

Chicago Bears Media Conference

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Coach Kevin O'Connell

Visitors Postgame Press Conference

Vikings - 27, Bears - 24

KEVIN O'CONNELL: There's a lot to unpack after that one. But I'm so proud of our team. I'm proud of, I think, days like this kind of affirm a lot of the things that we really feel are important with our organization from a standpoint of when things aren't going well, things aren't going your way -- I thought the defense battled and kept us in the football game. Special teams made huge plays.

Obviously Myles Price with some big returns, Will Reichard with the field goal to give us a little bit of life there at the end of the first half. I was so proud of J.J. and our offensive group.

There's a thousand things that we all can clean up. There's a thousand things that myself and our staff will get cleaned up. We can all be better, but to come to this place, ton of energy in the building and find a way to just keep playing, just keep trying to find a way.

And our guys, there's been some games here over these last few years where we demonstrated that. But tonight felt like there was something -- new quarterback, on the road, some new players throughout our team. Really trying to figure it out together. And the way we were able to do that very, very proud of our team.

There's obviously some guys with some notable performances. And then I'll hit you guys some injuries.

J.J. McCarthy, clearly, the thing is I felt poise from the very beginning. I didn't necessarily think our entire group with some of the things that transpired where we were really close on some things that could have changed the game a little bit. A lot of yardage that we got via some penalties there.

But just didn't do a good enough job sustaining. Obviously converting third downs early on was an issue to get drives going. But J.J. McCarthy, for him to make some of the plays he did, I told him at halftime, you are going to bring us back to win this game. And the look in his eye was



fantastic.

The best thing is just the belief I felt from the team, the unit. And ultimately, that doesn't get done without him in the second half -- two passing touchdowns and then the critical rushing touchdown at the end.

Will Reichard, like I said, that field goal was huge, 59-yarder. Myles Price, I talked about that from the standpoint of being a rookie out there, changing field position, giving us a chance all night long. You look at Eric Wilson stepping in for Cash. And then obviously blocking a punt.

Jordan Mason and Aaron Jones, it was kind of a tough night there. And having Jordan to be a little bit, be that physical presence. And then you see Aaron's ability to change the game on one play with the touchdown.

And then Javon Hargrave, you felt him all night long. And Caleb is really a tough guy to bring down, clearly. His athleticism is real. We talked about it all week. And you've got to give those guys a lot of credit for playing the good football that they did. And it was a flat-out battle.

It's not always going to be pretty. When you're trying to bring along a young quarterback, and you've just got to keep playing and you've got to allow him to grow.

There was a lot of just things we can improve on, and we will. It will be great to be home for a couple of weeks. But all in all I'm very proud of our team, very proud of our staff. And just that figure-it-out-ness and find a way will be a redeeming quality as we continue to press onward.

To give you an update on a couple injuries here. Cashman did get a hamstring. He'll have an MRI. And then Okudah, there on the last play, everything checked out. We wanted to be smart with that. But he'll be evaluated for a concussion. He'll travel home with us as well.

Ryan Kelly and Ty Chandler, they went into the blue tent and both returned. With that, I'll open it up to you guys.

Q. What about J.J. made you believe that he was going to take you there?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I just felt it was a very unique game



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from a standpoint of, obviously, you have to just put blinders on and just keep playing. Every rep for him is an unbelievable experience. It's an experience for me with him. It's an experience for our offense.

Obviously Justin (indiscernible) stepped in and did a great job battling all night. But there were times where J.J. had to overcome some things around him, and he just kept playing. He didn't necessarily alter the way he was playing. There would be a play out there, they'd tip the ball -- it was just for a while there, just felt like everything that could go wrong kind of did.

Many, many times, you know, teams will wilt in those circumstances, and ours did not. It's a credit to our players. It's a credit to what they've built in that locker room.

And we're 1-0 with a thousand things to clean up across the board. The defense knows they're going to have to battle all year long. After that following the opening drive touchdown, I think next nine drives they only gave up a field goal.

I'm just proud of the group, but J.J., especially, heck of a growth moment for him and one that I had total belief in him that we were going to figure it out together.

Q. On the read-option on the touchdown run, what made you decide to go to that, that moment in that third-and-one?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: They made some adjustments, kind of some unscouted looks. In the first half across the board, I thought they did a great job keeping us off balance with some looks that maybe you're working off of a tendency from a previous team that you played against the coordinator from. And I don't know whether it was maybe a couple of their guys being out, but they were doing some things differently than maybe what was on the sheet.

With a young quarterback and you're trying to work through what that looks like, you've got to work through it together. And we had some miscommunication. Obviously it got very loud at times. The negatives. Up against the play clock a little bit.

But I thought as the game went on, you could kind of feel J.J. pushing that group to get out of the huddle a little quicker, get to the line of scrimmage, get a line. We're trying to help him out as much as we can, especially in a game where there could be some looks that you're trying to work through that maybe weren't jumping out at you on tape.

So we're trying to make it as user friendly as we can, but sometimes that takes some time. So we've got to find a way, find that middle ground, continue to push the urgency and the execution.

But once again, that play call, in particular, was really just a matter of -- J.J. is a very good athlete. And the look presented itself where we felt pretty good about T.J. being able to kind of lead him in from there if it was a pull-type read. He was reading the play. And he made a great play.

Both of his touchdown passes were critical, huge plays as well. And great execution by him.

Q. After the pick-6, what did you notice from J.J. on the sideline that let you know that he was going to be okay?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: It was an all-out zero pressure. He got to his protection. That was a veteran quarterback play. It just happened that the corner knows that it's an all-out zero. He learned how to play pretty good vision zero coverage here. And credit Shony, for making that play. What a huge play.

When you have a pick-6, the way the first half went, normally that's enough for a lot of teams to go ahead and pack their stuff up and head home. There wasn't one moment.

I just told him, I said, "You did everything right. They made a play. You protected yourself enough to maybe" -- there was another potential eligible on the play that might have had an opportunity to score, honestly, and what kind of play would that have been?

But great learning op. Vision zero. He's looking at you the whole way. A field out-cut to Justin Jefferson, and he made a play on it.

So I just told him, just let the whole day, just worry -- just keep playing the next snap together and I promise you we'll find a way. That's what I told him.

And he has an unbelievable look in his eye on game day, and he just kept -- his belief and his trust in himself -- and the phrase that I like to use, you guys have heard it many times, being at your best when your best is required, there's no other time than that than to have two touchdown, two passing touchdowns and a rushing touchdown, 21 points in really darned near close to just the fourth quarter alone. So really big-time moment to build off of.

Q. How important were those early fourth quarter runs for Jordan Mason to set up other things like the



play-action game?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: It was one of those things where, because of the crowd noise and you're trying to avoid third-and-longs as much as possible, probably should have ran the football more in the first half. That's where I've got to grow and get better as well.

This is a total look inward to how we improve, and it starts with me. But I thought that growth -- I'm a big fan of not having that figured out on Tuesday morning. Normally I like to say Monday morning, but as a staff and as a collective group, we really honed in on some things that we wanted to get done. And that efficiency set up a lot of things and allowed us to make some plays in the pass game.

But having Jordan's physicality with Aaron being as fresh as we could, and keeping him as a weapon in the pass game came together in a way we needed it the most.

Q. What did you think of the teammates' reaction to J.J. scoring on that zone read?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I think it was just momentum was kind of just, the way the defense was playing, just kept telling Flo, just keep giving us an op. You're doing everything in your power to just keep giving us an op. Then the special teams kicked in and made some plays with the returns and the blocked punt.

And then just it was kind of, the team's got a lot of confidence in itself. There were moments where maybe that confidence was being tested, but absolutely not broken. So that was kind of an eruption a little bit of our sideline and kind of what was keeping it together kind of let out in that moment.

It was big-time to see the team. They voted him a captain. They clearly see something in him. We do as well. This is one game. He did an unbelievable job leading this team back to win. It was a total team effort. But we will use this as a major, major growth moment, and we've got a short week and gotta get ready to go.

Q. Ty Chandler's return at the end there, do you go into that saying if it's returnable return it?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Gotta return it, try to get it under the two-minute. I know for a fact that Matt Daniels was in the huddle telling the guys that. But Ty is really the off returner. With the type of night that Myles Price had, they're trying to kick it away from him. And I'm sure they're trying to get that thing to the chalk to make sure we can't do that.

And I don't even know how deep it was. I didn't care. But I think he did -- you never want your players looking over at me during a play. But it was get out and secure the football for sure. And that allowed us to take it all the way down there.

I think there was half the stadium was at the line of scrimmage during that four-minute drive. Rightly so, they were just trying to get it back.

Q. The reason Blake -- could you describe what --

KEVIN O'CONNELL: That's why we went and got him. E-Will has been such a critical edition that Kwesi and his guys went out and got him. You're always looking for that veteran presence. He's a player that -- I don't know if we win the football game unless you have Eric Wilson to kind of -- not only the blocked punt, but with just the way he goes in and he's green-dotting and calling it.

You want to see a prototype of a veteran guy that helps your football team win by any means necessary, it's Eric Wilson. Fired up that we have him. Fired that we were able to bring him back here. He's clearly already had a monumental impact.

Q. Whether the blocked punt or the kicker returns Myles Price, how much did your special teams contribute to being able to come back here?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Shoot, we only had, what was it, 49 plays of offense. We just didn't have enough time on the field. We didn't have enough to really do our part for the better part of two and a half quarters. So you need your defense to be what they are and what they were for us tonight.

You need your special teams to make a play here and there, steal that hidden yardage wherever you can, and those guys did a great job.

We talk about it a lot: What are you going to do it in your one-play phase to maybe go change the game? And those guys affected the game in a really positive way. Credit to those guys, Hat, DG. You don't win a game like this until it's a true all two, three phase finding a way.

Q. This is just one game but the fact that J.J. took you through this, (indiscernible) going back in the second half, how important is that for his development (indiscernible)?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, you know, part of this thing, with a young quarterback, is everybody's going to be



waiting for the aha moment of, like, look what happened.

And for him, that can weigh on a player. But not him. He prepared the right way. You talk about meeting the moment regardless of circumstances, regardless of what the outcome may have ended up being. There's a big picture plan that you hope to not have this chapter be the first chapter of needing to bring your team back so significantly after a really tough start.

But, yeah, look, there's no way to deny. We don't win this game unless J.J. plays the way he did in the second half and, most importantly, kept the belief of his football team behind him. And now we know it's possible.

So we hope to not be in these circumstances very often, but this team's made of the right stuff. Players have built something special within that locker room and on that sideline, and I'm just very, very proud of them. And you have to be so proud of J.J. leading the group back.

Q. What did you think of just the defensive line rotation, (indiscernible) younger players stepping up and making plays?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: We want to keep those guys fresh. I felt all those guys active, the activity of being able to stunt the run enough to put them in long-yardage situations and get off the field and keep giving us those opportunities as an offense.

But, yeah, I've been telling you guys for the better part of, since late July, like, we feel great about the depth of that group, seeing those guys play and rotating, try to keep those guys fresh when they're on the field a lot more than we're on the field as an offense. You've got to try to do that so when the momentum does swing, we can try to get that win, get a really tough, hard-fought win on the road. The NFC North, this is what this division is going to be.

Obviously we want to play a better version -- we want to be a better version of ourselves as a team for four quarters. But we'll have to lean on different phases of our team at different times. And that's just the NFL, the life you live in the NFL.

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