

Division I Football Championship: North Dakota State vs South Dakota State

Friday, January 6, 2023

Frisco, Texas, USA

North Dakota State Bison

Matt Entz

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Once again, good afternoon and welcome back to Toyota Stadium and the 2023 FCS Football Championship here in Frisco, Texas. Glad to see everyone once again. I'm Jim Powers. I'll be moderating all weekend for everyone.

We'll kick things off, the folks from Fargo have arrived. It's North Dakota State once again and their head coach Matt Entz. We'll ask Coach for an opening statement and open it up for questions.

Coach, take it away and congratulations on being here.

MATT ENTZ: Excited group of young men, coaches, support staff. Great trip yesterday. Got down here, and you could tell the energy level continues to grow and swell.

I'm sure I'll get a question today how is it different than any other trip? They're all different because it's a different group. Super excited about a really good opponent we're going to play on Sunday.

Right now we've got to practice. We've got some things we need to continue to shore up, continue to get better hopefully here the next couple of days.

But it's going to be a great game. We know our opponents are a very good football team with a ton of tools, ton of school kids all over the place. So it will be an exciting one for both fan bases.

Q. Not really more on Xs and Os, but more just on the feel of coming down here. I know you said it's always different. One thing we were just having kind of a fun discussion about was everybody came out in gray when you guys came up to take the picture, then you came in here in this extremely lovely hoodie. I was saying, wow, the gray was kind of a low key look, but this hoodie right here, can you just explain this for us?



Because this is a fantastic look right here.

MATT ENTZ: This is our Military Appreciation Day we have late in the year, probably in November, usually around Veterans Day. This is Operation Hat Trick. I just threw it on because I'm trying to get one step closer to practice. This was my practice hoodie and getting ready to go.

Just grabbed it because it was in my locker.

Q. I know we talked after the Incarnate Word game wanting to get healthy and back up to speed after that. With these past weeks that have gone by, how do you feel the progress has gone for you guys? Do you feel you've gotten as healthy as you wanted to after the Incarnate Word game?

MATT ENTZ: No, we're never going to get as healthy as I would like to. We're still going to have a handful of guys that won't play for us on Sunday. But everyone who will participate is as healthy as they've been probably since fall camp.

We've had a good winter camp. We've been able to get guys healthier. I don't know if it's healthy enough to help us. We'll find out on Sunday.

I'm excited about where we're at. I think our mental health is in a good spot too. Our kids are excited and hungry to go play this game.

Q. You mentioned knowing that South Dakota State is a really good team. You've already seen them once this year. How much does it help going into this National Championship Game?

MATT ENTZ: It's familiarity on both sides of the ball. It's not just NDSU familiar with South Dakota State, but South Dakota State is also extremely familiar with North Dakota State and have a pretty good bead on personnel, have a good bead on what each team likes to do from a schematic standpoint. So I anticipate there will be a little bit of a chess match at different times on Sunday.

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At the end of it, it's the team that's going to be able to execute the best. The team that makes the fewest errors is probably going to have the greatest chance to win.

Q. What is different with the physicality of South Dakota State as opposed to five, six, seven years ago?

MATT ENTZ: I don't know if much has changed along the offensive line. I go back five, six years ago. They were pretty talented football team as well. I remember 2016, them coming into the Fargo Dome and beating us. 2017, them whipping us in Brookings. So this isn't a program that just appeared.

I think they've been a player in FCS football for a number of years now. Coach Stiegelmeier does an unbelievable job through the recruiting process. They've got a great developmental program going on down there as well. I think it's pretty unique when you have two programs that lean on high school talent that are able to finish the year pitting against one another here on Sunday.

Q. Is there a different feel among your team because of their recent success against you?

MATT ENTZ: We haven't talked about it because all we have to go is 1-0 this week and the next one's the most important one. I think there's learning opportunities from previous games, but we don't want to dwell on it.

One of the sayings that we've kind of utilized is learn, burn, and return. We need to learn from our past and then get over it. Then we've got to move forward. Sit around and worry about what happened back in October, it's going to create a lot of fear and anxiety within our team.

So we're excited for the competition. We know they're a really good football team, but to get here, you have to be.

Q. If Eli Mostaert is able to play, what can you expect out of him? He hasn't played in 3 1/2 months.

MATT ENTZ: That's a good question. Over the course of winter camp, he has participated kind of here and there sporadically, a lot of indy. Hasn't really seen any live reps. It will be interesting to see how quickly he can transition back into that mode.

Probably the closest thing to a live rep is maybe one or two pass rushes that he had, but again, we were very cautious with him as we navigated winter camp.

Q. I know you've had great success going into the state of South Dakota to get guys. Are you surprised that SDSU hasn't -- I know they've tried. I know you try

to keep the borders tight -- but the Jacks or USD hasn't had success in getting a North Dakota player to come south?

MATT ENTZ: I don't know if surprised is the right word. It's something that we make sure that we try to do a really good job and get the best players out of the state of North Dakota. We challenge them always that the best players come play at the state university.

We've been fortunate to sneak down into Sioux Falls and Watertown and Pierre and get some really good football players out of the state of South Dakota, but it's never easy. There's always a connection to Brookings or either universities in South Dakota.

Q. Mark Gronowski, their quarterback, he got hurt in the first series when they played here the last time and lost all of last year. What have you seen when you watch him on film in the games he's played in already?

MATT ENTZ: He does a great job as their quarterback. You can tell by the confidence he plays with he has great understanding of what they're doing schematically.

I think just -- what I see now in January versus what I saw in October, I see a young man who looks to be much more healthy. I think maybe early in the year they were trying to protect him a little bit with that knee. Still probably some trust issues. I've never gone through an ACL tear like he did, but I'm sure they weren't necessarily wanting to get him involved into the quarterback run game as much as they have of late.

He's become a bigger part of that. A lot of that shows up on third down where they try to get you more into a vanilla call because of the threat of quarterback run game. He just adds another facet to their offense.

Like I said, they've got great offense coming out of their backfield. Their tight ends are two of the best tight ends you're going to see in the country. They have great wide receivers that can not only stretch you vertically, but not afraid to run across the middle. Then you couple that with a really good offensive line. They've done a great job of putting this group together.

Q. Can you give a comment on Wisniewski? Two Elite 90 awards two years in a row.

MATT ENTZ: If anyone knows Cole, Cole is a perfectionist. Cole comes from a family over in Sparta, Wisconsin. His stepfather is actually currently over in Africa serving our country. I think Cole has a pretty regimented lifestyle. He knows what he likes. He's very



organized. He's very probably type A.

I think you see just the -- this award talks to the support people we have on campus. Kelli Layman, our academic coordinator, does an excellent job, our faculty and staff on campus. Also, Cole in the time and effort it takes to be a student-athlete in the Division I level, he's going to try to be a champion in all facets.

Q. Speaking of campus, no secret that former President Bresciani threw his entire support behind the program. Have you noticed anything change whatsoever with the new guy in charge?

MATT ENTZ: No, I haven't. I know he's excited to be down here. I got a big handshake and a big smile from him when I saw him on the plane yesterday. His wife and his son and daughter are here too. I take that as all positive moves.

I think Dr. Cook has done a tremendous job. I know it's early in his tenure. I've been fortunate enough to create a relationship with him, and I know he's excited about NDSU athletics.

Q. Coach, it seems like the road to Frisco has been paved by great line play for both teams, really good conditioning. What are your thoughts on the battle in the trenches and how impactful that's going to be on the outcome of this game?

MATT ENTZ: Well, I think that is the outcome of the game is probably going to be whichever team can find an advantage up front on the offensive line, defensive line.

I think both teams pride themselves on being really good in the trenches, defensively and offensively, and you know those two position groups are going to have a huge, huge impact on the outcome of the game.

So it's not a surprise two Midwest teams are going to lean on their offensive and defensive line.

Q. When you played Incarnate Word, obviously, they have a dynamic passing attack, and in trying to take that away, they were able to get some run, a little bit more on running lanes than you would normally like to give up versus a team. Obviously South Dakota State poses a much bigger threat on the ground, but they do have that threat to pass. How do you balance that defensively to be able to make sure that you don't wholesale out to stop the running in Isaiah Davis but then also take care of those guys on the back end?

MATT ENTZ: That's always the conflict that you're put in

when you're playing good football teams is where do you want to give some things up? They do have some RPO out there, some run-pass option.

We're going to have to jump in and out of two high, single high, find good times to bring pressure and try to speed up the operation. But that gets back to my comment earlier today, there's going to be somewhat of a chess match throughout the course of the game. One, because of familiarity, and two, I think there's two very good football teams that are going to play on Sunday.

Like I said, what we can't do is we can't give up explosive plays. They're too good not to move the football, and they're going to have some success on the ground and in the air, but we need to minimize the explosive plays, and we need to play better on third down than we did earlier in the year and probably even going back to our '21 game.

Q. Is that what you're going to -- like these practices, you're anxious to get out to practice. Is that kind of what you want to make sure you're cleaning up in these last --

MATT ENTZ: Just communication, assignment, special teams-wise. Being down in Texas, all of a sudden there are some other distractions. We have a lot of family down here. We have a handful, about a half dozen kids who are from the area. You just want to get them back into the game.

Yesterday was an early morning practice. We haven't practiced for over 24 hours. That's my excitement is just getting back out there and making sure we get back to football because ultimately that's why we're down here.

Q. Looking a little bit more at Davis on what he's been able to do on the ground. First four games, didn't get in the end zone once, and then nine straight in a row scoring, including all three of the playoff games and getting a couple against Delaware. You talked about just sort of slowing down the run and the pass, especially on the offensive yardage seam. What can you do to stop a lot of the scoring? There's been so much offensive scoring just on the running game.

MATT ENTZ: We've got to play really well in the red zone. We need to tackle better than we did the first time we played them, especially in the second half. That's a challenge to our guys.

We've done some things to try to show how tackling is going to be critical, especially how many broken tackles Isaiah Davis has had throughout the course of the year. He is a big, physical runner. If he gets his shoulders

parallel to the line of scrimmage, he's tough to bring down. We're going to have to get a lot of people to the point of attack.

But playing really good red zone defense, giving up field goals. It's kind of a saying within our program that they're not going to get you beat. But we have to -- again, it goes back to, if we can play better on third down defensively during the course of the game, it will help us.

There's on average probably about ten series during the course of the game, and we just haven't done a good enough job of ending those on third down when we've had opportunities.

Q. You guys are down here in Frisco as underdogs. I know you probably haven't talked about it much within the team, but has it created kind of a different mood for this National Championship Game?

MATT ENTZ: Our kids probably do know. They're on their phones more than I am, so I'm sure it's popped up on some sort of social media outlet. But we haven't talked about it.

I think the fact that we're down here and there's an opportunity, a great opportunity, and our kids have earned this opportunity, I think that's all the motivation that they need right now.

They're excited for the Bison, and they should be because that's all we've talked about. We get to go win a National Championship on Sunday, and we're excited about that.

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