

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Vanderbilt Commodores

Martel Hight

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Martel Hight.

Q. We were just talking with your teammate about Coach Lea. He's a Vanderbilt graduate. Is it more meaningful playing for someone who wore the uniform himself?

MARTEL HIGHT: Yes, it is, but also just knowing Coach Lea as the man he is, he's loving, he's caring. And he tells you the truth. That's what you need as a head coach. He comes off as a great man.

Q. Who did you watch to become a very good return specialist?

MARTEL HIGHT: I watched De'Anthony Thomas' and Tavon Austin's college highlights. And I kind of just replicated my game after them.

Q. How is the feel coming into this season different than maybe last season?

MARTEL HIGHT: There's a little bit of a confidence boost throughout the program, but, I mean, nothing's really changed. Our mission is winning. So we're going to keep honing in on the little things to continue doing that.

Q. Obviously the game last year against Alabama did a lot of things for a lot of people. How much do you feel like that game individually may have helped Diego even in his case, putting him on the national spotlight, so to speak?

MARTEL HIGHT: Well, you know, the way that Diego is, he's a great guy. He's a dog. I mean, that win, it probably did boost a little bit. But with that win or without that win, that guy is going to always come in and be the same person he is, and that's passionate about what he loves.

Q. I heard Coach Clark say that you had eight games last year that were decided by one possession and you

went 4-4 in those games. What do you think y'all learned from last year that maybe can get you over the hump in those close games?

MARTEL HIGHT: To not take no team for granted and come out and play Vanderbilt football and be disciplined to what we know.

Q. Eli Stowers, tight end, what has he meant to the team? And having him back, what's it like guarding him in practice?

MARTEL HIGHT: Eli, that guy, he's a great guy. He's God-given, that's more so like our preacher on the team, when we need to prayer for players or just in general, that's the guy we point to.

But he's a really great athlete. He's physical, pretty tall, has great hands. He doesn't drop the ball. So guarding him is pretty tough. Bigger body, and he's pretty swift, pretty big and pretty fast.

Q. Martel, what was the difference in your defense last year to help contribute to the wins in the conference?

MARTEL HIGHT: You know, just getting coached from Coach Lea. And it was like he broke down the big things and made it like smaller. So just a better understanding of the defense and just good calling from him is what helped us.

Q. Would you say Diego's personality rubs off on the rest of the team and it helps Vanderbilt sort of embrace that underdog mentality sometimes?

MARTEL HIGHT: Yes, like I said, he's a dog, but also he's a great guy outside of football. If you get to know him personally, then you know, he's a loving guy. He's genuine.

But when you have a quarterback that's built like that, he kind of gives you a little ego boost, too. Just having him and having that mentality at the quarterback position, I think it helps a lot.



Q. Last year with some of Vanderbilt's big wins, you got national recognition from it. Now that you're out there, what's the most important thing you would want people to know about you as a person or player?

MARTEL HIGHT: Me personally? That we're not going to keep feeding off of last year and that we're going to keep bringing more. But we still have a chip on our shoulder and we're still here to fight for the winning spot.

Q. How important is it to seal off last season we did well but we have to focus on this year? Is that an important mindset to have this year?

MARTEL HIGHT: Yeah, the past is the past we have to leave it behind us. But we can also build off of it. That's what we're going to do. So we're just going to break down last year's film, see what the things that we need to improve on but we're just going to improve on those small things and build off of it.

Q. There's buzz that you may have something of a two-way role this year. Any thought on how your preparation has changed for this upcoming season?

MARTEL HIGHT: Yes. So, I mean, I am playing both ways. I mean, it does not really change -- I have to do both ways. But it's like 50/50, so I have a pretty good schedule for it. Certain periods I do offense, certain periods I do defense. Then team segments, I do a certain amount of plays on offense and on defense.

Q. What's the biggest adjustment to this offseason knowing that you're going into a season playing both ways?

MARTEL HIGHT: Just staying healthy, staying in the training room and in the film room, to not forget plays and formations. But staying healthy is the main part.

Q. You talk about playing both ways. How much did Travis Hunter's success -- was that something that you saw him doing what he did, you go to Coach Lea and point out some things or what?

MARTEL HIGHT: So it's crazy because me and him played against each other in high school, so we were back and forth, back and forth. But like I said, I did it in high school.

I didn't think it was actually possible to actually do it because of rules, but once I seen Travis do it, I was like, hey, Coach, let me do that. And he kind of gave me the shot at it. We'll see how it plays out.

Q. I've spoken to teams in the past where they were the decided underdog, and they would discuss, we think we can win this game. Then they played the team the next year and it was, we know we can win the game. So do you feel your team is at that point, psychologically?

MARTEL HIGHT: No. So we don't really go into games thinking, hey, can we win; can we not win? We go into every game with the mission of winning. So every game we're going to always assume that we're going to win no matter who it is.

Q. There are a lot of great places to play in this league. Do you have a favorite road trip or place that you like when you go on the road?

MARTEL HIGHT: FirstBank Stadium.

Q. Are you excited to see that stadium full of life? And with the renovations in the past, is that something you're looking forward to?

MARTEL HIGHT: Yes, I am excited for it. But we played in it when it was called the "Concrete Jungle" as well. No matter if it's all built or halfway built, we're going to come play.

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