

CFP First Round: Penn State vs SMU

Saturday, December 21, 2024
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA
Beaver Stadium

SMU Mustangs

Coach Casey Woods

Coach Scott Symons

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State 38, SMU 10

(No audio)

SCOTT SYMONS: Execute at a high level at third down, give us a chance to win. Obviously, you know, put in some tough situations. I thought they were resilient in those, but, yeah, it's, you know, when you look at the stat line overall, it's kind of what you saw. I mean, we had more first downs than they did. We let four or five runs pop that we didn't get lined up. The short yardage, really their drive that -- their drives that got going in the second half minus the short fields what have you were just tempo and us getting lined up in some of those key situations didn't feel like they changed the line of scrimmage. I thought we stood up. I thought we were gassed probably from the first quarter. We were on the field a long time in that first quarter and I think, you know, over the course of the game, that probably wore on us, but, yeah, there were four or five runs, uncharacteristic that we didn't net the football, get them down, whatever that situation was, got tempo, didn't get cleats in the ground but I thought -- you know, I was proud of the resiliency our kids had when our back was against the wall, especially early.

Q. And Casey, can you talk about can you talk about what you kind of hope the offense learns from a game like this and what Kevin can kind of learn, when, obviously, yeah, there's some execution mistakes and what they can take away from this.

CASEY WOODS: Yeah, the number one thing is you can't be reckless with the ball, you know, that obviously put us in a hole, put Scott and the defense in a hole early on. I do think he responded later and he had some throwaways that we talked about at halftime so he was able to, during the course of the game, to adjust some of those things, but you play a good team like Penn State that's going to cost you



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ultimately in those situations. Obviously we got to do a better job finishing in the red zone. I thought we did -- I thought we were aggressive. The game plan was to be aggressive. We knew we wanted to attack. We wanted to try to get things don't. We kind of missed the throw there on the first drive of the game that would have been a -- had a chance to score a touchdown there and we were just trying to be aggressive in those situations, challenged them at halftime, you know, playing such a tough first half. Came back out, very similar, I thought, to what we did at Clemson. Had a 10-play drive and a 13-play drive. They ultimately only resulted in three points, so we got to find ways to finish once we get down there and make sure that we do the things that are necessary. I think as far as, you know, Kevin enters the offseason as the proclaimed starter. He's our guy a and he knows what it looks like to get to this point. Isn't anybody more disappointed than him right now. I know that he's got a short memory, he's done a great job at having that all year long. He's got to come with the -- he's got to bring the maturity on, you know what I mean, and now the team is relying on him to be able to continue to handle and move the ball the way that we need to and it's not a back-up quarterback coming in situation like it was halfway through the season. Now it's your team and we got to go from a seriousness standpoint from that.

But I was really proud of how they responded, honestly, coming out in the second half, and I think we've commented on this. We've been part of games this year where everything you call works and we've been part of games this year where nothing you call works and it's just kind of one of those days for us offensively.

Q. Steve Landsdale, Pony Fans. When you guys go into the locker room on the short end of a 28-point margin, how much of -- in the offensive side, how much of the conversation was schematic adjustment and how much was you and the offensive staff sort of trying to help your guys regroup and restart that second half with a new attitude?

CASEY WOODS: Yeah, I think that's a good question. I think you probably answered it in your question. A lot of it was that, schematically I think that we felt like we had good scheme. We thought we'd run the ball a little better than



we did. Some of that was execution. Some of it was just missed holes and sometimes they just made plays. They're a good football team. Some of those holes close up faster versus a defense like this than others that you've had. So we felt good schematically going in there. Kevin felt good about what we were asking him to do offensively. We talked about helping with the protections a little bit more. We had been exposed in some empty protections there in the first half, so we tried to do that and you saw us get some throws off down the field including the touchdown the last play of the game, just helping shore up some of those things for him. But other than that, there weren't major schematic adjustments from that. It was getting those guys ready to go. And honestly, it wasn't hard. They were confident. I felt like they couple back out in the second half ready to go and we took the ball and moved it ten plays down the field and couldn't punch it in there. Close, but scored points, did the things that we had to do and when we got the ball back, marched it down there again and just, you know, just misfired. Got the offsides penalty. That was certainly a factor down there in that student section endzone that you have to be able to account for into the future, but now that our guys have had a taste of what this game's like, had a taste of the success of what this thing can be. There weren't a lot of hung heads in the locker room. There was a lot of disappointment. There was a lot of sadness, but there was a lot of confidence, too, that Penn State and ESPN, everybody that watched this didn't get to see the best version of what SMU's offense can be and, but I think that they're confident in what the future of this thing can be.

Q. Casey, Bill Embody with On The Pony Express. With Kevin, the last two games didn't start that well for him, just from a turnover perspective. I know you guys went right down the field that opening drive but now that he is the returning starter, do the conversations change around turnovers maybe as far as preparing him to maybe avoid some of those in a sense?

CASEY WOODS: Yeah, they have to, right? In order for us to be good. He's a guy that has to be able to differentiate between a play that he can make and a play that's not worth trying to make, you know, so sometimes there -- hey, you're late in the game we're pushing down there and we've got -- a play's got to be made in certain situations, then you got to have freedom to be able to play the way you're going to play. On second and ten backed up at your own 20 on the second drive of the game, it ain't worth doing some of the -- you know. So I think being able to differentiate -- some of those just come with the experience of playing the game, right? He's got to be able to get out there and identify certain drives of the game, I understand situational football. That's the next development, I think, in Kevin's game, really embracing

what it is it is that we got to do third down, score zone, red zone, certain times during the game, when to take hits, when not to take hits. All that's going to -- his growth and development. This year, boy, it started out let's just execute plays. Then it was let him play and get the ball moving around and then we got hot and then it was, you know, kind of just played man from that front situation and he was able to respond a couple different times with our backs against the wall and really did a good job in the second half and leading it down.

But, sure, into the future he's got to have a better situational awareness, day one install of situational awareness is you can't turn the football over and have a chance to succeed and put our defense in bad situations like we did. So certainly that will be eh something we're invested in but really proud of where he got here. He's as disappointed, like I said, as anybody, but I think we got a great opportunity moving into this offseason with him leading us.

MODERATOR: We got time for a couple more.

Q. Scott, Penn State's tight end, Tyler Warren, won the Mackey Award, had some enormous numbers during the course of the year and he got some plays today, obviously, but how did you simulate him in practice and what was your key to, I don't know if you want to say keeping him in check, but not letting him have one of his huge days?

SCOTT SYMONS: No, I mean, you can't simulate him in practice. You know, our Scott team guys tried to give us a look but that's not the same. I think our guys were really clued in to him and like I said, you know, we felt like going into the game, once again, that if we limited explosive plays and were efficient on third down and we were at least even in the battling field position that we would give ourselves a chance to win and we really, like I said, we had the one short yardage touchdown run that popped where we were not lined up. It was they tempoed us, we weren't all on the same page. Got to put us in a better situation to get us lined up in that and that whole drive, basically, was tempo plays that we just weren't cleats in the dirt.

We gave up, the long pass, I believe, was 25 yards, so one explosive pass. I think Warren's long was 15, you know, so our guys practiced well. We felt like once again, felt like obviously if you win the battle of field position and we were efficient on first down, which we were under our goal. We were a little over 50%, I believe. Our goal is 66%. There was one or two calls I wish we had back on third down, but, you know, we had the big fourth down stop, too, there. So it was kind of a tale of I felt like about five plays for us on defense, really, that, you know, you're in tough situations,

you got to find a way to make every play to give yourself a chance to be in the game. So I thought those guys gave us a good look and our guys were locked in with the game plan and confident, just, you know, didn't execute quite well enough in that type of a game.

MODERATOR: Final question.

Q. For both of you guys, what is this season overall, your initial thoughts on it? What does it mean to you guys to have reached this point? I know it's bittersweet right now, but just the overall trajectory of the program with a season like this?

CASEY WOODS: Um, yeah. I think it's -- I think we raised the bar. Coach Lashlee asked us back in February, we all had T-shirts on that said raise it and I thought we did that. I thought our program as a whole we raised it in recruiting. We raised it in operations. We raised it in equipment and video and coaching and playing and these guys were unafraid and our fans raised it and obviously our program and what they've invested into it raised it. Our administration has raised their level and I think that we that comes raised expectations, which is good. That's what we want, right? That's the cost of doing these things, that you have a chance to do that and we set a school record for attendance so our fans understand what's going on, right? It was amazing to experience a crowd like it was today, right, as a football guy, being able to get out there and be at a place that is such a -- what a unique atmosphere it was, but I think as far as the trajectory of the program, I think we've raised it, right? We set a new standard and our kids have bought into that and they understand that and we've got great leadership and we got great exiting senior leadership that's done a fabulous job here for us the last two years, going to two conference championship games, winning one, winning 22 games, I believe, and we got a new crop of sophomores and juniors that have played a lot of football for us, significant football for us that are going to have to take that leadership torch and lead us forward going.

But I think that they've now had a taste of what it looks like and I think the country's has a taste of what SMU can be and the danger that we can provide to them and the excitement that we can provide and I really look forward to watching Scott develop our defense and watching Kevin develop our offense and, man, I think that the future's bright and we're going to be disappointed today as we should and we're going to go home and get some rest and recruit and get back to work, but if we can sit and take measure of this season, then we're going to try to do that in the next couple hours:

MODERATOR: Coach Woods, Coach Symons, thank you

for your time.

SCOTT SYMONS: Appreciate it.

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