

Sunday, September 24, 2023

Vikings Head Coach Kevin O'Connell



Very tough ending to a football game that, quite frankly, we felt like was in our grasp again and didn't execute at the end overall the way we needed to on either of our final two possessions to get one of those footballs in the end zone. You know, the last play sequence there, have a chance at K.J. (Osborn) early on, just one of those -- we don't miss a lot of those. Then roll into a sequence of downs, hit T.J. (Hockenson) on the fourth down, and then first and goal (we) wanted to get -- we have elements in our offense to go fast at the same rate of time hopefully that a clocked play would be. There was a little bit of -- with the crowd and the situation with the headsets, there was a little bit of confusion early on. By the time he (Kirk) was able to clearly hear me and get everybody aligned, too much time had come off the clock. Probably looking back on it, just should have clocked it and taken the three snaps from there to try to punch the ball in the end zone, but wanted to try -- the way we were defended down there, if we can get a call, that essentially gives us a chance to score before they can set their defensive plan, bring extra DBs and things in the game to defend some of our personnel. I wanted to try to get one (play) off. At the very least you're thinking it's an incomplete and you've got enough time under our normal operation to get a few more, exhaust the rest of the downs if you need them. That's not what took place, and then we had the unfortunate tipped ball pick there that eliminated our opportunity to win the football game. Thought we ran the ball well, which was encouraging. Clearly, we're very explosive in the pass game. We just need to be a little bit better on third down and give Kirk a little bit more time to operate and try to find some people because there's some throws to be had if we can keep him safe and clean, which is tough to do against a front with Khalil Mack and some of those guys, but that is the expectation. And then defensively, we knew that's a very good offense, very good quarterback over there. A lot of yards, but they did get us the stop that we needed. It gave us a premier opportunity there to try to win the game, and we did not capitalize.

Q. Do you think the confusion you referenced played a role in just the execution of that final play?

A. I think he (Kirk) was having trouble hearing me at first. I don't think the headset was initially -- whether it was the crowd or what, he wasn't hearing me clean at first, and then by the time he pieced it together enough clock had gone off that I think probably we should have just clocked it at that point. But we have, like I said, Kevin, we have elements of our offense no matter where we are on the field to try to go fast and capitalize on situations. It didn't go that way.

Q. After the snap Kirk throws and it's intercepted. I mean the execution, the outcome, was it impacted by the issues communicating?

A. No. He got a play called. You know, we had J.J. isolated on the back side, a chance to try to get levels over the defense and then potentially throw it out the back of the end zone if it's not there. I don't think -- although the time was incredibly critical, I don't think that contributed. If we would have clocked it on first down and then run that play, I think that attempt probably still gets made. I do think that.

Q. Kevin, three losses in a row, two at home. It's a pretty big hole to dig out of.

A. It is.

Q. Do you think the guys in that locker room are the ones that can do that?

A. I do. I do. And I think what we are going to continue to do is continue to find a way to amend, coaches included, starting with myself, to do a little bit more, find a way to do a little bit more and find a way to complete four quarters of football the way we need to play to win games. And that's complementary. When you're playing against a really good offense on the other side, 475 yards of offense is great, but we still finished with 24 points, and they finished with 28. So, it wasn't good enough to win. I will say I've been a part of a team before that's lost three in a row -- it wasn't the start of the season, but we lost three in a row and found a way to win a world championship. I believe in this team. I believe in the makeup of this team. I believe in our leadership. I believe in our coaches, and we are going to continue to work. That is not one

concern of mine with the type of guys we have in there. We can be disappointed, and we can be very upset about the outcome today, which everybody in that locker room, coaches and players included, we are. We're right there with our fans and feel it. But hopefully -- our backs are against the wall now. We've got to find a way to get our first win this week and go on the road to do it and just see if we can start stacking them from there and working our way out. Got a lot of football left.

Q. With all those yards in the run game, how are you so unsuccessful on third down?

A. You know, they got a couple kind of one-hitch kind of timing type pressures on Kirk. Wasn't really all-out pressure. They were able to get to him a little bit on some of those downs. We had Alex Mattison on kind of a design play against man coverage. He's pretty much by himself at that point, and I think (Joey) Bosa off the right side hit Kirk's arm as he goes to throw it. Those are the things. Those are the little things here and there that, you know, we make those plays -- had a chance to intercept the football late in the game, got our hands on it and really got our hands on pretty close to getting the hands on the one at the end of the half as well. Both of those are touchdowns for the Chargers. So we make one or both those plays and find a way to just give Kirk enough of a click to really throw a plant throw to Alex on that touchdown. And then some of the other third downs we've been pretty good so far this year on third down and just got to find a way to continue to protect, and what that looks like, we'll continue to find the best five guys we can put out there and work, mix our eligibles, work our different receivers, T.J., J.J., Jordan and K.J. all showed up and made plays at times. And then we just got to find a way to just be a little bit more consistent as we're coming off the field after taking it over the goal line.

Q. Was this a game where your opponent was on the spread the entire game?

A. You know, with our style of defense, they clearly came in with a plan to just kind of see if they could get pressure looks and had some answers just to put the ball in play on bubbles and block them up receiver screens and one-step throws. They were not going to try to drop back in those scenarios, and that's where we got to just keep the feet in blocks, getting off blocks. Hopefully those blocks aren't happening illegally before the ball is caught so we can try to rally and get people to the football and force them into situations where they can't just continue to call those plays. Danielle (Hunter) made a play getting the ball out on a critical third down. Just need to continue to get our ops, and when we get our ops, too, to potentially turn the football over, you know we'll start making some of those.

Q. When you had the ball on the one-yard line and a chance of score and you handed it off to Alex Mattison. Was a quarterback sneak not an option for you guys at that point?

A. It was probably a little bit -- we could have. In that scenario when you're just inside the one, you know, you potentially could save that QB sneak for maybe fourth down when you can reach the ball out and try to just take it over that way. I was confident in that call. We put goal line on the field. I have to go back and watch it and see exactly where the breakdown was on the play. We were confident we could get a little bit less than a full yard right there on that run. We didn't get it. And then ultimately it didn't work out. So that's kind of what I'm talking about. Whether it's been turnovers at the pylon or late in the half, an interception being tipped and caught at the one in the opener or being down there trying to punch it in. I thought we were physical. I thought we were -- versus a lot of their plan of playing shell and having a plan for Justin. We got some clean looks to run the football and took advantage of it and then generated some explosives in different variations of our offense. Just got to find a way to get one or two more scores there and, I think, you know, would have been different.

Q. The double pass to Mike Williams, have they done anything like that before?

A. Yeah. Anytime you're going to throw 10 or 15 bubble screens in the game as the zero answer, we got to be ready for that play because the second you see one, two, three, four times and them flipping the ball out there, I think everybody knows, potentially a double move of some kind is going to come off of that. And we were trying to coach those guys up to be aggressive, fly up there and confirm, once that ball has been thrown, to go up there and make those tackles. We just got a little giddy there and jumped it before we had seen the ball actually thrown to the bubble, and then he kind of tucked it for a second. That's a trick play that scores with how we were having to defend them. And we'll coach it up, continue to try to coach it up. And give them credit for executing that one, but yeah, Ben, that's -- I'm sure over the course of some of the looks that we've seen over the years, when you're in those pressure looks and they only have so many

answers complementary play to be able to get the ball out of the quarterback's hands to somebody else and double pass was a great execution by them for a big play.

Q. When Kirk can't hear you in that situation, do you want him to make that decision to clock it?

A. I think there's some scenarios -- the headset just goes completely out would probably be a better scenario than if he's just -- it's choppy and he's trying to piece together what I'm saying. He called the play we were trying to get to. We were lining up in the exact same formation we were just in on the conversion to T.J. He ran a great route over the middle, had a chance to maybe catch and score. I got to go look at that one. But then just trying to line up the exact same way and get the ball snapped to see if we could get that thing in the end zone on first down without allowing subs and rush and all those things to come on.

Q. Brian Flores was throwing almost every kind of formation, every kind of blitz at opposing offenses. Do you worry that the personnel is just not allowing you guys to do what you need to do?

A. We'll have to definitely take a look at it. It does seem like there's sometimes where we're close, but really, when we're trying to force some those all-out looks and the ball is coming out, that's one thing. Some of the other scenarios where we're bringing pressures of different kinds with either fire zone or different types of coverages behind it, that's when it seems to me like Justin (Herbert) had quite a bit of time on some of those to sit in there and push the ball down the field when he wanted to. So that's where we just got to try to find a way to get home. Hopefully we can get Marcus (Davenport) going at some point. I think that's been an element that we've been missing just his physicality and his versatility as a guy on all three downs. So hopefully we can get him going and maybe add a little juice in there to some of those rush groups on third down to get people off the field.

Q. Kevin, you started the game with those five straight runs to Alexander. Was that kind of your statement of confidence in him?

A. Yeah. It's easy to keep calling them when you're moving the chains and the runs look like that. So, I credit our guys. A lot of work went into trying to make sure we continue to hone in on what we want to be in the run game, which we want to be versatile. We want to be multiple, but in the end, we challenged those guys to win the line of scrimmage, and Alex was running it really hard. As much as we emphasized turnovers all week and we talked about it and we did multiple drills, we do have a conversion right there close to his forward progress being stopped or not, we've got to make sure we finish the down with the football, and nobody was more upset about that than T.J. (Hockenson). But across the board if we get that first down, maybe we can continue to run the football and hit our head on the goalpost the way we were running it to start the game. But turnover there ends that drive and they turn it right back around and turn it into points.

Q. Just for crystal clarity, did Kirk not hear you?

A. He was having trouble hearing me initially.

Q. Was the headset crackling?

A. I haven't had a chance to -- it was probably the crowd noise and probably just the -- sometimes that happens that it's not always noticed when we're in just a normal two-minute mode or we're just using -- but I do know we called a pretty similar play before in two-minute this season down there to even score last week against the Eagles kind of towards the end of the game. And it's just a situation where communication is key, and whatever -- if there's any roadblocks between that, that's where we just got to make sure everybody's got clarity in that moment of what we're trying to get done and doing it as fast as possible.

My expectations are always sky high for our group, so I'm trying to steal one more play, but clearly with that much time going off the clock, even though I don't ultimately think time was the issue with that game ending the way it did, it certainly would have been -- if that ball does get thrown away, we're down against it to where we might not even get the other ops anyway. So that one, purely on me trying to be too aggressive in that moment. We get the first down. Definitely looking back on it, just wish I would have clocked it. And no matter what benefit we had going fast, the value was not received clearly with what that execution looked like in the moment, and that's something that, looking back on it, I wish I would have just had him clock it and not tried to steal one there.

Q. Was it cramps for Justin Jefferson?

A. Yep. Byron Murphy Jr. had a contusion of some kind, and any other updates I'll get to you guys tomorrow.

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Vikings Quarterback Kirk Cousins



Disappointing to be 0 and 3. Disappointing to lose the way we did. Left too many plays out there. You have to score touchdowns in the red zone to win in this league. We didn't do that today. Chargers did a good job; they made plays. I'm proud of the way guys battled. I think we have a lot of play makers on this team. Thought Justin was his usual self. Thought T.J. (Hockenson) was great. Thought Jordan Addison was big time. He's going to become a big-time player in this league. Thought K.J. (Osborn) was outstanding. So I'm just going to continue to be a point guard distribute to those guys and try to get better doing that every week, but we've dug ourselves a hole and we got a long way to climb out.

Q. Why did you guys struggle on third down?

A. Combination of factors, I'd say. Not any one thing.

Q. The last play, Kevin said that you couldn't hear him. Was it the noise? Was the headset going in and out? What was going on there?

A. Yeah. Just couldn't hear him in the noise. Just ended up calling the play, and the play I called was the same play he was trying to get to.

Q. You never did fully hear him?

A. Correct.

Q. You just kind of interpreted?

A. Yeah, I just called the play. We always practice that. If the headset goes out, what do you call, and I just called the play and it ended up being the same way he wanted.

Q. When it's kind of chaotic right there and you can't hear, do you have the authority to go up and clock it to get guys to do that or do you have to just run a play?

A. I mean I could do anything I want. I can do the quarterback sneak. I can do whatever I want, but at the same time you also have to deal with the consequences. Against Buffalo last year I snuck it on my own and didn't get in, so until you know the future it's hard to know whether to take the reins or not, but I've done it before. I try not to make a habit of it, certainly.

Q. What's the thought process of not clocking it there? Is it just so that they can't sub and keep them on their heels?

A. I don't know. You'd have to ask Kevin. I was just trying to get up and call a play.

Q. Walking off it looked like after the game was over you went up to Justin who was kind of standing there by himself and you talked to him for a second. What did you say to him?

A. I just told him to hang tough. Nothing fancy in that moment. He gave us everything he had, and everybody else did, too. And that's why it's deeply disappointing.

Q. Kevin talked about the fact he's been on a team that has lost three in a row before and gone on to win a championship. What's your level of optimism or do you have a message for your team at the moment, being 0 and 3?

A. I mean it's a long football season, and we're going to be here in December and January talking to you guys, and this will feel like a long time ago. We've got a lot of opportunities up ahead. I just try to go 1 and 0 each week. I kind of view them as separate stages, like a Tour de France. I don't really connect them. I view them as 1 and 0 and then whatever happens you just kind of erase that week and you start a week fresh, and you just do that 17 times and see where you are in early-mid January. That's kind of how I operate. That's how our locker room operates, and nothing will change this week.

Q. After the ball was snapped did it feel rushed because of the chaos down the stretch?

A. No, I think with the clock winding to where it was I felt like I'm going to put this off of T.J.'s frame in ours or nobody's spot, and it's like a clock. And it's either ours for a touchdown to win the game or it's incomplete. I'm going to put it off away from his frame and to a safe spot. You don't expect the ball to bounce up twice in the air and get intercepted, but my thought was the quicker I can get this thing out, put it to a safe spot, we give ourselves another chance, if, in fact, it is incomplete.

Q. Do you feel like the offense has had the type of rhythm that you were expecting the second year in this system?

A. I think it goes in stages, and I think there's explosiveness, there is playmaking, and then it can be difficult to sustain drive in and drive out. I thought we ran the football really well today, and I think we have the people we need in the room to be able to do that. That showed today. You're going to have your spurts, but you're always looking to be -- every single drive to go put up points. But the red zone, I think, was the challenge. You go 0 for 4 in the red zone, that's going to be tough.

Q. Can you put your finger on why the touchdowns have been missing in the red zone?

A. I would think it wouldn't be any one thing. I think it would probably be a combination. When you go to each play, what happened on that specific play, and I don't think it's a repeating pattern. Just today we were 0 for 4 and gotta be better.

Q. Kirk, on the throw to K.J. there in the end zone, how did you feel about kind of the operation there and the ball placement?

A. Yeah. Not a good throw. Got to put it on him, got to win the game with that throw. And just getting through the progression and led him to the front pylon, needed to kind of lead him straight up the red line as opposed to the front pylon.

Saturday, September 24, 2023

Vikings Wide Receiver Justin Jefferson



Q. Does it feel like one of those games that, one inch one way or the other way and we're having a different conversation?

A. For sure, I feel like it's been like that the past three games. It's tough we're still hurting ourselves and shooting ourselves in the foot. We have to do better as players by executing the plays, not having any pre-snap opportunities, and not turning the ball over. We have to do better player-wise.

Q. What were some of the challenges in the red zone? We got a couple of chances down there. The first one ends in a field goal and the last one at the end of the game.

A. It's tough to get down there. When we get in the red zone they start playing double team, triple team. That's why we were leaning on the run a little bit more. I feel like it was working tremendously throughout the whole game. We just have to get that one yard, just one yard away from being up and having them try to come in and get us.

Q. There seemed to be a little chaos at the line at the end. You guys could've downed the ball and given yourself more of a chance, a breather, what happened there? Was there a lack of communication, it seemed to be chaos there.

A. I'm not sure. I'm trying to get the play call and line up to go win a game. That decision is not on me. I'm just trying to line up and play football.

Q. When it's over and you're standing there on the sideline by yourself, what's going through your head?

A. I'm a competitor, I hate losing at the end of the day. Ever since I was a little kid, I just hate the feeling of losing, whether it's football or a board game. It's always that competitive spirit in me, I hate losing. Every week I try to go out there and give it my best, give it my all. To come up short three times in a row is tough.

Q. What was the talk in the locker room about being 0-3? Not giving up, not looking at the numbers of what that means.

A. We're right there every single game. We're losing by a few points, literally by one play. We just have to lean on each other, the season is still far from over. We have to keep going, keep leaning on each other, study the plays, and get better every single week. Of course, we have to fix the turnovers.

Q. It seems like it took a little while to get you involved, in the beginning there. What were they doing to you early that was taking you out of the game?

A. Just like everybody else they double me, and have a safety over the top. They are always saying I wasn't going to get 150 today. That shows you the emphasis on trying to stay over top of me, and not let me get a good game. Still with the schemes and the connections with me, Kirk (Cousins), and the other guys, I still go out there and have a great game. It's tough to have a great game and still come out with a loss.

Q. Has it felt at times this year, that the offense isn't on rhythm the way you thought it would in the second year in the same system?

A. I don't feel like it's out of rhythm. It's those one or two plays that we're losing out on. It's a fumble, a pick, or having good drives and ending the drive on a turnover. We have to stop that from happening and take care of the football. Emphasizing what we've been emphasizing, hold on to the ball and protect the ball.



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Vikings Safety Harrison Smith

Q. Is it too early to start second-guessing what's called on both sides of the ball?

A. No, calls aren't the issue. We just have to make plays.

Q. You had at least two tipped passes that ended up hurting you and the defense almost had a couple of interceptions. Is that indicative of how close you guys are or are those misplays?

A. That's indicative of the league. That's how it is, it's always one play. You can always look back, if I'd have done this, he done that, you just have to make them. That's what winning teams do, they make them.

Q. Was it some of those quick passes maybe?

A. Yeah, honestly it's hard to fully grasp everything without watching it. They did some good things and hit us on a couple of balls here or there.

Q. Did you feel like the Los Angeles Chargers were doing a good job picking up some of the blitzes, or how did you feel about the blitzes' effectiveness?

A. Early, I wouldn't say they were picking it up. I'd say they were getting it out. They picked up a couple of them and a couple of them were good.

Q. Justin Herbert, the pressure was there and they were within arm's length a bunch of times. As you guys watched the tape getting ready for this, did you know he was that slippery of a quarterback?

A. I don't know how many times he escaped but I think it was mostly quick throws.

Q. When you go to that fourth down, are you thinking they're going to try to go up the middle, or with the success they had with Keenan Allen, they'd try to sneak one to him there?

A. Whatever your job is, you have to execute, and we did on that play. That was good for us.

Q. Are you surprised they went for it in that situation, I know Brandon Staley is an aggressive coach.

A. That's kind of their MO, trying to win the game there yeah.

Q. How tough is this starting zero and three, considering what you feel like you have in here?

A. It's not ideal. You look back on all the games and say, if this, then that. That hasn't changed since I got in the league twelve years ago, that's just how it is.

Q. It's kind of a back-and-forth kind of game, but a game of almost. How frustrating was it to end the game on one of those?

A. Frustrating, our guys are trying to make plays. I don't want to say it's not bouncing our way but we have to make plays and that's all I can say.

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Vikings Wide Receiver Jordan Addison



Q. Do you think you could've done more?

A. Yeah, for sure I left a couple of plays out there today. It's going to sit wrong with me the rest of the day, but I'm still working. We are going to get it right.

Q. Do you play it through your mind a lot? How do you correct what you want to change?

A. You have to do it in practice, I got to go hard every day, go back watch the film and see what I did wrong, and I have to shake back. I got to be better for the squad.

Q. You know you're going to get your opportunity; do you ever wonder when they'll come?

A. You never know when they'll come, you just always have to be ready, so I am going to make sure I am always ready.

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Vikings Cornerback Akayleb Evans



Q. What was L.A doing so well in the passing game?

A. They took advantage of the opportunities.

Q. Any of the veterans say anything to you to hold your head high?

A. Stay steady, stay in it for the long game.

Q. How quickly will you be able to move along from the missed opportunity?

A. Fast.

Q. When you guys are at this point how much as it become to move as quickly and regroup and not look back and turn it into a longer thing?

A. That's the main focus right now, we'll be able to do that.

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Vikings Tackle Christian Darrisaw



Q. What about the end there where you guys used a lot of the clock before the interception. It seems like the clock ran for a long time.

A. We know our coach (Kevin O'Connell) is trying to put us in the best situation. Whatever happened we knew we just needed to get the play off and execute it.

Q. Does it feel like you guys are ticked off? It feels like there were a lot of missed plays today that could've changed the game.

A. I wouldn't say we were ticked off. We can all play better, clean up some things. We got what we need in this locker room. We are only three games in; we still got 14 opportunities. It's regular season so we are going to take it one week at a time, try and go 1 and 0 every week.

Sunday, September 24, 2023

Vikings Wide Receiver K.J. Osborn



Q. On that last drive you guys were fingertips away from the game changing, how frustrating is that?

A. It's frustrating, they call it the game of inches, you know we couldn't get it done, and make up for that. But we have to put our head down and make it to next week and get ready for the Panthers.

Q. What did you see from that Chargers defense that may have been different from prior weeks when you played the Eagles and Buccaneers?

A. Obviously against us we see a lot of two high. Obviously a lot of cloudy with JJ (Justin Jefferson). The safeties weren't as aggressive as we saw on film, but other than that I think it's kind of the same story, it's just ourselves, I think we can go as far as we want.

Q. How frustrating is it three weeks into the season and you guys are consistently beating yourselves?

A. Super frustrating, But I mean you can't go back on it, the only thing we can do is put our heads down and continue to grind. Kirk (Cousins) talked about it the other day, it's about habits, we are in this for the long game not the short game, so if we can continue to build good habits, I think we'll be okay.

Q. What allowed you to spring open on fourth and six for the long touchdown?

A. We saw the play was called for man to man, and I wasn't able to see the other side if we got the look, but we must've got it, so I just worked him up and was able to create some separation and we had the crossers and Kirk (Cousins) threw a great ball and I was able to finish it.

Q. You must have felt confident, you got a lot of snaps inside the 20 last game. What do you think happened?

A. Just execution. It comes down to those tip balls and being just inches away. We could feel it, we were on the one-yard line with a lot of snaps inside the 20. Obviously, super frustrating not being able to get it done. Like I said, we have to watch the tapes and learn from it and move on.

Q. Did you feel like you did do some things well today that you could build on?

A. Yeah, I'm sure there's things we did that we could build on. I have to go back and look at the tape, everything didn't go bad, like I said, we have to go back and look at the tape and try to learn.

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Vikings Running Back Alexander Mattison



Q. How does it feel to find that stride after a couple games of struggling to get the run game going?

A. It feels good. It feels good to believe in our own game, to trust in our own game, and to execute. So as long as we just continue to do that we'll put ourselves in a better position, game-in and game-out, to have an opportunity to win a game.

Q. Did you know you'd be featured going into the game or were some of those calls made on the fly?

A. It's all up to the play-callers who are doing a great job of calling some plays. So going into the game each week I understand what my responsibilities are when we call those plays. It definitely was a little surprising getting some of those back-to-back-to-back but that's what we love, that's the game that we want to play. So, for us to be efficient and be effective in doing so feels good and establishes some trust that we can believe in our run game and keep it rolling.

Q. It shows great confidence in you too, the coaches building the game plan around you.

A. Yeah definitely and I just want to continue to do that. Continue to showcase and make plays and contribute to this offense going out there and trying to win football games.

Q. You had a lot of snaps inside the twenty at the end of the game. You must have suspected you were going to do it, what happened? Was it frustrating for you guys?

A. Yeah, it's frustrating. Sometimes the ball doesn't bounce your way. Sometimes you just get out-executed and there was a moment right there where we didn't execute. So we just have to try and make sure that we finish.

Q. You've had quite a week and a half, from the Philadelphia game to all that's going on on social media and then signing Cam Akers. How does it feel to you, the last ten days, to play this much and all that has happened?

A. I'm just playing ball. I'm out here doing my job, I have a responsibility to do, I have a game that I love to play. I have family that I'm doing it for, and I have my brothers to my left and my right in this locker room who I'm trying to go out and do it for. So that's all I think about, that's all my mindset is every time I go into a game.

Q. What was the difference in the running attack for you today?

A. A big emphasis, we corrected what we needed to, hashed out some of the details in the run game. Trusting in it, believing in it, getting started early, and sticking with it.

Q. There was one point at the end, it was going to be an RPO, and then Kirk Cousins thought he was going to throw it and you snagged it. Was there miscommunication there?

A. No, I don't think so. It was probably a misread there, we have to look at the tape and see what we were thinking on that play. But it was one of those plays in football where we had a guy free and we didn't have time to make the right cut.

Q. Do you guys leave that game thinking, "We left one out there?" The ball goes off the defensive back and into them for the touchdown and T.J. (Hockenson) has a tough ball in the end zone.

A. Yeah, definitely. That's football for you. Any given Sunday, it's anyone's game. That was a situation where a ball like that, tipped ball, picked ball. So we just have to make sure we try and execute. Everything we do leads up to that point right there, leads up to that moment so we have to make sure that we go out there and execute on all phases throughout the game so we don't even put ourselves in that position.

Q. I know you would trade it all to get a win but is there some satisfaction you can take?

A. Yeah definitely, you feel confident in the run game after a game like that. We just have to continue to do what we do, firing on all cylinders in the run game, week-in and week-out so we can continue to beat up on some defenses and put ourselves in a position to win a game.

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Vikings Tight End T.J. Hockenson



Q. That was a tough loss, what was it like in the fourth quarter? Looked like you guys still believed, still fought and it was just a questionable play at the end.

A. Yeah I mean it's super tough. Obviously we're really fresh off of it, its a tough one at the end ... But we fought until the end and that's what we can ask of this team, that's what you'll see every week but we just need to come out with one of these.

Q. What happened after your first down at the line, how come you guys couldn't get to the line?

A. What was it, fourth down right before that? We had that fourth down conversion, they're playing man coverage and then we get it. I probably could have beat the guy a little better and then try to get in the end zone but then I think operationally we just need to get up and then we called our last play to see if we can steal one and then we bang off the linebacker, try to get the ball – it's just a tough play, it's something that I look at myself in the mirror and I want to come up with that obviously all the time. It's just a tough one.

Q. Any loss is going to hurt but you guys had a couple chances in the red zone. Even their go ahead touchdown, Akayleb Evans had a play on it. Is this a loss that may sting more than the others?

A. They all sting man. I mean you get into this league and you want to win so bad and this is a great locker room to be in, KO (Kevin O'Connell) is a great coach to play under and you want to play for your brothers. You want to do everything you can for your brothers and when you make mistakes and things just don't go your way, that's a hard thing to go home to. To look back and you don't know when that plays going to be in the middle of the game, it's hard. But we have to come back, look at this tape tomorrow, come back and move forward. Like KO said, he's had teams that go 0-3 in the middle of the season and they come back and they can still do everything. Everything is out in front of us so we have to keep our heads up and just keep moving forward.

Q. You guys seemed a little off on offense, there were a number of different plays you're probably going to see on film that could have changed the game. Does it feel that way out there, that you're doing a lot of things well? It just seems like there's a lot of near misses.

A. When you're out there it's just the game. You have to read the defenses, you have to do a lot of things and I feel like we're on the same page with the quarterback for the most part. I think sometimes they'll send some things or they'll do some things and he's in a rush and then we have to quicken things up and that's on us as receivers to understand that. He looks out to us and tells us that stuff and so just understanding that we need to get in and out of our breaks as quick as we can and for me as a tight end, I'm in the line too so to be able to help those guys as much as I can. The Chargers played a really good game, you can't take anything away from those guys, they had the ball fall their way a couple of times and that's what has to happen in this league so you have to give credit to those guys and go back and learn from this tape.

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Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley

Q. Given the way the season started, what does the win mean?

A. Yeah, an important win, and I think it was important to finish it that way. It was a nail-biter, and we've played in three of them. I think for our guys to come alive in all three phases in the fourth quarter and finish the game was really important. It was a team win, and I thought our guys really came through in the clutch, and we finished the game the way that we expect to.

Q. You talked a lot about the defense for the first few weeks. They got a goal line stand and held them to a field goal earlier, and then to finish the game like that, what does that say about the group and just their sticktoitiveness?

A. I really feel like this group likes playing together. I thought the group hung in there. There were a lot of momentum swings in the game, and with the third down penalties and some of the weird clock stoppages, fumble, no fumble, I thought our guys just really hung tough together. Our red zone defense was outstanding. It won us the game, and I thought our third down defense was outstanding too. We had a couple of tough third down penalties, but I thought we rushed the quarterback well together, continued to build off that. I think the last two weeks we've rushed the quarterback at a high level, but really building on our situational defense. I thought the two-minute defense at the end of the half and certainly the two-minute and then red zone defense at the end of the game I thought our guys really came together and played well.

Q. What went into going for it on fourth there late?

A. Just no timeouts, and it was less than a yard. We felt like we had the play to finish with the ball. We were protecting four points, not three, so that was part of my thought process. I believe in our group. We came here to win, and that's what we were trying to do.

Q. Is that one of the wilder games you can remember with the end with the two deflections, the touchdown, and obviously the interception?

A. Yeah, the entire game was wild to me. There were just so, so many things in that game that happened that I think tested the patience of our team, I thought the connection of our team. I think all three phases just really hung tough, and that's a good team over there, and they've had three thrillers too. So Kevin's group is going to fight. It was just one of those big-time NFL games. It felt like a playoff game out there today, and I felt like our group really had their best at the end, especially on defense.

Q. Go back to the fourth down, how convincing was the math there for you to make that decision?

A. Convincing, yeah. The fact that he didn't have time-outs was important and the fact that it was less than a yard.

Q. Not that you're surprised by Justin Herbert, but just the way he played today and firing all over the field.

A. That defense really forced him to have a commanding performance. I mean, with the amount of pressure that was on him today, there was a lot of the zero pop-out pressure, and it was on him. For him to go 40 of 47 for 405 just shows you that he is one of the special players in the league. We needed that today. I mean, his performance carried us through that third quarter when he got really hot, and the most important thing that he does is he takes care of the ball. No turnovers today from him in a game where he is getting blitzed almost every single play. There are very few quarterbacks who can do that. I thought it was an outstanding offensive game plan, and I really felt like our group on offense hung tough today. It was a tough game, and we made a lot of big plays in the passing game today.

Q. What did they say to you at the end, your challenge at the end of the first half? Take us through that.

A. Basically they said that because the ball didn't come out immediately that it wasn't a fumble.

Q. Did they rule forward progress?

A. You get the opportunity to do the official thing afterward, and I look forward to your correspondence with him.

Q. On Keenan's touchdown pass that looked like Palmer and Williams were open. He almost sort of froze the safety there for a second. It's his first career completion, I think. He made it look pretty easy.

A. Yeah, it was atonement. Those that have been covering the team, a few years ago we ran it against Kansas City. A little atonement there for an incompleteness. Keenan really throws a good football, but we've been working on that play. I'm excited for Keenan because it capped one of those maestro performances for him. A career game. A record-setting game. Again, when your best players play like that in a big game, it gives you a chance. Keenan and Justin were fantastic in the game today.

Q. What went into the decision for J.C. Jackson to be inactive for this one?

A. Just a coach's decision. We felt like this was the right group for this game and really nothing more than that.

Q. Is he going to have an opportunity to get back in the rotation?

A. It's to be determined.

Q. (Question about J.C Jackson).

A. Just we felt like going into this game that this was the group that we wanted to play with in this game. Felt like it was going to give us the best chance. That's what we did today. And I was really proud of the way our defense played today, especially the secondary. You know, we had Derwin go out there, and our guys really competed today against a good offensive group, and that group really brought us home at the end of the game.

Q. Do you have any updates on Mike Williams?

A. No updates on Mike yet.

Q. On Derwin's penalty. looked frustrated when he left the field.

A. He was frustrated because he led with his shoulder, and he is frustrated because he's making the right football play, so that's why he is frustrated. If you know Derwin, Derwin is one of the outstanding competitors we have. A guy that does it right, sportsmanship, the whole thing, and he was just frustrated.

Q. How do you feel like Tuli played?

A. Yeah, good observation. I think you and I talked about it during training camp that we felt like he had a chance, but he just does a lot of things that winning edge players do. He can rush the passers. He is rugged in the run game. We can move him around. He has a big-time motor. You see that motor get him to a lot of the plays. He has been around the quarterback a lot this year. We're going to continue to need him to step up in that way.

Q. Did you guys anticipate that his strength would translate this quickly in terms of how he is rushing and tackling?

A. I felt like when we got him in pads, we felt like he had the snap in his hands. He has quick hands. They get on you quick, and they're heavy. So his best football is ahead of him. There's still a lot for him to learn, a lot for him to improve on, but he is making plays out there.

Q. You mentioned maestro performance for Keenan, what allowed him to do what he did today?

A. Just that chemistry with him and Justin. The ability for Kellen and our offensive staff to formulate things to get him in premium positions and to allow him to make a lot of decision type routes that make him really tough to defend. He just is so good at understanding leverage and attacking different coverages. Today you need a guy like him that's a security blanket for the quarterback when there's that much pressure. He was just fantastic. He was good running with the ball after the catch. You know, level one, level two, cut, threw a pass. It was one of those complete performances and part of Chargers history today.

Q. Obviously the plan today was to put a bunch of bodies on Justin Jefferson doubling him a lot. How did you feel like the plan was executed? Obviously there was the one touchdown and missed tackle.

A. We were trying. We were trying to mix it up. Like I said, there's a reason why he is so productive. I mean, everyone is trying to engineer their thing around him.

I thought our guys competed. I thought he had to beat us today, and that's what we wanted was for him to have to beat us. I think what our group did today is they hung tough. That group in the secondary today hung tough, and they played their best in the red zone.

I love the way we played on third down as well outside of a couple of penalties that I think we can learn from, but I think we can build on this performance, and hats off to Justin (Jefferson). He is a hell of a player.

Q. You're going to face quite a bit of public backlash over that fourth down decision. How do you explain just the motivation for doing that, and have you been affected at all by how people react to some of the decisions that are a little bit unconventional?

A. If I would have been affected, we wouldn't have gone for it. We would have punted it. It was fourth down and less than a yard. They had no time-outs, and I believe in our offense. I believe in our offensive line, our tight ends, our quarterback.

I felt like we had a good play for what they would be in. It didn't go down. We were protecting four points, not three. Again, if it was a three-point game, it would have been a different decision.

I felt like the defense could play the way they did down the stretch, and again, I've got full confidence in our group. It's your job as a head coach to make sure your team knows you have belief in them. I think we came here to win. It was a tough road game against a team that made the playoffs, so we were trying to win the game, and I make no apologies for that.

Q. Did you think about a sneak there?

A. Of course.

Q. Why not? Was it a look what they were doing in front?

A. Yes.

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Chargers Quarterback Justin Herbert

Q. How important is it just to get that win?

A. It's huge. That's a really good football team, and for us to walk out of here with a win, it was great for our football team. It was a hard-fought win. Certainly not how we drew it up, but any time you can leave this place with a win, I think that's big for us.

Q. What can you say about Keenan Allen?

A. Just as consistent as they come. He's so talented, so smart. He knows exactly how people are playing him. Understands leverage so well, and he is a quarterback's best friend. To be able to get the ball out to him quickly, for him to make plays, he makes my job so much easier.

Q. Was it something that you guys saw in the preparation, or was it something he was doing today that just kind of allowed the success?

A. I think it's a little bit of both. I think we took a look at how they played defense and tried to maximize our matchups with him. We know how special Keenan is. Any time you get him one-on-one, you have to find ways to get him the ball.

They brought a lot of pressure, so we had to do our best to protect, block that up, and get the ball out as quick as we can.

Q. When Coach Staley decides to go for it on fourth there late, what was going through your mind? What did you think about that call?

A. It's a yard. You have to get a yard. That's on us as an offense to get that yard. It's one of the plays we practice all the time, and it's unfortunate that it didn't go our way, but I'm rocking with our defense, our offense as well. We believe in those guys to get that stop.

So although we didn't get it, we'll get it next time, and the defense came away with the big stop.

Q. What did you think of Keenan's touchdown pass?

A. It was perfect form, an incredible ball. So it was really cool for him to be able to throw that.

Q. Have you been angling to get that, trying to get that play called in a game?

A. Keenan, he has done a great job working into pat and go with him, so sometimes he'll throw the ball, and so we knew how special he was as a receiver and as a quarterback. So got him out there, and he made a big play.

Q. Were you surprised at all at some of the loose coverage on Keenan? It seemed like he was pretty open.

A. I actually thought they did a great job of playing man coverage and getting up on him. Keenan just did a great job of beating that coverage. That's why we think Keenan -- we think so highly of him is because he is able to beat man in coverage like that. Whether they're place outside of him, he is going to break in. He just has a great feel for the game.

Q. Coach Staley called some of those decision routes for Keenan. What's that cohesiveness like with you and him?

A. Yeah, so it's basically just he is going to break the way that the defense is playing him, so they're going to give him access one way or another, and he is going to find that, and he is going to break to where I think he is going to break.

We've been on the same page for some time now, and he has just done an incredible job of communicating with me exactly what he sees in the defense, so he has made my job super easy.

Q. On fourth down Brandon mentioned that the front they were showing kind of prevented you guys from going to sneak. Kind of walk through the play call there and what sort of happened there on the fourth and inches.

A. Just have to get a yard. That's on us as an offense to be able to get that yard, but I love the thinking behind it. We believe in our defense.

So next time I know that we'll get that as an offense, but the defense came away with a big stop.

Q. Did you feel like front-wise they sort of closed off the potential sneak in that situation?

A. Yeah, the play was I handed it off.

Q. Yeah, I asked Brandon if they considered, like if he and Kellen considered a sneak there. Brandon said, but the front was preventing you guys from running a sneak there.

A. Yeah. My job was just to hand the ball off, and we would try and get that one yard, so it was unfortunately it didn't go our way.

Q. Is this one of the wilder games you can remember down the stretch? The two ricochets, the touchdown and the interception.

A. Yeah, they don't get any easier. In the NFL it's tough, and you are playing a really good football team over there. Any time we can walk away with a win here, I think that's huge for our offense and defense.

They came away with some big stops on defense, so it was awesome to see. A lot of things to clean up, but looking forward to next week.

Q. Is this one of the loudest places you can get?

A. It's a very loud place. They do a good job of staying involved in the game. Definitely a fun experience to play in. Got a lot of respect for that team.

Q. Have you been blitzed ever as much as you were blitzed today?

A. I'm not quite sure. I would have to take a look at that. I think they did bring a lot of pressure today, but I thought our offensive line, our coaching staff did a great job of creating a protection plan that we felt comfortable going into the game.

Q. For you navigating, how different is the approach from you when you realize you are being pressured that often?

A. Yeah, I think that kind of goes into the game plan of it. Just knowing where your quick outs are, where the protection issues are, and where the offensive line is sliding.

I thought the offensive line and the running backs did a great job picking up those extra blitzers. Guys on the outside were looking quick, so we had those hot answers. I thought they did a great job picking up those pressures, got the ball out quick, and didn't let it negatively affect us too much.

Q. Did you feel like today was for you one of the days where it seemed like almost just like everything was going your direction, specifically that play that kind of tipped out of the defensive back's hands for a touchdown?

A. I think it's just preparation. I thought we had a great week of practice, and the better you get prepared, the better you're going to play.

I thought offensively and defensively we had our best week of practice, so any time you have a week like that, I think you're going to feel much better on game day.

Q. The second touchdown to Donald that you fired in there, is that as hard as you can throw a football? Is there more in the tank?

A. There's more in the tank for sure, but it was a hard pass. It was tight coverage, and the great thing about Parham is he is so tall and he has those long arms, and he was able to hold onto the ball. It definitely was a tough pass, and that's why I was so excited that he came away with it.

Q. I'm sure you saw the defender. Next what's going through your mind? Are you thinking to yourself, I've got to put a decent amount on this one to fit it in there?

A. To be honest, I don't think you're thinking too much in that situation. You're going through your reads. The first, second, and third read weren't there, so you go back to DP, and you happen to find a big body. He is easy to find out there. Just put it up high and let him go up and get it. It was a heck of a play by him.

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Chargers Safety Derwin James Jr.

Q. What does it mean to get this win?

A. It's so big. It's major. I feel like we really needed a win as a team.

Q. What does it mean for you guys going forward in terms of carrying on the momentum?

A. Just taking it one game at a time, one day at a time. We got one. It's hard to win in this league and just stack them.

Q. How you feeling?

A. I'm going to be alright. Kind of grabbed on it and got tight but nothing to be concerned about.

Q. Take me through the final stand by your defense from your perspective?

A. I was over there. I, of course, want to be out there with them but had all the confidence and all the faith in the world in them. We stopped them the first time, they caught a flag, then we had to stop them again. So, great job by the defense going eight or nine plays, however many it took to get the job done.

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Chargers Linebacker Kenneth Murray Jr.

Q. What's going through your mind when coach sends the offense out there for the fourth and inches?

A. I know he's going to put us in the best position to win. Obviously fourth and one, they, were in our territory. He felt like our offense had an opportunity to go out there and get it done and get the first down. I'm always going to ride with him when it comes to that if he feels like that's the best call. That's what he gets paid to do; to make that call. So, he made that call, then we get paid to go out there and play defense and back him up and back the team up. We were in that red zone and we knew what we needed to do. They were down by four, so they needed a touchdown, so we knew to defend the end zone, and I feel like we did a good job at getting that done.

Q. What were you feeling when you caught that interception?

A. It's almost like I've been there before. I train for that stuff all the time; I'm always doing different stuff just for moments like that. When I see it coming in the air, I was there, and I just got my hands on it. And when I'm down I've got my teammates just telling me to stay down, and that was it.

Q. For the defense to play that way and get some of those stops, what does that mean?

A. Yeah, we battled through some adversity through the first two weeks and some adversity today. I just kept telling the guys take it one play at a time, getting a stop in critical moments, and I feel like we just kept battling and that's what you want as a defense. Obviously, there's things we can clean up that we need to look at and that we need to get better on, but we got a win in the NFL and we got to be happy with that, and just keep stacking them too. Excited to come out next week and have a better performance.

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Chargers Tight End Donald Parham Jr.

Q. What does getting this win mean to this football team?

A. Great start to something big. I feel like we're starting to get traction and I feel like we're really making the right strides to where we're trying to go.

Q. It seemed like your offense in the clutch moments kept delivering today. Is that a product of comfort level improving here?

A. Absolutely. We're believing the process and trusting each other and making sure we're doing what we need to do every day.

Q. Did you heart sink on that 4th down play?

A. Oh man, I don't even have any words for it. I know it was big time cause it really could've swung the game for sure.

Q. And it got loud in here right?

A. Yeah, that was a big thing for us, making sure we're taking the air out of the stadium by making plays and stuff like that. Then that happened (the 4th down play), and it was like, "Dang." But we got back on track, defense held up and did their part.

Q. At this point does it surprise you at all when coach gives you that opportunity on 4th and 1? Even at your own 24?

A. Absolutely not. At this point it's just routine.

Q. How did you hold on to the second touchdown?

A. God blessed me with great, strong hands, so that's all I got over that.

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Chargers Running Back Joshua Kelley

Q. Can you describe what this win means to you guys?

A. It means a lot man. I feel like this was a tough fight. As you can see, we went all the way to the end. And the league is funny. There's always moments in the league where it's up and down. This is one of those days where I felt like as a team we came as a collective offense, defense, special teams, and we just played with each other, and we won. I mean obviously you saw Keenan (Allen) and Herb (Justin Herbert). That was just a legendary performance, and they just carried us.

Q. What is it like seeing Keenan play knowing what he has done throughout his career?

A. It's really crazy because I see it at practice every day. And I see it during the games to the point where whenever the balls in the air, I know he's going to get it, every single time. It's crazy like you can't take it for granted. He's a hall of famer and he's just been the best receiver I have ever seen. He's amazing.

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Chargers Wide Receiver Joshua Palmer

Q. First of all take us through that touchdown?

A. Tip drill really, I just have to focus. I do a lot of work on my eyes. Justin (Herbert) trusted me and threw it up and down.

Q. What does it feel like to finally get on the winning side?

A. It feels great. The last couple of games we were on the losing side, which obviously didn't feel great, but we have been playing well the whole year so.

Q. Was it a little bit of luck or skill or both on that time you had?

A. A little bit of everything. It takes a lot of work to get in the right position.

Q. Can you describe what happened on that ricochet touchdown?

A. Justin (Herbert) trusted me, threw it up and I just came down with it, focusing on the ball.

Q. Pretty wild play?

A. Yeah it was, pretty circus play, but I had to come down with it. I had too, I had no choices.

Q. What was going through your mind there when you didn't convert fourth down?

A. Nothing much, because if we got it, it would've been great and if we didn't get it, everybody would've, not us, but everybody outside would've have been like "that was a horrible play". But we have ultimate trust in our defense until they showed up.

Q. What was it like watching Keenan Allen today?

A. When you have been here for a while, and you watch him every day I'm not really surprised. He's putting on a show for everybody else, but he's always putting on a show for us in practice, and games. So, it's almost like that's normal. Like we aren't surprised to see that. I'm not surprised to see that. I love that guy, glad to see he did it. Played a great game.

Q. Are you surprised at all by the way Justin Herbert played today like the throws that he made?

A. I'm not surprised at any throws he can make. You should know that by now. I've been here for three years, and I've never been surprised, maybe my first year, but not anymore. Everybody made great plays. Dub (Mike Williams) made a great play. Let's keep Dub in our prayers. Hopefully he will be back next week.

Q. It looked like Keenan kind of looked off the safety on that touchdown, but you had two guys were open.

A. Yeah, Mike (Williams) and I were open, but I knew he was going to throw it to Mike. I was hoping there was a chance I might get it, but it was for Mike.

Q. Did you feel like you were wide open on that as well?

A. Yeah, we were both wide open. We both came wide open. He even said it, I came open fast, but he was going to Dub (Mike Williams).

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Chargers Wide Receiver Keenan Allen

Q: That touchdown pass, it looked like both Palmer and Williams were open, and it almost looked like you pumped for a second. Are my eyes deceiving me or did you actually do that?

A: I did see Josh (Palmer) kind of popped out early, and that's one of the ones that you don't throw. All week, you are looking at the play and you are like 'If Josh pops open early, then I can just go to Josh', but you don't know what that backside looks like, once you all go in motion that backside is going to push over. You just have to respect the play and know that Mike [Williams] is going to come open, too.

Q: Have you been lobbying for that one?

A: Yeah, I kind of messed it up two years ago as well, against the Chiefs. Same play, Mike [Williams] was open, and I threw it short at his feet and he couldn't make the play on it, so I had to get it back.

Q: Coach Staley said were atoning for that one..

A: Yeah. All week. Let's go.

Q: What can you say about how Justin Herbert played today, especially with the line of pressure that that defense brings?

A: Resilient. The first time that we played them, [Brian] Flores was in Miami. It was tough. We didn't know what to do, we were kind of mind boggled out there, we didn't know who to be looking at, they kind of fooled us half the game. Today, we had that number on every play. Herbo [Justin Herbert] was in there, he was settled down, not getting rattled at all. Every time he came to the sidelines we had more answers and more answers so it was great.

Q: Coach Staley called some decision reads on some of those plays, what were you seeing that allowed you to get open?

A: Yeah, it's tough for Herbo. They were pressuring a lot, they were playing a little flat-line coverage. I'm not going to run an end route, I'm just going to run a hitch and then if he can tackle me, hats off to him.

Q: The 3rd & 17 play, what happened on that?

A: We ran it twice. We ran it the first time and it was when they had a strip sack on 3rd down. They ran it then, and I was open. Then we came back and ran it again, and we didn't talk about it on the sideline, we just called it again, and Herbo just kind of looked at me like, 'I knew you were going to be where you were supposed to be' and I was like, 'everyday, everyday'.

Q: Is it gratifying to you that people know where the ball is going and you still make the catch?

A: Defenses are defenses. Everybody on the field can know where the ball is going but somebody has got to make a play. You can point at it and say 'oh, he's going here' and do all of this, but you still have to go stop it.

Q: How about your defense at the end of the game, the Vikings had eight or nine chances to score a touchdown?

A: Hats off to them. When it comes down to it, defense is going to have to win a game. Defense wins championships. That's what it has always been about. We had the lead in the past three weeks, the same situation, and we have been short on two of those games. If we are going to come back today and bounce back and be able to rally and go through, it was great.