

# TransPerfect Music City Bowl: Missouri vs Iowa

Monday, December 30, 2024

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Nissan Stadium

**Missouri Tigers**

**Head Coach Eliah Drinkwitz**

**Brady Cook**

**Johnny Walker Jr.**

**Blake Craig**

**Marquis Johnson**

Postgame Press Conference



accomplishment for this senior class and something that they should take a lot of pride in. Back-to-back seasons finishing ranked is an unbelievable accomplishment for our program, and really, really proud of them.

With that, I'll turn it over it on the moderator.

THE MODERATOR: You may not be aware of this, but your field goal kicker with his first kick broke the TransPerfect Music City Bowl record for the longest kick and with his second kick broke his own record.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: He's a record breaker, man.

**Q. Coach, when Brady got hit towards the end of the first quarter, what were you thinking? What was the emotion?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Have you ever seen the movie "Tombstone" with Doc Holliday is laying and acting all sick, and then he gets up, and it's like, Yeah, I may not have been quite as injured as I appeared. That's pretty much Brady's entire story.

When he got hit I was, like, Nah, he's just faking it. He likes to play it up a little bit.

BRADY COOK: We got the flag.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: We got the flag. There was one point where you could tell. It looked like they were roll-tackling him pretty, and it looked like his ankle started bothering him, but I just kept telling him you're a finisher man. You're going to finish. You have to finish.

**Q. When you talk about these guys as finishers, where does that come from?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Well, we got a quote -- I'm going to read it to you because I think it's a really powerful quote, if I can find it amongst all the text messages I have.

"All endeavors call for the ability to tramp the last mile, shape the last plan, endure the last hour's toil. The fight-to-the-finish spirit is the one characteristic we must

Missouri 27, Iowa 24

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to comments from Coach Drinkwitz and then open it up to questions.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Just congrats to Iowa. I mean, they're a really good football team and hard-fought. They made us earn every yard and every opportunity. They played a really good football game today, but the story really is our football team and these guys right here and their commitment to finishing the season.

Just so proud of the way they battled. Numerous players -- I think I saw where our top four pass catchers were out for the game. Theo Wease, what an unbelievable job he did in the first half. Took an injury and couldn't return in the game. He laid it all on the line for us.

Then other guys: Marquis, stepping up big-time, Blake Craig stepping up big-time making two unbelievable kicks, Johnny Walker, with the sack and pressuring the quarterback.

We knew at halftime if we could just contain the quarterback run, we would be okay, his scrambles. Obviously Toriano with the big interception. Blake going in there and making the kick to tie the game. Then obviously Brady leading us back down there to get the other one.

Really, really proud of our team, and to finish the season, the win totals isn't important, but being ranked -- to start the season and finish the season ranked is a heck of an

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possess if we are to face the future as finishers," Henry David Thoreau.

It's just something I think speaks to us. There are a lot of people that start things in life, but they don't finish. If you're going to be a person of significance, if you're going to be the best at whatever you do, you have to have a finisher, fight-to-the-finish spirit.

It's just something that we talk about start fast, finish strong all the time as one of those things that's important in our program, and I just felt like these seniors had come this far. We just needed to finish. We needed to finish. Boy, they did in the fourth quarter today.

**Q. Coach, I think that's 11-1 in one-score games over the last 12. How did you guys do it this time? What's the mentality once you get into these moments where the game is close, and you know you have to clutch it up at the end?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: I think you would have to talk to the players. I think it's belief in each other, belief in what we're doing. We prepare really hard for these moments. We truly believe in an elite EDGE. We truly believe in faster, stronger, tougher than you in the fourth quarter.

I think there's a big belief, and at the end of the day I think there's always belief in our quarterback, in Brady, because you look back a couple of years ago and maybe it didn't go our way, but he never flinched, he never changed. He just kept trying, and he kept going back out there.

Then you flip it on the other side of the ball, you look at a guy like Johnny Walker. You have to get to the quarterback, man, just call Johnny. He'll get there. I think there's just a lot of belief in both sides of the ball.

We practiced a two-minute drill on Thursday, good-on-good, just because we felt like it could come down to that scenario, and really proud of them. Fight-to-the-finish spirit.

**Q. Brady and Johnny, that was the last game in your careers. What does it mean for you to go out on that note in that way?**

BRADY COOK: It was important. I mean, that's what we've been working this whole month for. That's what we had our minds set on. I don't think it was a decision for me or Johnny whether we were going to play in this one. We knew we were going to.

Getting that 10th win leaving our legacy and going out with a win, going out winning a championship, no matter what

the championship is. We won a championship today. That's what we want to do every year is play for championships. That's one of our goals.

JOHNNY WALKER JR.: What Brady said.

**Q. Brady, and this might be silly, but bear with me, Coach was talking out there on the stage, they zoomed in on and you saw yourself on the camera, and you winked. Why did you do that?**

BRADY COOK: I was winking to my family and Carli. I told them I would do that if I ended up on a stage again. I would do a little something for them to know I'm thinking about them up there.

**Q. Then just real quick, in general, the pride of the offense's grit, you mentioned a lot of key guys were out, but other guys stepped up and made great plays.**

BRADY COOK: Yeah, I mean, it's so many guys. It's hard to name them all. I'm so proud of Drake and Mitch. Drake Heismeyer came in the last four, five games and balled out. I mean, played at an unbelievable level.

He hasn't had that experience that you would think he had looking at him how he's played the last five games. It's unbelievable.

Mitch Walters coming in tonight, his big, goofy self, and letting up no pressure, no sacks, nothing. On his stuff. Four pass catchers out tonight, and everybody stepped up, including Marquis Johnson. I mean, he's 'Speedy Quis' down the field. Throw it up, he's going to make a play. All across the board, I'm so proud of that offense.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: We'll have to work on Marquis that after every play you don't have to act like you're injured. Next year if you could help me with that. Now, him I'm not so sure about. Him I get worried about. Brady I know, you know, so...

**Q. Kind of a follow-up for Coach and Marquis. I asked you a couple of weeks ago about letting your young wide receivers play more and duke it out for playing time. What did he show you today? What did you want to prove today?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: We've known Marquis has been a special player. I mean, we saw it last year, but the thing I'm the most proud of him about is it's always been about the team, and whatever the team has asked him to do, he's embraced that role.

He's been the best gunner on punt team that he can be.

He's played on special teams. He's done everything we've asked him to do, and now it was his opportunity and really in the last four games we've needed some big-time plays down the field to open up. Brady put the ball on him, and he went up and made some spectacular catches.

As these other guys move on, it was awesome to see Luther appreciate him coming back today. Theo is moving on. As those guys move on, man, it's really about Marquis and Josh's turn next. We're really, really excited.

It was easy to recruit a quarterback when you can send them tape of Marquis and Josh. So very appreciative of him and know that he's got a lot of work to continue to improve, but we know that the next year, hopefully two, but probably just one, is going to be really special.

MARQUIS JOHNSON: What was the question for me again?

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Why do you act like that after every big catch?

**Q. (Off microphone) -- knowing that you would get more reps, more time?**

MARQUIS JOHNSON: Really just prove that I belong here and I can do -- I'm here for a reason. Really the reason wasn't even proving. Like, everyone trusts me and knows I can do what I can do. I just go out there and do what the team needs me to do.

**Q. Marquis, can you just talk a little bit about just what this past season has been like for you to have some excitement after your freshman year and then have that ankle injury early and have to recover from that and have this big game tonight?**

MARQUIS JOHNSON: The ankle injury really didn't stop me. I wanted to continue going regardless of the ankle injury. I was, like, when we played against A&M, I wanted to get on the field so bad. I begged and begged and begged and plead, but this has been the best time of my life. I'm just enjoying it day by day and just doing everything I can.

**Q. Blake, just stepping up to that 56-yarder there, what was kind of going through your mind as you are lining up for that kick?**

BLAKE CRAIG: I'll be honest, I black out when I go out for kicks.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: That explains a lot.

BLAKE CRAIG: Definitely before the kick I'm thinking about all the seniors and everything like that that I'm there to do what I do for them, especially in this scenario with their last game. You know what I mean, so...

**Q. For Brady and Johnny, what are some things that now that we are actually at the end, you've been asked so many times about your legacy. What are some things that now that we're here that you want to leave behind that you hope you left behind for this new era of Mizzou football?**

JOHNNY WALKER JR.: I hope we left behind a great brotherhood. I mean, years before, I'm going to be real, it was toxic. We had to get rid of those players. Now I just hope the guys know what a winning team is and to continue with the success.

BRADY COOK: Yeah, to piggyback off that, I would just say a sustainable culture. I mean, Coach Drink built it. Let's be real. The one thing I'll say about Coach Drink is he brings the right people into this building. I've seen it.

From when we got here in 2020 to right now, the people he's moved out and the people he's brought in, it's unbelievable. Every single person that comes in our building has the same goal, the same mission, the same mindset, and that's been the difference.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Can I just add, I talked about it in the locker room. When these had guys showed up, it wasn't this way. It was really, really tough.

Then there was people leaving left and right, and I'm sure these guys had doubts, but they stayed, and they fought shoulder-to-shoulder every day to get to where we're at.

The underclassmen, man, they now know what it looks like, but they owe it to them every single day to keep fighting for the legacy that these guys built. I think it's the third time in school history to have back-to-back ten-win seasons. They've put us on a launching pad to keep going.

Our board, our Athletic Director, our boosters are all in right now on Mizzou football because of these young men. They're tearing down the north end zone because of these guys.

You saw the fans tonight again showing up in Mizzouville for us. It's awesome right now what we've got going. It's up to these guys and ourselves, our coaches to work our butts off every single day not to let them down, and we're going to.

**Q. Just want to ask you about a key play to Brady, the deep pass, the 44-yard pass. The team had taken a ten-point lead. Describe the idea of the play and how you feel you executed it and the whole thing?**

BRADY COOK: It's a play action shot. We've repped it a ton this December. Marquis knows he's the alert on that. He's full speed. He's coming across the formation, and he knows he's the big one.

The safeties came down, and it was just that look. You can see his ball skills. Whether the ball is overthrown, underthrown, left, right, it doesn't matter. He's going to go up, he's going to make a play and be physical. He's going to hold on to it, and that's what he does.

**Q. Describe what it was like for you as you see this things coming.**

MARQUIS JOHNSON: It's fun (laughing). No, obviously when the ball is in the air, I always say, It's mine. I'm going to go get it regardless. For him so he can trust me, I do every time so if we need it, just like how we needed it, just trust me and throw it to me, and I'll go get it.

**Q. Coach, finishing the season with nine and a half sacks. I think it's the most since Shane Ray had 14 in 2014. What do you think of his performance obviously in this game and then just in the second half of the season?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: There was a point midway through the season where Johnny and I met, and he was just -- he was pressing so hard. He was trying to put so much into it. It was really about just relaxing, trusting his training, and believing in himself.

I think he and Coach Early spent some extra time. One of the things before the Alabama game -- and I don't remember exactly who told him, but somebody talked about practice the move you're going to practice on Tuesday and Wednesday, so the scouting report -- practice that move on one-on-ones, even if it's not going to work against maybe the starting left tackle that you are going against for us.

He started applying that, and all of a sudden, man, he's just starting to break through. I mean, they were chipping him tonight. Every time I looked up, I'm like, Dag gum, they're trying to chip him, they're trying to do this. The sack he had on the goal line, he rushed right through that offensive tackle and got up underneath him and pushed him all the way into the quarterback, used his speed. Set him up thinking the speed got him off balance and then got his hands underneath and just drove him right into the

quarterback. Hands inside wins.

Just really proud of him. Really excited for him to get invited to the East West Shrine Game. I'm going to tell everybody. He's got an injury, and I thought he wouldn't play. In fact, I told him if he was my son, I wouldn't let him play, but he said, No, I want to play. I'm going to play, and we'll get it fixed afterwards if we have to get it fixed. If not, we're going to keep going.

For him to play four quarters tonight on an injury when he could have said, No, I'm going to tap out and get ready for the draft and combine and East West Shrine Game, man, you just don't have this much anymore. I love you, buddy.

JOHNNY WALKER JR.: I love you, Coach.

**Q. I remember you saying after the Arkansas game that the time you and Brady would be together coaching QBs was fast approaching. Have you given any more thought about what that future is going to look like?**

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: Honestly I figured the NCAA would just grant everybody eligibility, so I've been kind of kicking it down the road a little bit. I keep hoping that there's some sort of magic that will happen, but you know, we talked about core value number four is, "Enjoy the journey," and it's been a hell of a journey.

I'll always be indebted to him for what he's done for my family and what he's done for this program, but you know, journeys aren't always meant to be together forever. So he's going to go start his own path and his own career, and I have no doubt he'll be successful in the NFL. He's going to get a chance. Just like we all found out, don't ever count him out.

I'm sure he'll be a starting quarterback someday in the NFL, and hopefully he'll let me come watch him play. It's time for him to go chase his journey now.

What's that old weird saying? Don't cry because you're sad; be excited because it happened, or something like that? I'm fortunate that it happened. I'm fortunate that he stayed with us. I'm fortunate that him and Johnny chose to stay with us, yeah.

**Q. Brady, the play before your deep ball to Marquis, you found Daniel Blood on the third down for a big conversion. Prior to that throw you were 1 for your last 11. How important was that to get your mojo back?**

BRADY COOK: It was huge. It was huge. I really trusted

him on that route, and he ran it perfectly. He broke his man off. It was man coverage, right on the sideline, tight turned.

I was really proud of him because that was a game-changing play. That was a third down. We needed it. We were on a dry spell. I couldn't get anything going. Super proud of Daniel Blood for running that right and doing it just like he did.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: He's been 1 for 11 a lot. That don't even phase him, you know?

BRADY COOK: That's nice.

**Q. Brady, this program has meant a lot to you. You've express that. What does it mean to go out with a victory in this way and this comeback fashion?**

BRADY COOK: It's nice to go out with a win. It is. I look back, 2021/2022. That's not fun leaving the bowl site and going out with a loss. Not at all. You think about it for a long time. That sits with you for a long time.

I definitely didn't want that to be the case with my last game in a Tiger uniform. Proud of the team. Proud of how we prepared, how the coaches got us ready, how the team worked.

I think we practiced, I don't know, something crazy, like 13 out of 15 days in December. Something crazy. Nobody said a word in the locker room. A lot of locker rooms would be different. There would be a lot of complaining, a lot of defending, wondering what we're doing this for, but no, not us.

We prepared. We worked our butts off, and this was the result.

ELIAH DRINKWITZ: In 2021, your first career start, right, he led us on a two-minute drive. We go up, and they drive it down, kick a field goal to beat us. How ironic is it for you on your last game in a college career we're down all game, you lead us on, and Blake kicks the game-winning field goal, and we send the defense back out there, and this time you all get a stop. How about that fourth and one stop.

Just incredible the growth that the program has had. What a way to go out, man. That's pretty awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, players, congratulations.

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