

NFL International Series

Jets vs Vikings

Sunday, 6 October 2024

London, England, UK

Tottenham Hotspur Stadium

Minnesota Vikings

Coach Kevin O'Connell

Postgame Press Conference



Vikings 23, Jets 17

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Absolutely a gritty win by our team.

So many moments in that game, so many things we talked about going into this football game that materialized. Especially got to give it up for our defense, Flo and those guys. We needed them today. It was not good enough to our standard on offense, and moments like this are where we lean into a lot of things that our organization is built off of. Adversity, dealing with adversity together, no flinch, all three sides figuring out a way to come together and win a football game.

What I told our team is there's going to be days like this, and when there's days like this, good football teams find a way to pick each other up against a future Hall of Fame quarterback in tough circumstances.

Kind of a sloppy day all the way around with a little spitting rain and all those things. A thousand excuses out there. Our team didn't look for any of them. We kept playing, Will Reichard was phenomenal for us. When we needed three he got it. And like I said, our defense just lights out from the standpoint of picking up our team when we needed them.

We'll go into the bye 5-0. Five incredibly difficult challenges so far to start this season, including wrapping it up with a trip that we very much looked forward to, coming to London.

It's been a phenomenal trip. Want to thank everybody that took care of us at our hotel, the NFL, putting on a great trip for us, and obviously all the folks with the Vikings that plan this thing year-round. There's a lot of people that their names can't be mentioned right now, but I wanted to personally thank all of them for helping make this trip go.

We'll go into our bye, get healthy at a couple spots and hopefully come out with the momentum that a 5-0 team should. Tons of challenges out in front of this and I can't wait to attack them with my guys.

Just injury updates on a couple guys. Aaron Jones did have a right hip and not return. He'll be evaluated. I'll keep you guys posted from the standpoint of what that looks like, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed that that hopefully will be short-term.

And then Akayleb Evans did have a left hip flexor and did not return.

With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. In the third quarter up two scores and then up one score, there were a lot of deep aggressive shots that didn't really work out. How do you mediate being aggressive in those situations when you want to kind of put the game away versus staying in control so they don't have opportunities?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, we want to stay aggressive. I think that's one of the things that has helped us this year as a team. We had some opportunities. Sometimes you're not going to hit them. Sometimes there's going to be some things that maybe happen from an all 11 standpoint that disrupt the ability of a play to be successful. There's going to be a thousand things.

I didn't think particularly offensively our execution was up to our standard. Way too many pre-snap penalties, way too many things that we really talked about. And it starts with me as the play caller, and I've got to make sure that I find a way to continue chasing improvement because there were some things offensively that just can't happen in the big scheme of 17 games over a season.

Proud of our team for how we battled, but there were certainly some plays to be had, some plays I'd love to have back from a play caller standpoint. And then just the effectiveness as the day went on, not to our standard.

But being 5-0, our offense has had a lot to do with that, but there's going to be days where we've got to figure it out and we've got to do a better job, and that starts with me.

Q. Do you know what this is?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I believe that's a football, Brandon.

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Former teammate of mine. Love this guy right here.

Q. This is the football you threw to me before the game, so the game ball goes to Coach.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Oh, man, thank you. (Applause).

Luckily you remembered from our short stint with the Dolphins together -- I should say my short stint -- it does mean a lot to see you, man. You were a great teammate and unbelievable football player. I know many, many people besides just me think that. Incredible honor to get that from you, brother, and I really appreciate that.

Q. What that represents for me is us athletes transitioning, and the ones who figure out how to do it right, so you're an example for a lot of us. Super proud of you. You've got this team rolling. Who would have thought you'd be sitting here 5-0 with all the controversy, the turmoil.

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, I love my team, man. I love every single player, coach. I know that we've got something good going, and the record, the results, phenomenal. Hopefully people are excited about this team. But what it all starts with is what's in that locker room, as you know, and the makeup of a bunch of smart tough guys that love football. They love playing together. They love working together. And they're very much looking forward to chasing improvement, which is what you need to do in an NFL season as you know from all the great teams you were on.

That's what we're going to do, but thank you once again, brother. Really appreciate it.

Q. On Friday I spoke to you about why you guys continue to find ways to win, especially here in the UK. You're still undefeated in the UK going into a bye. What kind of message do you relay to your team going into that bye?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, this has been -- we've played some really good football teams, and we've found a way to win five games. We'll get a chance to rest up, recover, get home, and hopefully have our ability to hit the ground running coming out of the bye.

But my message is going to be very simple. Not a whole lot of folks thought this team would certainly be where we are right now at the bye, so that's -- it's an easy thing for me as a coach to remind our guys of what got us here, which has just been work, total elimination, and almost an ignorance to the noise, confidence in what we are as a football team, and just doing the little things.

There's a lot of little things that we're going to have to get better at, and it starts with me, the coaching staff. I feel incredibly blessed and fortunate to have the guys

coaching with me that I do, and I absolutely love my players. I love this team. I love coming to work every day. These guys are making it a joy to get to do what I do. Very fortunate to do that.

But there's just something about this group that they believe in each other. They believe we're going to find a way to get it done and come in this locker room and enjoy another one.

It was just about going 1-0 today. It sounds incredibly cliché. I get that. But when you're traveling as far as we traveled -- and there's a lot that goes into it, we've played some physical, physical games over this first five-week sprint to this bye, I'm very, very proud of our guys.

Q. One of the match-ups in this game was Justin Jefferson versus Sauce Gardner. How did you manage balancing giving the ball to one of your best players against not throwing to one of the best corners in the league?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah. I thought those guys -- we knew coming into the game it would be incredibly tight coverage. Both Sauce and Reed are two of the best corners in the league. I know Robert and his staff -- we knew there would be some ops, but at the same time it was a battle back and forth all day long. There was some tight coverage where they got the best of us. There were some plays where Jets and Jordan were able to get loose.

I did think as much of a struggle as it felt at times there in the second half offensively, I was really proud of the way we went down there and got those three points. That really kind of -- there's been some of that in this five-game run here where the momentum, the energy in the stadium, the adversity that's kind of hit, and Sam Darnold finding Justin on that big hit to start the drive, and then Johnny Mundt later on.

Would have loved to finish that drive with a touchdown, but we ensured three points and made sure they had to score a touchdown to beat us. That's where the complementary football, special teams -- although we had a few penalties that were pretty critical -- field position-wise to battle back and get a couple down in there inside the 10. Ryan Wright with that unit down on the football, and then Will Reichard.

There's going to be days like this. That's what our game is all about, and I'm just proud of the way our guys battled. And not one time did I feel any sort of tearing at the seams with the adversity as we dealt with it and that's the mark of a good football team.

Hopefully we'll chase improvement across the board, and I'm very much looking forward to doing that with my guys.

Q. For the last game you had an amazing first half but in the second half, you made the right adjustments and (indiscernible) in the second half. How are you going to manage it for (indiscernible)?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, that's a great question because that ultimately was why the game was so close. I think we won the turnover battle by one. But I think when you look at our penalties and look at it just from the standpoint of just effectiveness of offensive football, not a lot of decent hits in the run game, kind of after a little bit there. And then we did have some penalties, eliminate some yards, and then it just felt like we were backed up kind of against ourselves a little bit in the second half.

Had some plays that coverage kind of dictated. Maybe the ball had a chance to be completed, but either pressure or just missing a throw here and there -- Sam has been lights out. My confidence level I think was on full display no matter what kind of day it's been to allow Sam to push us down the field there with some big, big time throws at the quarterback position.

Like I said, it starts with me. We've got to improve and try to avoid -- even though we stayed aggressive with some calls, the execution wasn't really where we needed it to be to try to put that football game away when we had that lead.

Q. Talk about your confidence and aggressiveness to push the ball down the field. Was there ever a point where you needed to back off and try something different?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Well, the thing was the coverage was pretty tight. They were getting up on us a little bit and kind of taking away some of the quicker throws. So trying to live in a world where we can maybe use that against them and get the ball downfield. I thought it was incredibly competitive, two or three really good wide receivers going against some good coverage players.

We took some shots, and what happens is when those are incomplete, a lot of times you're either falling into 2nd and long or into a 3rd and long and then you throw in a couple pre-snap penalties, it's going to be tough sledding, a play or two away from looking differently.

And that's what the NFL is all about. We'll go back and look at it and make sure. Like I said, there's some definite play calls that maybe we can package differently, maybe we can build to give our players more clarity, how I kind of put it together with the offensive staff. Great time to do it over that bye week and hit the refresh button and come back ready to roll.

Q. After the Stephon thing, it looked like you hugged Flo. What did you say?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I just love doing football with him, simple as that. There's a reason why I've always envisioned getting to do Brian Flores because of his mentality as a play caller, how him and his staff are coaching that group. Sometimes you do some things as a head coach and offensive play caller knowing maybe we can take a shot here because I know we're going to hit a lot of them over the course of the year.

But I also know I have ultimate trust in our defense and for Gilly -- that's why we went and got Gilly, to put a game away, tight coverage like that, and makes a hell of a catch there, so we're kneeling it out for win No. 5.

But yeah, I just have so much respect for Flo. He is leading that defense at a world-class level and really impacting our organization with how we play and how we win, and that was what that moment was. You're always one for the moments, man. I love it.

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