

Division I Football Championship: Montana State vs North Dakota State

Monday, January 6, 2025

Frisco, Texas, USA

Toyota Stadium

North Dakota State Bison

Coach Tim Polasek

Cam Miller

Bryce Lance

Logan Kopp

Postgame Press Conference

North Dakota State - 35, Montana State - 32

THE MODERATOR: The National Champions are here. North Dakota State, a couple superlatives. This is their 10th national title. All of those have been won right here in Frisco. All-time record in the FCS tournament, 52-5, and they have the most victories in the in-tournament action of 52. What a terrific year for them.

Joining us with their head coach Tim Polasek. Also, our most outstanding player Cam Miller, also Bryce Lance, and Logan Kopp will be joining us here in a moment.

Coach, the floor is yours. Congratulations.

TIM POLASEK: A pretty incredible journey started with a group of seniors that decided after a team meeting to get together and just what are we going to do? They chose to stay. And once again, there's a lot of evidence with our program, we're running a football program, but those that stayed will be champions.

I'm so grateful to these guys, the players, this season in particular. Coaches get a lot of credit. Our staff, our support staff did a wonderful job, but in today's day and age, it would be so easy for these guys.

I'm not sure if any other program would have what we've got. I'm so honored to be the head football coach and just to be part of it. Cam Miller is the best quarterback on the football field today. There's no doubt about it. Tommy is a good football player, there's no question about that either.



But all year long, these guys have answered the bell with complementary football, and tonight was just another case of us handling adversity, handling some ups and downs, but that's what we're built for.

Q. Cam, wanted to ask about the 64-yard touchdown run. Was it a planned draw play, or did you see it open up and take off?

CAM MILLER: It was a draw play with the option to pass as well. We were blocking it as a draw. We had quick game off of it.

They played the perfect front and the perfect coverage to it for us, and it just parted. It's one of the longest runs I've had. It felt awesome.

Q. Were you surprised at how much room you had?

CAM MILLER: Yeah, it didn't feel real, honestly. Usually when we run draws, you've got to make a few guys miss. There was nobody there. They blocked it out perfectly. It was awesome.

Q. I asked Zabel this question on media day, about going separate ways after this game. So how does it feel going separate ways with this senior class as National Champions?

CAM MILLER: These guys mean the world to me. They're a big part of the reason why I stayed at this program, and they believed in me when nobody else did. When things were bad, they were the first people to pick me up. I'm so damn honored to be a part of this program and to be one of their friends and teammates.

Q. Cam, you kind of just did, but can you put into words what this journey this year has meant? Was there some validation tonight for some other things that happened this weekend?

CAM MILLER: Today was a team effort. Guys just did their job. We executed. We had a great game plan. The coaches did a tremendous job of putting us in great



situations to be successful.

But I've always felt like I've been the underdog ever since I was a little kid. I was overlooked. I was overlooked out of high school, overlooked when I was young. This year it's never been about proving people wrong, it's about proving myself right and that I am the quarterback that people say that I am and the quarterback that I think that I am.

Q. Bryce, any similarities -- you saw your brother in 2019. Any similarities with what he did to what Cam did today?

BRYCE LANCE: Man, I think Cam is 1 of 1 for sure. Obviously he didn't win that award that our whole team knows he should have, and I think he showed that today. I really don't think you can compare the two people because it's different journeys, but Cam is that guy.

Q. Bryce, can you talk about the long third down where you got all the way down by the goal line and just how big that play was. I think they cut it to three, and you guys got the momentum back and scored to go back to double digits.

BRYCE LANCE: I dropped one earlier, and I knew I had to go make a play. For Cam to trust me with that throw, it meant a lot. I just knew ball was in the air. I had to go get it.

Q. Bryce, you finished top three in single-season NDSU history in receptions and receiving yards. Can you go through the season you had and, along with that, the trust you had in the guy sitting to your left?

BRYCE LANCE: I think Coach Polasek emphasized it's a player's operation, a player's program. But it really does start at the top with him and all our coordinators and coaches as well. The faith they had in me, the belief they had in me, starting from spring ball. A couple days after spring ball practice, Coach Polasek came up to me and said I was going to be All-Conference this year. That meant the world to me and, honestly, kept me going.

Q. Logan, why did you think you guys' defense had so much success in the first half?

LOGAN KOPP: Before I answer that, I must say that the reason I'm sitting in this chair right now is because of the God that I serve in His grace and His son Jesus, who died for me and saved a wretched sinner like me. I'm nothing without Jesus, and He saved me, not because of what I did, but because of what He did 2,000 years ago on the Roman cross. That's why I'm sitting up here, and that's a greater joy in my life than any accolade that we'll ever get.

Yeah, we dove into the game plan early on, right when we got back from Christmas break. Coach Olson and the coaches did a great job of coming up with a scheme that's able to attack and defend all of the -- essentially a triple option offense that they have, whether they hand it to one of their thousand yard rushers, whether Tommy keeps it to run or keeps it to throw to his talented receivers.

Just trusting the guys around me, doing my 111, if I'm responsible for the quarterback dive, or if I'm responsible in coverage, just trusting, if I do my job, the other ten guys are going to do their job. We were just playing with great communication, great fundamentals, trusting our teammates in that first half, able to get them out of rhythm and make them kind of one dimensional in the first half. That's what led to a lot of success.

Q. Logan, what does it mean for this program to get back on top? I know you guys didn't go very far away, but it's been a couple of years. What does it mean to get back on top and be the champions?

LOGAN KOPP: It means a lot. Obviously the standard here has been the same for 15 years now, and it's a National Championship. It's to get up on that stage in Frisco. The past two years, we have fallen short, and we've worked our butts off, 365 days, 24 hours a day, to get back up here. The adversity we faced, the extra hours we put in on the field after practice, up in the offices in the film room. It really does pay off.

We owe it to the coaches for just the hours they've put in, sacrificing time with their wives, with their families to work on game planning. Man, we owe it to them and to the older guys leading us like this guy right here. It's unbelievable.

The group of guys in this locker room, the relationship we've formed is second to none. I love these guys so much.

Q. I know you talked about wanting these guys to relish in every moment, not think ahead all year long. To get this one done and get back on top, what were the keys to it, and how does it feel?

TIM POLASEK: I think them embracing the message about how me sharing past experiences that I learned here from Coach Bohl and Chris Klieman specifically, and then all those senior leaders. The way we've gotten this done is just remaining humble and hungry. You have to put that chip back on your shoulder. Any team in the past that has done stuff really is not relevant to how our season is going to go.



I think them embracing that, really diving into the nuance of three core values, and getting to work in the weight room. I'm just going to keep repeating myself. This all started with a group of seniors that decided to stay.

We're doing some wonderful things to try to get as many kids as much as possible, but they made a collective effort to say, we need to stay here. Again, it's just evidence that at North Dakota State those who stay will be champions.

Q. You guys made a lot of third down conversions tonight, but the biggest one probably with less than four minutes left, which allowed you to go back ahead by 10 points. Just talk about that moment in the game and that one play.

TIM POLASEK: I'm trying to find something to talk about here. If you look at the stats, this thing is just even Steven except for the penalty yards. So we overcame some things.

Just some unbelievable individual efforts. I'm thinking about RaJa. No one is going to talk about RaJa's catch on third down, unbelievable play. What a clean, well-played football game.

Hat's got to go off to Montana State and the way they played. I don't know exactly what the difference is now, except for Bison pride.

Q. Coach, can you just talk about the start of the second half when Montana State made a run at you guys. I think they had one opportunity late in the game and they had a chance with the ball to take the lead and what you guys did to stop them?

TIM POLASEK: We came out and were productive in the drive, but we didn't score. They just hit us with their best stuff. Some really good triple option stuff, some really tough play action stuff off of their best runs. I thought they did nice job of setting things up.

It's a really well-coached offense with weapons -- tight ends, receivers, running backs, and the quarterback kid is just really good.

I thought they started the third period there better than we did, obviously. I think that we finished the first half much better, and that was a big deal. Getting those points on the board before the half was the difference, I guess you could say that.

Q. Tim, did you just say put the ball in No. 7's hands and go do it?

TIM POLASEK: Yeah, we want to be tailback oriented and not just about one guy and share the ball, but I really felt good about his ball security, and I really felt good -- even there late we didn't get a first down, but I thought we'd get a plus-one opportunity.

He was so solid tonight. I mean, if you look at the passing yards, 19 of 22, well over 300 total yards, there was no reason not to put it in his hands.

Q. You didn't go for it with fourth and really short. What went into that decision? When you were up three.

TIM POLASEK: Well, just that. I kind of felt like -- I mean, it's hard to get up here after you win a national title and then complain about things you want to be better. But we gave up too many big plays. But overall, if you look at the tailback run game, we did a really good job of controlling that. I thought they were having to go the long hard way for the most part.

I still like, when you look up at the clock, Jeff, I think you're talking about the nine-minute mark. If we punt and they happen to score, perfect. Put it in Cam's hands, and we'll win with the ball in his hands last. That thought crossed my mind.

Q. First half being 21-3, did you feel like you guys were playing looser? Was there anything intangible like that that gave you guys that big of an advantage early?

TIM POLASEK: There's some people in here that were in our pregame. I thought our pregame was good today. I thought the message was well received. I went in there before the game in the locker room and just reminded them how well prepared they were, how tested they were, how battle tested they were.

I think that just led to some guys playing really free. In a National Championship-type game, you're not going to just throttle somebody. We knew they would come back. They came back against New Mexico in, I think, one of their first two games or whatever it was. They've got the heart of a champion as well, and we were just a little better.

Q. You told me Bryce Lance was going to be the guy this year. What was the confidence? What did you see when you got to Fargo to say that this guy could be a difference maker for us?

TIM POLASEK: I didn't tell you guys in spring, but Bryce alluded to it. I think I grabbed him on practice 3, and I told

him you've got All League type skills here. Let's start getting north and south a little faster after the catch. Let's start playing this game with some confidence.

For some young people, it's just a matter of somebody believing in them. I just flash to Coach Bohl believing in me. He's long, big, fast. He catches it. That's about it. I'm not some genius. He kind of stood out. I believed in RaJa and Braylon right away because of their leadership ability. Didn't know much about Mekhi and Chris and Terhark, and Bryce was in that group. I just thought he was in the mix to be one of the top two or three guys.

Shortly thereafter -- I grabbed Cam there too. I wondered if Cam would share this with you guys, but I said, Cam, you need to start thinking about No. 5 in a hurry here. Because I believe in him. He's capitalized on all his opportunities. It's really cool to see when young guys -- he's not even scratching the surface of his potential, but I think he maximized this year.

Q. Coach, what do you make of your offensive line's performance against Montana State's defensive line and how that allows you the success on the ground that you have and Cam Miller to go 19 of 22?

TIM POLASEK: I thought early on Montana State did a good job of early down and distance. We were getting three when we need five. We were getting four when we need six. Early on it was pretty good.

Then we started to -- I don't want to say we were running away from No. 26. But he plays his role so well, that some of the nub-side to short-side runs, he was tackling it. Our offensive line has been really good in pass protection all year. We've been challenged. Our conference, Missouri Valley football conference, you have to be consistent. You get challenged week in and week out. I thought our guys played well tonight. I really did.

Q. Are you in any way surprised by this season? I know you're the coach of North Dakota State and the standard is to win a National Championship, but the season started with some questions at some positions and it's your first year and there's some injuries and all kinds of things happening. Is there any surprise, or is this just what NDSU does?

TIM POLASEK: No, I think it's a combination of both. It's a little bit of what NDSU does, but then you hit a roadblock. Some players aren't recovering from injury. Brozio's out. Dylan Hendricks goes down. Sam Young's having his best season, he goes down. You start to, okay, these pieces are going to have to come along.

I would just go to our assistant coaches and our leadership to continue to stay gritty, improvement oriented. I'm not surprised, and that's probably why I comment on things throughout the year so much. The standard is the standard, and the expectation is the expectation, and we just did a great job of pushing through it.

Then with Cam's continued improvement, I thought we had a shot. I really did. He was playing at a really high clip. I knew we could win a shootout, and I knew we could win an ugly game. Those things are really important. We learned that in this journey along the way.

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