

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Alabama Crimson Tide Deontae Lawson Press Conference

Q. What's the biggest thing that stands out going against J.J. McCarthy?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I think the biggest thing is everyone being on the same page. He's a great quarterback, and he makes the right decisions, and he can definitely use what he knows and what we give him and that can hurt us. So we just have to be disciplined and make sure everyone is on the same page so we can execute.

Q. Justin and Dallas said Tyler Buchner has done a good job replicating. Have you seen that too?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yes, sir, no doubt. Tyler Buchner give us great looks. Not the only week he's done it. And I think it definitely helps us in a way because he's quick and it will definitely help us in the game.

Q. When you're watching film, what stands out about their running back and what are the challenges facing a talented running back like that?

DEONTAE LAWSON: He's patient. He's very patient, and he runs behind his pass. They've got a few guys that they rotate back there. And the offensive line, we have a good offensive line there. They're able to get movement and outleverage you, basically, and that just creates lanes for the running back to run through, and we've got to be disciplined. Everybody gotta be in their gap and we've got to be able to stop the run.

Q. When you first got here, what was going through your head? What did you know about them? What did you think?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Honestly, when I first found out that we were in, I mean, I wasn't really thinking about who we were playing at the time or anything. I was just happy for the opportunity that we created. But now that I know a little bit about Michigan, I mean, they like to run the ball and



they have an elite quarterback and guys on the edge. And we know the talent we have, and we just gotta prepare the right way so we can execute.

Q. Sign stealing stuff was a big deal in October. Did that cross your mind at all with Michigan?

DEONTAE LAWSON: No, not really too much. I'm just not going to really speak to that.

Q. What are your impressions of -- (inaudible)?

DEONTAE LAWSON: He definitely catches my attention. His cuts. His patience or him being patient and just how he runs behind his pass. He plays hard for his team and I know he's a great leader for their team. And ready for the challenge.

Q. Challenging, small guy, small in stature, does it make it tougher to bring someone like that down?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I wouldn't say it makes it tougher. I would just say we have to gang tackle him because he has a lot of gravity or a little leverage, I would say. But that's great for running backs to have and it will be a challenge for us, for sure.

Q. Could you take me back to the offseason. First time you heard Link, was Jalen selling it?

DEONTAE LAWSON: It was Jalen and Terrion selling it. I was with it. I agree everything they say. I mean the saying they've got is amazing, especially at the time we're at now. We just have to keep building on that.

I think that's something that really brought this team together in a way, but it's just something that they said and that we're going to live up to.

Q. I know he's not in your position group, but have you had a chance to talk to LT since he's came on board and I think LT...

DEONTAE LAWSON: No, I haven't talked to him much. But like if I see him, I would say hello, but other than that,



we haven't had a conversation or anything.

Q. Is it weird to have those guys come in in practice or do you try to give them as much advice and try to get them to adjust?

DEONTAE LAWSON: It's really not weird. Just try to get them adjusted, try to tell them how it's like and I mean I'm sure they'll see like once they're at practicing and everything.

Q. What's practice been like since you guys got to LA?

DEONTAE LAWSON: The same practice structure, just different environment. But I think the first day everyone just had to get a little used to it. We're kind of just sluggish a little bit. But as the week continues, I feel like we're getting closer, closer to where we want to be.

Q. Is it nice to have a normal game week of practice? I think you had an extra day off for the game, but to have that, a different setting, that familiarity of the schedule?

DEONTAE LAWSON: No doubt. At the end of the day, we know what we came here for. We know what it takes to win the game. That's all we can think about and keep our mindset.

Q. Jalen, practice, how far have you seen him throw the ball at times?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I don't want to make up nothing, but I know he throw it pretty far. And he is strong. He's been showing it since we first got here.

Q. I know obviously you don't take him down in practice, but in scrimmages, when he escapes out of the pocket, he moves, what kind of movement is it?

DEONTAE LAWSON: He's electric. I mean, sometimes we say in practice, when he scrambles, he would have got sacked or he would have got tackled but we know like he would have been going -- I mean, it's great to have him, and it sucks for the defense.

Q. Talking about the personality of this team, how is it different than the last two years.

DEONTAE LAWSON: I just think we're so together, and I think as people, like the people, our leadership group, how they're able to connect with the young players, that can make a huge difference because when you can create a relationship off the field with someone, then on the field, I

mean, you can tell them to run through a wall and they'll do it and that's great for us to have that definitely been in our favor.

Q. That was missing somewhat in the last few years. Do you see that as something to you was something that you had to...

DEONTAE LAWSON: I definitely will say that. When I first got here, I just don't think we were close enough, but we're a team. But like off the field we weren't as connected as we are this year, and I think that has made an improvement in our play.

Q. What specific strategies did you guys take and how did that come together?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Offseason, we did a lot of team bonding and just working together and having a young team kind of helps as well, just really learning from, what I did personally, I just learned from the years I've been here, the leaders that I've been around, and just do everything I can to inspire guys.

Q. (Question about previous teams.)

DEONTAE LAWSON: I would say Henry To'oTo'o is the biggest. Henry To'oTo'o showed me the way a little bit. Him, Will Anderson, of course, Jordan Battle, those three guys that I can name that I kind of -- I listened to what they had to say. I listened to everyone. But those guys were a little different, and Henry was just my brother. So that was different.

Q. What do you see of J.J. McCarthy on tape?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I think he's an elite quarterback that makes the right reads, makes the right plays and don't make mistakes, and that's what you want in a quarterback. I feel like he's a great leader for their team, and he's a great player.

Q. Michigan has talked about which of their quarterbacks are giving the look for Jalen Milroe, the most similar. Who do you think in practice is the guy who gives you the best look for J.J. McCarthy on your team?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I think we have Tyler Buchner that can help us with the reps. And I mean he does a great job. He's been doing it for a couple of weeks. And he does a great job for us.

Q. What does he try to emulate about McCarthy, maybe?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I mean, really just the running ability. I mean, he's going to throw it -- J.J. is going to throw it regardless. We don't have anyone to imitate that. But just the running ability and making sure we're just seeing that as well.

Q. You have kids coming in midyear, and is that weird when you see them show up? Does that go through your mind, like, wow, look at how young these dudes are, what they're in for?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I wouldn't say it's weird or anything. I would say the only thing, Sterling Dixon, he's a new enrollee, and what's crazy is he -- in high school, I was a senior, and he was in ninth grade, and we played at the same school. When I saw him here I was like, yeah, I'm getting old.

Q. When you started that like welcome to Alabama moment, a first practice, first workout, something where you're like this is different?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I would just say like my first couple of days of workouts, man, those were intense and something I never did before. I would say that was my welcome to Alabama moment. Of course, the competition on the field is crazy. But I would just say the workouts. That really opened my eyes early.

Q. (Inaudible) Justin question, what you want to do up front.

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yeah, you know with Justin being a veteran guy, he definitely took that D line group to another level, I would say. I feel like more D linemen know what to do, and certain calls. And that can help me not being able to say (inaudible), I can tune into my job and try to see what the defensive backs are doing, and it's great to have a guy like that.

Q. Seems like he's maybe naturally taken on a leadership role just with everything that he's been through, just the effort. Do you see that in various ways throughout the year?

DEONTAE LAWSON: No doubt. He's a guy that's showing up every day. No matter what, no matter how he's feeling or anything that happened, once he gets in those doors and on the field, it's just a different Justin. You can tell that he's hungry. And we saw that in the offseason of his work schedule, like you said.

And just him being him. And just being a leader on the field, and I feel like that helped in a tremendous way.

Q. Like everything that he went through over the last year, the effort that he gives and then also like his building team voice, I think they naturally listen to him?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yeah, I mean, Justin, he's kind of a character. He has a great personality off the field and he's always trying to either brighten someone's day or just be there for someone. I think that's what stands out to me about Justin. And on the field it's a different Justin.

He's what D linemen need to be. And he gets guys to follow behind him, and that's what's great to have.

Q. Favorite Justin story.

DEONTAE LAWSON: Justin story. Me and Justin we got something we do, we started this year, in the offseason a little bit. It's just a little like (inaudible) kind of thing, and I would say that's my favorite moment. This is my first year, really, playing with him. I mean, that's my favorite moment.

Q. Michigan is a team that likes trick plays, fakes. As a linebacker it's really important whether you bite or not. How do you make sure you don't get fooled by those plays?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I think I just gotta trust my training, make sure I'm prepared in the right way and just trust my eyes. I mean, that's really all I can say on that. Just trust yourself.

Q. Do you think there's a way to really predict these plays, or is it kind of almost impossible?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yeah, you really can't predict it. But I mean, you can kind of catch up on tendencies and try to anticipate, but you can't really predict, and you just gotta react, really.

Q. Coach Saban helped pull you guys together after the Texas game, and even South Florida.

DEONTAE LAWSON: Coach had this statement after the game. He just said, we have two choices; this could be the midterm and not the final. And I think that's what I took from it the most. Like, okay, a little midterm. We see where we are. Now we've just got to -- we know what we have to do and let's do it.

Q. The words resonated for you; he found the right words, I guess?

DEONTAE LAWSON: It was a perfect analogy for that

situation.

Q. How do you connect with a 72-year-old coach? Is it a struggle? Does he have this uncanny ability to connect with young people too?

DEONTAE LAWSON: He's a coach. He's been doing it for a long time. So I think he sees how he can connect with guys, through their experience there, and he finds his own way to connect with different people and that's really all.

Q. How about with you personally? Any moments with him, connected?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I don't really connect with him that much. But I mean I would say the DBs connect with him the most because they're in his room. But other than the DBs, like, I don't know, the DBs are kind of like his kids. We connect -- I would say the most times we connect is if he calls my name. Like if he calls your name on the field, then okay, yeah.

Q. On the radar?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yes.

Q. I know there were times friendly talking trash, does he do that with any part of the defense?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I doubt it. A little bit. But that's just Coach. He has his days where he is just in a joking mood.

Q. When he calls your name on the sidelines, is that thumbs up, thumbs down; are you scared?

DEONTAE LAWSON: I think if he calls your name, you can't be scared. Right? Because he's not going to call your name, really. He's an old-school coach, call you by jersey number. If he calls you by your name, oh, yeah, he knows me.

Q. Still any talk about joyless murderball?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Yes, sir, every week. Every practice. That's what we preach, and that's our mentality. Joyless murderball, DOA, all that.

Q. Any point in the Texas game where you felt we're not delivering joyless murderball, we've got a higher standard to meet, maybe when you talked about that?

DEONTAE LAWSON: This defense, I think up until this point, we really played one bad quarter of defense. And that was that game in the fourth quarter. And that's something that we still think about, but it's way past this.

But we want to make sure that we don't make those kind of mistakes anymore, and we know that can hurt us, as we saw.

Q. What did Nick do best from that game against Texas to get you guys where you are now? I know it was very positive and yet he never really deviates from who he is as a football coach.

DEONTAE LAWSON: Well, I would say what he said, like I said earlier, he said this is the midterm. Not the final. And that stuck with me the most.

But I think what changed our team is the players that we have. I mean, like a coach can only do or say so much to us. And I think that's just coming from the players and the leadership. We have to take accountability and actually be the leaders on this team.

Because the leaders that we have, they know what it takes to be a national champion or be a championship team. We just have to get those guys to deliver to the young guys to let them know we're only going to be as good as you let us be.

Q. The standard at Alabama is pretty heavy stuff. I think since Coach has been there, you've never gone more than two years and not won a national title. Got a chance to keep that alive. What does it take to play in that type of environment?

DEONTAE LAWSON: Well, I think you gotta be mentally tough. You just gotta keep going no matter what. I mean, just playing for Coach, he's a perfectionist, and so am I. So that kind of helps, but I would just say just living up to the standard.

You know the standard, once you get there, and just do everything you can to uphold that.

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