

Division I Football Championship: Montana State vs North Dakota State

Saturday, January 4, 2025

Frisco, Texas, USA

Toyota Stadium

North Dakota State Bison

Tim Polasek

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to Frisco, Texas, for the 2025 FCS Football Championship. Joining us now here on the dais is the head coach of North Dakota State University, Tim Polasek.

We'll have you make some opening comments and then open it up for questions.

TIM POLASEK: Obviously it's great to be back in Frisco. Want to start by thanking team Frisco. It's obvious to me that this game and the city have not only done a great job but have progressed forward. It's a first class operation.

It feels much more like a bowl game, and I do have experience with that. I think 6 out of 7 years I was able to be part of that when I was away, and it sure feels like a bowl game now. So thank you to everybody.

Want to thank all of our support for getting us this far. I take every opportunity I can to give credit to Jim Kramer, Ryan Napoli, Derrick Luken's been unbelievable. We haven't had a hiccup with the travel. The organization, the administrative support at North Dakota State is second to none. And our young people that provide us our uniforms and Gatorade and all that are first class and they've got bright futures.

We're looking forward to our final practice today. I think that's the most important thing going on right now is that we finish this prep out correctly. We come to meetings. We show up for meetings tomorrow, and we have great intent like we have practice here for basically two weeks.

We're just super excited. I want to say congratulations to Marty Brown with the Jerry Rice Award tonight. I'm really looking forward to -- I'm saddened that his mother had to work and couldn't make it down here, but he'll have some support there. We're excited for Marty's future, and he



earned that award.

Obviously Cam Miller being a finalist, however that goes, that's a heck of an achievement. I'm really looking forward to seeing Coach Miller tonight, his dad, and his grandparents. With that, we'll open it up for questions.

Q. Coach, you mentioned Cam just a second ago with the Walter Payton award. Obviously he pooh-poohs the individual awards every time we get a chance to talk to him, but for you, what does it mean to have him on stage and to get an award that prestigious?

TIM POLASEK: There's a lot of kids that lace them up on August 1st. There's a lot of starting running backs. There's a lot of starting quarterbacks. Let's not pretend we don't know what this award is for, right, like the Heisman typically.

For him to be able to compete and improve and be tough for the duration of the season, to find ways over the summer and spring ball to improve, to embrace any of the change that's happened here over the last 12 months is remarkable.

He's doing it with some different guys at receiver, and there's some guys that are back, but the relationship that him and Bryce have developed on the football field is obvious right now. He's got a lot of connection there.

I'm excited for Cam because he's taken a complete ownership of the protection side. So when we're talking about his future and having opportunities down the road, you cannot play that position without understanding where the five guys are being directed to. Then he has a really good handle on our run game as far as base rules and the things that he'll have to do potentially at the next level.

It means a lot for a coach's son from Iowa who had a few offers and those things to make it to this point. Cam is going to tell you the most important thing is getting this W.

Q. I'd like for you to expand, if you would, on the experience you guys have had since you arrived in Frisco. Also, your thoughts on the championship



possibly coming back after the construction is complete.

TIM POLASEK: For me, as far as it goes with this game, it's always going to be special. Going back to 2011 and driving down the highway and seeing basically nothing, and now there's a new city. So that's cool. I don't know if hopeful is the right word, but I think they do it right here. Team Frisco does it right. Frisco is easy to get into transportation-wise. There's multiple hotels. So all that stuff aligns with a big time football game. I'd second that, I guess, with just seeing the growth.

Then for myself to get here, we planned everything so we could get everything done in Fargo yesterday, as far as a football day. So it was really important for me to take some staff members out to eat. I thought Three Forks was awesome. Hunter Luepke and Derrick Dinger recommended that one. We had a phenomenal evening. Just all those things.

Then seeing our support when we got back to the hotel, we had a small gathering here. Then waking up with a football day here is what it's all about.

Q. Rare game on grass, big deal? No big deal?

TIM POLASEK: It can be a big deal. We've got to get out there today. I want our first five to eight minutes of drill with our players to be all COD, change of direction, violent movements. We're going to have to keep our chin over our toes, chest over our knees. We're going to have to plant and break with our feet.

I think that's something you guys should all be looking for. The team that breaks on the ball with their feet underneath them and playing outside their framework is critical on grass. It just doesn't grab as good.

Now, if the surface is as good as it looks, it shouldn't be a big deal. Against Colorado for us, it really wasn't, except for our sidelines the 30 and in was a little bit slick.

Our kids have got to get out there and move around early in pregame, which they'll be chomping at the bit to get out there on Monday night. But I think everyone getting as familiar as possible as quick as possible is a big deal -- can be a big deal.

We'll handle it. We need to. No excuses, just execution.

Q. What are some of the similarities you see from North Dakota and the state of Montana that lends itself to good FCS football?

TIM POLASEK: I normally don't keep my answers real short, but I'm just telling you it's the people. I would tie in South Dakota, and I would tie in Wyoming. I would tie in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Just really good people that care for each other, have a respect level for earn it. You've got to earn things in order to be respected.

That's about where I would stop. I don't have any experience recruiting Montana.

Q. You guys play in a dome, obviously familiar with cold. Do you see the weather being a factor at all tomorrow?

TIM POLASEK: We said no to the heated benches. We're going into battle. I know Coach Vigen will have his guys ready. 30 degrees or 20 degrees is nonsense. We've got experience in the cold.

We are indoors year round now with an unbelievable facility in the spring and in the summer. Any time we get a chance -- I learned this from Coach Ferentz and Coach Bohl. Any time you get a chance, you practice out in the elements.

I'm not concerned about that. Our guys have practiced way too hard for some cold weather to get involved. It's nothing like the NFC Championship game at Green Bay, minus 23, I can tell you that. I was at that game.

Q. You might be in the unique position that you faced the Heisman Trophy winner and potentially the Walter Payton winner. Just your thoughts on those kinds of players and the kinds of matchups you've had this season.

TIM POLASEK: You made me think about the hitch and just go score.

That was really remarkable. I'll tell you, we grew. We had a couple of guys, Duff won't play this week, but Duff, he battled Travis Hunter. I think he grew up a lot. His confidence grew even though he got beat in the end zone a couple times there.

The more I study this film -- I don't want to put him on some pedestal. He's a good player. He's Jordan Lynch to me. We were really a team in 2013 that we would call for verticals to get scramble opportunities, and Jordan Lynch went back-to-back weeks against the Michigan schools, 323 and then 357. He broke the NCAA rushing record for a quarterback, his own record, back-to-back weeks, and he finished third for the Heisman.

We have to keep this guy as boxed up as we can and play



as physical as possible on him. We've got to get him squared up and not allow him to be in space where he can slide. Every opportunity we get a chance to hit and be physical versus this guy will be important, just like a good running back.

Q. I was curious just about a couple matchups. The defensive ends for Montana State against your All-American tackles and how you might perceive the coverage on Bryce Lance?

TIM POLASEK: Interesting. I think on both sides the offensive lines are very schooled up. That's not to say our best or their best isn't gettable because we've seen that throughout the year, but they play together pretty well. I think they understand where their help is and where it's not, where they can get beat quickly and where they can't. Those things are pretty evident.

Then they're always connected in the run game, and I think the diversity in the run game can have a chance to slow down both sides of the ball as far as defensive end goes.

It's interesting like normal down or distance or second and seven or eight, a pass down where you have quarterback powers and quarterback zone reads, those D-ends now are in a conflict because a lot of times they're option players so they're not playing with just their ears pinned back.

So I think that's going to be interesting, who can capitalize on reading their keys and great get-off and fundamentals and technique.

Al Johnson is a great friend. I can't remember the first time I came in contact with Al. We've been in communication. He does a great job. He was well tutored at the University of Wisconsin, and they do a really good job.

The D-ends, I'm hopeful the D-ends have a big impact on this game.

Q. Coach, we talked about some older guys kind of stepping up into the opportunities, especially through the playoffs and whatnot, but for guys like Hunter Poncius, who's been here for so long, to be able to start in a National Championship Game, what does it mean for you guys to see them have those kinds of moments?

TIM POLASEK: First of all, somebody went down, so you feel terrible for their family and for that young man's situation, but that's what this program -- it's not coach speak. If you go back to the 2010 championship run, Matt Gratzek had to have microfracture surgery, and Coach

Bohl wanted him to get that done, and Matt said, no, this class needs to carry the Bison through to a championship at some point. And that kid chose to play 15 to 18 plays a game.

So there's always been these moments where people play hurt. I feel terrible Weerts didn't find out until Tuesday. He was going to get some help, and he was going to play through another back thing, and he was going to go lay it on the line, and it's just not going to happen. So it just creates opportunities for others.

One of the staples in our program, when we talk about standards in the program, is to have a great deal of urgency, a can't wait mentality. But it also encompasses everybody that plays for the Bison needs to be ready to go when they get their opportunity.

Time and time again, I think that's going to be a great piece of this legacy if we can finish this off the right way, and in our history, that's happened.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you so much for joining us. See you Monday night.

TIM POLASEK: To the local media, thank you so much. It's been a really fun year. I appreciate you guys.

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