

College Football Playoff

Media Conference

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Ohio State Buckeyes

Tuf Borland

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF

Q. Ryan just said as good as you guys played against Clemson, you'll have to be even better against Alabama. From a defensive standpoint I'm sure there's a number of things that stand out when you watch them, but what are the one or two things that stand out the most from the Crimson Tide offense?

TUF BORLAND: Yeah, unbelievable team, unbelievable players. They've got talent all over the place; big, physical offensive line; playmakers on the perimeter.

Coach Day said we're going to have to play our best game. We're going to have to play our best game this week. We're going to have to find another level for sure.

Q. I want to ask you about Justin Hilliard. You guys have both overcome a lot, and he's overcome even more than you have. Can you kind of speak to his journey and what it means to everybody on the team to see him succeed the way he has and how well is he playing right now?

TUF BORLAND: Yeah, he's a guy that's pretty much seen it all. The good, the bad, the ugly, he's seen it all. He's fought through so much on and off the field, and to see the success that he's having, it's awesome.

Justin, he's an unbelievable player, but he's an unbelievable person, as well. Again, just to see the success that he's having, one, nobody is surprised because of how hard he works, and two, he just deserves everything that comes his way because he's a warrior, always has been, and he's getting everything he deserves.

Q. Coach Day just described how basically Justin's leadership skills have developed, how he won over the team. I wonder if you would talk about that, just maybe starting with the Michigan game where he came back from that hit and I think hit Garrett Wilson for a big gain or a touchdown, and just playing with the ribs this week. What kind of leader is he?

TUF BORLAND: Yeah, he's a guy that's come in, since day one he's been here he's done everything that the coaches have asked of him. Really built that trust and that respect of everyone in the program. You can go every week. He's always battling something, and you guys saw it. It was one of the gutsiest performances from a player that I can remember in my time here.

So you can't say enough good things about Justin and what he's doing and what he means to this program.

Q. If I'm not wrong on this, I think you committed to Ohio State a few months after they won the national title against Oregon, and I'm wondering what that run meant to you and maybe what specifically seeing Ohio State beat Alabama in the Sugar Bowl that year did to alter your perception of Ohio State's program at all.

TUF BORLAND: I mean, sure, it was cool to see them have the success that they did have that year, but that wasn't a deal breaker for me, whether or not they were going to win. I think you win with people, and that's why I ultimately chose this place, just how special the people are.

Flash forward five, five and a half years later, we have an opportunity to do that again. But Alabama is a great team. We have a great challenge ahead of us. So we're going to have to have our best week of practice and play our best game.

Q. It's pretty remarkable how far this front seven and linebackers have come since this time two years ago. How much credit does Al Washington get for that, and what has he been like as your position coach?

TUF BORLAND: Coach Washington has been amazing. Deserves a lot of credit in what we've done. Day in, day out he's always there for us. Just the way he approaches his business every day, with the energy, the passion. It's truly contagious, and I think it just shows in how we've kind of taken off in this last season. I give him a lot of credit.

Q. I heard you were talking about the skill that Alabama has on the perimeter there. Just wondering if you can talk to how you guys are going to have to



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control that kind of explosiveness they have on Monday.

TUF BORLAND: I mean, I don't want to get too into specifics, but we talk about keeping them inside of us and keeping them in front of us, and that's certainly something we're going to have to do this week.

Q. More on that aspect of the game, when a team has an established big-time back like Najee Harris, how does it change your focus? I know you're always focused on stopping the run, et cetera, but how does it change your focus as a play starts to know there's a big-time running back back there like pretty much Alabama is going to be looking at Ohio State in the same way with Trey Sermon?

TUF BORLAND: Yeah, got to be locked in every play because he can hurt you. He's a bigger back, like you said, but he shows great patience and great acceleration when he wants to turn it up into the hole. Huge challenge. He's a great player.

And a great offensive line, as well. I know we'll have to be ready for the challenge.

Q. Just what kind of a confidence boost did the Clemson game give this defense, and did you feel like it was something that this defense needed to see after just how choppy the second half of the season had gone?

TUF BORLAND: I mean, I think we've always had confidence in ourselves. I think it just showed us kind of what we're capable. I think we've always believed we can compete with anybody in the country on any particular week.

We practiced against the best offense in the country every week, so we have confidence we can compete with everyone. Yeah.

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