

Army Black Knights Football

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West Point, New York, USA

Coach Jeff Monken

Press Conference



Army 14, Temple 13

JEFF MONKEN: What a beautiful day for football. Man, it was a great crowd, sunshine, and a gritty tough win. I'm so proud of our guys.

It was hard-fought. Everybody could see that, everybody that watched it.

Our team, I think, just slowly is improving a little bit each week, and I think when you win a game like that after having some of the setbacks we have to start the season, a tough loss a couple weeks ago at Tulane, just to continue to see our guys be able to win games like that and to tough it out and to get yards when we needed it, get stops when we needed it, just showing some maturity and leadership from within, and I'm really proud of them for that.

It was a great win. I think K.C. Keeler is an outstanding coach. Temple has got a good football team, and they're going to get even better. They're doing a great job with that team.

We were fortunate to win. Very proud and very happy to win the football game, to kind of just feel like we beat a good football team and had to gut it out to do so.

Q. It seemed your defense holding Temple to the two field goals was a key, and we talked with Andon Thomas, in the third quarter, the 3rd and 5 play, holding Temple to -- actually getting a one-yard loss as well, forcing a field goal attempt, which they made, but kept you in the lead. How did you feel the defense did in those red zone situations?

JEFF MONKEN: They've played really well in the red zone as of late. We struggled with that early in the year, but I think we've improved in that area, and I think we're playing better when the ball gets down there.

To hold those guys to a football game was big, obviously, to hold that one-point lead. I really felt like if they gained

positive yards at all on that 3rd down play that they were likely going to go for it. It was a big play. It was a big play to be able to keep them from their go number.

I know they're a team that uses analytics, as well, so as it turns out, that's the last time they had the ball, which was amazing that we were able to hold it the rest of the football game. But thank goodness. Thank goodness we didn't give it back to them.

Q. You were able to get momentum again in the second half, coming off to retake the lead. You had the 26-yard pass to Parker Poloskey and Cale Hellums scores on a 3-yard run. How did you feel about how the offense played coming back out?

JEFF MONKEN: Well, that was an important drive, obviously. Right before half, we had the 4th down play that we let their linebacker run right through the B-gap, and we got a player assigned to that linebacker and that gap, and he just missed the assignment and the guy shot the gap and it was a tackle for a loss. They went down, to their credit, kicked a field goal and took the lead at halftime.

So to come out in the second half and take the opening drive, I think it was 14 plays, right down and score, that was big. We certainly needed it. It was the difference in the football game. I'm glad we didn't go down there and kick a field goal. It was hard to gain yards.

We were talking about running the ball effectively, but I looked at the stats here just before I sat down, and we averaged less than four yards per rush. It wasn't like we were getting big plays and big chunks. They were hard-fought yards.

Q. On the last drive, what were the keys on making a 4th and 1 at the Temple 35 and the 3rd and 2 Jake Rendina converts so that you were able to hold on to the ball? Any standouts on the offensive line?

JEFF MONKEN: I think the entire offensive line. It's the offensive line, it's the tight ends, the running backs, everybody is just trying to move big bodies in a direction they don't want to go. That's hard to do. The offensive line



did that, and we did it four times or three times out of the four in the second half. The one was the pass to Parker, and that was a really nice play, good play call by Coach Worley.

It was just being gritty and trying to get those hard yards, and we had to do that a few times.

Q. You had time of possession 37 to 23 today. I know Temple is a time-of-possession team. I know that last drive took up 10 minutes, but it seems like the team followed the plan today. Is that what you saw?

JEFF MONKEN: You know, I don't know that time of possession -- Mike Martz was the offensive coordinator at Arizona State and I was a GA for him in 1991, and he told me the most overrated stat in football is time of possession. He said, it doesn't matter if you score on one play or 21 plays, it all counts the same. Maybe that's true.

But the way we play, to keep the ball away from other teams and not allow them to possess the ball, I think, helps us play complementary football. It's who we are.

Now, we don't have anything in our plan where we say we want to win the time-of-possession battle. That's not something that we emphasize. But I think just the nature of the way we play, we're able to control the clock, control the game on offense by controlling the clock. It certainly was key in that last drive. Holding that thing for the last nine minutes and 53 seconds, that's hard to do.

Q. Did you see this as a statement win or a signature win for you guys, the way you guys did it, the way the fourth quarter played out?

JEFF MONKEN: You know, we don't have any statements to make. We're just trying to win a football game. Our guys just gutting it out and trying to be tough. That's a well-coached team and a tough football team in Temple. Felt very fortunate to win.

As I said when I opened up, I think just the team is growing and I think the leadership within the locker room is showing up. I'm just happy at the way they're maturing and improving. We still made a lot of mistakes, and maybe that's a positive in that we were able to find a way to win a really tough football game and made some errors, and we overcame it.

But as we continue, we're not going to be able to make those same mistakes and keep getting away with it. You play with fire when you do that. I thought it was just a good tough win by our guys.

Q. I got to the stadium thinking the quarterback might have a really good game, and there were completions but not a lot of deep plays. Seemed that you guys knew what you were doing going into the game. What was the strategy with him, and do you think it worked? Obviously it did.

JEFF MONKEN: Well, that's not their deal. They're not a big take-a-shot team. They've hit some long passes, but then they hit that post route before halftime right in front of our free safety. We were in cover three, and we work hard trying to keep the ball in front of us, not give up big plays. They hit the tight end down the middle in the third quarter.

So they hit some chunk plays, but their deal is to -- I really like what they do on offense. I think their offensive coordinator does a tremendous job. He was at Montana State, and they were super productive and really good on offense. He's got a lot of experience with that offense that they ran, and he's implemented those pieces as well as some others that they've kind of meshed and a really good quarterback run game.

What was most impressive about their offense in my opinion going into the game is that they have two turnovers on the entire season. They fumbled it once, lost one fumble, and they threw one interception the entire season. I mean, I'm envious of that. If we had that, our record would be a lot different.

I give them credit. They play their brand of football, very complementary football, and I wasn't shocked that they didn't come out and throw chunk plays on us. That's not their deal.

But our defense, they just found a way. They just found a way to keep it in front of them enough, and we gave up some 3rd downs, and they were doing a really good job with the sprint pass over there throwing it in the flat. They hit us on that two or three times when they needed it.

But they didn't hit any big ones over the top, and we kept them out of the end zone, and the field goals don't add up as quickly.

Q. No turnovers for Army today.

JEFF MONKEN: None again, which we've got to play that way. If we had a single turnover today, we might not have won the football game. Six possessions for each team? That's as low as I remember maybe since we played Air Force in 2017. I think we had five possessions, maybe six possessions, and one of them we were taking a knee at the end of the game for two plays. They play the same way. And ball control.



Q. It was like a chess match a little bit; did you feel that?

JEFF MONKEN: It was. Paul Johnson always used to say, the best way to win a game is not to lose it. Sometimes you've just got to play and be smart, and I think K.C. does that. He's a veteran coach, and that guy has won National Championships with two different schools, and he's got, in his first year at Temple, them on the cusp of a bowl game. He knows what he's doing, and probably pretty similar philosophy to us.

Q. Coach, Paolo Gennarelli there, could you tell us about how he's doing? And Bartosh comes in and doesn't miss a beat, just keeps going. Talk about that.

JEFF MONKEN: First, Braden, he's a tough kid and a good football player. I'm particularly proud of his improvement over the course of his career here. He's really gotten to be a much better football player.

As a sophomore, just two years ago, we couldn't have put him in the ballgame. He wasn't ready. But he could play and be a starter for us now. It's just those other guys are -- they've got more experience. They're a little bit better. But he did a really good job.

As for Gennarelli, he's had, I don't know, probably three or four times in the last five weeks where he's gone out of a game with an injury. He's just tough as hell, and he keeps coming back. He'll come back from this one. He'll be fine. I'm not sure if he could have played by the end of the game, but I saw him in the locker room, and it's the same ol' deal. He's hurting, but he'll come back around.

Q. The last series there, Temple runs out of time-outs and they're down by one and you guys can kill the clock if you don't score. I think during the last time-out, it was right before the play, Cale had a shot at the end zone if he wanted it but he smartly went down at like the 3 and then he went down on the next play before he scored. I know Cale told me that you guys practiced that. Were y'all talking about it in the huddle before the play? What was the situation there? Did you have a feeling Temple was going to try and let him score, quote-unquote?

JEFF MONKEN: Well, once we got to a certain point, we weren't going to score. We had an opportunity to run the clock out. One, we were going to make them use all their time-outs, and if we had to make them use all their time-outs, we were going to make them use all their time-outs, and if there's still enough time for them to get the ball back, obviously we'd kick a field goal, go up by four

and try to go stop them.

But once we had them -- once they used all their time-outs and they had none left, their only pathway to victory was for us to score a touchdown. So we understand that. We were talking to the whole group, and I made an error, I told them, hey, you get inside the 5, hook slide and go down. Well, the 1st down marker was at the 3, and so it should have been a 1st down, go down, once you get the 1st down, and inside the 3.

So the next snap, obviously he went down inside the 3-yard line, and I think likely there they were going to let him score, wisely. If they had let him score, then we go up by eight, we've got to kick it off, they've got a chance to go down and score and tie the game.

That's the right play. It's not a hard play to make if you're a smart football player and you care about winning. That's all that matters, not your stats or getting in the end zone one more time. Cale did his job, just like he was told to do.

Q. You talked about the team's improvement, and I know obviously there's a lot of things you guys can still work on, but definitely getting better every week as you mentioned. A few short weeks ago you guys were 1-3 and things were looking a little hairy, now you're one game away from bowl eligibility. I know you talk a lot about the team from two years ago that started 2-6 and finished 6-6 and beat Navy, won the CIC. Do you see some similarities in the way this team fights and maybe their mindset and mental toughness a little bit?

JEFF MONKEN: It's hard to compare teams. It's hard to compare players and leaders. Each team is different. They're like my three kids. All three of my kids are different. You sometimes have to parent them differently. They have different personalities. Each team is like that.

This team has taken on its own personality, and like I said, I think they're really starting to grow. The leadership is really beginning to show up in our locker room. So I'm encouraged.

But we just want to -- I just want to stay disciplined to the process of trying to get better and improving each week. That's where results come from, not the fact that -- yes, with another win we could be bowl eligible or other games out there where, quote-unquote, things are on the line. I just want us to play the best we can, and results come from that.

So just being disciplined to those things. I've got to do a better job, and our staff has to do a better job. We made

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

some mental errors. The first touchdown, the touchdown that they scored, on 2nd, 3rd and 4th down, we had an assignment error or we had eyes where they weren't supposed to be. They threw the ball out in the flat. We shouldn't have had our eyes in the backfield, we let the guy cross our face and we were running out there to tackle him on the 2.

On the 3rd down play we come off the edge unblocked, we're responsible for the quarterback and we don't take the quarterback and he gets out there and tries to throw a pass.

Anyway, it goes to the 4th down, and once again, a guy flashes across our face, our eyes in the backfield. We should grab that guy and cover him. Those are -- it's the responsibility of the coaches to make sure our guys don't make those mistakes.

The 4th down play at the end of the first half, it's our responsibility to block the B-gap run through. We've got a guy assigned to it. He didn't put his eyes there. That's why his eyes are supposed to go first. It's the responsibility of us as coaches to make sure they don't miss those assignments. We've got work to do as a staff. We've got work to do as a team. That's what we're going to focus on is trying to get better.

Q. Talk about Jake Rendina, as a person, as a player, and his path this year because obviously it was tough. I know he got banged up early, had the bounceback. Just talk about his progress and where he's at.

JEFF MONKEN: I really like Jake Rendina. He's a very likable guy. His teammates love him. He's a running back that if you go into -- if you came to our lift tomorrow and went in the weight room, he would be down at the far east end of the weight room with the offensive linemen. That's who he lifts with. His strength numbers, he doesn't lift with the other skill guys. He's got to lift with the linemen because that's the amount of weight he's putting on the bar when he's benching or squatting or doing all of that.

He's kind of a player's player. Everybody likes him because he's tough and physical.

Today we really called on him to be a ball carrier, and he's a good ball carrier. But after the game, I think it was Tony asked me about the carries that he had, and I said he's probably had more carries today than he's had the whole season, and I think that turned out to be true.

He did a good job. He got some really tough yards, and when he got hit, kept moving the pile and pushing people forward and a really powerful kid.

He did a really good job on the follow plays where Cale was carrying the football. That's really been what he's been best at. But I was proud to see him get in there and get those tough yards. He's just a powerful, strong player, and it was great to see him do something other than just put his face on somebody and block them. He was able to do that with the football.

Q. Speaking of the ugly yards, Temple was allowing 162 per game. They gave up 50 percent more today. 224 yards by you guys. Some games are more difficult than others. Was there something special about your run game today and your block play today that maybe the stats are the same but there was something different or unique about the way you did it today?

JEFF MONKEN: No, I don't know. We averaged over 300 yards a game last year, so that would be well below our average from a year ago. Every one of those yards was tough today. Temple is good. They're very well-coached. Their guys were beating blocks and sliding off of blocks. They made some good plays on the perimeter.

Every yard we got was tough. I'm not sure what our longest play was, but we just didn't have any that we really just ripped out of there for a long run or anything like that. It was credit to Temple.

It's something that we're going to face other teams that are going to defend us well and got really good players, probably every game we play it's like that. Hopefully we'll find a way to push them out of the way and get a little bit more production in the run game because it's hard to win a football game that way every single time, so we know we're going to have to get better.

Q. Can you just talk about the success of November? I think it's 8-1 the last three years.

JEFF MONKEN: I don't know. I guess you'd rather be lucky than good.

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