

Vanderbilt University Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 28, 2019

Derek Mason

Post Game

Vanderbilt - 24 - NIU - 18

DEREK MASON: Hats off to Coach Hammock and Northern Illinois. Just very happy to for our football team to get this win. They're not easy, we'll come back tomorrow and fix what needs to be fixed, but today I told those guys go enjoy it. Sometimes -- and I talked to our guys a little bit about being out in the wilderness, and I shared some stories, one about Moses, one about a lot of different people but being in the wilderness sometimes and being lost and needing to make sure that you keep your focus and I thought these guys did what I asked them to do, which is compete. It wasn't perfect, but I'm really proud of what I saw from Ke'Shawn Vaughn today. He was a little sore, a little dinged up, but he's a warrior. I definitely appreciate his mentality.

Last night his son was born at around 7, so that young man stayed at the hospital last night with his newborn son and they had a chance to come over this morning, so he had a lot on his mind. I appreciate him for the warrior he is.

Our defense showed improvement. We let the lid off a little bit late in that ball game and that happens, but I thought these guys -- and again they fought -- a lot of snaps, here's what happens when you got young guys on the back end, I looked all the way across the board and I'm looking at Randall Haynie, a red shirt sophomore, I'm looking at BJ Anderson, red shirt freshman. DJ Durkin, red shirt freshman and those guys were battling and making communication and making some things happen. So I'm excited for those guys, because I think we can make a run. But it's about one week at a time.

Our only goal this week was to go 1-0. That's it. Whatever happened in the ball game, yeah, I know we had penalties, I know we had some things that got to get cleaned up, but the reality is go 1-0. It was going to be that type of ball game with Northern Illinois because they're a team that's going to fight, going to be scrappy. This game got a little loose and slippery on us, but we'll come back, we'll look tomorrow, fix what needs to be fixed and move on to Ole Miss. I'll open it up for questions.



Q. Pink only had one catch, do you think you'll go back and look at this game and say well we need to get him more involved or take the win and say whatever we did worked?

DEREK MASON: I will take the win and we got to get Pinkney involved.

Q. Ke'Shawn didn't, when you guys were up 24-18 I think it was, Ke'Shawn didn't have a carry on that next drive. Is that part of holding him back a little bit or anything in particular there?

DEREK MASON: No. I think he was a little tired and fatigued. Not from like truly being worn down but just from everything that had happened in the last 24 hours. Emotionally exhausted just a little bit, so for me it was just about being smart. Again you saw him rush for a touchdown, then we put the young Keyon Brooks in and then Brooks comes back the very next play and goes for a touchdown. When you got good players at the end of the day they don't always have to be on the field, you just want them on the field in key situations when it warrants it.

Q. Seemed like the play calling was focused on short passes. Was that the game plan?

DEREK MASON: It was not the full game plan. I thought for us we were going to take some shots, but it got a little loose at times on a couple of key down and distance situations where we wound up taking sacks. We had some protection breakdowns. So we decided to go back to the idea, okay, spitting it out, because we needed to see him function. And here's the deal, penalties doesn't, didn't help in this deal. Any time you get off schedule it makes it really hard, it puts more pressure on you, not just being able to go down the field, but just trying to get back into manageable third and medium third and short situations.

Q. How do you see Riley growing as a quarterback in comfort in particular?

DEREK MASON: I see him growing, I want it to be faster, that's just me. I thought he played a heck of a game, I thought again it's all and some. Not all or noting, but all or some. And I mean he never gets rattled, it's never about him getting rattled, but we got to see it better we got to see more of it. We got to be able to find it and find it now. We got to be able to get us into the right play calls. But sometimes it's not his fault.

So with that being said, I'm hard on him, I'm hard on him right now because I know we got to go. But by the same token everybody around him has got to do their job. Penalties, okay, aren't his fault. So he's having to manage downs, down and distance situations to get us back on track. But with that being said, he's got to do his part and believe me when you touch the ball every time, the expectation is for you to get it done.

Q. The flee flicker, was that something you guys thought you would use in this game and Kalija was the trailer on that play. Is that something you guys thought would be open there?

DEREK MASON: We did. We did. We thought if we caught them and in zone, okay, or man, where you get a rub, off the motion, you would have an opportunity. They hit us a couple times in practice with it, but here's the thing, Gerry had about four or five trick plays; but you can only use those plays if you can stay on the field. They're down and distance plays. That play came where? When we crossed the 50 yard line.

So again you got to have opportunities to stay on the field in order to manifest or roll through all your offense. So we're not staying on the field enough, that's on us. We got to go back and take a look at it. But here's what I do know, some plays were made out there today, we left a few out there, but we got the win.

Q. What do you say to and what do you say about a linebacker that turns a guy loose with the ball in his hands, a senior captain, I think, and allows a touchdown when he seemed to have him wrapped up?

DEREK MASON: I look at this and at times everybody wants to try to explain it away. I just tell them to finish, do your job. It's that simple. There's so many times -- and I'm not minimizing it, but football is a very simple game that we can make very, very hard. If you don't know, tackle him. I mean, know, don't know, I really don't care, just tackle him. Okay. If you tackle him, we'll live with whatever happens afterwards. But one of those plays where -- that's a first for me, it truly is, a guy in the grasp and he steps out and I don't know if he thought he heard a whistle or whatever, but listen, I'm just glad I'm talking about it on the other side of a win because if that's the one of those plays that you're talking about in a loss, that's a tough pill to swallow.

Q. Pink looked upset from where we were sitting. You said you need to get him the ball more. Why did he not get the ball do you think?

DEREK MASON: Again, I will tell you, okay, I mean we started with two series where we go down and score. Then after that it's almost three and out every series. So with that being said, I told him at halftime we have to make sure -- guys only get touches if we can cycle

through downs. If we can put ourselves in a position to move the ball down the field. And we didn't.

So, I mean, this isn't the Jared Pinkney show, it's a football game. And he's given up enough of himself in this game to warrant touches. We just got to do a better job all the way around of making sure that those things come his way. There's better opportunities, there's more opportunities for him, but football is an 11-man game.

So we'll take it, we'll go tomorrow and then we'll look at it and like I said we'll come back next week and Jared Pinkney will have an opportunity, but we're just going to run our offense.

Q. You referenced the two early scores and then the three and outs. Was it something they did different defensively or was that more about what you guys didn't do offensively?

DEREK MASON: Combination. I saw them do a great job on first down of stopping some runs, then put us in second down and a couple series in a row penalties went back-to-back, which puts you in second and long, which changed the dynamics of really the play calling and what you're doing.

So trying to get half of it back on second down and then trying to get on schedule on third down and that didn't happen. So when it didn't happen, okay, defense trots back out there on the field. That first quarter seemed like a long quarter because it seemed like we were out there for a long time. And then you get through and then in the second quarter and it's a little more of the same.

So for us, again, the toughest win I mean the first win is the toughest win to get. I told our guys, it looked like it was going to be easy and then it started to slip and then it started slide and then it felt like it was running away from you and then you had to make a stand.

So let's call it what it is, it's a victory for the Commodores and we'll get back to work tomorrow and I'm sure you're ready to talk to these players if I don't have any more questions.

Q. What was your conversation with Ke'Shawn becoming a dad and then playing the game and what was your conversation with him about kind of juggling all those sort of things?

DEREK MASON: I'll keep that between me and Ke'Shawn that was a private conversation and that me and him had going into this and sometimes like those conversations just need to be kept right where they are.

Q. Can you say generally the pride you would have

in him about having the personal part of that and then coming out and playing as hard as he did?

DEREK MASON: Yeah, well, I can allude to this: I told him last night -- I'll tell you what I told him last night. I said, When you have your child and you hold your child in your arms, you realize everything around you now is bigger than you. Your work becomes a little bigger. Your drive becomes a little bigger. Your purpose, everything that you do, matters. And he hugged me and I left him alone.