

CFP National Championship:

Miami vs Indiana

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Hard Rock Stadium

Miami Hurricanes

Shannon Dawson

Pregame Press Conference

Q. D'Angelo Ponds has been ranked the best corner in the BIG TEN and the Top 5 in the nation. What type of impact does a player like Ponds have on your offense Monday night?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean he's always around the ball. The kid is very seldom out of place. He's just a really good football player, and he's one of a lot that play for them.

So, yeah, I mean, the structure of their defense allows him to get eyes on the quarterback and trigger on the ball. And he does a really good job within their scheme. But he's also a very instinctive player. Like when the ball comes his way, I mean, he can leave and go trigger as good as I've seen. So he's just a really elite player.

Q. Coach, going back to sort of some points a little bit earlier in this playoff run, especially the Texas A&M game. You guys really leaned heavily on the run there. And you said yourself it's kind of hard to sort of be patient and trust whenever something is working in a game like that. How do you kind of find the balance between patience and also obviously looking to change and looking to adapt to whatever the defense is doing whenever you're in a win-or-take-all game like this?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah, I mean, it's an internal struggle at times, because inherently I want to be aggressive, but ultimately I want to win the game. And so I think I have to be in tune to the flow of the game and what's working. And we communicate between drives, between every drive. We have iPads now, so we watch and try to pinpoint what's working.

The flow of the game matters, and there's different situations and different things that pop up in every game. In that game particularly, it was some tough circumstances in that game that dictated a lot of things.



NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

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But ultimately we want to be aggressive, but I call it cautiously aggressive. We are a team that leans on the run game. We've done it all year. And so it starts with that, but ultimately we have to push the ball down the field at times, too. And I just gotta go back and forth with when to take those chances.

Q. Shannon, when you guys were evaluating transfer quarterbacks last year and decided that Carson was the right fit for you, what concerns, if any, did you have about his health, and how has he kind of bonded with you in such a short time so that symbiosis between play caller and quarterback is there?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. It was a completely different journey with him because he didn't go through spring. So we had some concerns at the beginning about the surgery and everything, but we talked to a lot of doctors. And Nick Mullens was a quarterback I had years ago, and he had this similar surgery. Brock Purdy had a similar surgery, and they were both worse than Carson's, and the surgery was a different time; and they got back, and both of them felt really confident the next year and felt good. So there was a lot of conversations that were had to get over the hump of, hey -- I'm not a doctor, you know, and I don't pretend to be a doctor. So I had to have some conversations to make us feel good about that.

But ultimately the building of the relationship started at an awkward time, because we live in a different time now. You don't recruit a kid for a year and a half, get to know him and his family and all the rest. It's more like an NFL approach now.

But our personalities did match very well together. He's a very low-key guy. He's very easy to coach, because he's very cerebral. He pays attention to what you say, tries to do, very coachable kid. So I think that helped through the process.

Q. Coach, beyond the production, what has CharMar Brown brought to this team after coming in from North Dakota State?



SHANNON DAWSON: Consistency. I mean, his character is off the chart, you know. He's a guy that really a lot of kids should look at as far as his perseverance and his attitude. When things didn't always go his way this year, but he stayed constant. He stayed positive. He didn't waiver. And when his number was called, he did his job, and he's done that all year.

So I can't say enough about the kid as far as his approach and his attitude, especially in today's age where it's a "I gotta get mine" mentality, right, and everybody wants it right now and wants a ton of it. And sometimes you just gotta stay the course and you gotta weather some ups and downs. I mean, that's the way life is.

So he's a great example of staying the course, staying positive, blocking out the noise, because everybody's got the people in their ear when things aren't going your way. Sometimes it's very close people to you, right, and you gotta block out all that and you gotta focus on what matters and what you know reality is. And then when you get your chance, you gotta take advantage of it, and he did.

I can't say enough about the kid. I love the kid. His attitude, his character is probably what pushed through the most with him.

Q. Shannon, the way things are now with transfer quarterbacks coming in often for one year, how much of a sense do you know what you're getting?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, other than watching film and trying to do as much background research as you can, things happen pretty quickly, too. It just so happened with Carson, there was a couple of people in his past that I'm very close with. Todd Monken was one. Had a long conversation with him. He recruited him to Georgia. He probably knows him the best because Todd's son and him played on a summer league baseball team together. So he gave me a lot of insight on the kid.

Buster Faulkner was a guy that was at Georgia that I've known very well. And so I had a conversation with him, just to kind of get the personality, because there's all -- I mean, look, there's all kind of narratives out there, probably from me, from everybody, right. And getting to the truth a lot of times is hard. You gotta cut through the weeds a little bit.

But those two guys were very instrumental in telling me a lot about him, made me feel really good about it. And then you can put on tape and see that he's a very talented quarterback. That was easy. That was the easy part. The other stuff is the stuff that I wanted to know a little bit more about. But after talking to them, it made my decision really

easy.

Q. Is it inevitable as a program if that's the path you go down with your quarterbacks that at some point you're going to get one that's a bust that it's just not going to work?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, are you a gambler? Are you a blackjack player?

Q. I mean, I've played blackjack before?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. Well, nothing is 100 percent in life. And inherently I am an old-school soul. Like I like developing kids, and I think reps within a system matter. And I think at some point that's going to mean more, right?

Q. What did this coaching staff see in Carson Beck kind of in the beginning of it all, going through the transfer portal and trying to find the right guy to lead after Cam Ward? Just what was it about him that stuck out to you the most that stays true to today?

SHANNON DAWSON: The one thing is he's played in a lot of big games. And we looked at his career as one of, man, this kid's got a lot of experience. We felt like we were a really good football team, and we felt like we needed somebody that's played in some big games, because we were hoping to play in some big games. And he's been in a lot of them.

And so that was the one thing at the beginning that I looked at is like, man, this kid's won a lot of games, but he's won a lot of big games and been in a lot of big games. And so that experience was very much so a big point in taking him.

Now, you gotta have the talent. Like I had -- look, everybody evaluates quarterbacks differently, right? And I think 99 percent of the people screw it up, because ultimately you have to be an accurate thrower from the pocket to be a productive quarterback, period. Everybody gets enamored with, oh, this, that, the kid can run a -- I don't care. Like if you can't throw it accurately from the pocket, then I'm not that good of a coach. Does that make sense?

So ultimately that's what I wanted to see on film. Like what kind of player is he? Is he a progression quarterback? Is he sitting in the pocket finding lanes and triggering through it with accuracy? And that's what he was.

Now, you don't always see that when you put on tape. A lot of offenses today are RPO driven where the -- you know, hell, I could play quarterback, you know?

But ultimately we do it a little different way. Like you gotta dissect defenses; you gotta throw through lanes intermediate passing. And there's reads. So ultimately that's what I wanted to see, and that's what he did. And he's a very cerebral player. So you could see that on tape. Like he was really good from the pocket.

I do think he's more athletic than people give him credit for. We've urged him to make some plays with his feet, which he has over the last month or so. But ultimately that's what I wanted. What I want all the time is if you can't make your layups, then offensive football is a struggle.

Q. When Malachi steps on the field, first time you saw him in practice, what was that like?

SHANNON DAWSON: Look, the kid's been -- what you see is what he's been from day one. Even going through camp I was very reserved with giving him a lot of praise, because ultimately not doing it in a game, you know, you want to see it when the lights are on, right? And I have seen at times in my career where kids don't make that transition till later. Like it takes some time. Like experience matters in this game.

Typically older kids are better than younger kids, right? That's probably one reason why Indiana is such a good team and such a good defense. They have a bunch of older football players. They don't get rattled a lot. Like the game is not too big for them. So I was hoping with him that was the case, that the game wasn't too big for him. And fortunate for us, we had a big game first game, and he showed up. And so ever since then it's been pretty consistent.

Q. He's a young guy. He showed up at 17, right?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah, this should be his senior year in high school.

Q. So when he first came up like working out, could you tell?

SHANNON DAWSON: No, not until we started. Obviously they were throwing the ball around and stuff, and I have a lot of conversations with the quarterbacks about skill guys and stuff. And like obviously his ball skills are really, really elite. But ultimately when we started playing, right, when we started practicing, he was just -- he always made -- he made plays every day, and sometimes they were like plays that you scratch your head, you know.

And so ultimately I do not know what makes him him, you know. I think you gotta give a lot of credit to our Maker,

you know. He was just put on this earth to play slot receiver in our offense, and he does a damn good job of it.

Q. With the pressure there to get it right at the quarterback position if you go into the portal, can you offer a little window into what the last two weeks have been like trying to get that decision right for next year while also preparing for the biggest game you possibly can?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. With me I focus on the game. I don't really get involved in that. So my focus is strictly on the game.

Q. Coach, each of the last two years, with Carson and Cam, obviously, they were experienced quarterbacks who came here with multiple years as a starter under their belt. Do you feel like it's important to try to find experience specifically at the quarterback position if you are going to go into the portal as opposed to a red shirt freshman who maybe was really promising out of high school or something like that?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, I think experience matters at every position. Like I was telling my man over here, I mean, older kids typically play better than younger kids. Not always, but like if you're going to roll the dice and play the odds, older kids typically are better than younger kids.

Now, I do think we have the best quarterback room in the nation. We have very talented guys in our quarterback room.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Carson and that when he came to Miami, he had sort of a rocky first few months with injury and his car getting stolen and coming and learning a new offensive system and everything, and that's a lot for everyone to go through, let alone when they're in the spotlight like he was. So I'm curious if you could sort of speak to sort of how you've seen him grow and settle down, I guess, or settle in to Miami over the last nine months given his kind of hectic start?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. There were some things that happened at the beginning, but what that showed me with him is he's a very resilient person. None of that stuff bothered him.

I mean, look, he's been through a lot in his career, and he handles adversity probably as good as I've seen. I mean, even when we had the hiccups in the regular season, the day after the game he moved on pretty quickly. And that's the one thing I was hoping with him. Whenever we did not play our best and we obviously took a couple losses that

was a struggle, he bounced back the next day pretty quick. And I think he handled those situations similar. Whenever bad things happen, he just tends to move on, which I think is one of the best characteristics of a good quarterback is the ability to weather the storm, have short-term memory and not get too high and not get too low and kind of stay right there in the middle.

And that's his personality in general. He's a pretty even-keel human being. He doesn't really get too up or too down. So he gets hard on himself at times. He is very hard on himself, and he's a perfectionist in a lot of ways. I think that that's something that like everybody struggles with at times, like looking in the mirror and like really self-reflecting and being hard on yourself. But ultimately I think that's a good characteristic, too. It's better to be hard on yourself than like point fingers to everybody else, right?

But he is a very resilient dude, and he's been through a lot, and that's probably why he weathers things throughout the course of games like he does. He doesn't really get too caught up in the emotions and the highs and lows of the game.

Q. I wanted to ask about Indiana specifically. They're an attacking defense, yet they have, it seems like, great gap integrity. How fundamental is that and the discipline that they have? How challenging is it to go against a team that seems to have those kind of qualities?

SHANNON DAWSON: Very challenging. We haven't went against them yet, but I go against a similar defense every day.

And so they're elite at gap integrity. They really are. Their whole front is -- the way that their D-line and linebackers and safeties match up in the run fit is elite. Like they're very seldom out of position. I mean you can watch through the course of the whole year, and they're just very seldom out of position. Like they can dissect things as quick as I've seen a defense dissect things. And if you have tells, you know, they're very, very smart, their football IQ.

Their linebacker, No. 4, I mean, if you give a tell, then he'll be at the point of attack before you are. You know what I mean? Like sometimes seems like they know the play that's coming.

And a lot of times offenses get in these rhythms where obviously at this point in the season we've played 15 games, they've played 15 games, you really are who you are. And you try to create wrinkles and stuff and disguise as much as you can disguise, but ultimately I know what they're going to do on defense, and they have a pretty

damn good idea what we're going to do on offense, and it's going to be who can execute it better.

So it's very challenging. They're an extremely well-coached, elite, hard-playing defense, as good as I've seen. So it's going to be a huge challenge for us, but I'm looking forward to it, too.

Q. They call their defense the illusion defense because what you see before snap may be different from after the ball is snapped. How do you prepare for that? What are the keys for Carson and everybody else identifying things when things are like that?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. I think that's a great point. In my opinion within defense, the reason they're successful is because they make you play quarterback after the snap, if that makes sense to you. And so a lot of times, especially with the way offensive football in general is today, with a lot of RPOs, which we don't -- we're not a huge RPO offense, but a lot of times quarterbacks are strictly coached, and they like have like this thing in mind before the snap. But with them you better be able to play quarterback after the snap.

And so I do think that we're programmed the right way, because our offense is a very reactive offense as far as like our pass game goes. We don't really get obsessed with pre-snap looks. Now, we take in the data, but ultimately we're a progression offense. Nothing is predetermined in our offense, which I think is a reason why I feel good about having some success.

Now, obviously not too many people have. But we are a post-snap organization. Like our quarterback is programmed to see coverages and see space.

Now, their coverages are, honestly, pretty damn elite. And they do a really good job of subtly changing coverages. Like it looks very similar to other things they do. They occupy space extremely well, and they play eyes on the quarterback coverage, which years ago that's how defenses played.

Now, a lot of defenses have gone away from that with all the man coverage and three-match stuff people are doing now.

So they're really -- they're almost, in a way, if I can phrase this properly, they're kind of like preparing for an option offense. Like you don't see it a lot, so when you do see it, it's a little different, right? So just the way they play coverage is a little different than everybody else's zone coverage, which I think those guys do a really good job.

Q. Why did you identify C.J. Daniels as a target when he was going to enter the transfer portal and what makes him effective for your offense?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, he has a lot of video evidence of playing really good football, and you know, he would probably admit that LSU didn't go exactly the way he wanted it to go. But ultimately I saw a guy that's played a lot of football, a lot of experience, and we've talked about this with a couple other guys, and I just thought that our receiving room needed an older guy that had a lot of experience.

Now, with that being said, I had no idea -- like I kind of had an idea of the player I was getting, right. But a lot of times, especially with the transfer portal, you don't have an idea a lot of times of the person you're getting. You try. Like you try to do as much research as you can do. Where we knocked it out the park with him is his character and his leadership. It's elite. Like he is an elite human being.

And so I don't know if we necessarily knew that. We kind of got lucky with that in a way. We knew the player we were going to get, and he's had a really good year, but he's had a bigger impact on our offense with leadership and character.

Now, he is the one in that receiver room that keeps everything going in the right direction. I mean, he blocks his ass off and he does the dirty work, and I think everybody follows suit with that. But that's been his biggest impact.

Q. Coach, getting to this stage is a big deal for any head coach, right. And you've been with Coach Cristobal now for three years and, look, every head coach has his own style and way of doing things. I'm curious, over these three years, what has impressed you about his leadership style, the way he manages the team that you feel like has allowed Miami to get to this point and play for a National Championship?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, I think talent evaluation is one of the biggest things, and acquisition of talent. I mean, it takes talented kids to play at this level. And he has a keen eye of what he wants, especially when it comes to up front and how to build a team. And just watching him build this team from the O-line, D-line back has been eye opening to me.

Now, I do think that other than like just talent, you know, the way that he managed this year with the couple losses we had was the reason we're here, because there wasn't a huge overreaction. It was more so of, hey, let's get back to the process, let's get back to work, let's figure out what we

have to do to be better. It wasn't a blowup or anything like that, which I think at times, as assistant coaches, you're anticipating certain things. Like you always anticipate the worst, right? But I do think that his demeanor in those times of trouble was really helpful for our staff and our team.

Q. This year, compared to your previous two years, when losses happen, did he handle it different this year?

SHANNON DAWSON: No. It's been pretty consistent. Even my first year here -- we didn't lose one till like four or five games, right, the first year. I think we went like 5 and 0 and then we had like a couple of hiccups.

But ultimately, when you first get to a place, you're always curious about that, you know. And so it's been pretty consistent.

We stay pretty even keel through adversity, which I don't think you can coach in a productive way if you're not. And I think that bleeds over to our kids, and it bleeds over to how you manage games, because if you can weather the storm, typically you can have some success.

But the season is the same way. I mean, look, it's a long season, and there's only one team that didn't go through adversity and they're still playing, right? They've had none. Obviously they've probably had some adversity, but they haven't had a loss. And so how you handle those losses is important.

Q. Coach, defensively speaking, how would you kind of describe the identity of Indiana's defense and what they kind of want to do to opposing offenses at their core?

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, I mean they're very hard to run the ball against. They're very gap sound. They strain. They get off blocks probably as good as I've seen. It's hard to sustain blocks against them. And I don't really know why other than they play with extreme effort. They strain.

And so their back end does an unbelievable job of disguising coverages. They do a good job of playing -- I mean, their zone defense is good as I've seen. They're mostly zone. They'll play some man at times, but they're mostly zone. And the way they mix up zone coverages is really elite. They don't really get into a rhythm as far as like -- it's almost like -- I would say it's almost like they have these things they do, how much ever it is, let's say it's like eight, and they just kind of pick them out of a hat, you know. I don't know if -- they'll call a similar coverage on 1st

and 10 that they do on 3rd and 4, you know. So I mean, it's hard to get in a rhythm against them because they are mixing stuff up on the back end a lot, and they're just really good at zone coverage.

I mean, their eyes are on the quarterback. They move with the quarterback. They do an elite job of getting hands on the ball. They probably have more tipped ball interceptions than I've seen in a while. So it's a savvy defensive unit in general.

Q. Shannon, you kind of touched on it there, but it seems like Indiana does a lot of post-snap movement and things up. How are you and Carson able to work and simulate that that and go over on film? How much can you address that before you actually see it?

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, I mean, the good thing is our defense and their defense are very similar. They're from similar backgrounds, right? So we go against our defense every week. We have certain sets that we do against them every week. That's been very helpful, because ultimately there's nothing better than like game reps. And you get those game reps in those settings.

But I would say the good thing is our pass game is not dictated on pre-snap looks, if that makes sense. I mean, we're a progression-based offense, and I mean, our quarterback, we put a lot on him as far as seeing space and going through his progression and getting it to the open guy. So I feel like we're equipped, but ultimately there hadn't been a lot of people have a lot of success versus them. And so we'll see. We'll see how it goes.

Q. What's gone into your third down offense, converting the third downs? How important is that in a game like this with a team that obviously does that well with their own offense?

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, I mean, you gotta do better on second down. A lot of third down is getting in third down situations where you can actually execute. There's not a lot of football teams that execute a lot of third-and-longs on a routine basis. And so if you can stay out of those, you can have a much better chance of converting them.

So our third down rate for the last probably two or three games has been really high, and it has a lot to do with what we do on first and second down.

Q. Shannon, the three playoff games offensively have looked different. How much do you go into the game -- because sometimes you can grind it out, you can throw, like last game. How much does that play into a

game like this?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, look, every game is different. I mean, the people you're playing is different. The atmosphere is different. The weather is different. So there's a lot of things that dictate the flow of the game. So my job ultimately is to score one more point than the opposing team. However that looks is how it looks.

But ultimately, I mean, I anticipate this game to be one that's we're going to have to grind it out. You know, I mean that's just the way it is. Their defense doesn't give up a lot of explosive plays. On the year they have only given up a handful, right?

So ultimately this game is going to be played probably intermediate to the line of scrimmage. So I know that. And so ultimately we have to be very efficient. Like my man over here, I mean, getting first downs is crucial. You gotta keep the chains moving, and you gotta get first downs.

Q. Mark Fletcher has been great during this College Football Playoff run. Why do you think that is? Why do you think he's turned it up here in the playoffs?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, probably opportunities. He understands that these games carry a lot of weight, and guys like him tend to rise in the most crucial situations. And he's an elite player. And he's really been the carrier of this offense. We've leaned on him in the most critical times, and he's come through.

You gotta give a lot of credit to our O-line. You gotta give a lot of credit to our tight ends and our receivers. Like it isn't just one guy in the run game. It takes everybody, you know. And we're not one of those offenses that allow receivers to get away with not playing physical.

And so those guys blocking safeties and being really aggressive in the run game helps, too.

But obviously Mark is the one toting it, most of the time, and he's been elite. But he's also just been that guy since I've been here. He's a guy you can depend on in tough times. He's a very steady personality, high character, cares a lot. And he's just hard to tackle. Big kid.

Q. Just curious how much you've talked to Corey about his experience, maybe what to face. Any discussions this week about that kind of stuff?

SHANNON DAWSON: At length. I've talked to Corey a lot. I talk to Corey a lot in general, but this week I've obviously leaned on him a pretty good bit because of the similarities in defense, and obviously he's worked with

those guys. I don't know how much it'll help. We'll see. But we have had multiple discussions.

Q. How much has he helped all season long? How has he helped you all season long? You said you've talked to him throughout.

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. I'll bounce ideas off of him just in general of what defenses -- just philosophy stuff, why do they do certain things like they do. I'm more curious than I am anything when I see something that's a little bit different. Or if I see people doing something over and over again, then -- because I'm not wired like a defensive coach, you know. And so there's a difference between offense and defensive coaches. So sometimes I'm just more curious in how they see things.

You know why offensive and defensive coaches are wired different?

Q. I mean, it's a huge difference.

SHANNON DAWSON: What do you think the one biggest difference is?

Q. I mean, they're just obvious, they're trying to score. The aggressiveness?

SHANNON DAWSON: We can punt. They can't. Does that make sense?

Q. Coach, I'm curious for you, like how did you guys identify Malachi Toney and what has he kind of meant for you guys?

SHANNON DAWSON: The identifying of him, he's been a good player for a long time. So that was pretty easy. Now, I don't think anybody would have imagined him having the impact that he's had this quickly. You never know that, because you don't know how long kids are going to take to settle in and be who they are.

And you see talent, and you hope that you get it right. You don't always get it right. I don't know what percent that is. But ultimately when they get there, the speed of their development is always different. Some people hit the ground running and the game is just the game, and some people it takes a while.

College is different than high school. They're living on their own. There's a lot of things within just everyday life that changes. Sometimes kids have an adjustment period. And so everybody's maturity is a little different. And so I don't think anybody could have foreseen him being what he's been, but I'm sure damn happy that he is.

Q. What has impressed you the most about the way Carson Beck has been able to lead this team, specifically in the postseason, and what do you think makes him such a great leader?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, part of that, too, is just overall just being in a lot of big games. I think experience matters when it comes to like how a guy approaches things. There's a certain amount of failure you have to go through to have an understanding of like, hey, man, you know, embracing it in a way, right. And so I do think that Carson's playing his best football now.

And there's a lot of reasons for that, and one of the biggest reasons is, whether people want to admit it or not, I mean, you go into a new system, you know, I'm different than the guys that coached him in the past. I program quarterbacks different than he's been programmed. And we didn't have a spring football period to kind of iron out a lot of things. And so as the season went, we got very fortunate that he's a good enough player that we kind of hit the ground running. We didn't have a lot of hiccups at the beginning, but when we did have hiccups, he handled them in a very professional way. He was very positive the next day, bounced back very quick.

He's an extremely coachable kid. Like he listens. He's easy to coach in the sense of like, A, he's very, very smart. His football IQ is off the chart. And there's not a lot of things he doesn't understand. His immediate feedback is as quick as I've had probably. I mean, he dissects things and sees it, and he's pretty accurate when he comes off the sideline. But ultimately he's playing his best ball now probably because he's had more reps.

Q. Coach, the Indiana team forces a lot of turnovers.

SHANNON DAWSON: Do they?

Q. They have the highest turnover margin in the country.

SHANNON DAWSON: I didn't see that. (Laughs).

Q. Do you like adapt your game plan to that to minimize the risk of -- because the games that you lost, you all had more turnovers than usual.

SHANNON DAWSON: Did we?

Q. I think so.

SHANNON DAWSON: We try to protect the football, and ultimately in the games that we lost, you're correct, we

were a little careless with the ball at times.

I do think that there were some just they made good plays at times, too. So a lot of that stuff you really can't control. But their defense does cause a lot of turnovers and a lot of tipped balls. I think it has a lot to do with just the way they play zone coverage. They get their eyes on the quarterback. They trigger on balls quickly, and they just get balls popped out. And they're always occupying the space. So it seems like there's always a guy there to get it, right?

And so, yes, there's no adjustment to the game plan, but I have stressed the fact that if we turn the ball over, we will probably get beat.

And so ultimately when you have the ball in your hand, the program is in your hand, and that term is used a pretty good bit. And so you just have to care a lot about protecting the football.

Now, we do a lot of ball security drills. But as far as like changing the game plan because they get a lot of turnovers, I mean that doesn't really exist other than just take care of the damn ball, you know.

Q. What stands out to you about Indiana's front seven? It runs a lot of simulated pressures. Have you seen looks like that and what does that look like from your standpoint?

SHANNON DAWSON: What's a simulated pressure?

Q. Just mixing up looks in the front seven where they drop guys back.

SHANNON DAWSON: I was making sure you knew what a sim. You good? Nah...

Their D-line is very active. They slip off blocks probably as good as I've seen. It's very hard to sustain blocks with them. The only thing I can say is that they just play with extreme effort. You know, they strain really hard.

So they're very hard to run the ball against. They're always matched up well in the run game. Like their linebackers and their D-line fit well together. And so I think one thing that sticks out with them is they just play hard. I mean, they really, really play hard. And so we have to play hard. We have to finish blocks, which we've done a really, really good job of doing to this point. But it's going to be our biggest test of the year, and we know that. So that's going to be the tell of the game.

Q. Coach, maybe a personal question. You've

coached several places around the country and then came here to Miami in the last three years. You've produced a number one overall pick, and now you're in the National Championship. Does it feel like a culmination of your career being at this high stage at this moment?

SHANNON DAWSON: In a way. I feel more blessed to have the opportunity. The way I view it is very simple is this. I mean, I've been around a lot of really, really good coaches in my life, and I've been very fortunate to have some people around me that have molded me to get to this point that haven't coached in this game.

And so I'm very appreciative of being here, and I understand how hard it is to get here, and I also understand that it doesn't all about me at all. Like I have a lot of people in my past that gave me opportunities that other people didn't get, and there's a lot of really good coaches out there, and I'm very fortunate that I got those opportunities.

And I look at a lot of people in this profession that are really, really good coaches that haven't played in this game yet or haven't played it in their career. And so I'm just more blessed to have this opportunity than anything.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Malachi. From what I hear, he was a legend from the time he was like 10 years old coming up. How important was it to get him, keep him home here and how excited you've been to plug him in and find ways to use him?

SHANNON DAWSON: Man, the excitement of using him is I can't even put into words. I mean, what you see with him right here, I mean, he's that person every single day. He pops in my office every day, smile on his face, glowing. And I think a lot of his success is because he's the same person every day. I mean, he really -- he lifts people in a room up, and he just has that look. Some people just have that charisma about them, right? And he does.

Now, the ability, I mean, look, we can all sit and talk about the why, but ultimately he's blessed, right? He has this ability that God has given him, and is he's doing a lot with it.

We try to do as much as we can with him, right, but we also know that defenses are going to focus on him a lot. Like he was double covered a lot on that last drive. So other people had to make plays.

So that's just part of -- and that's the beauty of football really is like it's a true team sport, and when somebody gets a lot of focus, then other people have to step up and



make plays. And we have enough talent around him where that's possible.

But being able to tinker with him and find different ways to move him around and get him the ball has been fun. And he can throw. He can really throw the football.

Q. How have you seen Alex Bauman grow this year?

SHANNON DAWSON: You know, that's a good question. I mean, from the beginning of the year till now -- he's a vital part of our offense. I mean, he does a lot of things that doesn't show up on the stats sheet, especially in our run game, and he's starting to really get aggressive in our pass game, too.

He's getting targeted more and more. But the things that he does that don't show up on the stats sheet is really what fires me up about him. And he's a very selfless person, which I think at that position you kind of inherently have to be, because it's a tough position. You're kind of a lineman at times, and you're kind of a receiver. You have to live in a lot of different worlds at that deal. So you kind of gotta have a servant mentality there. And he does. He's a great teammate. He's an awesome kid to be around. But he's a vital part of our process, especially in the run game.

Q. I wanted to ask about the quarterback position. Last year you had Cam. This year you got Carson. How much does that help you in the market for the next quarterback and people just looking to say Miami is a great place for quarterbacks?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. I think success breeds success. So I do think that last year when we got Cam, I think it was very important to -- especially in the nature of college football today, it's good to be marketable, you know what I mean? And so putting things out there and being able to develop guys to the next level and being able to sell that.

And that was the biggest selling point with Cam was like -- because I had to sell Cam before the success, which is sometimes harder, right. And so I had to sell him on the picture of like, look, man, like I'm going to put you in a position where these NFL teams are going to view you as the top quarterback, because you're going to play in a system that you're going to have to make checks, you're going to have to make run games -- you know, a lot of the things that you see in the NFL.

And I played quarterback, not very good. But like it should be appealing to play behind an O-line like this, because they can really block, and Mirabal does an elite job. And we protect as good as I've seen. So that's a huge selling

point, too, is like, look, man, look at this pocket you're throwing in.

So ultimately getting Cam and then flipping the page to the next year, obviously Carson was either NFL or us, which was great, because that's what we want it to be. And then getting him, and his journey was a lot different because he was injured, couldn't go through spring, and that presented a handful of challenges, because you gotta get to know, you gotta get integrated into the system. And as a quarterback, you gotta bring everybody together. It's hard to do that when you're not practicing.

So I do think that dealing with different personalities is important and showing the fact that, look, like this offense is not just for one type quarterback. It's going to really take you -- and you're one piece of this whole puzzle. But then you can showcase your skills and really develop for the next level, which everybody wants to do.

Q. With Indiana's defense, you hear opposing coaches talk about what they do up front, kind of the stunts and twists. You hear about their simulated pressures. When you turned on the film, what stood out to you about what they do and their kind of approach?

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, I think the first two things that stick out is they don't give up a lot of explosive plays, and they're hard to run the ball against, which if you just take those two factors, that pretty much will tell you the defense is pretty good.

But I do think that they have a lot of older guys on defense. Look, the scheme is great. Like what they do on defense is really, really solid and really elite. But the players, obviously, no different than our offense, our defense and anybody that does anything worth a crap. It's like you have to have the players, right?

So they've assembled a bunch of older players that really know that system really well, and they're very seldom out of position. And I think they know it so well that it allows them to dissect what you're doing pretty quickly.

Like their eyes can kind of be more on you than if they had a bunch of players that's more thinking about what they gotta do, where they're maybe not focused on the offense, the set, you know, whether the guards are a little deep or whatever, right? So they can really focus on a lot of things that are like tipping point things for them that allows them to react the way they react. And I think that has a lot to do with just having older kids that really understand the system. And they can just get things lined up quick and dissect it quick.

Q. I noticed Jakobe mentioned a nickname for Carson after the Fiesta Bowl of Vanilla Vick. And I know you had been wanting Carson to run a little bit more. I'm not sure Vanilla Vick was in your lexicon. What was it that you saw that you started telling him as the season wound down before the playoff like we're going to need your mobility a little bit?

SHANNON DAWSON: It's something that I stress just in general with quarterbacks. I mean, anytime I'm watching film or watching the game, I talk in terms of like, especially like just say it's a pass play, right. We're a very progression-based offense, which I think is a little different than a lot of people today. But I'm a little old school. Like progressions are sacred to me, right. And the pass game is sacred to me.

But I will talk -- and, look, Indiana is a good defense to talk about, because they do -- every defense has the option to cover everybody. Like there's going to be times where you just exhaust all your options and like you're standing there with the ball. And so ultimately what you do in those times matter.

And so I always urge a quarterback, look, like if I'm watching film with him, I'll be like, look, like your eyes are here, then here. Now if you've exhausted your options, get me 5 or 55. I'll make that point. Like give me 5 or 55. Now, I don't know if he's going to get me 55. But 2nd and 5 is a lot better than 2nd and 10. So I've urged him to get those dirty yards. Even if it's two or three, that makes the next call a little bit different.

And so he's been very aggressive over the last month and a half probably in those situations, which has allowed us to stay in rhythm on offense and on time. And those plays, even though it might show up as like six runs for 17 yards or whatever it is, those 17 yards are critical.

Q. Jakobe said that he had heard one of the offensive coaches use Vanilla Vick as a nickname. Is that something you guys had said before or was that spur of the moment?

SHANNON DAWSON: That's the first I've heard it. It probably could have got said through the course of the year. There's a lot of things that get thrown out in practices. But when he said it was the first time I heard it. I think that's a great nickname.

Q. It's catchy.

SHANNON DAWSON: It's catchy, yeah.

Q. Listening to Francis talk about the respect he has

for Aiden Fisher and what Fisher does on that defense communication wise, understanding things, predicting things. He said he was talking to some of his friends at Oregon just about the way (indiscernible). Can you kind of discuss a little bit the chess match there?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah: I mean, look. He's in tune to everything you're doing. He's a really elite player. He's a very, very, very -- within their scheme I don't think that there's -- he's a coach on the field. I mean, he dissects things extremely quickly. And he will -- if you have tells, I mean, he'll be calling that out before the snap. And so I do think that that's just a good sign of a good player, a guy that's in tune to everything.

But his calls and his stuff that he has to do is so engrained and so quickly perceived that he can focus a lot on what you're doing. And you're not going to trick him. He's not going to get tricked a lot. And so we have to do a lot of things to keep him a little bit off balance. You know what I mean? Because if you allow him to sit there and dissect, it can make your life hard.

Q. (Inaudible)?

SHANNON DAWSON: We're going to try to do some things that obviously cause a little confusion on their side, and we'll see how successful it is.

Q. I wanted to ask about Malachi and what are the biggest strides you've seen him make over the course of the season.

SHANNON DAWSON: I mean, it's probably been more so of us finding just different ways to use him. I think it was, especially at the beginning of the year, he should be in high school still, right? So at the beginning of the year you hope that what you see in practice happens in games. And when that happens and you see like, hey, this guy's capacity is really high, right? His football IQ is really high. His ability to do a lot of things is really high.

I was probably a little too careful at the beginning of not overloading him, because I wanted -- like he's young. And so typically with young guys, like let's do what you do and let's get good at it. But as time went, I had to start just finding ways to put his skills on display. He can really -- like he can throw the football. He can do a lot of different things.

And so as the year went, it was more so me just kind of adding on to his part and just seeing how much he can handle. And ultimately I don't know if there is much that he can't handle. His capacity is just really high.

I mean, he's the type of guy that you can see a route -- like, for instance, I might -- we watch a lot of games, right? NFL, college, I mean, look, I have a lot of people that work. And we're very in tune to things that are going on around the nation. And so if somebody does something that's like, oh, that's pretty neat and that might fit something he can do, then you show him one time and you go do it at practice and it's like exactly what the guy did. I mean, his body control and his ability to understand spacial awareness and like how defenders match him and just all that stuff is at a different level with him.

Q. You mentioned adversity, the fumble against Texas A&M. With a guy that young, do you worry mentally what that might do?

SHANNON DAWSON: It didn't worry me with him because I'm around him every day. And so I know his character. I know how even he is as a person.

Now, look, everybody gets affected by negative stuff, right. One of the biggest reasons I didn't have too much worry about it is because I knew guys like Mark Fletcher and I knew guys like Coup and I knew guys like Carson would go pick him up. And we have an elite group of guys that care about each other, and when things like that happen, it really -- I don't have to do a whole lot. Ultimately I just walk by you and say, look, move on. It's no different than if Carson makes a mistake. I'm like, look, next play. Ultimately we say next play a lot, because, look, bad stuff is going to happen. Like you play this game long enough, something bad is going to happen.

So the really good ones have the capacity to have extremely short-term memory. And he does. Like did it affect him in the moment? Yeah. But he snapped over it pretty quick, and then when his opportunity came in the next drive, he won the game for us.

Q. Coach, you have been encouraging Carson to run a bit more whenever he sees an opening. What was your reaction seeing him run for that game-winning touchdown at the semifinals?

SHANNON DAWSON: I was just as excited as all the fans were. We had a timeout left. And so I was going to throw it that play, and if it was incomplete, I was going to run it, because we had a timeout.

I just wanted to take care of the football really. I wanted to be aggressive there. I felt really good about the play we were running. They did not run the defense I thought they were going to run. And so it ended up being man coverage. And so they covered him on the option route. And so there was just a huge sea that opened up, and a lot

of that had to do with our man coverage because everybody was tracking across the field. So, yeah, whenever he saw it and took it, I don't know if I was relieved or happy or whatever you want to say. But it was good to see.

Q. How much has Mario been able to blend together the portal in high school recruiting to put this roster together?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah, I think that's probably one of his best qualities is like understanding that high school recruiting still matters and that's still your base and sprinkling in transfers at the right positions.

There's an art to hitting on transfers, because ultimately if you look across the nation, it would be interesting to see the success rate. I don't know what it is. But I know on our team overall it's pretty high.

Q. It's hit and miss.

SHANNON DAWSON: It's hit and miss. But if you look at the ones, like this year particularly, that we brought in, they've all had a pretty enormous impact on both sides of the ball.

And so he does have the ability to see talent and see exactly what we need and be able to blend that with, I mean, high school recruiting, which obviously matters the most and sprinkling in transfers when you need it. You can't abandon high school recruiting. I think that's a mistake a lot of people make.

Q. I want to ask you about Indiana's defensive backs. What makes them such a talented and productive group for Indiana's defense?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah. I mean, that's a good question. The scheme they play, they're really good at what they do. They're older. They play with eyes on the quarterback. They're always in the right spot. They mix up stuff and disguise it very well. And they track the football at a high level, at a very high level.

And part of it is their scheme. And they're older. And they're just never out of position. And they have a lot of tipped balls that end up being interceptions. You know what I mean?

A lot of it has to do with the coverages they run. But they trigger on the ball well. And so we have to be elite with our guys. Like the eyes are very telling in this game, probably more so with this defense than any defense I've seen in a long time.

I would kind of say that their defense is kind of an old-school defense. I used to see those kind of coverages years ago. It's kind of how people played zone coverage. But now, man and this three-match and all this stuff that's kind of populated the college space, they've kind of went back in time, and like they have zone drop eyes on the quarterback. And I think that's why a lot of people struggle with them, because you don't see that a lot these days.

And they do a really good job of mixing up the coverages. And they don't really get in too big of a rhythm of like being in one all the time or a couple times in a row or in the same situation. And so you really have to focus on what you're doing and not try to get consumed with, oh, like, what coverage are they going to be in. Well, hell, I don't know what coverage they're going to be in.

So you have to have your eyes on your reads, and you have to do a great job of seeing space and taking advantage of space.

Q. When is the last time you've seen a team run zone this well?

SHANNON DAWSON: Other than going against our defense, a long time, because our defense is very similar to theirs.

But, no. Look, studying these guys and taking a deep dive has been refreshing in a way, because I appreciate the way they play defense, and I appreciate the way they play zone defense. The level in which they play, the strain in which they play with is something to behold. There's a reason why they're really good right now. So it's going to be a great challenge, and I'm looking forward to it.

Q. So my dad used to be president of Wingate University. He wanted me to ask you what your one year at Wingate taught you about life and football.

SHANNON DAWSON: Look, there's things about like, first of all, when I got there, I said Wingate, and I was quickly corrected to Wingate. So I mean, look, God knew what He was doing when He opened that door for me, because I grew up in a small town. Not a lot of people leave. That was 14 hours away.

So I got in my white Toyota pickup truck and drove, and the first time I'd ever seen Wingate is when I got there the first time. The people there, I mean, it's a unique place. And obviously it's small, a thousand students or whatever.

There was a professor there, Nancy Randall, sociology professor. You know who I'm talking about? Elite human

being. And her husband Jason. And so they would have me -- and, look, she probably made my life a lot easier, because when I got there, I just so happened I got in one of her classes. I took one of her classes every semester from there out, just because I appreciated the passion she had for teaching.

And so they knew I was a long way away from home, so they would have me over to their house, and like she would cook. Her husband made his own beer, which I don't know at the time, I probably wouldn't have said that. But like we would go down in the basement, and I would test his beers that he made. He was elite at brewing beer.

But to me, that place is a lot about the people. And then Joe Reich ended up being the head football coach there my last year, who I still keep in contact with today.

Q. Such a good guy.

SHANNON DAWSON: Probably one of the best human beings I've come across and one of the best coaches I've come across.

So it's just the relationships that happened there have stood the test of time. And a handful of guys that I have a text with every day is guys I played with there.

And so I wouldn't have changed anything. I mean, I wasn't a great player by any stretch, and that's kind of where my career tilted to. And it was exactly what I needed at the exact right now.

Q. But your career path, you take a little bit with you all along. You've been so many places to be here tonight.

SHANNON DAWSON: No doubt. Absolutely. And, look, that's one that -- like I lean on Coach Reich a lot. I'll text him about certain things, and we communicate back and forth. But I've been very fortunate like all my stops to be around some very elite people. I'm just very fortunate, because ultimately I know that without that, then I have no chance of being here. So I'm very blessed with that.

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