

Army Black Knights Football

Friday, August 30, 2024
West Point, New York, USA

Coach Jeff Monken Press Conference



Army 42, Lehigh 7

JEFF MONKEN: It's sure good to get a win first thing out of the box.

Q. (On the 375 yards rushing.)

JEFF MONKEN: I thought we did a good job of getting some good hard tough runs on the inside. We've got a good offensive line, and for the most part, they were able to get some push and get some movement up front. There were a couple times they got us for a couple lost-yardage plays, I believe. I didn't look at how many we had, but there was a couple. A couple of short kind of got stuffed runs.

But for the most part, I thought they did a good job and were able to run the quarterback and the B-backs in the interior. We had a couple plays on the perimeter.

Was the longest run of the day the fake punt? It probably was. Noah had that long run, didn't he. We gained a few there, too.

I was happy with the way we ran the football, controlled the clock, and the fact that we were able to get into the end zone for a touchdown on every drive, which it doesn't matter how many times you have it, if you score a touchdown every time you have it, it's usually going to end up being pretty good for you.

Defensively I felt like at half we were kind of in the bend-don't-break mode. We get that first touchdown and that was a good drive on their part, took it 75 yards and pumped it in the end zone, and give them credit, they looked good on that drive.

There were some other times where -- we had them in 1st and 25 and we gave up 22 yards on the pass play and they were able to get the ball down there and we picked the ball off in the end zone.

But I'd like for us to make them punt a little bit more. The run game for them was sometimes pretty good. At times we did a good job getting off blocks and getting a stop, but they had some good run plays in there themselves, running the quarterback, running their tailback.

I thought their team played really hard, and I noticed on the very last touchdown, there was less than a minute to go, and their defense was out there and they rushed the PAT really hard like it mattered, and it says a lot for their culture. I thought their team fought and played hard, and I was glad we were able to come away with a win, running the ball and doing a pretty good job stopping the run.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: I thought those guys played really hard, and for the most part played pretty well. They're not all void of experience. Donavon has played in games, Damon Washington has played in games, Kalib Fortner has played certainly a lot for us at inside linebacker, Kyle Lewis and Jacob Tuioti and Andre Miller, Jack Latore, Chance Keith. He's not had a lot of experience. He's probably one of the least experienced guys in terms of the time he's had on defense. Elo MODOZIE, he's played a little on special teams, some situational stuff as a freshman. But those two guys are playing a lot for the first time. We've got a lot of guys in there with Max and Larkin who have been in games. They may be starting for the first time, but they've got plenty of experience.

We had confidence in those guys and confidence that they would go out there and be able to execute the fundamentals and perform.

Like I said, there's things we can do better. There's things we can do on offense a lot better, special teams, every area. There always is. There's always areas to improve.

But I thought the defense, like I said, came up with some plays when we needed it. I wish we wouldn't bend as much, and hopefully as we go through the year, we'll bend less. But if they don't get in the end zone, that's the bottom line. But flipping the field position where they start on their own 25 and they're punting into the end zone and we're

picking the ball off in the end zone, that's a pretty good shift of field position. It's a field position game, and the better field position we get on offense, certainly the better chance we're going to have to score.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: So I didn't communicate with him at all. I had the ability to communicate with him on that play, but I didn't communicate with him at all. It's just a call that we have. They took it from the sideline out to the field. He's got the opportunity to take the play if it's there, and the look that we wanted was there, so he called for it, and he's actually the guy that calls it, and did a good job. They got a couple blocks for him and started off looked like he was going to get stuffed there and he kind of wiggled out and had a good nice run.

I didn't want to start the season, our first offensive drive with a punt. We've got a new offensive coordinator; the system we're running this year is a little bit different, and I want our guys to have some confidence. If we didn't make it, we didn't make it, go play defense. We had a lot of game left at that point. I figured that if we gave the ball back to them and they went and scored, we're going to find a way to score ourselves and put ourselves back in the ballgame. But it worked out, and we had a nice game and were able to finish the drive with a touchdown.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: Gutsy? I don't know if you think it's going to work, how much guts does it take? I was confident it was going to work. It was a pretty easy call.

You know what, if it wasn't there, he could have called it off and we just punt. It's not an all-or-nothing play, so he could have just called it off and we would have punted there and been disappointed that we had to punt it.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: There are plenty of guys that are capable of carrying the football for us. I'm not anointing any of our guys as All-Americans or anything like that. They're just tough guys, and they care about the team. They're going to run the ball hard and play the best they can for our team because they care about their teammates.

Fortunately we've got Kanye Udoh who's I think a very talented player, and he showed the ability to run with some power today and break tackles and stiff-arm guys, which was really fun to watch and encouraging. The touchdown run he had down there in the corner on our sideline was a great run. Hayden Reed is one of our best football players,

so to be able to get him the ball and he's very slippery and finds his way into holes and seams and gains positive yards. Rendina is just a hammer head; he moves the pile; he's a strong, tough runner. Our quarterback is tough as nails. He runs the ball, and he gains positive yards, knocks people back.

We had a couple plays that were negative yardage plays, but those plays were not a guy just getting knocked back because he couldn't move the guy that was trying to tackle him. Most of those were perimeter plays or balls that got out to the edge and they had an angle on us.

I like the running backs that we've got. The slots, they're all a little different, Miles, and Hayden is playing slot and Noah Short and Samari Howard are all a little bit different but all capable of carrying the ball, and they're doing a good job blocking on the perimeter for each other.

So it's not perfect, and we've got a lot of things to improve, but a lot of confidence in that group of guys that we've got.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: Well, it's a lot nicer being 1-0 than 0-1, I can tell you that. Being 0-1 isn't worth a damn. Glad we got the victory tonight. We're going to play a team next week than the one we played tonight, more talented, and we're going to have to play better. We can't bend as much as we bent on defense and expect to play as well next week.

We can't have negative yardage plays and the short yardage plays in early drives in downs against FAU and put ourselves in 3rd and long. It's going to be hard to overcome against talented teams like Florida Atlantic.

We're getting ready to play in a great league. It's a very talented league, well-coached league. Out of the Group of Five conferences in the country, it's in my opinion as good as there is. Other conferences will make their arguments for their teams, but there's a lot of parity in the league. There's a lot of teams at the top of this league that are outstanding teams that have played in New Year's Six games and beaten Power Five teams.

It's a strong league, and it's going to take a strong effort and performance on our part to compete and play in the league. But we're excited about that opportunity.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: They are, and those two were big. The one going toward the building here, the pick was important. They were kind of getting themselves into scoring position,

and like I said, they pushed that ball down after having 1st and 25, they're getting ready to score, and we made the pick in the corner of the end zone. Those were big. We couldn't have emphasized carrying the ball with two hands more than we did.

We work ball security every day, but just constantly talking about the importance of squeezing the ball and having two hands on the ball. So I was really proud of our guys for that. The ball exchanges were good, the pitches.

The one that I probably was most disappointed was the one that Bryson tried to force it on our sideline, and it careened off the hand of our pitch back and then out-of-bounds. Those things we can't do. That's a major error for us. He's just trying to make a play, but he's got to eat it at that point. So we can't do those things.

But we took care of the ball. We got up off the ground with the ball about every time. I think Bryson on one of the sneaks, it popped out of there late. He was down, the whistle had blown, but I like for our guys to stand up and hand the ball to the official after every play that we've got it. It just confirms that we've hung on to the ball and it's still ours.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JEFF MONKEN: Well, Hayden Reed played several different places, just at the slot and the B-back position. I don't know that we had a lot of other guys moving around. We've got some linemen on our team that can play different positions on the line.

On defense there's like Trey Sofia, he can play a defensive end position, he can play the outside linebacker position. He just played D-line tonight. Hayden is probably a guy that you'll see moving around a good bit.

With the motions and the shifts and those kind of things, it may look like guys are playing a different position, but they're pretty settled into where they're at in the lineup.

Q. (On snap penalties and unforced errors.) Is that an improvement over what you've seen?

JEFF MONKEN: It is. I'm not satisfied unless it's zero. But it was better because we've had some issues with that as we've gone through preseason camp. It was Hayden Reed who jumped on that one play, and frankly, I told him in practice, we've had the same issue with him. He just gets -- he's just amped up and ready to go, and on the start of the snap count he just flinches for whatever reason. He's got to grow out of that. So he will.

I was proud of our guys for not being antsy like that and jumping on snap counts. Lehigh played an entirely different defense than we anticipated. It's not their base defense, at least in terms of the way their defensive coordinator has defended option in the past. But we had practiced against that defense every day in camp against our own defense. We were really anticipating a different front, so I was proud of our guys for managing that and doing a good job, and they didn't panic.

Q. 1st and goal from the 3 (indiscernible) Noah Short for a touchdown. Was that what analytics told you to do or did you think you had a good shot at getting the touchdown there?

JEFF MONKEN: We were a little bit outside of our number, but I felt like we could -- if we could get it to the perimeter, and I asked Cody, you got a play that you like here, so we hadn't run that yet in the game. It's a good misdirection play. A lot of times down there on the goal line, the secondary has crept up pretty close to the line of scrimmage because you're three yards from the goal line and they're not going to be standing in the back of the end zone. So they're very reactionary, which they have to be, and so we were able to hit a misdirection play. Kanye did a really nice job getting out there on the perimeter and sealing the linebacker that followed him out of the box, so he pitched off the end and we pretty much just walked in there.

Q. (On the diversity of the offense.)

JEFF MONKEN: Oh, I don't know. I don't know if it's that diverse. We're just trying to find a way to run the ball. As many different ways as we can run it. I don't know that we could have lined up and run the play 40 sometimes, but just put it out and get it on the perimeter some and line up in there tight and knock people off the ball and try to move the pile. A lot of different ways to gain a yard. But a lot of guys carried the ball, but I don't know that we were calling -- we didn't call a bunch of different plays. It was just the same plays maybe presented a little bit differently and different guys carrying it.

That's what we want to do. We want to be able to run the ball effectively and not be forced into long yardage situations where maybe that's not in our wheelhouse as much.

Q. Is this the balance you expect from the offense as far as the number of ball carriers and such? Can we expect that this year, or game situations will be different?

JEFF MONKEN: It doesn't matter to me who carries it, but

I want to run it every single time we got it. That allows the ball to keep moving forward. It puts us in manageable 3rd and 4th down positions, and frankly it really doesn't matter who carries the ball.

We've got some very capable guys. It, I think, keeps them fresh. You've got some workhorses and they could probably handle more carries, but we've got some guys that do some things, maybe for them personally, they're pretty good at running certain plays or getting the ball in certain ways, and we want to get the ball to them in those ways, whether it's a hand-off or a pitch or a toss or a pass or whatever it may be.

But I stand by what I said; we want to run the football, and we want to be better at running the football than anybody in the country. Whatever that means and however that's done, that's our goal.

Q. (Indiscernible) was the team aggressive enough tonight? I'm sure you would have liked to have gotten to the quarterback a bit more.

JEFF MONKEN: Yeah, we were trying. There weren't a lot of throws that they were asking him to make where he had to stand back there in the pocket for a long time. The first and 25 where they hit that 22-yard pass on the sideline, we lost contain, so we didn't hold him in the pocket, and he got out there and had a really good view of the throw.

We weren't in a great position to defend that pass. They flooded the zone. They had a vertical route by No. 1, they had a deep out by No. 2, and a flat route by No. 3 on a 1st and 25. We jumped the flat route. We don't need to. We can be underneath the No. 2 route and probably in better position.

But a lot of the throws were catch-and-throw. He didn't hold it for very long, so it's hard to get to the quarterback when he's getting rid of the ball in a couple of seconds.

I know Elo MODOZIE did a good job rushing the passer. He just, like I said, couldn't get there. The guy was getting rid of the ball and couldn't quite get there on time every time. Hopefully we'll get better at rushing the passer and beating one-on-one blocks.

If you watch us play, we aren't loaded with guys that are just great All-American pass rushers. We've got to do some things up front and move people around and stunts and twists and blitzes to try to get people home. That was the thing on that throw at 1st and 25. We ran a blitz, we rushed six people, so it puts less people back there in coverage, and unfortunately we lost contain, and that gave

him access to throw it.

Q. What does this win do for your momentum as you move forward?

JEFF MONKEN: I don't know. You never lose momentum if you keep believing, so it doesn't matter what happens. I'm proud of our guys for the win, but we take it for what it is. That's an FCS team that won two games last year, and that's not to discredit Lehigh. They have an outstanding coach, and I think that's a good Patriot League team. But we have to -- instead of wearing our arms out patting ourselves on the back, find what we can do better and have enough humility to understand that we're going to have to do a lot of the things we did tonight better if we're going to beat FAU or have a chance.

I think it's great to win, and we're going to celebrate every one of them because it's hard to win a college football game. For anybody else who was around here in 2015 when we lost to Fordham to start the season, that's no fun.

I'm glad we got this win, and we're going to enjoy it and learn from it. But hopefully get better and improve as this keep goes along so we can go down to FAU and give them everything we've got and give ourselves a chance.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports