

Opening Statement

“I want to announce the players of the week from the Western Illinois game. First off on offense, we have co-players of the week: Matt Herian and Willie Amos. On defense, Ira Cooper. On special teams, Andrew Shanle showed up really well. Despite our shortcomings in special teams, his play stood out among the pack. We also announced two scout team players of the week: on the defensive side of the ball, Brandon Rigoni. He did an excellent job portraying the look we were going to see against Western Illinois. On the offensive side of the ball, Joey Ganz, the quarterback from Stagg High School in Chicago. He did an excellent job portraying Western Illinois’ quarterback during the week. I just want to commend those players on a job well done.

Looking at Southern Mississippi, I am really impressed. I am very impressed with their ability to play championship-caliber football. I looked extensively at their defense, and the thing that just jumps out at you is the way that they’re able to play so many different fronts and really give you a pro-style type agenda. I say that because they can get in and out of an odd front to an even front to a nickel front. They give you a lot of stuff in terms of stunts and blitzes, so we’re going to have our hands full on Saturday. It will be quite a challenge for our team, a huge test for our offense. Conversely on the offensive side, they’re very impressive offensively. They’ve got a lot of players returning, they know how to move the ball. They’re older, they’re a more mature group right now, and they seem to be getting into a rhythm as you’ve watched them last year late in the year. Their special teams show you so many different alignments, and they cause you to really hone in on your preparation to the extent that they could come up with a surprise or gimmick at any time.

When you enter games like this, for them, it will be their opener, and we really don’t know what to expect besides what we see on film from a year ago. It will be one of those challenges where you’ve got to be ready for the unexpected. But our players are excited. Talking to our team Sunday, and yesterday the players who came in, they’re excited. They know what type of team this is. They command your respect, and they command your attention because they’re a very sound, fundamental defense and offense. They have tremendous success and tradition down there, and from my reading, the history shows that they’ll take on anybody anywhere. They came in here a few years ago and evidently gave Nebraska a heck of a time, so it’ll be interesting to see as we get prepared for this contest with Southern Miss.”

On challenges for Nebraska’s quarterback against Southern Miss:

“They’re one of the few teams that can take their linebackers and extend them on the line of scrimmage and really give you a full house look. They do a lot of things where they’ll try to blitz the A gap. They’ll bring them up and show their intent to blitz. They’ll come right up on the line of scrimmage and do that. They’ll also overload you on the weak side and the strong side, so they have a full repertoire of things that you’ve got to manage in terms of your protection plan. So we’ve got to do a great job setting the protection plan, making sure that we are well protected and that we certainly give Joe the necessary options and tools to win.”

On Southern Miss linebackers:

“Their front is the standout group on the entire team when you watch their front seven on defense. Like Jay (Norvell) was talking about earlier, they’re very mobile, they’re athletic, they’re strong, they’re physical. They’ve got good knowledge of their scheme. It’s excellent structure. Their defensive coordinator was ranked as one of the top assistants in the country last year, and again, they’ve got good history. He’s been there for quite some time, and they’ve had tremendous success in their structure. They’re going to feature their players a lot of different ways, whether they continue the blitz or whether they overload. They certainly don’t need to; they could sit there and play vanilla defense and be just as good as anybody. I’ve got to compliment them; they’re really a heck of a team on that side of the ball.”

On improvement at center and other positions:

“Well, we’ve got to get better. That’s the number one thing. We’ve got to improve this week, and we’ve got to improve at that position (center) as well as every position on this team. It’s a challenge now that we’ve got one game under our belt to make the necessary corrections, to eliminate the mental errors that we have in our game that was exposed on Saturday night. We are by no means satisfied with where we are. We’re happy that we got off to a good start like we did, but we know there’s plenty of work to be done. Going through the film session with the players, it’s pretty obvious that there were a lot of yards, a lot of possessions left on the field, so there’s a great deal of improvement that we’ve got to make coming into Southern Miss.”

On the atmosphere at Saturday’s season opener:

“The atmosphere was outstanding. How can you not enjoy yourself in this type of environment and atmosphere? We’re close to 80,000 people. Their loyalty, like I’ve said on many occasions is unparalleled. And you can say that to a recruit, and you can promote that in a conversation with them, but until they’re here, until they witness that and go through the reception line at the beginning of the game when the team came off the bus, and until they go through the Tunnel Walk, until they go out into the Sea of Red and they feel what’s

going on, they feel the emotions of our fans and the support and the loyalty, there's no place like it. And I can see why they call it that.

They understand that it's important here, that it's our lifeblood, that everything about Nebraska centers around football, and it's great to see them come in on their official visits. Not only did they get their questions answered from the football side of it, but academically as well. It was a great weekend."

On his reaction to the atmosphere Saturday night:

"It was great. I enjoyed it. I think I locked up my jaw a little bit going out the gate, but that's alright. But it's not about me going out there, it's about our players. I always draw back and look at their focus. It was great to see their emotion. There's not much that needed to be said before the start of the game. I walked in the locker room, said a couple of words, and I thought they were going to knock the doors down. The emotion was good, and the energy level was very high. We've got to duplicate that this week."

On motion shifting:

"I felt very confident that we were disciplined in our movement and what we were doing prior to the snap. I wanted to make sure that we executed, that we blocked, we tackled, we threw, we caught, we don't turn the ball over – that was my concern. There's a lot of window dressing that goes on prior to the snap, and like I said, we try to create some mismatches with that type of shifting. Of course there's an opportunity to get a Willie Amos on a strong safety with that one shift that we got. We double-moved him, and obviously we were able to connect on that, but we had a holding call that brought us back. Those types of things are things that we're trying to get accomplished with the shift package."

On clear communication in the line of scrimmage:

"We feel that the play call handles that, and a lot of that has to be adjusted with the communication up front or with the potential of an audible if it's not the right play. We're not of the philosophy of wasting plays. If there is a certain situation that requires a quarterback to audible out, he's educated to do that. We certainly don't want to run a play into a defense that we can't block, so we're always conscious of that. We'll always be audible-ready in that respect."

On the crowd reaction to the offense shifting in the first play:

"I didn't hear anything. I didn't hear a word, I was focusing on the next call and the next situation, but movement is a part of this package. You're trying to create as many mismatches and trying to diffuse a lot of what people are attempting to do."

On Joe Dailey and turnovers in the first game:

"During the course of practice, you're going to have some problems in terms of turnovers, and you learn from those. Those are great learning situations. Like we tell Joe, you're the mailman here, and you have to deliver the mail to all these different houses. And Joe wants to go to the mansion all the time, but we'd like for Joe to go down to the low-rent district and check it down to the backs. Like (running backs coach) Randy Jordan says, we're like 7-Eleven; we're open all night and all day, so we need to check down.

Joe's capable of doing that. He's really progressed in a way that he's coming along. Like I said the other night, he handled everything that we gave him – all the verbiage, the mechanics of getting in and out of the huddle, all the reading he does through the wristbands, and the communication from the sideline. He's really done an excellent job of that. But let's put it in perspective; he's still a sophomore, and he's trying to run a pro system at a sophomore level. He's making tremendous strides, and he'll be that far ahead a year from now, two years ahead in the game. But at this point he's doing terrific, and he's growing. There's going to be some error, and he's going to take some calculated risks, but the main thing is that he learns that a part of this system is vision, seeing the field, and seeing what his options are, and making decisions as quickly and as rapidly as he can with patience and poise.

And then lastly, the big thing we talk to Joe constantly about is his footwork. And I know for the fans out there, you're saying, well, what does footwork have to do with this? Footwork is essential for timing, and if you're not in tune, and if you're not on the same page as your receiver is, your timing is going to get thrown off. It's important for Joe to learn that he has to set his feet, spit the ball out as quickly as he can, and look for another down. And look for another day, for that matter. So we're trying to educate him in that respect of how to manage the game, and sometimes there are some calculated risks. I don't want to take away his play-making ability, so like I said Saturday night, it's a very fine line when you get out of the pocket, and you're trying to make a play down the field, as long as it's open, I'm OK with it. But I think when you're forcing throws on the move and you don't see everything, then you've got to answer to

that. He's very honest about that, and he sees his error and he'll certainly rectify it."

On the interceptions:

"Well, I'm never happy about throwing interceptions, don't misconstrue that point. I think it's a learning experience, but, no, the number one priority of the quarterback here is not to turn the ball over. Ball security is of the utmost importance any time you take the field. That's our number one goal as an offense – not to turn the ball over, whether it's decision making at the quarterback position, or ball security at the receiver or ball carrier position. It's vital, it's a must. And that's our number one goal here, is win the turnover battle. When we don't win that, we do raise concern, and we do address it."

On the I-back position:

"There were a couple of pickups in that game where the back inserted up in the B gap and took on the safety that was blitzing and flushed him up. I thought it was a good inside-out position on the safeties and on the backers, so I was pleased. It seemed as though the blitzes that we got last week won't be the same type of blitzes that we're going to get this week. I say that because I thought the safeties that came in the Western Illinois game that blitzed came from more depth. I think these safeties and these corners and these backers that are going to blitz in this game are going to be much closer, much more stacked, and more show in their intent. We're going to have to step up and engage it immediately."

On Tierre Green at the No. 2 I-back spot:

"He's done a lot of things, and I don't know if that No. 2 spot is defined or not. Obviously Cory (Ross) is getting the bulk of the work, but they all share the responsibility and the contribution of running the football and protecting and running routes. We're going to need everybody. Tierre was one of those players, as Coach Norvell was talking about, who does have speed, and you do like to get him on the perimeter so he can utilize it. That's not to say he's not a functional back inside as well. All you need to do is go back and look at the inside zone run that he ran for a touchdown. I think he's very capable of being a complete back in terms of his running ability."

On the special teams:

"The No. 1 concern, again, goes back to handling the ball and making those fielding decisions that are so critical and vital to your field position and to your defense and offense. That's a key area, and it's important that we come out today and really focus in on securing the ball and doing the right things we need to do in the return game. The communication wasn't as good as it should have been, and it wasn't our best, but certainly we can learn from that and get better."

The coverage unit – we need to get better. I look at our kickoff coverage, and I know we're going to get tested by two outstanding returners from Southern Miss. They're highly-ranked coming out of last season, and they'll provide that challenge for us again this week. We've got to do a great job. I know our kids will be challenged. I feel that in Coach Busch, I've got a lot of confidence in his ability to coach special teams and the players that we've plugged into those positions to play. I feel confident that they'll get rectified, but talk is cheap right now. We've got to go out and do it."

On special teams around the country early in the season:

"Special teams in that first game are really critical. A lot of games can come down to special teams in the opener. This weekend will be no different. It's important that we do a great job covering all situations, working hard, focusing and preparing for the unexpected because they can make the difference."

I look back a year or two ago to the opening game of Buffalo and the New York Jets where the kickoff return, the kickoff coverage, those two facets of play made the difference. There's nothing more disappointing when your offense scores, and they answer the score with a kickoff return. It takes that momentum away. When a team answers a score with a score, it puts them right back in the hunt, right back in the game. The tide and the momentum can shift so quickly, and all that work you do driving the ball down the field for eight, 10, 12 plays really can get wiped out with one score or one return. I convey that to our players, and they understand. They're good football players here. They know the importance of special teams and the value that it has on winning games."

On calling plays without a quarterback headset like in the NFL:

"I hate it. If I have anything to say in college football, hopefully we can get a quarterback walkie-talkie unit going. That may cost a little bit more money, so I'm not sure that the athletic directors will be happy about that, but I just think it's great for the game. I think that you have young people playing this game, the fans want to enjoy it; they want to see a great product out there. Why not eliminate any potential for error that could happen through a communication error? I find that you can do more things, and your offense can

open up more, if you have that type of system where you're in constant communication with the play call. I also think it's a calming effect for your quarterback. You can talk to him while he's out on the field just like you are during the course of the week. I see some benefits, but I don't know if that's in the nature of college football.

I've adapted well through it. I really enjoy going through the process. It's a little more tedious, and you have to be a little more organized, but you've got to do what you've got to do."

On instant replay:

"I'm used to it. I'm very familiar and accustomed to that style of play. I don't know if the fans would appreciate it. It does slow the game down. I did happen to see that play of Wisconsin's, and Barry (Alvarez) did point out that it did slow the game down considerably. It took momentum right out of Wisconsin's offense, and I do agree with that. If you're going to do it, the procedure's got to be quick. I know it's been sped up in the National Football League, and it's still time-consuming. There's value to it, obviously, but it's also going to take away from the game a little bit. It's going to take away the momentum of the team. A lot of those errors – I think it's a 50/50 percentage; I'm not certain on that statistic, but my general instinct tells me that only about half of those calls get reversed anyhow."

On scripting plays:

"We always do it. That's our custom, that's our tradition, that's what we've always done, so we're going to continue to script our openers. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't, but it does give you a good starting point. It gives you a reference point to how you're going to adjust during the course of the game. I really think it allows you to probe a defense and allows you to really get a feel for what they're trying to do and how they're going to come out to attack you."

On seeing the team in a live game:

"I felt very confident coming in with this team on Saturday night. I love playing under the lights. I thought it was a great atmosphere. College football is played during the day, early in the morning this week, played at night, it doesn't matter. I enjoy playing at night, especially early in the year."

On staying on script for the plays:

"We got all of them called, and we didn't deviate very much. We did call everything that was on the script. If we have a script breaker, we will certainly come back to the other plays that are listed. We're really trying to get everybody involved early on in the game and try to build some confidence in the play selection and the execution of what we're trying to get accomplished."

On receiver Willie Amos:

"I think as you watch him Saturday night, he gives you a big play threat. He has the ability to score touchdowns from a variety of alignments and positions, he can run the vertical game, and he can work you on the double move. He's got the speed and the agility to make that big play. The big thing about Willie is that he continues to get better. He's an unselfish guy, he's a great guy to be around, and he's a fun guy to be around in practice. He's got tremendous assets. He does have big-time speed, and when you've got that type of speed, you've got to find ways to utilize it."