

9/12/2011: Todd Graham Big East teleconference transcript (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Below is the complete transcript from Pittsburgh head coach Todd Graham's Big East teleconference on Monday, as the Panthers prepare for their game against Iowa at Kinnick Stadium on Sept. 17:

Graham's opening statement:

"Well, we are thrilled to be 2-0, even though we probably played down to the level of competition last week. We just didn't close it out. We had a chance to go up 35-7, turned the football over. We had a couple of turnovers in the second half that we have to eliminate. We're putting the ball in care-free too much. We turned the ball over five times at one position in the first two games. But lots of positive things. Guys have been giving in the last minute of both games just cheap scores, things like that. But again, any time you can be 2-0, you're excited. We're moving forward. It gets tougher this week going down to Iowa. We know exactly what to expect there, and we've got to play our best game to be successful."

On the progress of linebacker Brandon Lindsay in Pitt's new defensive scheme:

"That was by design. We put him at field end and in the boundary, what we call our "Boundary Panther," and he has played both. He has got two quarterback sacks. I thought he played his best game last week. He was very impressive against the run and impacted the quarterback. He did a great job. He's

a guy we're going to try to move around and try to get our best guy on their best guy. He has done a great job for us, and a guy that's a really solid football player."

On whether new schemes on both sides of the football are where he thought they'd be through two games:

"Well, I would have liked for us to have played a heck of a lot better than we played last week. I think the first game was about where I thought it would be. It's just like defensively, I think we played about 26 series. We've had 17 3-and-outs, which is phenomenal. The other nine series, we've given up six touchdowns, and have had five critical errors on those, and most of them have been late in the game. I think they scored two touchdowns in the last three-and-a-half minutes of the ball game, and I think a lot of it is just getting complacent when you're ahead and stuff like that, and then we've got to be more disciplined with what we're doing.

"But we're about, I expected to be offensively. We got Ray [Graham], who is the leading rusher in the country right now. He has done a tremendous job. We've had dropped balls, which you don't really say you expect that, but sometimes those things happen whenever you're putting in a new system. But the main thing has just been the plays where we have not executed the offense, or the plays we've operated outside, not showing the discipline that we need to have to run this.

"You can't ad-lib in this offense. You have to be disciplined running it. To be quite honest, we haven't really played well at quarterback. We've done some great things at that position at times, and we have great potential and I have great belief in Tino [Sunseri] and what we're doing. There's just a lot of pressure on that position, and we've got to be more disciplined and learn and continue to work hard to get better.

"I'm really pleased with where we're at special teams wise, other than we're missing field goals and the kicks have not

been very good. They've been inconsistent. But our special teams units have been stellar. I mean, we've played two football games and have had zero penalties. We had one penalty kicking the ball out of bounds, but our units have been very disciplined, very stellar.

"We've been, for the most part defensively, we've done a great job against the run, and doing well against the pass. Just giving up some bonehead, critical error plays and stuff like that. We've just got to get those things corrected, but we've got the makings of a really good football team. We've just got to improve and got to do it in a hurry this week. We'll be tested. We'll find out where we're at this week, I really believe."

On concerns with the offensive line through two games, particularly in the passing game:

"I think it's a combination of a couple things. We have a couple of new guys playing. No question we've had mental errors there and things that we've got to get corrected. We're holding the ball too long at quarterback. We've been sacked six times on max protection, which, I could tell you we've been sacked, in four years, six times in max protection. That just tells you that some of these things, they grasp faster than others. I think too, I think it has been also, sometimes you forget you're in your first year as a coach, and we've got to make sure that we're mastering and be able to execute the things that we put on there. I think probably, we're trying to execute too many things.

"But our offensive linemen, we've ran the ball extremely well. I mean, we've got the leading rusher in the country with Ray. Even with that, there are a lot of things fundamentally we can improve upon. We've got to get better. I think [Chris] Jacobson has played two solid games. [Jordan] Gibbs has only played one game, because the first game, he hyperventilated and had an asthma deal, and he played a good game this last

game, not a great game. [Lucas] Nix has been steady. He was just making too many mental mistakes and breakdowns. But once we eliminate those, we're going to be fine. We've got to throw the ball on timing, and we're not used to doing that.

"These are the things you didn't see in scrimmages, you didn't see in practice, that you don't see in the game. But we're very patient. We know exactly where we're at and where we're going, and we've just got to improve. But the key to our development's up front, the offensive line getting better fundamentally, and then our quarterback just settled in running the offense. When we do that, we're going to score points."

On the quarterback situation:

"Oh, there's no doubt that Tino's our quarterback. We had planned on getting Trey [Anderson] action in the fourth quarter. I just kind of felt like we were making mistakes and kind of fumbling around there, and I said, 'Hey, we're not going to play Maine and not get our back-up quarterback some reps,' because he's a true freshman, he's a walk-on. He got here in August, so we wanted to get those reps for him and that's why we put him in there. But we planned on doing that. That was a planned thing. But we've got all the confidence in the world in Tino, but he has got to play better, and we've got to get it done."

On whether he has a background with either Iowa or with Kirk Ferentz:

"We've got a tremendous respect for Coach Ferentz and the Iowa program. He is one of the guys that are active legends in the business, watching what they've done and admiring how they do it. They've done the same thing. They're not changing anything. They're very consistent. They block well. They tackle well. They don't make mistakes, and they don't beat themselves. And then they play football in a very, very

physical manner, so I've got a lot of respect for him.

"I've had the pleasure of meeting him a couple of times, but other than that, I don't know him that well. I know he has got a history up here in Western Pennsylvania with Upper St. Clair High School here, and I think he aided back here under Coach [Jackie] Sherrill. So I know a lot of people here know him well and think an awful lot of him, as do I. We have mutual friends, Bob Stoops, and guys like that, that think an awful lot of him as I do."

On whether a running back like Ray Graham is a safety net while installing a new offense:

"Oh, I'm very thankful for him. I can tell you that. And that's the thing, you know. I can tell you that if you look at it, it's high-risk, and it's also a high-reward deal what we do offensively. I can tell you that we're closer than you think. Having a guy like Ray that you know can make, and I can tell you, we sometimes hand the ball off to him and we're fundamentally messing up, leaving a guy unblocked, and he just makes him miss and makes yards. His tenacity and how he competes is as good as I've ever been around. He has got a chance to be premiere, one of the best I think in the country. Absolutely, that's something that helps you. It gives you a great deal of confidence when you have a guy like that in the backfield. And Zach Brown has been very consistent as well. I think the running back core has been very good."

"I think we've been inconsistent at receiver other than Mike Shanahan. Mike Shanahan has been stellar for us. We've got to get more consistency at receiver. As we go and get those younger guys developed up front on the offensive line, we're just going to get better and better. But everything we do, the biggest improvement has got to be up front and at quarterback."