

Battle of the Piney Woods 2022

Saturday, October 1, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

Stephen F. Austin Lumberjacks

Coach Colby Carthel

Postgame Press Conference



Sam Houston State 17, Stephen F. Austin 16

COLBY CARTHEL: Pretty good game. Exciting. Great football game. Two really good football teams. Two great programs. Two great schools. A lot of rivalry and animosity and respect going back and forth 100 years. It's a shame it's got to take a pause, but I thought both teams played their tails off, and credit to the Sam Houston State Bearkats and their players and their coaches for winning that ballgame.

It was a tough one on us and our locker room. Just really, really pleased with how we played.

We've been having to retool things defensively. We've had a lot of turnover in terms of coaching staff and players and everything with the way college football is nowadays, and really today I saw -- I'm really pleased with our team, with how we played, how we competed, how we played on offense and defense. Very disappointed in our special teams. We did not play to our standard there.

I think that was the difference in the ballgame on some of that.

Again, all credit to Sam Houston State and their players and their coaches for winning this one. Tough pill to swallow for the Lumberjacks.

Q. Did you kind of have a déjà-vu from last year with that facemask and that offsides penalties today?

COLBY CARTHEL: Oh, offsides is an easy call. He was offsides. I was déjà-vu for the penalty for a defenseless receiver from the guy is going up across the middle, the ball is there, we do a great job hitting him in the strike zone, with a shoulder. I'm not going to tell a kid not to play, and I disagree with that call. I disagree with the game of football if you can't do what happened there, and that one hurt.

Q. How was the crowd support?

COLBY CARTHEL: It was wonderful. Great, great turnout, a lot of purple. That's one thing I've been pleased with. I know we haven't won one of these games, but I think it had gotten pretty apathetic. I don't know if that's a word or not.

But the support is there, and we appreciate the fans and the alums and everybody coming back. Two straight years we've played our tails off.

It's not a fair fight. It's not a fair fight at all, and that's unfortunate for our players to play so close and not be able to pull it off, because it would have been an upset. These two schools were like-minded and very similar 20 years ago, but it's not anymore. They've doubled us up and then some on enrollment, athletic fee and budget and facilities.

We've lost 11 in a row now. I don't think all 11 of them are due to poor coaching. I'm blaming the last three on me, but we're fighting with a short stick in this rivalry right now, and we've got to step things up if we want it to continue in terms of our support and where we're at as a program.

I think we can do that, and I think our university can do that, and I think there's some bright days ahead for SFA, for SFA football and also for us as a university, and those that follow us understand there's some changes coming, and I think it's going to be really good.

But it's been tough. We were the underdog in this thing for a reason, and this underdog team played their tails off, and I love those guys in that locker room, and there's a lot of hurt, as there should be, because they played well enough to win. We just didn't get the job done.

Again, credit to Sam Houston State.

Q. You learn more from losses than you do from wins. What's something you can take from this loss?

COLBY CARTHEL: I'm sick and tired of losing. These three I've learned enough in these battle of the Piney Woods I've been a part of, have had the lead in all three of them in the fourth quarter all the way up until the final 48 seconds this time. But you can learn, and that's the



message I told the team in the locker room. We were 2-2 coming into this game and I wasn't real confident in who we were just yet as a team. I wasn't real confident in what we could accomplish as a team just yet, but what I saw out there, those 60 minutes of football, I'm very confident in our team now in terms of moving forward and what we can do this season.

We've said it all along, this game does not define us. This is a big game because it's a big rivalry between two great universities, but our season is still ahead of us. We've got a WAC Championship to play for, we've got championships to play for, and that team I saw out there in purple today has what it takes to get it done, but we're going to have to get back to work on Monday and get ourselves up off the mat and learn from it, as you said, and I'm confident these guys will do it.

Q. Just talk about the defensive effort today. I saw a lot of turnovers from your guys. Talk about the defensive effort.

COLBY CARTHEL: Yeah, very, very pleased. Those guys have had -- again, there's been a lot of turnover. It's college football nowadays, but we lost seven FBS-level players to the NFL or graduation or what have you that aren't there from last year's dominant team, and we haven't played real well up to our standard.

But they did tonight, and had a shutout going into halftime until we bugged that thing up with our punt team and everything.

But really, really pleased. That second half was all about defense. I mean, it was just three-and-out here, three-and-out there, defensive stop -- both teams. Credit both defenses. But really, really pleased with what I saw there from our guys to do what they did throughout the game defensively.

Q. What are your areas of improvement that you're looking at?

COLBY CARTHEL: I think we've got to improve our special teams units, and we were -- had really good -- we were really, really sharp up until this game. It's uncharacteristic for us. But just overall we've got to shore some things up there.

Then I think just keep improving. That's what makes this one a little easier to deal with is I know our team got better and has been getting better over the last three weeks and really excited about what we have in front of us. But you'd better pack a lunch every week, and it'll be tough sledding next week against ACU and then Tarleton coming to town.

Both those teams are 4-1 or something like that and very talented. We'll have our work cut out for us, and that's where we've got to put our big-boy pants on.

We can hurt on this one and feel sorry for ourselves for a few hours and make good decisions, but then let's strap it back up and go to work Monday morning.

Q. Just talk about it's the last battle of the Piney Woods for a while. Talk about what this rivalry means to you.

COLBY CARTHEL: It means -- it's a game to us as a staff, and it hurts because I wanted it not for Colby Carthel, I wanted it for those guys in that locker room, I wanted it for our university, our administration, our professors, everybody that dons the the purple. I wanted it for everybody that's every graduated from SFA. There's a lot of great pride with our great university, and this game you're judged on.

I wanted it for them, like because we've talked about in pregame or leading up to this thing, this thing splits families and workplaces and everything else. There's all kinds -- I saw on Twitter all kinds of tattoos being wagered back and forth and this, that and the other, and dadburnit, they're not going to be the tattoos I wanted to see on people.

But it stinks, but again, my hats off to our guys and their effort and the way they played. I love everybody in that locker room, and I love what's in front of us, and looking forward to the rest of this season.

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