

CFP First Round: Miami vs Texas A&M

Saturday, December 20, 2025

College Station, Texas, USA

Kyle Field

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Mario Cristobal

Postgame Press Conference

Miami 10, Texas A&M 3

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Just found a way to continue to keep pushing through some difficult situations. The defense was off the charts the entire day. We found ourselves finally running the football and getting some chunk yardage. It took a while. We were up and down on offense.

Just a great response, turned the ball over, both by the defense, getting the ball back, and the offense going right down the field and scoring.

With that, questions, please.

Q. Mario, with Malachi, he fumbled the second to last drive and then you go back to him and he guess the touchdown. What did it mean to go back to him and for you to trust him to execute in that big moment?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You saw the entire team just go right to him after the fumble. Everybody trusts him. A lot of the reason why we're here today is because of his play making ability. He brings so much energy to the team. They trust him. They love him. They knew that there was going to be some more football to be played, and he was going to be a big part of the reason why we were going to have a chance to pull out the game.

Q. Last year you guys had so many issues defensively down the stretch that cost you, and then this year, this defense has been phenomenal all year but particularly today, keeping you in the game and sealing it with that interception. Did you envision all of this when you brought Corey in as the defensive coordinator?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, we knew we were going to get better because what he does really caters to our personnel. We're built to be a very aggressive front seven. Guys that are explosive, guys that have length, that have



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power and twitch.

He did some great work at Minnesota. They were a top-10 defense over there, and JMU, as well. Can you envision this level in year one? I think that's hard for anybody to exactly make it look like this, but nothing surprises us because of the way our guys just work and train.

Q. Mario, for Mark Fletcher to come up big at that last drive, what do you think that means for him and what he means to the program, and he was obviously running the ball early, to lean on him there at the end?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, Mark, 17 carries, 173 yards, man, he was such a difference in the game. What he means to the team, it was a rough year for him, you know that, with the passing of his father. He never flinched, stayed with his teammates, played the game that Saturday. That's about a year ago.

He's just the heart and soul of our football team. Everything he does is dedicated to his teammates getting better, to the team winning, and to see him just -- he took over. He took over the ground game in a game where we were having a real tough time moving the football.

They have a really good defense. That wind was all over the place. That blew some things out, both in the passing game and on field goals. But Mark Fletcher certainly wasn't affected by it.

Credit to the offensive line, also. They're whipping a bunch of pressure, the plus-one concept, safety blitzes, Will fires, Nickel fires, and we just got our feet in the ground and started moving them. I think we ran for almost 200 yards on 28 carries, 6.2 a shot. Something to certainly be proud of.

Q. How proud are you of the grit that your players displayed with the adversity?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That's the best part. It really is. Because a year ago, as was mentioned earlier, we had a tough time stopping people on defense. Man, I felt like you're always wondering, man, do you kick it, do you go, do you kick it, do you go, what do the analytics say, what's



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the feel for the game, what kind of defense are we playing, what's the caliber of team and their explosive capabilities?

It was one of those games where we felt, all right, we're holding up good and we're knocking them back. It's going to be one of those tight back-and-forth games and field goals are going to be critical.

I guess what I'm trying to say is the confidence that they bring to us and being able to call and manage the game is off the charts, and certainly they were the difference today.

Q. If you talk about a 1-0 mentality, you gave yourself a moment after you made the CFP to enjoy it a bit. This win, how long do you enjoy this, understanding what it means, that you've won a game in the College Football Playoff, you're advancing, you continue on with a chance?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The players, I want the players to enjoy the plane ride, with their families when they get back. As a coach, man, by the time you get back to the locker room, you're like, give me the injury report, let me know where the guys are at.

I think I'm more -- man, how do you say this? I'm more inclined right now to just make sure I congratulate each and every player on our team because the guys on the scout team did an unbelievable job because you're down numbers as the year goes on. You have a roster of 105. That's a massive cut from the previous years.

They are just as responsible for this victory as the guys making the touchdowns and the stops and everything else.

I want to take every minute I can today to thank, congratulate and love up our players for their commitment to the University of Miami and for validating all the hard work that they have been doing since some guys three, four guys and some guys that got here in January.

We're blessed to have guys of that caliber as human beings and as competitors to come to work every day and work with.

Q. Bryce Fitzgerald, two picks. What can you say about how he's stepped up over the last two months coming in as the starter?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The best part about him, he wasn't here in January. He went to Columbus High School, okay, and he doesn't get out until June. That's when he joined us.

Quick study. People always wonder, how is he going to be

able to catch up. He was the only one that started late. He never flinched. He spends every waking minute. It's kind of like Malachi, just gets in there, studies it up, spends extra time doing it. When the lights come on, certain guys just kind of have it. He's that guy. When the lights come on, he knows what to do, how to do it, and there's no flinch in that guy at all. You don't sense any type of freshman reservation from him.

He's certainly a guy that we're really, really proud of, and looking forward to more great play from him.

Q. To make the playoff is one statement. To win a game in the playoff and advance is another statement. What does this mean for the overall build of Miami football in terms of where you're headed in the future, and do you take stock of milestone situations like this?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, I do. I think it's important. I think it was important, first, to get in the playoff. Then to go and win at a place like this, right, 100 plus thousand people, on the road, a team that was arguably top 2 or 3 until their last game, and to get it done in this type of environment, we needed that.

If you could draw it up how we wanted it, we wanted to go there. We wanted to come here and do it against a great football team.

What does it mean for us? Continued progress, the vision, and we've never altered the course despite all the challenges that come with it. But that's part of it.

Again, really proud of our players. It's all about them and that staff because, again, 40 plus days ago, we were lower than low and found a way to just bring a different level of energy every single day and lift each other and the program up, and here we are with a chance of keep playing, and that's all that matters now, 1-0.

Q. Back when you played in Miami's winning games like this with regularity, it was always guys stepping up in the moment, and today you were in a tie game with eight minutes left, and one after the other, Fletcher, Toney, Fitzgerald, they all in rapid succession stepped up and seized the moment. Your thoughts?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, they probably saw Andre Johnson and Edgerrin James and Michael Irvin on the sideline and said, hey, man, those were great days but now it's our turn.

There's no flinch in these guys and the way that they train,

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the way that we train collectively as a group, the belief in each other is extremely strong. We train and wire our team to be confident and aggressive in everything that we do. When you come into an environment like this, you have to find a way to take the momentum one play at a time, and it's probably going to be played 175, 180, 185 because they have a great team, they're going to keep coming.

We have guys that are about that life, that are about that type of training, that truly enjoy the situation that calls for them to be at their best against great players.

A testament to them. A testament to recruiting, development, because a lot of times that gets lost in the mix with some of you guys. Just flat-out just toughness and resiliency.

Q. Coach, just talk about that postgame smooch from Michael Irvin and some of the energy that he brings to the sideline.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That was disgusting. I mean, he's got a lot of energy, man. I couldn't find enough wipeys to clean myself. Mike is awesome. I remember being in high school and coming over to practice at the University of Miami and going, man, I want to be part of those dawgs. Those guys were dawgs. I signed with them, and I'm like, holy crap, these guys are good, I'll never play here.

That guy means so much to the program, to its fan base, to our community, and then to see other guys show up, as well, and all week long to see the pride returning to so many former players, to our administration that's worked so hard to put this all together, to our fans that traveled. I know these games are kind of tricky; they give you like five tickets and people got to be stuck up in the corner, but they traveled. They traveled well. They were felt. But yeah, the smooch, I don't know about the smooch.

But God bless him. Glad he's here, and glad he's here supporting us.

Q. There was about a week's worth of noise and debate about last teams in, first team out. What, if anything, do you feel like this result said about the committee's decision to put you guys in as last team in?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Look, regardless of what the result was today, they made the right decision. I said it a lot of times before. Last year we had to go to court, I felt, because we had a case, other teams had a case, but it was fuzzy, it was muddy. This year, what was fuzzy about it? We come down to the end, we had common opponents with another great football team that I'm sure would do

great in the playoffs, but we did better against those common opponents and we won the head-to-head.

God forbid we should ever get away from the meaning of head-to-head because just look out there today how many guys were helped off the field? How many guys had to be carried or limp off or get on crutches? How many guys are seeing the doctor right now for competing head-to-head. Let us never, ever devalue the importance of head-to-head competition, please.

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