

CFP First Round: Miami vs Teaxs A&M

Saturday, December 20, 2025

College Station, Texas, USA

Kyle Field

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Shannon Dawson

Coach Corey Hetherman

Postgame Press Conference

Miami 10, Texas A&M 3

Q. Malachi, second to last possession, he fumbles it then gets his redemption at the end. What did that mean for him, for the team, to see him bounce back after one of the few rare mistakes he's made this year?

SHANNON DAWSON: Look, people make mistakes. It is what it is, right? He came off the field, he was obviously irritated himself.

I just told him, look, keep playing. Our defense is playing really well, we'll get the ball back, and you'll get another opportunity to change the game.

So ultimately, he got that opportunity, and he made the play that we all know he can make. Look, nobody panicked in this game. We knew it was going to be a game that unfolded similar to the way it did. We just needed to make a play at the end. Thanks to these guys right here.

Q. Shannon, how do you handle that situation going into that final possession, because there's a lot of people who say, oh, get down at the 1, play for the field goal. But in that game, can you do that? What did you say to those guys?

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, I mean, look, we missed two field goals, right? So it was one of those situations where we needed to score. I didn't feel comfortable personally being up 3. Being up 7 with no time-outs against those guys, I'd feel a lot more comfortable against.

Now, you could technically go down at the 1 or 2 and drain it down, and if something happened on the field goal -- you know, if you can score, in my opinion, you score, especially with no time-outs left, especially the way that game was



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going, and you get up by 7.

Q. Shannon, you were throwing everything at them today --

SHANNON DAWSON: I was. I appreciate you noticing.

Q. Pretty much everything.

SHANNON DAWSON: A-gap run ended up winning it.

Q. The A-gap run ended up coming through at the end. Just talk about both of those things.

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, we did. I'll give those guys a lot of credit. They played very well on defense, and they're a really good 3rd down defense. I was trying to stay out of 3rd down and long and didn't do a great job the first half, but the second half we stayed out of 3rd downs because we ran the ball better.

I wanted to lean more on that. I could see Mark getting some momentum, so ultimately, we knew a couple plays that was working, and we were -- that last drive I was not going to deviate from those couple plays.

Until we ran it at the end when they started crowding everybody down, I figured we'd toss it to Mally and get around the edge.

Q. Shannon, running the ball up the middle with Mark Fletcher works sometimes, but what does he mean to the team, and the fact that he was able to have this career game on this big stage, what do you think it means to the team and to him?

SHANNON DAWSON: I don't think anybody is surprised about him having a career game in there on that day. He's been that guy ever since I've been here, and it's awesome to have a guy like him that you can lean on at the end.

It was pretty clear when we threw the pick and they went out and stopped them, which they did every time, I told Mark, I was like, look, we're riding you down the field. It was clear what we were going to do by everybody involved, and he made people miss. Great for him.



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Q. Coach, Pringle had some success at the end of the season, but you went heavy Mark Fletcher today and you even ran Malachi up the middle some. Was there something you saw in their defense that had you go ahead and give a game plan where we was just going to run at them?

SHANNON DAWSON: I did. I thought there was a handful of teams that had success with similar type plays. They're fast. Their defense tracks pretty well. I did think that we could have some success up the middle.

Now, the run to Mally, it was outside zone. It cut up in the B-gap, which I tried to explain to all of you guys, that sometimes outside zone ends up being a B-gap run. Nobody listens to me. But ultimately we did see some things where we thought duo was going to be a successful play, and you go back and watch that, and really the key to that play, because they were bringing safeties down the middle, our receivers came in and blocked those safeties up.

Both of those guys, Keelan and C.J., did an unbelievable job on that last drive eating up that safety pressure. If they don't do that, we don't have success.

Q. Coach Hetherman, Marcel Reed, what was the game plan going in to stymie Marcel Reed. What was your game plan?

COREY HETHERMAN: I think the number one thing was to try to contain him in the pocket, try to give him different pictures, try to do different things up front just to try to keep him caged up in the pocket so he couldn't extend plays.

I thought he did a really good job, especially later in the game, of moving around, trying to find things later down the field, scrambling and getting some yards.

I thought changing up the pictures pre-snap and defensively all game long, just trying to make sure he was uncomfortable and trying to not give the same coverage every time, try to move pictures around for him pre-snap, and I thought our guys did a really good job of handling that all day.

Q. Corey, that was a game where there was no margin for error. It was tight the whole way. Talk about what was going through your head throughout the game. Obviously you never want to let anybody score, but you called that game under probably a little more pressure than most games?

COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, I thought our guys executed

really well. I thought our guys, they communicated well. There was a lot of different pictures. There was a lot of different things, communication pre-snap that our guys handled really well. They communicated.

I thought one thing was we had to limit the big play. Our special teams stepped up huge. We gave up the one big explosive early. We blocked the field goal there. Our guys responded in that situation. It was really just containing the quarterback, keep things top down, and then we needed to tackle.

They did a really good job. They have some really good players on the perimeter. They made us miss at times. But our guys swarmed to the football. They played inside out, and we swarmed the ball, we got them on the ground, and our guys kept responding all day, and I thought our offense did a really good job of moving the ball and keeping us off the field at times.

Q. Corey, along those lines, just describe the feeling of the defense playing this type of game in this stage and to have it kind of all come together at the perfect time when really the offense struggled a little bit early?

COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, I think our guys have continued to get better every single day. It's been different guys in different spots. We had some guys return back to the roster this week. We had different guys that were out with injury this game, and we're hoping to get them back next week.

But at this point in the season, a lot of different guys have played different roles. At this point in the season, a lot of different guys have played together, depending where guys were dinged up in certain weeks or where other guys had to step up to play certain roles.

We had a lot of guys in different spots, even on that last play of the game.

I think just guys being put in those situations earlier in the season, guys being put in those situations in different environments in league play this year, I think it prepared them for the situation today where no one panicked. Everyone just did their job, they stayed their role.

One of the messages going in was just play one play at a time. At some point they were going to make someone miss. At some point they were going to have a play. It was just respond and then just keep playing one play at a time and just -- so now what was really the message, and I thought our guys did a really good job of handling that today in a tough environment.



Q. Corey, Keionte thanked Carson Beck and the offense for getting them ready for that last drive. I'm curious, what is it like Wednesdays when you do two-minute? Is that level of competition pretty similar to what we saw on that last drive?

COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, this time of year is always interesting because how many practice reps are you going to get, how many full-speed reps are you going to get. The toughest thing for us is Tuesday-Wednesday. When we go against our offense, there's a lot of things I think look really good on the board and then they just expose us.

It's so hard defending our offense during the week that a lot of those pictures, a lot of those reads, the speed that they play at, getting those looks from our offensive line week in, week out, that's the hardest thing we do.

Going into the game every week, that Tuesday, that Wednesday prepares us, and it's Carson. It's the way he reads. It's the way he sees the field. It's defending our receivers, our tight ends, how well they run, our backs in space, our offensive line, how well they pick things up.

There was a couple other things I kind of wanted to throw at them today, and looking back, Wednesday, we get stuffed. I'm like, hey, maybe we'll hold on that and work it one more week.

I think that preparation that we see all the way through the year, from spring football, fall camp, going through the season every Tuesday practice, every Wednesday practice prepared us for that moment today on the road.

Q. Corey, this was a defense that was pretty maligned last year before you got here. At what point this year did you say, I think this is a defense we can win a championship with?

COREY HETHERMAN: I think our guys grew close. I think our guys came together after spring ball. Spring ball, I thought we saw improvement. Our guys continued to get better.

But I think when our guys this summer, Akheem Mesidor, different guys that came in, Kei, Mo, Wes, different guys in the back end stepped up, ZP up front, and then you look at the work ethic that Bain has and guys start following that because they see the successes those guys have had, and now they're starting to hang out more off the field. They're coming in there, watching more film. They're doing things together all the time.

Now that defense is connected, and now they want to play for one another. They want to go out and compete every

single series. They don't want to let themselves down.

Then the offense, I think just as a team, special teams, the offense, the defense, I think our team is very close, and I think that's why our guys go out and compete the way they do, and I think that's why we've grown and we've connected more as a defense since I think what we were back in January.

Q. Shannon, maybe this dovetails with his answer a little bit, but beyond just what he is capable of doing when you put the ball in his hands, what is Mark Fletcher's role as the emotional bedrock of this team?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah, he's just steady. He's the leader of our group, along with obviously a couple of the O-linemen that have been here since the beginning.

But ultimately, Mark is a guy that's just as steady as you can get. You can lean on him in tight situations. I thought it was crucial today that we didn't have any pre-snap penalties in a pretty tough environment, and the communication from back to front and O-line to running back and running back to O-line was elite today.

We didn't play our best, obviously. We did just enough to win the game. But having a guy like Mark that you can lean on in the end is crucial.

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