



NEW ORLEANS SAINTS VS TENNESSEE TITANS
SUNDAY, DEC. 22, 2019 • NISSAN STADIUM
SAINTS POSTGAME NOTES

- With the win, the Saints move to 12-3, giving them back-to-back 12-win seasons for the first time in franchise history.
- The win improves New Orleans' all-time regular record against the Titans in the regular season to 6-8-1 and improve their road record to 4-2-1.
- The win wraps up New Orleans' regular season road record at 7-1, giving them a 7-1 road mark for the fourth time in franchise history and for the first time in back-to-back seasons.
- HC **Sean Payton** improves his record against the Titans to 2-2 including a 2-0 mark on the road. The win gives him at least a .500 regular season mark against 26 of 31 NFL opponents.
- Facing Titans Head Coach **Mike Vrabel** for the first time as a head coach, the win makes him the 66th coach Payton has a victory against and the 48th coach he has a winning mark against.
- Offensively, New Orleans racked up 377 yards with 299 passing yards and 102 rushing yards on the way to scoring 38 offensive points.
- QB **Drew Brees** started and completed 27-of-38 passes for 279 yards, three touchdowns, and a 118.2 quarterback rating. Brees led the Saints on six scoring drives resulting in five touchdowns and one field goal.
- Brees appeared in his 274th career NFL game today, moving past K **Norm Johnson** for sole possession of 23rd place on the NFL's all-time games played list.
- WR **Michael Thomas** finished the game with 12 catches for 136 yards and a touchdown. With Thomas' 12 receptions today, he moves past Pro Football Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison for the most receptions in a single season in NFL history with 145.
- Thomas caught the record-breaking reception late in the fourth quarter on a 13-yard catch and run that brought the ball to the Titan's one-yard line. One play later, Thomas caught a two-yard touchdown pass from Brees to extend the Saints lead to 10 with 2:16 left to play in the game.
- With Thomas' 136 receiving yards today, he surpasses Pro Football Hall of Famer Randy Moss (5,396 yards from 1998-2001) for the most receiving yards through a player's first four seasons in NFL history. Thomas currently has 5,475 career receiving yards since 2016 when he entered the NFL.
- TE **Jared Cook** recorded his longest reception and scoring play as a Saint on a 61-yard touchdown pass from Brees in the second quarter. Cook finished with three receptions for 84 yards and two touchdowns.
- RB **Alvin Kamara** led the team in rushing with 80 yards on 11 carries with two rushing touchdowns. The first of Kamara's two third quarter scores was both his longest carry and scoring play of the season. Kamara also caught six passes for 30 yards.
- Kamara now has 758 rushing yards and 515 receiving yards in 2019. With his 30 receiving yards on Sunday, he became the third player with at least 500 receiving yards and 500 rushing yards in each of his first three seasons, joining Abner Haynes (1960-62) and Herschel Walker (1986-88).
- QB **Taysom Hill** started the game as a fullback, catching two passes for 21 yards, carrying twice for 11 yards, completed 1-of-2 passes for 20 yards and led the team with two special teams tackles. Hill's only completion of the game was Michael Thomas' 143rd reception of the year, tying the NFL record.
- The Saints' defense sacked Titan's QB **Ryan Tannehill** five times and extended their streak of not giving up 100 rushing yards to an individual player to 41 regular season and postseason contests.
- LB **Demario Davis** led the team in tackles with 11 and added his fourth sack of the season. Davis now has 109 tackles for the season, surpassing 100 tackles for the third consecutive season and sixth overall in his eight-year NFL career.
- CB **Patrick Robinson** finished with a season high six tackles and broke up the Titan's final pass of day on 4th and 10, sealing the game.

- LB **A.J. Klein** set a new career high with 2.0 sacks and added three tackles and a pass defense.
- DB **C.J. Gardner-Johnson** tied a career high with eight tackles and tallied his first career forced fumble.
- DE **Cameron Jordan** played in his 143rd career appearance on Sunday, moving into a tie with WR **Eric Martin** for 18th on the club's all-time list.
- Jordan has 14.5 sacks in 2019, breaking a tie with LB **Charlie Clemons** (2001) and Jackson for the fifth-highest total in franchise history. With his sack today, Jordan becomes only the fourth Saint to have 14 sacks in a season, joining DT **La'Roi Glover** (17-2001), LB **Pat Swilling** (17-1991 and 16.5-1989) and DL **Wayne Martin** (15.5-1992).
- DT **Shy Tuttle** recorded his second sack of the season.
- Playing in his 173rd career game, P **Thomas Morstead** punted five times for 244 yards (48.8 avg.) with two inside the 20-yard line.
- K **Wil Lutz** converted one 47-yard field goal and five extra points. Lutz now has 32 field goals in 2019, setting both a career high and franchise record for field goals in a single season, surpassing Pro Football Hall of Famer Morten Andersen's 31 in 1985 and John Carney's 31 in 2002.
- WR/RS **Deonte Harris** accounted for 171 yards from scrimmage, returning four kicks for 150 yards and returned four punts for 21 yards.
- The Saints extended their streak to 287 regular season games without having been shut out, dating back to a 26-20 win at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on September 6, 2002 at Raymond James Stadium, the longest running streak in the National Football League and fourth overall.

TENNESSEE TITANS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS POSTGAME QUOTES
Sunday, December 22, 2019

HEAD COACH MIKE VRABEL

(on if he thought the hit that caused wide receiver Kalif Raymond to fumble was a hit to the head against a defenseless receiver)

I did, but again, they didn't see it that way. That's what happens. It's fast; it happens quickly. Again, it's about player safety and about when that player becomes unprotected. There's a certain time completing the process of the catch, and it's a fine line.

(on if wide receiver Kalif Raymond was knocked out during that play)

I know that he was down on the ground. I don't know what his status was before I got out there. When I got out there, he was fine and talking to us.

(on if it is an unusual feeling to lose a hard-fought game and still have another opportunity next week)

Sure. I think just the approach that the playoffs have started essentially for us because when you get into any kind of playoff, when you win, you move on to the next step. When you lose, you're done. I think that's really where we're at right now.

(on his thoughts behind running out the clock at the end of the first half with three timeouts and 2:05 left on the clock)

That they were getting the ball in the second half, and we just wanted to make sure that we were sound and smart with the football. We got a first down there I think, but we weren't able to sustain. That's what the thinking was, was that you want to be smart with the football and go down and score points, but you also don't want to leave Drew Brees and a couple of timeouts and a minute and 45 seconds.

(on how he thought running backs Dion Lewis and Dalyn Dawkins performed while running back Derrick Henry was inactive in today's game)

First of all, that was an organizational decision that we thought was best for the football team. We try to make every decision with the team's best interest in mind. There's a lot of guys that stepped up and took advantage of their opportunities. Dion (Lewis), (Dalyn) Dawkins, Tajaé (Sharpe), (Derick) Roberson. Nigel (Harris) got to play on special teams. That's what this league's about, guys taking advantage of their opportunity.

(on if he expected to see Saints cornerback Marshon Lattimore travel because of Titans wide receiver A.J. Brown)

Yeah, probably. He had done that, and I think that we were expecting that. That's what you get when you start playing well in this league, and they have other players that are very good, that that's what happens.

(on the kind of week he anticipated for running back Derrick Henry's health now that the team is in a do-or-die situation)

I think that, first of all, nobody respects the effort that Derrick puts forward for this team (more than me), not only in the conditioning to get his body right, to be a runner that can withstand the pounding of an NFL season. I fully understand what that toll and rigor is. You can only hope that it would help, and that's why we made the decision that we made.

(on the effort early in the game to get the ball into the hands of Jonnu Smith and A.J. Brown with Derrick Henry out)

Well, I think that's something you always try to do, whether Derrick (Henry)'s involved, it's just guys that can help you. You know, I think some of those plays are certainly not going to get noticed but I know that (MyCole) Pruitt and (Taylor) Lewan had great blocks and great adjustments on the pressure. They pressured right into the one that A.J. (Brown) was able to score on and that was probably the most difficult look that they could have gotten and they both blocked it very well. To be able to get Jonnu (Smith) free like that, you have to be able to sell the linemen the action and the linemen did that with the pads down. Jonnu continues to improve and got his eyes around, got vertical when he caught it.

(on the issue with kickoff coverage)

It's hard to see but here's what happens on kickoff coverage. You need a great kick, like punt coverage and then you need guys that are able to run down there, avoid without slowing down and then we've got to finish on the football. Then you've got to be able to keep leverage and try to bend it back. So again, we'll look at that, and we knew that was a strength of their football team. They have a returner that's very confident in what he's doing. He brought it out five-deep and that's certainly something we'll have to look at and continue to work on.

(on waiting on the result of the Houston game to decide on making RB Derrick Henry inactive today)

There's a lot of things that we kind of go through to figure out when we're making decisions. I would say that that's probably something else that factored into the decision.

(on what he liked that outside linebacker Derick Roberson did today)

It looked like he factored. It looked like he played fast. He flashed and you know again, there was a lot of times where we were executed the keys and understood what we were trying to do as far as disrupting the timing of the quarterback and getting guys into the pocket and hitting receivers. You know, we dropped two passes. He really threw us one to Kevin (Byard) and (Tramaine) Brock was there on the other one. You've got to catch the ones they throw you.

(on being frustrated after closing the score to three points and they would answer)

I mean, it's just not good enough. You can give up big plays and missed tackles, the execution. You have breakdowns where our guys aren't on the same page. Yeah, I think that that's frustrating when I think that our offense to come back and answer, close the gap like you said. We get them down there and try to hold them to a field goal and they were able to score again.

(on the energy and effort of the team)

I love the effort of our football team, you know. I know that they're going to fight. They're going to compete. We came out. We did some things very well. We got a lead but no lead is safe against a team that's got the type of players they have that are led by the quarterback that they have. Just unfortunate when officials tell you they've missed calls on touchdowns. I'll leave it at that. You've got to do a better job of not letting them get the touchdown. It's hard enough to stop them as it is.

(on yardage total of two excellent receivers the last two weeks and having to be better in that regard)

The guy just broke the all-time record. We'll have to do a better job the next time we play a guy that's got the all-time record for catches.

QUARTERBACK RYAN TANNEHILL

(on the emotions of losing in Week 16 and having a chance to secure a playoff spot in Week 17)

It’s like mixed emotions. Losing hurts. I hate losing – that’s kind of what my feeling is right now, is that we just lost the game. We understand the situation, and next week we have an opportunity to win to get in. For me personally, it’s tough to lose a game, especially when you had a shot there in the fourth quarter down three. I had a great feeling about it, I thought we were going to go down and win the game. We weren’t able to do that, so it hurts. You hate losing. I’m proud of the way guys battled, but we just didn’t do enough to win the game

(on the hit to the head that Kalif Raymond took in the fourth quarter that resulted in a Titans’ turnover)

That’s one of those gray (area) hits. Obviously, you hate to see one our guys get hit like that – really, anybody. You see him get hit in the head, I’ll let the official officiate, but definitely hate to see anybody get hit in the head like that. It’s a tough play and you don’t like to see it.

(on what his emotions were on Kalif Raymond’s fumble in the fourth quarter)

They did a good job taking away Jonnu (Smith), number one. I reset and saw Kalif (Raymond) give him a good move at the top. I was able to give him the football over a backer, so I’m thinking, ‘Yeah, we’re across midfield. We’re rolling.’ I saw the hit. I didn’t see the ball come out initially, but I saw their guys – I was kind of behind the O-line – scrambling for the ball, and knew what it was then. I wasn’t sure what the call was going to be because it was so bang-bang. Obviously, it didn’t go our way.

(on what A.J. Brown can learn from going against Saints cornerback Marshon Lattimore)

I think A.J. (Brown) had some opportunities and did a good job. You can see it there at the end, he went on a go route. He made some plays for us. I don’t think A.J. was locked down by anybody. We have a ton of respect for (Marshon) Lattimore and what he can do, he played extremely well. I think A.J. had some routes. The read took me to the other side a couple of times. Looking on the pictures, he was still winning on the backside. Obviously, he’ll grow from the experience, but I thought he did a good job today.

(on other players stepping up in Derrick Henry’s absence)

It’s huge. Those guys have been coming up big for us all year. Obviously, it’s tough not having Derrick (Henry) back there, but we had guys step up and make plays. We got out to an early lead, and then couldn’t sustain that through the second quarter. I think that’s what hurt us, is yeah we jumped out, but in the second quarter we’ve got to be better offensively, keep that momentum going and keep putting points on the board.

(on what led to getting Corey Davis more involved in Week 16)

We try to mix it around every week. I just think it’s the way it fell today. Corey (Davis) was winning on his routes, and we were able to get him the football. We’re going to try to have a few plays every week to mix the ball around, it just matters week-to-week if coverage allows it, and if they win. So, a lot of factors go into that.

(on what he would like to change when playing the Texans for the second time in Week 17)

I think we’ve got to start faster, which we did today. But, then sustain that momentum and just keep it rolling. Be consistent throughout the game. Obviously, you’re not going to score every drive, but you just want to be consistent, move the football and execute. I think we had opportunities to do that today, and we did at times, we’ve just got to be consistent with it.

(on Tajaé Sharpe having a big day receiving)

Tajaé (Sharpe) has come up big for us. He had some big plays today – a couple off-schedule plays. He’s finding the open spot, and then solid speed for him to get in the end zone on the long one. Then, kind of high in the back there for the second touchdown. He’s a guy that’s got a lot of range, he’s long, he’s got a great stride. He can do it all for us. We put him at every position, so he really opens up a lot of things for us.

(on if the Saints pass rush was doing anything specific to get pressure)

I’ll have to back and look at it on tape to see exactly what was going on. I think the offensive line did a great job of battling through that, and then giving me time there in the second half. A couple plays I was able to extend and find receivers. You’ve got to give credit for the way that they just battled through that, and then protecting me in the second half.

(on if he thinks there were times that he held onto the ball too long)

Yeah, I think there were a couple plays there in the first half where I could have just found somebody to dirt it to. There was some ones that I don’t think I could’ve gotten it out, and it was a couple that I could’ve probably found a way to just dirt it and live for another day.

(on if he’s hopeful that Derrick Henry being inactive Week 16 will help him play in Week 17)

Yeah, we want to get Derrick (Henry) back. I think he’s been crucial to our offense the whole year. I think anyone can see that and what he brings to the table. Obviously, not having him out there today was tough, but he wasn’t ready to go. Hopefully another week of rest will get him back close to 100 percent and he’ll be ready to go on Sunday.

(on if Houston winning the AFC South title on Saturday changed how they approached this game)

Yeah, I’m sure we adjusted a little bit. We’re not making major changes. I think throughout the week we kind of figured out what we liked against that defense, not specially built around one player, or anything like that.

(on how important it was to use this game without Derrick Henry as a practice game for the playoffs in case Derrick Henry isn’t available)

I’m not sure that was a factor at all. I think every week you try to mix things up and throw some different things out there. We did have some different stuff, but I think we would have ran those regardless if Derrick (Henry) was playing or not.

TIGHT END JONNU SMITH

(on coming up short in a tough battle)

Yeah, we came up short, we fought back, give credit where it is due. Those guys, they overcame some adversity and they kept fighting. played a good game, they’re among the best in the NFL. We’ve got to come in here, you know, get this thing cleaned up, get ready to win a game.

(on offense slowing down after a quick start)

We are going to find out when we watch the film. I can’t tell you right off the bat, but there were some problems that we are going to get fixed up, collectively, you know. Keep our heads high, we are still in this thing.

(on if he was aware Pittsburgh had been defeated at any point during the game)

No, we didn’t know. I just found out from you. That’s good to hear.

(on how team approaches this week knowing a playoff berth is on the line)

We just have to take it one day at a time. Take it one day at a time, everything that we have been successful doing, we have to get back to finding what that was and maybe see things that we were changing sometimes when things don't go in your favor. But we are just going to do what we do, play hard and play with a chip on our shoulder. Play with effort and finish, everything that we do, just keep playing.

(on describing his catch and run play)

A great setup by Ryan (Tannehill), the O-line protected, a great ball. Corey (Davis) made a play.

TACKLE JACK CONKLIN

(on some of the challenges the offensive line faced in today's game)

Obviously, the Saints played great. You know, they played well enough to beat us, we have got to do better. Some situations where we've just got to do a little bit more, have less penalties and (we had) some issues with protection. Little things like that, the Saints took advantage of those issues and we fell short.

(on putting the game behind them with an opportunity to gain a playoff berth next week)

Exactly, take what we can from this game and the playoffs start next week for us.

TACKLE TAYLOR LEWAN

(on next week's opportunity to gain a spot in playoffs)

This is our playoffs. We need to go in there and make sure we play well and be the offensive line and the offense we know that we can be.

(on if he was aware of the New York Jets' win over Pittsburgh)

No, I wasn't aware until after the game, somebody told me. So, you try to do your best, I mean it was a very weird, from the circumstances, a weird game today. But you try to do your best and focus.

(on when he became aware Derrick Henry would not play today)

Probably when the 90 minutes or 60 minutes comes out that someone says who our inactives are. You know, my job is to focus on being the left tackle. We've just got to be ready to go next week.

(on despite having a tough loss, still having an opportunity to gain a playoff berth)

Yeah, I mean, I said it was weird game. I am happy that we have next week to get in there and go win and go play. So, we have our work cut out for us. We have a big game at a place, historically, since I have been here haven't had a lot of success at and we need to go in there and win a game.

WIDE RECEIVER TAJAÉ SHARPE

(on how the Titans continue to fight to the end)

That's kind of been the mode of this team ever since I got here four years ago. Tough, physical, never quit. No matter what the situation is, I know every guy in this room is going to fight until its triple zeros on the clock. That's never a concern. We just have to do a better job of putting it together for four quarters.

(on the team's ceiling if the Titans make the playoffs)

There's no ceiling. At all. If there is, we're going to bust through it. I think this team can be as great as we want to be. We just have to go back to the drawing board, correct our mistakes, put it together, and get ready for Houston.

(on the offensive players stepping up in running back Derrick Henry's absence)

That's what this team is built on. Obviously, we had some key guys down today, but it's kind of a next man up mentality. When one of our soldiers goes down, the next man has to be just as ready as he was to come in and make some plays when their number is called.

(on what worked well for him today)

I just felt like the coaches called a play where I was able to find a way to get in the end zone. Ryan (Tannehill) made a heck of a play scrambling, both times. The first play was kind of a mess, and I just tried to find an open hole so he could see me. In the red zone play I saw him scrambling, and I just wanted to keep the play alive, and he found me in the back of the end zone.

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER DERICK ROBERSON

(on his performance today)

I was just telling Drew Brees I'm going to get to him. I told him after the game 'I got my first career sack against you,' and he told me good luck. All week we knew we could get after the O-line.

(on his first career sacks being recorded on Saints quarterback Drew Brees)

After I got the first one, I was like, 'Yeah, I need to get another one.' Drew Brees is a Hall of Famer. Anytime you can get to a Hall of Famer like that is a good day. I actually grew up being a Saints fan when Reggie Bush got drafted. So, I told him that, and he told me he was going to send me something.

(on being able to contribute as a young player)

It feels good to go in there and do anything I can do to help the team win.

(on if today's performance was a sign of things to come)

Oh yeah. Like my coach said, we just have to keep on going. This is just the start.

(on his progression from training camp to now)

It's just preparing every week in practice and every day, working on my fundamentals, learning the plays. Just being more of a pro, finding a daily routine, even on off days finding stuff that I know and to stick to it.

WIDE RECEIVER A.J. BROWN

(on being matched up with Saints cornerback Marshon Lattimore)

To be honest, we were going back and forth. I won some rounds, he won some. In my opinion, that’s probably one of the best cornerbacks in the league. When I had a chance, Ryan (Tannehill) didn’t look my way, but when he had me he kind of looked my way, so it was going tit-for-tat. But, I respect him and I learn from it. I love going against a guy like that. They show you what you are and where I want to be. I know these matchups are only going to get better.

(on what made his rushing touchdown succeed)

A lot of guys doing their job. A lot of guys going unnoticed. I got the touchdown, but a lot of guys were doing their job.

(on what happened to the offense after the first two touchdowns)

To be honest, I don’t know. It was a tough one.

(on the mindset heading into next week)

It’s do or die. The playoffs already started. We have to get this win.

(on wide receiver Tajaé Sharpe’s performance)

He played a really good game. He stepped up. It’s been a little tough for him, but he showed up today and I appreciated the attitude he came into the game with. I’m proud of him. He deserves everything he gets.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE JURRELL CASEY

(on what the Titans must do to win next week)

Go on and compete, or we won’t be able to last in the playoffs. We have to make sure to clean up the mistakes and get ready for a hard-fought challenge next weekend. Put us in a great position to win.

(on when the team learned that the Jets had beaten the Steelers today)

When we got into the locker room. I don’t think anyone was paying attention or focusing on that. We were trying to win this game and focus on that, but we didn’t get it done today. When we got the news everyone understood what time it was now.

(on Titans’ defensive breakdown in the second half to allow Drew Brees to play so well)

They started making plays. (Drew) Brees started making plays, and their guys started catching balls, and we could didn’t get to him as much as we did in the first half. We should have helped out on defense a little more. They started executing, and we weren’t.

(on playing the Texans for the second time in three weeks)

It’s not a disadvantage. It can be a disadvantage because you know each other so well, but at the end of the day it comes down to heart, pride and soul. It’s what it comes down to in a rivalry game, that’s what it is. No matter how many times we play them, we understand what the Titans versus Texans is. We played them every year, so playing them back-to-back, or playing them two weeks later, it really shouldn’t even matter. It’s still a rivalry game. This just gives us motivation, to know we still have a chance to go fight in the playoffs.

(on getting his 50th career sack today for the Titans)

It feels amazing. To have 50 sitting on my career is definitely amazing, but I’m not done yet. Got plenty more to keep on coming. 50 is just a sweet number.

SAFETY KEVIN BYARD

(on the performance of Saints quarterback Drew Brees and the New Orleans offense)

I thought during the first half we were assaulting in the middle of the pocket. We were getting him off his spot. He was making some big plays. Roby (Derick Roberson) had a couple of sacks as well, so he played pretty great. I think in the second half he got into a little groove, and he was able to make some hell of a throws and things. His guys made some great catches. A couple of my targets that I gave up were some great catches. It’s just where you win some and lose some. I feel like I wanted to get the ball out, but it is what it is. I feel like the guys battled their tails off, and we tried to get ourselves back in the game. He’s made a living, and that’s why he’s going into the Hall of Fame, because he’s a great quarterback.

(on the Titans controlling their own destiny to get into the playoffs)

The season is not over. We feel like the playoffs have started already for us. We win, we keep moving. You lose, you go home. So, that’s kind of the mentality of the team right now.

(on what the Titans must do differently this time around playing Houston next week)

First off, we definitely have to contain No. 10 (DeAndre Hopkins). Try to eliminate him as much as we can from the game, and try to keep No. 4 (QB Deshaun Watson) in the pocket. Don’t let him scramble around and make those big plays in the pass game. Stop the run. We’re just going to have to play great complementary football to beat those guys, especially down in Houston. I think it’s going to be a pretty good environment. We have to do what we need to do to play big time football.

CORNERBACK LOGAN RYAN

(on the Titans’ defensive effort today)

Really, we were too aggressive the last two minutes of the first half, and that got them a score. Then they came out the second half, with a combination of deeper throws and some shorter throws. So, I mean, you are not going to hold those guys to seven points or whatever. They are a good opponent and a good offense, and they’ve been on a roll. I think we took it to them. I think we made a blueprint on how to compete with them, we just failed to finish in the end. Some poor field position, some poor unfortunate calls out there. Some of the stuff didn’t break our way, and they had some good field position. Short fields, and he (Drew Brees) is efficient in the red zone. So, that’s what he does best.

(on Titans’ playoff possibilities despite the loss today to New Orleans)

We knew regardless we were going to do everything we could to win this game. Regardless the season wasn’t over today, so its win and we’re in. So our playoffs start next week, and we have to beat teams like Houston to do anything in the playoffs anyway. I mean, the playoffs start this week. It was a good battle, we wanted to win, did everything we could to win. Hats off to Michael Thomas, he’s

a good player. Hats off to Drew Brees. I think they saw – we came and competed today, and they had some more points at the end. But it’s now all about the Houston Texans, and getting in the playoffs. I’m pretty frustrated that we didn’t win today, but I have a playoff game next week. If you told us from this time last year that we win and we’re in, in Week 17, no matter how you get there, no matter what it is. Against Houston – we played them and lost to them by three. We want that situation, everyone in this locker room wants that situation. So, I’m excited. It’s going to be a great week. Santa is going to hit our house, and I’m going to have a fun game out there in Houston, and an opportunity to get us in the playoffs.

(on playing Texans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins next week and the performance of Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas today)

He’s (DeAndre Hopkins) going to get his targets. They are going to throw him the ball every play, fifteen times a game. So, he gets ten catches for 80 yards, and you have to keep him in front of you. I think we did a good job with that last week for the most part. We just have to keep stringing them (good plays) together, to get them on third down. The field position was unfortunate today. Make them kick field goals instead of touchdowns. KV (Kenny Vaccaro) had a perfect play to the pocket, but the guy caught the ball. That’s football, some bad breaks and some turnovers. It didn’t fall our way today, but Michael Thomas is going to get his targets and get his catches, and you just have to limit the damage.

SAINTS HEAD COACH SEAN PAYTON

(opening statement)

It was good to get a win be it we started off slow, did a few things to get that momentum shifted. Special teams gave us some good returns today, and offensively we got going, and I think we played a lot better in the second quarter and better in the second half. It was a good win to get on the road against a good football team we played today.

(on Saints running back Alvin Kamara’s performance today)

He’s playing well and he is doing an outstanding job. It was a great check by Drew (Brees), that one play, his first touchdown, was an audible. I think more than anything else, it is just to continue to find the spots that we feel like he does well, and there’s a lot of them in the run game, the passing game. He played well. He is very unselfish and it is good to see him have some success. I thought some of his plays really helped us. We had him open in a few other plays in the passing game, but that all being said, I am glad he is on our team.

(on how injuries to the secondary impacts the team)

You lose a corner, you move some guys around, move some guys up obviously. With P.J. (Williams) outside, we ended up moving a safety. We moved P.J. back, Patrick Robinson, and fortunately we are deep there. We knew going in with three safeties active we might have to have a backup plan, and sure enough we needed to.

(on Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas’ record breaking season)

I really wasn’t aware of it until about two seconds ago. We are talking about what, season catches? I am excited for him and I am sure he would say the same thing. More importantly, it was about getting the win. We got a lot of double on third downs, they did a pretty good job of trying to take him away. We were able to find some of his touches in the slot. That’s a great accomplishment. Marvin Harrison was a fantastic player.

(on the forced fumble and play by Saints defensive back C.J. Gardner-Johnson)

It was good catch, it was a good tackle, and we are gravitating to where we are moving the head from the hit. That was a good play by him. He’s been smart. He’s played well. I like what we have in the player. I like the way he competes. He is around the ball and man he loves playing football, so he is doing well.

(on if he was surprised that the Titans continued to kick to wide receiver/return specialist Deonte Harris after he was having success in the return game today)

Well they finally – in the kickoff hit one, and D (Deonte Harris) ends up with it. Look, those returns were something and the field position it put us in was really good, and it had a lot to do with us winning the game.

(on the performance of tight end Jared Cook in recent weeks)

Yeah, you guys saw him in training camp. He’s got such good run skills after the catch, he’s a big target. The play that he and Drew (Brees) made today for the first touchdown was significant. It was good to see him – again, if we’re getting doubled outside over to the X, there’s times where he’s just going to have the single.

(on the balance between sacks and coverage sacks)

I want to see the tape before – I mean, I thought that they’ve got a good rush plan. We gave up a couple twists and got edged on a few so we’ll see.

(on if the offensive penalties today were discouraging)

Yeah, discouraging, and yet there were a handful that I was able to get a chance to see, and there were a few of them that – I mean, they are what they are. So, anything else?

(on the potential of the offense with players like running back Alvin Kamara, tight end Jared Cook and wide receiver Michael Thomas)

Each week the job is to understand the game and then understand what we have to do to win the game. They do a good job of mixing up some zone and man looks, a little bit different than what we’ve seen throughout the year. So, on a short week, that was a concern of mine in preparation. Are we going to be able to recognize some of these things? We got a couple of corner blitzes today. I knew we were going to get some zone pressure on third down, and fortunately we were able to solve some of those puzzles in the second half.

(on the play where Head Coach Mike Vabel challenged the call which resulted in giving the Saints extra time)

Well, we went through a few different things there. I’m trying to think of the call he challenged. Whether it was an interception or incomplection, yeah. You’re waiting. We talked about a few different things. You got a corner blitz coming off of that clock stoppage and we were working an individual with Mike (Michael Thomas), and sure enough here came the corner, and Drew (Brees) kind of – there’s a safety coming over the top and those guys were able to make a play that converted the third down. But yeah, when you have a little bit more time like that, you go through and you kind of rehash some thoughts as to what we want to do on that call. So, it gave us a little bit more time than normal.

(on watching other games around the league that impact the Saints’ seeding)

Well, we’re flying after this and then tomorrow we’re in on Carolina. It’s hard to watch games, honestly. The players will have a chance to but we’ll see when we get home.

(on if the Saints looked passed the Titans and have mentally been on Week 17)

Yeah, look, the concern coming into this game was they do enough things that are different, they’re out of the conference, and then you’re coming off of a Monday night game and are you going to be able to simulate them all, while getting your guys rested. We felt like we were going to need their legs, and we were going to have to back off practice and spend more time with some walkthroughs. So, can we prepare to play this team the way we want to and still come in here with enough energy? I felt like we didn’t to start but we found it shortly into the game and that was encouraging.

(on the character of this team after the highs and lows of the season)

Yeah, they have, and yet we still have to clean up a few things. I told them just two minutes ago, ‘Hey, you have to believe that from week to week you can improve,’ and this is a team that still can improve, and I think that’s going to be important when we get into the tournament with better teams, single elimination, and we’re going to have to be better in some areas, lot of areas.

SAINTS QUARTERBACK DREW BREES

(on if he got a sense on if wide receiver Michael Thomas was emotional after breaking the record, or if he was laid back as always)

I wouldn’t say laid back is Mike T (Michael Thomas). I think he is a fierce competitor and there is a great sense of urgency with everything that Mike does. We see that on the practice field every day. We see it in the locker room. He is also a fun-loving guy. He loves his teammates. He loves the locker room. He will be the first one to tell you – he said it after the game – “I love this team, I love playing for this team and I love battling for this team.” I think he just has an engine and he has a fire that is pretty rare. I think we all pride ourselves in being competitors and preparing the best we can to go out and perform on Sunday’s. But, he’s pretty rare. He’s very rare in the way that he goes about his business each and every week. Everything you see on Sunday is what we see literally on every rep in practice. There is not a single rep that’s an “I’m just going to take it easy this time,” kind of thing. He is full go all of the time preparing himself for that championship rep, because I think in his mind that is how he is getting ready to play on Sunday. That is how he is getting ready for bigger games down the road. He is always putting himself in that position.

(on the first touchdown pass to Jared Cook jumpstarting the offense)

I thought that was really important. Obviously, they jumped out with two consecutive touchdown drives and we kept shooting ourselves in the foot offensively with our first four or five possessions it felt like. It was penalties, just miscues and not very good execution. Yeah, that was big. I think that obviously gave us a lot of momentum going into the half and then we came out with the ball on the first possession in the second half and took the lead right there and never looked back.

(on if he checked to that particular play on the touchdown to Jared Cook)

Yeah, we checked into it. I felt like we had an opportunity to throw a seam ball to Jared (Cook) and he made a great catch, great run and a great block by AK (Alvin Kamara) outside on the corner that kind of sprung him down the sideline.

(on if he checked to the Alvin Kamara touchdown run as well)

Yeah, we were checking passes and checking runs and scoring touchdowns. That’s good stuff.

(on if Michael Thomas addressed the locker room following the game)

Obviously, he got a game ball. It turns out you get game balls when you catch 145 passes in a season. He got a game ball and he got a chance to tell the team how much he loved being a part of it. It is always great to hear guys say that.

(on if he knew that Michael Thomas needed one more reception to break the record)

I didn’t. I knew that I had thrown a lot of balls to him and I knew that he needed 11, so I felt like he was close to it or eclipsing it on one of those.

(on if he can put into perspective how hard it is to catch 145 passes in a season)

If you break it down it is almost 10 catches per game through 15 games. That’s remarkable especially with as much as teams target him and have a plan for him. Again, testament to his ability to get open and his desire and his work ethic.

(on if it was good to see running back Alvin Kamara have a big game, especially the long run for a touchdown)

Absolutely. That run and then the tough goal line run. He was great all day.

(on if not scoring a touchdown since week three was starting to weigh on Alvin Kamara)

In a way it weighs on all of us because he is such a big part of this offense and what we do. He is highly productive. Typically, with that comes touchdowns. That is a product of the productivity. But for one reason or another he just hasn’t gotten in the endzone for a while. But I hope we broke that seal and obviously he got in twice today and hopefully there is a lot more where that came from.

(on Alvin Kamara’s block downfield on the touchdown by Jared Cook)

That’s the thing – he is a team player. For a guy like me, quarterbacks are used to throwing touchdown passes. But if I get to hand it off five or six times a game and watch our running backs go into the endzone, I will be the happiest guy out there, too. I don’t care if I throw it or not. So, what’s my job – to put everybody in the best position to succeed. And then Alvin (Kamara) doing whatever he can to put the offense in the best position to succeed and getting some of those hard yards that doesn’t result in him getting the touchdown, but Mike Thomas got it, or Latavius Murray got it, or Jared (Cook) got it, and it was because of his block that Jared got it. That’s good football.

(on the second touchdown pass to Jared Cook)

I trust him. I tried to throw it where he could get it and the other guy couldn’t.

(on Mike Thomas’ intensity in practice)

You will definitely get a helmet slam once every week or two. Whether he didn’t run a route just like he wanted to, or the ball wasn’t where it was supposed to be. Rarely does he get a hand on it and not bring it in. Again, he just has high expectations for himself and everyone around him. It makes everyone better.

(on defensive back C.J Gardner-Johnson’s confidence and the play to force the fumble in the fourth quarter)

Yeah, he has a ton of swagger. I love that about him. I think that is what makes him a great player and you love having him on your team for that reason. I think not only does that lead to plays like that, but I think it gets everybody hyped around him, too. He is one of those guys that has a way of just getting guys excited.

SAINTS RUNNING BACK ALVIN KAMARA

(on how it felt to get back into the end zone)

It felt good.

(on if there was a specific play that energized him today)

You know, we got, I think, we have the best O-line in football. So great looks, great blocks outside. It was just a perfect storm, I guess.

(on Saints tight end Jared Cook's first touchdown reception)

It was a big touchdown, I think we needed a spark and he provided that. It was a big play. I think we kind of got juiced up after that.

(on what today's win does for the team moving forward)

I mean, we're still not playing our best football. Shooting ourselves in the foot, a lot of penalties offensively. We've got to start faster than that, but, you know, a win is a win. We found a way to get some rhythm and get some momentum going. The defense did what they had to do, gave us some life and we fed off of it.

(on his first touchdown run)

I mean, we worked that during the week. So, I mean, if he calls it, I know he sees something that he likes. So, when he called it, I just stayed true to the read. Terron (Armstead) and those guys on the front side did what they had to do. Back side got their blocks in, you know? It was wide open for me, all I had to do was run.

(on running out of bounds in the first half when he may have had room to run)

I just thought the guy was on me, so I ran out of bounds.

(on getting back some burst since his injury)

Just to get that burst back, just to get it back going. Like I said last week, I think it's a race every week to get as close to 100 percent as you can. So, that's what I've been trying to do.

(on making a defender miss a tackle in the third quarter)

Yeah, it felt good. It felt good. I think that was one of those plays that I'm used to having that I just haven't had, you know, these last couple of weeks. I think just a little bit healthier, feeling better.

(on scoring a touchdown for the first time since Week 3)

We’re wining still, so, you know, it is what it is. I mean, I would like to score, but, you know, the wins are coming. I'm not really a selfish player. It is what it is. As long as we're having success as a team, I'm good.

(on making plays to help the team win without scoring personally)

As a football player, you're one of 11 guys on the field. So, I mean, every play you have a job to do. Even if I'm not scoring or touching the ball, I mean, I have a job to do. Whether it's to block somebody, whether it's to hold a flat defender for, you know, a route up over me. Whether it's to be the play fake, I have a job to do. So, as long as I'm executing my assignment, I'm fine.

(on playing with Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas)

I mean, it's the same thing when you guys ask about Drew Brees. Mike (Michael Thomas) is Mike. It's not anything out of the ordinary for him. He works hard, he wants the ball, he demands the ball. When he gets the ball in his hands he makes plays, so he deserves it.

(on his touchdown run)

It was great blocking, you know, so, like I said, all I had to do is run.

(on the Saints offense finding a groove the past few weeks)

Yeah, I mean, this game was sloppy. A lot of penalties, like I said. Shot ourselves in the foot. We’ve just got to focus on attention to detail and clean up some of the messes we're creating on our own, because I feel like when we play clean nobody can stop us. We're stopping ourselves with first-and-20 and things like that.

(on if he thinks about the potential of the Saints offense)

Like I said, you’ve got to limit the mistakes and the errors, and, I think we can go as far as we want to go.

SAINTS WIDE RECEIVER MICHAEL THOMAS

(on how it feels to break the NFL's single-season receptions record)

To be honest, it doesn't really mean nothing. We got the victory. We're trying to play and go to a championship right now, and at the end of the season we'll look up and see all the things we accomplished. But right now we're focused on one common goal, and that's a championship.

(on moving into the slot position at times today against the Titans)

Just figuring it out through the course of the game. Taking what they're giving you, and learning how to execute and split doubles, and create separation, and just preparation throughout the week. Talking to Drew (Brees), asking him what he likes and what he sees, and just trying to be absolutely where he wants me at the right time.

(on his level of respect for Marvin Harrison)

Oh yeah, most definitely. Tremendous player, Hall of Fame player. I actually know his son, who's actually going to Ohio State and has a bright future as well. A guy that I got to know this offseason, who is going to be real special and I'm excited for him to go to Ohio State. Marvin, there's not many bad things you could say about him. He's a real professional, the way he went about his business. Just to be in this position right now, it's a blessing. I don't take it for granted. But, the fact that we still have more goals as a team as far as like, not the individual stuff that comes along with it. I would be selfish to be like, 'Oh, you know, I just caught all these passes and did all this.' Ultimately, I was catching passes to win the game to help my team to be in the position we're in now, so I just want to keep catching passes and end up where we want to be.

(on setting a single-season NFL record for receptions)

We're just so locked in and focused on playing that perfect game, winning as many games as we can and staying in the moment. So, it's hard. I broke the record and caught a lot of passes, but it's just like, what I was doing that for, was for my team. So, I wasn't really looking at the stat sheet, but I was making sure I caught the passes and added value to my team. That's ultimately what I'm here to do, and I feel like as long as I continue to do that I'll catch more passes and break more records.

(on his touchdown today)

Just accountability and our preparation and our coaching. We have tremendous coaches who allow us to play fast on Sundays, that put us in position to make big plays to move the chains, and credit to those guys. Credit to all my teammates, honestly, for the record. It was a contributed effort they all played a part in. Like, I couldn't catch a pass if Ryan (Ramczyk), Terron (Armstead), Larry (Warford), (Andrus) Peat, (Nick) Easton – those guys, my teammates, I love them. They honestly put me in position to make those plays. They gave the quarterback enough time. Credit to picking up protections by the running backs, to the receivers clearing out space, to Teddy Bridgewater to Taysom (Hill). I could go down the whole list and thank all my teammates. To the defense, they gave us the ball back and gave us possessions to make those catches. It's all complementary football.

(on his plans for the recording-breaking football)

Like I said, I haven't really, like, taken it all in yet. I'm just happy for the victory and to be moving in the right direction playing for a one or two seed.

(on going around to his teammates following his record-breaking catch)

Oh yeah, I always do that. You guys probably just caught it there because of what just happened, but I always like to encourage my teammates and let them know – just thank them, and make sure we're all locked in and we're staying focused, and doing the things we're supposed to do and encouraging them. Just things team players do.

(on breaking the NFL's single-season receptions record)

The record, it's broken and it's going to be extended next week. That's all I'll say. Like, we have a big game coming next week. I don't really want to talk too much about the individual stuff, man. I'm blessed to be in this position to be able have the opportunity to break that record, to be with the names of those guys. We can have this interview at the end of the season, you know, after we look at all the individual stuff. Right now, I'm playing for my team.

(on what motivates him after signing a large contract in the offseason)

First and foremost, I don't pay attention to other guys and what they're doing, and all the stuff they have going on. I just try to stay in my lane, you know, maximize my potential and always try to get better. Find ways to enhance my weaknesses, and improve the things I'm really good at so that no one can take those away from me, and keep my blinders on and win games. That's the best feeling at the end of the day. wins, The win column, adding up the win column.

SAINTS TIGHT END JARED COOK

(on erasing a 14-point deficit to get the win)

It was a rough start with a lot of penalties. We just had to keep fighting, they don't stop the game at halftime. You just have to be resilient and keep going and that's exactly what we did.

(on Saints running back Alvin Kamara's block that helped spring his first touchdown)

It was huge, and I thanked him a boatload for it. Kevin Byard was the single safety, and he was able to get in front of him and kind of set the block up inside. He stayed on him the whole time. I appreciate that AK (Alvin Kamara).

(on if his first touchdown helped ignite the offense and if Drew Brees checked to that play)

I felt like it was something we needed. Penalties kind of set us back early in the game and we just needed a spark, and Drew (Brees) found me on the backside hash. He checked to it because they were all up with two deep safeties back. He saw that and knew that the Mike (Michael Thomas) wouldn't be able to get back in time.

(on what the team learned from the win)

Coming back from a 14-point deficit is not easy and that's not the position you want to be in. It's important for us to come out and start fast, and keep the momentum.

(on how perfect the throw was on his second touchdown)

Yeah, Drew (Brees) trusts me man, and he threw it. That's the first thing he said to me on the sidelines, 'I trust you man, so I'm glad you went up and made the play.' That's something that we've talked about all season, that if I need you to be there for me I'm just going to put it up.

SAINTS SAFETY C.J. GARDNER-JOHNSON

(on his forced fumble that helped seal the win)

I wasn't trying to hurt the guy, honestly I was just trying to make a good football play and the ball came out. I read his eyes the whole way. When you stare a receiver down, for like a million years, everybody should know where you're going. But like I said, I didn't try to hurt anybody. I was just being a football player. I try to protect myself because I don't want to go in head first and hurt anybody, that's not my intention. My intention is to jar the ball loose with a shoulder or hand. You have to respect players. I walked over to him and shook his hand after the play.

(on if he thought the forced fumble was his best play of the year)

No, I've got way more from where that came from. I'm young, I'm still learning. One thing about me is I'm not one of these guys that gets caught up in one play. I've got another game to play. We've got another game to play. I'm just ready to get in on Monday and watch the film on Carolina, and hopefully we can get this No. 1 seed. That's all we are hoping for right now.

(on what this game says about the Saints secondary with a lot of moving parts and players filling in)

We’ve got a lot of guys that have played a lot of football. You’ve got to get thrown out there and they know that. You just have to go in and put your nose in that book, and listen to your teammates. There wasn’t any fall off, we just have to move some people around and keep pushing.

(on if he looks at his starting opportunity due to injury as an audition to be a full-time starter in the NFL)

It’s not an audition. I just prepare like a starter. My position coach tells me every day, ‘Prepare like a starter. You never know.’ This is a league of changes, so you have to be able to adapt to change.

SAINTS LINEBACKER A.J. KLEIN

(on how impressed he’s been with guys stepping up and filling in for injured teammates)

I’ve been impressed, especially with guys going down and bringing in new faces to the building that haven’t been with us all year. It goes to show that the coaching and players help bring everyone up. It’s a war of attrition and a long season.

(on forcing a turnover after the Saints failed to convert on fourth down)

It’s huge momentum. There is obviously going to be ups and downs in the game, so it’s all about how you react. I can’t say enough about this D-line today either. I don’t know how many times we sacked them today, but they were putting pressure on (Ryan) Tannehill all day and keeping him uncomfortable. When plays need to be made, it seems like this defense steps up.