

CFP First Round: Tulane vs Ole Miss

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Oxford, Mississippi, USA

Vaught Hemingway Stadium

Tulane Green Wave

Coach Greg Gasparato

Coach Joe Craddock

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 41, Tulane 10

Q. Greg, I was asking Jon about this, as well. Did Ole Miss look different offensively? Did they do anything different that you noticed from the team that you prepared for in September?

GREG GASPARATO: A little bit. Early on they just window dressing things a little differently. It was a lot of the same schematics. We didn't handle it very well the first two drives and were able to settle down. Proud of how we responded, but they added a few new little wrinkles with some formations, some motions. But it was similar to the first one, and they just made a few more plays.

Q. Kind of felt like the same guy calling both games?

GREG GASPARATO: Yeah, I do. Early on they did a really good job getting into some snug sets and getting our inside fitters to come up on some play actions and allow some over routes.

So we changed up how we were calling it really after that second drive, and I thought they responded really well.

We were able to take 14-0 like that, let up three points the rest of the half, and then they just started making plays. Missed tackles, guy wins a one-on-one. I thought we did some things better, but at the end of the day they made more plays than we did at the point of attack.

Q. Greg, you mentioned it after those first two drives, y'all settled down. What do you feel like wasn't working on the first two drives, especially on those first five plays that were all explosives?

GREG GASPARATO: Yeah, I think it was a lot of eye candy, so we're a big single high coverage team. We kind



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of changed what we were doing on the back end a little bit just to give a little bit different picture, different roles, different leverage, and we were able to collect the over routes a little bit better and apply pressure.

The thing that when we did get stops that helped us was creating negative plays, so that first play of the third drive we were able to bring pressure, get a sack, and all of a sudden it's 2nd and 17, and then we're on track and we get off the field.

We've got to make the plays that present themselves. When you're playing a really good team, you have to have answers, and we had some, but they had some, as well.

It was back and forth for a little bit, and then they made more plays at the point of attack than we did as the game progressed.

Q. Joe, y'all were able to move the ball a lot, but when it got deep downfield, no matter if it was turnovers or a negative play, what do you feel like didn't allow you to be able to score for most of this game?

JOE CRADDOCK: You know, the first drive was indicative of our whole game really. We go right down the field. We stayed on our opening script after converting a couple of 3rd downs, which was big for us. We stayed on script, and the play call to go to one-on-one to the X out of an FIB formation, we ran the back out, safety flew off the roof, we had one-on-one, and we just didn't execute there.

Then just critical moments, right. We talked about it in the first game. We didn't do very well on 3rd down the first game. We had a critical MA in the first game in the red area, and I just think in those critical moments we just didn't make the plays that presented themselves.

I didn't call a great game, either. It's not all on the players. I've got to do a better job.

Q. It felt like the first time against Ole Miss one of the biggest problems was efficiency on 3rd and 4th down. Sumrall talked about how some of the problems from last game showed themselves the same way this time. Was that something you felt like stayed the same, and

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why?

JOE CRADDOCK: Yeah, last game I did a terrible job of sticking with quarterback sneak. In the first game that worked every single time, and we got away from it. That's when we got stuffed. We kind of felt like this game we could come back to that, and probably was not a good idea by me.

In the first game it worked every time, like I said, and we tried to get off script a little bit in the first game and we got stuffed. This game that was kind of our plan. We felt like we could knock them back and get the sneaks. It's been good for us all year, and we just didn't get it done.

Q. For either or both coaches, obviously the last 48 hours has been tough for Coach Sumrall. How much did the team try to rally around him, and did you notice any difference in his focus obviously with losing his dad?

JOE CRADDOCK: I don't think so. I think Coach is a stud, man. He told me yesterday at practice right as we finished up, and me and Greg both, we've known George for a couple years. Coach Sumrall said it: It sucks. It's life. It's hard.

But I didn't see -- I think our players were going to play hard for Coach either way, so I didn't really notice anything for that. But prayers go out to the Sumrall family. That's a tough deal. Nothing any of us want to go through.

GREG GASPARATO: Yeah, same thing. Coach Sumrall is a phenomenal leader. People look at you in times of adversity, and I don't think he could have handled it any better. I really don't. He brought the team together, the guys rallied around him. There was no let-off because of that, if that makes sense.

Coach's mom got to the hotel last night. That was a big deal. I don't know how he did it. I lost my dad when I was in college. I don't know how he made it through. He's a stud, and the team rallied around it.

Man, he's done a lot for a lot of people. He really has. People see that. It's not just what you say, it's what you do. He loves -- I mean, attitude, toughness, discipline, love, those are our four core values. He lives them out every day, and that's who he is, and that's why we've been successful as we've been.

I know this sucks and this is the feeling you don't want to have at the end of these, but there's a lot of people that wished around the country they had an opportunity just to feel this way and get here in the first place. There's been a

lot of good to this season, and Coach was the leader of that, and this was the ultimate adversity and he handled it as good as you could.

Q. I know it's hard to stomach right now, you're competitors, having to finish like that. But that atmosphere, that environment for the team, getting to this stage, can you speak to that and what it means for this program to achieve what it did achieve?

GREG GASPARATO: Yeah, I think that was the goal all along. For us, we knew -- we have a very good conference that we play in. We've got some pretty good players on our football team, and you have really good seasons by going 1-0 a lot.

We were 11-2 going into this game, and we went 1-0 11 times. That's how we got here. When you get to this point in championship games, the details matter more than ever.

I think when you go back and watch the tape, there's things -- I'll second what Joe said. There's calls I wish I had back in this game early on, late in the game, to put guys in position. And then there's other times where we needed to execute at a little bit higher clip.

Everything you do matters. If you want to win a championship -- you earned the right to play here, but so did they.

We've got to be a little bit more -- we've got to execute at a higher level playing on a stage like this.

The thing about playing on this stage for me and I think our guys, it was -- pregame there's a lot of hype, there's a lot of crowd noise. As soon as that ball is kicked off, you don't hear any of it. You just don't. You're locked in on the game. It's just like every other game from that standpoint. You've got to communicate at a higher level. You've got to win your leverage at a higher level because you're playing a better football team that earned the right to be here.

But I think moving forward our guys know what it feels like. Just like last year we lost the conference championship game, everybody in the off-season kind of used that as fuel. We're going to get back and the outcome is going to be different. I would say the same thing going into this off-season. We got where we wanted to go, and now when we get there, what are we going to do with it. That's going to be going into the off-season, everybody is going to lock in and we've got to be a little bit better.

JOE CRADDOCK: Yeah, Greg just said a lot of the things I was thinking, from the disappointment to end last year at Army and for our guys to work the way they have all year,



to mature the way they have all year, to win one-score games, to come together.

There's a lot of hurt people in that locker room right now because they love each other, and that's something pretty special that Coach has built on this team. Our guys have gotten really close.

I love those guys. It's really hard to look at some of them knowing that it might be the last time they ever play college football or football in general and maybe the last time I get to coach them.

Really difficult right now, but it's great for the program to be able to play in that environment, on that stage, and I think that our guys will come back in the off-season, like Greg just said, and work extremely hard to get back.

Q. Greg, now that Sam Howard's season is officially done, can you talk about what he's meant to this team over the year and to you?

GREG GASPARATO: Yeah, he's the heartbeat of this team. I think it's just a good reminder to everybody, man, that's what you recruit. You recruit warriors that are going to hold everybody at the highest level. We always talk about when you bring someone in this locker room, that's what you're encouraging, that behavior, and you want to bring in force multipliers, guys that aren't just good at what they do, they maybe everybody else around them better, coaches included.

Sam has just -- I can't say enough about him. I know he hears this all the time. We talk about it all the time. He is the ultimate leader, ultimate competitor, and he's somebody you want your kids to grow up to be like one day. He's as good as it gets. He's the last one off the plane every time cleaning up, he's the last one off the bus, he's the last one out of the locker room. He leads in a lot of different ways.

That's what you want to give yourself, a chance to win in life, to win in football. You want guys that are going to attack everything they do because everything matters.

The best moments of his life, he hasn't hit them yet. They're coming down the road, and I'm just looking forward to keeping up with him and helping him through his journey.

Q. On a game when you knew you had to execute at a high level to give yourself a chance, there was that two-play sequence in the second half where you had a guy wide open deep, didn't hit him, ran a hidden ball trick that looked like it was working, fumbled, lost the

ball. Was that kind of the game in a microcosm almost?

JOE CRADDOCK: Yeah, I just think our guys played extremely hard. They gave it all they had, just came up short. I've got to call better plays. Execution has got to be better, all the things. I just think that when it mattered the most, I didn't call a good enough game, and I've got to be better there.

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