

Division I Football Championship: Montana State vs North Dakota State

Saturday, January 4, 2025

Frisco, Texas, USA

Toyota Stadium

Montana State Bobcats

Brent Vigen

Press Conference



couple years with the coaching change and everything, and we faced them a couple times through my time here. I guess it's poetic that we're back facing them at least on our side of the poetic piece. Excited about the opportunity. They're a very good team, very good in all aspects, and we'll have our hands full. And our guys are primed and ready to go at the same time.

Q. You've got a couple guys on this team who were with you the last time you were at this game and a different group who's experiencing it for the first time. What have you asked for from those players in the separate groups on how to approach it this week?

BRENT VIGEN: Our senior group, a lot of those guys were on the field back in '22, the '21 team. They were the young guys, and I think they're the guys that have learned lessons through these last couple years. I think how they've embodied how we've done everything doesn't all of a sudden create these new ways of doing things for this game.

This is the National Championship Game. But no matter who we've played, we've taken that opponent as the one that's in front of us. I think that in itself has served us well. I think our young guys have really taken to that.

Now in coming here, another situation where we have two weeks between games, but this is our fourth bye week essentially. So that part, the sequencing of the two weeks hasn't been anything different. I think what our older guys continue to preach probably as much as anything, the trip down to Texas is great and all, but the game is what we're going down there for.

We've had a business-like approach these first couple days down here. Again, it's not like we need to become something different on Monday night. We just have to become the best version of ourselves, and I think we've been able to do that time after time this year. That's the task on Monday night.

Q. I was curious your thoughts on the Montana State D-end matchup versus their All-American tackles. What do you kind of think of that matchup?

THE MODERATOR: Good morning and welcome to Frisco, Texas, in the 2025 NCAA FCS Football Championship weekend. I'm Jim Powers. I'll be your moderator for all the press conferences this weekend. It's great to see everybody make the trip to Frisco.

Joining us first is head coach from Montana State, Brent Vigen. What a terrific year for them this year.

Coach, we'll have you start off with some opening comments.

BRENT VIGEN: It's great to be back down here. Thinking back three years ago, we were obviously happy to be here. We got on a little bit of a run there in the playoffs, coming in as the 8 seed. Certainly learned a lot from that experience, came up short that particular Saturday.

I think that set our program on a different trajectory. I think we had different expectations from that time moving forward. The last couple years, we've come up short.

I think this group of seniors in particular, in coming up short and learning some hard lessons through their time, started going to work really about this time last year when we got back to Bozeman for the second semester and really did a great job day in, day out of putting their best foot forward. I think that lesson, that way of going about our business has served us well through the course of this season.

Getting into the playoffs undefeated, just about where we were as a program, and to be at home and to rip off three, I think, really good wins to put ourselves back in this position, very grateful for the efforts of our team, our staff, and like you said, the opportunity against a really good North Dakota State team that we'll see on Monday night.

They, in their own right, have gotten back here the last



BRENT VIGEN: Yeah, it will be really important. Zabel and Miller are two of the best in the FCS. Obviously Zabel is a Senior Bowl invitee. You flip that around, I would like to think Brody and Kenny in particular are two of the best defensive ends as well.

So what does that look like on first and second down? I think in the run game that will be important, but then you get to obvious passing situations, that will be a tall task for our guys, and I'd like to think it's a tall task for their guys too.

Not that it's going to come down to that, but I think how we fare in that matchup, first in the run game, is really important. Those two players are really good in the run game, and I think our guys are too. Look forward to it. It's one of the many matchups in this game that are going to make this game so good.

Q. Can you talk about maybe the sense you get of how hungry this fan base is to finally snap this championship? It's been 40 years. What kind of sense do you get there?

BRENT VIGEN: 40 years is a long time, and the 40-year reunion was this fall. Kelly Bradley, who was the quarterback of that team, came up to me and said, hey, this has been great and all for us, but we need a new team to be remembered. I think that goes a long way with how our fan bases have felt.

Certainly a lot of ups and downs over the last 40 years. Recent history, quite a few ups, but just not quite getting over the hump. I don't know that it's any added pressure by any means, but I think there's this continued momentum of our football program, and the fan base, I think, feels that at the same time.

These opportunities don't always come around, just the way things line up. We've been fortunate to be in this game now 2 out of 4 years, but when you're here, you've got to take advantage of it.

I appreciate our fan base for their support on Saturdays in Bobcat Stadium, those nine games. I know we played a Friday night in there too, it was phenomenal. The support continues on the financial side and needs too has been great.

So we're going the places we want to go. We're building the way we want to build. And this is where we want to be.

Q. Curious your experience here since you and the team have been in Frisco, and also whether you'd like

to see it return after the renovations are complete to the stadium?

BRENT VIGEN: This is my fifth opportunity to coach in a game down here. Those first three were '11, '12, and '13. For Frisco in my eyes to continue to embrace this, Frisco is growing tremendously in the last 15 years, so that's what I see. I see community that's really embraced it.

Our experience since we've been here has been a lot of work on the practice field. We did get to TopGolf last night. I think the guys really enjoyed that. Had some Whataburger last night. I think wanting to settle the score between our West Coast guys with In 'N Out and Whataburger is always something we're arguing about. I think that was a good score for the Texans last night.

To your point, I think it will be interesting how the next couple years play because it's certain from my estimation that this community has continued to embrace the opportunity to host this championship, and I think it certainly deserves a fair shake to get back here.

Q. I know that and you and your family are fully Montana State Bobcats now. I know it's been a long time since you've been at NDSU, but there's still a lot of connections there. Fair to say, a lot of Bison fans won't be as upset as if they lost to somebody else. They'd be happy for you. Just talk about what NDSU has meant to you over the years and the connections there.

BRENT VIGEN: I was there 21 years between being a student-athlete, a graduate assistant, a coach trying to make his way, and ultimately a coordinator. That's where Molly went to school, played basketball, our three sons were all born in Fargo. It's our foundation, that region.

I'm from 50 miles north. Molly is from 100 miles down the road towards Indianapolis. That place will always have a special place in our heart for sure.

The continued success is something I certainly take great pride in, my time there as a student-athlete and becoming a coach was just major transition through those two decades. I hope you see some progress over two decades, I guess.

To see the continued success, and I know having a good friend in Tim being back there as a head coach, seeing him have success, a couple guys on that staff that I recruited in Grant and Carlton. Chris' son Devin is back there, Gene's son Jared's back there. A lot of ties, and my old teammates, we stay in touch from the '97 crew.



The fact that we're back again playing them, I don't know for me if that's the way it was supposed to be or not, but they're one of the better teams out there. So if we're going to be here, we're probably facing them at the end of the day. Look forward to going out there and competing. Obviously a special place to me and my family.

Q. Kind of going off that, being in both states, what do you think lends itself to those states -- and you can throw in South Dakota -- kind of being so good at FCS football?

BRENT VIGEN: Well, it's three states. It's a lot of area that FCS is the top level. There's no pro sports in any of the three states. I do think high school football is really valued in all three states, and I think the competitive drive that each of the states have, we have it within our state with the University of Montana. I know the four schools between the Dakotas, there's a lot that drives each other. So I think all those pieces.

Then I think absolutely prideful, humble people from all three of those states that are going to do everything they can to see their school do well. So the support we all get, that's not just fans in the stands, that's people really stepping up to be competitive, to do everything they can, to help us do everything they can on the field, I think that's all part of it.

So we're in this pocket of the country where FCS football is king. I think that in itself is a huge driving force. It's not to say there's a world where we couldn't all compete at a higher level, but I think right now we're competing at the highest level we can. I think that's always going to be the expectation for us at Montana State, and that's why it's a great place to be.

Q. Brent, can you talk about -- this has been kind of a wild ride over the last few years for you, and then this season being undefeated, can you talk about this group of players, your relationship with them, and what it has meant to you? So many of these guys like Tommy and Brody and all these guys who are not going to be here as you move forward, what they've meant to you and what this particular group has meant to you and the culture that you guys have built?

BRENT VIGEN: First time through it was less than a year in the making, and that group is very special to me in how they embraced our new staff, of which a lot of guys were holdovers on that staff. That group did a great job of transitioning and believing in what we were doing.

Now, this group, they were the young guys on that team. 14 of them were on that initial roster that we took over in

February of '21. So these guys in our journey, my journey have all coincided here at Montana State. Their growth, our continuing to build this program has all happened together.

Very fortunate, such a special group of young men. I think the selflessness that this group has collectively is probably unlike any team I've ever been around, and I've been around some really good teams that had plenty of it, but this group, not only the seniors and the way they've embraced their role and embodied their role and done everything they can, their ability to express that view to our younger players is what you're looking for in a program.

Those guys, to your point, are going to be done on Monday, so we need the next group of guys like them to emerge. That's what I see happening in our program, a lot of good young guys that they see how it should look. That's what allows for continued success. In this day and age in college football, rare, very rare.

So to say we have it -- we're not going to be perfect. We're going to still lose some guys over time, but to say we have that and can continue to have it is a comforting feeling because those guys have clearly laid the foundation. We're going to be forever indebted to them. They're going to go down in legacy unlike any other group in Montana State football history.

Q. You've coached and recruited Brock Jensen, Carson Wentz, Josh Allen. What sets Tommy Mellott apart from those guys, and what similarities does he have to those guys?

BRENT VIGEN: Speak to similarities first, I think the competitive drive, the belief that they're not going to tell anybody how good they can be. They're going to become as good as they possibly can. That's the consistent piece, the competitive nature and the ability to get everything they can out of their ability.

Certainly Tommy is of a different stature. Tommy would win a race I know for sure amongst all those guys. He's as quick as anybody on our team, and he's on the football field as fast as anybody on our football team.

Now, along with that stature piece, he's got to do it a little bit differently just because of that. I think he's continued to reach his heights because there's that same common thread of not being satisfied in anything. I know, when we lost that game last year to end our season, that was the best he had played quarterback, and we had to really point that out.

I think he still had aspirations how far can this go? He's so



humble at the same time. I think they all have a lot of similarities in just who they are inside, how they've been raised. Hardest working guys on the team. I think those are the common threads.

But I think his stature, his game, his running ability is on a different level.

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