Vandy coach has work cut out for him

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James Franklin has his work cut out for him.

He is not unlike every Vanderbilt football coach that has tried to unlock college football's Rubik's cube.

I watched Franklin stand erect as a statue while a driving rain peppered him during the fourth quarter of the 23-13 non-conference loss to Northwestern.

Franklin refused to wear any raingear. He took the punishment, his eyes staring straight ahead.

His team is now off to a dreaded 0-2 start and had chances to win both games.

Things didn't improve when the team charter flight was delayed and the team didn't arrive in Nashville until after 4 a.m.

Franklin just stayed at work, wearing the same suit until he went home at 10 that night.

Asked if that adversity could help the team bond, Franklin didn't play his hand.

"Whether it was a bonding situation, I don't know,'' he said. "My wife was sitting next to me on the plane and we didn't bond.''

That answered that.

This week, they get a punching bag in Presbyterian College. You know the football team might not be of high caliber if you are still a college.

Vanderbilt paid six figures for this win and, yes, I am already putting this one in the bank.

If Presbyterians can believe in predestination, then I can prematurely guarantee Vanderbilt wins Saturday.

I mean, if your nickname is the Blue Hose and your mascot is a wee lad named Scotty the Scotsman, what chance do you have against an SEC football team?

Presbyterian opened its season on a high note, with a 45-10 beatdown on Brevard. Yes, that Brevard.

Last week Georgia Tech put a 59-3 run in the Blue Hose. The Yellow Jackets rang up 712 yards of offense. Presbyterian scored its only points on a field goal five seconds before the final horn.

This is one game Franklin can be given permission to look ahead, although he is not going to like what he sees.

While Presbyterian has Furman, Davidson, VMI and Liberty on its schedule, the Commodores must contend with trips to No. 7-ranked Georgia and Missouri, then home games against No. 18 Florida and Auburn.

That appears to be Vanderbilt losses in at least three of the four, perhaps all four.

An unheard of opportunity for Vanderbilt to make three straight bowl appearances seems unlikely, despite all the optimism Franklin brings to the table.

“We’ve seen some bad times in our past. We’re seeing some tough times now, but the future is bright,’’ Franklin said.

“We support one another. I support them and they support me when I need it as well. We have had some setbacks, but nothing has changed whatsoever.’’

Franklin has confidence his team will find a way to fight through this.

His first-year success led to fans raising the expectations bar. Fans thought this team was better than Northwestern. They were, but the scoreboard failed to reflect that.

Northwestern was once the dregs of the Big Ten. Hamstrung by high academic standards, it struggled to attract elite players who could get it done in the classroom. Under former linebacker Pat Fitzgerald, the program has now been to four straight bowl games.

Unlike Vanderbilt, they have learned how to win those type games. It’s why they beat Syracuse on the road and Vanderbilt at home after trailing at halftime.

James Franklin knows there are miles to go before he sleeps.

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