

October 22, 2001

Quotes From Today's Football Press Conference

MT Media Relations

McCollum on being back in conference play

New Mexico State has a really good football team and their coming in here undefeated [in the SBC], in the driver's seat, and in first place. It's a big challenge for us, but we're looking forward to it. We're glad to be back at home. We've got to have a good week of work in order to try and stop a team that has a lot of success moving the ball. It starts with their quarterback and a couple of good running backs. They're a physical football team; they fly around, and have a lot of movement. We have to come out and play really well and get back on track against a good team.

McCollum on the conference race

I think every game is a must win for us. We go into every game feeling like we have to win. In terms of the conference race, this is a very big game. There is no hiding that fact. We know what we have to get done. We have to execute better than we have the last two weeks. We have to try to play a complete game on both sides of the ball.

McCollum on the team's confidence

We're a team that hurts when we lose. If you don't, then I don't know why you play the game. We went to Ole Miss and played a team that we felt like we could do some things against if we had played well. We put ourselves in bad situations with penalties and hurt ourselves. It put our backs up against the wall. We didn't get off the field on some crucial third downs when we thought we should have. Confidence is putting work in. We have to have a great week of work. We have to play with fire. The team we are playing is first in the conference and for us to achieve our goals we have to go through New Mexico State and that comes this week.

McCollum on preparing for New Mexico State

They do different things. They predominately run the football with some option. They've had a week off to prepare for us. We got a good start last night and we will continue this afternoon. It is going to take a great commitment from our football team to study them, prepare for them, and understand what we've got to get done. The biggest key is for us to come in and give great effort and get both sides of the ball where we need to be. We need to play a complete game. We haven't had that the last three or four weeks. The players are excited about being at home. We've played five out of our first seven games on the road, and we know that we have three of the last four at our house and that's important to us. We have to go out and represent, we have to play with great effort. We're excited to get going again and be in conference play.

McCollum on MT's quarterback situation

I would say right now that Wes [Counts] will probably start and Jason [Johnson] will probably play. The one that gives us the best chance to win will be in the game, which has always been the case at Middle Tennessee.

McCollum on NMSU quarterback KC Enzminger

He's a great player. He makes things happen, he's very elusive, and they [NMSU's coaching staff] like him running the football. He can throw it around and they have guys who can make plays. He's an exciting player. The offense starts with him. He does some great things for their football team.

McCollum on playing at home

This is big. We need an edge and I would hope we could get the stadium loud and full of fans for this game. We have two more conference opportunities and this is the first one. We have back-to-back games here. We've got to do our job on the field, but it would be nice to come into the stadium on Saturday after being on the road so long and have an atmosphere like we had at Ole Miss. That was a sell-out crowd and a great atmosphere for their team. We had a great following there and it was exciting to see so many Blue Raider fans in attendance. It would be great to see a stadium full of Blue on Saturday.

McCollum on team injuries

Dwone Hicks will be day-to-day and **Jason Spray** is out. Johnathan Barry and **Don Calloway** are still out. I think that is just about everything in terms of injuries.

THE PLAYERS

WR Kendall Newson

On the team's confidence: "The team's confidence is fine. We're confident in what we're doing. We have to have the intensity and hunger because we have our backs against the wall and need to win to have some breathing room."

On the New Mexico State defense: "Their defense runs to the ball well and are great tacklers. They play a physical game and are very good up front and in the secondary."

On the offense's recent struggles: "Last week we had some turnovers and our offense was not at its best. This week of practice is crucial. You can't put a lot of pressure on yourself. We know we can get the job done. We just need to remember the little things and play like we practice."

FS Michael Woods

On this week's game against New Mexico State: "It's a must-win game for us. New Mexico State is number one and in the driver's seat. The conference race is pretty much over if we don't win. We have to have the mindset to win this game to be able to win the conference. It's do-or-die for us. We have to play like it's the most important thing in our life."

On the New Mexico State quarterback: "Their quarterback is very speedy. We have to contain him and go at him hard because he can pitch it or run it.

"We tried to put more pressure on [Ole Miss quarterback] Eli [Manning] last week. We were blitzing more linebackers and our defensive linemen got great pressure. We really need to do the same thing this week. We have to play physical. They are a great running team, like to pound and power the ball at you. But they also have a lot of play-action fakes. They are hard to prepare for because they can keep you off-balance with the option."

On playing free safety: "I was more comfortable [against Ole Miss] than [against North Texas]. You have to get the feeling and flow of the line and the receivers. The most important thing is to not get beat deep in this defense."

OL Brandon Westbrook

On returning home: "We're happy to come back home. We're upset about our two road trips, but we have to look forward to the things ahead. We have to get back and play strong."

On the New Mexico State defense: "They slant a lot and give you a lot of different looks and will bring people from everywhere. You have to study film and know what's going to happen out of the different looks."

On playing guard and tackle this season "Playing guard and tackle, guard is a little different because you don't have as much space to work and don't drop as far back in the

passing game. The hardest part for me is moving from one side to the other, because it's a totally different stance and it feels awkward. But it becomes more comfortable as the game goes on."

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