

October 3, 2012



An Interview With:

FRANK SPAZIANI BOSTON COLLEGE

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, we're out of conference. We're going up to Army. Out of conference, in conference, we're at a point where we need a victory, and it's going to be a hard-fought game up there. We fully understand the problems that go with playing an academy, especially at their place.

With that, questions.

Q. To make that key switch from being the team that throws scares into people and hangs with people for so long to being the team that comes away with a victory, what's the key to making that switch?

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, you know, once again, I don't know if we've thrown any scares. Are you talking about us throwing scares into people?

Q. Yeah, you've been hanging with people, hanging with people.

FRANK SPAZIANI: You know, and that is one way to look at it. But the way to look at it is that we've lost all three of them, and that's really the bottom line. I mean, they're L's and there will always be L's. We have to understand that that's who we are, what the reason is and why we haven't been able to turn those into W's, and that's what we're trying to do this week.

And there's always a fine line there, and I think we're making progress, but every week is different and unique, and there's certainly a lot of mental aspects to it.

Q. So what is the reason? What is the why? How do you jump over that fine line, I guess?

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, once again, it's all about execution. We haven't been able to make the plays that will turn an L into a W, and it's about

practicing, it's about commitment, it's about getting the guys in the right spots. It's multi-layered. It's just not, okay, now we're going to do this. It's a process that has to be done. There's experience that comes into it. There's a lot of things, and certainly the way we're practicing has been better, but once again, we haven't done it yet, and we have to continue to work and it will happen.

Q. It seems like tackling in general has been a little down this season during college football. I was just wondering if you could address that and how much work you do on the art of tackling in practice.

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, you know, that's an excellent question. You know, we try to do as much as we can, and I think what has happened in football now is it's become really a multi-layered type of game offensively. There's a lot of things coming at you, and there's -- the tendency is to get away from your fundamentals and make sure you're in position to do certain things. And you have to balance that up with, well, you're in the right position but you've still got to fundamentally block and tackle. It always comes down to that.

We're no different than other people, and certainly ability has everything to do with it. But we spend a lot of time on tackling. Once again, once you're into the season, you're more Xs and Os as certainly the season goes on.

Q. Aaron Smith, he's from West Point, your wide receivers coach. What has he meant to your staff in the first year?

FRANK SPAZIANI: Oh, Aaron has done a great job for us. He's brought a little fresh approach to our wide outs, he's brought some toughness to them. He's been a breath of fresh air. He's a young, energetic coach, and it certainly has transpired and shown up in how the performance of those players have been over the first four games.



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Q. How unique is Army's offense to prepare for this week?

FRANK SPAZIANI: It's as unique as it gets. I mean, there's only a few people in the country running that type of offense, and it presents a practice problem, execution with your scouts and try to get the proper look at it. But you can't really duplicate it, so it's a major problem and a major concern, which we've been through before, though.

Q. I wanted to ask you, pretty much every coach that plays Army talks about how they respect the Cadets and it's a great opportunity to play at West Point, but they also say how tough it is to prepare for Army and how difficult it is with the offense. Can you talk about how you balance that out when you make a schedule and decide you're going to play West Point or any of the academies? How do you balance the decision to play Army or any of the academies when the coaches and the players respect the chance to go to the academy and what all the kids are going through, but at the same time --

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, I'll be honest with you. That is done on an administrative level. They give me the schedule and I play it. I certainly-- having coached at an academy, I certainly understand exactly who the individuals are that we're playing, and I certainly understand the coaches there. The kids are kids, and they have a special interest. But the coaches are the guys that have always really impressed me at the academies because they do a fantastic job. Fantastic.

Q. You're talking about how unique the Army offense is. How similar is it to the one you'll see when you play Georgia Tech?

FRANK SPAZIANI: Similar. Similar. You know, it's similar. I mean, that's the best way -- that's the only thing I can say. It's different; these guys have as -- I don't know if you heard my answer to the last question. These guys have unique problems that they have to address, so they do some different things to help themselves and help their players. But it's very similar.

Q. I was just wondering, coaches always say having only one week to prepare for a unique offense like that is tough. Does playing Army now, will that help you two weeks

down the road getting ready for Georgia Tech do you think?

FRANK SPAZIANI: Some of the aspects of it, yeah. We're not thinking like that, but once again, as I said, some of the plays are very similar, and some of the things we have to practice against are going to be the same. Yes, it helps.

Q. Alex Amidon just seems to be getting better as the season goes along. What are his best attributes as a receiver? He's obviously getting open and they're finding him.

FRANK SPAZIANI: Well, this is his third year; that's the first thing. And he's made progress every year. He works extremely hard. He spends as much time as needed in the film room, and he works hard on the practice field. He obviously has a gift, and certainly Doug (Martin) has done a great job of utilizing him and putting him in the right spots where Chase can get him the ball.

I don't know if he has any unique characteristic other than -- well, he works harder than most football players, and he's got the ability. So that's usually an elixir for success.

Q. He's not the biggest guy, 5'11", 195, but obviously that doesn't hold him back any.

FRANK SPAZIANI: No, once again, he works hard. He's got speed. He's just really a neophyte who's just scratching the surface for his ability. We would have loved to have had the opportunity to red shirt him and have him only be a red-shirted sophomore now, but that's not the case. His best football is ahead of him, and certainly the offensive scheme has helped him.

An Interview With:

DABO SWINNEY CLEMSON

DABO SWINNEY: Good morning, everybody. Proud of our guys for getting it done up at Boston College. That was a really big win for us, and got another big challenge this week with one of our biggest rivalry games that we have with Georgia Tech. It's always a very tough game for us. We've had some really close games and hard-fought games but have not won many of them the last few years here.

Big, big game. It's good to be back at home. We've got a nice little home stretch coming up and an open date next week. Looking forward to getting back out in front of the home folks.

We're going to have to play very well. This is a team that I know they're coming off a tough loss to Middle Tennessee, but they've had two overtime losses at Virginia Tech and then against Miami. I think everybody knows the kind of team that Georgia Tech is and the kind of coaching staff that they have.

We're going to have to play a great game. Obviously their scheme presents many challenges, and we're off to a good week as far as preparation. But look forward to getting out there Saturday and hopefully playing our best game.

Q. I was just wondering if you could address in general why tackling has been so poor in college football this season, and how much do you work on the art of tackling in practice during the year?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, well, I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of theories out there. I think the game has changed, for one, and especially with the younger kids. I mean, I've got three sons, eighth grade, seventh grade and third grade, and they all play ball, and it's -- when I was growing up, I'm not sure what your age is, but when I was growing up, we -- you didn't have all these flag leagues and all that kind of stuff. I mean, you played and you tackled every day. I mean, that's just what you did.

Even in high school, we tackled every day. Even in college. When I was playing in college, our quarterback was live every day. I mean, that's just -- we were live all the time.

But things were different back then. Your scholarship numbers were more, and I think as -- and it's the same thing in the NFL. You see the same thing. The NFL, I think they're only in pads maybe once a week, and so a residual effect of that, or a trickle-down effect of less live practicing is the tackling. Same thing in spring ball; when I was going through college, every spring practice was live, every day. You had to come out and you played until the guy was on the ground.

It's just different now. Now you have -- you've got to have a certain amount of days in shorts, you've got to have -- I mean, you have to have -- you can only have three scrimmages. You just get less work at playing the game full speed. And it's the same thing in your fall camp.

Again, I'll use myself as an example again. We had two weeks of two-a-days every day. I'm not an advocate for all of that, I'm just trying to answer your question. I'm just saying that now the first five days are one practice and three of them are in shorts and you can't go live and then you can't have back-to-back two-a-days. There's a lot of reasons why the game has changed a little bit.

Now, they've tried to make the game safer is a reason for a lot of these changes. But what happens is when you don't get to play this game live and full speed often, and then all of a sudden you show up on game day, it's just hard to simulate, so it takes a little bit longer, I think, for people to really improve. I think it takes a little bit longer for guys to really get in the groove. And I think you'll see teams that -- you'll see the tackling improve as the season goes.

And then just the way the youth of America is today, when what they're being taught in middle schools and high schools, the high school coaches have had to adapt and change because there's so much competition out there for their players. You know, lacrosse, soccer, you have all these things that are pulling players, and so I think coaches have evolved, and they've had to change the game a little bit.

All of that, I guess, is a roundabout way of answering your question on maybe why tackling is not as good, and very few schools practice live during the week. Now, we've changed that. We have a very young defense, and in fact, we started last week, just Tuesday and Wednesdays, we are going live. I've never done that. We've always pretty much been a -- we'll have a period or so, but we've pretty much been a thud team, full-speed, form them up, but we try to stay on our feet. And most people, that's what they do.

But we're so young in so many areas, we've just kind of bit the bullet and have started practicing live on Tuesdays and Wednesdays with our defense to try to improve in that area.

Q. I actually wanted to ask something a little similar. I was looking at scoring in the league and across the country watching some of the video game scores go up. I know it goes in cycles. Are we going through a cycle now where the offenses maybe because of tempo, spread, whatever, seem to have the upper hand over the defensive?

DABO SWINNEY: Probably, and I think you'll see all that stuff change again at some point. I mean, that's just the way it is.

You know, and that was a crazy game. You've got to give some credit to some of those offensive people, too, now. You're seeing some very good quarterbacks and a lot of great skill, and the skill development has just become so refined over the past several years because of basically the 7-on-7 teams that you have. These guys practice year-round with that stuff now, and it's just second nature.

So that's part of it. But I think that stuff is definitely cyclical, and I don't have any doubt that if you're going to be a great team and you're going to have a great program, in my opinion -- and listen, I've made my living coaching offense forever, but I believe with all my heart that defense has got to be the staple. It's got to be the consistent thing amongst your program. And not that you won't have some ebbs and flows in years here and there, but overall, I think you've got to be great on defense to consistently win at a high level.

Q. Does the fact, though, that offenses are so explosive and so good now change the way you coach in terms of you get a lead, you'd better not sit on it, you'd better keep attacking even with a two-touchdown lead or something like that, don't get conservative because you know the other team can put up points quickly?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I mean, all those are factors you're always thinking about, but I think the more important thing is whatever you're committed to, that's what you need to do. Whoever you are, whatever your philosophy is, then just be who you are. But you always have to react to what the game situation is. You have to have that flexibility to realize, hey, you know what, we're in a situation here where we've got control of this game; maybe we're an up-tempo team, but listen, let's slow it down.

In fact, we did that up in Boston this past weekend. Most of the fourth quarter we were in a different mode than what we would normally play in because we had a 17-point lead or 14-point lead, and the clock was totally against them. We didn't execute very well because we ended up fumbling the ball and not getting a fourth and inch, so we made it a little bit more interesting than it needed to be.

But that's, I think, again, be who you are, but you have to have flexibility within your system

to exercise common sense because of the situation of the game.

Q. I think I read or saw, or I forget where I figured it out, but am I correct in saying that Coach (Paul) Johnson is someone you've particularly gotten to know and have been visiting with in the time you've been a head coach?

DABO SWINNEY: Did you say Coach Johnson?

Q. Right, right.

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, Paul and I are friends and get along very well. In fact, since I've come into the league as a head coach, he's been one of those guys that's been very gracious to me and insightful. He's been around a long time. He's been a very, very successful college football coach, and I've got a lot of respect for him and the tremendous job that he's done everywhere he's been, and especially the job he's done at Georgia Tech.

But yeah, we get along fine.

Q. You mentioned he's been insightful with you. Is there anything you've been able to learn from him that's helped you?

DABO SWINNEY: No, those are all just private things, private conversations that we've had. But I've always enjoyed spending time with him. You know, he's got, again, a good understanding of the business. He's got a good understanding of the game. You know, he's very down to earth, and again, has been one of those guys that, as I've gotten to know all the head coaches throughout this league, he's been a good guy and a guy that I've enjoyed getting to know.

An Interview With:

JIMBO FISHER FLORIDA STATE

JIMBO FISHER: We've had a very good week of practice. We'd better because NC State does an outstanding job. We've come off a very tough road battle with South Florida, which I knew it would be; intrastate game, very emotional game.

They had dropped a few that they weren't expected to, so they come out and really played very well in the game against us. Our kids did a great job of handling adversity on the road, were able to make the plays we needed to make. I think we learned a lot of lessons. I think it was very good to get that first road win. It's always very tough to win in someone else's stadium.

I think this week will be a great challenge. It's again, a double-whammy game; we've got an ACC game and an inter-divisional game, and you have a team that is very hungry, a team that is very talented in NC State, very well-coached, can throw it on offense, good special teams players, can run it on offense. And defense they give you multiple looks, multiple blitzes and then back out and do different things and are very well-coached. Mike Archer and his staff do a tremendous job on that side.

So we'll have to have our "A" game. It's a very tough place to play, it can be very loud, and I'm sure they'll have -- being a night game it's always a great environment, so we'll have our hands full. We'll bring our "A" game, we'll have to be very focused and play a great game.

I like the way our kids are working, I like the development we're making, and we continue to make little strides each week.

Q. I was just wondering if in general you could talk why you thought tackling was so poor this season and how much time you spend during practice working on the art of tackling each week.

JIMBO FISHER: We do. We do drills every day, which we do, and I think there's two main reasons. One, there's greater athletes playing college football than ever have before on offense -- defense has them, too, but offense has a lot more skill guys, and I think the game is spread out into space. And I think the more space you're in, that's what you -- and when you block -- the old days when you wadded them all up and you tried to block, you're trying to create a hole in space so a guy can get through and make a guy miss. I think the game has become a space game, and I think guys -- greater athletes in space, ball being delivered in so many different ways and getting good players out there, it's harder to tackle them. It's an art, and that's why on defense you have to constantly work at it and you have to gang and run to the football.

Q. My question is a little similar. I was looking at scores, some almost video game scores from the last weeks, and I was wondering, I know it goes in cycles, are we in a cycle where offenses are ahead of defenses right now?

JIMBO FISHER: I don't say that. I think it depends what part of the country you're in, I really believe that. I don't say that out of any disrespect. I think to be able to do the things you have to do to stop people, you have to have great defensive linemen and corners, and I think that's one thing in the southeast that we have large abundances of, that you're able to do that, when you're able to pressure the quarterback and get pressure on him and he can't hold the ball and throw all those balls when you're in no back and one back and all those things, I mean, to be able to pressure the quarterback and affect him, that's why the NFL is so different. That's why it's such a different game.

And then have the guys that are covering, I think -- I don't think some parts of the country have as many athletic defensive players as certain parts of the country do, for instance, us and the southeast. It's not a knock on anybody, it's just a fact; and look at the draft and look where the players come from. I think that's just a fact that makes a huge difference.

Q. The fact in the ACC there are a lot of good offenses, is that attributable to the fact that we're in a cycle with a lot of experienced quarterbacks?

JIMBO FISHER: Could be. When you've got a guy at quarterback and offenses can now do more, they can check and get in and out of things, you've got guys that can run and make plays, I think that definitely is -- I think the quarterback trend, when you study defenses and teams that play that are great defenses, really study how many great quarterbacks they've faced and guys that can do things.

I think that answers a lot of your questions, but I think that's a very good point, and we have a league that has a lot of excellent quarterbacks.

Q. If I can ask another question on tackling, I'm curious, if a team has a bad tackling game or if yours does, can you generally kind of trace it back to something, whether it was a poor week of practice or maybe a lack of energy or something like that?

JIMBO FISHER: Can be. Can be a lack of energy, could be the skill level of the other team, or it could be a game in which fundamentally you're out of place and not keeping -- you always hear me talk about keeping leverage on the ball. I think it's very easy in today's game to get out-leveraged in a lot of ways because of the way people do things, and I think that can cause you issues, and I think leverage on the football is critical, too, and then playing your role in defense and things that happen.

Q. Can it happen that you can have a bad week one week and then the next week you're actually tackling pretty well?

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, I think it does. It's like kids today are amazing because some days they can do the same -- take the same test in school and make an F one day and make an A the next day. I think it's a product of our society as far as focus, concentration, and the stress and strain in which a lot of these kids are under. I think it's different today, and I think that does affect you. I think the pressure in the media and the things that happen can also affect how they perform.

Q. For this not to be a shootout game this week, for this not to be a game where NC State is scoring as many points as they did against Miami last week, what does your defense need to do?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think, again, keep great leverage on the ball. I think we have to give multiple looks; I think we have to win the battle in the trenches; I think we have to be able to affect the quarterback in a very legal way and be able to put pressure. That's anybody. That's what you want to do. But you have to cover their guys. You're going to have to try to create different looks.

They have very good receivers, and (Mike) Glennon, you give him looks all day, he'll rip you apart. He can throw that football to all parts of the field, and I think you have to be dominant up front. I think we have to give multiple looks in the secondary to be able to cover, make tight windows to be able to throw and not allow them to run the football. If they can do both, we can be in trouble.

Q. Do you have to make any different preparations for a guy like Mike Glennon than possibly some other quarterbacks?

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, you'd better cover all inches of the field, short, deep. He does a great job of using his tight end. Some offenses don't use

tight ends or backs or certain receivers. He uses everybody, and I think that really has to bring your awareness up across the board as far as he can get the ball to all places of the field and does a tremendous job of that. You know, in your preparation as far as -- you've got to try to get him pressure and try to get him off his spots and be able to him move and do those things, but I think it's very critical that you have to be there and you have to give multiple different looks in the secondary because of his knowledge that -- when those guys have been around a long time that get the ball to all parts of the field, he's going to find those holes.

An Interview With:

RANDY EDSALL MARYLAND

RANDY EDSALL: Well, we're coming off a bye week where I thought that we were able to address some of the issues that we needed to address after the first four games, and looking forward to playing a really good and well-coached Demon Deacon team here on Saturday.

Q. I know you eased Kenny Tate in for a while last week and now it appears A.J. Henry is ready to get back in the mix. What's kind of a realistic play number or whatnot for where you see him right now and returning from the ankle?

RANDY EDSALL: Well, I don't know if I see him playing in the secondary at all this week. He's behind. We've got Matt Robinson and then also him and Sean Davis working this week. We'll have a better idea, but as long as Matt and Eric (Franklin) are healthy, I don't really see other safeties in there playing.

Q. I did some research, and I'm not sure I have it all in front of me, but it appears that you've been able to cut down penalties since your arrivals in College Park. I'm curious what kind of approach you've taken.

RANDY EDSALL: Well, what we try to do is just emphasize using good fundamentals and good techniques, and then during the preseason

we try to get the officials here as many times as we can and really just -- we have a saying in our locker room that the kids see every day, as they're in the locker room and as they go out to practice, penalties lose games. I've just always had a big emphasis that I think the more disciplined you are, the better fundamentally and the better technique that you use, penalties won't occur.

We're not a team that can play from behind the chains anyhow, so it's just always been an emphasis of doing things the right way and using good technique and fundamentals and understanding that, like I said, if you have a lot of penalties, that can cost you a game.

Q. You've got an offensive lineman, Justin Gilbert, who missed most of his sophomore year with a knee injury, most of his junior year with a knee injury, and he's back again and starting for you. Talk about how he's played and what he means to your offensive line.

RANDY EDSALL: Well, Justin is a guy who's a senior, fifth year senior, so any time you have somebody that's a fifth year senior, they're going to bring a level of experience and knowledge to your team. In Justin's case, he just doesn't have as much of that experience because he really hasn't played football in a year and a half due to all those injuries. You could see that he was a little bit rusty when he got back out there, but again, he's a guy that is a -- works hard. He's a guy that has ability, and he's somebody that has to continue to get better. You can see that he still has strides to go because he's been out of it for a year and a half, but he's making some strides.

And again, it gets back to the point that he's just got to play a little bit lower, and he's got to continue to be a better technician at that right tackle.

Q. What does it say about a guy with two devastating knee injuries like that who still wants to get back out there and go through the rehab and through the work and become a player again?

RANDY EDSALL: Well, I just think it shows his love for the game. I think it shows his love for his teammates and what the game of football means. I think that's why he decided to continue to pursue playing. Some guys might not continue to pursue playing, but like I said, he loves to play the game. Football is important to him, and his teammates are important to him.

Q. Can you give your quick evaluation of Perry Hills' first four games as quarterback?

RANDY EDSALL: Well, I feel that Perry has progressively gotten better with each game, and I think that that progression is going to continue to take place with the remaining games. And again, there's things that we've talked with him about and we've shown him on film where he needs to improve, and he's working very, very hard to improve in those areas.

So again, I just think that he's come a long way since the first game. But he also knows that he has to continue to work on some of the things that he didn't do so well in those first games, and he's trying to do that each and every day.

Q. Do you have a concern that starting a freshman quarterback might give prospective student athletes pause about committing to Maryland with maybe having to sit behind a guy for another three seasons?

RANDY EDSALL: No. I mean, the thing about -- with our program, it's competition. And again, you never know, also, and you hope it never happens, but with injuries. When you have injuries, that can be an issue, as well. And the thing that we are always going to do is we're always going to play the best guy, regardless of who it is. But no, I would hope that people would want to come and compete, and if they don't want to come and compete, you probably don't want them anyhow.

Q. After hanging with UConn and hanging with West Virginia, how are you going to jump over that fine line and get back to winning?

RANDY EDSALL: Well, what we've got to do is we've got to minimize the mistakes, and we've got to take advantage of scoring opportunities on offense when we cross the 50-yard line, and on defense we've got to minimize and get rid of the big plays against us. And the same thing with the kicking game.

If we do those things and we get everybody really just doing their job and taking care of their responsibilities, then I think what happens is we'll win those games and we won't be on that short end of the stick.

Q. Yesterday you talked about Mike Madaras, your new starting left tackle. What kind of kid is he? What kind of person have you gotten to know from recruiting and now his freshman year?

RANDY EDSALL: Well, Mike is a guy that's a neat guy to be around. He comes off as a little bit quiet, but when you have the opportunity to really sit down, he opens up, he's very intelligent. Again, he's a guy that comes from a really good high school football program at Good Counsel, coached by Bob Milloy. He's a guy that really, like I said, you like his effort, you like his tenacity. Again, he's picked up things really, really well, and now he's got to have that opportunity to start, and we just think that the more snaps that he gets, he's really going to develop into a really, really fine player.

But like I said, just his athletic ability, his tenacity, his feel for the game and the strength and all that stuff will continue to come. But he's just a good guy to have and a guy that's going to get better with each snap that he gets here the rest of the season.

Q. A follow-up on that question. Was it a tough decision for you to put two freshmen in there on the offensive line, or did they just make it too hard to keep them off the field right now?

RANDY EDSALL: No, it wasn't a tough decision. I think when you have a chance to see it every day like I have and then to see things in a game and then to see what I think can make us the most productive, you make those moves based on that film, on the video, in practice and those things. And I think we have got two guys with Michael and Andrew that I know this: We're going to get great effort from them. They're going to continue to develop and be really good guys and really good players.

So again, those are the decisions that you just have to make as a head coach that you feel that that's the best thing that you can do to help your team win and be successful.

Q. Just in general through the first couple games that you guys have played, what's your evaluation been of the pass protection?

RANDY EDSALL: Oh, we've got to get better, there's no doubt about that. That hasn't been to my liking, and we've given up way too many sacks. We've got to continue to work and

get better with the technique and making sure we don't make mental mistakes in terms of the protections and who we're supposed to block or the protection that we should be in. So no, we have got a lot of work to do, and that's something that we worked on last week, but we have got to continue to get that cleaned up.

I think that having Andrew (Zeller) and Mike (Madaras) in there, I think that'll help part of that, and everybody else has to do their job around them.

An Interview With:

TOM O'BRIEN NC STATE

TOM O'BRIEN: We're excited about the opportunity to compete against Florida State, who through the first five games of the year certainly is the best football team in this conference and deserved of their national ranking. When you're averaging 51 points a game and only giving up 11, it presents a lot of challenge.

We're excited about the opportunity to compete against them and look forward to the game on Saturday night.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about EJ Manuel, some of the growth you've seen over the last few years? He now is the all-time leader in the conference percentage wise, completion percentage. What makes a quarterback such an accurate quarterback like he is?

TOM O'BRIEN: Well, I think that the thing that aided him is, and it was always -- it's a blessing in disguise sometimes when you're a young guy that has to be forced into action because I think (Christian) Ponder went down a couple times and he had to get in game plays and he had those experiences. And certainly last year, his first full year as starter, he got better and better as time went on.

I think a lot of it has to do with -- what we've done with our quarterbacks, and we've had good quarterbacks through the years, is you have to make them successful. So I think Coach Fisher does a great job of understanding what his talents

are and what his abilities are and putting him in situations and throws where he can be successful, and I think that's what the goal of anybody who coaches a quarterback is.

So it's a combination of he has great talent, certainly you have to think that he does a good job off the field studying in preparation for a game, and he's been given throws and given opportunities to be successful.

Q. How much of this week is about figuring out how to slow down Florida State, and how much of it is just kind of improving your own selves and correcting some things from last week so it's not another shootout?

TOM O'BRIEN: Well, certainly Florida State presents all kinds of problems for you, and that's the biggest challenge of the week that we have in the coaches' meeting room is trying to figure out how we're going to put ourselves in position to try to stay with them.

I think as far as the team is concerned, the main problem I'm concerned with is their legs and their health. I mean, we played basically a four-hour game in 90-degree heat with humidity astronomical, too. So right now I think the physical fact of getting our legs back, because certainly if we're not quick -- if we're not as quick as we can be and as fast as we can be, it's going to be tough to stay up with the athletes that Florida State has.

Q. But if you are kind of in good shape, do you think, I have the horses to be in a shootout game with FSU?

TOM O'BRIEN: No, we don't have the horses to be in a shootout game. I don't think that's ever the case. But we are going to find out on Saturday night.

Q. There's been some talk that tackling through the season doesn't seem to be as good across the board, and I'm curious if that's something you've noticed either watching film or catching games on TV?

TOM O'BRIEN: No, I think that's been the thing that's probably for the last half dozen years or so, and a lot of it comes from the NFL, talking about fundamentals aren't being taught at the same level they have. And when you look, certainly -- and probably rightfully so because of injuries, we've cut back so much in spring practice and the opportunity to teach the fundamentals that are required. Certainly tackling is something that requires that you are fundamentally sound in what

you're doing because of the possibility to be injured if you do it the wrong way.

But I think with all the cutbacks we've had and times that we practice, especially in preseason camp or in springtime when you have a chance to coach those fundamentals and be fundamentally sound is where things are lacking in college football right now.

Q. Can a team go from being a reasonably decent tackling team to just having a bad couple weeks and be able to rebound after that?

TOM O'BRIEN: Yeah, I think a lot of the things that happen in college football are mental as much as physical, and it's a matter of want-to and make sure you get accomplished what you have to get accomplished. So I think mentally certainly if you want to get somebody on the ground and you've been coached well and you have good fundamentals, then you'll find a way to get them on the ground.

Q. A lot of people think Florida State might have the best defensive line in the conference. From your point of view what problems do they present?

TOM O'BRIEN: Well, they're big in the middle, and I think that's -- if you're going to be a four-down lineman team, you need to have those big 300-pounder strong guys that control and keep their linebackers free, middle linebacker free specifically, and then they have great skill on the outside. (Tank) Carradine and (Bjoern) Werner both lead the conference in tackles for losses; they lead in sacks. They turn those guys loose because the guys in the middle can eat up a lot of blockers, and those guys set the edge and get up the field and create all kind of havoc.

Q. How confident are you as far as your pass protection? I know you had some issues early, but it seems to have been better lately.

TOM O'BRIEN: Well, the problem we have right now is we're starting our fifth offensive line in six games. We only have one guy that we came into the season in the position that we wanted guys to be in. That's definitely going to be a concern for us Saturday night against this great front of Florida State.

An Interview With:

JIM GROBE WAKE FOREST

JIM GROBE: I was very disappointed this past Saturday. We lost to a good Duke team. I thought their kids played great. We did not make the plays that we needed to make. We got in pretty good shape in the fourth quarter with a great chance to win a football game at home and didn't get it done. So we're disappointed. But we're also excited to get back to playing again. Tough place for us to go. We've had mixed results at Maryland, mostly bad ones, so hopefully we can take this football team up and play better than we have the past couple times.

Q. What difference do you see in the Maryland team - of course they're coming off a bye week, also - but from last year when they were 2 and 10 to this year?

JIM GROBE: Well, for one thing they're playing much better defense. They have a really physical front, a good group of linebackers. I think their secondary does a nice job in coverage, whether it's zone or man coverage. I think they're playing offensively really solid to try to run the football and hitch off play action throws, and they've got some really talented kids, a group of receivers that are talented, one kid in particular that's a home run threat every time he touches the ball. And I think -- the (Stefon) Diggs kid is who I'm talking about, and when he's on special teams as a punt returner, kick returner, he's electric doing that stuff.

They're just a much-improved football team. I'm sure their year two with Randy in every area, offense, defense, kicking game, I'm sure they're feeling better about things than they did last year.

Q. And from your standpoint, now that you've had some time for the loss of (Michael) Campanaro to actually sink in, how do you compensate for that?

JIM GROBE: Well, we can't, I don't think. I think he was just special. You know, every team has got two or three kids on both sides of the ball that are your key, key guys, and you need to keep them healthy. In our case, Camp was just kind of an invaluable guy because he was worth 100, 150

yards of offense every week, and that's a big chunk to take out of your football team.

But maybe we can distribute a little bit better. You know, I think that sometimes where Tanner Price, our quarterback, was kind of counting every snap on having the option of going to Camp, I think now we've got to read it out a little bit better and we have got to count on our guys to catch a football. We didn't catch it very good on Sunday. We had some opportunities without Camp out there but dropped too many balls. A couple of them led to turnovers. We've got to do a better job catching the football, but we can't really replace Camp, but maybe we can spread the ball out a little bit more than we have been.

Q. In order to get some W's the last two months of the season, what do you have to improve upon and what has to get better?

JIM GROBE: Well, I think the thing that we've not done a very good job of is we haven't really played well in a game -- maybe North Carolina was probably our best game where we played good defensively and offensively. So we need a good effort out of both sides of the football.

I thought this past Saturday going into the game, I thought our defense had the biggest challenge. I was worried about Duke's ability to score points, and I didn't think we played very well offensively. We had too many turnovers to win the game.

So what we've really got to have here down the stretch is we've got to play better defensively. That's something that you've got to do if you're going to win. But we've got to be an offense that takes care of the football, and those are things that we just can't compromise on.

So it would be nice for us, and I think it would give us a chance to win if we could get to where on Saturday we don't have one side of the ball or the other playing their best football without the other side. So I think the key for us is to play good on both sides of the football.

Q. To follow-up on the Camp question there, who are some of the guys that you really need to step up with him out?

JIM GROBE: Well, he's really, really a young guy, but Sherman Ragland is a kid that has all the ability in the world. We see him kind of as a Camp guy going forward, so eventually that's the kind of role that we see Sherman Ragland filling in

for, but he's got to catch the ball better. And right now he's struggling a little bit with not just running the offense but routes and catching the ball and doing all those -- pretty good blocker, but he's got to improve.

And then I think Terence Davis is a real key for us. I think Terence has been hurt this year. He's had two separated shoulders. He's back in action. The problem he's had is he just hasn't been able to practice much, and I think this week we're going to get a full week of practice out of him for the first time since August, and I think that will be key. It would be nice if Brandon Terry stepped up for us. That's a big kid that can run and catch the football. I think Brandon could be a key. We may even have to look at a couple freshmen going forward. It's probably going to be three or four weeks before we get Camp back.

But when you talk about Campanaro and trying to replace him, I'd say Sherman Ragland and Terence Davis are kids that could fulfill that role if they'll step up.

Q. I know Nikita (Whitlock) was banged up this season, and you had another, too.

JIM GROBE: Yeah, Merrill Noel had a hamstring from the start of the season.

Q. Can you put into perspective how much of an impact that's had overall on your team to have such big name guys banged up?

JIM GROBE: Yeah, it's really been a problem for us. The thing that you generally count on from both Nikita and Merrill Noel, you count on a lot of bonus points. I don't think that Nikita, so far this season, has had a tackle for a loss or a sack, and I don't think Merrill Noel -- last year he led the nation in pass breakups. I don't know if he's had but one or two this year. And then they've been hurt, so I can't be overly critical.

But when you take your play makers out of the mix, and of course we talked about Camp earlier, every team has got two or three guys on each side of the ball that are really key, that are the big play guys, and if they're not making big plays, it's hard to estimate how much that hurts your offense or defense.

Q. I know Campanaro is a local guy. Has he been disappointed that he's not going to be able to come back and play in front of his family and all that stuff back in Maryland?

JIM GROBE: Yeah, I'm really disappointed for Camp. He's got a broken hand.

The good news is they're not going to have to do surgery. He doesn't have any displacement in the bone. He'll just be able to keep it casted and it'll heal up on its own. The plan right now is hopefully to have him back for Clemson, possibly not until Boston College, but we're going to get him back, and that's the good news. The bad news is I really think he was looking forward to coming back close to home and having a chance to have family and friends come and watch him play. He'll probably be with us anyway. I think we'll bring him with us just because he's good to be around the receivers and kind of be another coach for those guys. But he's definitely disappointed that he's not going to be able to come home and play.

An interview with:

PAUL JOHNSON GEORGIA TECH

COACH JOHNSON: Good morning. I tell you, we've got a tremendous challenge this week. When you put on the tape of Clemson, they're scary good. They're very athletic. I think all their skill positions offensively, they have next-level players, and they're executing at a high level.

It will be a huge challenge for us. That's always a tough place to play. We've got to bounce back from a really disappointing game on Saturday. We get thrown right back into the fire against a quality opponent in Clemson.

Q. Coach, looking at the numbers, it looks like your offense is functioning at a pretty high level, but you're struggling on defense. What do you need to do better defensively?

COACH JOHNSON: I think that's a fair assessment. We turned the ball over Saturday. We stayed away from that, but we had way too many turnovers offensively in the game Saturday.

Defensively I think we've given up so many big plays and our tackling has been very poor. In my mind the tackling probably cost us our first two conference games in the fourth quarter or in overtime - actually before they got into overtime, we probably didn't need to get into overtime.

That's something we've got to improve on.

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We have to cut back on the big plays and get back to playing defensively like we're capable of playing, I think.

Q. One point brought up before was whether teams hit in practice and tackle during the week or cut back on that. Do you guys go hard tackling during the week or do you limit contact?

COACH JOHNSON: We do a tackling drill almost every day. We have tackling stations. A lot of times when the defense are doing it against scouts, they may not go to the ground, but they work on angle tackles, short yardage form tackles, all those type deals.

We practice full speed, at least on Tuesdays, at least 15 or 20 minutes on Tuesday on offense. So our guys are doing it defensively. It's a little harder. They go full speed. But most of the time they try to stay off the ground.

Q. I guess the big question is, if the defense has so much trouble stopping Middle Tennessee, how tall an order is it to stop Clemson?

COACH JOHNSON: If we play like we did Saturday, they may not have enough lights on the scoreboard for Clemson.

Hopefully we'll bounce back and we'll play better. I think you go into the game anew. Our guys are looking forward to go in and compete and having a chance to rectify. We'll get guys back from last game that will help us.

Q. You mentioned defensive problems. Is that coaches, X's and O's, scheming, or just wrap people up and we'll be in better shape?

COACH JOHNSON: Well, I think if we could tackle better, that would be a good start. Then as coaches we have to do a better job helping them be better tacklers and putting them in a position they can be successful.

When I tend to look at things, we can help offensively, too, by not turning the ball over, getting in front of people, doing those kind of things. There's a lot of factors that come into it.

Q. Al Groh, a guy you think can turn this thing around?

COACH JOHNSON: We hope so. Like I said this week, Al has been a good coach for a long time. I don't think he forgot how to coach in the last two weeks. We have to get back to doing what we do, tackle better, be better, be productive.

Q. Paul, Clemson has so many weapons. If you force them to pass, they have great receivers. If you try to take away the pass, they have great runners. Is there a secret to at least containing them, not letting them light up the scoreboard?

COACH JOHNSON: Well, I think we've had some great games with them in the past few years. The key is you try not to give up the big plays. They got a lot of big-play guys. You try to limit the big plays.

I don't think you're going to shut them completely down. They have a good scheme, too many good players. So you got to try to match them. You got to try to get some turnovers, force them to continue to execute. If you don't give it to them all in one or two plays, make them have to grind it out.

They can do that. Clearly if you watch, they can. But that's a far better chance of trying to stop them than the other when you give it up in one or two plays.

Q. Is this the kind of game where if your offense can execute some of the six, seven, eight minute drives, that would work in your favor?

COACH JOHNSON: That would be great. That would be good in every game, but especially in a game like this.

What's happened in the past, we've had some really great, close games. They've kind of been that way. A year ago we were forcing it, they turned the ball over some. We got up. In the second half, we were able to hang onto the ball, run the clock six, seven minutes at a time on drives. That would be a good recipe if it could happen again.

Q. Looking at the numbers from the Middle Tennessee game, you know you are renowned as a running offense. You had one of your balanced offensive games. Was that a function of being behind and throwing to catch up or did you get some good balance on offense in that game?

COACH JOHNSON: Hmm. A little of both. We got ourselves behind. Actually at half it was tied up. We came out and got a penalty, killed ourself on the first drive, they scored. After that, we never caught up. Had another turnover, got

down two scores. We had to start throwing more than we normally throw.

Q. The percentage looks good. Were you happy with the passing game?

COACH JOHNSON: We've done better throwing the ball. We had some key drops. Really about eight minutes to go, we were back to within a score, had a guy way behind the defense, under-threw it, dropped it, they picked it off. Actually, hit him in the chest, bounced off.

It's better. Something we've continued to work on. If we're that balanced, it's usually not a good thing (laughter).

An interview with:

LARRY FEDORA NORTH CAROLINA

COACH FEDORA: We're real excited about Virginia Tech coming here and having a big ACC game on TV. I think our fans and players are excited, so it should be a lot of fun.

Q. Coach, starting with Virginia Tech offensively, they've gotten off to some slow starts in ball games. What do you see that they struggle with early and what do you see that helps get them in gear that you want to avoid?

COACH FEDORA: Well, the thing that they've probably struggled with more than anything is just turning the football over. Doesn't matter who you are offensively, what type of offense you run, if you turn the football over, it's going to make it difficult for you. You're going to put your defense out on the field more often.

It's something we're concerned with also, is starting fast. I know it's something that they put a lot of emphasis on.

I think both teams will be working on trying to get out there and get after it from the beginning, not waiting to see what happens, but actually make something happen.

What do we need to do? We need to play ball the way we play. We need to be good on our tempo and take care of the football.

Q. Defensively from Virginia Tech, they obviously struggled some with the passing

game with Cincinnati. What did you see in that film? How does their secondary look to you?

COACH FEDORA: Really for us, just watching them, they almost changed what their thought process was in this game. They played a lot of man coverage, whether it was man free or zero. Evidently they didn't feel like Cincinnati could hurt them that way. I think they were fortunate enough to complete a few passes.

If you look at it overall, they were pretty much dominating them other than a few big plays.

Q. Do you anticipate seeing that man-to-man coverage or do you think they'll go back?

COACH FEDORA: I don't know. That was a surprise for us that they did that. We'll have to wait and see.

We've been working both ways, whether it's going to be their base defense, what they do normally, or whether it's going to be more man, man free. We have to plan for both.

Q. Last couple weeks on this call you've talked about your team still searching for an identity. How much do you think that will evolve or emerge against Virginia Tech this weekend?

COACH FEDORA: I think we'll know a lot about this football team after this game. Obviously Virginia Tech is a very good football team. They've always been great on special teams. They're known for their defense and they're going to play hard-nosed football, be a physical team. We're going to find out a lot more about the identity of this football team Saturday somewhere around 4:00.

Q. You are leading the ACC in pass-rush and sacks. How important is pass-rush to the fact that you're doing pretty well overall in pass defense?

COACH FEDORA: Well, it's critical. I mean, nobody can sit back there nowadays and cover guys all day in the open field because everybody knows how to throw the football these days. It's not something people just give lip service to. Everybody can do it. Everybody's systems enable it.

So you have to get pressure on a quarterback to help those guys on the back end out. If you don't, they'll pick you apart eventually.

Q. Sylvester is right up there at the top. What is he doing that has made him so effective?

COACH FEDORA: He's just a heck of a football player. Plays with a great motor. He's got that never-say-die attitude. He's going to give all he's got. He believes he's going to get there.

For an inside guy to be leading our team in sacks, that's pretty impressive because that's normally where you get your double-teams, there's more bodies in there tight, less space to maneuver.

Sly has done a heck of a job with that.

Q. Looks like two freshmen defensive ends, Jessie Rogers, Justin Thomason are getting in that rotation. Can you talk about those two guys?

COACH FEDORA: Both of these young guys as true freshmen have come on for us lately. Jessie has been getting reps for quite a while right now. Part of it, Justin, early on he had an injury during camp that kept him from getting a lot of reps. Jessie was healthy, able to get a lot of reps. He matured quicker. He got over the shock of camp quicker. It's just taken Justin a little bit longer to go.

Both of those guys will factor in for us. Both of them will have to make plays for us as this season goes.

Q. Logan Thomas is such a load at quarterback. He's like a defensive end playing quarterback in some respects. He's so tall and big. What kind of unique problems does he cause?

COACH FEDORA: Well, for our defense, we'll only have two guys that weigh more than him on the football field. Our two defensive tackles. He'll weigh more than our defensive ends.

It's tough. When you go to get that guy down on a pass-rush or a sack, it's going to take seven or eight guys to get him down. It's something we understand, our guys are going to have to fly to the football, we're going to have to get there, we're going to have to gang tackle. That's what's going to have to happen. He presents a unique challenge for any team.

Q. From your side, you wanted going into this year to get Gio Bernard the ball as many different ways as possible. Considering he's got seven touchdowns so far, is that working out the way you would have liked it to?

COACH FEDORA: Well, I wouldn't have liked for him to have missed the two games he missed. I would have liked to have had him in every game. Unfortunately he only played in three games. We found a variety of ways to do it. Last week he didn't touch the ball a whole lot because it wasn't needed. I would much rather have him for the long haul during conference play.

I think he's now back a hundred percent, rested up, ready to go, should have a great second half of the season.

Q. On them offensively, they have gotten running the ball with No. 20, Michael Holmes. What do you see from their running game? Is it hard to get a handle on them because they played so many different guys?

COACH FEDORA: They have played a lot of guys. One thing I think that does for them it enables them to have fresh legs in there all the time. Probably all those guys bring something different to the table.

But anytime you have a quarterback like Logan Thomas that will pull it down, he'll take off with it, he weighs 250 pounds, you have a problem in the running game. You have to have somebody assigned to him. You have to pray that that guy is going to get him down when he needs to.

An interview with:

MIKE LONDON VIRGINIA

COACH LONDON: Good afternoon.

Yes, great opportunity to get into our second conference game. It's another road game opportunity for us to play a Duke team that's been playing well. We have to be able to play well and do some things on the field with our play to give us a chance to compete and play and win.

That's all part of it, just having a chance to go on the road and play again and get back to playing the type of ball I know we're capable of.

I'd appreciate any questions.

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Q. Mike, one thing we didn't ask you about Sunday or Monday was your kickoff returns. It seemed like it was a rerun every time they'd kick it down to the left side, your guy would run basically along the right sideline. What can you do to mix that up or do you need to mix it up some in terms of your returns?

COACH LONDON: Well, we have to make sure that the game plan for that, it's multiple opportunities depending on the kicks, even if the kick is kicked where we maybe game planned to do some things with it.

I think that's one of the things we talked about during the start of the season, as the season has gone on, the kickoff return unit was one of the pluses for us with Khalek Shepherd returning. They did a good job of coverage. Our average starting position was at the 17, 18 yard line. That was exasperated by a couple penalties.

There's some things that we can do with a couple different schemes about ball placement and how maybe different returner look, still having Khalek back there. That's something that's approached with Coach Poindexter. We've addressed that and look for an opportunity, again, to have some returns.

We always look at the other team's kicker. Is he kicking it into the end zone? Are teams bringing the ball out? If they are, then what opportunities may be presented to you?

We have a good kicker, good coverage team, there appears to be opportunities to return kicks.

Q. Duke is off to their best start since 1994. Watching them on film, what are they doing better this year?

COACH LONDON: Well, I tell you, Coach Cutcliffe has done a great job there just hanging in there with his message, just talking about his philosophy. The players have bought in. It seems like (Sean) Renfree and Conner (Vernon) have been there forever. I think when I was at Richmond we played against them.

It matters when you have an older, experienced quarterback, some receivers that have been around the system that he's teaching.

What you see is that they're executing. They're executing their offense at a very high and efficient level. They're playing with a lot of energy. He's got them playing well.

Q. Renfree didn't play the fourth quarter Saturday. They tell us he's day-to-day. Does it make it difficult for you?

COACH LONDON: It's the system, the scheme they have in place, that presents the challenges. I'm quite sure that Boone is a quarterback that's got a lot of talent. When you look at him on the face of it, he's running the ball more. I'm quite sure he can execute their offense, too, by throwing the bubble screens, play-action passes, things like that.

(Sean) Renfree is a great quarterback, great quarterback, one of the highest-rated quarterbacks in the ACC. Obviously it would be something that they'd miss him, but I think at the same time the other quarterback can run the system.

When you're surrounded like a guy like Conner (Vernon), some of the other people they have, they have enough confidence in Boone and the rest of the team to pick up the slack for the quarterback.

Q. Mike, without giving a full injury report, could you say whether Phillip Sims practiced Tuesday and today?

COACH LONDON: I could say that Phillip will more than likely be the starter for us. Second day in a row he's moved around, done a nice job. Doesn't seem to be hampered by anything. That's kind of the game plan right now.

Q. One of the reasons it seemed like you hesitated to make that switch coming into the season was because he was a little bit behind in the learning curve. Do you feel he's completely caught up there?

COACH LONDON: I think the level that he's caught up has been his performance in games. I think every week is always a better week in terms of his knowledge of the offense. Puts himself into him having performed the last three and a half weeks or so that he's deserved an opportunity to start a game, to get the reps in practice, to get the concentration on the finer details of things.

I think we feel pretty good that he's ready to handle those things now on the offense, how to run it, to match some of the physical tools and skills that he has.

Q. Now that you've gotten to know Phillip over a few months here, not even just in terms of on the field, what have you made of him off the field as a person? Has anything surprised you in terms of who he is, maybe something you didn't know before he came to Virginia?

COACH LONDON: Well, I remember when I was at Richmond and he was at Oscar Smith, and they won a state championship. Tim Smith was on that team. Perry Jones was on that team. We met at a banquet. Rich Morgan was head coach being honored at a similar banquet. We were sitting at the same guest of honor table. Having a chance to meet him, his family, mom and dad at that time.

Over the course of time here recently, he's come and got really acclimated to the team. He didn't come here saying, I'm from Alabama, I'm this, I'm that. He came in and adapted to the team culture here. Guys have accepted him. He's ingratiated himself to his teammates. Didn't come in with a lot of bravado, pounding his chest. He just came in and worked, tried to learn the way we do things here.

Over the course of the season, the last few weeks, you've seen the performance side that appears it merits, when he was coming out of high school, back in that time, about his skill set.

As time goes on, like any other player that's in your program, you get to know more about him because you go through the ups and downs, the good times, bad times with him. You kind of see what they're made of. Those times are being forged right now. We'll continue to have that type of relationship, not only with Phillip, but all the players.

Like I say now, it appears that players have confidence in him, in his abilities. So, like I say, we're excited about having him having the opportunity to be the quarterback at this upcoming game.

An interview with:

FRANK BEAMER VIRGINIA TECH

COACH BEAMER: Really impressed with North Carolina. They got veterans up front on the offensive line. The tight ends are excellent. The



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quarterback, Renner, is completing 64% of the passes. Their tailbacks are really good. Bernard is back now, full tilt. Then big, tall wide receivers that can go get it.

They do a good job at offense, stretch you horizontally, vertically, make you defend the field. Great screen team.

Defensively, giving up 296 yards on average in a game, really playing well as a football team, really at the top of their game. We've got our work cut out for us.

Questions.

Q. You're giving up about 200 yards per game through the air. North Carolina is averaging about 300 passing yards per game. You talked about their quarterback (Bryn Renner, 1400 yards, 14 passing touchdowns through five games. Talk about the challenge going against this offense.

COACH BEAMER: Well, it is a challenge. Again, Renner is a veteran guy, smart guy, doing a great job for them, knows where he wants to go with the ball. Got good skill people to go to, an offensive line to block for them. They're for real, there's no question about that.

Q. Coach, looking at some of the numbers, North Carolina scored 66 points last week. Around the country, West Virginia had a 70-63 game. It's like video game scores. Are we going through one of the eras where the offenses have the edge on defenses?

COACH BEAMER: I think when you got good talent on the field, and I think North Carolina has good talent, West Virginia has good talent, can stretch you, get athletes out in open spaces, it's tough to defend.

Q. Your defense has broken down a couple times this year, which is something we're not used to seeing at Virginia Tech. Are you happy or is there a problem you need to correct?

COACH BEAMER: I think everything that's happened is correctable. We have kids that want to get it corrected, want to play at a higher level. We're working like heck to get that done.

Q. Frank, now that (Giovani) Bernard is back for them, seemingly a hundred percent, what are the particular problems that he poses

with his broken field ability, not necessarily a power runner, but he's a great runner in space?

COACH BEAMER: Yeah, I think he does have power and has great quickness. Got him back there on punt returns, he can go. I think he's averaging 7.3 a carry. Shifty, nifty, I think a heck of a back.

Q. Remind you of anybody you've seen recently?

COACH BEAMER: He's a great runningback. When you watch him, it doesn't take you long to see, he's got some special skills.

But I think those other two do, too, Blue and Morris. I think they're well set at the tailback position.

Q. Coach, I know we've talked about some of the struggles you've had on both sides of the ball. When you're looking at some of the positives overall, what do you think is the biggest positive you've seen from your team?

COACH BEAMER: Well, I think at some point in time in the season we played well in every area. The last half, last week the offense had some numbers. Defense played well. Special teams. We've had some returns, good coverage. In every area we played well at times. Our challenge is to play well all the time, play consistent.

Sometimes when you got some new people at positions and so forth, you're not as consistent as you want to be. But we're far enough along now that we need to be consistent in how we perform.

Q. I know we asked you earlier this week about David Wang and Tony Gregory. Are they still good to go for Saturday?

COACH BEAMER: Yeah, we'll see how it is here and make that report on Thursday.

Q. Looking at Logan Thomas' numbers this year, they don't seem to be quite as eye-popping as last year. Is that because he's lost some key supporting weapons, receivers, top runningback from last year? How much of that is him having to take more of a load?

COACH BEAMER: Yeah, I think when the two receivers we lost, two top all-time receivers at Virginia Tech, David Wilson is in the NFL, (indiscernible) I think is starting four offensive linemen. I think sometimes the people around them, sometimes you're not sure where a receiver

is going to be, this and that, sometimes your quarterback doesn't look as efficient as he could be.

I got every confidence in Logan. He's a competitor. He's a leader. He's smart. So we just got to pick up around him and make sure we're playing in a consistent fashion.

An interview with:

DAVID CUTCLIFFE DUKE

COACH CUTCLIFFE: All right. This is obviously a big game for us every year, being a rival game, obviously same division. A very talented Virginia team. A well-coached Virginia team. They're always big, physical, athletic football team. They're going to play hard in all three phases.

They've got a lot of weapons on their offense. Put up 625 yards a week ago and a lot of outstanding players on defense. One of the best linebackers in our league. But a big, powerful defensive front.

I think they do an outstanding job with their kicking game. So it's a team every year that gives you a lot of problems.

With that, I'll take your questions.

Q. David, do you see any possibility for another 55-48 game like two years ago?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: You know, I don't know (laughter). I don't predict those things. Every time somebody says like that, it ends up 10-7 or something like that.

You just don't know. All of that ends up being about matchups. That's part of that when it can happen. The other part of it is, it seems to me that each game somehow, some way takes on its own personality.

We know this: it's going to be a hard-fought ballgame and they've all been really good football games.

Q. It's likely Phillip Sims will start against you. As your people look at the film, is it pretty much the same offense or do you feel you have to prepare for him any differently?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: No, I think it's the same offense. They have a system, a very versatile system. Any coordinator will call something to the strengths of a player, but not outside of their system. It's the same system.

You have to remember, if he's been the number two guy, he's getting the number two reps at practice. Your number two receivers and linemen are repping the same things that the ones are repping because if they have to go in, they have to know what to do. Systematically, it will be the same.

Q. Coach, I was wondering if you had any update on your own quarterback, Sean Renfree, whether he'll be able to play this weekend?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: We do an injury release on Thursdays. We'll update it at that time.

Q. I want to ask you about one of your players, Jamal Wallace, moving from end to tackle. You had an injury there. How is he holding up inside?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Jamal has done really well for us. He's a lot bigger than he was. He was kind of growing in the direction anyway.

He's been our starter. He's really an athletic guy. Was actually a hurdler in high school on the track team. He played at about I guess 250, 255 a year ago. He's in the 275 plus range now and still moves well.

This team - and he's an example of it - has been willing to do whatever we ask them to do from a position change or even a side-of-the-ball change to adjust through all these injuries we've had to deal with. I'm very proud of Jamal in being unselfish in making that move.

Q. I was looking at the numbers. Perry Jones had an amazing game for Virginia last Saturday. What kind of problems does he present with his ability to catch and run the ball?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: A lot of them. I think he is just a tremendous football player. He's given us problems every year. He'll give you problems again. I mean, he's going to get yards. He's going to be involved. He's going to catch all sorts of pass routes, not screens, not any one type of route. He's very capable of being split out.

I think he's a heck of a ball-carrier. He runs the power play very well. He runs the stretch play well. I don't see anything he doesn't do

extremely well. I think he's one of the most versatile players in our league.

Q. It's not very glamorous, but this game is going to feature the two top kicker/punters in this league.

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I think you win with the kicking game, there's no question. I think when you get into conference games, teams that you play every year, the kicking game, it's not just the fact that if they hit a good punt, kickoff well, place kick well, whatever, but the punting game is all about field position, all about coverage, all about returns. So whoever plays the kicking game best in these close conference games has a darn good chance of winning.

Q. Anthony Boone played the fourth quarter against Wake Forest. If he were needed to see extended action in a game, what could we look for from him?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Just like I mentioned about Sims a little while ago. We have an offensive system. Anthony Boone has been taking the number two reps all fall camp, all during the season to this point. We're running the same offense, whether it's Sean (Renfree) or whether it's Anthony or whether it was Brandon Connette. Again, there are minor things that you play to the strength of a player.

But I think the beauty of our team, and I said this going in, I hate that we had to use it, but if something happened to Sean, which it did last week in the ballgame, we have very experienced, capable football players.

One of the things I noticed on the sideline when Anthony had to step up and play, the other players didn't bat an eye. I mean, they're used to him playing. It's why we've always played quarterbacks, backup quarterbacks, in situational roles if they're good enough. Certainly Anthony, Connette, those guys have been good enough.

We won't change. Disregard who is at quarterback, we're going to be who we are.

An interview with:

AL GOLDEN MIAMI

COACH GOLDEN: Wonderful opportunity for our football team to play at Soldier Field in a great venue against the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, a team obviously worthy of a top-10 ranking. Playing well now. Played a different schedule themselves. Operating at a high level in all three phases.

It's a great challenge for our team against a mature team with a great tradition. We're excited about the opportunity Saturday night.

Q. Coach, this is the 25th meeting. From 1971 to 1990, these two institutions played 17 out of 18 years. Talk about this rivalry. It's such a special game when you think about college football. Any chance you may extend the contract and talk about how special this rivalry is?

COACH GOLDEN: It is special. Obviously what makes it special is the tradition of both schools, the players that have come before us, the players and coaches that have built it. That's what makes it special.

It's obviously our opportunity Saturday to rekindle that. It's unique. It's special. It's a great intersectional rivalry. Just fortunate to be a part of it Saturday night.

Q. Al, where do you think your team is now compared to the last time you played a road game?

COACH GOLDEN: Well, I think the last time we played a road game I think we grew up a lot. Two times ago against Kansas State in Manhattan, we were not ready for that venue. We weren't ready for that challenge. Then we responded at Georgia Tech. I was pleased with that.

Hopefully we've grown a lot over the last two games to be able to kind of keep our eyes on the prize this week and stay focused and not have any distractions. That's the key going into this Notre Dame game on Saturday night.

Q. When you look at them on film, what makes the Notre Dame defense so damn good?

COACH GOLDEN: First of all, they're personneled really good. The 3-4. The 6'4", 6'6" at the ends, over 300 pounds, gives you a matchup problems right there. The nose Nix is 320 pounds. He's active. All the linebackers are 250. They have arguably, if you want, but I think unarguably, the best player certainly on defense in the country in Te'o. He's everything that you think he would be when you turn on the tape. A guy like Mata who runs it on the back end.

They're able to stay in cover two, prevent you from getting big plays and stop the run with seven, which gives you a tactical advantage. I think they're excellent in the red zone with the bracket coverage, holding up the run. Obviously less than 10 points a game, less than 3.3 yards a carry. No one has run the ball in on them.

Q. It looks like you have the better offense and quarterback. How much in this day and age does that matter?

COACH GOLDEN: I think what they're doing right now is designed to prevent that. That is what the challenge is going to be. Something is going to give. From their standpoint, their ability to drop eight in coverage, play two, play that three cloud, that three role that they do so well, getting out of three, four, five man rushes, that's a challenge when you play ha 3-4.

I think they're personneled really well. I think their staff does a great job. That's going to be the challenge in this game.

Q. Not to sound too trite, but was that kind of a coming-out party for Stephen Morris the other day? Did you think this was possible in the spring when you didn't have him?

COACH GOLDEN: We definitely thought it was possible. I just think the last two weeks he's done a good job. We saw glimpses of it the previous three weeks, but we didn't see the consistency. After a couple errant throws in the first quarter of Georgia Tech, he settled in, started to relax, doing a great job throwing, not aiming right now.

I think obviously the receivers have stepped up. There's some trust there. We're protecting him well. I think he's making good decisions with the football. Obviously from an athletic standpoint, he can create. He's fast. He's got good vision down the field. He's got a big-league arm.

Q. Coach, you were talking about how good Notre Dame's defense has been this year. That's bucking the national trend. You are coming off a shootout. Huge offensive numbers going up around the country. Are we in one of the cycles where offenses are ahead of the defenses overall nationally?

COACH GOLDEN: We might be. But I think generating more offense is if you just look at these schools, the conferences, the offenses are not only attacking but the offenses are attacking the defense with a different offense just about every week.

If you look at our schedule, for instance, we've faced pro style, spread teams, option teams, we've faced everything you can imagine in the first five weeks.

There's not a lot of uniformity. Everybody has their own take on the spread. Some people are running spread option with it. We're seeing anything from four or five wides one week to two tight ends or two backs. We're seeing it all from week to week. It's really hard anymore just to adapt week after week.

Certainly given the inexperience and age of our club, that's really hard to adapt from week to week. I think that's part of the trend, as well, that's being overlooked. At the same time for all the spread that we're seeing, you have to personnel your team differently. I think you're seeing a lot of NFL teams start to personnel their teams differently. You don't have to look any farther than Ray Lewis losing 25 pounds because he sees the way football is going now.

Q. Controlling tempo, running a faster tempo a lot of places, is that a problem defenses have coping with that, not being able to make situational substitutions?

COACH GOLDEN: Sure. I think that definitely has an impact. I think the multiple tempos, using multiple tempos is difficult as well.

Again, I just think we're getting flexibility in formationing, and we're getting it from week to week at every angle. That's what is making it tough.

Hats off to Notre Dame right now. I think the 3-4 deploys really well against spread attacks. Obviously that's why they're doing it. And they're doing a great job with their cover two, which is preventing big plays.

Q. What do you have to do to fix your defense?

COACH GOLDEN: We just got to keep working. Honestly, we got to keep working. It's not that I don't like the younger talent we have, I like that, we're just asking them to do so much so early. We need our more experienced guys and our leaders to step up, for sure. We got to be getting it to a stage now where we can settle in. There's got to be a point, I don't know when it's going to be, when we can have some continuity and there are no freshmen anymore.

Eddie Johnson, he's not a freshman anymore. We're getting Denzel back, Gionni, who was hurt earlier, Gionni Paul, he's made a couple starts now in his career. We have so many first-time starters, we need to settle in, everybody just relax and execute and everybody do their job. That's going to be a challenge.

I know that day is coming. I'm excited about the direction we're going. I know statistically we're nowhere where we need to be. We grow from week to week. We get Denzel (Perryman) back, Gionni (Paul), who played well in his first two starts. We're adding Deon Bush. We just keep adding guys to it and settle in.

Q. Soldier Field has a storied history. Talk a little bit about the impact of going to that kind of facility for your young team at this point.

COACH GOLDEN: I think it's great. When it's all said and done, it's a special day for both universities, both staffs, both football programs, and the young men that are playing. I think at the end of the day both teams are going to look back at this venue, one of the storied cities in America, say, This is what it's all about, this is what college football is all about.

I think we're going to create memories. Hopefully they're positive memories for the Miami Hurricanes. But to experience this challenge, to go into a venue like that where so much of the history of football was made, is really awesome for our guys.

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