

Army Black Knights Football

Saturday, September 9, 2023
West Point, New York, USA

Coach Jeff Monken

Press Conference



Army 57, Delaware State 0

Q. Coach, big win today. What's your feeling coming off the field?

JEFF MONKEN: I'm glad we won. I'm proud of the guys for the fourth quarter. I thought we played a good fourth quarter after, frankly, a little bit disappointing third quarter. Just the way we finished the game.

There were a lot of things at halftime that needed to be addressed, and I felt like we improved on some of those things, and there weren't any major changes or adjustments or anything like that. Just doing the simple things better.

When you win 57-0, I kind of feel like a -- I feel a little ungrateful coming in here and feeling like we can play a lot better, but I know we can play a lot better, and I'm happy for our guys that we won, and certainly to win at home is really important for us.

But I know who we're getting ready to play, and I look at this stretch of games coming up, and we're going to have to play a lot better than we did today. Certainly better than we did last week, if we're going to have a chance to win.

Those are the things that I recognize and see, and I'm excited for our guys to be able to go and celebrate a victory because that's a great feeling.

Last week didn't feel so good. Feels a lot better today.

There were things last week that we needed to do better, and unfortunately we had to pay the ultimate price and find those things out. Today we've still got a lot of things we've got to do better. Fortunately we didn't have to lose a game to find that out. Having some humility and trying to recognize and identify those things where we can work for the next five days to get ready to play six days from now.

Q. Daily had a good game. Got to be good for his

confidence.

JEFF MONKEN: For sure. He did a good job. He ran the ball hard. He made some good throws. He missed on a couple of throws, and that's disappointing to see that, him have those opportunities, but he's getting better. He's a tough leader, and again, he ran the ball hard, broke some tackles, and good to see him hit some of those plays to Isaiah especially and get some big touchdown passes.

It doesn't matter if you complete a pass for six yards or 60 yards; it feels good to complete a pass and gives you some confidence as a thrower. He just did a good job leading our team. He remained pretty poised for the majority of the game.

We've got to get better as an offense just continually each week, and he's a big part of that.

Q. How critical was it for Bryson after today to restore his confidence or give him some confidence?

JEFF MONKEN: You know, last week he made some really good plays, but obviously had some plays that he'd like to get back and we'd like to get back. He had fewer of those today. He had fewer plays where he's wishing, I'd like to get that one back.

But there are some. There's some plays where he'd like to say, I wish I could try that one again, throw that one again, and that's okay. That's good.

Quarterbacks should be critical of their own play. He wants to perform really well, like all the guys do, but he's able to self-evaluate and see what needs to be done.

He takes coaching. When Coach Worley or Coach Thatcher make a correction, he earnestly tries to get better at that, even in-game corrections. He's a really easy kid to coach, and he's just a tough, hard worker.

He's going to get better. He'll get better as the season goes along, and hopefully he'll play a really good football game next week. We're going to need him to.



Q. On defense you were able to put pressure on the Delaware quarterback and had a field goal blocked and Jack had the sack and the fumble recovery and Jackson Powell had a big play. How do you feel about the defense today putting pressure on?

JEFF MONKEN: There were some plays where we really did a good job putting pressure on. We got some sacks and tackles for loss. Certainly we want to be a stop-the-run team.

The sacks go toward rushing yards, so I think it's a little bit skewed, but for the most part, I thought we did a good job with containing their run game.

There was a couple of times they popped out of there. We got blocked or missed a tackle. Those are things that we've got to correct certainly.

Their quarterback did a nice job of throwing on the move. There were several times where either play action or boot plays where he got on the move and found an open receiver, found a guy in the flat, found a guy across the middle. He missed a couple throws where they had guys open, especially down there in the red zone, and we kept them out of the end zone, but a couple times it was their fault. They just made a couple throws that were errant.

But our guys kept playing, and like I said, to start off with in the fourth quarter, we got them out there, and three-and-out, made them punt, and three-and-out, and made them punt, and that was super positive to finish that way. But there's things we've got to correct.

It wasn't a perfect game by any stretch. When you have a shut-out, I think often those that look from the outside in say what could be wrong; you shut them out; they didn't score in the points.

Well, yes, but there are still things that we need to improve on, areas of the field that we need to play better. Start of the third quarter, we go down there and fumble the ball. We're going in.

We've got a 3rd down pass, we hit the quarterback, we rough him, they got an automatic 1st down. Next thing you know it's down there at our 10-yard line, and they march all the way down the field.

That's not a positive. It's not a positive. Not a positive for our team, to fumble the ball, to have a foolish penalty, to let them drive the ball all the way down the field. Those are things we've got to improve on. Though they didn't score any points, we've got a lot to fix.

Q. Zach Mundell was at wide receiver; you described him as a quarterback prospect in August. Is that his new position?

JEFF MONKEN: Oh, I think he's still a quarterback. But he can help our football team. He's quick. He's athletic. He's got good speed. So we just wanted to get him in the game.

That was a place we knew we could get him into the game. He wasn't going to be the starting quarterback today, but he's the kind of athlete that we'd like to play at quarterback in this system.

He was in the last system. He's an athletic, tough runner, fast. He's different as an athlete.

I think he remains a quarterback, but we're going to try to get him on the field wherever we can. Today that was playing him at receiver.

Q. (No microphone.)

JEFF MONKEN: We had intended to put him in on a final drive. My intent was this in the third quarter: To have a scoring drive for Bryson Daily to start the third quarter, to give him a chance to come out of halftime, go take a drive down and score. Well, we fumbled the ball, so we put him back in, and by the time that drive was over, the third quarter was over.

So we gave the next series to Larry Robinson. We wanted to give him a series. Larry is a really good player, played in our prep school, and we wanted to see him operate. He did a nice job. So we put him in for a second drive, and he scored on that drive.

So we wanted to put Champ in, and we put Champ in. He had a drive, and I said to Cody, we've got to give a drive to Dewayne Coleman, and he said, absolutely, we're going to put him in on the last drive. Well, as it turns out we just -- the time ran out and we didn't have a chance to get him in there.

That's no fault of his. We just ran out of series.

In the third quarter had we done what I had hoped we would do and go down and score on the opening drive, we probably would have got every one of those guys a series and then started the rotation over again.

Q. Can you talk about Champ played that last series in the first half. Was that just the situation --

JEFF MONKEN: We did. It was less than a minute to go.

Champ is a really good athlete. He's really good on his feet. He's got a very capable arm. He's long and athletic, and when he pulls it down, he can run it.

We watched him all preseason camp making plays on his feet.

In that situation, we wanted to give him a chance because of who he is as an athlete. To be able to pull it down and maybe make a big play on his feet if he had to go in there and just see how he would respond.

The first play he probably held the ball a little bit too long. He could have pulled down -- it was kind of an open middle, and I had hoped he would kind of run the ball up in there, and then the second play he probably could have held it just a shade longer, and we had a time-out, and I was able to talk to him.

I said, look, don't hang on to it so long. You can pull it if it opens up and go. What he did the next play, he's a freshman; he's listening. He ran around the edge, and then we competed a couple of passes and got ourselves in field goal range.

I thought about making one throw to the end zone, but I really thought we've probably got as good a chance to kick a field goal here and get three points as we do complete a Hail Mary at the end of the half.

Cole has got a really strong leg, and he had enough leg, he just pushed it over to the right. I wanted to give him a chance to do that and really to see him make that kick and perhaps give us some confidence for down the road in kicking a long field goal.

I thought that was a little bit outside of my receipts sky's range. He's got a really accurate leg and a strong leg. He's kicking the ball better than he ever has. But Cole, you watch him kick off, those are cannon shots. He hit the upright about halfway up the sticks with the one. He's got a strong leg. I wanted to give him a shot at that. Unfortunately he pushed it over to the right side.

Q. Cody had a fumble recovery, too. Was he on the team last year?

JEFF MONKEN: He was not.

Q. Can you talk about having him back on the team?

JEFF MONKEN: Really excited to have him back. Cody actually served in the United States Army for the last couple of years, so he was here. He went out into the Army. He's now come back, and it's incredible the maturity

and the growth that a guy makes just as they go through their experience here, but that opportunity for him, and he's an aggressive leader, a really tough, physical kid, and so we didn't -- he wasn't eligible to play last week. There was some things going on with the NCAA and going through that process, and he got cleared yesterday. He was able to get in there.

We had intended to take him and play him some last week, and then this week, just the uncertainty, he was on the scout team for most of the week. He'll find his way back over to the other field and kind of get him prepared.

I'm really proud of him, and he's a favorite of his teammates. They love that guy.

Q. What's your take on the offensive line? You were a little bit critical in the first week. How did they do today?

JEFF MONKEN: I thought they did much better in the second half. In the first half we had some short yardage plays, and a couple of times Jakobi hit his head right on the line of scrimmage. There was bodies and people in the way and we were not getting push or guys scooting through on the backside.

I was not pleased with that in the first half, and I challenged those guys at halftime and said we've got to do better, and I thought we did that better. In the first half we averaged four yards a carry. We had 19 carries for 76 yards.

We had hit some big plays, some big pass plays, so it's not like we had the ball a bunch, and time of possession was down, too. But when we had those opportunities in the first half, we weren't running the ball as effectively as we need to, and we did that better in the second half.

For the game, that's one stat I looked at right at the end of the game. We averaged 6.7 per carry, so we went from averaging four yards in the first half to averaging 6.7 over the course of the game, which was a positive.

Now, I'm sure their defense was a little worn down. I think they had 68 guys on the trip their coach told me. We had far more guys and some fresh guys at the end, so maybe that made a difference. But the fact is we ran the ball in the second half much better.

Q. What's your big picture take coming out of this, responding to last week?

JEFF MONKEN: That we've got to get a lot better. That there are a lot of things that fundamentally we've got to do better. Execution of assignments has got to be better.

That's a challenge every week, but if we don't get better at all those little things, even mistakes we made today, it will be very difficult for us to win the football game this coming week, so we've got to get better at a lot of those little things.

Q. What about drawing positives from this? How important are the positives at this stage of the season?

JEFF MONKEN: Oh, there's a lot of positive things. We did a good job protecting our passer. He was able to throw the ball without somebody in his face all the time. We were able to get some good tough runs. We got the ball pitched and got it on the perimeter. We completed some high percentage passes, a little bit like we did last week, the slant route over the middle. We finished drives in the second half. With the exception of that fumble to open it, we finished the drives in the second half.

Defensively, though we let them go down the field, we did get a blocked kick and kept them off the board. That was a great job of responding with your back to the wall.

There's a number of positives. There's always things to find on the film that we can praise our guys for. Even last week. Last week there was some good plays and some guys that had good performances. It just collectively as a team it wasn't good enough.

Today there was some guys with some really good performances. There was some guys that made some mistakes. But collectively what we did was enough to win the football game, and that's all that matters is playing well and playing our best as a team.

As the season goes along, we hope to improve. That's all I hope for. It's not about the other team. Wasn't about Delaware State. It's not about the next team we play. It's about our team and trying to maximize who we can be.

Q. The physical intensity was apparent, but can you talk about the mental focus coming into the game and what you saw from your team today?

JEFF MONKEN: Frankly, in the pregame, I didn't think we were very focused. I called them up while we were on the field in pregame and got after them.

I went in there in the pregame or in the locker room before the game started, and I got after them in there.

I had hoped we'd be focused and ready and frothing at the mouth to get out there and play, but I didn't see that in warmups, and it was disappointing. I thought we had a good week of practice. I thought our guys practiced hard.

We had a Tuesday practice that was -- I mean, it was hats and horns for an hour and a half. We were hitting each other and playing physical, and our guys were mad about what happened last week, and they practiced that way on Tuesday. It was a really good practice.

I had hoped that intensity would carry over to today, and unfortunately I just felt like we weren't screwed in like we needed to. I got their attention out there on the field in pregame. I got their attention before the game in the locker room, and it's not often that teams that aren't prepared mentally focused can flip the switch, but I thought they did a good job of responding and kind of got each other going because there were other guys in the locker room that realized we needed to do better, and they kind of got on each other, had the courage to hold other people accountable.

I thought we came out and played hard and played physical, which is important, and that paid off in some kind of important places or moments in the game today.

Q. Marshall's fumble, what did you have to say to him afterwards and perhaps even in the locker room after the game?

JEFF MONKEN: Well, I told him I love him, but if he continues to fumble the ball, he'll be standing over there close to me, and that's the bottom line. It's unforgivable to fumble a football. He fumbled one last week, and he felt bad about it. He felt like he let the team down. He felt really bad today because he felt like he let the team down.

The fact is when you make a critical error like that, you do let the team down.

I'd be letting the team down if I didn't make it really, really important to him that he never allow that to happen again. We made an emphasis this week, and we practice ball security every day. I mean, every day.

To not have two hands on the ball in that situation, again, is just -- we couldn't coach it any harder than we're coaching it. I'm not pointing the finger at Ay'Jaun, but the bottom line is players make plays. They have to go out there and make the plays. They're the only guys that can make it.

The coaches can't make those plays, the trainers, the equipment managers, the guys standing on the sideline in the uniform that aren't in the game, they can't make the plays unless they're in there. When you're in there, you've got to make the play.

He's disappointed and I'm glad he's disappointed because

it matters to him. He cares. He loves this team, and I love Ay'Jaun.

But I told those guys, if I see a player without two hands on the ball, you're coming out of the game and you're going to stand next to me. We pulled a lot of guys out over the course of the game today because I watched another defender, a guy in a different color jersey get close to him, and he didn't have two hands on the ball. I said, yank him right now; put somebody else in there. When he came over, I told him. I said, you know why you're standing over here? Because I didn't have two hands on the ball. That's right. So stand over here and watch the game. It's a terrible seat, but maybe you'll learn.

That's it. What else do I do? What else do I do? Because a fumble, a single fumble can cost you a football game. The team we're getting ready to play, it was a one-possession game. We lost in overtime by three points. So one fumble can lose that football game if it's a one-possession game. I'm not going to allow it to happen if I can control it. If that means I've got to play somebody else that I have confidence will hang on to the ball, then that's what I do.

But Ay'Jaun is a really good player. He can really help our team win football games, but he's going to help the other team win football games if he fumbles the ball, and that goes for everybody else on our team. They help the other team. They don't need our help. They're good enough. They don't need our help. We need to help us.

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