

Aflac Kickoff: Syracuse vs Tennessee

Saturday, August 30, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Syracuse Orange

Coach Fran Brown

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee 45, Syracuse 26

FRAN BROWN: First I want to take my hat off to Tennessee. Their coaching staff did an amazing job of preparing their players. They fought really well. Just a classy football team.

I also want to be able to thank our staff and our fans for supporting us following us being down here. It's a great venue. I think that this Aflac game has been going on for years, and I'm happy we had the opportunity to be in it. Happy for our players and their families and just all the fans and all the alum that got a chance to come out here and support us today. It really means a lot that they were able to do that.

Q. Fran, Devin obviously went out and didn't come back. Do you have a sense of how serious his injury is at this point?

FRAN BROWN: Not sure. Not at this point.

Q. Same thing with Berry Buxton?

FRAN BROWN: Yeah, I'm not really sure. Not at this point. We didn't really stress how serious it is or if they may have been able to come back in. I'm not really sure just because of the magnitude of the game and where it was.

Sometimes just different things happen, so for me I don't know that yet, so I can't give you a direct answer. So I don't know.

Q. Defense was an area where you knew you had to get better coming into the season. What did you think they struggled with the most or why did you think they struggled?

FRAN BROWN: What do you want me to say?

Q. It could have been their tempo, it could have been just how good they are --

FRAN BROWN: I think we handled the tempo well. I don't think we tackled well in the open field. I thought that we handled the tempo well. I thought that -- this is where it's kind of hard to -- I thought we handled the tempo well, but I did think that we could tackle better.

I thought there were times in the game where we were able to get a couple three-and-outs, and when you're able to do that, you could see the football team that we can be. They did it a little bit better than we did. Their offense ran the ball extremely well. I think the run game was what opened up their passing game a little bit.

So from that standpoint I feel as though we've just got to tackle better in the open field.

Q. Fran, when we looked at last season, 4th and 1, 4th and 9, and you brought that up a lot, the guys bring it up a lot. This game in the first half you went for it on 4th and 10 and it worked out. Just what you can say about going for it at that time.

FRAN BROWN: It was just something that you had to do at that moment just because of the magnitude of the game and where the game could have went to. You didn't want the momentum to stay on their side. They had momentum a lot of the game, so it was just going through the monotony of football and that momentum at the moment, it was important we were able to go and get that, so I just told them go for it.

Q. As far as Steve Angeli, your takeaways from him having his first start, just what you saw from him throughout the game?

FRAN BROWN: I think that Steve did a really good job. I think that he had our team behind him. We fully support him. I fully support the way that he played today.

A couple mistakes but nothing major that we can't fix. I feel



as though he'll be a good quarterback for us down the road, a real good quarterback.

Q. Coach, along those lines about going for it on 4th and 10, that game had a chance to get away from you pretty early and you guys battled back to the point where you're a possession or so away from making that really interesting at the end. I know there are no moral victories, but did you see some things today that you feel like you're encouraged by and you can build upon here moving forward?

FRAN BROWN: I'll have to watch the game forwards though. I'm very thankful that our players continued to play. But for me to just say -- it's about wins and losses, but I am very thankful that the players went out and they fought and they stayed together. I think that's a part of us building a culture and building a program, so I'm extremely thankful they were able to do that.

But to tell you there's some moral victories and things of that nature, for me that would be a loser's mentality, so I can't say that. But I am very thankful that our players stuck together and they continued to fight until the last play.

Q. Your no-huddle offense seemed to really work. Was that something you guys wanted to get to from the jump, or did the score dictate that, or was that always part of the game plan?

FRAN BROWN: It was just the game. I thought they did a good job. I think Jeff is really well at what he does, and it's just a feeling in the football game that we go through. We can go either-or. But when you feel you can do some things, being able to go fast, it helped a lot, so just something that we done just because it was working at the moment.

Q. When you were looking at the film, did you anticipate Tennessee using McMurray in as many different ways as they did and him making that much of an impact on the game?

FRAN BROWN: Man, I thought he was a good football player. I thought he was a good football player since he was being recruited out of high school. I just thought he could play ball. That's part of the game.

Q. It felt like Tennessee was really trying to go at Da'Metrius early. How did you deal with that in terms of getting attacked early in the first quarter there?

FRAN BROWN: I thought it was good for him. He's a freshman. The kid should be a senior in high school and he's in college. He got beat on a deep pass, and he came

back and he played.

For me, I was always worrying about what was he going to do after he got beat, and he showed that he was tough and he's meant to be in college. He came back, had a breakup, made a couple other little plays, tackled. I'm excited about his future. I think he'll be well.

It's always about when you get beat, what do you do afterwards. That's how you're supposed to judge, after you go through. But I thought he did a really good job after he got beat, and I'm proud of him going out there and consistently competing.

He had his chin up when he ran in that locker room because I wanted to be there and look every player in the eye and see him, and he had his head up. I just told him, just keep fighting; I love you; it'll come back.

Q. Was there anything specifically you saw from him after those plays that he did better to not get beat?

FRAN BROWN: It's a leverage thing. It's a leverage thing. It's about leverage a little bit, being able to turn and go. I think the most important break is turn and go, where a lot of times you don't put as much emphasis into it.

But he did a good job. It happens sometimes. He made a play earlier, I think he misjudged the ball as a freshman, got too excited and misjudged it to get a PI, then the other one came later on. But he'll be fine; he had a breakup on the sideline, a tackle, a couple different things. I'm very thankful for his future. I'm excited about his future and thankful that he's a student-athlete here at Syracuse.

Q. Steve was under duress a lot tonight. How do you feel like he handled the pressure from their pass rush, and what do you think Tennessee's front four did so well to match up with your O-line today?

FRAN BROWN: I think they did a lot of disguising, moving, just moving the front, doing different things of that nature, bringing backers from different levels, having them outside. Then they'll also go in and stunt the front, then have them blitzing from inside. They did a good job doing that.

I would say Steve handled it well. Maybe held the ball possibly a little long maybe one or two times. But in the same sense, I just want to take my hat off to their defense. I thought they did a good job, and they gave us some looks that obviously was a problem. We gave up five sacks tonight, and that's not good. It's hard to win when you give up five sacks. We've got to go back and be able to fix that.

A couple maybe on the protections has called them out. A



few others maybe where he held the ball a little bit too long, but it's so easy to say that now. I would have to watch the tape and tell you that more.

But I'm very thankful for him. I think he's going to be a really good quarterback here for us. I'm really happy that he's at the helm for us.

Q. Along the lines of your run game, Will Nixon is a guy that's played at this level, Willis only played in a couple of games last year. How would you assess his play, kind of stepping into that role today?

FRAN BROWN: I think we've got to give Willis the ball more. I think he's -- I've been saying for a while, at some point you've got to give him the ball. We're going to make sure that we get him the ball more. I think he's going to be the guy that can run the rock. I think him and Will both do a good job. We want to get other guys involved also. He did a good job, though. I think he's the best player on the team from an offensive perspective, so will be a good deal.

Q. Johntay was obviously very effective early and then maybe they took him away or maybe you saw some other things in the second half. Did they change anything in how they defended him in the second half?

FRAN BROWN: No, I think his body started tightening up a little bit, and then I think Tyshawn Russell was doing a pretty good job just from there.

Could you pause the cameras and stuff like that real fast for me? It's kind of hard to be up here trying to answer you guys' questions when y'all keep talking back there. It's a little bit disrespectful. I know we lost, but let's focus a little bit.

Q. You were talking about Johntay and sort of the difference between the first half --

FRAN BROWN: His body started tightening up a little bit. I think one time he got tackled, went down, he started to get tight a little bit, but he kept going, in and out pushing, but I thought Tyshawn Russell started to be able to play too. So you want to keep guys with the hot hand; that's sort of the game of football.

Q. Like you said, five sacks is too much, but it's also four new faces, it's Tennessee. How did you think the offensive line did?

FRAN BROWN: I think Tennessee did a really good job, but that doesn't mean it's okay. You said there's four new faces, it's Tennessee. I thought they did a really good job. I felt that there was a time or two that if we would have

gotten another stop, we would have got a chance to go score, so it was kind of a close game to a certain extent.

Five sacks is unacceptable no matter what it is. As long as I'm the head football coach, that'll never be acceptable for us to do that, so I have to get us better.

Like I told the players, I've got to do a better job of getting you prepared throughout the week so that way when we get into this atmosphere and we have an opportunity, we keep it close. But I think our players are good enough that we need to make sure the game gets a little -- I don't want the game to ever get out of reach. As long as they're in reach, we'll have a chance to win because that's the way college football is. When it gets out of reach, I don't want you guys to start thinking that their players are just that much better, right, because people always say, well, they beat us like that, Fran, so a couple people can be coming in, started telling me, you've got to get better players, you've got to get better players. No, my players are straight. We've got to execute.

This is a game of execution. It's not about the players, it's about being able to execute, and it starts from the top down, so I've got to make sure I go back and watch everything, do everything the right way to make sure I put the guys in position to be able to execute.

Sometimes the scheme may be a little too hard for some people. Maybe it's a little too easy and they're able to break it faster, but I think it always starts with the coaching, and after the coach is able to analyze himself to make sure we check everything out, then I'll come back and talk to you about it. But five sacks was on me.

Q. How much of this loss was due to lack of experience or Tennessee just being the better team today?

FRAN BROWN: I think they was the better team. They beat us today. He was the better coach than I was. He had his team more prepared than I had our team, so therefore they're 1-0 this week, we're 0-1 right now. I'm just looking to go 1-0 next week to be honest. I appreciate you asking that.

Q. On that note, about the improvement of teams from the first week to the second week of the season, can you talk about that and what your message is going to be to the team because after you lose what happens after that?

FRAN BROWN: There's a process we follow every day and we've just got to get back to the drawing board, go back and do everything the right way. Monday will be



Monday's practice, Tuesday is going to be Tuesday's practice, and you just follow that process.

Everyone has to play their part in that process, especially when you're trying to build a culture and there's unity. With unity everyone has to be completely involved. I don't pray that half the team could be involved and the other half can't and then you get a win because then that win isn't real, and you won't be able to sustain it.

When you're trying to have a real culture and a real winning program, everyone has to be completely involved and completely locked in, but there's a process that you follow daily, and when you go through that process, that process doesn't mean you have to win at the end of the week. The other team is also having a process. You just hope that you guys are more bought in, and in the fourth quarter you can have one more point than them.

Q. You always lean on faith and lean on the family and the bigger picture. That message in the locker room afterwards, just what you wanted to say to the guys with everybody prepares, everybody goes through the process, someone has to win. What is that message that you wanted them to leave with as they leave Atlanta here today?

FRAN BROWN: Just make sure we stay together, continue to fight. For me it's about doing everything the right way, though. To me it starts with my faith, but then after my faith on Monday morning, we've also got breakfast. After breakfast you have got class, and you have all those things.

I don't want anything to happen -- a lot of times things happen for people all of a sudden and they didn't really deserve it, and then it kind of blows up in their face. I want everything to be truly deserved because of the work we put in from an academic standpoint, to a football standpoint to practice, from studying at practice, doing all the things needed when practice is over, making sure we're at dinner, going over to study hall.

You've got to be able to live your life completely right for it to work the right way, especially when I'm consistently talking about faith and wanting to do it through faith and wanting it to work out that way. You've just got to keep doing it over and over the right way, and eventually it all works out the right way, and you just naturally become addicted to winning. Guys will become addicted to winning. If you've got seven classes in one week and you miss three, how do you expect to go win Saturday? How you do anything is how you do everything.

That's how I want our guys to understand and be able to

analyze this thing called life that they're starting to go through on their own.

They're young men becoming men, and when you're doing things the right way, I want the household that they all run to be ran the right way. I want it to be ran on things being done right, with good morals, with integrity, understanding and knowing that you represent your name and most importantly we get an opportunity to represent this S and this block S holds a lot of weight throughout the country. So I want to make sure that's being done the right way.

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