

Army Black Knights Football

Saturday, November 11, 2023
West Point, New York, USA

Coach Jeff Monken Press Conference

Army 17, Holy Cross 14

JEFF MONKEN: Well, I'm certainly proud of our defense. I thought they played a great first half and made some big stops. Had a big stop on 4th down in the second half. Kept us in the game. They were the reason we were able to win the football game.

But just the whole team, toughness and resiliency. To get that last 4th down on 4th and 1 which we needed to win the football game, that was a big play.

A lot of things happened in the game I'm disappointed about. I'd like to -- wish I could have changed right there on the spot, but give Holy Cross credit. They've got a good team. They're well-coached. They're physical. That quarterback is dynamite. He's a good a runner at quarterback as we've faced. He's really good.

Big play in the game, obviously, was the punt block in the first drive. Coach Saturnio, our special teams coordinator, did a great job of really putting our guys in position, and it was a nice job of executing. Jabril Williams has blocked punts here before. He's come off the edge and blocked a punt. He was right down Main Street today.

Just really a gutsy block because when you're running right at the punter, there's that chance you're going to rough him, and he knew he could get it and smothered the kick. It was heads up by MODOZIE scooping that thing up and running it in.

Glad to get a win. We needed it certainly. To win two in a row was big for us.

We've got to get back to the drawing board tomorrow. Coastal Carolina is a great football team, very talented football team, and we're going to have to have a great effort next week to win.

We'll enjoy this one and get back to it.



Q. Talk about the way Leo played.

JEFF MONKEN: He was around the football a lot today. I think he had double-digit tackles. That's two weeks in a row.

But he just prides himself on fitting where he's supposed to and being in the right position. He didn't make any tackle, but he makes a bunch of them for us. He's done a really good job this year as a captain and helping keep that defensive unit focused.

Q. What was the thought on the 4th and 1 play where you let Bryson run instead of giving it to a fullback?

JEFF MONKEN: At the end there? That play has been a good play for us by having the quarterback carry it, we get an extra blocker, so the running back is able to either lead or take a guy off the edge. It's been a good short yardage play for us.

He's such a strong runner. He breaks a lot of tackles. He's able to move the pile. He's a little bit like a fullback, and he puts his shoulder down and runs the ball like that.

We just felt confident in that call and having him carry it.

Q. I asked Bryson, you got the pitch play going today to Tyrell Robinson at least three times. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: They did a pretty good job stringing out us a couple of times. We just kept getting it out there toward the perimeter, and finally he'd pitch it at the end. He had one to Markel down our sideline, which was a good gain, but they had a couple times where they sniffed it out pretty good. They're a good defense, and I thought they did a good job defending us today.

But we hit a couple plays, and getting the touchdown and going up 14-0, that was big. Obviously we needed an offensive touchdown there in the first half. I would have liked to have gotten one off that long pass that we threw to Casey.

That's probably the drive that I'm most disappointed in and



probably frankly most embarrassed about, that we get the ball at the 1-yard line and we walk it in on 1st down, we get a holding call, three on the day, and then we take it back, we get it back down to the 1-yard line, and we get three cracks from the 1 and we don't get it in.

We pride ourselves in those situations of getting the ball in there, and we didn't do it. I'm really disappointed.

But our defense did a great job. They had the ball at the 1-yard line, too, and went for the pop pass there at the very end and Jabari made a big heads-up play and knocked it down. That's the difference in the game. They probably beat us if they get that touchdown.

Q. The struggles at the goal line today, what do you think is missing in the offense to get you guys where you want to be? Are the penalties holding you back a little bit?

JEFF MONKEN: Well, the penalties did. They told my I think we had seven drives today. Three of those there were holding penalties on, we didn't score on any of the three, the ones down there on the goal line. We punted on one that wasn't a holding penalty. We scored on one, kicked a field goal on another, took a knee on the last one. The penalties really hurt us.

A couple of times we had a chance to throw to some uncovered receivers. The pass to Josh Lingenfelter there at the end, on the first drive we had the wheel route and we didn't hit T-Rob and we had to punt the ball there. There's some opportunities there to hit some plays.

I mean, I don't know. I don't know what's missing. If I knew, I'd fill in the hole and correct it.

But we're trying to run the ball and run the zone, and they did a good job getting off blocks and kind of muddying up the water in there, trying to add the back in as a blocker and run the quarterback.

Give them credit. They did a good job. On the field goal drive, we had the play there on I think it was 3rd down, maybe 2nd down. We ran the quarterback counter, and we got the whole edge.

Bryson just stuck his nose up in there and could have continued out and probably meant like a sweep play, which was the way it was designed, and he was I think adamant about trying to get the 1st down. That one might walk in there for a touchdown.

There's some plays out there that if we had them back and did a better job blocking them up and able to complete a

couple passes, then maybe it's a different story.

But I'm just glad we had enough to win.

Q. How would you assess this game and that team?

JEFF MONKEN: That's a good football team. That's a team that lost by three to Boston College in the opening game. They won 12 games a year ago with the same quarterback. They won six ballgames this year. They lost to Boston College and us. They lost to Harvard, who's got a good team and lost to Lafayette.

They've got good players. They've got good coaches. They've got a good football team, and we knew they would. I knew they'd be tough and tough to beat. I think their quarterback run game is as good as anybody we've faced. I mean, they reminded me a little bit of the kid from Boston College, the way we ran the ball. That kid is good.

I'm sure that probably he had some opportunities in the transfer portal, at least I'm told he did a year ago, to go to Power Five schools. He could certainly play at that level.

Credit to them, they were able to keep him, and he does a good job for them. It was two tough rugged football teams, and give them credit, they've got a good team. I think just slugging it out.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: We did. That made a difference in the game for sure. As I mentioned the pick by -- who was it down there? Q, yeah. Stepped in front of that. That was a big play because they're going to get points there. That's an opportunity for a touchdown or a field goal. I'm glad we were able to do that.

Q. Talk a little bit about the special teams update because you had the punt block and Cooper Allan has a strong day punting, averaged 42 on three attempts. What can you say about the role special teams played today?

JEFF MONKEN: Obviously the punt block was the difference in the football game. To get off to a 7-0 start like that without that punt block, maybe we don't win the game. Cole Talley kicked off and did a really good job.

The last kickoff there was a really strong wind coming from the scoreboard toward the building, and he just ripped it and put it about eight yards deep in the end zone.

Cooper did a good job. There was one time where they gave us pressure, and they brought a guy off our right side

and he was close to it, but a couple times they were in punt safe, they left their defense out on the field, so he was able to take his time and get off a good kick.

He did a good job with it.

Q. Holy Cross gets in your territory six out of eight drives, but you only allowed two touchdowns. What do you think of the way your team bore down?

JEFF MONKEN: Yeah, it's frustrating to see them go down there and get on that side of the field. We get a little anxious because they get close to scoring. But the defense just came up with some plays.

We talked about it I think last game, just that it's not pretty all the time. It's a little bit of a bend-don't-break mentality, but it worked out. The guys made plays, kept them out of the end zone, got some turnovers, and it was great -- like I said at the very beginning when I stepped in here, it was a great effort by our defense. They kept us in the game.

Q. What can you say about your team's ability to win ugly?

JEFF MONKEN: Well, I thought it was beautiful because we've been on the other side of victory far too often this year, and that's miserable, I can tell you. They're a good football team. I knew they would be. They are a good football team.

We beat a good team today. Outsiders looking in think, oh, gosh, it's an FCS program. Well, you can take a poll in here when our guys come in here for the team meeting tomorrow and have guys put their hands up how many guys had a scholarship offer at Holy Cross. Wouldn't be too many hands going up. Go ask the same question in their team meeting tomorrow, how many guys had an offer from Army. There would be a lot of hands go up. It just is what it is.

When we've won games here, it's not always been where we just boat race somebody out of the stadium. We're hanging on for dear life. We're stopping 4th down plays and we're stopping two-point conversions and we're winning in overtime. When we've had really good years, we've won a lot of those close ones, and this is a really good football team, a talented team.

Our guys to be able to find a way to win I think was fantastic, and it's really a good win for our program, especially being 3-6 going into this weekend. We'll have to play a lot better next week. We will. Coastal Carolina is very talented. They've got a great quarterback, and they're a well-coached football team, and they're having a great

year. It's going to take a tremendous effort next week.

But we'll try to gather what we can from the win today, what was good and what we can fix, and try to get it fixed. There's plenty to fix, but there's some good, too.

Q. You've talked about the extra intensity of the CIC games. Today was a home game on Veterans Day. Was there any extra intensity?

JEFF MONKEN: I don't know that there was extra intensity because it was Veterans Day. Every day is Veterans Day around here. Everybody that works on this campus is tied to our men and women that serve. We've got a great number of men and women who are on active duty right now that are administrators, that are professors of our staff, tactical officers. There's veterans here every day, and we appreciate the opportunity to represent our men and women that serve. We wear their colors every day.

It's with a tremendous amount of pride that we run on to the field carrying the American flag and wearing the uniform that we share with our men and women that serve.

Our guys -- I think if you ask any Army unit that's fighting together, they're fighting for the other people in the unit. There's pride in country and the bigger picture stuff, but really when it comes down to it, it's the people you've built relationships with, and you fight alongside of them, and you fight to win with them.

Our guys do, too. They fight with their teammates and for their teammates.

But we also are very aware that we represent something much bigger than ourselves, not just a university, which we do, and our graduates, our long gray line, which we do, but over 1 million men and women who currently serve on active duty in the military, are Army reservists, and every man and woman that's worn that uniform, our veterans, those that have put themselves in harm's way and have served under the red, white and blue.

It's a privilege and an honor for us to do that all the time.

We don't sit in the team meeting and sing patriotic songs. We've got a job to do. But I know our guys are proud and particularly just happy to win on Veterans Day and hopefully our men and women that have served and currently serve are watching a team they can be proud of.

Q. I'd like to ask you about Quinn's kicking performance this season, which also was on display today. Can you talk about his performance along with the confidence you have in him, particularly in clutch

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situations?

JEFF MONKEN: He's having a really good year. Obviously there was some kicks a year ago that he -- that really bugged him. The Troy game, missing the kicks there.

But he come back, and he kicks two clutch field goals in the Army-Navy game and help us win that football game, three really big kicks last week against Air Force. Those were important for us in the victory. Then today, that was a big kick. Into the wind -- down there on the field, I don't know what it was like, but I could see the flags, they were sticking straight out when he went out there to kick that ball. It was a great kick.

He's developed physically and just mentally he's really gained a lot of confidence. Coach Saturnio, I can't say enough for the job he does with those guys in building their confidence and helping them get into a great mental space to be able to do their job.

That's a lonely place out there when you're the kicker, the snapper, the holder. Everybody is going to notice a mistake. He does a really good job of helping those guys.

But I'm proud of Quinn. It was a big kick again today.

Q. (Indiscernible) quarterback under center probably surprised the Holy Cross snap as well as some Army fans which led to the possibility of the ball being distributed a little bit more. Is this something that is a part of the maturation of the offense and should we anticipate more of that going forward?

JEFF MONKEN: We thought that might help us. We hadn't run any under-center plays all year, and we thought maybe we could pop a couple of those in there and force them to change gears a little bit from the way that they were defending us in the gun to an under-center defense.

We had the wheel route. That was the first plan that we ran from under center. Tried to throw it to T-Rob, and it was a little bit out in front of him and inside, but we had him open. Ran the toss, ran a trap in there.

Just some things that were a little more fast-hitting.

So I don't know. I don't know if that's something we'll continue to do. It just felt like today that was a way that we could catch them off guard a little bit.

Q. Can you talk about the goal-line stand that you guys had defensively and how that changed the trajectory of the game.

JEFF MONKEN: The defense has played really well the last two games. They have played pretty tremendous the last two weeks. They haven't played tremendous all year long, but they played pretty well the last couple of weeks, and the goal-line stand was huge, as I mentioned earlier.

Without that goal-line stand, I'm not sure we win the game. They probably beat us. So it was a big play. Some good stops on the run game, and then the one with the pop pass, and when I saw that guy slip behind us, I said something I won't repeat, but Jabari Moore came from the opposite side of the formation, recognized it, and just made a great play. It was a huge stop.

Then just to be able to get the ball off the goal line like we did and get a 1st down and give ourselves a little breathing room, that was a really big turn of events there.

Q. Are there things from this game you can improve on?

JEFF MONKEN: There's not enough time in the afternoon for me to tell you all the things we can improve on, but I'll be ready for your suggestions so you can write them all down for me and maybe we can work on that stuff.

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