

Sunday, September 9, 2018

Willie Taggart

Postgame Press Conference

WILLIE TAGGART: Big win for the 'Noles. Excited, I guess; found a way to win the ballgame. It wasn't pretty, but it was good to see our guys find a way to come back and get a win after we started slow and weren't playing as well. I thought it was a great team victory. Our defense stepped up when they had needed to get the ball back, and I thought our offense made plays that we needed to make to get back in that game.

Q. What did you think of Deondre's performance?

Well, he was doing a good job distributing the ball to his teammates. He was giving it to a lot of different guys. He was really locked in to his assignments. When I think about Francois, he doesn't get to practice in the spring, and they have to share a lot of reps in training camp. Again, these reps that he's getting in the game are so valuable to him. You see from game 1 to game 2 he's so much better, and I think that's only going to continue to improve. But I thought offensively we finished some drives. Still nowhere near where we need to be, but it was good seeing the guys find a way to score and make plays when we needed to.

Q. With all the injuries, it seemed like the offensive line really struggled again tonight. Is it something you feel is correctable, and how do you go about that?

Yeah, I think it's correctable. Again, we've got to continue to teach as coaches and help our guys. I do think to play up front, to be really successful up front, you need a group of guys playing together, have a synergy there so you can execute the way you need to. We've got a lot of guys going in and out and it's hard to get a rhythm. But again, I was happy with the guys that came in, especially late in the game, and got some things done for us in order to move the football in the game. But it kind of is what it is. We knew coming in that that was one area that we were thin at, and can't make no excuses, just got to get up and be ready to go and watch the film and see what we do wrong and try to improve on those things.

Q. Can you pinpoint the difference in the defense from Monday night to tonight, and how much did that short week impact the defense?

Well, I think our defense was going against a different offense than what we faced on Monday night. The offense threw the ball 60-some times, and we knew that was going to happen. Again, I knew early on we were playing too soft, some guys, and we weren't getting to the quarterback. He [Samford QB Devlin Hodges] did a good job getting it out of his hands and got us beat a couple times with the deep ball. That's just 101, and guys got to make the play. They made the play, and we didn't.

But I was impressed with our defense, especially in the second half. I thought they came in in the second half and played the second half. I thought we made some adjustments that we needed to and was really happy with the takeaways that they got in this game that were much needed.

Q. Talk about the confidence and the leadership you have in your quarterback leading you guys down the field for the game-winning score with four minutes left.

I've said it a lot. I thought Deondre showed a lot of leadership without even saying anything; just the way he was taking hits and getting back up and sitting in there, making throws. You could hear him on the sideline -- it would be hard for his teammates not to want to make a play just listening to him on the sideline and talking to his guys and encouraging them and letting them know that we're going to be fine. 'Just stay in it, stay with me, and we're going to be fine.' He threw a deep ball to George [Campbell], and George dropped the ball, and I see him [Deondre] on the sideline, 'Forget about that. I'm going to come back to you and we're going to make that up.' That was really good by him, and I know his teammates love hearing him say that and want to make plays for him.

Q. How was Khalan [Laborn] and how did losing him substantially affect your team?

It hurt. He was a big part of the game plan going into this game. He dislocated his knee on that play, so it hurt us. Unfortunately for Khalan, he worked really hard to get out there and help our football team.

Q. The second straight week, the defense like you mentioned, has been able to make adjustments in the second half and come away with some success. What does that say about Coach Barnett's ability to make those adjustments?

It says a lot. He's a big-time coordinator. There's a reason why we wanted him here, and it was big. They got some easy things they got away with there early, and for him to make the adjustments that he did and our guys to respond the way they did is huge, and I think that helped put ourselves in position to make some of those interceptions that we got.

Q. Overall would you say that you guys were sloppy again? You had nine penalties, and I think you had a catch by Tre' McKitty that didn't count and illegal formation on back-to-back plays.

Oh, absolutely, it wasn't a clean game at all. That's a challenge for our football team. Our challenge week to week is to see if we can play at our best, and we know by far that wasn't our best in that game. Again, we've got to play cleaner; we've got to play smarter. If we're going to be a championship football team like we aspire to be. Got to play smarter. We've got to play cleaner than what we did tonight. Again, for us to play as bad as we did and find a way, I'm impressed with our guys that we didn't quit and that they kept fighting and found a way to win the game. I mean, I thought it was a hell of a comeback for them, and for them to do that says a lot about them.

Q. Coming off the field after the game, you could see Levonta Taylor visually emotional. You guys embraced. What was that conversation, and what were those emotions attributed to?

It's kind of like the question I just got asked about us playing sloppy. He wasn't really happy with the way he played, so he was feeling down, which is understandable. Our guys want to play better and need to play, but we've got to do the things that it takes in order to play that way. Again, I just had to remind him it's hard to win a football game. It's not easy at all, and we should be excited. I don't care what kind of win you get. You get a W, you should be excited and celebrate, and then you go watch the film and try to make the correction from the mistakes that you had so you can make sure you play a cleaner game. But our guys understand a win is a win and we're going to take it but also look at ourselves and try to get better and make sure we get better for next week. That's our challenge, and that's our goal as a team to get better. We got better this week. It wasn't as good as we wanted to, but we got better.

Q. Tamorrion finished with two catches, two touchdowns. You've talked about what he's done in practice. What's it like to see the success translate from practice to field so effectively?

Well, I'll tell you what, he had one heck of a practice this week, and I think that's a big reason why he played the way he was. He was locked in all week long, every single day, he came out there and he played with a lot of passion. It was like it was the first week of practice. We talked about it all week, like

this guy is going to have a good game for us, and he did for us.

Q. Could you talk about Hodges, their quarterback? He was pretty amazing there for a while. And then also, Ricky, is there something technically going on with Ricky or any idea what's going on there?

He's just got to make a field goal. Ricky has made them in practice. He's just got to make a field goal. He'll be better than what we've had, and he knows he's better than that. We expect more, and I think we'll get it from him.

Their quarterback, you can tell that he had a great understanding of their offense and he was really accurate throwing the football. He did a great job throwing the ball down the field, and intermediate. We knew that going in that he was going to be a challenge. I thought we'd get to him more. He did a good job getting rid of the ball quick enough, and their receivers did a great job catching for him.

Q. These first two games obviously aren't what you had hoped for to start the season. What do you attribute these slow starts to?

Great question. I mean, that's something we've got to continue to evaluate and see if we can be better. We took the ball first this game hoping that we could start fast. The first game we took it in the second half. We've got to continue to look at it and see what we can do better. The biggest thing is just looking at what we're doing schematically and technically and then try to correct it and make sure our guys are doing it the way that we need them to do it.

Q. Coach, it seemed like Alec Eberle was struggling on his snaps under center. I hadn't really seen that before. Was something going on with him mechanically or something?

Well, I thought the ball -- well, just talking to him, he thought the ball was more moist and probably needed to change it. I know the one that went over Deondre's head he said was real wet there. But just one of those things. Hadn't had those issues, and it happened today.

Q. I want to ask you about the third downs, 4 of 14. Obviously you want to be better on third down. There were some short yardage ones that didn't work out well. Is it something you can tweak in play calling or what do you think you can do to improve that?

Yeah, we can call a different play if we want to. There's plenty of plays we have. We can call different plays. But the play that we called, we've got to execute it. When I say execute, we've got to block it, and then our backs got to run it. When it's third-and-one and you want to get the first down, you can't mess around, and the offensive line's got to come off the ball. You've got to move people. Yeah, we can call different plays, but we feel good about the one we had, we've just got to execute it. Not just that fourth down, but I think all our plays. If we do a good job of executing we'll get the outcome that we're looking for from the plays that we're running.

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