

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 21, 2019

Willie Taggart

WILLIE TAGGART: Big win for our football team. Proud of this football team. Each week we keep improving. For our guys to come here and play the way they did and play the fourth quarter and find a way to win the ballgame was big for our football team; a much-needed win for our football team.

Again, always great to play at Doak Campbell and great to have our fans there help us along the way.

Great win for the Noles.

Q. You guys obviously had a lot of adversity to battle back from. What did you see from your team, especially in the fourth quarter?

WILLIE TAGGART: They kept fighting. Guys just kept fighting. We had some playmakers that stepped up and made some big plays for us when we needed them to make the plays. The play D.J. Matthews made was big and the play that Terry had there in the fourth quarter was big for us.

Just kept playing. Didn't get down on themselves. They made the plays we needed them to make.

Q. What do you think this win could do for the team moving forward?

WILLIE TAGGART: Just like I said a minute ago, guys are showing they're improving. Each week they're improving. Hasn't been as fast as we would like, but for them to go out and put a complete game together was big for our team and big for our confidence moving forward.

We got to build off it now.

Q. We talk about Hornibrook, his game, the way he played.

WILLIE TAGGART: Alex came in and did a good job for us. Came in the third series of the game and led our team down and scored a touchdown. When James got hurt, for him to come in and lead our team was big for us. I think it showed his experience and how mature he is. Game wasn't too big for him; the moment wasn't too big for him. He was ready for it.

Another example of our football team, a guy stepping up when that opportunity came. It's so important. We always tell our guys that. You never know. You're got to be ready.

Proud the young man was ready for his opportunity.

Q. What is the status of James Blackman, the extent of his injury?

WILLIE TAGGART: We'll know more on that tomorrow. Got to get an MRI. Good to see him

walking on it right now.

Q. Was it his foot?

WILLIE TAGGART: No, his knee.

Q. You held Louisville to 2.6 yards per carry. They're a really good rushing team coming in. You guys struggled against the run early on. What changed? What did you do better to slow down the run?

WILLIE TAGGART: Like I said, we're just getting better as a football team, understanding our mistakes in previous games, and our guys are correcting them the next game.

The first three ball games there was always something different that was coming up and hurting our team. Felt like our guys improved each week, whether it's lining up right and then having the mentality to stop the run, and they did a good job stopping Louisville's run game.

Q. Penalties have been big on your list of things that you want to correct over the last few weeks. 5 of 36. How pleased are you with that performance?

WILLIE TAGGART: Excited. Again, another area of improvement. We know I said last week that penalties cost us in the game. When we don't have them we got a chance to win ball games. When you don't turn the ball over you got chances to win ball games. Our guys played some winning football tonight.

Q. We saw Jaden go down. Do you have any official word?

WILLIE TAGGART: No, we'll know more from Jaden tomorrow morning as well.

Q. We saw Alex before the injury get a couple series. What was the reasoning behind that? Do you think it helped him when he got thrown in the game?

WILLIE TAGGART: No, Alex was going to play well regardless of when he went in. Reason we did is we wanted to. We wanted to get him some reps and get in there. We knew he would do a good job, and he did exactly what we thought he would do.

Q. I think that was the first time Tamarrion touched the ball today. How has he been doing and how big do you think that play could be?

WILLIE TAGGART: Terry has been doing well. You know, he's been a great teammate. Again, like any other receiver, he would want the ball more and get it to him more. Proud of him what he went the whole game not getting the ball but stayed locked into the game and made a couple catches for us there in the fourth quarter that was much needed for our football team.

Again, could have been frustrated that he wasn't getting the ball, but he decided to be a great teammate and be ready when his name was called. Sure enough, he was ready.

Q. (Regarding Cyrus Fagan)

WILLIE TAGGART: It was huge. We talk about guys stepping up and making a play. When things aren't going our way, we need someone to step up and make a play. It was great to see Cyrus make that play for us. He's been having a good training camp. He's been totally different this season. He's been locked in to being a better player and it's really paying off for us; paying

off for him as well.

Like I say, great for him to get that.

Q. After you took the lead, the defense got two really big stops at the end the game. How positive is that moving forward, what your defense did after the pick by Cyrus Fagan to finish out the game?

WILLIE TAGGART: Just the way our guys played overall defensively, they did a great job against the run. Gave up a couple big pass plays, but for the most part, they played football the way you're supposed to play it.

To be able to come up with those stops when we needed them, that's an improvement for our defense and our football team. So that's what we expect out of those guys. We need them to continue to play that way. I think they will.

Q. Seemed like James Blackman, when he was in the game, he was keeping the ball and running a little more early. Was that emphasis for you all this week or just him reading the play and knowing they were keying on Akers?

WILLIE TAGGART: We called plays for James to run the ball and so he ran. Then when he had time to scramble and caught a pass play, he scrambled. I know a lot of folks worry why James don't run. We don't call a lot of run plays for him. At the end of the day, he did a good job of running when we did call him.

Q. Last couple weeks you've been mentioning this team needs to mentally get tougher. You wanted to challenge them. Was the way in which you won today with the way the defense got a stop when Louisville was deep in that territory and the offense be able to respond and take the lead, how big was the way in which the game occurred for you guys and the victory?

WILLIE TAGGART: It was just big that our guys overcame some of our demons from earlier in the year. Every game we started and we went in halftime up and then we start the second half and don't do much. Each game we did something a little better. Last week we played hard for three quarters but didn't play smart for four. This game we put it all together.

Again, just a sign of progress with our team and understanding our mistakes and not giving up. I think you see a team starting to believe in each other a lot more. What I'm seeing and saw the last two weeks is our guys are starting to play for each other. That was something that was missing. When they play for one another, great things happen for them.

Q. Clearly these kids, and for that matter your staff probably, would've been easy to say, Here we go again. Do you believe demons can be a good thing?

WILLIE TAGGART: Do I believe demons can be a good thing?

Q. Yeah, like keep that in mind.

WILLIE TAGGART: I don't know about demons. I just -- I believe in our kids, our young men, and know what they can do for us and how good they can play.

Again, I'm just excited that they've been able to block out all the negative and continue to stay focused on getting this football team right and getting themselves right. I'm more proud of them for that than anything.

They've been able to block out the negative and stay positive and found a way to finish, win a ballgame here at Doak.

Again, got to build off that. It's a lesson for our guys to stay in our cocoon and not allow anything outside affect what we're trying to get accomplished.

Q. Cam was a workhorse for you again tonight. How impressive was he today?

WILLIE TAGGART: Cam did a good job; 29 carries. Cam ran the ball hard. I thought he ran it really hard in the second half when we needed him to. Some of the tackles that he broke was big for us. He was just fighting for first down.

Again, I think we all seen that out of Cam all year long. He's doing what we expected him to do, and we need him to continue to that.

Q. With Alex coming from an offense not much like the one you have, to learn here, have you been impressed how quickly he's picked up on a different offense?

WILLIE TAGGART: I've been impressed since the day he got here. Those things didn't just happen. Alex put in a lot of work to be really good. He put in a lot of work to understand the offense. He put in a lot of work to get to know his teammates.

Like I said before, I'm more impressed with that from Alex than anything. How he came and how the team has embraced him since day one because he's put in the work to get to know his teammates individually, take them out and working on drills and stuff.

I think the other guys appreciate it. This guy is coming in working his tail off trying to fit in with everyone else. He's done a great job. That's why we knew if he got in guys would continue to play for him, too.

It's great to have someone like that, and he was ready for his moment. You know, I don't think for us it was a surprise or anything. Kid has played in a lot of big games. Again, we saw today it wasn't too big for him.

Q. It's not breaking news that James is a good teammate. How did he handle letting Alex go into the game early?

WILLIE TAGGART: Like I think we all expect for James to handle it, like a pro. Like a teammate. Did he like it? No. He don't necessarily like it. I don't think in any competitor likes to be taken out of a game. He trusted in the process and his coaches and what we're doing. Like I said before, James unfortunately got hurt, but he's our starting quarterback. He's a great teammate, and he didn't do anything that we didn't expect for him to do.

Just continue to be a great teammate even after he got hurt. Got wrapped up and came back out there leading his team.

Q. How do you get (indiscernible) to kind of bounce back and regain his confidence after this game?

WILLIE TAGGART: Competition always helps.

Q. Third game this year at home where you had a big lead and the team has come back. In a weird way I know you want to win games 50-nothing, but is it a good thing for this football team to come back after getting punched like that? Is that a good way for this team to win a football game?

WILLIE TAGGART: I think it's a sign of improving for our football team. We tried to do that early in the year and didn't work. Kept fighting and staying locked into each other, what we had to do, and we found a way. Get put in that situation again and see if you can correct it.

I think that's most important, that you don't continue to make the same mistakes twice. Our guys corrected some mistakes that caused us not to win those games early in the year. We played smart today and found a way to make some winning plays when we needed to win them. That's how you win ball games.

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