

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Pitt vs Michigan State

Thursday, December 30, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Michigan State Spartans

Connor Heyward

Press Conference

Michigan State - 31, Pitt - 21

Q. I'm wondering if you can kind of walk us through that touchdown, and particularly you come down with the ball and you're kind of looking up into the stands, pointing into the stands. How special was that moment for you, particularly against your dad's old team?

CONNOR HEYWARD: Yeah, it was real special. This game meant a lot to me not just because it was a New Year's Six bowl but playing my dad and mom's alma mater. My mom grew up in Pittsburgh.

My brother, playing for the Steelers, has a big impact on Pittsburgh community. And the whole family being born in Pittsburgh except for me. I was born and raised in Atlanta. Live in the same house my whole life, about 25 minutes outside of Atlanta.

So this game just meant a lot to me. And I just wanted to come out victorious.

Q. Kind of going off that, what did it mean to you to be able to finish your career on such a high note with that touchdown, that drive in the fourth quarter, in front of your friends and family in your hometown?

CONNOR HEYWARD: It meant a lot. I had like 50 people here at least, 50, 60 people, friends and family, coaches from high school, coaches from little league. My friends I grew up with and old teammates.

It was just amazing to finish, and to it with a group of guys in the locker room and all the coaches that have pushed us to extreme limits, but they know how to love on us as well.

So just being able to get this dub means so much and more. Words don't describe it. And to be at home, that's



just icing on the cake.

Q. What do you think that this team -- do you think this team's legacy is or will be in time being Coach Tucker's second team? And what do you think this season can do for maybe the next few seasons, and how quickly maybe things can turn around here based on what happened this year?

CONNOR HEYWARD: This win is going to do a lot. I think it's going to attract even more recruits. Obviously you guys see Coach Tucker and the whole staff recruiting very well at a high level, nonstop and getting the best guys up to East Lansing and letting them see the campus for the first time. And they're always blown away.

I think it will attract more recruits and just more attraction to Michigan State football. I think a lot of people knows that it's a gritty, physical team and by-any-means team, but once they get up there they'll like it even more.

Once you're around the coaches and the whole culture, it just kind of rubs off on everybody. So I think this win can do a lot. But obviously for the team, for next year, they need to put the work in as well. I know Coach Tuck isn't going to take a back seat to that and continue to push guys, and I think the team will also be remembered as a team that never quit; a legendary team, where only six times this has happened now where teams at Michigan State history have 11 wins or more.

And so to do that in Coach Tuck's second year just shows how much work the players and coaches have put into it.

Q. Do you think it will take you a while for your career and what you did here to really sink in, from coming here as an athlete, starting at running back, entering the portal, to returning and then switching to tight end and to have it happen against Pitt, do you think that will be something that might take you a while to really adjust to?

CONNOR HEYWARD: It kind of hit me after the game, honestly. Just like everything that I've been through, the good and the bad. And sometimes you just have to go



through the bad to -- sometimes it has to rain to see the sunny days, as I kind of see it.

And I think everything just came full circle. It's a blessing to play the game of football and to finish it off this way against all the connections I have with Pitt. It just all came full circle.

Q. From where you were two years ago, I don't know if anyone has chopped more than you have for Mel Tucker, if the final chapter of this story is a 21-0 fourth quarter, what does that mean?

CONNOR HEYWARD: Keep chopping. Back's against the wall. You've got to be able to make a play. As an offensive skill player, you want to either have the big block or the big catch when the game's on the line.

You saw a number of guys step up, not just me. Tre Mosley had a lot of tough catches in traffic. Obviously Jayden, the one to start the game and the one to win the game. And then Speedy catching the one-handed one behind him. And just Payton putting the ball in the air and believing in everybody, not a lot of quarterbacks are like him and spread the wealth.

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