

CFP First Round: Penn State vs SMU

Saturday, December 21, 2024
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA
Beaver Stadium

Penn State Nittany Lions

Nick Singleton

Dom Deluca

Tony Rojas

Drew Allar

Abdul Carter

Dvon J-Thomas

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 38, SMU - 10

Q. Abdul and Tony, what have you seen from Dom DeLuca in practice this year, and why do you think he has a knack for making big plays in big moments?

TONY ROJAS: I'll start. I'd say he's just the same person every day since I stepped in on campus, whether it's leading all the younger guys like me and Taye and stuff like that.

Just the attitude he brings to practice every day, positive attitude, his work ethic, it just all meshes together, and I feel like it all gets put together.

ABDUL CARTER: Ever since I got here from year 1 to year 3, ask anybody in the building, Dom does everything right. He always does his job at 100 percent, always in the right position. He does everything right, and he makes plays on the field because of that. All of it shows.

Q. Dom, this is for you. Your high school career, so decorated, you went through a lot of adversity right before you came to Penn State. When you look at this moment, you walked on, earned a scholarship, became a captain. A game like this, this is history. Have you had any time to kind of think about how special this is being able to play here at Penn State and have a game like this in the College Football Playoff?



PLAYOFF FIRST ROUND

DOM DELUCA: Not really. I'm just trying to celebrate with my brothers, going 1-0 each week. Being able to come out with a win on the first week of playoffs is huge. I'm excited to celebrate with my brothers.

Q. Dvon, the defensive performance today, how you guys dominated the quarterback, the offense as a whole kind of a little rattled there, how would you describe it being out there and how you guys were able to dominate and take over?

DVON J-THOMAS: I believe it was a mentality at the top of the week. We spoke a lot about going in and being exactly who we are and not letting the moment define us but defining the moment. I think we did that well.

I think our defense really went in, very level headed. We understood that SMU was a really good team with a really good quarterback that can make some explosive plays, especially on his feet moving around.

I think we came in, and we played and adjusted to that well. With spectacular performances from Tony Rojas, Dom DeLuca, Abdul, the list goes on. That is just a testament to us and how we approach everything throughout the week, especially Coach Allen's approach to this week, especially coming off of the Big Ten Championship, adjusting to the tempo and playing through that very well.

I think we just did a great job in our preparation and really examining and looking at what we did a couple weeks ago in the Big Ten Championship and improving on that.

Q. Drew and Nick, when it comes to Nick and Kaytron as a tandem, do you feel like you guys are playing your best football this 2024 season, the most effective? If that is the case, to be peaking going into the playoffs, what does that mean for this team?

NICK SINGLETON: I feel like me and Kaytron, we always say we the best backfield in the nation. We stand on it. Shout out to the O-line. They had a good job today doing what they doing. I feel like we just keep going with it. Keep practicing hard. Take one day at a time and find the little stuff we can get better at.



DREW ALLAR: We talked about it as an audience, we want to be crescendoing. I'm not saying that right, but we'll go with that. We want to be peaking at this time. That's how we want to operate and really just building momentum into each game.

Like Nick said, they're the best backfield in America, and I truly believe that. It starts up front at the end of the day for us in both the run and pass game. But when you have guys like Nick and Kaytron on the team, they make a lot of guys miss. It just really helps our offense flow as a whole.

Q. Tony, first off, what did you see on film leading up to this game that meant you guys might have been able to turn in three interceptions off Jennings? And as a quick second point, did you feel like you were playing running back again on your pick six?

TONY ROJAS: Like you said, we knew the quarterback scrambles a lot, and we couldn't all proceed to the ball because he makes second plays out of nothing. Whenever's he's getting out of the pocket, that's what he's known for is making plays and passing downfield.

I kind of knew that, how the running back ran, knew how to follow him, and I was in the right spot at the right time. Yeah, I felt like I was a running back. It felt good again, yeah.

Q. Dvon, you talked about mentality on defense. Knowing that this was your last home game, how did that kind of play into your mentality? To win your last home game on a stage like this in the College Football Playoff, what did that mean to you?

DVON J-THOMAS: I mean, it meant the world, to be honest with you. I wanted to go out with a bang. I believe, truly believe that we are the best defense in the country by far, by any means, and I think today was just another opportunity for us to show that. There's no other way that I wanted to go out of Beaver Stadium than to put on a defensive performance like we did.

Two pick sixes, and we stopped the run. We stopped the passing game. We shot everything down. I truly thank everybody on defense and on offense for everything that they did just because it made the moment so special and just made it just an incredible moment to leave off of in Beaver Stadium.

Q. The offense started little slow today. Was it something the defense was doing particularly, or was it a matter of locking in internally to flip that switch going on?

DREW ALLAR: I talked about it with the O-line and really we talked about it as an offense. It really comes down to our process and worry about us. At the end of the day, we weren't executing the play calls that were there. I had plenty of missed throws in that first quarter that I need to hit and get the ball to the play makers in space and allowed them to show off their ability.

It's something that we just have to get better at. And we emphasize it all the time. We just have to go out and execute it. At the end of the day, there was nothing that they were doing that was stopping us. It was more of just little things here and there that allowed them to make plays.

We always talk about it on offense, 11 guys have to be right for the play to work. And then on defense really only one guy has to be right to stop the play. We always have to be on the same page, and it comes down to communication. We'll get those things fixed, no doubt about it.

Q. Dom, three quarterback questions. One, what did your high school career playing quarterback, does that help you as a linebacker? What did you see out of Jennings as a quarterback leading up? And have you offered the offense your services as a backup?

DOM DELUCA: Growing up a quarterback, just being able to read defenses was a huge part for me. Now being on the defensive side is helping me play better in being able to read quarterbacks better, being able to read offenses better, identifying formations and what plays I get from each formation.

I have told Nick a couple times, if he needs me to step in for him, I'm here.

Q. Dom, after the game, James Franklin called Penn State a true college football program, talked about guys wanting to sacrifice for one another, wanted to see other guys do well. When you've got a program full of coaches and players who sacrifice for one another, who want to see each other do well, how big of an impact does that have on this team's success.

DOM DELUCA: It's huge being able to do that with your brothers and sacrificing for your brothers. Everyone doing that at a high level. We always talk about taking food off of someone else's plate if you don't do your job.

Us doing that and being able to make those sacrifices, either its sacrifice yourself in the gap for the D-line to make a play or take a double team off a D-lineman for them to



make a play, anything you can do to help us, it's huge.

Q. Drew, the goalpost gets set a little different for everybody of course. You guys have been asked ad nauseam, when is Drew going to win the big one? When is Coach Franklin, when is Penn State going to win the big one? Do you feel this is a big one today, and do you feel like today made a statement about Penn State moving forward in the playoffs?

DREW ALLAR: I don't care what anyone says about me, my team, or my coach, at the end of the day, our process is our process. The only things that matter are the ones that are in the building day to day and know what's going on behind the scenes.

In terms of Coach Franklin, he gets a lot of criticism that's undeserved, and he's done a lot more than people give him credit for. Obviously, winning his 100th game, it's special to be a part of that and be the team that was able to deliver that 100th game win to him. To have it on a stage like the playoffs and at home in Beaver Stadium, it's truly special.

We don't take these moments for granted, but at the end of the day, me personally, I don't care what anybody said about me from the outside just because I saw a quote like why would you take criticism from somebody that you would never take advice from? That kind of sticks with me.

There's a lot of people out there that don't really know what goes on behind the scenes, and it is what it is. It's part of playing at a place like Penn State.

It's, again, sticking to our guns and sticking to our process.

Q. Drew, when you look at leading this offense with the game starts out with two defensive touchdowns and another interception that leads to a touchdown, just what you can say about the defensive side of the ball and what these guys did to help you out on offense in this game and throughout the season?

DREW ALLAR: In this game specifically, they definitely got us going. Obviously like you said we didn't have a great start offensively. To be going up 14-0 and offensively we really didn't do anything up to that point was huge.

That allows guys like Abdul and Dvon just to pin their ears back and rush the quarterback. They're going to be more throw happy just in general because they're down in the game. That really got us going as an offense. Obviously the third interception set us up in a really good spot to finally get in the end zone offensively.

They've had our backs throughout the whole year. It makes -- they have made me a lot better throughout this

year just going against the best defense in America. I'm just glad that I get to go against them every day out in practice and not against them out on the field in a game setting.

Q. Nick, Coach Franklin said after your touchdown run, you came up to him -- I'm going to quote him. You said, I'm a violent -- and then he cut it off. What statement were you trying to make with that run and then after it?

NICK SINGLETON: I'm not going to repeat what he said, but that's what my game is. I'm trying to be more of a physical runner, run through someone when the extra man is there. Coach Seider always says just leave one for us. Everybody can block it up, then just leave one for us. That was my mentality at the 1 yard line.

Plus getting in there and trying to help my team get a win.

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