

ReliaQuest Bowl: Michigan vs Alabama

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Tampa, Florida, USA

Raymond James Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide

Kalen DeBoer

Postgame Press Conference



Michigan 19, Alabama 13

KALEN DeBOER: I loved the fight in our team in the first half to gain some momentum, just got to finish some drives there at the end of the fourth quarter. That's what it comes down to. Make a throw, make a catch.

Guys played their hearts out, though. Never going to question the competitiveness of some guys out there playing through a lot when it comes to even just the physical pain that they're trying to grind through, trying to finish this thing right. Feel for those guys. Want the guys that obviously are going to be coming back to remember this feeling, remember some of the feelings throughout the year, but we've got to keep building for the team to move forward.

Q. Early in the fourth quarter, you have 4th and 7 on Michigan's 34, you throw incomplete there. Was there strong consideration for kicking a field goal there, making it 16-13 which maybe could have made a difference later?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, you think about it. Felt like at the time and obviously now we know that he can kick the one at the end from that distance. Just felt like we were on the fringe of really what the percentages were, understanding who we are, and again, it sounds like you don't have confidence in your kicker, which I do, but just felt like we can convert a 4th and 7. What was it, 4th and 7? Yeah, 4th and 7.

Unfortunately we didn't. Felt like the passing game when we were executing, which that's a big part of it, that we can find a way to convert and get the ball into the right guy's hands and let him go make a play.

Q. You decided to stick with Jalen even after that first quarter. What went into that decision?

KALEN DeBOER: Well, I think there were some elements at play. I know even the pick, I mean, that's a really nice play. You throw it maybe two inches out further, and it's a catch for us, and I'm not sure if we'd run out of bounds or what there. But they made a nice play.

You guys were there, you saw the elements on the snap. They've got a guy field it, you can't turn it over. They struggled, I think, and unfortunately they had the field position -- fortunately for them they had the field position where they didn't really have to press until the rain kind of moved through.

But that certainly didn't help us and kind of dug ourselves a rut, had to play a little different style again.

But hats off to our guys there at the end of the first half of understanding, hey, just get one score, and then one score led to two. Wish we could have just done something there I think the end of the third quarter, beginning of the fourth quarter, where we get maybe a field goal, put some points on the board, put the ball in the end zone.

Q. Kind of sticking to that, for clarity's sake, did you consider making a change at quarterback, and if so --

KALEN DeBOER: No, I didn't. I just felt like there's things that he still did. We scored a field goal with him using his legs. We went 95 plus yards in less than a minute. Just that factor and what we needed with him and his mobility added to the run game, I felt like that was the swap right there.

The interception early, you want a lot of those incompletions happened and down and distances that weren't favorable or backs to the wall and have to throw the ball at the end of the first half, at the end of the second here, so I know that gets away from you from the completion percentage.

But I thought there was still a lot of good plays that he made, too, and I saw, I guess, a fighter, the fight in his eyes, and as long as I see that, I want to hang in there with the guys that this program means a lot to.



Q. Given the lack of depth at receiver, you guys didn't really go to the running game as much. Was that just because they were stopping you, or what was the reason --

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think that they're one of the top five rushing defenses, and I know that there's personnel on both sides, both teams that were different maybe from what you would see in the regular season, both us and them.

But I think there was certainly part of our game plan to where we felt we needed to spit the ball out and get the ball in the right guys' hands and try to do that, and whether it was slipping or incomplete passes, some of those plays didn't get executed the way that you practice them for the last two, three weeks.

Yeah, there were some runs that I think JAM at the end of the game poured up in there at the end of the first half. I really thought he did a nice job getting us out from behind our own end zone there. He ran hard, and I think just having a little bit of a balance was important for us in this game because of who they were and a little bit of what we felt we could do to attack them.

Q. Kalen, do you think your season was successful?

KALEN DeBOER: Every time you're in the locker room and you have something like this, it's disappointing. But I think there's a lot of things that you take from it. I know that the guys that hung in there, that probably played their last game in the crimson and white, they wouldn't have had it any other way as far as to show the grit, show the determination, show the competitiveness. They stayed the course.

There's a whole lot more, I just think, that really goes into the last 12 months. People see what happens on a Saturday, but it's guys choosing to stay here, guys choosing to go from one week to the next when you're on a little bit of a roller coaster through the middle of the season, and as long as we learn from it, then to me, then it can be a success moving forward.

We're going to take all these things that happened, and there's some things that happened in the game today, too, that we've got to learn from and make sure that those mistakes don't hurt us a year from now. I don't care if it's turnovers, penalties. It's everything. So to me, it's a success if we move forward and we take advantage of the lessons, even though we don't want to learn those lessons sometimes because they're hard. We're going to learn from those lessons, move forward, and be better next year because of it.

I told the guys that played their last game how much I appreciate them. I know their teammates shared how much they appreciate them, as well, in the locker room, and we're going to -- I know they're going to make us proud when they move on to the next level, and I promised them we're going to continue to make them proud with the fight and the standard of competitiveness that they instilled in this program here moving forward.

Q. Was there an explanation given to you on the sideline infraction?

KALEN DeBOER: I think just ran into someone on our team. I'm not sure who or what.

Q. You talked about the fight in the first half and were able to carry that momentum into halftime. Why do you think you weren't able to keep it going in the second half?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, you know, the losses were the ones that hurt us. A sack, being behind the chains. That's what they thrive on. Their defense does a good job of thriving on being physical, forcing you into down and distances where you're behind the chains, and when that happened, it's tough to overcome against a team that understands their identity, plays team football. We knew the game would get shrunk down when you kind of knock out the first quarter, which you can't do, because that's part of the game, and all of a sudden it takes on a different game of its own because you're down 16-0. You're just fighting, scrapping and trying to give yourself a chance like we did at the very end.

Q. Kind of looking back, Jalen hasn't announced his intention in terms of what next year looks like, but how have you seen him grow? How have you seen him respond to being the face of your program?

KALEN DeBOER: Well, I think everyone would probably share the same feeling I have, is that the guy always speaks about the team. He always speaks about his teammates. It's not about him. He leads that way every day in our program.

When you're the quarterback of any football team, the eyes are always on you, especially when you're at Alabama, and you're going through some ups and downs once in a while in the course of a season, it takes on a heavy burden sometimes.

He's just steady. He stays the course. I guess the fight in him, the ability to move forward, I thought that that is something even in the midst of times when he maybe didn't

make a play that he could have made or wanted to make or even a mistake, which everyone is going to make a mistake here or there, I thought that that's one area where he's really improved, especially the last half of the season.

I think our guys appreciate that in him. I think that they have taken on as a team, too, and always tried to move forward, even when we're not perfect.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

