

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Vanderbilt Commodores

Randon Fontenette

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Randon Fontenette.

Q. Vanderbilt last year, magical season. What do you want to see the team do a little bit better this year?

RANDON FONTENETTE: I would say close those margins. Like Texas, lose by three. Just finishing games that we came short of last year.

Q. What can you say about Diego as a teammate, as a leader, and sort of the way his personality rubs off on the rest of the team?

RANDON FONTENETTE: Oh, yeah, Diego, he's a different kind of player. His aura, his competitiveness, just his demeanor, how he carries himself, it really spreads light to the locker room, like, okay, this is our quarterback. This is what he's doing. We need to move accordingly. Just the way he carries himself, it really spreads through the whole locker room.

Q. What was it like finding out that he was coming back for another year? How did that play in the locker room?

RANDON FONTENETTE: It shocked everybody. We weren't expecting him to get it. But when he got it, it spread light throughout the locker room, like, OK, we're going to make a run. We've got our quarterback back, we've got our guy, it's time to go on the run.

Q. Is there a different vibe entering this season that you feel around campus, around the city?

RANDON FONTENETTE: Oh, definitely. Especially with Pavia coming back, everybody knows him. It's a lot of more interactions with students walking around the campus, with outsiders. Anywhere we go with Pavia, somebody is going to ask for a picture. It's definitely a change in Nashville.

Q. Last year, when you all came to LSU, you lost by seven. This year y'all are going back to Nashville. How do you look to turn that match-up in your favor?

RANDON FONTENETTE: Just executing. We have to do the little things right because we play great opponents with NFL talent all across the board. So we have to bow down to the little things and execute when we need to execute.

Q. What can you kind of say, was there a tangible kind of benefit to the win over Alabama, the upset? Did you kind of feel, players never want to look back, but how much did that game kind of keep y'all rolling?

RANDON FONTENETTE: That game was crucial because we were coming off a two-game losing streak. We lost to Georgia State. We weren't prepared. Took Missouri to double overtime, thriller loss.

After the Bama game, when we got that win, it showed us we're here, we can play with anybody in the country. We have to execute when it matters. And it really gave us hope and it gave us motivation.

Q. How important is that belief when you guys can beat teams that have historically competed for SEC championships? And in order to, when you guys pull off a win, you had a couple of them last year, what does that mean for a team's overall psyche?

RANDON FONTENETTE: I feel it shows what's the locker room all about. It shows the type of players, the type of men you have in your locker room. It means a lot for the program. It means a lot for the players having that mindset that we can go in and win any game in any given moment, no matter the rank and no matter the team, no matter the team's history. So it's very critical.

Q. What do you tell prospective teammates about Nashville and the possibility of living there while you're playing for Vanderbilt?

RANDON FONTENETTE: It's definitely a recruiting pitch. Living in Nashville, playing in the best conference in college football. It's a big recruiting pitch that our

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department likes to use.

But players want to win. So that's our main focus is winning. It's cool to live in Nashville, it's cool to live in a good city. If you want to go to the NFL it doesn't matter what city you live in. It matters if you're winning and it matters if you're making plays on a good team.

We're trying to build Vanderbilt up to that good team to where we're nationally talked about, and that's what we're working on.

Q. Talked about that national reputation. Obviously a win against Alabama does things for a program. How much tangible results do you think that win had in Diego's case having him be the face of that?

RANDON FONTENETTE: It definitely played a big role because Diego, he's a marketing monster. You don't really see that many guys like him at the quarterback position, with that swagger, with that demeanor, with that mindset. Even with the physical attributes he has, you don't see too many quarterbacks like that.

I feel after that win they seen what Diego can bring to college football, the spark, the energy, the aura he can bring, that definitely played a huge role -- maybe, maybe not -- but I think it played a huge role in him getting that year.

Q. Diego's story starting as a guy who was in junior college and worked his way up to the mid-major level, now he's in the SEC. I think a lot of folks might see that as an underdog story. Do you guys see yourselves as underdogs, or did you see yourselves as underdogs at some point in this development?

RANDON FONTENETTE: Definitely I see myself as an underdog. Coming from where I come from, not highly recruited. Entering the portal, not too many offers. I knew where I was coming. I knew where my heart was at.

Speaking for Diego, definitely he has an underdog story. Started at a juco two years, Conference USA, came to Vandy, beat Alabama.

He's been through a lot, he's done a lot. I would definitely say he has an underdog story.

And I feel like Vanderbilt is always going to be the underdog. I feel that's the program. I feel the program has thrived upon individuals that feel they aren't getting the recognition they need, aren't highly recruited.

I feel players like that will thrive at Vanderbilt because

having that mentality when you're playing the big dogs, it gives you a different type of energy and a different type of motive.

Q. When you're selling the Vandy program to people coming in, what do you tell them about Coach Lea?

RANDON FONTENETTE: I would say Coach Lea, he's going to take care of you. He wants your best interests. He's going to spit it to you straight, be genuine, not tell you lies.

If you're not ready to play, he's going to tell you. If you're ready to play, he'll put you out there. He's going to tell you the truth at all times.

Coach Lea, he cares about Vanderbilt football heavily because he's alum. He wants the best for the program, and he's going to bring in the guys that he feels fits the program to the best way.

Q. You talked about Diego's personality and first off, reaction to him wearing a tux to this event, I mean, what was your thought there?

RANDON FONTENETTE: I actually picked it out for him. He was so last minute, I had to put a little something together for him.

Q. More so about his swagger approach, what's your best interaction with him that just kind of, when you think of Diego, you think of that moment?

RANDON FONTENETTE: It's a lot of moments. I would say, off the field, I would say just hanging out with him. Like, one day I pulled up to his house, he'll say anything. But I like that. That's what we need.

He's one of those guys, you never know what's going to come out of his mouth, good or bad. Y'all having a good time? He might say some off-the-wall crap, and you're all laughing the whole time. Just having him, he's a character. He's a character.

Q. You mentioned that Coach is a Vanderbilt graduate himself. Is it more meaningful playing for someone who's worn that uniform?

RANDON FONTENETTE: It's definitely more meaningful because he gets real emotional about Vanderbilt. Most coaches, they're in it for the check or maybe to level up to a better program. But for Coach Lea, he had chances to leave Vanderbilt to go to a different SEC program, but he stayed. That speaks volumes.



I definitely feel having him as an alum, it shows his passion and his drive, that he wants Vanderbilt football to be a top program nationally. That makes us play harder because we know he's all the way in us and we're not going to war by ourselves. He's going into the fight with us. So that is definitely a big major part.

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