

October 3, 2020

Virginia at Clemson

Memorial Stadium (Clemson, S.C.)

Bronco Mendenhall Press Conference

On differences between performances against Clemson

“We were more prepared, as a coaching staff. Our players were certainly more prepared after seeing what Clemson looked like a year ago. We were anxious to play, eager to play and believed we could win. A handful of plays, a handful meaning five or six, were the difference in the game. To Clemson’s credit, they made those plays. [Travis] Etienne was difficult to tackle and probably the difference in the game, maybe a turnover by us and an interception in the end zone by them. Couple of things, we need to make those plays. It goes right to the end. I liked our conditioning, our toughness, our resiliency, I liked our execution, but a handful of plays was the difference. A significantly different story than a year ago, and that’s how I see it.”

On interception to begin second half

“It didn’t take the air out of our sails, it just was, we kept trying to close within a two-score margin. Great teams have great players that make plays at the right time and the one-handed interception in the corner of the end zone was a great play by a Clemson player. Those are the kind of plays that help you get into the playoffs and help you win championships and help you become a really good program so really nice play by that corner.”

On effect of using timeouts in the first half

“Really not that much. Here is the simple thought behind that. Clemson is hopeful to have shock and awe right from the beginning and put you on your heels and never let you recover. I was absolutely willing to use timeouts and slow the pace to make sure our guys were ready, and they were. That was absolutely something that we would do again and was prepared to do because of how fast, how explosive and how easily they jump out on teams so quickly. Looking to stall and use them if we needed to and I believe we needed to.”

On third down breakdowns

“It was a challenge the entire game, defensively, either with tackling or Clemson’s receivers making plays, or Trevor Lawrence scrambling or screens to jersey No. 9 [Etienne], right. They have good players and they are really well coached. They were just one step ahead in terms of making the plays they needed to on third and long, which is atypical. We are normally very good on third down, that shows the difference. We worked to adjust, we worked to blend, we worked to try different things. They out-executed us on third down, really pretty consistently throughout the game.”

On Brennan Armstrong’s play

“He did amazing. Brennan is tough mentally and physically. The stage wasn’t too big, the team wasn’t too good. I was really pleased with his mindset, his execution, his leadership. He did a really nice job.”

QB Brennan Armstrong

On playing on this stage against a team like Clemson

“The experience was good. Just looking back, the main thing was we were marching down the field in the second half and that was gonna be a big score for us, you know, get some momentum starting the second half. The pick in the end zone, that would have really swung it honestly. That’s the one thing I look back, the pick in the end zone, that kind of hurt us. I think we would have scored there, would have had good momentum and the outcome of the game, just the score of the game could have looked a lot different.”

On getting into rhythm faster tonight

"I think so, obviously we emphasized starting faster this time because we did start pretty slow last week. Once we got into the rhythm, I feel like we can consistently keep it. I feel like we move the ball really well. There were only a few drives where we really stalled out, otherwise we were picking up first downs, getting the ball down the field, keeping our defense off the field and taking a good couple of minutes off the clock by pushing the ball down the field. We got to the red zone a couple of times and couldn't score. I think we moved the ball pretty decently."

On Billy Kemp's night

"I mean Billy is just a tough player. He never backs down from anybody and I knew I was going to be able to count on him in this big of a game. It is as simple as that. He has my respect, I trust him, and we are on the same page. I knew no matter what was going to go on in the game he was going to be there no matter what. Just, Billy is a great player. Plays hard all the time and I have complete trust in him."

FS Joey Blount

On challenge stopping Etienne

"I think he is one of the best players in college football. He showed that today and I have a lot of respect for him and what he does. There were a lot of plays left on the field that we had him in the position we wanted but he didn't wait. With his athleticism and his game, he made it for himself and got out of the situations we had him in. We need to be better at tackling, pursuits of the ball and really just wrapping up. There were a lot of mis-tackles as a team where it looked like we had him, and he made a play out of nothing. Etienne is a really good player, high caliber player, and he had a really good game today."

On feeling going into halftime after scoring touchdown

"I felt comfortable about that, going into the half only down by two touchdowns and getting the ball after the half. Our offense was getting on a roll and that was kind of a momentum shift that we needed. I feel like the defense, we weren't playing great, but we were playing enough to keep us in the game. We kept the ball in front of us, we weren't having shots over our head, we were getting good pressure on the quarterback. Our third down conversion percentage, we weren't getting them off the field on third downs. We were just having little dinks and dimes here and there and that kind of breaks the will of the defense if you would say. I really liked how, at that point, our offense had been very competitive and trying to get us a chance to climb back into the game. We need to have better complimentary football on both sides."

On third down conversions

"That is the way to tire out a defense, those long drives, five to 10-minute drives almost. It feels like you are on the field so long, kind of losing pace. Every call starts mixing into each other and then third and long we get our nickel out there, that is a package we strive and do well in, for them to complete that and move the chains it starts the cycle over again and gets very, very repetitive. It's not a great feeling. That is something we need to work on to compete in this league. Quarterbacks are going to make those throws. Trevor Lawrence is one of the best quarterbacks, not just in our league but in the country, the throws he is making are not so that other quarterbacks can't make those throws. So we have to be prepared for those throws and get off the field, get off the field to give the offense good field position and just play complimentary football again."