

Bill O'Brien
Blue-White Game Press Conference
April 21, 2012

Q. Did you have fun today?

COACH O'BRIEN: Sometimes. No, it was fun. It was a good day. It was a great day to get into the stadium and get in a game operation. There's some things that you can really learn from that. You can meet as a staff, which we'll do before these guys head out on the road recruiting, and talk about a lot of the glitches, because obviously it wasn't perfect, and we can really learn from it. So it's a great opportunity for our players, our staff to get in there and get the feel of how a game would be run under our leadership.

Q. Can you assess the quarterback play, and are you closer to having a top two?

COACH O'BRIEN: I feel pretty good where we're at quarterback-wise. I really have to watch the film, I really do. I've got to see the film. It's hard to see from the sideline. But, all three of those guys (Matt McGloin, Rob Bolden, Paul Jones) made some plays today. And again, I have to reiterate, all three of these guys, we've asked a lot of them. We've asked them to learn a system that's totally different than anything they've ever learned, and that takes time. And different guys learn at different rates, and some guys get it right away, other guys get it the next day, other guys get it two days from now.

So we have to let it soak a little bit, let it soak for ourselves as a staff, and then we'll make a decision headed into training camp on who we're going with or who the top two are.

Q. Two-part question for you. Did you have any particular thought or emotion as you came out onto this field today, and what did you say to the guys right after in that huddle?

COACH O'BRIEN: Right before the game?

Q. When you first came out, yeah.

COACH O'BRIEN: Sure, yeah, it's a great place. I was very excited. I wish the weather was a little bit better, but I can't control the weather. But it was a great day. It was really pretty neat for me to run out with the team, and we've got a bunch of guys that are very excited to be a part of this Penn State football family. It was a fun day for me to coach a spring game in Beaver Stadium.

Q. And what did you say to them just right afterwards?

COACH O'BRIEN: Take it into the locker room. Bring it up, bring it down, and take it into the locker room.

Q. Can you talk about the format of today's game, why you chose to go with it, and how you felt it went out there with the coaches and running it the way you guys wanted to run it?

COACH O'BRIEN: Yeah, what we'll do is we go back and talk about it as a staff and research how that went. I thought it went well. There's a bunch of points on the scoreboard, and I think one of the main things I wanted to do there was reward the defense for good plays, and obviously they made a

lot of good plays today. The defense is probably ahead of the offense right now, and that's to be expected in a new program when everybody is learning new things.

I felt it was pretty good, and I think it was exciting for the fans at times. I'm not saying it was the most exciting game in the world, but I said it wasn't going to be the most exciting game in the world. But again, it was great to see all the fans out there, and I think it was a good day for Penn State football.

Q. You talked about it not being potentially very exciting. How much of your offense did the fans, would you say, saw today, and how much did you kind of pull back on the throttle?

COACH O'BRIEN: They saw about 10 percent.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Bill Belton, how you feel he ran the ball today, and are you happy with the way he's adapted to the new position?

COACH O'BRIEN: I've been real happy with Bill. Bill is a guy that's a smart guy, he's a quiet guy. He works at his craft, and when we moved him there, he's picked it up pretty well, and he's got good instincts.

I want him to carry the ball a little bit closer to his chest and take care of the football, because like I tell these guys, when you carry the football, you carry the hopes and dreams of this football team. So ball security will be something that we'll talk to him about.

But again, he's had a good spring and I've been very happy with that position switch. That was a good one.

Q. You were talking about your offense out there. I noticed you guys were writing the plays on a blackboard -- 2, 14, 30 -- stuff like that. Was that simple, just to make it easy?

COACH O'BRIEN: We did that in New England.

Q. I wasn't on the sidelines in New England.

COACH O'BRIEN: Oh, you weren't?

It's just some plays are wrist-banded, and we also have a signal system, but we certainly weren't going to signal plays in with the game being on the Big Ten Network. We just used our wristband system today. We have several different ways of getting a play in, and that's probably the simplest form there is to just write the number on the board and the number corresponds with the play on the wristband.

Q. We saw a number of passes to the tight end, which a lot of people were kind of expecting.

COACH O'BRIEN: Sure, we've got a good group of tight ends. They're all learning a new system. I don't know how many of those passes were completed, but we'll definitely -- we spread the ball around in this offense, and the one thing, people have asked me about the tight ends over and over again, because of the success we had the last two years in New England, but again, every year is different, every team is different, so we're still evaluating this team, and we'll spread the ball to the tight ends, the receivers, the backs. Hopefully it'll be very balanced.

But again, the tight ends will be a big part of what we're doing, and we'll keep developing them in training camp.

Q. You've talked about other factors in how you evaluate quarterbacks. How important is pocket awareness to you when you're evaluating quarterbacks?

COACH O'BRIEN: Yeah, that's a great question. It's a big part of it. Having an understanding that the centers and guards set the pocket and that the tackles set the width of the pocket is very, very important for the quarterback to understand, and young quarterbacks don't always get that. And so we talk to them about hitting their back foot and climbing the pocket to respect the integrity of the pocket. That's a work in progress.

I thought it got a little bit better today. I thought all three of those guys, I can just picture in my mind each one of them climbing in the pocket and stepping up and making a good throw. I think -- and a lot of it has to do with how the line is blocking, too. They have to block better. So it all works together. But I was happy with how they did that at times today.

Q. When you've been asked to sort of assess the team throughout this stretch here, you've mostly talked about intangibles. They're hard workers, they're coachable, et cetera. Now that you're at the end of spring practice, do you have a better sense of the tangibles, what kind of athletes, what kind of talent you have?

COACH O'BRIEN: Yeah, I have a better sense after winter conditioning. I do have a better sense of that, and I think that we've got a big team. I think we've got a physical team. At certain spots I think we've got decent speed. But again, I'll continue to evaluate that during training camp and all the way through, especially when we start playing games next season that'll be a huge evaluation, not having played any games yet, and then we go out next year and play some games and see how we match up. But to this point I've been pleased with our football players and their skill level.

Q. You had mentioned earlier that you had hoped to give the three quarterbacks as even a bit of reps as possible. Were you happy with how many plays each guy got to run or would you have liked to see more from one or another person?

COACH O'BRIEN: Charlie Fisher (quarterbacks coach) did a great job today. I don't know if you noticed, I kept going out there to talk to him. That's what I was talking about, how the reps were. Again, if I'm going to stand up in front of this team and talk about being fair and honest, then we need to be fair in scrimmages like this with the distribution of reps, especially at that position.

I believe it was fairly balanced. Now, obviously it can't be equal; each guy didn't get 30 reps apiece, but I think for the most part it was fairly balanced, and we'll be able to review the film and have a good understanding of how they all played.

Q. You came into this thing with your eyes wide open. This is more than a football program. There are people who come from places where they've learned to lose, like Boston all the way to Florida, and it's a \$100 million program. Is there one thing that you've learned, either that you picked up or that somebody said to you since you've been here that you think is going to be the most helpful going forward?

COACH O'BRIEN: I've learned many, many things. I wouldn't be able to pick out one thing. I've met so many people, whether they're Penn Staters or State College people or people in the new neighborhood that I live in that just talk about what a special place this is and what the University means to the community, the state, the country.

And so I realize every day -- I wouldn't say that there's one thing, but I do know this, that this is a place that I'm very, very proud to be the head football coach here, and I also know that the football

program is a part of an athletic department, which I believe is a great athletic department, which is a part of a special University, and that's all we are. We're a big part. Obviously there's a 108,000-seat stadium that we're sitting in right now. But we're a part of a great athletic program and a part of a great University.

Q. When the spring practice started there were some questions about the defensive end position and lack of game experience, guys coming off of injury like Massaro and everything. They had talked about hopefully maybe getting a five-man rotation. Do you feel good about the defensive ends now coming out of spring practice?

COACH O'BRIEN: I feel very good about our front seven on defense. I think we've got eight to ten defensive linemen that can all rotate in there and play, obviously led by Jordan Hill. He's one of the better inside defensive tackles that I've been around. I feel good about our linebacking corps. We haven't seen Mike Mauti. He's coming back for training camp, and we're really looking forward to having him back on the field.

So I'm happy with the front seven, and that would include the defensive end spot.

Q. You've had to make a few switches in the secondary, moving (Curtis) Drake over and shifting (Adrian) Amos to safety. How do you think that's come along so far and are you happy with the depth you have there?

COACH O'BRIEN: We had to make some moves over there just to get some numbers over there, that's the thing. All those guys have shown flashes. Stephon Morris -- everybody asks about the position changes, but it also starts with the guys that have been there, and Stephon Morris and Malcolm Willis, those guys have had really good springs. They're good leaders for us, and those other guys that you mentioned have come in and done a good job, too... Amos. Those guys have done a good job, too. Again, it's not the deepest position on the team, but there are guys there that can play football.

Q. Obviously it's an important day for your players, but for your coaching staff, can you kind of explain how important it was to kind of start that communication process that you guys will be dealing with throughout games, throughout the season, how you guys communicate yourselves?

COACH O'BRIEN: Yeah, that's a big part of it. I wish we had probably done it one more time this spring. Looking back on it, I wish we had come over here one more time for a scrimmage, but we didn't, and so we'll have to go off of this one.

But a lot of us have worked together. It's funny, you get on the headset, I haven't coached with Mac (McWhorter) in a long time, but it was just like yesterday. You get on the headset, you know what he's talking about and what he's looking for. The same thing with Ted Roof. It's kind of like riding a bike. That's the best thing about having a staff that you've worked with before.

I feel very good about our communication. Where it will be, not where it is right now, but where it will be, but again, we'll get in here during training camp for at least one more, maybe two game-like scrimmages where we have coaches in the press box and coaches on the field and keep working at it.

Q. How did you come out of this scrimmage and the spring in general from an injury standpoint? Anybody get banged up today and everybody going forward?

COACH O'BRIEN: Yeah, we had some rough last couple days. T.J. Rhattigan had a knee today. I'm not sure what it is. Didn't look great. Great kid. Felt terrible for him.

James Van Fleet the other day in practice, a knee. I'm not sure exactly what that is because the swelling -- there's a lot of swelling there, but great kid. Felt terrible for him, too.

So you just hate to lose anybody. I met with the parents of our players this morning and talked to them about the violence of the sport and feel great about our training staff led by Tim Bream and our team doctor, Dr. Sebastianelli. There are a couple guys there that really care about these kids and will take care of them, and you hate to see injuries, but those things occur in football.

Q. Can you talk about Paul Jones' overall body of work this spring and what does he need to show you to win the starting job in the fall?

COACH O'BRIEN: Paul Jones has gotten better every single day. Paul Jones and I have a unique relationship because we both have unique senses of humor. He's been a fun guy to coach, and I'll keep between he and I what he needs to do to win the starting job, but he made a lot of strides this spring, and he's doing better in school, and I've really enjoyed being around Paul Jones.