

Vanderbilt University Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 12, 2019

Derek Mason

Postgame

UNLV - 34, Vanderbilt - 10

DEREK MASON: UNLV played hard. They were first aggressor. They played hard. They fought. They played a 60-minute ballgame. We did not. And so my hat goes off to Coach Sanchez. I talked to him right after the game and told him that his team played well.

You look right now, and I know most of you want to ask where do we go. You look at this football team, and this team is fighting. Right now we're trying to catch a break, trying to create some things for ourselves right now, trying to do whatever we can to keep this group from being frustrated and trying to create some momentum, and I believe some of what you see in ballgame speaks to that, 4th down opportunities early in the ballgame with Ke out, and we actually wind up going for it. We miss the throw, and that's a momentum changer definitely in this ballgame.

But you know, I've got to give credit to Ke'Shawn. I thought he played one heck of a ballgame. I wish he would have been healthier, more accessible because I would have given him the ball as many times as I could. I thought he played hard. I thought he played well.

But for us, I mean, it's miscues. Defensively I thought at times we tackled better, but we just couldn't get the ball stopped initially. They laid on us, and they were heavy up front. I mean, they laid on us, and I know you say, okay, well, it's UNLV, but they were good-sized up front and they did a good job with their scheme of just getting the ball downhill, and it slid in there several times.

For us, it's been explosive plays given up, man, that's really let games sort of get away. I thought second half, defense played harder, a little better. We had our fair share of opportunities, but didn't capitalize on any of them. You know, then games start to get away.

Kalija goes out in the first half, as most of you saw. He had a heel bruise, and it just -- it carried over from last week and felt like he couldn't go early, and then he got warmed up and tried to go in the second half, and it finally just wore down on him.



But with this group, we just have to make sure -- and I told these guys in there, hey, the voices are going to get loud, okay, the communication is going to get loud. The thing we've got to do is stick together. They get it, and they understand where we're at right now in this. We're a 1-6 football team, and that's not where you want to be -- or a 1-5 football team, and that's not where you want to be. This football team has got games left to play. We've just got to continue to keep working because it's not going to get better just because we want it to, it's got to get better because we will it to. That's where we've got to go.

If you have any questions, I'll take them.

Q. Derek, in the past you improved the defense pretty quickly early in your tenure when you took on the play calling for the defense. Have you done that at all yet, or have you considered doing that?

DEREK MASON: I haven't considered doing that as of yet. I mean, we've got some young guys, and I can tell you that I know defensive football -- I mean, I could make some minor tweaks and adjustments, but right now we have to make sure that our guys are just straining and continuing to put those guys in positions where they can make plays. A lot of the plays that you see, they're contested plays. There's guys there, and there's opportunities.

So schematically, I think we're where we need to be. It just seems like for us, we keep getting hit because we're young, we're straining, we're trying to get there. We've got to continue to keep stressing the same things fundamentally, and when those guys grow up, they'll get there, but for some of those guys right now, they're not where they need to be just physically. So with that being said, you live with some of that and just try to continue to make sure you can mask it when you can.

Q. You said Tuesday that you thought the team had kind of turned a corner in practice. What happened between then and now?

DEREK MASON: Well, I think execution. I think falling into a lull, getting behind just a little bit, and then having to get through the resilient piece. Right now, relentless is how they worked this week. Resiliency, that's something where each individual person has to dig down and try to sustain that for themselves and fight to

get to the other side, and guys are fighting, but we need 11 guys, not nine, not eight, not six.

Miscues and opportunities lost, continuing to play -- it's not coach-speak, but it is just what it is right now. We have to play better collectively in order for us to have a chance at success. I mean, too many missed opportunities in drives for us to be good on offense, defense, and we were, again, okay on special teams.

Q. Are you disappointed that Deuce was not effective those early drives when he got a chance?

DEREK MASON: Yeah, I mean, the reality is we're working off of what we've been working off of all year. I think everybody wanted to believe that Deuce is the magic key to what's going on. I think Deuce has an operation of what we do maybe a little better than Riley, and I think at times it functions that way. But I mean, when it comes to pure arm talent and where we sit today, like Riley is a better quarterback, he just doesn't have a pronounced history with the offense. So for him at times, you can see that he's guessing instead of going through the read.

And granted, these are the same things that we've talked about before, so what we have to do is make sure that we continue to put those guys in a position to try to help this team. We know we can run the football. We've got to find the guy who can help us manage the game better and then make plays in critical situations because right now we just don't have a quarterback that can make a critical play in a critical situation for us.

Q. You mentioned you've got six games left, but you got a contract extension back in the spring. Any concern at all for your job long-term? Do you feel like you have anything to prove in these next six games?

DEREK MASON: Absolutely. I've been in this profession for a long time, and for me, I've always coached this thing on a one-year deal. Like for me personally. I don't care what contracts say. For me, man, it's about trying to make this program better and getting this program better and getting these young people better. That's what I'm charged to do. You know, I mean, like the money -- I remember when I was watching this thing for nothing, and now I don't coach for nothing, and let me tell you, I'm going to work as hard as I can with my staff to ensure that these young men skill-wise and from a football standpoint get better.

I truly believe that, and if I'm not doing that, then I'll walk away from the game, okay. I'm here to make sure that I can get this thing right, and again, it's not about being right, it's about getting it right. So that's what I'm charged with, and that's what I'm going to do.