

Army Black Knights Football

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West Point, New York, USA

Jeff Monken Press Conference



Army - 20, Air Force - 3

JEFF MONKEN: Obviously, excited about getting that win. It was a hard-fought win. They're always hard. These games are hard to win. We knew it would be a fistfight all the way to the end. It was. I was proud of our team.

Our defense just played so well. We had a few times where we bent. The first half, their scoring drive, they had gotten a chop block penalty. It was first and 25, and they gained 21 on first down. They were able to turn the sticks. But I'm really proud of the defense for stopping them there and forcing them to get a field goal.

The first half, offensively, we got in the red zone a couple of times. Stalled out. Had to settle for field goals. Second half, the opening drive was really a great drive and I think just more indicative of what we'd like to be running the football.

So it's a great win. I'm glad we found a way. And it takes a lot out of you emotionally because it is such a big game. But proud of our guys. A chance now to play for the CIC trophy in 43 days. That's a long way away, and we're not going to talk about that until the time comes, but I'm glad we at least have a chance to play for it.

Q. Coach, Bryson's unable to play. Next man up, Dewayne. Defense steps up, everybody does their job so to speak.

JEFF MONKEN: It's a good lesson for our players. They're all going to serve in the Army. Some of them will serve in units where things happen, and somebody has to step up. And if the pilot that's flying a helicopter can't fly the helicopter, you don't just take the day off. You find someone else to fly the helicopter.

When you're jumping out of the helicopter, somebody turns their ankle and they can't do their job on the fly anchor in the middle of the formation, then don't throw the white flag up and say we can't do it now. Somebody's got to step up.

It's a good lesson for them. Dewayne's perfectly capable. He's talented enough. He's smart. He's a good football player. And we didn't do all of the things in the first half, particularly, to help him. We didn't help him enough.

Give credit to the other side. They put up a good fight. But there were times we were able to run the ball effectively. We did it better in the second half. And I'm just proud of our team for finding a way to win that game. I don't care how you win. I don't care how ugly or pretty or any -- just finding a way to win that game is important, and I'm glad we did.

Q. Coach, is there anything you can say on Bryson Daily's situation? And how did you work with Dewayne this week to prepare him to play today?

JEFF MONKEN: We prepared -- we've been preparing Dewayne to be the quarterback since we started preseason camp. We have Cale Hellums and Ethan Washington and all those guys.

Everybody on our team that's not a starter is one snap away from being a starter. The starter goes down, somebody has to go in and perform. We captain have a dip in the performance of the unit because somebody else has to step in there.

So he's very prepared. Cody Worley, our offensive coordinator, does a tremendous job coaching those guys. He's the quarterbacks coach. Calls a really good game for the things that they can do. And so I felt like Dewayne was prepared and so were the other guys, if need be.

I've got no status update for you on Bryson.

Q. In the third quarter, what was it about Kanye went out, had 7 carries for 53 yards. Dewayne had two carries, one for 15 yards, setting up the key touchdown. What did you say to the team during half and preparing for it?

JEFF MONKEN: The second half drive, we talked about it at halftime, the importance of going out and being able to

run some of our base run schemes and do it effectively. It's something we've been doing all year and needed to do in the second half if we hoped to win.

If we couldn't run our base stuff, then we probably didn't deserve to win. So we did a much better job in the second half than in the first.

Q. The key on defense was six sacks and several interceptions. Playing a quarterback, Quentin Hayes, and their version of the offense, what was key on defense to hold them to three points?

JEFF MONKEN: Having the lead helped because it forced them into having to press a little bit and probably maybe be uncharacteristic. They had to throw the ball some. We got them in some long yardage situations, and we were able to get some sacks in those situations.

So I think it helped to have a lead. It does in this game because they're so closely contested. And trust me, you just feel that angst every single play of the game. And so our defense came up with a lot of plays. The interceptions were huge. The sacks, those were big. And just really proud of our guys.

Q. Coach, the offensive line really seemed to come alive in the second half, as well as Kanye. Talk about that, if you could.

JEFF MONKEN: I think we just assessed what we had been doing. We get an opportunity, obviously, to look at the iPads, and that helps in discussing what we're seeing, what we're doing, what we're not doing very well. And there were some times just we didn't sustain blocks, and that's credit to the guy on the other side. He's beating the block.

There were times too we didn't block the right guy, and that agonizes me more than anything. They were changing their fronts. Sometimes we just didn't communicate well enough. It happens. Hard to play perfect. I wish we could. We try to do that.

How about the O-line? Really kind of felt challenged in the second half, and then they stepped up their game. Kanye ran the ball really hard. Was proud of him. Took care of the ball. That was key.

Q. I know you have scored a lot of points and gotten a lot of yards. But any team that wins a championship, invariably you've got to run a couple out. To have one like this today in such an important game, how much will that pay dividends for you going forward?

JEFF MONKEN: It was first real adversity we'd faced this year where we had our backs to the wall and had to fight. That's good for our football team. We knew it was coming.

Cody Winokur said maybe after Game 1, maybe Game 3, we're playing here at home, he said, adversity is coming. We've got to be prepared for it and know that there's going to be a time we have to really fight.

Today was the day, and we knew that would be the case from the onset; that it wasn't going to surprise us. We knew it was coming. Every one of these games, I've been a part of 11 in a row here against those guys, and a lot of them have been really close. This was a close football game. The score's maybe not indicative of what a closely contested, hard-fought football game it was.

I hope that will help us. I hope that will help us win at times when we have adversity, have our backs to the wall.

I think it's a tough team. I think we've got a mentally tough team, which you have to be if you're going to be physically tough and play rugged like I think our guys do. It's good leadership from within. Our players, our seniors, our captains are doing a really good job leading the team.

Q. Do you hope to get Bryson back at some point this year?

JEFF MONKEN: I hope to get him back this week. We'll see. We'll see what happens. We fully expect to get him back. I hope it will be this week.

Q. Coach, earlier in the week you mentioned that statistically, one stat in particular, the turnover battle, winning that 75 percent of the time, winning that means you win 75 percent of the time. Today, your team did that. I thought your defense seemed to turn it up a notch and realize how close of a game it was and do what they had to do. Would you talk about that?

JEFF MONKEN: I think our entire team was playing the game with very high intensity and really good effort. I think our guys were playing really hard and playing tough.

The defense felt that responsibility, when the offense had to punt and the defense had to go out there, we had to get them off the field. They made some plays, but we came up with some plays of our own with the sacks and the interceptions.

They had a couple of fourth downs. They had the fourth down run by the quarterback when he scrambled. They had the fourth down pass on the sideline over there, and we didn't fold the tents. Nobody went and finger-pointed or

anything like that. They lined up and played the next play and responded. I'm really proud of them for that.

That's I think what Chris was asking, that resiliency, that mental toughness.

Q. You wore black flags on your helmets. Was this a 100 percent a black flag game?

JEFF MONKEN: Oh, sure. This game always is, and it's really need to wear the skull and cross bones, the black flag. Thanks to Rich DeMarco for that. He really pushed that and has made that an official logo for us, which gave us the opportunity to wear that.

And that symbol and what that means to this team, to this brotherhood for decades and what it means to our team now just really, I think our guys were excited to do that. Really fired up to see those helmets in the game.

Q. Coach, so in the third quarter, it was fourth and two, and you converted on first down that led to a touchdown. Talk about how important that was.

JEFF MONKEN: It was fourth down and two, yes, and we converted and scored a touchdown on the drive. It was not really a go number. At that point in game, when you score, it was a punt at 2.

But the way the game was going, I just felt like we needed to maintain possession of the ball. Kanye made a good run. We blocked it really well, and he got it handily, which was a big play, certainly. And that score was big for us.

So any points in these games, any points are big. And to get a touchdown in these games is huge, obviously.

Q. Talk about Air Force and their fourth quarter. They were driving the ball a couple times. Talk about how your defense stepped up tremendously.

JEFF MONKEN: They did. I mentioned the two fourth and longs they had. Give them credit. It's not easy to convert fourth and 11, I think it was. I don't know what the one was on the pass. It was longer than that. I think we'd just sacked the quarterback. So it's not easy to convert those.

As I said, the defense just didn't flinch. They played the next play and didn't allow the play before or the disappointment of letting them stay out there affect the next play. Came up with interceptions on both of those. Maybe it's the same drive. I can't remember.

Q. Jeff, congratulations on the win. I know you don't want to add anything to Bryson being out. But what

did you say to him this week when it was kind of decided he wasn't going to play? Coach/quarterback.

JEFF MONKEN: Say to him?

Q. Yes.

JEFF MONKEN: I said I felt really bad for him because there are no bigger games in an Army football player's career than the Academy games. And I know how disappointed he was to not be able to play these guys today so felt bad for him. He wanted to be a part of it, but he doesn't realize what a big part of it he was today.

Just the confidence he's given this football team to be able to go out and play like we did today is built off the success we've had with him as our quarterback. So he'll get healthy and be playing again. It's disappointing to miss these games. I knew that and I acknowledge that.

Q. What role did he play this week and today?

JEFF MONKEN: He's a captain. He's a great leader. Our guys have tremendous respect for him. That doesn't end when he's not able to play.

Perfect example is Tyrell Robinson. Tyrell Robinson didn't play the first half of the season and came in to the East Carolina game last week. Hadn't played since last December, and nothing has changed in terms of his leadership, the respect our guys have for him, what he meant to the locker room. So all through all that, he continued to encourage our guys and coach our guys and lead our guys.

Bryson did the same, and he'll continue to do that. So, I mean, you find your role and what you can do to contribute that week or that game. We had guys today that maybe didn't play as much as they have in the first seven games. And we had some guys play today that played way more than they did in the first seven games. Just their role today.

So everybody takes on the job and the role that they have, and hopefully we do it well enough as a unit.

Q. What do you like about Dewayne Coleman, and did you see anything from him today that maybe you didn't expect or haven't seen?

JEFF MONKEN: I don't know if I saw anything I didn't expect or hadn't seen. I thought he showed great poise. Early in the game, we had the drag route that he hit to Casey Reynolds over the middle. Got some pressure. He didn't panic. He just kind of took a couple of back pedal

steps, saw him clear, dropped it in there. That was a really great play.

He's confident. I assure you that Dewayne Coleman wasn't scared or apprehensive about playing. He was excited to play. And he's been waiting for this opportunity.

And so I'm just really proud of how he handled the team, handled the offense, and did his part. And like I said, we could have helped him a little more. There will be things on film that we'll correct and tell him that we should have done this or could have done this or you might have hit this run in this seam or, you know, hugged this block a little bit more.

That's an opportunity to coach him and get better. Fortunately, if there were mistakes, and I'm sure there were, we didn't pay the ultimate price.

The best thing he did all day was take care of the football. He didn't turn the football over. He didn't turn it over. When we did drop it on the ground, he was wise enough to get on it and make sure we still had it. So that's the best thing he did all day.

Q. Was this your best defensive outing of the season?

JEFF MONKEN: I would say. I don't know if our defense could have been asked to do more than they did. Obviously, there were some plays there, like I said, it was first and 25 at one point. They converted, got a field goal out of that drive. We had them in fourth and 11. They scrambled. We had a pass down our sideline on fourth down that they converted and got a down there and into scoring territory.

But with the exception of the one in the first half, we found a way to get them off the field and came up with three big interceptions, and that was great.

Nate Woody just does a tremendous job defending this option offense that we saw today. He's done a great job throughout his career. I coached against him when I was at Georgia Southern. I got so sick of playing against him. So as I said, you can't beat 'em, join 'em. I'm glad we've got him on our staff, and he's doing a terrific job.

Q. Coach, Kanye had a big game, and then Dewayne Coleman got a lot of carries. There wasn't a ton of stuff to the perimeter. Was that just because of Air Force's familiarity with your offense or more taking what they gave you?

JEFF MONKEN: We thought it might be difficult to get it to the perimeter. We did a couple times, and they ran us

down. There's a lot of factors involved. But frankly, we just didn't think we were going to get much out there. We tried a couple times, and when we did, we didn't get as much as we hoped. Felt like trying to take this thing straight ahead and hammer the ball interior and give it to Kanye Udoh for the good run was probably serve us best in trying to do what we do best.

Q. Fake field goal from the 31. Was that play supposed to go to the end zone or --

JEFF MONKEN: It was.

Q. -- different options there?

JEFF MONKEN: It was. It's something we practiced, and it didn't work out. The ball placement probably could have been a little better. That's our holder/punter who was a high school quarterback and a baseball player. He's got a good enough arm. Just didn't probably put it exactly where he'd have liked to put it. But he gave him a chance.