



Minnesota Vikings Media Conference

Monday, December 16, 2024

Head Coach Kevin O'Connell

Postgame Press Conference

Vikings 30, Bears 12

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I thought tonight was an awesome, awesome environment. Credit to our folks who handle game operations here. Love everything about the white-out, and I thought our fans responded once again with another phenomenal effort.

It's why it means so much to me to win at home, a divisional win in December. Far from perfect, but I thought our defense was phenomenal.

Really in those weighty downs, especially I think they were 2 of 15 on the third down, fourth down stat. Guys making some plays, play style showing up, and really overcoming some tough circumstances, and ultimately giving us some short fields early and then we were able to put together two longer drives in the second half to kind of put the game away.

Tough football team. I could tell those guys are competing. Thomas is doing a great job getting those guys to fight, and I want to compliment him and how he brought his team to compete here.

Just happy with where we're at, 12 wins at this point in the season. We need it to keep pace with where we want to be. It's going to be incredibly competitive down the stretch here, and we're going to have to play well and continue to improve chasing our best football.

Q. Why do you think the pass rush had so much success today against Caleb?

A. I just think that we were really disciplined, but it just felt explosive. Guys flying off the edges, and it's great being back at home and the crowd noise. Them being on the sideline count allows our guys to get off on the rock, and when that thing is moving, it just felt like it was relentless.

Felt the Flo did a nice job changing up some of the rush patterns and sending some different guys and just changing things up and allowing our guys to -- what I thought was a pretty sticky kind of night on some of those weighty downs in coverage to make him hold it and move off the spot. So compliments to Flo, his staff, and I love the way our guys were flying around out there.

Q. How big was it for Aaron to reel off a couple of those runs in the second half?

A. Yeah, it was one of those things coming in the game. We knew with the way they defended us, there was some movement. They were going to have some plays in the run game, maybe force some less than ideal kind of second and third downs, but we wanted to kind of sustain it and allow our guys to continue to kind of adjust to what we were seeing in the game.



Got a lot of five DB groupings to the 12 personnel groupings. It became that kind of night where we were going to be able to get some runs off.

Credit them. They're physical. It's a good defense. A lot of talented players over there. Made enough plays in the pass game, and unfortunately, I didn't like the penalties. There was a lot of penalties.

It just seemed like we were able to overcome it with some third down execution to move the chains, but just across the board just kind of to clean up some things, and we're going to have to do it on a short week before we head out to Seattle.

Q. Justin was saying he was pretty moved in the pregame by seeing Cris Carter and Jake Reed in the Randy Moss jersey. I wondered what you thought of that, and just kind of the affect it clearly has on Justin?

A. I think it was important. We talked internally this week about what we could do to show our support, our love for Randy. Everybody knows former teammate of mine, but most importantly you can feel the love for him in this building tonight.

It's great to have C.C. and J. Reed here to carry his jersey out there. It was a heck of a movement. I know Justin had -- when he scored his touchdown, I don't know exactly what he said, but I know it was showing his love for Randy.

He means the world to this organization. His name is up in the rafters in the Ring of Honor and Hall of Famer. He's meant so much to the NFL, and I know the Twin Cities and what he was able to do here.

We're behind him every step of the way. We care about him. We love him, and we just want to do whatever we could with the platform on Monday Night Football to make sure -- hopefully he was watching are, and if it gave him any joy at all, it was well worth it because that's how we feel about him.

Q. A couple of those drives on the one-yard runs where you were able to line up heavy personnel and finish the drive with the short run, what does that do for this offense being able to just --

A. Yeah, we have to be able to run the ball in the red zone. We had a nice touchdown kind of off of a hard play action early, but then as you get down in there where we're going as a team, we wanted to be able to run the football in. It will only set up all the different things we want to do.

I thought there was some real physicality. I loved Cam's finish on the last one, and I loved Aaron getting behind a pretty well-schemed-up play by the guys to just kind of get the momentum and finish forward into the end zone, which I thought were great examples of red zone running.

When it's not going to be perfect, there's a lot of bodies in a short area, then you have to have a great examples of play style straight and finish to put the ball in the end zone. Not only out of your back, but your O-line, your tight ends, receivers, blocking.

That's huge for us. Everybody knows we can throw the football in the end zone with the best of them, but to be able to do that as well and finish drives like that, I think it's important for us moving forward for sure.

Q. How much do you talk to the guys about what's out in front of them?

A. Yeah, I think that's what's been so special about this team this year. What I want them to focus on is recovering after this game and getting ready to go on a short week to go play a really good team in a really tough home environment in Seattle.

Whatever is right in front of us is what we're attacking. I think that's how you get to this point in the season. You win different ways. They're not always pretty. To look up and win this football game 30-12 with kind of felt grimy at times tonight just with their ability to make some plays defensively and then with our penalties and things like that.

So there's a lot to clean up, which as a coach of a 12-2 football team, you love that because there's a lot of things to go back to work on. There's a lot of things I can improve on.



We're going to continue to just try to get better. The whole mantra of "getting better, getting better" is a consistent every day thing that you can never ever rest in this league because everybody is improving, and the great teams in this league are going to play their best football towards the end of this month and on into the next.

We want to be one of those teams, but we know we're going to have to go earn every single thing. We had a heck of a finishing stretch here with these three games, and I love that we've have won 12 out of our 14 ops, but we want to be able to finish, and it's going to be a grind because these are really good football teams we're going to play, whether it's two on the road or hosting Green Bay here.

So a lot out in front of us, but we have to go back to work. That's what this is all about and continuing to chase improvement.

Q. Those fourth down stops in the first half, your thoughts on guys like Tillery, the guys that were holding their gaps?

A. I gave Tillery game ball because it's never perfect for me watch it from the sideline, but I just felt him, the penetration and getting in the back field, making the back stop his feet. To get stops in those situations, those are essentially turnovers in a lot of ways, especially when they're backed up in their own end zone, being aggressive, trying to win the football game. Getting short fields off of that is critical.

It doesn't show up as a turnover in the stat sheet, but I certainly look at it like that. I thought that was a great example of what our defense has been all season long, which is incredibly resilient, and they rise up in those moments, those weighty moments, whether it's rushing the passer, coverage on the back end, or short yardage situation like that.

Just critical foundation to win the game like we did tonight really on the backs of our defense playing great at home.

Q. (Indiscernible) was in and out. How did he finish out?

A. He was able to come back. Got his knee evaluated there and ended up getting taped up and came back in the game.

You know, we felt it a little bit. We're already down one tackle. To have B.O. go in and get evaluated, we wanted to make sure he was okay to return, which he was, but as always, you come out of a game like this. We'll see how he does and turns over during the week. I'll keep you posted.

Brian O'Neil once again just showing what he is all about going back in there and playing really good football.

Q. What went into the decision to go for that fourth down? What did you see on that play?

A. The one we went for? A lot of that is just what I was seeing from the other side of the ball. Defensively those guys were flying around, and they felt like no matter what even if we didn't get it, which probably could have called a better play there.

Ended up turning the rock over, which Sam knows on fourth down he has to put it in play somewhere. I hate that it ended up in an interception there, but defense did get a stop. They did get a stop. Just like I said on the headset, I'm going to go for it because of my faith in those guys, where we were, field position-wise. Just wanted to give our guys a chance to see if we can finish that thing off with a touchdown.

They got the stop they needed. We just ended up -- I think that was the roughing call that gave them the first down. That's where all three phases, picking each other up, if we're going to go after it, that's great. Love the execution and the aggressiveness, but we can't have a penalty in that situation to give them a new set of downs.

Q. Randy has been retired for 12 years. He hasn't played here in almost 15. In your time here have you been able to pick up just what he means to Vikings fans and how popular he remains here?

A. Yeah, I can tell you this much. What he was able to do here during his time was incredibly impactful on the Twin Cities and Vikings fans. We have a lot of former Vikings coming by weekly it seems like. We love having our Vikings legacy players that have played in this organization, blood, sweat, and tears for this organization.



Every single time those guys come back no matter who it is, if they were a teammate of Randy, I'm always asking just because he was a former teammate of mine. There's nothing but love and admiration from his teammates because he was a great teammate. Our fan base watched him compete like crazy and have a continue ton of success here. He's been phenomenal in his second career too.

I think Randy Moss is one of those folks who you better hold him in high regard because that's the type of player and person that he is. I just got the chance to be fortunate enough to have a locker right next to him in my short time in New England, and he had a huge impact on me.

Q. You mentioned them playing five DBs to heavier personnel. How good do you think it is for you as a staff to kind of have to go through some of these games with these different opponent strategies and adapt like you get to do every week?

A. Yeah, you go in with a plan and practice based upon what you think you're going to get, but this time of year is all about being able to make adjustments. Tonight it was about making some adjustments, making sure we were identified right in the run game, getting hats on hats, getting downhill, handling the movement.

I thought our guys did a nice job of that as the game went on and piecing together some drives where, you know, it didn't feel like the explosive kind of night throwing the football. That was due to kind of their game plan a little bit, but we made enough plays. We converted enough third downs, ate up some clock, and we were able to get a couple of touchdown drives there in the second half that really allowed our defense to kind of keep their momentum going.

It was awesome to see some of the young guys in there. DT played good all night. To get that sack there, got a bunch of guys in the game kind of in the end. Every snap we can save with where we hope to go as a team and get experience for some guys is only going to be bigger as we go down the stretch here.

Q. Did you have a sense for maybe why some of the balls were coming out high on Sam early in the game there?

A. Yeah, we'll take a look at it. There was a couple of there that you just kind of noticed. He set an incredibly high standard for himself, so I think everybody, me included sometimes, when either somebody is open or he's able to stride into one and doesn't throw an absolute strike, it's a pretty good standard to set for yourself when we're all kind of wondering what happened at that point.

But I thought he battled. I thought he showed his athleticism again. There were some big-time ops. I love the op that he took on the keeper to get that last penalty with Jordan kind of getting behind the defender there on the keeper.

Then just some of those kind of dirty completions on some third downs right at the sticks. Trent late. T.J. had one. T.J. drew a foul on another. So continues to execute at a high level. Will continue to improve, but Sam is doing a great job.

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