

Division I Football Championship: Montana vs South Dakota State

Friday, January 5, 2024

Frisco, Texas, USA

Montana Grizzlies

Toyota Stadium

Bobby Hauck

Press Conference

JIM POWERS: We're going to go ahead and get started. Once again, welcome to Frisco, Texas, in the 2024 NCAA FCS Football Championship. I'm Jim Powers, and I'll be your moderator for all the press conferences this weekend.

Joining us now, a team that we haven't seen in a little bit here in the National Championship Game, from Montana, their Head Coach Bobby Hauck joins us.

Coach, congratulations on a terrific year. We'll let you get started with opening comments.

BOBBY HAUCK: Thanks, Jim. I appreciate the help. I guess I'll just start with that. We really appreciate all the great treatment we've had here in Frisco and all the hospitality, everything from getting to the hotel and getting welcomed to just how welcome everybody that's associated with running this game here at Toyota Stadium has been.

I congratulate South Dakota State. Coach Rogers and the crew have done just a great job. What a terrific run-up to this game, unbelievable job this season by them. It's a privilege for us to be here and to have a chance to compete in the game against them.

With that, I like our team. We've done a nice job. We've worked hard. I think our guys are looking forward to the game on Sunday. Hopefully we have a good performance because we're going to need that to compete with South Dakota State.

Q. You've talked about some of the terrific things your team has done throughout the year. What's the one aspect that your team has really done best in your eyes?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, I think we've been good enough in



certain aspects of this to be here in the past couple of years but haven't been able to do it. So I'd say the number one thing we've done is stay healthy.

Not that we haven't had any injuries. We've lost guys, but we haven't lost multiple people at the same position and wound up decimated. That's probably the best thing we've done.

The other thing we've done well is we've played -- I hate the term complementary football, but we've done that. We've played well in all three phases.

Q. After September you had some close games, and then you had a loss at Northern Arizona. When you started to get on a roll, what did you see in your players that just was so refreshing that maybe was a burden earlier when you weren't playing as well as you could?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, first of all, the goal isn't to play your best football on September 1st. The goal is to improve through the season, and I think we just kind of personify what happens when you stick with things and you keep working and you persist.

Q. You said obviously you love this long break in between to game plan and stuff. Now that you've been down here and have been able to kind of experience the lead up to it, how much have you been able to appreciate that? Also maybe, do you think you'd appreciate it as much now being kind of an older, veteran coach than maybe if you came earlier?

BOBBY HAUCK: Just had to throw the age thing in there (laughter). All right, true.

Well, this has been great for our guys. This is a bowl trip to a degree, where you can come down to the bowl site and the game site and continue to prepare and enjoy the camaraderie and get acclimated to the surroundings. So I think that's been terrific for our guys.

You distracted me with calling me old.

But it's a different preparation for us. Kent and I were just talking about it. When we used to have to do this, a lot of times we'd play on Saturday, like the James Madison game, I think, played on Saturday and fly all the way back across the country. Like I would leave the game, stop by the tailgate, say hi to my wife, go in and start watching film, have a Monday practice on Sunday, Tuesday practice on Monday, and get on the plane and go play the game on Friday in Chattanooga.

So we didn't have great ability to prepare, much time to do that. This has been a lot more smooth for us in that regard.

Q. This is your fourth time here as a head coach. The previous three did not go the way you wanted them to. What are your thoughts on being back and just maybe how you're approaching this game versus those other three?

BOBBY HAUCK: So I won't be redundant on the preparation. That's different certainly. You play every game to win. Each game plan is different. This lead-up and the prep, as I mentioned, is completely different than those games.

Yeah, when you get to this game, the team, as I mentioned when I first sat down, the team on the other side is always good. You have to go -- as simple as it may sound, both teams are good football teams. You have to play well to win the game. If you don't play well, there's no way you're going to win it.

So you have to go play well and get a couple of breaks, and that's the way it goes. The team we're playing has won 28 straight. They're awfully good.

Q. Is legacy anything that you think about in terms of your coaching career at the university? And how much would it mean, maybe for you, to come away with a win on Sunday?

BOBBY HAUCK: To contradict Sean, legacy is for old guys, and I'm not there yet.

(Laughter).

Q. Can you speak to the late Don Read, just the impact he made on you in your coaching career? And then how would you describe the impact he made into launching the Montana Grizzlies into the type of program they've become now?

BOBBY HAUCK: You bet, Frank. Thanks for bringing that up. I was going to touch on that at the end if somebody

didn't. Coach Read passed pretty much while we were in the air coming down here.

Coach Read had an unbelievable impact on a lot of people, just a truly great man and a great guy. He got me going in coaching along with several guys on our staff.

Just a wonderful human being. I think that for him to be as beloved by the percentage of his former players that he is is just phenomenal and speaks volumes to who he is.

Don had a major impact on the University of Montana, the football program, the university, and the state of Montana. Obviously he had a life well lived, and he did exactly what he wanted to do at the pace he wanted to do it.

Q. I heard you mentioned last year you sat a little bit with John Stiegelmeier last year after he won the national title. He invested a lot of time in that program and got over and won that title a year ago. Being in a similar position to him this year, what did that conversation kind of mean to you a year ago, and how did that inform things maybe this year now that you're in a similar position to him going into this game?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, again, Stieg is way older than me now. For goodness sake. Do they have a mirror or something over there? These bright lights show all the flaws.

Coach Stieg is a friend. We've known each other for quite a while. Got to do battle looking across the field at him a few times.

The 2009 team that had us way down in the playoffs was probably good enough to win it. I think you only get a few opportunities -- back to Greg's point, you only get a few bites at this apple, and I was obviously thrilled for him to get that victory in his last game at South Dakota State last year.

It's just a little bit ironic that the next night the FBS Championship Game is on, and Stacy and I sat and watched it with him and had dinner with him and got a chance to enjoy it and tell him what a great job we thought he did.

It's a unique thing. I don't know the exact number of years. I think he was 30-some consecutive years at South Dakota State. That's just phenomenal, the commitment he had to that university and that program, seeing it through transition and up a division. And then culminating with the FCS Division I Championship was just a good way to go, a lot like Don Read, who I just spoke of.

Q. I spoke with Alex Gubner, and he was like adamant about staying in the moment and being purposeful about making every day count and every week, and he pointed to the Northern Arizona loss as kind of like a reset for you guys and really being purposeful about the way you prepare every single day to go out there. Is that something that was kind of like a mantra for you after that game, or was that just something that the players kind of decided that they really needed to lock in there?

BOBBY HAUCK: You know, it's coaching or playing 101 probably, where you only have one game each week. If you start worrying about another one, you have a chance to get beat. That's not what I'm saying happened down at Flagstaff because they just beat us and they did a good job.

But you have one game a week. Our opinion is it's the biggest game in the country because it's the one we're playing in. That's how we approach it each week every year. Sometimes you accomplish that a little better than others.

Q. Coach, the players have touched on this sometimes this year, but you guys have beaten teams this year that you lost to last year. You mentioned Sacramento State, Montana State, North Dakota State. Do you view this year as a little bit of a revenge tour kind of getting back on track and all?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, that's not really for me. Every team is different. Our team's different. Their team's different. The lead-up to it is different.

You can make a big deal of -- I shouldn't say you. We can make a big deal out of that, but that all goes out the window about the second play. So you've got to go focus in on the assignment and executing. That's what we've done, I think.

Q. Coach, you kind of touched on it a little bit about SDSU. You said they're a good team. Very open-ended question, what are some things that you see that make them as good as they have been?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, they're veteran. Obviously I mentioned that South Dakota State has won 28 in a row -- unless my numbers are wrong, but I think I'm right on. You don't get to that point without being really good at everything. So the team doesn't have flaws.

I mean, some of their players are better than some of their others, and every team has positions that are stronger from the NFL on down. But they've got a lot of returning starters

from a team that did this a year ago.

They haven't really had many close games or any close games. They've just kind of dominated everybody. I think that's probably what they expected coming into the season, knowing what they had coming back. I think they're really into the detail of what they're doing there.

We've had three weeks. I've watched a lot of offense, defense, kicking. I think everybody has an understanding of what they're trying to accomplish schematically. They know what the guys to the right and left are doing. They play hard, physical. They do things that we kind of espouse ourselves and admire in football teams. They do it.

Q. If I could swing it back to Don Read for a moment, he had a list of seven things on his office wall. Never took a photo of it, so I'm paraphrasing, but one of them was about special teams winning at least one game a year. I wonder if you remember that.

BOBBY HAUCK: Two games a year.

Q. Two games a year. See, I was wrong.

BOBBY HAUCK: It was in our special teams book. I've plagiarized a bunch from Don over the years.

Q. That's kind of the question. You've made a mark as a special teams coach as well as being a head coach. Is it thanks to Don Read, or is it in spite of?

BOBBY HAUCK: I always kind of avoided it when I was around Coach Read just because I didn't -- I wasn't interested in it. Then when I went to UCLA, Coach Donahue roped me in, and that's where I kind of got going on it. I used to run the other direction when Coach Read would come. I should have listened. My attitude about it put me three years behind, or two.

Yeah, Coach emphasized it obviously. It was his thing. I think I always took it from Coach that he really truly believed it was a third of the game.

Q. And to follow up, South Dakota State, we've talked about the quarterback and their defense, but their special teams, including a pretty dynamic punt returner, seem like a tough task. Can you speak to that a little bit?

BOBBY HAUCK: Yeah, it's going to be redundant to what I just talked about. They're good in all three phases, meaning they're really good in the kicking game. They play well week in, week out. Again, everything they do is hard

to pick apart in terms of trying to find a hole or something to take advantage of. They just don't give up much, and they take a lot in the return game.

We've got problems everywhere when we look at these guys trying to game plan. The kicking game is one of those.

Q. At the start of the season you shuffled your coaching staff a little, gave everyone new responsibilities. That turned out pretty good, even better than you thought it might?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, I'll go back to front on that, Jay. I don't think anything ever turns out better than you thought it might. Otherwise, you wouldn't have done it. So you do things because you think they'll be highly productive. Otherwise, you don't do it. You do something else.

You know, I've talked about this earlier in the year. We have everybody -- I think, Justin Green coaching a different phase or position, what we're doing. I think it's worked out obviously well. We're sitting here with, whatever, 13, 14 wins, whatever it is. So that's been good. I think it speaks volumes to how our staff is, how they're receptive to doing different things.

It goes back to my response to Fritz on the special teams question or Coach Read, I mean you take things, this is something that years and years ago when I was an assistant at Colorado, I got to talk to Coach Paterno about some head coaching things. Coach Paterno, they never had much turnover on their staff for a long period of time, and he would shuffle guys from offense to defense and position to position and said it was really productive. I kind of memory banked that in the '90s.

Q. Wayne Hogan wrote a great piece about the interview, he called it. I'm sure you read that article. What's the memory of that interview, which he said still stands out as one of the greatest interviews he's ever conducted?

BOBBY HAUCK: Oh, you mean when I interviewed with those guys for the first time?

Q. Yes.

BOBBY HAUCK: I owe Hogan a phone call. I need to call him.

It's kind of funny. My memory of that is kind of foggy because we were actually -- back in those days, you had to recruit. You'd come in, you'd have recruiting visits on the weekend and bowl practice, and then those guys showed

up, and we had a big recruiting weekend going on. I'd been on the road for two weeks. We had practice that day. And then I had to go meet those guys at the Marriott in Seattle.

I was kind of shocked when he and I talked about it afterwards, they thought I was totally prepared. I thought I was wholly unprepared at the time. So I don't know. Whatever I did clicked because they hired me. Grateful for that, of course.

Q. From your run in the 2000s to now to get back to this stage, how much have you had to change your coaching philosophies and the way kids like to be recruited and concepts to stay relevant in the way college football has changed? Or have you always kind of done things one way and just had success?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, I would never say we've ever done things one way. I think that we have always adapted and evolved, whether it's scheme or recruiting or practice habits or training or whatever. I think everything evolves and everything adapts, and I don't think there's any way you can survive long term, meaning in our business long term is probably two years.

But I don't think there's any way you can survive long term without adapting. To me, recruiting's become way easier. You get more information to recruit. The rules are more loosened up, so you have more contact with kids. They don't talk anymore. So all you have to do is send them a direct message or something, and that's called communicating. So that's become less cumbersome.

Yeah, we've evolved. Everything we do is evolutionary, and we'll change stuff this off-season.

Q. This is the third straight year that the participants in this title game have come from the Dakotas and Montana. Obviously every other level we've seen a little more diversification, but it seems like between these states there's pretty hot competition right now. What do you think it is about these states that seems to be bringing such a high level of football and championship quality football right now in this particular window of time?

BOBBY HAUCK: Well, I think it starts with the university wanting to support the programs. I think they're all universities that view football as important and a priority. And so the universities support the programs, which gets you a foot in the door. Now you have to go execute it.

So then if you look at it, the coaching staffs are exemplary. They know what they're doing. Then they all have a

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

common denominator.

Just kind of back to Lucas' question, what do all these teams that have been in this game the last few years have in common? They're tough, physical, disciplined football teams.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports