

Division I Football Championship: Montana State vs North Dakota State

Monday, January 6, 2025

Frisco, Texas, USA

Toyota Stadium

Montana State Bobcats Coach Brent Vigen Tommy Mellott Paul Brott

Postgame Press Conference



TOMMY MELLOTT: First of all, I just want to say this is Paul Brott, defensive tackle, starter for us. Paul Brott, he's a stud. I appreciated playing for him. I just want to make sure everyone knows that. Mispronounced his name earlier, I suppose.

I don't know, I think that our offense was a little bit stagnant there from the first half, unfortunately, and came up short because of it.

Coach Walker got us going, players are making plays, guys kept fighting. It's very easy, 21-3, to quit in a National Championship Game, it is, and we came back out there, and we had a group of guys that fought for this team, fought for the seniors, and just came up short.

Q. Paul, was there anything you kind of saw out front for their offensive line that they were able to have some success both passing and rushing, especially at the end there?

PAUL BROTT: No. What I have to say is they just outplayed us in the first half there. In the second half, I felt like we were coming back, playing harder. They just outplayed us, had better technique.

Cam was able to escape the pocket and go for some big runs. So we've just got to get better at that.

Q. Tommy and Paul, for both of you, certainly not the ending that you hoped for, but 15 wins still speaks to a lot of success. Can you take us through, now that the ride is over, what the journey of this season has been like and how special it will remain to you?

TOMMY MELLOTT: Just a summation of an entire career playing for Montana State, it's just been a pleasure and an honor and something that has grown me into the man I am today.

And I certainly wouldn't trade it for anything, the early mornings, the late nights, all the work. So many guys that I've met that I've built relationships that I'll hold forever. Certainly this year was very special.

North Dakota State - 35, Montana State - 32

THE MODERATOR: We're going to go ahead and get started as we'll visit with Montana State. First off we'll have Coach make an opening comment. Joining us tonight is Tommy Mellott and also joining us is Paul Brott.

BRENT VIGEN: A hard-fought battle. Obviously want to congratulate North Dakota State. The way the game played out, they played better than us. Ultimately dug ourselves a big hole.

Guys fought like crazy in that second half, cut it to three a couple different times, that one time down three with the ball. It just didn't happen for us.

I think we came here with one expectation. I know it stings a lot for these guys, for these seniors in particular that have laid such a foundation for our program. They've certainly built upon the seniors before them, but the success they've had, been through a lot of ups and some downs. Obviously this is a low point.

You end up rattling off 15 victories and you can't finish it off, this is not how we wanted this day to end. But I know the program's much better for their efforts. I know they're much better off for being part of Montana State's football program. So I can't thank them enough. We're going to miss them, I know that.

Q. Tommy, I was just curious if you could talk about what changed for you guys offensively in the second half as you started making that comeback.

Hat's off to North Dakota State for beating us today. Unfortunately, I think the better team lost. That's how it goes sometimes. That's football. That's why they play the game. We didn't play the right game. God is good in all circumstances, and I trust that.

Q. Paul, what have these seniors meant to you?

PAUL BROTT: Coming in here as a freshman, being here with these guys, they took me under my wing right away. As soon as I committed, Tommy DM'd me on Twitter saying how happy he was for me to be here. These guys have led this place to just a higher standard. Each year these class of seniors have just risen it to a higher standard.

I can't speak enough to how much they've led this team, how much they've meant to me and these younger guys. Tommy set new standards all the time. Brody is one of my best friends. So is Khabib [phonetic], Blake Schmidt. They've done so much for me in this program. It's going to be different without them there.

Q. Paul, can you talk about the adjustments you guys made against the quarterback run game in the second half? Also, what happened on the long touchdown when Miller got loose in the open field in the first half?

PAUL BROTT: That first one, I'm pretty sure that was a draw. We didn't have any middle pressure, so he was able to just run through free. In the second half, after that happened, we had two components to close down those gaps so he couldn't escape through the middle there.

Q. Tommy, you finished with the program record for single-season touchdowns and in completion percentage, and you finished the game this season on the field. How gratifying was that to have all those accomplishments?

TOMMY MELLOTT: Yeah, individual accomplishments, I've never really loved. I think it's always been about the team and what they've done, schematically from our coaching staff how they set me up in good positions.

I'm a kid from Butte, Montana. We don't have quarterback coaches. So you go out there and play football, and they trusted me. They gave me three of -- you know, the four seasons to play. And it was an honor to represent this program, honor to represent those coaches and play for the guys in this program.

Q. Brent, could you talk about the way that Tommy sort of ignited you in the third quarter and how much that momentum sort of helped you guys close the

gap?

BRENT VIGEN: Coming in down 18 at the half certainly wasn't where we wanted to be, but we knew we were still a drive and a stop away from being right back in it.

How he played in that second half and we mixed it up a little bit more, I think he just did what he always has done is he's made plays.

The result of this game isn't going to change the fact that that's one of the all-time greats in our program, not only the player, but just a student-athlete, leader, everything. So really proud of what he's become. Just the way he speaks, you can get a sense for what his priorities are and were.

Unfortunately we came up short because I know winning this championship was the most important to him, and it didn't happen. It wasn't because he didn't fight and scratch and do all kinds of things on that field tonight.

Q. Wanted to ask about, I think it was on their last scoring drive, the third down conversion. You guys are down three, and if you can hold them to three points there, you have a chance to go down and take the lead potentially. That conversion and how crucial it was.

BRENT VIGEN: Well, there was a few of them, a few of those plays that they made. Cam Miller is 19 for 22. That means they only had three incompletions. There was a bunch of big third down plays in that.

That would have went to -- I don't know if that was to Nelson, I think the one you're talking about, that got seven on third and six. I know the slot fade at the end of the third quarter, was a third down too. That was a huge play. I thought Simeon was in a pretty good spot, and they just made a better play.

That's probably -- whether they coached way better or whether they played way better -- I don't know that it was way better, but they coached and played better than us today in those critical situations. Those third downs, that's where it shows up the most.

Q. Brent, what kind of pressure did Cam put on you today?

BRENT VIGEN: Well, we didn't put a lot of pressure on him. I think that's where -- that's my first thought. So then the credit goes to, I suppose their scheme, their front. He threw the ball where he wanted to generally speaking without much duress.

I think the long touchdown run, our front parted like the Red Sea. I don't know whether it was a draw. I just think he saw there was an opening, and we were kind of in man underneath coverage, and he was gone.

Knew that we had to put some pressure on him, and I don't think we did that. Ultimately, for him to rush for 121 yards, that was not going to be a good number for us to rush for those yards. He was going to make the plays probably in the passing game, to some degree, that he did. A lot of credit goes to him.

I'm really impressed with what he's become. I know we saw him as a young player out here in the '21 championship, and he's become an excellent quarterback.

Q. The three points in the first half, what kind of do you think were the biggest explanations for the slow start?

BRENT VIGEN: Well, I look at our -- it's not our tailbacks' fault, but they carried 22 times, and they're 3.5 and 2.4. That part never really changed. They each had a long of 6. We really didn't get our tailback running game going.

We moved the ball. We got a couple first downs. I think we had a 17-play drive that results in three points. I think just our inability to finish that drive in particular came down to -- God, just a couple yards here and there. I know Rohan had a play down the sideline that should have been an eight- or nine-yard gain, and it was a six-yard gain, and we followed up with a two-yard gain.

It's just things like that. You have to be able to make all the plays and all the yards that were there, and we didn't. That's credit to them. I thought they tackled well. I think they kept the ball in front of them for the most part. That's what we expected. We didn't have opportunity, maybe enough space to make them miss a whole lot.

The result is we go in -- I certainly took a chance going for that fourth down. We were fourth and five, I think. Just felt like we needed to do something to create a jolt, and we didn't get that fourth down. They turned around and score right before the half.

That consequence going from 14 to 3, and if we punt and pin them down, maybe it's harder for them to get that last score before the half, but I just think we needed something to jolt us. If nothing else, Tommy was making some plays with his feet, and it didn't happen there.

I think it's a combination. They played well, and we probably just weren't good enough in that first half.

Q. How do you sort of turn the page on this now? I know you're going to let this set in, but how do you sort of move forward as a program after this benchmark loss?

BRENT VIGEN: Well, we're back at school a week from tomorrow, and it's really that simple. The '25 team has begun. You move on from a really good senior group, a great senior group, but I do think the foundation in our program has more than been laid. I think we've got a lot of young players that took steps this year. We'll have to take bigger steps.

I guess in some regard no different than losing in December last year and picking yourself off the mat, getting a new group of leaders to emerge, and going back to work.

Our expectation for this program is to win this game, and that's hard to do. It's really hard to do. It's really hard to get here, first and foremost. The fact we've gotten here two out of the four years, I think speaks to where our program is at, I suppose.

We needed to learn another lesson, I guess. I don't know why, but we did. So here we go, on to the next year.

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