



#3/3 Tennessee 44, #19/17 Kentucky 6
October 29, 2022 | Knoxville, Tenn. | Neyland Stadium

Tennessee Head Coach Josh Heupel

Opening statement...

"It was a great day in Knoxville with the atmosphere and Vol Walk. The energy inside the stadium well before our guys even came out of the tunnel was awesome. I can't thank our guys enough. It was great seeing a bunch of former players back here for Champions Weekend. That was fun. The atmosphere here all night long was an advantage for us, so thank you to the fans. Defensively, I thought we did an unbelievable job controlling and dominating the line of scrimmage. We did a great job of matching out guys on the backend. We played real ball tonight, and it was suffocating defense. It was fun to watch those guys. Special teams did a great job. They created plays in the early part of the season through the return game. Our guys did a great job. Paxton Brooks was awesome all night long and our cover units too. Offensively, we did enough to score enough points to get a good win."

On Doneiko Slaughter's play...

"He trained at corner. With all the moving pieces we had, he had been playing at safety. I thought he went over to corner and did a great job early on in the football game. His versatility is big for us. Obviously, we haven't been healthy at the corner position. We feel like next week will be the healthiest we've been since the beginning of the season. We feel like we will have the opportunity to have everybody back and playing at a really high level."

On what's allowed Jaylen Wright to turn the corner with his play...

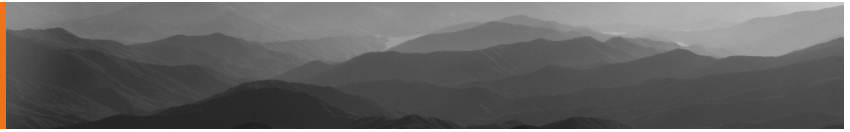
"First of all, he's been really consistent with his practice habits, attitude and being intentional in the meeting room. He's still a young football player, and he's (been able to) really grow. His understanding of the game, what we are doing and how to press the run game. He's become much more physical and playing with a good pad level. His best football is still a long ways ahead of him. I'm really proud of him over the last month of what he's done and the strides he's taken. It's really important for us that his game continues to mature."

On if he felt the team ever overlooked Kentucky throughout the week...

"No. These guys, the reasons we have found a way to be on the right side of it every week is because they have been focused, they have prepared, they have practiced, and they get themselves ready emotionally and physically to play hard once the ball is kicked off, all week long. I thought we were very dialed in and locked into the process. Good teams get better throughout the season; this football team has to continue to get better as we get into the back third, back half of the season."

On why he thinks this team's best football is ahead of them...

"It is still ahead; there are a lot of things that we can be cleaner at. Tonight, just redzone. Offense, there were a couple of opportunities off of turnovers where we did not operate and function at the level that we are capable of. It does not mean all 11; sometimes it is just one guy, but there are some things that we can be cleaner in, and at times on defense and special teams, some of those same things. So, it is a constant growth and evolution to who we are individually and collectively. I do like this football team because they do have good practice attitudes; you can tell that they care about each other and they are going to play hard for each other."



On what he attributes Jalin Hyatt's success to...

"There is something to putting him in position; it is him going and making plays, it is Hendon making plays, and it is our offensive line protecting. At the end of the day, it is players, not coaches. Jalin has done a great job, but it takes all of those guys to do a great job for him to have the night that he has. He is playing at a really high level. His understanding of the game, playing with fundamentals and technique; it is special, the run that he has had the last four or five weeks in particular."

On Tennessee's game plan against Chris Rodriguez...

"There wasn't anything that we completely changed dramatically. We misfired a couple of things, he got going—he got to the second level and that's an issue when he's got the ball in his hands. We misread the touchdown run, came back and started playing better just all three levels of the defense fitting everything good together. I thought in the football game, the penetration on the edge and the interior too, forced him to balance somethings and not get startled."

On Cedric Tillman's performance after coming back from his injury...

"Cedric I thought did a great job during the course of the ball game with the opportunities he had, but throughout the course of the night, he handled everything really well. We had him on pitch count here in this first one. He's had two weeks of really good practice at full speed where we felt comfortable. He's been itching to play, and we felt like we wanted to make sure we made the right decision for him for the long term and short term too as we go through this season. He's ready to play his best football in my opinion."

On Jaylen McCollough ...

"He did a great job. He's a leader on our defense—a quarterback in some respects, being able to get all three levels of the defense in sync, and it was awesome to have him back out there for us."

On his mindset going into halftime ...

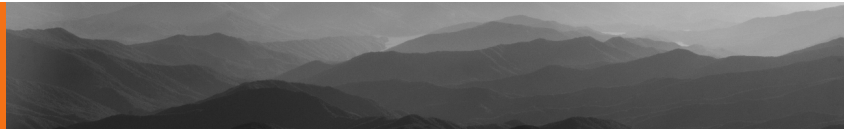
"Defensively, getting a stop was critical right there. I think it was maybe 27-6 at that point. For us, because you have a quarterback you can trust with the ball in his hands and a smart decision maker, you are able to be aggressive in some of those situations, and we trust our offensive line too. Obviously, they hit a few things that got us into the endzone and right to Jalin (Hyatt) on that drive."

On Doneiko Slaughter's position in the future ...

"With everybody coming back for next week, we'll evaluate where we're at and what the best rotation is. You have seen us defensively. We play a bunch of guys, and I think that is important for us. He does have versatility; he's cross trained and has been the entire time we have been here. He did a really nice job tonight."

On the tempo and formations of the offense in the red zone...

"At the end of the day, it still comes down to execution, so when we're good in the red zone because the quarterback makes a good set and we're being physical upfront, we're able to run the football effectively and make competitive one-on-one catches. The tempo can be an advantage for us. You've seen us at times slow down and still execute too, so our guys are able to be flexible in what we're doing. At the end of the day, when you're down there, decisions happen faster for your quarterback, and you've got to make competitive plays. Our guys have been doing that, and we've been really physical up front."



On the defensive stat line giving up two third down conversions ...

"That's important. That's the situation you want to be in defensively and a situation that you have to take advantage of to get off the field. You could see it tonight. We were matching things out better and playing tight coverage and then we were able to get to the quarterback too and make him uncomfortable. You put all those things together, and you're able to get off the football field. Technique, eye discipline, the understanding of your schemes—all those things have continued to grow for us and that's what good defenses and good teams do. They continue to get better. There's still a lot of room for improvement for us, but part of the effort tonight for sure."

On excitement level for upcoming Georgia game...

"Certainly, it's going to be a big ball game, great football team. We are going to enjoy this one tonight. I think it's important that you enjoy the journey. I told the players before the game to enjoy the Vol Walk, enjoy running through the T. We built this type of energy because in the way that you've worked, competed. They'll enjoy it tonight. The players will enjoy it when they get back on Monday. Staff will turn it around early tomorrow morning. We understand it's a really good football team we are getting ready to play. These are the type of games, you come to Tennessee because you want to be on this type of stage, you want to play in front of an audience that's going to be captivated by these two football teams."

On secondary's performance tonight...

"Just growth, man. Understanding of what we are doing and continuing to evolve and grow and get better. We have a couple different guys out there too that have a little bit more experience in general. Guys continue to play and grow and compete. Put that together with what we did up front, applying pressure, get a chance to get off the football field the way they did."

On turning the program around so quickly...

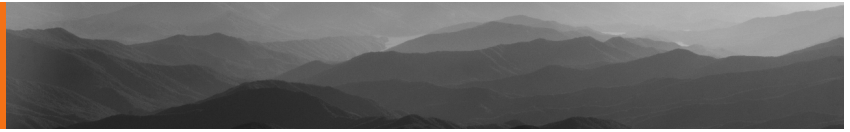
"The first day that I took the job, I stood up here as I was getting introduced. This is what you envision. You started a journey. You understand the type of team that you want to build, how you want to play. Everybody together. You're in the nuts and bolts, just continuing to grow, compete and get better every day. Small decision affects our growth. This group of individuals, it's the group of individuals that chose to stay. They want to be here. They've grown individually in who they are, what they're about and how they compete every day. Collectively, you can see that they care about each other. Once you start having a group like that, you can cover a lot of ground really quickly as a football program. Obviously, we've taken some huge strides. Next week is another big test but one we're looking forward to."

On the role the defense has in the team's current level of play...

"We had key stops, created field position and forced turnovers tonight. Short fields all night long, some of which offensively we did take advantage of in field position. I thought special teams, Paxton Brooks did a great job, pinning them inside the five a couple of times. That's what good teams do; you start playing off of each other. When one is struggling, you got another one that picks them up. Give them a chance to get the feel on the ground too. There's been times throughout the course of the year that that has happened. Whether it's offense holding it together or defense holding it together at Pitt, you just keep competing together. They care, they love each other, and they have fun. It's a fun locker room to be in every day."

On the run defense being solid throughout the season...

"Understanding of scheme and understanding of eye discipline, it's a big part of it. Development of fundamentals, continued fundamentals from your front four to your second level to your third level. Continued growth in



tackling. All of those things play off of each other and allow you to grow and we play the tougher run defense that we have.”

On playing a lot of personnel defensively...

“One of strengths for us defensively is the ability to rotate and play a lot of guys. Next man up. That allows you to go out and play as hard as you possibly can. That allows you late second quarter, second half to be fresh and to go compete and play hard. Absolutely, that’s a huge part of it defensively compared to a year ago.”

Tennessee Redshirt Senior Quarterback Hendon Hooker

On the defense that improves each week...

“Day in and day out, I see the defensive guys putting in extra work, whether that’s getting on the jugs, which you can see these guys (Brandon Turnage and Doneiko Slaughter) have been getting on the jugs heavily. Making great plays on the ball and coming out and playing with their hair on fire, which is their goal. I’m extremely proud of them and love to compete with them every day. It’s a heated battle on that practice field, and I’m excited to get back out there and compete against them.”

On what the team’s goal is...

“Championship. We want to win the SEC Championship. Our goal is to be playing in Atlanta at the end of the season. Every day we come in, it’s another day at the office. The same way a mailman goes and delivers the mail, the same way we go into the football facility. Lifting weights, hopping on film, and trying to get better every day.”

On their approach from week-to-week...

“Like I say every time I get up to the mic, it’s business. We’re here to accomplish a goal that we set in January. Whether we’re No. 1 or No. 25, it doesn’t matter. We’re going to approach every game the same way, take every opponent seriously and prepare that way. Our preparation has showed that we’ve prepared the right way when game time hits.”

Tennessee Junior Wide Receiver Jalin Hyatt

On meeting Chad Johnson...

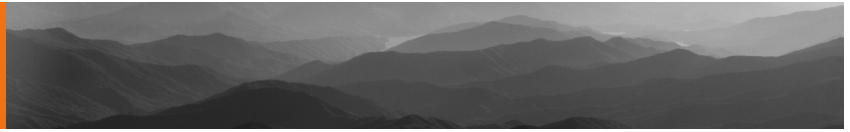
“I met him right before the game. He’s taller than I thought. Those are the things you dream of. Just to have the opportunity to see him, just to meet him, it made my day and I think that’s why I wanted to play so hard today, just because he was here.

On his record-breaking performance and if he knows anything about Marcus Nash...

“I need to know my Tennessee history; I do not, and I feel bad about it, but I’m not trying to think about the accolades. Whatever it is, we just got to be game this week. We’re worried about what we can do and how far we can take it. With the guys we have on this team, I think they have the same goal. We all have the same goal, and I think that’s why we’re capitalizing on our opportunities.”

On next week’s Georgia game and Tennessee’s success...

“That’s what you live for. You live for games like that and you know we are going to bring our all for Georgia. It’s definitely going to be our healthiest team coming into Georgia. We’ve got our guys back. It starts with Coach



Heupel. It starts with the coaches just keeping the next-game mentality. We preach that every team meeting, every practice. We treat it like every game is a big game. We just got to keep going, keep capitalizing on what we're doing, and just every opportunity that presents itself we have to take advantage of."

Tennessee Junior Defensive Back Doneiko Slaughter...

On what factors played a role in him making his interception...

"Just going through my technique, that's about it. Just going throughout my technique through the week and just following that. That's all."

On his versatility as a player...

"It just comes with mentality. My freshman year, I played STAR coming into the defense. Once you play STAR, you can just know every part of the defense in-and-out. Again, with mentality, if you have the mentality that you just want to be great, God will have your back."

On if he's surprised on how quickly Tennessee football has turned around since 2020...

"Yes, yes I am. When coach Heupel first came through, I was like, 'he's a great coach.' For real, he's a great guy. He brought a lot of energy. As soon as he stepped in, I just felt like the whole room's mood changed. He's just a great coach who wants to get to know his players."

Tennessee Redshirt Junior Defensive Back Brandon Turnage

On what is beginning to click for him recently...

"Really just being consistent, trying to stay locked into my technique every day and stay locked into everything that is going on. I just stay locked in and keep other guys locked in, because you never know when your time is going to come. I was just being prepared for the moment."

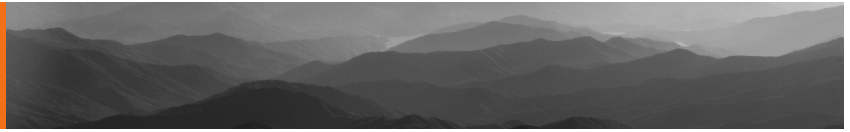
On his interception...

"We were playing Cover 2, and just knowing the formations and some of the little eye candy that they give us, I kind of tried to bait it and tried to play it 'high-low' and break on anything short with having help over the top."

Tennessee Defensive Lineman/Linebacker Byron Young

On if he felt they could get after Will Levis...

"Yes sir, most definitely. We knew off rip that we would have to stop the run to even get that chance for him to pass. So, our game plan was to shut down the run to force him to pass, and then next to shut that down. That is what we did, and we came out with a win."



Kentucky Head Coach Mark Stoops

Opening Statement...

"Not very good; we got beat by a better football team. They beat us in virtually every area, coached us, outplayed us, very good football team. You got to come in here and play as good as you can in every area to expect to compete with a team that is top three in the country, and we didn't do that tonight. I felt there were moments, early, where you got to capitalize, you got to convert. We had some possessions in the first half as we were hanging around, fighting in a one possession game where we had a conversion on third down and we had the opportunity to make a play and didn't. Later, we drive it down again, and have an opportunity to cut it to a six-point game, or whatever it was at that point, and get the interception, what a heck of a play by them. You can't do that with a team that is as explosive as they are offensively. If you don't possess the ball, if you don't score points, it's hard to hold on and eventually, that raveled on us and you saw the result.

On the offense's limited strategy...

"At that point, when we were in predictable pass, there's things we can do better. I think there are things where mixing it up and taking our shots for second down and things of that nature, when we did actually, we had one or two early. Predictable pass is not a good situation for us, as you know. We've been struggling with it; we're trying to protect the times, but really, it wasn't just protection. We didn't run it effectively enough, we weren't good on play action gain, we weren't good in the screen game, we weren't good in any area. You have no chance to beat Tennessee if you have 200 yards of offense and not enough first downs."

On how Will Levis played...

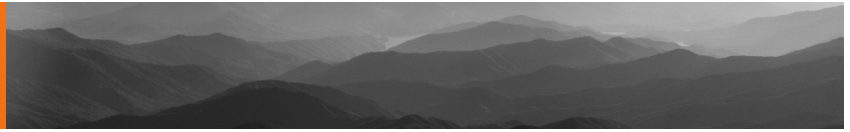
"It was tough. When the game was starting to get away from us, he's forcing things, and that's the competitor in him; that's human nature. We are trying to force, trying to make plays, you know they're scoring at that point, we aren't moving the ball. The play where they made in the first half with the deflection was a very good play off the deflection and the other ones; there was one underthrow as well and the deep one.

On broken coverage on Tennessee's receivers...

"That was very aggravating. They put stress on you, we know that. It's really hard to sit here and get beat the way we did and sit here and say you did some good things. That's a punchline waiting to happen. There were some good stops. You have to play great as a team. We didn't move the ball; we didn't get first downs and we didn't score. Special teams, we gave up a punt return late, but we were backed up and couldn't get first downs to get it out of there. We were fighting at doing some good things. There were some that they hit on us that we worked the heck out of. We should've played better. You can't do that. We were fighting, making them work for yards. Then, the two big explosives were something that we worked hard on and had a good idea about. Doesn't make it any easier. I'm not putting any blame on any one particular player. That's on all of us. It hurt because we understand what's coming there."

On containing Tennessee's running game...

"It's hard to say because the game gets away from you. When it gets rolling on you like that and you're not moving the ball, you're going three and out and you're turning it over; it can pile up on you in a hurry against a team like this. There were some really good stops. We had an opportunity to stay in the game. With the competition, you're going to naturally play better, and we didn't do that. Once there's separation, we're going three and out or turning



the ball over. It gets very ugly against a team like that very quickly. I thought we had some good stops early and had a chance to keep the game close. You have to keep pace in all areas. We didn't do that."

Kentucky Senior Defensive Back Keidron Smith

On how to go forward after the loss...

"We digest this loss that we took tonight; digest it tomorrow if we need to. Come Monday afternoon, we have to get ready for next week, and that's Missouri."

On Kentucky's defensive struggles...

"We had breakdowns in our defense, but we have to give credit to Tennessee. They took what the defense gave them, and they executed."

On if Tennessee did anything surprising...

"It wasn't anything different. We were out of position on some of the plays. Some of the times they earned it. Give credit to them. They played a hard-fought game."

On if it is frustrating to get a defensive stop then give up a big play the next play...

"It can be frustrating, but you have to play the next play. They're the number three team in the country. They're going to create explosive plays. It's just how we can manage the next play after that."

On if there was any quit in the team in the second half...

"That was our main point of emphasis coming out of the locker room. If you're going to have your head down, there's no reason for you to be on that field. We made sure of that."

Kentucky Senior Quarterback Will Levis

On what Tennessee's defense did well...

"They were just playing some zones that were plugging up the holes of a lot of things we were trying to dial up. Credit to them for doing that. Most of it was just shooting ourselves in the foot I think. For me at least, the second interception was on third and long, trying to squeeze in a ball that I don't need to in a game that we were down by a lot. I just need to learn from that underthrow of a go ball. You just can't do that. Not so much what they did, but what we did to ourselves."

On how the team feels about Tennessee's success...

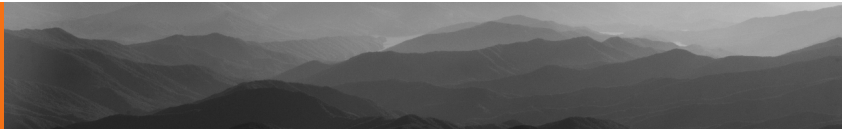
"I don't really care. I'm just going to take it one game at a time and keep having the best season that we possibly can. It sucks that it's not playing out the way that we had wanted it to. Props to Tennessee, they're a great team, and I hope they continue to go and keep playing good football."

On if playing a high-powered team like Tennessee caused him to force any throws...



TENNESSEE

POSTGAME QUOTES



"I think that second interception was really the only throw that I forced. I think that's definitely not a throw that I make if the game is any closer. I could've targeted it a little better, but that was the only throw in my progression there on 3rd and 10. I was just trying to make a play. It happens."