

NFL International Series

Vikings vs Steelers

Sunday, 28 September 2025

Dublin, Leinster, Ireland

Croke Park

Minnesota Vikings

Coach Kevin O'Connell

Postgame Press Conference



Steelers 24, Vikings 21

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I thought the guys battled until the very end of the football game. Put ourselves in way too much of a hole with clearly losing the turnover battle and penalties continued to be a critical factor, something I've got to get fixed. Specifically the pre- and post-snap penalties that when we give away yards or we get things stacked against us, creating 3rd and longers for our offense, earned 1st downs that aren't necessarily happening between the whistle against our defense.

I thought our defense kept us in it battling, a couple big stops, and then we were able to put together some two-minute drives despite being down a few guys up front, which is never an excuse. Expect everybody to be ready to rock and roll and step in, next man up.

Had a chance to still win the football game in the end because our guys compete until the very end, regardless of circumstances, and just didn't find a way to get it done.

Credit to them for playing a good football game, winning the turnover battle, and their formula to win is that, and they were able to do that.

Injury-wise, Brian O'Neill will have an MRI tonight, looking at his knee, and then Ryan Kelly was out with a concussion, and then Carson did get poked in the eye and was able to continue playing.

Q. With O'Neill, how concerned are you guys?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: I was out there when they evaluated him. Don't want to get too far ahead from the standpoint of what it might be, but it sounded like they were talking about his MCL, so that's one they'll have to evaluate.

I know he was trying to do everything in his power to tape it up and see if he could go. One of the toughest guys on our team, so I know he would have absolutely tried to get back out there if he could. We'll evaluate him and see

where he's at.

Q. (On Carson.)

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, you go into the game trying to make sure you do everything in your power based upon what you view as the challenges going into the game from the standpoint of I thought we tried to do everything every which way we could try to limit T.J. Watt's effectiveness. He's a really unique special player.

Throughout the game we had some breakdowns in some other areas and just kind of took us out of the flow of being able to run the football. It took us out of the flow of being able to use our play action pass game.

I thought we did do a pretty good job early of moving the football via the ball coming out pretty quick and trying to find ways to get some catch-and-run opportunities, but as you stack some of those negative plays, you just end up in down and distances that are very conducive for them, and then eventually the score is very conducive for them, and you're trying to make sure you piece together what was the original plan of making sure you never want to leave 90 to an open edge.

I think one of the few times we did, he got off the ball so fast they called him for an offside in the neutral zone.

But then as you lose your center and then obviously BO, it has some effect on the execution, but I don't look at it as anything more than the next man up, and we've got to consistently do some more simple things early on in the game just from the standpoint of doing our job, the execution when it's all 11, when it's all there.

And you're going to have some times -- both interceptions were off of tipped balls. What we've got to look at is was the ball going to the right spot, what was the protection like, who tipped it, could we have gotten hands down.

And then on the 3rd and long we're just trying to put the ball in play right there. We got to Zay a little quick on that one. Don't necessarily -- Carson is processing and seeing kind of the intent of the play, which had a provision in it to get the ball to Zay, just maybe not as quick as he did, and the ball ends up being thrown on the

... when all is said, we're done.®



west side of the center, which was not the intent, and the ball gets tipped and that one is an incredible play by T.J. Watt off the tip.

I think Heyward might have got the first tip.

But those two tip balls are still interceptions. We got the ball out one time on defense, and it looked like it bounced. JG got it off the quarterback one time and it looked like it bounced right to one of their guys.

You've got to overcome that. That's funny shaped football and the tipped balls were intercepted, and the one time we got the ball out, it was just the next down for their offense.

When that's happening, then you've got to create some things. I thought the blocked field goal was big, and then obviously the defense at the end, finding a way to get the stop, and then we flipped that into a touchdown and had a chance because of that.

That's where you're just never going to see this team quit. They're going to play to the end against a very good team. We just didn't do enough things to overcome, either our own execution or the injuries or whatever. I don't really look at anything other than we've got to improve and continue to grow as a team.

Q. In the first half when Carson gets poked in the eye, did that affect his ability to read things coverage-wise?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: It looked like we had T.J. on maybe the down, either right after or maybe two downs after, and it was his left eye. He made that throw many, many times, made it to the right against the Bengals kind of in a similar area of the field, and just left it a little inside, tough catch, and ended up kind of all but ending our opportunity to maybe get seven there, and what that looks like if we can do a little bit better job coming out in the third quarter, what does the game look like.

So it all connects. It all works together throughout the game. Then like I said, we complemented at the end with a will to try to win the football game overcoming all the things that in many cases we put ourselves in that situation.

Q. With Ryan Kelly, are there any larger conversations that need to happen with the two concussions?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Clearly the health of our players is always the first, the beginning and the end and the middle of that conversation, beginning, middle, end, so we'll totally defer to the doctors and we'll defer to the protocol, and ultimately we're going to want to make sure Ryan is in a good place.

That's not anything I particularly ever want to mess around with. We'll be smart, and at the same time I'm much more -- definitely not my lane to weigh in on those things until the medical staff or we get to that place. But I appreciate the question.

Q. On that last drive, it looked like you wanted a clock reset for the delay --

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Well, we were dealing with the play clock. It was a unique thing about coming to play here and then you find out about three minutes before the kickoff that that end zone's game clock and play clock would be turned off for the day. Trying to go as fast as we can in the coach-quarterback system kind of went out there at 15 seconds. Normally you have that clock right in front of the quarterback, it's kind of registering I've got to get going, and it was just precious time lost in a sequence where with the clock -- we're trying to get as detailed of a play off as we possibly can to account for a lot of the things we're moving the ball with from the standpoint of help on the edges, making sure we get things up front to give us a chance on the play to let our guys get downfield.

That was a critical, critical penalty, and then I think we might have got beat on a TE on the intentional grounding. Had an opportunity maybe on that one to get a pretty significant chunk, which you're looking for at least one or two times there to try to see -- for sure get in field goal range, and then we're still thinking about trying to get in field goal range and then have opportunities to either make it a shorter field goal or try to score.

That was kind of the momentum of the game. I thought the best thing to do would be onside kick it, see if we could capture it right there, continue to have it, and then Noah and Flo and the guys could get a stop, and then it was going to be a race to try to get three points and try and get this thing into overtime.

Q. How tough does it make it for you as you're approaching knowing when there's as much shuffling as there's been on the offensive line?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: Yeah, you're asking guys to step in there. You're asking guys to play against some premier players for sure and try to use the game plan as much as we can, at least as a starting point.

Then from there, we were trying to piece it together a little bit to move the ball and account for some things in the second half, which I thought Carson did a really good job kind of handling. We get the explosive to Jay. You don't get in the end zone on that play and you're trying to get a play off, and there's just sequences and parts of our offense that maybe there's an answer, but it's down the line into things, especially when you get down in there



and then just the -- you would have loved to save every second you possibly could.

But at the same time you've got to account for all those things that we talked about and you're accounting for certain things where you're diving deep into the playbook a little bit into combined protection with the ability for your playmakers to make a play and see if we can get one or two hitch throws out for Carson.

Q. What did you think of the atmosphere today, and do you think the noise played a role in the last drive?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: You know, I think the atmosphere was a great atmosphere for football, both our fans that made the trip, the fans that were wearing purple, and I thought they had a great showing as well. The energy of the building was fantastic.

I think probably a combination of the energy there on the last drive and then just -- one of those negatives being quarterback facing a clock that's off, that's not an excuse, we knew about it, but that is a unique challenge when it comes to most if not all NFL games.

You're normally staring right down right through the defense at that play clock to be able to speed things up and get the ball snapped. Got us in a big moment, and we've got to be ready to handle the circumstances a little bit better.

Q. (Indiscernible) was very low today. How do you plan to work on that in order to achieve since?

KEVIN O'CONNELL: 3rd down efficiency? Yeah, I think a big story and theme, you've heard me say the term, the early down execution, and then some of the penalties. I think we had a false start on a 3rd and medium, which would be in that 6 to 9 range, and that kicks you back 10 plus.

I think back to some of the early parts of our season here where we're -- when we can stay efficient and when we can get that early down execution and then lead into a 3rd and manageable.

I thought Adam Thielen had some nice 3rd down conversions today on some of those D & Ds, but then you've got to get people further down the field when you're talking about 12, 13, 14, 15, and that's when we ended up having a turnover today trying to put the ball in play, seeing if we can get a play started, and activate Zay a little bit in the pass game, which showed up again.

But yeah, it's absolutely something we've got to continue to work through. Those downs tend to be the weighty downs, tend to be the hard ones and the most magnified when you're down some guys because it requires some individual one-on-one blocks at times, and you're trying

to do everything you can to eliminate or at least contain some of the very familiar names on the other side that can affect the passer.

All while knowing there's a plan adjusting coverage wise. There's absolutely a way to -- a path moving forward for us to do exactly what you said, which is to improve on those 3rd downs.

But to me it's as much those plays as it is the plays that precede them and making sure we're efficient and staying on schedule to allow ourselves to get the ball out of our hand and put the ball in play to our playmakers.

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