

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Sunday, September 29, 2019

Willie Taggart

WILLIE TAGGART: Man, great win for our football team. Had a good feeling about this game going into the week. Our guys had by far our best week of practice this entire year this past week. Thought our guys came really locked in to practicing and understanding what we're doing and did a good job executing in practice through the week, and thought it paid off for us tonight.

It was good. We made another step in the right direction, and we've got to keep improving. Feel good to go into a bye week with a win. Hope we get some guys healthy. Again, I can't thank our fans enough for showing up tonight and showing out. I thought they were a big part of our victory, and I appreciate them so much for showing up tonight.

Questions.

Q. James went through all the pre-game stuff. Was he a game-time decision?

WILLIE TAGGART: James tweaked his knee again yesterday in practice, and so we wanted to see how he'd go through warmups and everything, see how it felt. Thought it would be best that we didn't put him in there.

Q. Coach, tonight was the first time that your team was able to get up on the scoreboard and stay up there. Do you think this game was a turning point for your team?

WILLIE TAGGART: I thought last week was a turning point for our team. I think our team is consistently getting better. Each and every week our guys are finding ways to get better, and that's what we talk about, trying to get 1% better each and every game.

Felt like we did tonight.

Q. You've talked about the team learning how to finish, close out games, how to win. Amari's force fumble at the end there to hustle and make that play, is that an example of guys learning how to do just that?

WILLIE TAGGART: Absolutely. If you look at that, think about our football team in the past, leave that ball on the ground; we don't ever get it. It was great to see guys running to the football. That's what happens when you run to the football. You're usually in position to get the recovery.

That was great to see out of our guys in this game, to get to the ball and recover it.

Q. Since the Louisiana-Monroe game, the rushing defense has been really, really good. I know you said it's about assignments and filling gaps. Did you challenge them at all after the Louisiana-Monroe game? Is it more than just fundamental changes?

WILLIE TAGGART: No, I didn't challenge them. I don't think we needed much challenge after the performance we put out there. I thought that performance was enough challenge for our guys

anyway.

I just think with our new defense, our guys just have a better feel for it, a better understanding of it. I thought in that second ballgame, that Louisiana-Monroe, we kind of got away from the 3-4 that we were doing, and that hurt us in that game.

So we stuck to our guns and our guys got comfortable with what they're doing, and we coached it better and we are getting better results.

Q. The defense as a whole I would say that's probably the best game of the year for them really. Maybe not even that close. You've seen the gradual improvement. Piece it all together as a unit, rush defense, pass defense all together, just how promising was it for you to see that?

WILLIE TAGGART: Well, it was great to see them put it together. I think coming into the season we knew what we could have as a defense. Again, started slow and just needed to correct some things and get back on track.

Our kids and our defensive coaches, we're all together in kind of the way to get better, and our guys are doing it. One thing we talked about was being good at something. First couple ball games we couldn't say we were good at anything. I think in the last three ball games we can say we're pretty good at stopping the run now.

We found something to be good at and we need to continue to build off.

Q. Coach, Ontaria had a career night tonight. What makes him so good and what gave you the confidence to keep putting him in the starting lineup and for him to finally break out today?

WILLIE TAGGART: He's been in the starting lineup all season. He's just been working his tail off. He's one of those guys that he just works. He doesn't ask for anything. Just goes out and does whatever you ask him to do and make plays. We saw that throughout training camp and just knew it was a matter of time before he showed that throughout a game. It was great for him to have that game today.

He's been one of our better receivers. Good to see him doing that today.

Q. There were three drives in the first and second quarter where NC State's defense was pretty effective and had you guys moving backwards, and then on the next one you were able to find some success in the pass game; keep it going. Was there an adjustment or what changed, if anything, for you guys offensively to neutralize the pass rush?

WILLIE TAGGART: Change the plays. Ran some different plays than we were running and those plays worked. When the other ones didn't work, we decided to run something different. And our guys executed. Went out and executed.

And you got to give North Carolina State credit, too. We're not going to go down and score every drive, but it was good to see our guys hang in there and bounce back and found a way to get our team down there to score some touchdowns.

Q. You guys defensively maybe could have picked off, I don't know, eight passes, nine passes. Again, is that just another step in the right direction; they're breaking up the passes?

WILLIE TAGGART: Yeah, we don't want to lead the country in breakups. We would like to have those balls. I think all of our guys in the secondary - I don't think, but I know - they all want (indiscernible) every single day from now on, we got to get those takeaways.

I will say this. I was excited our guys were being aggressive when it came to attacking the ball. That's something we emphasized this week in practice, and it was good to see them going and attacking the ball more than sit back and waiting on it. So I think that is why we got some of them, pass breakups; interception is now the next step.

Q. What you did you see in Alex Hornibrook during the week and how do you assess his performance tonight?

WILLIE TAGGART: I saw from Alex what I seen from day one. He prepares his tail off. Stays after practice with his receivers getting extra work in. He's up doing the -- when he don't have class or anything he's up in the film room learning and wanting to know the game plan.

He's a veteran. He understands what it takes, and I guess it's going throughout our football team where everybody is starting see the work he's putting in is paying off, and knowing that that's what it's going to take for us to continue to improve, is everybody to put in the work like that.

Q. You guys gave up eight sacks today. Was there something North Carolina State did that caused you issues our were the guys up front not handling the business?

WILLIE TAGGART: That's a tough question. It's hard for me to say something they did or not because I hadn't seen the film yet. I guess I can say something they did, they caused it. So I'll watch the film and see exactly what it is, why we gave them up, other than not blocking them.

I do think couple of them could have got the ball out a little quicker than what we did.

Q. I promise I'm not trying to get you fined. I think you had four, five personal foul calls. You say you try to coach that out of the kids and they're selfish penalties. But in those, at least a few of them, what do you coach them to do? What did they do wrong?

WILLIE TAGGART: Well, I don't think all those were selfish penalties. I thought our guys were playing really hard and sometimes those things happen. You just got to keep coaching them. Show them on film exactly what we did wrong and try to coach it out of them.

Some of those plays are bam, bam and it's tough on the referee and tough on everybody. That's the game now. We just got to try to play the game the way it's supposed to be played. Hopefully won't continue to get those penalties like that. That was a lot.

Q. Coach, looked like you made a switch at kicker there on the last extra point. What was the thinking there? Will that be a position that will be evaluated through the bye week?

WILLIE TAGGART: Yeah, it'll be evaluated and continue for those guys to continue compete. We had planned on putting Parker in there to kick, so we put him in there extra point to kick. We

didn't have a field goal opportunity there.

That's why we did it. They'll compete throughout the bye week and make sure we get the right guy kicking for us.

Q. I imagine having a comfortable win in an ACC game, I would assume has to do a lot for the team just confidence-wise and emotionally, especially going into the bye week. How do you feel about where you are going into the bye week?

WILLIE TAGGART: I like where we're at. Like I mentioned earlier, I think our guys are improving each and every week. Again, to have back-to-back ACC wins at home is big for our football team and big for where we're trying to go and get our program back to where we want to be.

I thought that was another step in the right direction. Good for our guy's confidence. Showing them that they can play this game, they can play it the right way, and they know how to win ball games. Just a matter going out and doing it each and every week now and taking it one game at a time, understanding that if we don't play our A Game, our best, anybody out there can beat us.

Also know if we can play our best we can beat anyone that's out there.

Q. Coach, you guys spread the ball around pretty well on offense all season. Ten receivers caught at least two passes in the game. What does that say about the talent that you have surrounding the quarterback position and what does it say about your offense?

WILLIE TAGGART: We have a lot of talent on our team, and sometimes it tough getting everybody the ball. That's two weeks in a row where I thought we spread the ball around and guys got some touches and made some plays for us.

That's part of offense. I think our guys are understanding, again, we're not just going to have one guy with 15 receptions. There is going to be plenty of guys, and our guys are embracing that now, understanding the game is about the team. There is not as much selfish play anymore.

That's what you're seeing, and that's why you're seeing a lot of guys catching balls for us. To me, that's why they're playing better. They're playing for each other and they're not playing selfish.

Q. Third straight game you haven't committed a turnover. Obviously they're crucial, but what do you credit the kind of string with ball security and not having those crucial mistakes, too?

WILLIE TAGGART: Part of it is preparation, being prepared, and then just being thoughtful of it and taking care of the football. We emphasize it all week every week. Always going to be the keys to the game for us is not turn the ball over. Last couple games we've done a good job of not turning the ball over.

We said, if we don't turn the ball over, we're going to have a chance to win. Got to keep playing that way.

Q. Cam's touchdown, pretty big moment, big spot. For you guys to get a fourth and one,

get the tempo, up to the line and execute like that, how pleased were you to see that type of execution in that type of spot?

WILLIE TAGGART: I was really excited, again, for our football team to finish the ballgame that way. Excited to see Cam get that run there at the end the way that he did. That's how he's been running all season long, and we felt there in the second half, we told Cam, We're going to try to get you the ball more and this is where we want you to pound them and make them tap out. I thought he did a good job of running there at the end.

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