

Tennessee Titans Media Conference

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Kevin O'Connell

Visitors Postgame Press Conference



Titans - 23, Vikings - 13

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I did want to start tonight. I haven't had a chance to speak with those of you who made the trip and many of our folks back home, but I did want to start out by talking about Harrison Phillips for a quick second. Obviously a tough move to make considering how impactful he's been to the Minnesota Vikings and the organization on and off the field.

First free agent we signed when Kwesi and I got here. He was the first one we signed for a reason, the type of man he is, the type of teammate, the type of leader that was recognized ultimately as him being voted the man of the year and also voted a captain.

Moves like that are not made without a lot of thought and a lot of making sure that I got a chance to spend a lot of good time with Harrison and got a chance to talk with A.G. and Mougey about the type of player they're getting, and I know he'll have the same impact there in a new regime there as they build their culture up. Harrison Phillips will be great for it. Just wanted to start out tonight and say that.

A couple of quick injury updates. Tyler Batty pretty early there had a right knee we'll evaluate via the MRI. Zay Scott had a right ankle pretty early. Two guys that have had really good camps. And a third, Elijah Williams, would be right there with those guys, had a right hamstring in the second half there.

Brett Rypien was evaluated for a concussion, but he returned. That was the play there where, I believe the interception there where he got hit in the head. It was enough to get evaluated for a concussion but not enough to maybe draw a penalty on the play.

With that, I'll open it up to you guys.

Q. Just to go back to Harrison for a minute, is there anyone in that room that you see kind of being able to step up and fill the quite large locker room presence

he had?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, the thing you have to understand about in the room, acquiring veteran presences like J.A., Jonathan Allen, and Grave have really been -- they've really been immediate impact players on and off the field. Guys that have sustained it and done it at a high level for a really long time.

That doesn't go into a hard decision like that as far as the leadership goes, but we do know we've got some ascending players on our roster, offensively and defensively, that are ready to assume that void that will be. We've got to make sure we're on top of that as a team because of his impact for sure.

Q. What did you want to see out of Max tonight giving him the start and a little bit more time again?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I think it was let him go through the process of pregame and going through the call sheet with Wes and Josh and just going through it as if he was getting a start and getting to play the whole game. We wanted to make sure we gave Rypien a good amount of time too. I thought both of those guys did some really good things.

Max once again showed some of the things he's shown throughout camp -- good decision-maker, made some plays, buying a little time with his legs, converting some third downs via some tight completions. I just thought both those guys did some good things.

We didn't do enough to win the game. We had a couple of costly penalties, one on a punt return that Myles Price took back, a good chunk there that would have given us great field position, had a penalty on that play. And then the fourth down to Fleming, I thought was -- versus a look he gets in practice quite a bit for our defense, the poise to know where to go with that thing and throw a ball like that. Flem made some great catches tonight. We just didn't come down with that one.

Q. Did Max surprise you with what he was able to do here, not only in camp, but this game in particular?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Surprised would be -- you know, I



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had high expectations for him. One of the things where we went into the draft with him being a guy we really, really liked throughout the process. He was local. We had a chance to see him throw twice at the Pro Day there at the U. Then just hosted him on a visit and just getting to know him.

He felt like a great fit. He felt like the mental, he's high capacity from a thinking standpoint, but yet he's one of those guys that can go out and apply the thinking really fast as he progresses through our system and through our pass game.

His ownership of really not getting a lot of reps early, didn't get a lot of work in the spring to be able to hit the ground running the way he did with his opportunities, and training camp gave him more opportunities, culminating with tonight getting a chance to start the last preseason game.

Q. Is there any consideration throughout the week of playing Sam? I saw he was suited up. Could have gone in?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: He was really up kind of for emergency purposes if we had injuries at the position. It was really more about getting to see Max and Brett and get them the maximum amount of reps to be able to make a decision on who's going to be on our football team.

Ultimately, I feel good about where Sam's at. He's, like J.J. and Max, he's really, when you look at it first time getting full-time reps in the system, I thought he's had some real growth. He had a good week of practice, took a lot of reps in our simulated scrimmage the other day. He's done a lot of good things. We're just going to continue to build and grow.

I do like the way those guys have come together in that room, and Josh and Jordan are doing a really good job with those guys. A lot of work to still do. We're going to work through obviously what the football team is going to look like as a whole. It was good to see those two guys do some of the things they did tonight.

Q. What do you like about the big games for some of these young guys who didn't get barely any practice reps this past week?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, you find out what they can learn. You find out who can learn without the maximum amount of reps because you go into training camp and you try to communicate to these guys that the reps are coming, so maximize your walk-through reps, maximize the meeting time when you're going through the practice and you're watching somebody else get coached up at the

positions. You've got to be able to apply that.

That is such is life for a lot of young players in this league to be ready for their moment when called upon. We've had a lot of guys, a lot of guys that came in under different circumstances, whether it's a rookie mini camp tryout guy that catches the eye of his position coach or it's a guy like Max or Myles Price.

You just go down the line, especially the defensive side, there's some guys that really came on and started to get some real work with the first and second unit. I told the team I think this group came together in a way that you could feel it. You could feel it in the locker room just now.

We've got a lot of hard decisions to make. It's at least by far the worst time of year for me to have the amount of conversations you're going to have. Considering a lot of these guys have probably done enough to feel like they've made our team, but the numbers don't allow us to keep as many as we'd like. We're excited about the potential practice squad we're going to have. With the elevation rules, you really kind of feel like you can have a roster well beyond the 53, but a lot to be determined here over the next few days. Tough conversations for sure.

Q. Generally speaking, how difficult is this time of year, this week and a half to kind of sort everything out, get ready, feel confident in your picks, that kind of thing?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, the communication and the process between our personnel group and our coaching staff and really solidifying the vision of our football team is the fun part. Unfortunately, what comes from that are 37 conversations where you're telling people that no matter what they did -- in many cases, maybe enough to really make the conversation difficult -- you're giving them news that I know too well. It happened a lot to me in my career.

I always feel like that conversation is my job. It's my obligation to make sure they not only get the well-deserved time from hearing from me and how much I appreciate them, but also some of the best conversations I had in my football journey were during some of those tough moments where a coach took the time to tell me how I can improve, things I did well, things I need to really work on and focus on.

Then the type of players we have in that locker room, there's many of these guys that are going to be ascending NFL players, whether in our locker room or another one. That's just the product of a good off-season, a good process in the college free agent process, as well as all the other aspects of acquiring players.



Q. Has Xavier Scott shown you enough that he's pushing for that running back 3 spot at all?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, he's had a great camp. We've got to work through the numbers position-wise, what we're going to be doing, keeping, and trying to envision what the team is going to look like. It's not always set in stone, those numbers, but he's definitely -- in my opinion, he's absolutely done enough to warrant real conversation.

I think Ty Chandler's had a really good camp too. Maybe not to the level in the games that Zay did from a standpoint of impact in the pass game. I thought he had -- he was great in the screen game. He had a great run tonight, which ultimately ended up with him getting a little nicked up there.

But absolutely, I think Zay has done -- he's had a really good camp. Quite honestly, he's a guy we thought -- we kind of had him on the practice squad, and you're developing a guy with that kind of size and that kind of speed, you're really hoping to see the type of camp he had, and he answered the bell for sure.

Q. Tai Felton, we saw him leave the other day during practice and he didn't play. Is he doing okay?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, he was close to being able to go. He was pretty sore coming out of that. We don't have any long term concerns. It was just more a matter of him getting a lot of reps the other day. It was a big time ones versus ones day, and when you're looking at it, there's a lot of these guys that played in the game tonight that were out there because of our current receiver situation with Justin and Speedy, and obviously even J.A. went down for a little bit, but he's doing great, he's doing fine.

Yeah, I think Tai, he had some moments the other day before ultimately getting a little banged up that showed some real growth. Real, real competitive reps against a Byron Murphy or a Zay Rodgers. So I think he's improved throughout camp, so physically talented with the speed and the athleticism to help our team. So I'm excited about Tai.

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