



HOUSTON TEXANS VS. MINNESOTA VIKINGS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sunday, October 4, 2020

POSTGAME QUOTES

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| HOUSTON TEXANS | VIKINGS |
| Head Coach Bill O'Brien WR Will Fuller V OLB Whitney Mercilus QB Deshaun Watson DE J.J. Watt | Head Coach Mike Zimmer RB Dalvin Cook QB Kirk Cousins |
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POOL REPORTER JOHN MCCLAIN INTERVIEW WITH NFL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF OFFICIATING AL RIVERON, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2020

Question: Can you provide an explanation for why Minnesota safety Harrison Smith was ejected from the game?

Riveron: "The ruling on the field was that of a foul on a defenseless player, and also an ejection. Anytime the officials rule a disqualification on the field, we take a look at it in replay to make sure that it is there. After we looked at it, there was nothing clear and obvious for us to overturn the ruling on the field, therefore the ruling on the field stood."

Question: On the touchdown pass to Houston wide receiver Will Fuller that got overturned by replay, what is the rule about having possession and the ball still being able to hit the ground?

Riveron: "The ruling on the field was that of a touchdown. When we looked at it, the receiver is going to the ground. And if he is ruled as going to the ground, he must maintain control of the football after hitting the ground. And what he does is, the minute the football touches the ground, he loses control of the football. He does not maintain control. Therefore, we overturned it to an incomplete pass."

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HEAD COACH AND GENERAL MANAGER BILL O'BRIEN (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Last sequence there, what did you see on the touchdown that they overturned, and could you take us through the decision to do the option play on 3rd down?

"They said that the ball moved when Will caught the ball, but when it hit the ground the ball moved and then the option, the way that they were playing our three by one formation, we felt like we could run that play, and it just didn't work out."



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Did you call the plays today?

"We just did it – the only difference today was the way we communicated it to Deshaun. That was really the only difference. There was no difference as to what we've been doing the whole year."

What do you take away from this game and how you guys performed?

"I don't know. I think we never quit, so I think that's really good. I think we've got a bunch of great guys. We've just got to figure out how to win a game. We got down there and we weren't able to get it in. The plays just didn't work. So, we just have to figure out – we've just got to keep working. There's really no way out of it other than that. You have no choice. The only choice is to just keep working and keep trying to improve, and that's what we're all going to try to do."

What do you see as some of the biggest things you need to work on for you to get on track and get a win?

"We have to continue to stop the run more consistently. At times we do it. We give up chunk plays in play action. We've got to do a better job there. We've got to find a running game, a consistent running game. And I just think that we have to finish drives. Our red area was terrible today. I think we were 0 for 3, or 0 for 4. We usually are pretty good in the red area, but give the Vikings credit. We just didn't do a good enough job in the red area, two field goals and then nothing there at the end, so you're not going to win many games doing that."

What exactly was the difference in how the plays were communicated in today?

"I gave the play to Deshaun, but we did it together. We've been doing it that way. The only difference is I just gave the play to Deshaun today. There was no difference in how we've been doing it the whole year, other than that."

When TE Jordan Akins got hurt, how much did that affect the offense with the weapon that he's been for you guys?

"He made a big play on that and he got hit and he had to be taken out for the concussion. So, yeah, I mean, he's a really good player. He's done a lot of great things for us. So, you know, yeah, but (Darren) Fells was in there. At the end of the day the next guy goes in. It's just a different personnel grouping, really."

What are your thoughts on the impact of the fumble by WR DeAndre Carter?

"I mean, it's not good, but I'm sure he wishes he could have that play back. That was a pretty key moment in the game because I think obviously we had stopped them and we were doing pretty well on offense. But we just – we turned it over."

What do you think needs to happen to improve what you're doing against the run, and what did you think of your tackling today?

"I don't know. I don't know. I think at times we tackled well. I think a couple times we like had him in the backfield but he broke free. I don't know, other than I've got to look at the tape. I'm sorry I can't answer that question more clearly for you. I just have to watch the film, see what we can do to be better."

Do you think inconsistency was your biggest issue on both sides of the ball?

"Yeah, you said it. We weren't very consistent. We started out in the first quarter offensively, really can't do anything, and then like I said in the red area we drive the ball but we get in the red area and we don't – the plays didn't work. Timmy and I, we're not calling plays that don't work. We're trying to call plays that we think will work, but they didn't work so we weren't able to punch it in. That was a big difference in our red area offense. Stopping the run, we're too inconsistent stopping the run. At times we do it really well and other times we don't. It's just something we've got to keep working on. There's nothing else we can do. We've got to keep working."

What made the Vikings successful against play-action today?



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"I don't know, we hit – we didn't hit. We called some shots. They played two deep and we weren't able to hit them. We had to check the ball down. But we hit a couple pop passes, so I don't know. I don't know."

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WR WILL FULLER V (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Your touchdown on the fourth down. It was initially ruled a catch then overruled. Can you talk about what you felt, saw, thought?

"Yeah, I 100 percent felt like I caught the ball. Watching the replay when I hit the ground the ball moved a little bit, but I felt like I kept my hand underneath the ball. So I just have to find a way to catch that without it going back up stairs. So I just have to find a way to make that happen."

JJ Watt said earlier we're 0-4. Obviously we have to do something different. Whatever we're doing is not working. It's brutal. It's terrible. It's depressing. It's sucks. How would you put your spin or thoughts on that issue?

"Yeah, I mean, I felt like he hit it head on. I was just talking to him and it's never a good feeling being 0-4. I've never been 0-4. This is my first time. Like you said, it's depressing, and we got to figure out what's not working and we have to make it work fast."

What do you think were the problems in the red zone today and how can you guys correct those problems?

"The problems were we weren't getting it in the end zone, so we just got to beat the guy across from us and find a way to get it in the end zone. I don't know the statistics, but I know we were kicking field goals today, and that's not going to get you a win."

What changed for you guys offensively in the second half, and what do you think you all can do to be more consistent on the offensive side of the ball?

"Yeah, I feel like we're still trying to figure that out. When it's working, it's working, and when it's not, it's not. I just feel like we got to practice better during the week and just make sure we're executing and being consistent in practice and that'll lead over to the game."

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OLB WHITNEY MERCILUS (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

The team's record is 0-4. What are the emotions like in the locker room for you and your teammates at this point?

"As anybody would feel after an 0-4 start, pissed, of course. Frustrated. Today, there were a few plays out there we wish we could have got back, especially making it close there at the end, just give us a chance to probably go into overtime. But it's just frustration all around, but the thing is, we've just got to stick together and keep pushing forward."

Vikings RB Dalvin Cook is a great back. What are your thoughts on how difficult it was to get him down today?

"Well, first thing it starts with up front, front seven setting the edges, building a wall, not letting him get down through us there down the middle or around the outside and all that. We understand he's got some great speed, he's a great back, great player, as well, but that's on us."

They had drives of 56, 72, 75 and 73 yards, and they had 162 yards on the ground. How does it hit you to hear those stats?

"I mean, I'm pissed. I wish we could have got those plays back, play a little bit better. Starting up front, like I said, setting the edge, that's on me and everybody else who sets the edge too, and just playing much more disciplined



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football. At times we were close there at the end, but we've got to start a lot earlier. The thing is we've got a 24-hour rule, take a look at it, correct the things that we did wrong, enhance the things that we did pretty well out there and keep pushing forward.”

Vikings QB Kirk Cousins averaged over three seconds a throw today. What makes it challenging to pressure him when they have those play action blowouts?

“Somebody has to get up into the pocket. Kirk Cousins, he's said he's going to sit back there, especially on those play actions. Guys have to be very disciplined as far as seeing high hats from the offensive linemen, getting back, panicking back into their coverage and all that, but up front we've got to be able to get to the quarterback especially in those situations.”

You talked about sticking together and the 24-hour rule. Are you confident this team has what it takes to turn things around and make something out of this season after this bad start?

“Yes, I do. I've been in much worse situations over the course of the years. I've been on teams where the defense held it down and led the team and everything. The biggest thing is for guys not to be separating, to come together. And the whole outside world is going to always doubt us no matter what. Even the time that I step foot into these doors. The thing is we've got to go out there and go prove it, and it starts with us just believing in one another. This team is very talented top to bottom. We've got depth. But we've got to be able to believe in ourselves in order to go out there and go play the best ball that we know how to play and just string those things along.”

The 24-hour rule, the believing – is that easier said than done when you're 0-4?

“Yeah, it can be. It's easier said than done because, of course, all that repeats probably in your head is the missed plays that you had out there, those missed opportunities, chances to get big plays, to turn things around and all that. You know, time is always going to move on. The days are always going to go by no matter what. You don't have a choice. Twenty four hours is all we've got. Go back, review it, let it sting, turn around, come back during the week on Wednesday and get to work and then focus on the next game.”

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QB DESHAUN WATSON (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Bill said that you guys didn't make many changes in the play calling other than he communicated with you. What was the difference today in how the play calling was orchestrated and how do you feel like the play calling went today?

“It was good. I mean, yeah, we could have started off faster, but we got in a rhythm and that's all we needed was for somebody to make a play, and we made a play and it got things going.”

What was your thought on the touchdown that was overturned? What did you see? They made the ruling that they made, but what did you see from the play?

“Yeah, we thought that Will (Fuller V) had his hand underneath and of course the ball moved a little bit, but we didn't think that the whole ball was touching the ground. We knew if we had control, at least with one hand, the tip of the ball could hit the ground, but New York made their call and that's what they made.”

What was different in your mind about just the way it was orchestrated, the way you guys did the play calling in terms of communication with the sideline, with Head Coach Bill O'Brien and Offensive Coordinator Tim Kelly?

“Man, it was the same to me. I didn't see no different.”

J.J. Watt was just saying that starting 0-4 for him is just brutal. What's your expectation, that you've been unable to win a game so far this season?

“Yeah, at the end of the day it is what it is. We're 0-4. We've just got to keep fighting, keep pushing forward, and that's it. But for me personally, I'm not going to let it take my joy. I'm going to continue to live life, continue to



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work my ass off, continue to come in here every day and play football. It is what it is. But at the end of the day my joy, my spirit, my smile, my energy, the love of the game is still going to continue to be there. That's how I see it."

If worried is the wrong word, what's the right word? Are you worried about where this team is headed right now and your efforts to try to make something of the season to salvage a successful now?

"No, I ain't never worried, honestly."

You've been running this offense with Bill O'Brien for now this is your 45th game with him. Do you get a sense on some of these plays the other team has a beat on what you're doing, like they know what's coming?

"I don't know. I mean, I just try to figure out what the best option is, find the open guy. If it's a run play, make sure we're going the right direction, making the right point, and try to execute as best as I can."

You guys had some success to start the third quarter. What is it you have to do to sustain that and to just be more consistent offensively?

"Just do it every drive. Get the first down and then we can get in a rhythm. That's what we did starting off the second half, and kind of try to continue that."

What made it tough to connect with Brandin Cooks today, just in terms of finding him and for him getting some completions today? He didn't have any catches.

"I mean, it was the scheme of Minnesota. They did their part. I did my job of whatever play call was called to execute the reads and find the open guy. Not saying he was open, but by the time I got back to him, either a defender was in his way or he was probably on the back side of the read. But yeah, I guess that's just how the day went. Definitely we want to get him the ball because he's a playmaker, him, (Randall) Cobb and all the guys. But yeah, that's just kind of how the game flowed today."

You always talk about being optimistic and keeping your joy, but is there any part of you that is frustrated just in the sense that you know that you guys should be better whether it's offensively or as a team, or you could execute better as a team at certain points during these games?

"I mean, of course. I mean, there's that. If we were sitting here 4-0 I'd be saying the same thing, honestly. Just the ball hasn't been going our way. Like at the end of the game the ball just didn't go our way. We felt like Will (Fuller V) made the catch, they overturned it, and that's just how the ball has been bouncing right now, so we've just got to keep pushing until the ball falls our way and just get ready for the next one, honestly."

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DE J.J. WATT (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

At this point now, obviously not where you guys had hoped for. Where does this team go from here to try to climb out of this hole?

"We obviously have to do something different. We are 0-4. Whatever we're doing is not working. Something needs to change. Something needs to be different. But the only thing that I know I can do is work harder, control what I can control, work harder, be better at my job, do better at my job, be better in my gap, make more plays, get off a double team, get a sack, get a turnover, get a takeaway. I can control what I can control."

How frustrating is it to go four games in a row without forcing a turnover?

"Extremely."

Can you elaborate?

"It is very, very frustrating."

Do you have any suggestions about it? You know you're trying to do everything you can.



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"If I had them, I would do it. I'm not saying that your question is a bad one, I'm just saying if I knew the answer, I would implement that answer."

When you hear they had drives of 56, 72, 75, 73, had 162 yards on the ground, how do those numbers hit you?

"Not good. Not going to win you many football games with numbers like that. Have to fix it, like I said. We're 0-4. What we are doing is not working. It needs to be fixed."

What needs to change from your vantage point? What do you think it is that needs to change for you guys to turn it around?

"I control what I can control, like I said. I've got to play my gap better, I've got to make better tackles, I've got to get to the quarterback and get the ball out, I've got to get strip sacks. I can control what I can control."

With QB Kirk Cousins, did you think you guys were getting to him enough and do you feel like their play action was a big factor in the game?

"I mean, I think we had like two or three sacks in the first half. Obviously, you want to continue that. We'd like to get the ball out if we can. But I mean, the story of us is we've got to stop the run. That's what we have to do. We have to stop the run, and we have to prevent passing situations. We have yet to put ourselves in a situation where we have a lead almost at any point, so that we put them in tough situations, get them off schedule and give ourselves a chance to get after the quarterback, and that starts with us. We have to stop the run. We have to get them uncomfortable. We have to put them in situations where they have to throw the ball and we can get after that, and right now we're not doing that."

You talked about stopping the run; talk about the plan for RB Dalvin Cook and what do you think about him now that you've seen him up close and personal?

"He's a very good running back. I said that last week in the press, and I'll say it again today. He's a very good running back. We knew that going in and we know that now after the game. He can make cuts all over. He can take the ball to the front side, stretch it out and get to the edge with speed. He can have vision to cut it all the way back to the back side and make plays on the back side. It's a matter of playing our gaps, every single gap all the way across the line, setting the edges and building a wall, and today we didn't do that. I didn't do that at times, other guys didn't do it at times. That's what happened. It's a matter of all 11 of us doing our job on every single play, like I said. It starts with myself. I can control what I can control, and it starts with me."

This is uncharted territory for you. This is the first time you've been 0-4 and the team has been 0-4 since 2008. How worried are you about this team and what it needs to do to make something to salvage the season?

"All I can do is control what I can control. I'm going to come in, I'm going to work hard, I'm going to try and find a way. I'm going to do whatever possible this week to find a way to get a win. I mean, this is terrible. It's brutal. I mean, it's depressing. It sucks. This sucks. I don't know any other way to put it. Like I said, I don't know any other way than to work harder. I know that working less is not the answer. So I'm going to work even harder."

I know you say you control what you can control, but as a leader on the team, is there anything that you can personally do to try to help your teammates or do something different maybe to help get the team on track?

"Yeah, I've got to make the plays. That's what I've got to do. I've got to make plays. I've got to get sacks, strip the ball, recover it. I've got to do whatever I can possibly do. So that's what I can do to help my team."

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HEAD COACH MIKE ZIMMER (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Opening Statement

"Nice to get a win today. Our guys overcame a lot of things during the week as far as all the different things that the league had us do. We even had a couple things happen before the game that we had to overcome, but I was proud of the resiliency of the team today. You know, we got a big turnover on the special teams, on the punt and defensively I thought we played really good in the first half, and offensively in the second half we did a great job of coming back after some big -- after they scored a couple times. I thought Justin Jefferson made some outstanding catches. Kirk (Cousins) made some really good throws today. Obviously Dalvin (Cook) is a really, really good football player, running the offensive line lane, protected well. Anyway, it was good to get a win."

What did you have to overcome before the game that you had mentioned?

"We had -- well, during the week, we had to take two tests every day, and so one of the tests came back of one of our starting players was a false positive. He had to take two more tests when we got to the stadium and then we had three other guys that had inconclusive tests and so they had to go retake tests again. So it just -- you know, we actually got the inactives in about ten minutes late because of that."

Did that false positive show this morning?

"From the point of contact test, yes."

Your defense at the end -- they got the stop when they needed it. What can you say about your defensive effort?

"I thought we played really, really well early in the ballgame. We got a bunch of three-and-outs. The time of possession was really good in our favor. I thought we were good on third downs today. We were good in the red zone. You know, we didn't give up as many big plays as we had in the past. (Jeff) Gladney got beat on the one long one and then we got misaligned on the other one late in the ballgame. You know, they battled and there's a couple fourth downs and we had to compete. It was nice to see them compete and fight a bunch of young guys, and you know, linebackers in there less than two week, three of the five linebackers didn't start training camp with us, I think is what I was told, you know, so playing with a lot of young guys. It's just the way it is."

Obviously your emotions on the sideline when Harrison Smith was ejected told the tale but what are your thoughts now, it was a penalty obviously but the decision to actually eject them.

"I love Harrison Smith like he's my son, first of all. You will, and you know, my issue has always been the quarterbacks can throw the ball in the middle of the field and there's no repercussions whatsoever. Harrison is not a dirty player. He's never been a dirty player. I feel like he tried to get his shoulder in there. They told me that the league office ejected him and you know, give ... If they want to give us a penalty, fine, give us a penalty, but don't eject guys. This guy is one of the best players in the NFL and one of the best people in the NFL. He's not a dirty player, so that's kind what irritated me, I guess."

Right after that, they had first and goal three times, Harrison Smith is not on the field, second quarter, third quarter, fourth quarter, first and goal at ten, first and goal at eight, first and goal at four.

"We spent a lot of time inside the 12-yard line and we've been decent at it for the most part, I think our guys understand how to play in that area. Quite honestly, I can't remember the calls if they were blitzes or we're playing zone or playing man-to-man. I can't really recall, but yeah, you've got to know how to play down there. If you don't -- there's two areas there. You have to defend the down and distance plus you've got to defend the goal line and so we try to teach our guys that all the time."



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And how did S George Iloka do? There were times where he looked a little bit lost but overall made some --

“Yeah, you know, it's hard for me to tell. You know me, I see mistakes. I did see a couple there, but he was actually our backup nickel today in case something happened to (Jeff) Gladney, and so he was preparing most of the week at nickel, so I actually asked him on the sideline if he knows what he's doing at safety.”

When you look at the number of broken tackles and yards after contact for Dalvin Cooke, what is that? Is that strength? Balance, what allows him to gain positives yards when it looked like it could be negative?

“I think it's both of those things plus hard. Dalvin (Cook) has got great toughness and great toughness and physicality, but he's a hard runner and he's got really good balance. I thought offensive line did a nice job blocking for him today and he scooted through there on some big-time plays.”

After that 55-yard missed field goal, I think it was 148 yards and 14 plays in those two touchdowns. What did you like from Kirk Cousins and just the way that he was giving Justin Jefferson, giving Kyle Rudolph, those guys covered, still throwing to them and showing trust and one resulted in a touchdown?

“Let me say this, first. I told (Gary Kubiak) Kubs during the game, go ahead and be aggressive here. Don't worry about throwing the football. They were trying to load up on us to stop the run and I said don't be afraid to throw the ball. I thought Kirk (Cousins) made some great throws and he got some help from (Justin) Jefferson and (Adam) Thielen was wide open on a couple of them. Jefferson made a couple tough catches and I think (Kyle) Rudolph -- I didn't see the catch that Rudolph made but I know this was a lot of guys around him.

You are sort of encouraging Kirk Cousins to make throws like that that are more contested?

“Yeah, it's just a feeling that you have. I think the more confidence he gets in understand that he can make those, the more that he will do them. At the same time, we have to be smart with the ball. I don't believe we turned the ball over today, did we? So that -- that's big, too. Taking care of the football, time of possession, I think our offense, we talked about trying to control the game offensively by their time of possession and by getting first downs and I thought we did that.”

What were your emotions as they were coming back there in the last drive and what did you observe on that play that was overturned?

“I couldn't see. I couldn't see the play. It was on the far corner from where I was. They told me upstairs that the ball hit the ground, and so I was glad of that. My emotions are figure out a way to stop them.”

Obviously last week, the run was working well, Dalvin Cook had some big yards but it didn't quite open up the passing game like it did today. What was the difference today?

“I think we did a good job protecting and I think that helps a lot. You know, it's hard to remember back who even played last week to be honest with you. I thought we protected well today and that helps for guys to get open.”

Offensively over the past two weeks you've used a lot more pre-snap motion than you did during the first two weeks. Is this something you've been able to install late or why the change?

“We did a lot during training camp, and you know, it's just -- it depends on the defense that you're playing, really, if you want to get -- like for instance, they had a corner following a guy today, so if pre-snap motion, if he goes in motion, it's man-to-man. If he stays there, it's zone. Simple stuff like that.

To follow up on Harrison Smith, any concern there could be a suspension?

“I don't know. I'm not -- that's not my call.”

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RB DALVIN COOK (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Can you take us through the touchdown run where it looked like three guys had a hand on you and you were still able to get through and score?

"It's called the striking zone. We're in the striking zone. It's been costly down there for us, finishing drives. We harp on it all week, finishing drives. When you get in the redzone, score touchdowns. Like you said, it's just about me beating my guy and helping my team win a football game. At this point, we're just scratching and clawing and trying to win football games."

How good did it feel to finally win the first game of the season and what kind of anxious moments were there at the end?

"It definitely feels good to win a football game to help the confidence of our team, to get us back in rhythm of knowing we can go out there and win a football game and if we play as a whole on each phase of the game. At the end of the game, the Texans came back and made it a game. They've got Deshaun Watson at quarterback. They paid him top dollar and we know what type of quarterback we was facing, so we had to go make a play. Holton (Hill) made a great play. He was in great coverage and you've got to salute to the defense. You've got some young guys that are stepping up. We had Harrison (Smith) go down. George (Iloka) stepped up in the next man role. You've got to salute the guys on defense for stepping up and making that play."

This looked like the most complete the offense has been through the season. Did it feel that way?

"Yeah, we got guys making plays downfield. We know what Adam (Thielen) brings to the table. (Justin) Jefferson, he's showing why we took him at that pick. I think he had four catches for like a hundred-something yards. That's a guy that can create some plays and some different matchups. He's taking a lot of pressure off Adam and this offense can go wherever we want to go. We've just got to keep working and not be complacent, just keep chipping away at it."

Can you talk about the confidence you had in short-yardage situations today?

"Our coach, K.P. (Kennedy Polamalu), prides ourselves on that. Collision balance, contact battles. We win those for our team, we put our team in good situations to go convert and get touchdowns. We've got to put that on our coach, K.P., by just drilling that in our head and not letting us be complacent down there in them short-yardage situations, and just going to get it to help our team get more downs to go score."

Was this the best the offensive line played all year?

"Just because we got a win, you could say. Last week we rushed for 180-some yards. It's just a matter of us going to get W. Offensive line's, I think to me, has been doing a good job. We've just been letting some plays slip here and there and they've been some costly plays to lose games. We're only getting better. They're going to be as good as we push them. We've got guys up front that's ready to fight for us and we've got to show them we're ready to fight for them too."

What did you think of the approach to run outside a lot and why do you think you were able to take advantage of your skillset to win on the outside?

"They've got some big, rangy guys on the inside. It's probably the biggest linebacker corps I've seen. We knew if we get those guys running sideways and use our speed to get around the edge and get on some of their corners and our receivers make some good blocks, we can make some yardage out there. We knew what we were getting into. We knew what type of atmosphere we were going into with those guys. I think we did a great job of – or, Coach Kube (Gary Kubiak) did a great job of calling it upstairs."

How important was it for you to play mad today, especially after S Harrison Smith was ejected?



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“Harry’s one of our emotional leaders. He really doesn’t talk a lot, he just shows it by example. When you’ve got a guy like that, you’ve got to go out there and fight for a guy like that. As soon as he walked off the field, we told him we were bringing this one back for him. Then we went in the locker room at halftime I told him specifically, personally, you know we’re bringing this back in the locker room for you and we’re bringing the W back. You know, it wasn’t as perfect at the end but we brought it back, and that’s all it’s about in the NFL, is just winning football games. Today we accomplished our first win and I know he was proud in that locker room to hear we got that win.”

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QB KIRK COUSINS (Transcribed by ASAP Sports)

Opening Statement

Great team win today. Hats off to the defense for getting that stop at the end. Great to watch their effort all game long. Offensively I was really pleased with how balanced we were, really similar to last week in that sense. It felt like we ran the ball throughout the entire game effectively, and then we were pretty efficient throwing the football or so it seemed, so I was pleased. Also, just the playmakers. I thought that Justin (Jefferson) and Adam (Thielen) made plays, Dalvin (Cook) and Alex (Alexander Mattison) made plays. I thought Rudy (Kyle Rudolph) made a couple big plays for us and just great to see players making plays, making things happen and proud of how we came down here after the week threw us a curveball and got a win on the road and was able to put it all together as a team. You know, just proud of our team and there’s certainly things we can improve on, you know, I’d love to be able to just end the game there, on the go-ball throw to Adam and put it out a little farther. There was another third down throw that I’d love to have back. You’ve got those throws that you want back, but all in all I thought it was a pretty efficient performance and we’ll try to build on that now and see if we can get on a run. But I’ll take any questions you have.

You mentioned the playmakers – Thielen, Jefferson and Cook – does this feel like a blueprint for the offense to lean on those three guys?

“I think it’s week-to-week. I think you can certainly expect Justin and Adam and Dalvin to be big contributors every week, but if we’re not running the ball well, maybe we take to the air more. Instead of having 25 attempts, we have 45 and then we’ve got to lean more on Chad Beebe or Irv Smith. When we’re able to run the football, you’re not going to have as many attempts and that means Dalvin and Alex are going to get quite a bit of opportunities. You have to credit our offensive line, Rick Dennison and Gary (Kubiak) for the run game they are putting out because it’s been really effective.”

Can you talk about how key those two drives were after they cut it to 17 to 16? You got the touchdowns to regain control of the game at 31 to 16?

“Yes, that was critical. I think in between our defense had a stop, as well, which was big. So you kind of build off one another. I think our team, like starting the game when our defense gets them to have to punt quickly, I think that helps our offense, and we had great field position all game long, too, which was a huge positive. I think the field position is kind of an underrated aspect of having a good day offensively, and I felt like we were rarely backed up, if at all, and that enabled us to get into field goal range quickly. That was certainly a big couple of series to be able to pull away a little bit.”

Knowing how high your time of possession was, did it feel better having that much more time to complete drives and see things through more than the first three weeks?

“I think sustaining drives was a big part of that. Again, running the football effectively is a big part of that, but you know, we were able to put together longer drives and our defense got off the field on several occasions, which also helped us have more opportunities. Certainly, I think it helped to control the ball as much as we did.”



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On the throw to Jefferson late in the game, how much time does it take to develop trust with a young receiver so you know where he's going to be and you trust him to make that catch?

"That's a funny question because when I came off the sideline after the drive, Sean Mannion said, 'You been working on back shoulders to Justin?' In other words, we don't have all that time or years banked so at some point, you just got to play, and believe that he can do it. And after he adjusted and found the ball and made the catch and kept his feet inbounds and finished the play, I looked at whoever I was with, Dalvin or Adam, as we were moving up the field, and I said, 'Eighteen can play, that's not easy to do.' Yeah, are we going to build trust over time? Yes, we are going to build trust, but some of the things he's doing, there is no trust, it's just raw ability and you're putting the ball out there and hoping, believing, that he's going to be able to make it happen."

Mike Zimmer said there was a point where he turned to Gary Kubiak and said, "Let's go. Don't be afraid to be aggressive." How much of that translated to you whether in words or play calling?

"He's not telling me that, so I'm just running the plays that are called. But I do know that Coach Zimmer has a tremendous amount of trust in Gary and rightfully so, and I think that helps our entire team and unit really play with confidence because I think Gary has earned that trust over a long time. Gary knows what he's doing, and he and Rick (Dennison) are a big reason why we've had success running the football the last couple years and why we've been able to put up 35 points three of four weeks. So I trust them and I just say tell me what to do, I'll go do it, and I believe that if I just do what they are coaching me to do that good things will happen."

What can this win mean for this team right now at this point in the season?

"You have to string wins together. One game isn't going to do anything for us. Certainly nice to get a win and get headed in the right direction, but each week is its own entity and we've got to be able to string some together for it to mean something and that's what's up ahead for us."

It seemed like Deshaun Watson was a little reluctant to run, and you're running sweeps on fourth down. Take me through that play call and what you saw on the fourth and two where you ran.

"We got the look we wanted, and so that play had the right look and that's largely why it worked. I think we did a great job blocking it. I think Chad (Beebe) had to block someone about three times his size, and he held up well and that's what enabled me to get to the edge and get us a first down. I would have liked to have kept my balance and gone down the sideline a little further, but glad we got the first. Again, just a really good play design by Gary (Kubiak) and Rick (Dennison) being able to call that and add another wrinkle."

After Harrison went down, it seemed like you played mad. Aside from Jefferson, there was one of those runs where it was Cook and then Thielen, and it seemed to come out in that moment?

"I do think this team and this organization has always kept fighting and been resilient when their backs have been against the wall and I go back to, you know, the last few years. So today I do think we played with the resiliency that I was proud of and made enough plays. But again, we can play better in the last ten minutes. I should be able to hit that throw. Our defense shouldn't have to go back out on the field and have to get that stop. We take pride in not having them do that. As we move forward, there's still so much to improve upon in the last few minutes of the game to be able to close games on offense and not ask our defense to do what they had to do today."

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