

CFP First Round: Texas vs Clemson

Saturday, December 21, 2024

Austin, Texas, USA

DKR-Texas Memorial Stadium

Clemson Tigers

Dabo Swinney

Postgame Press Conference

Texas - 38, Clemson - 24

DABO SWINNEY: First of all, congratulations to Texas. They're a really good football team. We knew that coming in.

I'm proud of our team, though. We just got ourselves in a really big hole in the first half, giving up 28 points. We battled back. Those kids could have quit. That's a tough situation. Everything's kind of uphill on you.

I'm proud of their fight. I'm proud of the heart that you saw of our group. We put ourselves in a position to win the game. I mean, we were down 18 points on the road against a really, really tough team. A lot of frustration with some of the -- just how we played the first half, defensively especially, but we never quit.

It comes down to a one score game. Got them backed up. Get a great kickoff coverage, get a tackle, got them backed up, and they go, what is it, 80, I don't even know, 77 yards, and makes it a two score. Then we come right back down, and we got a chance to punch it back in there. And we get stopped on fourth down. So those were the two critical plays in the second half. We had every opportunity to win it, I mean, literally. We fought back and put ourselves in position in the fourth quarter.

That's a huge hole to overcome, so I got to give just credit to the heart of our guys and the leadership and just their fight, just their character. I'm proud of that. It sucks that we lost the game, but I'm proud of the fight that I saw and again the character in a really, really tough situation.

To come back and put yourself in a one score situation with a chance to get a stop and we don't do it. Again, we got a chance to answer and make it a one-score game. Right there on that last drive, anything can happen. Just



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too big a hole to get out of. But they competed their butts off.

Just disappointing. It's sad. It's always sad when it ends, even when it ends exactly the way you want it. My last game, we won the National Championship, and I was happy that we won, but I was really, really sad that I wasn't going to be playing football anymore.

When you play this game and you put so much into this game, it's sad when it ends, regardless of how it ends, especially when you really truly, truly love the people that you're with. I mean, I really love these guys. There was not one day that I did not love coming to work with this group.

This has been a special group of seniors, a special group. I'm better because -- being able to do life with them. Clemson is better, and they're leaving us in a much better spot than when they got here. Great career. They won a couple championships, and they got us back to the playoffs.

I'm really, really proud of all those seniors. My heart really hurts for them because it was never -- actually never until they got the stop right there at the end and taking a knee, there was never a moment that I didn't think we were going to win the game. I really saw that in their eyes.

I'm just thankful again for the leadership of these guys. I'm going to miss them. That's the hard part. We do a lot of life with these guys when you meet them and know them for a long time. This is a special, special group of young men and great career that they had. They did so many great things. Just a blessing to do life with them. And a blessing to their families, what they've done here at Clemson.

Incredibly disappointed it didn't go our way. Congrats to Texas. They made a couple of critical plays. Obviously the first half we got ourselves in a real hole. Again, proud of our team for the fight.

Appreciate our fans. I know we had our some fans come a long way out here. Really appreciate them. We'll build on this. It's a great experience for our guys. They know

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they're good enough. Most of our team is back. You saw the heart of our quarterback, how about that guy? Just incredible, incredible leadership in the locker room. I wish everybody could experience what I just experienced in the locker room, the leadership of our guys. How much they love each other.

It's pretty special. Again it stinks, but we'll build on this. This will be just another step in the direction that we want to go to get back to the top of the mountain. You've got to put yourself in position. We did that. You've got to learn and grow, we'll do that.

The example that was set by these seniors, again listening to them all year, all year reading their comments, it's been amazing. Coming to work every single day has been an absolute joy and blessing. I promise you, the example that they set for these guys coming back, it will not be wasted. Those guys will build upon that. I've already seen that in the locker room.

Again, disappointing night. Great win for Texas. Wish them all the best.

Q. Cade Klubnik, you touched on it a little bit, but a stellar performance for the kid on his homecoming. What this does in the foundation for him next year and for your program with him, that has to come away with a lot of confidence in what he was able to do here against the best defense in the country.

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, how many people get that many yards on that group? They're really good. We missed a few of opportunities to punch it in right there on fourth and one. We think we had it if we stayed outside and kind of cut in, but we just didn't get it done.

He's just a competitor. That kid, he's one of the guys that spoke up in there and just talked about, he said this is the most fun he's ever had playing football this team, this year. Most fun he's ever had. Pretty strong statement.

I think that speaks to the closeness of this group. But he's an unbelievable player, number one. Great young man, he's just grown into this amazing leader. Really close group. You're just never out of it with him. He'll always give you a chance.

It's disappointing certainly we wanted to win the game. He didn't do anything to take away from the type of season he's had this year. It's been just an amazing year, and he'll build on it.

Saw a lot of young talent. How about T.J. Moore out there tonight. Had some big plays. Let's go making plays. Got

a lot of young talent. Mafah couldn't go after halftime. I knew that was probably it for him.

Hey, saw some other guys get in there and do some stuff. Slipped Adam in there, played a little running back for us today too, popped some runs. There was a lot of bright things. Again, it's always sad when it ends even when it ends great. We've got a lot of guys coming back. We've got a really good football team. Payton Page, Barrett Carter, and Marcus Tate, and Briny, RJ Mickens. An example those guys have set -- and Mafah -- it's a special, special group of people. There's a lot of young guys that have got a ton of great experience this year that I think we can build on. And add to as well.

Q. My question is about Mafah. Did he aggravate that shoulder at some point in the first half? At what point did you guys decide to try Adam at running back? He almost looked like a real natural out there?

DABO SWINNEY: Last week. After that, actually after the championship game. Best thing he does is run with the ball. See if we can create a little role for him and see how he looks. He looked great in practice.

I'm sure you all knew that. You all know everything. I think one of y'all asked me the question, would you consider moving somebody from another position? Was that you, Chapel? Oh, yeah. Chapel's got a telescope up on the tower or something there watching practice. I'm on to y'all's game. I get it. Like code language. That's what you were asking. You knew.

But I appreciate you. I appreciate that. You're good at what you do.

Yeah, that's really it. He did some good stuff, man. He is a natural. That's something that we want to try to grow this spring and really talked about trying to transition in there. See if we can kind of rebrand him a little bit. See what he looks like as a 230 pound back that can fly, and he's got ball skills. See how that works out.

Q. I thought it was a big moment there when after Mickens' interception, would have been a pick six. Tre Williams had the block in the back. Looked like Mickens would have scored even without the block, but you all had to settle for a field goal after that.

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, it was a critical play. I thought we had a PI down there too. On the goal line we didn't get a call there, and that could have been a critical play too. Yeah that was a tough one, and it was the right call. That's one of the things you try to really coach and do, but in the heat of the moment you get beaten. I hope the young

man's okay, but it was a definite blind side.

You overcome it. You battle. It was unbelievable to be in a one-score game, pin deep, and just get a stop right there.

Then you overcome that and go score -- get stopped on the fourth and one. So we had two critical plays, and it could have come down to the last one. Just didn't make it. Even with all the other chaos.

Q. I know that the game just ended, but just given the defensive struggles throughout this year as you kind of look and evaluate what's best for that unit, would you say any staff changes would be on the table?

DABO SWINNEY: We're not worried about any of that stuff. We had a great year, won the championship. Got to improve in all areas. Got an excellent staff. All those guys work really hard and well together, but we've got to improve everywhere. If we want to get to the top. Good enough to get the playoff, good enough to win the league, not good enough to win it all.

Q. You talked a little bit about that Texas defense, how tough they were. Is there anything different that your team did or noticed there towards the third quarter that you kind of found a spark of life there offensively?

DABO SWINNEY: Put the ball in our quarterback's hands. We just played kind of two minute tempos. We just put it in Number 2's hands, and he made plays, receivers made plays, tight ends made plays. We had just enough run game mixed in there, just enough. But I mean you're down 18 points. For the opening drive, they had like a 7 1/2 minute drive or something like that. So pretty much down 18 points, you've pretty much got to go all tempo. I thought we did a really good job in the second half, we held them to 10 points. Just such a hole.

I think we won the second half. Is my math right? 14-10, whatever it was. That part was good, but missed a couple of opportunities. Just put it in Cade's hands and said we're going to have to let it rip. Make some plays and play fast. A lot of tempo because we're not getting many possessions. Then the guys just made plays.

Q. You mentioned clawing back in the second half, that's kind of what you guys have done all year, the resilience to pick yourselves off the mat time and time again. What makes you proudest in terms of resiliency all season long?

DABO SWINNEY: Those are lessons that you hope that you learn from the game, first of all. Not saying to get knocked down, but you've got to keep going. You hope that especially young people those are lessons that you

can learn because you need that in life. It can't always go the way you want. We have setbacks. We have disappointments. It was just an awesome thing to go through the season.

I really truly mean that. I'm so grateful for this year's journey, really grateful. If I had one word, it's grateful. To get a chance to do life with this team. There was not a day where I didn't enjoy coming to work with our players, where I didn't enjoy coming to work with our players.

The leaders, these guys are going to do amazing things. They are going to do amazing things. It's a blessing to be able to see that, see resilience and see resolve. Those are things that will serve them well for the rest of their life.

This is a really tough moment, but when all the smoke clears and they get a chance to really truly appreciate their journey at Clemson, their lives have been changed. They've been equipped they've grown as men. They can walk out of here knowing that they left us better. They set an unbelievable example. It's a special group of seniors. The young people and the lessons they learned. That's really what it comes down to.

They've got to have -- especially in this world, man, and you have failure, fail in front of everybody and there's a ton of criticism and things like that, you've got to have courage and conviction to keep going, to be able to pick yourself up regardless of all that and keep moving forward and continue to keep the faith and believe. That's what it takes. That's what life is about.

It's just awesome to see that because that's what they did all year long, all the way to this microcosm tonight. Again, you're on a big stage, on the road. You're down 18 points to maybe the best defense in the country, and then you go play the way they did in the second half and, again, just two missed opportunities away getting from really, really interesting last couple of minutes.

That's heart. That's resiliency. That's resolve. Just keep fighting, keep believing, and keep battling, and they did that. Don't get any participation trophy or any of that stuff. You came here to win. Hey, end of the day, they did a lot of good things. We got one offensive lineman that we're missing: Marcus Tate. All the guys are back and then some. We know we're going to miss Payton Page, but everybody else is back. We've got a lot of great young linebackers that grew up this year. We've got some young talent at corner. A lot of young skill. Got a chance to be a really, really good football team and grow and get better and build on some things we put in place this year, and it's my job to make sure we do that.

Q. I know you still have to watch the tape, but what were some of the things that plagued you on the defensive side of the ball in the first half?

DABO SWINNEY: Just getting off some blocks, leveraging the ball. Coming underneath instead of going over the top. Just some base stuff. They're good. They're a good football team. If you misfit just a little bit -- missed a couple tackles. They're really good. They can make you pay for those things. This is a good football team. That's really it.

We didn't have any busts or things like that. We just came down to fundamentals. Again, getting off blocks. Playing in our gap. Leveraging the ball at corner. A couple tackles that were right there to make that we don't make. Eyes on a couple things, touchdown to the tight end. That was a mistake.

Just a couple of missed assignment things. They settled in and did a helluva job in the second half. We stopped. We turned them over. We got stops on downs. There was a lot of good things after the half that gave us a chance. One terrible play was obviously the 80-yard play, the opening drive.

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