

Nebraska Football
Weekly Press Conference
Oct. 19, 2004
Head Coach Bill Callahan

Opening Statement:

“For players of the game against Baylor, we gave game balls to the entire offensive unit for their performance. On defense, Stewart Bradley only played a half of football, but he was the MVP of Saturday’s game and well-deserving of it. He did an excellent job for the time he was in there for the first half. He created a lot of havoc, a lot of TFLs, and generated a lot of big plays early in that game against Baylor. On special teams, Brandon Jackson; when you look at his all-purpose yardage from Saturday’s game, you see the emergence of a young player, not only as a running back, but as a quality special teams player and returner for us as well. He created a lot of positive field position for us in that game.”

“Scout team player of the week on offense – we gave it to Joey Ganz, the young quarterback who continues to develop. He continues to improve on a weekly basis. There are bright signs for his future – positive signs in every respect when you watch him practice and prepare our defense. Our defensive scout team player of the week was Andy Kadavy, a linebacker who has contributed on special teams and served in a backup role.”

“We’ve watched three days of film, and I can say we’re very impressed in every aspect of [Kansas State’s] play. They are a quality football team. They have depth at each position, and they play an outstandingly physical game. Everything about their presence on the field captures your attention, not only from an offensive standpoint, but from a defensive perspective. They are the best defense we’ve seen to date in terms of their physicalness, strength, talent, size. They have the full package, so we’re going to be well-tested as we go down to Manhattan. We’re excited about the challenge and the opportunity to get back to work today.”

On why Kansas State has struggled this season:

“Watching the film and looking at their record, their record is not indicative of their performance. They’re a very well-coached team. They’re very athletic, and the game is going to come down to two or three plays during the course of any contest that’s going to be highly competitive. They’re a couple plays away just like we are, and the thing that stood out in my mind that was so impressive was the way they competed against the No. 1 team in the country. You watch their players and their level of competition elevate to that level. It challenges you, and that’s what you see on film. You see an equalness there in the way they play the game. They’re a very good team, and we’ll be up for the challenge.”

On preparing for Kansas State quarterbacks:

“I think the big thing is that we continue to improve on our pass coverages in terms of the deep ball. We’re going to have to play the vertical ball this week. They’re a team that likes to feature the vertical stretch, and they’re going to stretch the field. They’re going to try to get three or four receivers down the field and stretch you out, try to find the one-on-one match-ups they want to go to. In that regard, we’re going to have to be well-schooled and compete for balls in flight down the field. That’s the biggest improvement we have to attain this week as we go down to Manhattan and play the Wildcats. They’re a good pass offense. When they get a hot hand, they can do some damage, and they’ve been known for their ability to stretch the vertical.”

On sensing a rivalry between Nebraska and Kansas State:

“I have followed this game from afar for many years. I know the level of competition between the two schools, and especially within the division. Whenever you get into divisional competition, every game takes on increasing importance. Everything becomes more magnified as the race becomes tighter. This is an opportunity for our team to reach some of the goals we set at the beginning of the year, and it all happens within the division. Within our little division here, we have some great teams. Despite what the records show, there are quality football teams in this division. You look at teams like Kansas State, and it’s amazing to me that you look at the record and watch the film, and it doesn’t match. It certainly doesn’t match, and I’m sure their team feels that way as well. We have to continue to improve, and we’re not so worried about what they do or what rivalry is. We have to be prepared mentally and physically for this game.”

On Coach Bill Snyder:

“He’s a great coach. He’s put a number of players in the National Football League. Scouts have gone through there a lot of times and spoken highly of their team. I know a lot of people who have worked with Coach Snyder personally and have nothing but great things to say about him and his program.”

On the importance of the four-game stretch:

“Every game is big. I think our players understand, and we have reminded them about what’s important and what our goals are, so there’s a constant reminder of where we are and what our goals are. That never changes. We’re always focused in on what we have to get done and the goals we’re trying to achieve. You try to make a big deal out of every game. This program is renowned for being in big games. We want to be in big games. This will be an exciting weekend for our team, and we need to rectify some of the road errors we displayed a couple of weeks ago. It will be a great challenge for us to go back on the road and see if we can meet that challenge.”

On I-back Cory Ross returning punts:

“We’re looking at that closely. We still have a great amount of confidence in [Santino Panico’s] ability to catch the ball and field the ball, and obviously we’ve changed a little bit of our return game in that respect. But if Cory is ready and able to go, we’re certainly going to utilize him.”

On breaking the season into quarters:

“Our expectation is to win each quarter. We broke it down into the four quarters, and in our first two, we ended up 2-1. We’re now entering the third quarter, the second half of the season. We’re just trying to focus in on what we need to do for that particular phase of the season and how we improve and get better and work and where our focus lies as we go on the road and play at home. We try to bring up the importance of those small details of the schedule and give some insight to our players as to what could occur and what could happen within the divisional race and how we can meet our goals. That’s something we’ve always done and will continue to do.”

On Kansas State’s offense:

“I think the key is everything, not only (Darren) Sproles, but their ability to push the ball down the field vertically in the passing game. That will be a huge test for our back end. As you look at last Saturday’s game, we need to improve that phase of our coverage element as we continue to mix man and zone coverages. The other key for us is to put points on the board on the road. This will be a contest where you’re facing a defense that’s pretty stingy. Even though the numbers don’t reflect that, what we see on film is quality defensive backs, quality coverage schemes, and a strong front four that can generate a pass rush that forces you to get the ball out of your hands quicker than you want to. All those things – it’s not just going to come down to one player.”

On the number of players on the field during pre-game warm-ups:

“What we really wanted to focus in on was trying to get the players who are going to play in the game warmed up and get them heated up so they can perform. We want them to have the necessary time to get prepared for the game. In that capacity, you’re only working with a 50-yard field, and there are a lot of bodies on the field, and we want to get the players warmed up. We seemingly run out of room because of the nature of what we do. We need a little bit more room, so we’ve asked the guys to comply to not bring everybody on. In the past, from what I understand, a lot of those players were in the stands. I’ve elected to suit everybody up for the game, and deservedly so because of their efforts during the course of the week. The only thing we ask in the pre-game is that we have a little more room for our starters to get warmed up.”

On the secondaries working with Kansas State’s vertical passing game:

“Technique-wise, we have to play the ball in flight much better. I think we had ample opportunity to pick some plays off during last Saturday’s game. Unfortunately, we didn’t come up with those plays, but again, the deep ball is a play that will challenge your corners and man-to-man. It’s a match-up where we won last weekend. Obviously we didn’t do quite as well on our defensive side of the ball. But playing the ball in flight – getting your head around, getting your hands up, squeezing a receiver into the boundary as a defender – those are key techniques that are critical for defensive backs in man coverage. When you’re out there in space 30, 40, 50

yards downfield and you're running full speed, you've got to be able to make those plays. We're pretty close. We just have to tighten up our technique and come up with those plays. We've demonstrated that in the past. We just have to get back to better play in that perspective."

On seeing some traditional Big 12 venues:

"I've been to those places as a pro coach when we were scouting particular players in the off-season, so I had a chance to see those venues when they were empty, but not full. This will be interesting as we go across the Big 12. I understand the rivalries and the passions of the fans in the Big 12 Conference, and we're going to have to do a great job handling the noise situation and the crowds, but more importantly, focusing in on the details of our game. That's what I'm encouraged about. I saw some positive signs on Saturday. They were exhibited throughout the week in practice. We need another great week of practice, and hopefully that will carry over into this Saturday's game."

On Joe Dailey's performance statistically and on film:

"There is always room for improvement, and one of the things we saw in Joe's game was that he was comfortable managing the passing attack. He made quick decisions. He found primaries; he found outlets. I thought our coaching staff did a good job putting our players in position to make plays, and to our players' credit, they came up with the big plays. I feel Joe is getting more comfortable in what we're doing. We've changed up a lot of things in terms of play action. We've increased that type of role in terms of the passing game to complement our run, so we're trying to balance everything out between the three-step, the five-step, the play action. That's a lot on a young man, and I thought he handled it well."

On the offensive line:

"They're coming along. There's a veteran group there in Jake Anderson, Mike Erickson, Brandon Koch, Seppo Ewvaraye. All those players are continuing to emerge. They're learning and getting better every day. I see an increased development across the board in the run technique. I see the pass protection improving. Those are great signs to see, especially teams that like the blitz, as Baylor did. They like to bring pressure. When your line is capable of picking up pressure, that sends a solid message to your quarterback. It gives him pocket confidence that no matter what comes in terms of pressure, we're capable of picking that up, and we're capable of making the play with heat in his face. I thought we took a major step Saturday in that respect."

On the defensive pass coverage:

"It all goes hand in hand – pass coverage and pass rush. Your coverage is going to be exposed when you don't have the rush. When you take some gambles and blitz, that's football. That's the risk you take when you leave a corner out there on an island. The opponent tends to pick up the pressure, and the corner gets out there exposed more than you would expect. They have to come up with those plays, and I think our guys have done that pretty well. You're going to have those types of plays when you don't get to the passer and when you don't get the pressure that's needed to make your coverage effective. Each area – the back end, the rush, the coverage – they all complement each other. We're constantly looking at ways to improve ourselves in that capacity. I was watching us on film from the Baylor game, and for the first half, we played very well. In that second half, the only thing we need to do better is come out of the tunnel a little faster on the first drive, make that stop, generate a three-and-out, get off the field, and make our opponent worry. The only concern I have is that we start fast in both halves, and we didn't do that well enough on Saturday. We were scored on twice in the opening drives of the first half and in the second half, so that's one area that will be key for us this week."

"You have to go back and look at everything from a structural standpoint. Maybe we're putting too much pressure on people when we shouldn't be; maybe we should be a little more conservative in our play. Then it just comes down to making plays. We have to be able to make tackles and make plays and do the things that good defenses do. We'll continue to do that. We increased our tackle practice last week. We went a little bit more live during the course of the week. We're trying again to increase our production with our ability to tackle in the open field."

On the speed of the outside linebackers:

“In zone, you’re going to have some opportunities, and the ability to close windows and close zones is always critical. It complements what type of pressure you’re getting on the quarterback. If we’re getting that type of pressure on the QB, those windows become a little bit tighter. If there’s more time, the lanes are a little more open in terms of the coverage. Again, the rush has to be there, the coverage has to be tighter, and we have to play the ball in flight a little bit quicker.”

On replacing Joe Dailey during the Texas Tech game:

“Again, he wasn’t ‘benched.’ That’s a tough word to use. We elected to put a young individual there. I don’t want to go back all the way to Lubbock; that game is out of my memory. But I thought our quarterback handled his situation and managed the game quite well last week.”

On Nebraska’s standing in the Big 12 North:

“We’re not counting anything yet. We haven’t played, so it’s going to be important every week to center our focus a little bit tighter, a little bit more energized as we prepare. Every week is different. It’s a game-to-game, week-to-week business, and that’s how we live. It changes from one week to the next – the set of circumstances, the situations, who you’re playing, how they’re playing, what you have to do to adjust to a particular team; it all changes. I think it’s important that you realize that and you adapt quickly. The teams that don’t adapt don’t do very well. We’re not counting our eggs before they hatch, that’s for certain. We have great respect for the opponent we’re playing, and it will take a great effort to beat this team.”

On no television coverage of the upcoming game:

“I haven’t really looked into that; It’s not really my area. All I know is that if you win, you’ll be on TV. If we do our part, the rest will follow.”

On the “payback” aspect of the Kansas State game:

“I look at this season completely differently than how I have in the past. I’ve made that statement several times. I don’t look back in the rearview mirror in terms of what teams have done or how they’ve responded. This is a fresh start. We’re excited about the opportunity to go down to Kansas State and play them. It’s a football game. It’s that simple. It’s a divisional game, so it’s important and it has implications. These games are crucial games. What was done in the past was done in the past. I can’t help that, whether there are records broken or no records broken. I can’t control that. All I can do is get better and try to get our team better for this weekend.”