

# Army Black Knights Football

Saturday, November 30, 2024  
West Point, New York, USA

## Jeff Monken Press Conference



Army 29, UTSA 24

JEFF MONKEN: When we represent a unit, typically there are representatives of those units that come. Sometimes it's the commanding general, sometimes it's a senior staff member. Usually always there's the command sergeant major of that unit that comes. We were glad to have them here.

Adisa King, who is a former player, is a colonel on the command staff. He came back with command sergeant majors. They were in the locker room with us, which was really neat. Glad to have them there.

I lived in Hawaii for a couple years as you probably remember me talking about. It means a lot to me to get a lei from them. So thank you.

Proud of our guys. What a hard-fought win. First of all, just credit to UTSA. They played a really good football game and fought. Coach Traylor does such an excellent job coaching that team. They're talented. I mean, it was just a battle all the way through.

Fortunately we made some plays, made some critical errors we were able to overcome, which I hope is a good sign. I wish we wouldn't have some of those foolish penalties, unsportsmanlike penalties. Very rare we have those. We had two today.

The guys, they overcame some adversity. To be down in the fourth quarter like we were, get a score, come up with a couple interceptions that were absolutely huge in the football game, and to get that critical stop at the very end.

Certainly we got stopped on three downs. Didn't move the ball at all. Missed a field goal. They had momentum. Able to come up with that play.

Proud of our seniors. Great senior class. They have led this team. Four senior captains that have just done a tremendous job. It's great to be able to honor them on

Senior Day.

I'm excited to know we're going to get a chance to play one more time here next Friday night. Looking forward to the opportunity to play in the championship game. It's going to take a great effort next week. Tulane has an unbelievable team, well-coached. It will take the very best effort we've shown this entire season to win the game.

I know our guys are excited about having that opportunity. It's great to get a win for our guys today.

### Q. (No microphone.)

JEFF MONKEN: It's hard to encapsulate just what he's meant to this team this year in terms of his leadership and his play. I mean, he's been kind of the leader of our team with the way he's played and the way he's led.

He's tough, physical. Obviously had an injury that kept him out of a game. To see him come back the next week and rush for over a hundred yards, lead our team to victory, just I think it embodies all of the things that we hope for in an Army football player.

He's tough. He's humble. He works really, really hard. He does his job. He executes the job that he has. He does it very selflessly. He does it for the team. I'm really proud of him.

Great kid. Great family. He's a coach's kid. Just loves the game of football. We're very fortunate to have him as our quarterback.

### Q. (No microphone.)

JEFF MONKEN: Those two guys have played really well all this year. Kalib obviously made a lot of plays for us a year ago as a starter. The fumble recovery, they snapped it early. I think they miscommunicated. The ball was kind of rolling around. We were able to get on it.

That was a big play because we had just turned the ball over. We were able to get a field goal before halftime. As it turns out, certainly big points for us in the ballgame.



Andon Thomas has just been a great player at this position all year. He takes a pounding. I mean, to be in that many tackles. When you're playing blocks, you're having guys run into you, you're diving for balls. He's played really, really well all year long.

Those two guys are both guys that are team leading (indiscernible) for leadership. They're not team captains, but they're on the leadership council voted by their teammates and classmates on the team. Deservedly so.

They're both really, really good players and good leaders. They'll probably find themselves as captains next year just because of who they are and how much they meant to our team.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: They were trying to hit some big plays, and they needed to. It was just at that point in the game. They had to take some shots.

On the one, Collin did a really nice job. It was a little underthrown. He cut it. He was on the backside of the receiver. He cut underneath, made a nice interception, really good return that set us up on about the 50 or might have been in plus territory.

Then the last one was a great play by Gavin Shields. He defended the ball, the ball popped up in the air, Casey was able to grab hold of it, wisely went down to the ground. We were able to finish out the game there.

Really good plays, certainly at clutch moments in the game.

**Q. Did it make you nervous at all when you got behind during the fourth?**

JEFF MONKEN: 'Nervous' wouldn't necessarily be how I would describe my emotions. You feel a sense of urgency when you're behind in the fourth quarter that you got to score.

It was tough. I mean, it was tough sledding there, as they say, throughout the game. We weren't getting the yards on the interior run with the running backs and the quarterback that we have been accustomed to getting. Credit UTSA. They did a really nice job. They had a good plan. Their players were doing a really good job playing blocks.

Some frustrating things like having the ball down there on the one yard line. I thought we had punched it in. They put it on the two-inch line. Then we jump off-sides. Things

like that. Not getting the points that we could have. Those things are frustrating.

So to have a fourth quarter deficit and know we're going to have to drive the field to be able to get some points, there's a sense of urgency because it's not like we've been plowing through them all day long and we felt like, hey, run our base schemes here and hammer the guys.

They were triggering their corners, making it tough on us on the perimeter, which is why we had to rely on the pass some. We were able to get some guys open on the play-action passes. We had some nice throws with some nice catches. We had a couple drops that would have been nice to have completed.

We just kind of found a way and did what we needed to to claw our way back. The stop on fourth and two, they were going to punt when they switched from the third to the fourth quarter. They brought the punt team out. We left our defense on the field in case they were going to fake it on fourth and one.

As it turned out after the break, they trotted their offense back out of the field, put the defense out there, we stopped them. It was a huge play. Then we scored after that. That was a big turn of events, as well.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: I think they had to there. Certainly we would have gone for it there. I think they had to go for it there.

If they can turn the sticks and hang onto the ball, go even three more plays and punt, more time runs off the clock, fewer opportunities for us and our possessions. It's hard to score without the ball. If they can maintain possession and get a fourth down, that gave them a pathway to the end zone. Had they punted, I could see why they wouldn't there 'cause they're backed up to their own goal line a little bit.

I think we all as coaches at some point just got to feel like if we can move the ball three feet, maybe we can earn victory. If we can't move it three feet, I've been in this situation before, I don't know if we're good enough to win if we can't get the three feet when we need it.

It's like being on the goal line. You punch the ball in, try to score on the goal line. Sometimes people get a goal line stand on you. At the end of the game if you don't win, it's like, Hey, if we get the ball that close, can't get it in the end zone, the other team probably deserves to win.

We've been in that situation, too.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: It's great to see those guys making plays like that. They get a lot of practice reps. The defensive line, they rotate a lot of those guys in. Probably inside linebacker position, they don't rotate as much. You see those two guys in there most of the game. The corners is kind of a three-man rotation. There's Mayes, Platt and Weaver.

Casey Larkin and Max are going to play as many plays as they can. To see those guys come in for the guys that were injured, I mean, that was awesome to see guys like that step up and make plays.

You know what I'm proud of, those guys as backups pair like starters. They don't wait until they're the starter and then pay more attention in meetings, they become more intentional with their reps at practice. This team really prepares well like they're starters.

When a guy has to go in, he's ready. They're starters for a reason. We do feel like those guys give us the best chance. But there aren't a lot of positions on our team where if the starter goes out, the backup has to go in, we're scratching our head and crossing our fingers and hoping.

I think our guys will go in and really try and execute.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: For sure. For sure. I mean, Matteson is a guy, a year ago, at this point a year ago, I didn't know if he would ever play for us. I didn't know if he'd ever get in a game on special teams or safety position.

I've said that so many times. We've been here 11 years having similar conversations. But I think Austin Schuffert, I don't know, was it four or five years ago, he's starting for us in the most critical games in his senior year. I would have told you two years before that that he'll never play because he just hadn't quite got there.

They just develop and they work so hard. These guys care so much. It means so much to them. I mean, you can't dynamite them out of the weight room. They get in there and work. When they come in here tomorrow, they're going to be ready to meet and watch film, anxious to figure out how they can be better.

They're not looking at I can't wait to see that play where I made a play. They want to see the ones where they got to get better. That's what I appreciate about our team.

They have to be that way. We're not talented enough. They don't just walk in the meeting room, say, All right, we can fix that, that's real easy. Our guys got to work at it.

But the coaches has done a good job. They get coached with a lot of detail. Danny Verpaele coaches our safeties. Coach Woody, the job he does with our defensive staff, getting those coaches. Coaching the coaches, coaching the players. Really a great team effort. Coach Worley, he's doing a terrific job with the offense, putting a lot on Bryson, but he can handle it.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: Bryson ran it 39 times last week. He can run the ball a lot and handle it. He's run it over 30 times this year before.

But we got to take some of it off of him. He can't run it every single down. We really wanted to distribute the ball and get some carries to other guys and take some of that off of Bryson. It was a conscious effort to do that.

The passes are oftentimes a little reactionary to what they're presenting. As I said, they were firing corners. We pitched the ball out there, couldn't block 'em and arc 'em. As soon as we brought motion, that action started, they were triggering those guys.

That allowed some of those play-action passes to open up. Sometimes that's the only way you can get their attention. We used to be able to go out there and throw it through their legs, cut 'em. That would solve some of the problems.

Now we have to do it with other tools in the toolkit. Play-action pass is just a way to slow 'em down to try to keep 'em from triggering every time we ran a guy in motion.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: In August I was just hoping we could have a good week of pre-season camp. By the end of August, I was hoping that we'd have a good enough team to compete against Lehigh.

I don't know. I never thought about or crossed my mind to even consider, What would it be like to be 8-0 in the league? We're just trying to be 1-0 every week. Our guys have had that attitude. That's certainly my attitude.

It's a great accomplishment for our players to be able to do that. It's hard to do. It's hard to go undefeated. Certainly we're not undefeated. We lost last week. We're not

undefeated in the league. We got the potential to be. There's one more game to play, and it will be the hardest game of the year against the best team in the league. It will be a great challenge next Friday night. We're excited about the opportunity.

We're going to have to have great preparation and great execution next Friday night in order to have a chance to win.

Proud of our guys. Anything's possible for any team. It's just a matter of each team and how their guys do, doing their job, following their plan. Our guys have done a pretty good job of trying to do their job. 1/11th on each play, trying to execute in the critical areas of game, which for us is the third down plays, the plays on the goal line, the kicking game, being effective running the ball and stopping the run, which we've done a pretty good job of that this year.

We've done for the most part a good job on defense keeping big plays in front of us, not giving up too many of those. Today we had a lot of negative-yardage plays on offense. That's one of the things we really try to focus on, not get behind the sticks. I think at halftime we had six negative-yardage plays. There's critical areas of the game that we believe in. We really try to build our game plan on how to execute in those areas. If we do that, we can do it consistently, that gives us a chance to win.

Each week's a new week. But like I said, I never think about, Okay, here's our schedule, it's possible for us to go 8-0.

Teams in this league and teams we play are so athletic, so well-coached, so talented, that I just feel like every week it's going to be a really difficult chore for us to win the football game. I knew that today. They're playing their best football right now, UTSA. We beat a good football team today.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: I love to talk about Trey.

Here's a guy, he's worked his entire career at West Point for the opportunity to be the starter and be our kicker. If he were in another school, he might have transferred already, see the writing on the wall. I'm going to go somewhere where I can kick, be the starting kicker.

He earned the job this year as the place kicker, the field goal PAT kicker. When our kickoff specialist got hurt, Anderson, he came in and handled those duties well. He's done a really, really good job. So proud of him.

But he has worked so hard. He's got such a great attitude and a mental toughness about him. That's one of the things I think Coach Saturnio does so well and I appreciate so much of him as a coach, he coaches those guys like football players.

So they are tough. They feel a great sense of responsibility to do their job well. Trey has just been fantastic.

That late field goal, it was a longer field goal, 47 yards. That's no chip shot for anybody. I don't know what the percentage is on those kicks in college, but it's going to be on the lower end of the 50/50 ball. It's probably a little better than 50/50. No chip shot. He missed that one. He's been so good. That might have been his first miss this year. He's done a great job.

He's a great kid. Hope he'll keep kicking the ball well because I'm sure we're going to need his leg as we go throughout the rest of the games here this coming week and the week to follow, whatever comes after that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JEFF MONKEN: We practice it. We've got a term that we use. There are several scenarios that we have. The North Texas game two games ago, Bryson at the end of the game busted out of there and went down. He could have kept running. Even if he could have scored a touchdown, we wouldn't have scored a touchdown there. It was a situation where as soon as he got the first down, we knew that if we just turn the sticks and got a new set of downs we could take knees and kill the clock. The goal in that situation is to not allow the other team to have a pathway to victory.

They called timeout right before it. We had made the call. We were going to run the play. We had used the term, the tag term we have. He tells everybody in the huddle so everybody in the huddle knows if I have the ball in my hands, unless I can score a touchdown in that situation, I'm wide open, I'm going to go down and be able to kill the clock and kick a field goal.

With had a timeout. Talked to all of them about it again. Talked to Bryson. As he was running, he recognized that guys were kind of collapsing on him, he wasn't going to be able to score a touchdown. He went down. That gave us the opportunity to kick the field goal.

There was I think eight seconds on the clock perhaps when we took that snap. When he took the slide, there was four. I let him run the clock. I said just take it down to three or

less and I'll call timeout. So they did.

It's the last play field goal. But that was the good fortune we had of that fumble recovery we got that hit the quarterback. Again, it was right after our turnover. They turned it back over. It was great to get that three points.

**Q. You said way back in April that this is the reason why you joined the league, to have a chance at a league title, but also stay in the hunt for a CFP spot, too. Can you talk about the significance of that decision and being in a position to win.**

JEFF MONKEN: In today's college football world, with the expanded Playoff, a guarantee that the highest-ranked group of five champion would have a chance to go to the College Football Playoff. If you're not in the conference, you're on the outside looking in. I think in some ways we would be irrelevant.

Certainly our academy counterparts who had both been a part of conferences, with the expanded Playoff field, that gives us a pathway to the Playoff. If we remained independent, though that's been valuable for us and great for this institution for most of the history of the program, we had to do it.

Fortunately the American extended an invitation. The relationships that Mike Buddie and General Gilland had made with Mike Aresco, who was the commissioner at the time in the American Athletic Conference, we were able to join the league and accept the invitation.

I'm glad we did. It was the right time for us to do that. To be playing in the conference championship game the first year is probably a little improbable. I mean, it's not something you anticipate.

A year ago when we were having the press conference, we sat out there on those chairs in Michie Stadium, we would have been 2-6 at the time or 2-5 at the time. I was thinking, God, I don't know if we can save the equipment. We're going to go join a league that's full of talented teams and well-coached teams. We're just trying to get to the next week and win a game.

Fortunately we finished out the season strong last year. That was strong leadership we had in our program a year ago. Then able to start off well this year and play well and make enough plays. We started to put some wins together.

Frankly, we haven't talked about it at all, trying to go undefeated in the league. It's never been about that. Just trying to do the best we can to get the next victory. That's

why I'm so proud of our team. That's really where we've been.

I'm glad we joined the conference. It's awesome to be in this position, to have a chance to play for a conference championship. Not something you take for granted. I think there's 14 teams in this league. We're one of the two that gets to play. That's pretty great for our guys.

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