Vols using next two games to prep for SEC

KNOXVILLE (AP)

Tennessee's humbling loss in Jeremy Pruitt's debut offered lessons for everyone, including the coach himself.

The Volunteers are hoping for long-term benefits from what they learned Saturday in a 40-14 thumping against No. 14 West Virginia.

Tennessee has a couple of games to work on getting better before opening Southeastern Conference play Sept. 22 against No. 25 Florida. The Vols will be heavily favored the next two against Football weeks Championship Subdivision program East Tennessee State and UTEP.

"I think there are lots of ways our football team can improve," Pruitt said. "When you watch film from the past week, we made a lot of mistakes. There were a lot of unforced errors. We can't beat ourselves. You have to make the other team beat you."

Pruitt included himself in that criticism, citing a clock management issue that enabled West Virginia to have enough time to kick a field goal and extend its lead to 13-7 on the final play of the first half. West Virginia began that drive after Tennessee punted with about nine seconds left on the play clock.

"We punted the football when we had fourth-and-4 with a minute and 58 seconds left," Pruitt said. "I should have let the clock run (down more). I thought that was a critical mistake.

Tennessee stayed competitive throughout the first half, thanks to Tennessee's

fourth-and-goal conversion from the 1 in the second quarter. Pruitt's decision to forgo the field-goal attempt earned praise on message boards and social media from a fan base that often criticized the previous coaching staff's red-zone

decisions in big games. Even so, Pruitt saw plenty of areas in which he needs to get better.

"There are lots of lessons I can take from this game," the former Alabama defensive coordinator said. "I'm a defensive-minded guy, so when you're sitting there watching the offense, I need to know exactly what I can do to help give probably some influence to the offense. I need to do a better job of that in the game."

Facing lesser opponents the next two weeks could help build the confidence of a Tennessee program that has dropped eight of its last nine games, dating back to last season. It also should enable the

Vols' younger players to tune up before the start of SEC competition. O n e

underclassman poised for a bigger role is sophomore Tim Jordan, who replaced an injured Ty Chandler last week and rushed for 118 yards on 20 carries. Pruitt said Monday that Chandler's status is

day to day after the sophomore got his "bell rung" against West Virginia.

Jordan described his performance as merely "OK," but offensive tackle Trey Smith was effusive in his praise.

'One guy's not going to tackle Tim," Smith said. "It's going to take at least two, and that's if you're lucky."

The next two games also could give Tennessee's young secondary time to develop.

Tennessee started two freshmen - Alontae Taylor and Trevon Flowers — in the defensive backfield against West Virginia. Bryce Thompson was a third freshman defensive back who played last week.

That secondary gave up five touchdown passes against West Virginia's Will Grier, the Associated Press preseason All-America quarterback. Junior cornerback Baylen Buchanan said the entire secondary "didn't play to our standard."

Buchanan said the secondary made too many mental mistakes and must improve its communication. He believes the Vols can learn from the experience of facing such a high-powered passing attack in the opening week of the season.

"We're not going to get discouraged," Buchanan said. "We're not going to hang our heads. Nobody's walking around here feeling sorry for themselves. We know that we made a lot of mistakes. That's just something that we have to get corrected. We have a long season. Everybody's still hungry."

NOTE: Running back Trey Coleman has left Tennessee's program. The sophomore from West Monroe, Louisiana, had four carries for nine yards last year. He didn't play in the West Virginia game.

SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, SEPT. 1 West Virginia 40, Tennessee 14

SATURDAY, SEPT. 8 ETSU at Tennessee, 3 p.m.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 15 UTEP at Tennessee, 11 a.m.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 22 Florida at Tennessee, TBA

SATURDAY, SEPT. 29 Tennessee at Georgia, TBA

SATURDAY, OCT. 13 Tennessee at Auburn, TBA

SATURDAY, OCT. 20 Alabama at Tennessee, TBA

SATURDAY, OCT. 27 Tennessee at South Carolina, TBA

> SATURDAY, NOV. 3 Charlotte at Tennessee

SATURDAY, NOV. 10 Kentucky at Tennessee, TBA

SATURDAY, NOV. 17 Missouri at Tennessee, TBA

SATURDAY, NOV. 24 Tennessee at Vanderbilt, TBA



One Phone Call - One Ad Vois lose Kennedy to ACL tear

KNOXVILLE (AP) — Tennessee center Brandon Kennedy will miss the remainder of the season after injuring his anterior cruciate ligament in practice.

Volunteers coach Jeremy Pruitt said



Wednesday night that the Alabama graduate transfer hurt his knee during Tuesday's practice.

"He seems to be in good spirits," Pruitt said. And I know our staff and our players, everybody really has (gained) respect for Brandon since he's been here and how he worked and went about his business."

Ryan Johnson will likely take over as the starting center Saturday when the Vols host FCS program East Tennessee State. Pruitt mentioned that Riley Locklear and Jerome Carvin also have worked out at center.

Johnson had been Tennessee's first-team right guard last week in a season-opening 40-14 loss to No. 14 West Virginia.

The next guy w

have to do that in fall camp. We'll shuffle some guys around and see after today and tomorrow's practice what's the best combination."

Tennessee worked out many of its offensive linemen at multiple positions during preseason camp. Pruitt believes that will give the Vols the versatility needed to withstand injuries.

"You've always got to have guys that can move around a little bit," Pruitt said. "For instance, if you've got 10 offensive linemen, so there's your two-deep, well maybe your backup center on the depth chart might be your 10th-best offensive lineman. If you lose your center, do you play your sixth guy or your 10th guy. It makes sense to lav your sixth-best ouv To do things like that, you've got to be able to move guys around." Kennedy had appeared in three games as a reserve for Alabama last year before suffering a season-ending foot injury. He arrived at Tennessee this summer with two seasons of eligibility remaining and made his first career start last week against West Virginia.

"It's very unfortunate for him, but like I told him, he's got another year," Pruitt said. "He's been through this before. He gets an opportunity to get another degree."

NOTE: Although JJ Peterson started practicing with the Vols this week after getting approval from the NCAA Clearinghouse, Pruitt says the freshman linebacker is a long way from being able to contribute in a game. Peterson was the top-rated prospect in Tennessee's 2018 recruiting class. "JJ's out of shape " Pruitt said He didn't go through summer conditioning. He didn't go through fall camp, so he's got a long way to go physically before he'll be able to play."

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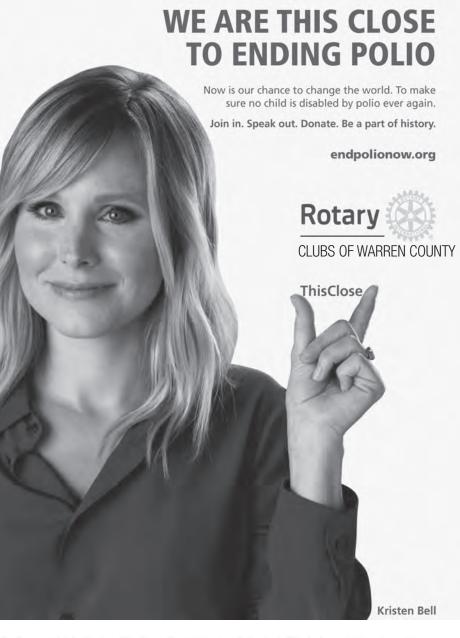
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Ryan Johnson," Pruitt "Ryan's played said. there. Riley Locklear and Jerome can play center. We've repped four or five centers over the course of spring and summer. You



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