

Vandal Notes: Linehan's UI debut gets nod of approval from a certain NFL coach

Theo Lawson/Lewiston Tribune

MOSCOW - There was at least one Idaho football fan who didn't seem to mind another week of lightning-related setbacks as the Vandals tried to play their season opener at Louisiana-Monroe on Saturday.

Scott Linehan, in the midst of preparing Tony Romo, Dez Bryant and the Dallas Cowboy offense for their own season opener, caught a break Saturday evening and flipped on ESPN3 to catch most of Idaho's 38-31 loss to ULM.

It was a sight to behold - that which took place at Malone Stadium both before and after lightning storms delayed the contest for more than two hours.

By the time Scott Linehan got to his laptop to cue up the game, his son, Matt, who had spent the better part of five months duking it out with Chad Chalich for the starting job, was already picking apart the Warhawks, who had allowed just five first downs to Wake Forest the week prior.

Scott had phoned his son for a few well wishes before each took the field Saturday. The Dallas assistant was off to the practice turf, where his Cowboys were scheming for the San Francisco 49ers.

Matt, meanwhile, was just hours shy of his college debut - also the first football game he'd played in two years.

"He called me before the game, told me to enjoy it," the Idaho quarterback said.

Linehan completed his first seven passes, eclipsed 100 yards in the air after just the first play of Idaho's second drive on offense and finished with three touchdown passes.

He was sacked four times, but hardly rattled.

"Just getting hit, it's been two years since I've been hit and I'm not going to say it's a good thing," Linehan said, "but it was nice to get in a game-like situation."

Lightning delays set the game back two hours and five minutes, which admittedly put a halt to Linehan's rhythm. They also enabled Scott to tune in and watch his son dazzle.

"I think the lightning delayed stopped our momentum a little bit," Matt said. "... It's good to hear that your dad is watching and all that."

Idaho coach Paul Petrino had expected to utilize both of his quarterback, but midway through the second quarter, after Linehan connected with newly appointed receiver Josh McCain for the pair's second touchdown - which also evened the score at 21-21 - the coach decided to ride the hot hand of his redshirt freshman.

"It was a pretty great game for a first start, redshirt freshman, did a lot of great things and that's a real hard defense to play against," Petrino said.

Linehan got another call from his dad before Idaho boarded a late flight that got the team home at 4 a.m. Sunday.

The two didn't exchange chalk talk, as they often did when Matt was a prep standout at St. Mary's High in Orchard Hills, Mich. Scott didn't offer his usual critique and instead voiced his support and approval.

"He called me and told me he was proud of me," Matt recalled.

It was a welcome change of pace for the younger Linehan, who has been on the other end of "coach talk" most of his life.

"He's adapted to more of a father role than a coach, he still helps me with things, but I think he's more concerned about supporting me," Linehan said.

Linehan will start Saturday's home opener against Western Michigan, though Petrino maintained that he hadn't locked up the job for good.

FOUR-STAR DT INELIGIBLE - Alfonso Hampton, the prized blue chip recruit out of San Diego, did not travel to Monroe, La., Saturday and it's unlikely that the defensive tackle will see any action this season.

Hampton is ineligible, Petrino confirmed after Monday evening's practice, and the coach doesn't expect the 6-foot-4, 350-pounder's status to change this season.

"We'll see," Petrino said.

Hampton was ESPN's ninth-rated juco prospect and after spending two years at Southwestern College - the only football he'd played up to that point - he garnered interest from Florida State, Oregon, USC and others.

Hampton was a late arrival to Idaho's fall camp and practiced with the team intermittently, but was not on hand for Monday's session.

CRAMPING THEIR STYLE - Petrino was none too happy with the cramps that linebacker Irving Steele suffered Saturday.

The junior college transfer, who was named a defensive captain before Idaho's trip to Gainesville, Fla., shared the team lead in tackles with 14, but was in and out of Saturday's game with cramps.

"Ridiculous," Petrino said. "It better not happen again."

Idaho came out otherwise healthy from the season opener. Offensive linemen Kato Fawkes and Jeff Travilion weren't available and neither practiced Monday.

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