CHRIS ASH: Good morning, everyone. Hopefully you guys have enjoyed another great event here in Chicago around Big Ten Media Days. I'd like to start and just say thank you guys for all that you do for college football, for the Big Ten and for our program specifically. Looking forward to working with many of you guys here this year as we go forward.

Just like all the other coaches, I'd like to thank Commissioner Delany for all of his years of service, his leadership for our league, for our institutions, our student-athletes. Because of him, the Big Ten is as strong as it's ever been and the best league in the country, and also because of him, Rutgers was able to join such a great league, and we're here today because of him.

We'd like to welcome Kevin Warren, also, as he takes over, and looking forward to watching him continue to grow and strengthen our conference in years ahead.

It's the 150th anniversary of college football, and at Rutgers we're very excited about being part of that history. It's important to our institution, our program, our fans, and we're excited about the celebrations that we have scheduled surrounding the 150th on campus.

Just a couple things about our program facilities, since I've arrived on campus and Pat Hobbs our athletic director has gotten on campus, we understand the importance of facilities to have an opportunity to compete in a league like this, and we've continued to improve our facilities as we go forward, and we're excited in a week here that we're going to open the Greg and Anna Brown Family Locker Room. It's a huge addition to our facilities. And in another year we're going to open the Gary and Barbara Rodkin Academic Success Center on campus for our student-athletes, and I think we've done a tremendous job of improving the experience for our student-athletes with our facilities, and it's also helped us in recruiting.

2019, it's a new year. It's a new team, as we go back and look at 2018 like we did at the end of the season, it was wasn't a lot of fun. When you're 1-11, things are difficult. I own it, and the good thing is that we can control our future. We're the ones that determine whether we're going to stay there or move forward, and I'm really excited about our football team, the way they've responded, the way they've worked, the way they've come together, and excited about what we can show on the field in terms of improving from last season.

I think this year we have the best chemistry on our team so far, the best leadership on our team, and it's because of the three guys that we've brought here with us today, all three elected captains here this spring, two of them are juniors on the defensive side Tyshon Fogg, Tyreek Maddox-Williams and offensive lineman Zach Venesky. All three of them are great representatives of our program. They're leaders, they're high-character individuals. They work extremely hard to be great players, to be the best they can be, and they hold each other accountable as well as other players on our team, and I think that's going to allow us to improve as we move forward.

I get asked a lot about what we have to do to improve, and first and foremost, I believe that more games are lost than they are won, and for us we have to figure out, and it starts with me, how not to lose games. That starts with taking care of the football, foolish penalties, playing with great fundamentals and tremendous effort, and those are things that we've been working on through spring, this summer, and we're going to focus on here in training camp as we get ready for our opening game against UMass.

With that, I'll go ahead and open it up for any questions.

Q. How confident are you that you have a lot of depth at jack and outside linebacker this year, that that's going to help you finally get over that hump? I know pass rush has been an issue the past few seasons.

CHRIS ASH: Just looking at our defense overall, I think right now we probably going into the season we have the most competition at all three positions. Starting with our D-line, because our jack position is kind of a hybrid outside linebacker/D-end position. I think we have the most players that we feel confident in playing on our defensive line. It's going to allow us to rotate more players that will keep our players fresh, which will in turn hopefully help increase the production of our pass rush and get more sacks.
At linebacker right now, I think it's the strongest position in terms of the depth and the ability on our football team, and in the secondary I feel really good about our depth and our strength there with our players and the competition that we've been able to create through player development and recruiting.

But overall just defensively, I like where we're at from a depth standpoint.

Q. I know you brought in a lot of transfers this past year. Can you talk about any of those publicly, and if so, which ones can you talk about?
CHRIS ASH: Yeah, we did. Just as we evaluated our roster and what we needed to do to move forward, we thought we could fill in some holes at certain spots by bringing in some transfers, whether it be four-year transfers or grad transfers, and I'm excited about the guys that are on campus right now. What they've shown, the guys that were there through spring practice, some guys that came here this summer and what they're going to be able to do to help our football team.

I think you just look at the offensive side, we brought in McLane Carter to help us at quarterback to help create some competition, Matt Alaimo at tight end is also a transfer that will be eligible here this fall to help us. On the defensive side Drew Singleton transferred back home to New Jersey, he's at Will linebacker for us and we really like what we've seen out of him so far, but those are some guys that we think have a chance to potentially impact us right now that have been cleared to play.

Q. As somebody who has to play Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State and Ohio State every year, how do you feel about the debate of realignment in terms of divisions?
CHRIS ASH: I know a lot of people have talked about that. I think it just goes by the year. There was a time when the league went to the different divisions, that some of the traditional blue-blood programs weren't as strong at that time, and I don't think you're going to be able to realign the conference to make everybody happy. We could try to do that and have those conversations, I just don't think it's possible.

It is what it is. It's a very competitive league on both sides, in the East and in the West, and we've got to play who we play, and I like where it's at right now, and I don't see it changing anytime soon.

Q. How important has it been to have John McNulty, same offensive coordinator for an off-season? Something you haven't had so far.
CHRIS ASH: Yeah, that's a big part of what we feel will be our success moving forward, having the same offensive coordinator. I think it's the first time in maybe 10 years at Rutgers. It's an amazing stat, but it's a true stat. And I think what John brings going forward and being back a second year is just the knowledge of the players. When an offensive coordinator goes in to a new situation, the first thing he wants to do is here's my package, here's my system, here's what we're going to do, without great knowledge necessarily about what the players' strength and weaknesses are and what they can do, and coming back for his second year, John has a great understanding of our roster, our players, and more importantly probably what our offensive line can do and what our quarterback can do, and we've been able to make the necessary adjustments in my opinion to fit our players and hopefully put them in positions to have success, knowing who we have to play week in and week out.

That's a huge point for our program, to be able to get a guy to come back in that position for a second year and work with our players, so there is some consistency, but there's some understanding of what we have to do to fit the players that we have.

Q. You have two really good running backs coming back in Isaiah Pacheco and Raheem Blackshear. How do you expect them to elevate their game heading into 2019?
CHRIS ASH: Yeah, they both had a good year last year. It starts with Raheem Blackshear. He's the veteran guy of the group. He's also a captain of ours, so he's the leader of our offense. Really excited to see him take another step off his freshman year. He had an impact on our team. Last year he took a step forward because this next year we expect him to be an elite player for us.

Isaiah burst on the scene last year as a true freshman, had some really big runs, some good plays. We expect him to take another step forward and become more of a complete running back. He was a good runner. He needs to become a better receiver as well as a better pass protector, also. And then we have two other -- actually three other scholarship running backs that we're excited about, Elijah Barnwell is running back in our program, and the two young freshmen in Kay'Ron Adams and Aaron Young that we're excited about. So we think we have a good stable of backs that are going to provide some play making ability for our offense, but it'll be led by those two individuals.

Q. You return about 70 percent of your offensive production from last year. What's the dynamic of meshing those newcomers with what you have returning?
CHRIS ASH: Yeah, it's going to start just on how we
install things. We've had some guys on campus in the spring, we've had some guys that just showed up here this summer. We have to do a great job of installing our offense in a fashion that allows those guys to learn quickly so we can truly evaluate them and not have to think and be confused and play slow.

But we have three or four guys that we think are going to be potentially impact players and play a big role in our offense’s improvement and success this fall, but we’ve just got to be really smart on how we install and teach and allow those guys to learn so we can get a true evaluation on them.