

TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Virginia vs Missouri

Saturday, December 27, 2025

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

EverBank Stadium

Missouri Tigers

Coach Eliah Drinkwitz

Nick Rodriguez

Connor Tollison

Press Conference

Virginia - 13

Missouri - 7

THE MODERATOR: We have Mizzou head coach Eliah Drinkwitz with us, as well as Nick Rodriguez and Conner Tollison.

Coach, do you want to start with an opening statement?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah, obviously very disappointed with the result. Thought our guys had great resolve and fight throughout the game. Obviously gave us an opportunity right there at the end of the game.

It's on me. I didn't do a good enough job calling plays tonight or getting us into a rhythm or giving you things we could do and execute quick enough. Bottom line, it's on me.

Disappointed for obviously the seniors. Connor, the way he's played and performed here for a long amount of time he's been here. For Zion, for those guys. This is going to stick with me for a while not doing enough to help them find a way to win.

Like I told them in there, they helped rebuild this program to what we want to be. This year we came up short. Now we've got to find a way to move forward.

Guys like Nick, Ahmad, other guys that are coming back, we got to start the process over again when we get back here in January and get back up.

With that...



THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Coach, on the last play when Brett came in there, was that something you were made to do by the officials?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah. They said he had to come out of the game. Guess it was the referee's decision.

Q. Generally on the offense, what was the struggle with trying to find a rhythm?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah, I don't know. I thought the first drive we had a great rhythm. The second drive we had a good rhythm. We couldn't convert some third downs.

The muffed punt right there, we were out of sorts. There was a third and eight, we run a seven-yard route. There was a third and four, we throw the ball behind him. Should have been a clear first down.

We were just off. After the muffed punt, didn't have a great sequence there. Obviously the missed field goal kind of took away the momentum. We were never really able to get it back.

They went on that, what was it, 12-minute drive to start the third quarter. Has two fourth down and we were never at that point were able to get in and settle in on what we needed to do.

Q. Third downs on both sides of the ball seemed to be a bit of a struggle. What was it that was going wrong?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah, for us offensively it was execution. I thought we started the first drive off really good. The second drive, then third drive, like I said, we were short on our routes. So that was not good.

Defensively they did a good job of keeping us off balance. They were running the ball, throwing screens, stymieing our pass-rush. I don't think we had a sack. I can't remember the last time we didn't have sack in a game like that. Disappointing.



Q. On the 19-play drive to begin the third quarter, anything they did different coming out of halftime that maybe was a surprise? The defense wasn't necessarily prepared obviously for a long drive there. Any surprises or anything they changed up?

NICK RODRIGUEZ: I'll just say it was execution on our part. Nothing we haven't prepared for. Just execution.

Q. Coach, how would you evaluate Matt's performance tonight?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah, I thought he did some really good things. Obviously had a chance right there on the two-minute drive. Moved us down the field pretty well. So yeah, I mean, a lot to build on.

Obviously it's a lot of growth. Everybody's got to grow and learn from their reps. That's really his third start, right? I thought he did some really good things. Obviously wish we could have that interception back.

I think there was just a couple of throws that we were a little bit late to. But overall I thought he gave us an opportunity. That's all I could ask for. That's really on me. I didn't do a good enough job calling plays for him.

Q. Hardy did not get the ball in the third quarter or until under five minutes in the fourth quarter. Was there a reason for that?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: I think they had the ball for the first 12 minutes of the third quarter. We came out, threw an out route to Kevin Coleman that we missed. Handed off the jet sweep to Kevin Coleman that got us some yardage. Then we missed the third down conversion. That was the end of the third quarter, if I remember right. I think we got fourth and one when we punted there.

Then in the second half, I think the first drive of the fourth quarter was backed up and we went -- Jamal was backed up. We went run, run, and then we tried to run it again and we ended up being short. We had a go-for-it call, but jumped off-sides the next time we touched it.

I mean, it wasn't designed that way. We only had six plays, I think, yes.

Q. Connor, from your perspective, what was so difficult from the offense tonight?

CONNOR TOLLISON: I think they did a lot of movement up front. I think they put a lot of people in the box. I think they knew we were going to look to run the ball. They had a good plan for it.

Q. Coach Drink talked about you guys as seniors. Where is your mind at?

CONNOR TOLLISON: I look back to, what was it, my freshman year when he played in the Armed Forces Bowl. We lost. It was a real step for the program forwards. I hope these guys in the locker room can use this same thing, look at this and take that next step forward.

Q. Nick, I know it's disappointing, but your best game of the season statistically. What was working so well for you? What kind of support did you have from Josiah Trotter? I know he had a surgery before the bowl game, but what kind of support did he give you?

NICK RODRIGUEZ: I would say we just had a good week of prep. We all worked together. There's no one person that plays the game on defense, so we worked together as a team.

Josiah trotter, he motivates me. He kind of, like, showed me how to go through it with the season.

Unfortunately he got hurt. But he did leave a good example for us in the defense.

Q. Coach, you talked about you have to feel the loss before you can move on. What needs to happen next now with the portal coming up in a couple weeks?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Yeah, I mean, first we got to go in there and appreciate the seniors for what they've done for us. Then starting tomorrow we'll finish up resigning the current roster.

There's going to be guys transferred, there are guys already told us they were going to transfer but they wanted to play tonight. We really appreciate those guys finishing.

Then once we have kind of a final feel of where that is, then we'll go attack the portal and build a new team. That's college football now. I mean, every team's looking to rebuild their roster post bowl games, post coaching changes, whatever. That's what we'll do.

We've got a really strong foundation. Nick's going to be back.

You're going to be back, right?

NICK RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. (Smiling).

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: He already signed. Just making sure.



Ahmad is coming back. Matt Zollers has already signed. We have a really strong foundation of guys that are signed. People are making fun of people for putting out posters or tweets about resigning. I think you kind of have to now to make sure everybody knows who is coming back, right?

I think we've got a really good foundation in the trenches. We got a really good foundation in the skill positions. So it's about filling in the holes, sustaining the culture. Guys like Nick and Ahmad, Matt, Jalen Marshall, all these guys that have committed to coming back and resigning, they got to carry the culture that's been established, that Connor fought for.

That will be what we do, go back to work. I mean, nothing good comes easy. It will be a fight to the finish here, a fight to finish off resigning our team, then we'll go to work. That's what we'll do.

I think, and I know, the fans are disappointed. I'm disappointed. I know that locker room's disappointed. That's a good thing. That's a good thing when Missouri is disappointed after a season like this. That's where we want to be. That's what we got to be.

That's what we're going to continue to fight to uphold, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Nick, Connor and Coach.

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