

December 31, 2022

Mark Stoops - Destin Wade - Trevin Wallace

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Nissan Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're going to hear from head coach Mark Stoops and quarterback Destin Wade and linebacker Trevin Wallace. Coach Stoops will make opening remarks, and then we'll open it up for questions.

MARK STOOPS: Obviously, very disappointed in this defeat. You want to start by recognizing and congratulating Iowa. They played a very good game.

Both of us were down some players and a bit short-handed, and they did what they had to do to win the football game. Starting right at the onset I think just getting us in bad field position. They played very good defense. We know that going into it that they're a very good defensive team.

They played better than us in special teams in certain areas early and put us behind the 8-ball. Defensively I thought we played really good for the majority of the game, but by being backed up early, it helped them have a short drive and set up their one offensive touchdown, and really we were playing a bit of catch-up from that point on.

Very proud of these guys. Very proud of Destin and Trevin. As I told the players in there, we have a great group in there. We were a bit short-handed today, but it is what it is. So were they.

We came in here to compete to win, but I also wanted to let Destin play. I wanted to see the future and what it looks like and give him an opportunity to just go out there and play ball and play it with the confines of our offense and our system and down a coordinator. You know, he was put in a tough situation. He will learn from it without a doubt, and we look forward to that and his growth.

You know, defensively Trevin and the defensive guys I thought played pretty darn solid all day. Played really hard. Iowa was creative early trying to get their playmakers, their tight ends, the ball with some deception screens, if you will, and did a nice job of getting them the ball, and they make some people miss. They're very good players. Very close game to that point.

The third and one, you know, I'll put that on me. I won't put that on Destin. I probably should have ran the ball there and got out of the half. One once we got that, it kind of put us in a really bad shot.

That's the confidence I have in him and us and our future. Things are going to be fine. We have a very good football team that wants to come back hungry. Obviously there was just something a bit off this year from time to time. I just told the players this, and I'll tell you that's on me. I have to get that fixed to get back to being who we are.

I think Iowa won today by being Iowa, and credit them. I say that with a compliment. We've got to get back to being us and doing some things better.

I have a lot of work to do, but I'm really excited about it because I feel like there's a great nucleus of young players. There's a really good set of guys with experience coming back.

As I just talked about Trevin and some guys right in the middle that have some experience now that are ready to explode and be really big-team players. So I feel like we have a lot of good pieces in place, and we just have to get back to work.

Q. Coach, you said you wanted to see Destin play. What did you see?

MARK STOOPS: I saw a young man that has a bright future. Destin was put in a tough situation today. So there will be a lot of arm chair quarterbacks that sit back and want to critique this guy, but I tell you right now, let them go back there and play against that defense and see how easy that is. It's a tough row to hoe. Believe me, we know that going into it. It's a tough spot, but he manned up and did some good things.

We needed play very well around him. We talked about it all week that it's not just on the quarterback or any one player. We need to do some good things around them, and I think there were certain areas where we fell short. It's not a time to point fingers. We all accept it, but we know we're going to grow there this, and I know he will grow from this.

Q. Destin, what kind of defied your expectations? I know it's one thing to be on the practice field, but what was it like once the game started? How did you feel?

DESTIN WADE: I felt confident. Just my coaches putting me through my practice basically, and I felt confident going in there, but it's football, and things can go wrong or good, which is just how it is.

Q. You were pretty calm early. How were the nerves? Your hometown. Playing a top-ten defense your very first game. How was that?

DESTIN WADE: It felt like I was playing at home basically, so not really much nerves. Just that first snap and that first hit, for me I just felt ready to go after that.

Q. I know it's different without Chris. Most first-time starters -- he attempted 30 passes. Was that part of the game plan to kind of let him let it rip?

MARK STOOPS: It was. We felt like we had to spread it out a bit. Iowa, if you watch them -- we weren't quite the same team we were a year ago. They are still very physical and very tough up front, so hitting in big sets and playing smash-mouth with them I think was going to be a tough spot.

You know, certainly there's things we can do a lot better and put him in a better position to be successful and so on, and so we'll look at all our areas. But, yeah, we did feel like we had to spread him out a bit and use his legs, use some quarterback run game, which gave us some good plays.

We actually had -- I'm not going to say -- I'm not going to tell them because then they're going to make a story out of it, but just read a script wrong. You know what I mean? We signalled it wrong. You know what I mean? Little things like that. What else? You were going to say something, John.

Q. In a game like this, field position was always going to be key. The special teams and running part of it. How much of hiring Coach Boulware is designed to address that part of this?

MARK STOOPS: 100%. Yeah, definitely. We have to turn the table there. You know, there were games this year where we won the hidden yards in the core four, but not enough. And there were certainly games that it impacted it in a negative way, and I had to address it, and I did.

Q. Mark, when you say the time it takes (inaudible) --

MARK STOOPS: I already addressed certain things. I think you see I have two new coordinators come coming in here. That's two-thirds of it right there. You want me to just hit the reset button and blow up the whole thing? We're playing pretty good defense. No, I'm teasing.

But there were just things. I have it own my part. That's what I just told the team in there. The environment of college football, I don't have all those answers. I can't go on that dissertation right now. You know, it is what it is.

We are going to manage it the best way we can. We feel like we have a strong culture. There were pieces that needed to be better. It's that simple, right? I mean, I have to address them, and I have to make it better. It's not pointing any fingers. It is what it is.

If you want to throw darts at somebody, throw them at me. I can take them. I'm putting that weight back on, so I can take a few more darts. You know, there are things that we need to re-address.

You know, with bringing in the coordinator that I believe I'm going to get on the offensive side of the ball will help. It will help hit the reset button.

Q. Coach, you mentioned a couple of times your quarterback in the future. No matter what happens in the transfer portal (inaudible) --

MARK STOOPS: Destin knows just like Trevin knows that they're going to go out there and compete every day. Nothing is given. Everything is going to be earned, and they have an opportunity to do that every day.

Q. What can you say about the performance of Iowa's defense? I mean, your team got shut out for the first time since October 19 of 2015.

MARK STOOPS: It's rough. We knew they were very good going into it, and our defense, Trevin and them, we gave up seven. So a very good defensive game.

There's going to be people out there knocking that, but there's a lot of people that still love and appreciate defense, right? So I think it was a good game in that way.

Somebody ask Trevin a question because they played pretty good.

Q. What was working well for you all, Trevin, defensively, especially on those fourth down stops?

TREVIN WALLACE: What was working for us was everybody was coming together. Even though we was still down, no matter what happened we still had our heads up because most teams when they go down, they start backing up, but we still had our food on the pedal. Even though we didn't like the outcome, the energy was still up, so that's what was working for us.

Q. What is the locker room like this month when you had guys opt out and enter the transfer portal? You knew you were short-handed, but you still brought that energy.

TREVIN WALLACE: Our locker room is still the same. Nothing had changed. We knew we had people opt out or hit the portal, but we were like no matter what happened, we still have each other's backs. We're brothers, so you know we're going to keep grinding with each other no matter what the outcome is.

Q. Trevin, you played a lot (inaudible) -- how do you feel like you personally did?

TREVIN WALLACE: I feel like I grew a lot from my first year to this year. You know you still have room to grow no matter who you are. You still have room to grow. I feel like I grew a lot. There's still room for growth.

Q. Destin, when did you know you were going to start today?

DESTIN WADE: I knew just during the week just taking the one reps. Just getting used to that. That's when I knew I had a good feeling, and some of the coordinators were telling me.

MARK STOOPS: Really before we left he was taking most of the one reps before we left, so I think he had a good feeling at that time.

Q. The punting seemed to keep you back pretty much all day long deep in your own territory. Harkening back to the Texas A & M game, how much did that affect you?

MARK STOOPS: I'm sorry.

Q. The punting.

MARK STOOPS: It did back us up. You're right. We lost on that, there's no question. They hit some really good punts, covered it well, and then the one punt return that we gave up hurt us because they got it out to around the 40 yard line and continued to play the field position game.

You know, we've done that before, played very good defense, played with great field position. They started that way. They deferred. They deferred, and they won that situation early and put us in a hole. Sorry.

Q. There's a lot of hidden yards.

MARK STOOPS: There is a lot of hidden yards. Put us in a bad spot.

Q. It felt like those deep balls, they were always a little off. How come you all could not connect today?

DESTIN WADE: I think it's just more work probably just has to be done, reps, just getting used to the feeling. Like, I haven't thrown with him in a serious ball game, so just getting adjusted to that speed and reps pretty much.

Q. Mark, your run game struggled. Those first four games of C-Rod not playing again today. What do you need to see out of your running backs moving forward?

MARK STOOPS: In general I think it's one of the areas that we have to address that I mentioned where we maybe touch off from where we've been. We're just not as physical as we have been.

We haven't been as effective in the run game, and we've got to look at all of that. What is it? Is it personnel? Is it schemes? Is it too much, too little? We'll look at all of that.

Q. Mark, you had all three of the quarterbacks listed on the depth chart heading. What was it that separated to give him the start?

MARK STOOPS: I think just a belief. I think everybody had a strong belief in him, you know, and his ability to make plays.

This is just his first game. You can imagine more games under his belt how comfortable he will be out there moving around in that pocket, you know, knowing when to step up, knowing when to escape, when to throw the ball away.

It's hard. It's a tough position to play, and you're going to get better with every rep, with every opportunity. That's part of the difficulty with young quarterbacks and quarterbacks in general, and that's why you see it all the time.

I mean, they need the reps, but they all do. If you have three good quarterbacks, they can't get enough reps in practice, especially at a full-tilt in a scrimmage-like situation because I'm always yelling at these guys to stay off them because I don't want them to break their hand or step on their foot or do something. It's really tough.

Until you get in there and do that, and we really wanted to see him go do that, and he really did some good things. Yeah, there's a couple of plays, a couple of those

picks he and I would probably rather have over, but he is going to learn from that. And, again, it was a really difficult situation to go into no matter who was playing quarterback today.

You know, even with Will with all those reps and the experience that he has, we know it would be tough with that defense.

Q. Coach, did it frustrate you at all that in the waning seconds Iowa kept throwing the ball?

MARK STOOPS: No, I chuckled. I don't know. I was ready to get the hell out of there myself. I know that.

But that's to their credit. On the other hand, I would probably hand it off, and I would still be ready to get the hell out of there (laughing).

Q. It was pretty a crazy season for the linebacker room with those injuries, but it seemed like you and Derrick got a lot of opportunities. What do you feel like that position group has going for it moving forward? Losing a lot of experience, but a lot of talent there too.

TREVIN WALLACE: I can say that we are losing a lot of experience, but, you know, being young and playing even more, you know, the experience is really not going to go nowhere.

But it's going to feel great, you know, because we're bringing a freshmen. We are bringing two freshmen in, so I feel like the experience is going to be real great. It's probably going to start off slow, but we're going to get there.

MARK STOOPS: I want to piggyback on that. It excites me. I have such respect for the guys we're losing. I absolutely love them. You know that. I've always talked so highly of those guys, and I love them.

I'll be there for them the rest of their life, but it excites me when I see young guys that come up because as I'm telling them all, I'm trying to recruit somebody to take their job. We want good, strong, talented players like this to keep on coming up through our program. So it excites me when these guys get the opportunity to move forward.

Q. (Inaudible).

DESTIN WADE: A good amount. Just friends, family, teachers, coaches.

Q. Everybody in your hometown?

DESTIN WADE: I'm sure (laughing).

Q. What did you do well? What were some of the things you would like to improve on?

DESTIN WADE: Some things that I felt like I did well was escape the pocket and try to find a play down field.

I felt like I did a good job executing in and out of the huddle, making sure my guys are lined up, and just reading the coverages and seeing if it's man or zone, man tells.

Some things I would like to work on, making better decisions are, better accuracy and placement. Just overall leading the team.

Q. What did Iowa do to make it so difficult?

DESTIN WADE: They're just one of those tough defenses that are true to their defense, run their base-downs, and they have good secondary and that linebacker, Jack Campbell. Just their pressures too made it hard.

Q. How hard was it not maybe being nervous or feel a lot of pressure on yourself knowing that you are basically playing so close to home?

DESTIN WADE: Like I said earlier, for me I didn't really have any nerves. Just it felt like home basically because I've been in that stadium before. I just felt cool and calm, collected.

Q. Mark, I'm curious how you compartmentalize. Obviously January 1st, earlier this year, you won the Citrus Bowl. Turn the page of this season, end the year. Going into 2023 with a loss and moving into the next season. How do you process that and kind of set 2022 aside and look ahead to 2023?

MARK STOOPS: Yeah, it's exciting. You kind of got through the very difficult parts. We all have, right? I mean, I think everybody has their issues I would think at times, and things are tough, but I think that part of it really excites me, you know, because we have to go to work.

We have a lot of work to do, but we have a good group of guys. We have good coaches. I get great support to have the ability to make changes when I have to. If

I feel like I've made a mistake or for whatever reason it's not working, I have that ability and the autonomy to make the changes that I feel need to be made.

I feel like we're addressing them, and it excites me to get back to work. You know, if you can't handle those things, you're in the wrong business because this is challenging, to say the least.

Q. Have you seen a tight end play quarterback before in a college game?

MARK STOOPS: I probably have. I think I have. With the Wildcat package I think that back in the day, if I'm not mistaken. I think the Sooners when Bob was there maybe had a package like that.

We all run a Wildcat in certain forms or fashion. It depends on what type of person. My man, we were going to give you the rock too. We were trying to get him a carry today, but we didn't get that done, so we couldn't get it moving. But, yeah, we had him on offense at one point too.

Q. Coach, could you speak to the unavailability or the reason that Keaton wasn't in today?

MARK STOOPS: Pardon me?

Q. Keaton Wade not playing today.

MARK STOOPS: Probably because they only played 31 snaps. That's pretty low. Is that right? Is that right?

Q. Sounds right, yeah. Eight three-and-outs.

MARK STOOPS: You go eight three-and-outs, it's hard to rotate guys.

Q. Mark, there was probably a time when bowl games were different and you wouldn't put a freshman in a bowl game in that situation. How much different is it coaching up to bowl games, not just you but for everybody, given the way college football is now? Your team changes drastically from the end of the season to this game.

MARK STOOPS: Very different. Very different. I don't know what else to say. We compete to win the game. We came up short. None of us are happy with that. You know, these guys work and prepare to win, but is this exactly a great situation to throw him into? Here's a bowl game against a top-ten defense and because of the way this is. I don't know if that's right either, but I don't have all the answers. You

know, I know we tried our best. I know we compete to win no matter what the stakes are, and we lost today, and I give Iowa credit for that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Stoops, Destin, Trevin.

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