

# Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Florida vs Alabama

Saturday, December 19, 2020

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Dan Mullen

Florida Gators

Alabama 52, Florida 46

DAN MULLEN: I'm proud of our guys, how we competed tonight. Continued to battle for four quarters. Really not tonight -- proud of our guys for everything they've gone through this season. Go play an 11-game SEC schedule, never been done before. To go through all the adversity we've had to face throughout the year, starting back to the day we were supposed to start spring practice, to get pulled off the field, to all the questions and the doubts all through the summer if there's going to be a season, to starting the season, having to shut it down after three weeks.

Coming back, going through week after week after week not knowing until Friday morning if you're even going to play a game. To show up and compete every single week. I'm really proud of our guys, everything they did, how they held themselves and played at a high level. Never stopped competing till the clock hit zero.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Dan, no such thing as moral victories. What do you take away from just the way the team rallied? What character did you show tonight?**

DAN MULLEN: I mean, I thought we showed a lot of character tonight. Like I said, talk about competing as a team. We're always going to compete. We're always going to battle, fight and play for four quarters.

That was an excellent football team we played tonight, a lot of talented players on their team. Give them credit. That's why they're ranked the No. 1 team in the country, deservedly so.

But, I mean, it showed the character that our guys have. They've shown that this entire season, for everything that we've been through.



**Q. In terms of the defense, what is your assessment?**

DAN MULLEN: I think four of the five were stops, they got first downs on penalties or they got third down penalties early. I think we made some mistakes.

You're coming into this game, there's things you have to do to win. Win the turnover battle. We didn't do that. We made a bunch of mental mistakes that really hurt ourselves defensively in the first half on third down with opportunities to get off the field, we have some penalties to knock it off the field.

Give up that drive at the end of the first half. All that's disappointing, obviously. Our guys continued to battle all the way to the end, right? That stop there at the end, they gritted it up and got the stop, got the offense the ball one more time.

**Q. Talk about what you think this game, very emotional game, coming back against the No. 1 team in the country, will do for the trajectory of your program moving forward?**

DAN MULLEN: I think our guys, we got some young guys that have been here, they're going to be hungry to get back here. That's the goal, to get here to this game, go compete.

I mean, usually you're looking at every year this game, some of the best teams in the country are playing each other in this game.

To be here was great for our guys. Obviously we want a lot more than just getting here and showing up. That's what we control. Our focus is going to be getting here again next year, then competing, and to win this game.

I think that will help and that will have great focus for us going into the off-season.

**Q. On the final touchdown, fantastic catch in the corner, a lot of weapons over the course of the year. Talk about Kyle Pitts, that he possibly might not be**



**coming back next year, what he's done for the program.**

DAN MULLEN: I think, you know what, he's shown he's the best tight end in college football. I mean, he's a dynamic play-maker all over the field. You can play him inside, play him outside, a great blocker. I think he's a guy that obviously I think has worked his tail off to put himself in the position he's in.

He's a great young guy. I mean, worked his tail off even to be able to play today. Then come out and had a huge game. I mean, he's a great high-character young guy, great leader in the locker room. He's a tremendous worker. I think his drive shows out there on the field where his performance has gotten to.

**Q. After the Kyle Pitts touchdown, take us through the thought process of the timeout.**

DAN MULLEN: That was bad clock management on my part. We should have had it ready to go for two. Our thought, though, is we're going for two right there, we're going to try the on-side kick. We're here to win. Would have given us two two-point conversions. If we didn't get the first one, we'd have to get the second one to tie. If we got the first one, all we needed there was an extra point to win the game at the end. That was the thought process to go for two.

That was a bad job by me, we had to use that timeout there. Would have loved to have that timeout and given us an extra 40 seconds of the ball to try to get the and-one touchdown.

**Q. You've shown you can get here and that you can hang with Alabama. What is the next step to the program winning this?**

DAN MULLEN: We got to get a little better up front on both sides of the ball. Our guys play hard. You look, they're a little more physical I think at the line of scrimmage than we were. We got to get a little bit better up front. Get back here, get another shot at them next year, or whoever is here from the West. I don't want it like you guys all freak out like I just trash talked everybody else on the other side of the league.

I want to get back here, take a shot at whoever comes from the West next year.

**Q. Kadarius Toney, another monster game today, the effort he's put out the last two weeks. Is that a representation of the kind of person he is?**

DAN MULLEN: Yeah, I mean, he's an awesome, awesome young guy. I mean, came here, you get to know him, he's probably not the easiest person in the world to get to know at first. Once you get to know him, he's a tremendous, unbelievable man.

I mean, his work ethic, his competitive nature, his desire to be great. That shows out there in everything. He's a great route runner, got tremendous hands, has learned to have a great feel for the game on how to get open. You can hand it to him out of the backfield. Heck, he's got an unbelievable arm, could go line him up as quarterback.

He has a very, very bright future ahead of him in the game of football.

**Q. What was the mood in the locker room? What was your message to the team?**

DAN MULLEN: You know what, I think everybody's extremely disappointed. We wanted to win the game, expected to win the game. A little bit somber. It's probably the last time this team ever plays together. That's a tough deal.

I think there was a lot of guys that really care about each other, have really worked hard to get here to this point. I know there's a great deal of disappointment in the locker room, but there's also a lot of respect for everything that everybody on this team went through and did for this year. There's a lot of love for the guys and the family that this team is.

**Q. Will you turn down a bowl game?**

DAN MULLEN: I have no idea. We just played this game, so... I know you want to go run with everything, you guys like to blow things way out of proportion and everything. That was really the last time this team will play together, I imagine. Whatever the future holds, I imagine this team as a whole of how it is will be the last one played here. You guys, I know you want to run and make stuff up all the time, so go do that, if you want.

**Q. How do you process a loss like this? You have to be drained right now emotionally, physically.**

DAN MULLEN: I'll be honest with you, this season has been emotionally draining. Hard to say teams have gone through what we've gone through, right? I think that was our eighth consecutive SEC game. It's amazing the emotional and physical toll that takes on your body for the players.

Coaches, we'll be fine. We'll get back to work tomorrow



and get this program headed back in the right direction. Not in the right direction, I think we're headed in the right direction, get this program back to getting on path, try to get here again next year to compete for a championship. I think you guys know that. I say I want to be a great program, a program that competes for championships on a consistent basis. We want to do that.

I do know for our players this season has been a massive emotional and physical toll. That I'll be honest, I don't know anybody else in the country has been through. I don't know anybody that's played eight consecutive SEC games right now. I don't know anybody that's played eight consecutive conference games.

I'm really proud of our guys for their commitment and desire to battle and fight.

**Q. When you're thinking about what you'll do, replaying it, what is going to stand out? What will you replay and focus on?**

DAN MULLEN: I mean, there's a lot. Hey, the little mistakes we made during the game, how do we get that stuff fixed. How do I make sure that we're not making the little errors in the game that cost us the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DAN MULLEN: Thank you, guys. Go Gators. Merry Christmas, everybody. Happy holidays.

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