacking. I’m very proud of Shayne; I do believe that he has a chance.

“The biggest change for all these guys is going to be our summer program and workout regimen. One of the biggest things for a lot of these guys is flexibility. In our training process, it has a lot to do with speed. We can train speed and get faster, but a lot of it has to do with your range of motion. You have to be flexible in your joints. We had about 10 guys at Tulsa that we had to do extra flexibility stuff with. We have over half of our football team here doing that. Even though it’s not good, it’s also encouraging because you can improve flexibility. That is what is going to be good for Shayne – improving his flexibility and being able to get down there in that Panther stance – his explosive power off the ball and down the stretch. He has ability and a lot of heart. That confidence is growing. He’s a dangerous player.”

On special teams:

“We have a different approach to special teams. Some people take it and put it by itself, but we coordinate it with our defense. Our punt cover and our kickoff cover are coached by the defense and ran that way. They are held accountable to the defense because they’re really defensive plays. Then the kickoff return and the field goal PAT is with the offense, and I coach the punt return.

“We segregate it out like that and we’ve had a lot of success with that. If the defensive coordinator is held accountable to it, then I like the fact of having him run that stuff. We went from being a very mediocre kickoff cover team to being a top-10 kickoff cover team in the country because we changed those things.

“I think the kids are excited about what we’re going to be doing on special teams. We’re going to be very explosive and high-octane on special teams.”

On Cam Saddler:

“We hope to have him back next week. “

On encouraging the football players during spring camp:

“We call it the Pitt way. It’s not my way; it’s the Pitt way. I have to be held accountable to doing things the Pitt way. The number one thing we want our guys to have is that they have confidence – for them to believe that they are better than they actually are. We coach and train them hard and we do that with respect. We’ve worked on gaining confidence a lot. It’s a whole bunch of little things that breed that. Confidence - that is the key essential to winning games,”