

Houston Texans Media Conference

Sunday, December 31, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

C.J. Stroud

Postgame Press Conference



Houston - 26, Tennessee - 3

Q. C.J., can you talk about how it felt being out there today and how excited you are about this win.

C.J. STROUD: First and foremost, I want to give all glory and praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's been a blessing. It was a blessing this week to get back. I felt like I got back to my normal self kind of really fast. Our O-line did a great job protecting me and ran really clean routes and executed at a high level.

It felt great to be back. Definitely want to keep building from there.

Q. C.J., you played in big games before in your college career. You stepped in after being out for two weeks. What was that like to step right into that role? It just seemed as smooth as silk.

C.J. STROUD: Appreciate that. I feel like everything that we did on the field today, we put a good week of practice in. I think all 11 guys took the responsibility really serious.

We had Robert Woods and Sheldon Rankins come up to us and talk to us last night about the opportunity we have, and I think everybody took that really serious. We're really excited because we're playing our best ball towards the back end.

Of course last week we didn't do well, but we weren't really at full strength. To me for this week that we're kind of at full strength and still played a good game against a tough Tennessee Titans team that takes everybody really to the stretch and be able to shut them out almost and be able to put up some points offensively and defensively, I think that's a recipe for success.

Q. C.J., Bobby talked about it might have been a little bit before he understood exactly what you were capable of doing. How did those first few drives feel? You were pretty successful on those early drives. Was

it methodical? There were a lot of plays. You got kind of explosive later in the game. Was that kind of on purpose to get you in a rhythm?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, Bobby had a great idea of kind of trying to get me back in the rhythm of being out there. It really started in practice. I feel like my quarterback coach Jerrod did a great job of getting me back into the flow of things, just getting game speed reps.

So I think they did a great job handling that because I feel like I was kind of back to normal on that first drive. The first pass we completed, from there on, like that first drive, I really felt fine. I felt great. I felt like I was seeing it really well, making the right reads, making the right decisions.

I think Bobby had a great game plan, and we kind of just took what the defense gave us. They backed up a lot, took away a lot of our shot plays. We were able to stay in drives, which was really big. I really think that we had a good plan to kind of get me back in the flow of things around what we were doing offensively.

Q. To have the balance you had on offense today, what does that mean to you? And to control your own destiny with a win next week, how do you feel about the season?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, towards this point in the season, you want to be able to run the ball and pass the ball at a high level, and I think today we did that.

For me, I think it was kind of tough honestly because they kept backing up and didn't give us anything deep. We were trying to stretch the field, but just being smart, I think, is where I've kind of grown towards this part of the year, really taking what the defense gives you.

I think running the ball definitely helped too. Motor did a great job, along with our O-line, our tight ends, our receivers blocking really well. When you're doing that at a high level, that's going to be great for the offense, and we've got to keep that going.

Q. C.J., earlier this year you talked about changing the



culture of this franchise. Typically, as they would say, you stood on business. You guys were 6-3 at home this year. How does it feel to make good on your word and how has the culture change affected people around here?

C.J. STROUD: As a man, your word is everything, and what you say should be what you do. I feel like, of course, this league isn't easy. It's like you can say it all you want, but if you don't put in the work, then I feel you just kind of talking for no reason.

So the work has been put in from this team, from our coaches, our front office, to our players to our strength staff to our training room staff to our chefs in the kitchen to the redshirts, like all around work has been put in. It hasn't been easy.

So I think that's kind of what God wanted, though, the hard wins, the hard grinding days where you maybe not want to be in here, you know, and you just want to go home and chill. We know to this city it means a little more. You can see like the vibe.

Today I don't know how many fans we had, but I feel like that was the most we put in the stadium probably in a long time. To show up today, I think that was pretty cool to see. I definitely think that we're going to keep this going.

The time is now. It's not next year. It's not the year after that. It's right now. We have the opportunity to control our own destiny. So I'm excited to do that.

Q. C.J., talk about how this feels. Knowing what the team came from last year, what does this feel like for you?

C.J. STROUD: It feels how it feels. I'm a firm believer in trying to be set where my feet are and not look ahead. Tonight I'm going to enjoy this win and do that, but at the end of the day, I'm back to trying to hopefully win this division, but try to win that game to get in the playoffs.

I feel like -- I don't know, man. It's hard to put words together because there's so many special things, special moments, special people that have made this season be special. I'm just blessed to kind of be a part of this and be in the forefront of leading this team. I'm just really blessed, man. I can't put into words how blessed I am.

This week I just try to do my best to thank God throughout everything. It was tough these last few weeks not being in there and seeing my brothers grind and wanting to make plays and wanting to do everything that I knew I could do, but I had to sit back and take care of my health.

It was tough, but I just thank God through it all.

Q. C.J., you said it was frustrating the defense would take away the deep plays. Did you see any effect of the longer drives? Did you see any effect it had on the Titans at all?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, I think they do a great job over there, having a great play caller like they do to be able to take away those things. He's very smart. He knows the right timing of calling his defense and things like that.

So I feel like it's my responsibility to take care of the football in those situations. Those long drives do wear a defense down a little bit, and we were able to kind of sustain that. I think the next step we have to take of course next week is to score in the red zone, scoring seven and not three.

I feel like at the end of the day, you put those drives together, it helps. It sets the tone. I think that first drive set the tone that we were coming to play ball today. I'm really just proud of it because you don't know kind of how it's going to go being your first game back and stuff.

It was cool just to see us have positive drives. I think that was the main thing. We didn't take a step back, which is really big in our keys to victory.

Q. Congrats on the win. I know you're pretty thoughtful about most things that you do. Can you explain, is there a particular meaning behind wearing the Kobe Bryant shirt today?

C.J. STROUD: I mean, Kobe is my favorite player of all time in basketball. Honestly, I don't really think I had any crazy idea about wearing it, but I think like, when I seen it this morning, it kind of put like a mindset type of switch on me.

I remember watching Kobe's interview, I think we were up 2-0 -- I say we (laughter). We were up 2-0 against the Celtics in The Finals, and he goes, The job is not finished.

We've had a great season. This has been a complete turnaround from last year, but in my opinion, the job is not finished. We have a lot left in the tank, and we need to empty that.

I feel like the shirt kind of spoke to me this morning. It wasn't really anything, but I got a nugget out of it.

Q. C.J., this week you talked about how when you were out you were able to see some things from

watching games on TV. I'm wondering if there's anything you saw while you were sitting out recovering that you were able to say, okay, I can implement this today? And talk about what it meant having Tank with you guys on the field.

C.J. STROUD: It was right there. Just having Tank on the sideline, like energy. It seemed like in that Cleveland game we had literally no energy. They're going to make plays in the NFL. You can think we're super heroes and Texas is going to win every Sunday -- that's the goal. That's the plan, but the other team is going to make it hard. They're in the NFL and get paid just like we do.

I think like after big plays we kind of just hung our head, and I feel like we felt sorry for ourselves. Especially offensively, we had a couple of positive plays, a couple of explosives, and we got a flag, and we came back. Guys are acting like we can't overcome it because you just see everybody's head down.

For me, I said something about it, but I more so show it with my actions in practices. I'm going to work really, really hard to stay positive through this week, just like assess the tone. Thank God we didn't have a really negative play on first or second down this week, and even if we did, we probably overcame it.

That was kind of like the main nugget I took from watching the game on TV. So I just tried to apply that.

Q. C.J., during the NFL combine, I asked you what was your mindset as far as being able to come into a rebuilding team, and what do you think you could bring? And you said that you were built for that. You were taught that at Ohio State. You also said that you'd been taught that going through adversity just makes you stronger. You also said to us earlier that pressure is a privilege. Going into the game against the Indianapolis Colts next week, have you seen this franchise starting to take that next step?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, great question. I think you hit it on the nail, man. Just kind of how I was raised and the situation I played with in college of just a lot of pressure, like a lot of like it's on you, C.J. You've got to go make a play. You've got to lead us to victory.

Honestly, I used to ask like why? Why is it always on me? Why can't I just like get something easy? Around like high school was the time like, man, God put something special in my heart, like a special type of talent into me.

Since then -- I really didn't pick up the pressure is a privilege until I got to college, but that's the main thing that I

think God put me through a lot of adversity for was that reason. Smile through all the pain, smile through all the adversity, smile through the great times.

In this line of work, you can't always kick yourself in the dirt. I'm the first to hold myself accountable for my mistakes, but at times I have to honestly remind myself like smile. My life isn't as bad as I probably make it seem to myself. Something we all can do as humans, even through hard times, I still smile. Even through good times we smile, but we know that our successes come from the Lord.

I appreciate just God putting that -- my daddy is always talking about having tough skin when I was younger. Just putting that tough skin on me since I was little, and keep going, keep going. Get knocked down, keep going, keep going. It just has been kind of how my life has gone.

So I'm blessed to be an impactful person. I feel like I get a lot of people who reach out to me, and I feel like I'm just doing what God called me to do. I'm sorry I'm long winded. I just really am truly thankful for all the things that not only I've been through but where I'm at now.

I have a lot of friends here. I have my family here. I can tell you I wasn't always like this. I've always tried to be mature and things like that, but it wasn't always the case. But God has put amazing people in my life, amazing city like Houston, amazing city like Columbus, back home, a lot of people have poured their lives into me, and I'm just blessed to be on this stage to face you guys.

It's just not me. I think that's the biggest thing that I wanted to talk about. But pressure is a privilege, and I appreciate that.

All right, you guys. God bless.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports