

University of Tulsa Football Media Conference

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Coach Kevin Wilson Press Conference



East Carolina - 38, Tulsa - 31

KEVIN WILSON: We appreciate the fight and the battle. The kids played really hard and battled their tails off. They could have still done a lot of things still a lot better. We, first half, had an opportunity with several drives to get a few more points and we didn't.

Had a great turnover in the second half. Didn't get anything out of it. Left some points on the field. Came down at the end, got close but didn't maybe make the right execution or the right calls we needed.

The defense battled but they gave up some plays. So much better by the D, but the team that came in, they're very, very hot. And 21-, 28-nothing run right out of the gate, first quarter. I appreciate the way we tried to tweak things defensively.

Open week there. Made some strides. The effort was awesome. A lot of love for our players. I keep saying that. I think you guys don't believe it. But for the team to be where they're at, and start two true freshmen the O line -- counted up the day, we got over 3,000 snaps of freshman. We five freshmen running down the kick team. It's just a young team, but they're getting better.

But what I love is the old guys, Cam and Benjamin and Owen and Vontroy, those old guys -- Malachai, the way they battled. And Dayne Hodge, who got nicked up tonight and couldn't finish. Just a great group of kids you love, you want to have them have more success.

But it's a great group. They practice great. We almost played -- we talked about trying to play, we almost got 60. At the end I was asking downstairs, I already asked the defense, did they think they could get a stop because they were fried. The one last drive, I kept saying, should we take a timeout just to catch because we had some guys that laid it on the line and they were fried.

But I asked the defense, should we go for two or do you want to get a stop. The D line and the linebacker, I said

we've got enough juice. We would have kicked and played overtime if we had been fortunate enough to make a play. But I was asking the guys again.

Again, phenomenal effort. Kind of what we want it to look like. Just gotta see if we can keep building on that and be fortunate enough to sustain and keep getting stronger. And most importantly we're trying to build -- we've got some great kids been here four, five, six years that are leaving. I keep saying, these days in the football season, like life it's terminal. It kind of ends and you want them to be the best days.

If we knew X days what would we be doing? Can we make these our best days. Not every day is game day. And sometimes not every day is the result you want. But the effort, the fight, the ability to keep persevering and keep coming. It was great to see.

So a lot of respect and appreciation for those players and the coaches downstairs. They did a hell of a job.

Tip our hat to East Carolina. Good team. Been playing good. They were better than us tonight.

Q. You mentioned young guys and older guys, obviously Cam taking that last drive or that last play down to that 1 yard line, obviously a lot of games come down to one yard a lot of the times. Is something like that lingering in the locker room right now, just heartbreaking for the guys like that?

KEVIN WILSON: The kids were just saying hey, how much they cared, and wouldn't trade it for anybody. That was those guys. Of course, I keep saying this is a really -- I don't walk -- I've walked out of some games (indiscernible) I was at. But what I see with the way they practice and the way they do things.

There was no, we came up short. We did -- (indiscernible) are you sure it's the call you want. I took time to take the timeout to give us more time to talk. The clock was stopped. It was going to be a 30-second timeout. I was trying to get a minute timeout by letting the clock burn, what are we thinking, what do you guys want, what do you want?



Then we fortunately had a chance, just didn't come down with the ball on third down. The first run wasn't a good play. The second run got us a little closer. We didn't make it competitive, the third down play with a guy that played great all night. And one of our other players just came up short. I guess it wasn't a good call because it didn't work.

Q. Joseph Williams, a guy that's young, had a heck of a game. Just overall play tonight, could you talk about him?

KEVIN WILSON: He's very talented and coming in here he played high school quarterback. He's raw and learning. Coach Switz is doing a great job, a great core of those young guys. But just appreciate how they're coming. And appreciate the job they're doing in the classroom.

We're going to fight like heck to kind of keep them around too as we go forward (indiscernible). The thought process was a year ago with where we were, the best way to do this was to get as good of high school recruits as we could because that's kind of the market right now because everybody is going after portal.

We didn't maybe have the resources to get some upper portal guys, so we took upper high school guys. They got developed, they're very talented. But they're still young. They're not as mature. They haven't played as much. They haven't been exposed to things.

He's a sponge. He's getting better. Shows a lot of athleticism. Right now -- he would be a heck of a safety too now, but he's a heck of a good player. He's played well these last couple three weeks.

Q. What did you feel went into your ability to hang with them better in the first half than you have most of the conference play?

KEVIN WILSON: Yeah, I mean, a couple guys started well, didn't finish. Then we did the reverse of that. All we talked about this was not "can you," because I think they've shown in spurts what they're capable of. The question is "will you." And will you longer, and will you long enough.

And will you, when something goes bad, not go down to the crapper? Will you come through that? It's okay if they make a play or we miss something. That's okay, we can keep playing. Let's keep playing.

I thought tonight was the first time -- we started the third quarter kind of funky. Offense couldn't do anything. It was a one-score game. And there was no momentum no air out there.

And fortunately Joe made a couple plays and we got momentum, got back into it and gave ourselves a fighting chance. I just think with the five-minute mark not getting a first down was huge. Again, maybe should have took a timeout or two to try to help the defense help us get a stop, which didn't help.

Bottom line it was better but it wasn't good enough. And it's just some execution or play calling or the sequencing of things needs to be better to get the victory that we need.

Q. Did you feel like the return of Elijah Green and Keuan Parker was a lot of the better play in the back end, or did you think there were some other things involved in that too?

KEVIN WILSON: There were some other things, too. Again, because sometimes the way the film is I can't see it. But we played a game not that long ago with five corners out. And that's kind of tough. And it was kind of hard. It was nice to get to (indiscernible).

But with the open day we did tweak some things. We did try to help him. That was my comment to the defensive coaches, we're not helping this guy. You either need to do something with somebody else or do something to help him.

I thought we just had some adjustments defensively, and with the, quote, week and a half, we had a little time to get it and we still gave up some things. And some of those runs at the end of the game didn't get fitted up right. We needed to get them down. We still gave up too many big plays.

It was nice to see the kicking game bounce back. We put in too much time for it to look like it has this year. Keuan played well. Good to get him back. It was good to get Elijah back. He's a very talented young player.

Q. Last play, fourth down, you go with the shovel sweep. What did you like about that call? And looking back on it, do you still like the call? And what goes through -- you've been calling plays a long time -- what's your thought process? Are you trying to figure out what do I need to do here?

KEVIN WILSON: The thought, early in the drive we were left-middle on second down and they wanted to run the quarterback to the right. I said, go to the left because now you've got sprint-out throws to the right for a right-handed quarterback, which is what we did the third -- I've got those other guys calling plays.

So the deal was, hey, I'm going to let the clock run down, what play do you want. We had a couple passes, a couple runs. And they kept wanting to come back to the run. I go, it's fourth-and-two. And it was a good two. It wasn't a one and a half. It was a full two.

I go, are you sure? He said that's what they wanted. Unfortunately there's an extra hat and it just didn't work out. If it's a good call, it works. Not blaming anybody. It wasn't a good call. Just didn't work for us.

Q. The defensive backs, three interceptions, and you had a pick-6 and some big plays. You talked about helping the corners, but just you have to be very pleased with getting the turnovers and seeing those guys do well.

KEVIN WILSON: Katin Houser has been playing really well. Their quarterback early in the year was very loose with the ball, I think had 12 picks. Made changes and the quarterback was coming in, playing hot. Like I said, very proud -- I think the rush had a little bit to do with it, I think the quarterback felt our pressure, was throwing off the back feet.

With R.J. and Emea (phonetic) and Von and Owen and all those guys, Myles Jackson, those guys, I think they thought the rush was part of that. I think defensively we make some calls a little bit better. I think we had some coverage looks that helped us.

We finally got our hands on some balls. We've been close. We always talk about tips and overthrows; you've got to have them. We didn't get them. Tonight we got them. We actually had a couple we didn't get.

We had the one trap we didn't get there. We were close to maybe having -- you win the game with turnovers. Kind of where we're at, we win the turnover battle. It's still a little bit short. We need to do that to win.

We haven't done that a lot this year. It was again pleasing to see those guys make those plays. We'll need it next week going to Tampa.

Q. Now that you guys fall to 3-7, officially eliminated from bowl game contention, does that change anything going forward, who you play, how you play?

KEVIN WILSON: To me, again, three, four weeks ago I kind of changed, here's what I think we need to do to keep us moving.

The first thing was to find any way we can to have a more positive outlook and practice and the meetings, and the

kids are working hard. They're getting corrected.

A part of positive leadership is you have to make corrections, but you need to make them optimistically, showing guys what they can do and what they can accomplish.

So we've been kind of working on that, quite honestly, and I don't think anything will change tomorrow as we meet with these guys.

We've got class tomorrow we've got to get to. We'll come in tomorrow afternoon and watch it. We'll have Saturday off. We'll get some light work, get prepping in for the trip to Tampa to play South Florida.

We've been working a lot with our young guys to not over-practice. But if we're not making sure they're having good days, it's going to hurt us later.

I've always done it where everything you do as a coach has got to be indebted to your old guys. So you don't want to slight a senior. You've got some guys here that are sixth-year seniors. You want those guys to have as good an experience.

I've been trying hard to push as many buttons to create that kind of environment. I think that's why we continue. We haven't had some outings. But to play like we did tonight, when our backs were against the wall, those guys followed it, it was their choices; they did it.

I think part of it is the environment we've been trying to create to keep us moving, and I'm going to keep that as we go through tomorrow. There's no cashing in. There's no "it's over." No, this is our group, this is 2024, and tomorrow we'll have 15 days with this group.

And tomorrow is going to be -- day 15, we're going to make that day the best we can and keep growing and keep these guys moving in the right direction on and off the field from a six-year guy that's getting ready to get his second Master's to one of these young puppies that's learning how to play, we're going to keep marching it.

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