

Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Michigan vs Texas

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Texas Longhorns

Hero Kanu

Jelani McDonald

Press Conference



Texas Longhorns 41, Michigan Wolverines 27

Q. You weren't part of the 2024 team that went into Ann Arbor and won. You were an Ohio State Buckeye at the time. What did this win mean for and how intense was it?

HERO KANU: As everybody knows, I played for Ohio State the past three years, and that is a big rivalry. I was preached that rivalry from my freshman year on, even from the recruiting process. Obviously, there is a certain feeling towards the team up north. A lot of emotion, and just being honest, that meant a lot to me.

I haven't beat them yet, in these previous three years, and finally getting this win with my team here was amazing. I think Jonah can tell you, I was happy. I was happy in the locker room. I was screaming. I said thank you to everybody on this team, and it just meant the world to me.

Q. How much has Colin grown as a leader and a voice on this team, and do you and hero both think they can lead this team from a leadership standpoint going forward?

JELANI MCDONALD: Colin has grown tremendously as a leader. Vocal. Nonvocal, all-around. He has just become a full football player and man going into life. I feel like he is definitely going to be able to take our defense far, me and a couple more leaders, but he definitely has the team on his shoulders for sure. For sure.

HERO KANU: Just to pick up where he left off, Colin has grown tremendously from the off-season throughout the beginning of the season, throughout the season. Obviously, he is a leader on the field by showing what he can do, and he talked the ceiling is high for him. That's hey

a lot more than he can do, but off the field, I think that's something a lot of people don't see. How he is interacting with his teammates. How he is guiding them, leading them, when there are questions. He is always the first one to raise his hand, like hey, I can help you out.

And just having like that passion to be a leader, too. There are a lot of guys that are being forced to be a leader and a lot of guys that are natural leaders. He is a natural leader.

Q. Hero, you coming back next year? And what excites you both about the team coming back next year?

HERO KANU: For me, honestly I am not going to have to wait a little bit longer for the decision. But regardless of what the decision going to be, this team is going to be awesome.

TY'ANTHONY SMITH: I mean, sure, as long as we stick together, we all we got, we all we need, you feel me. Yeah, simple as that.

Q. A lot of younger guys got to play tonight. Bo Barnes has been mentioned a couple of times. What growth have you seen throughout the season in the younger guys, and what's the reaction when they get big plays like that tonight?

JELANI MCDONALD: The other guys have come along, man, especially during this two-week time preparing for this game. They have definitely stepped up and played the roles that we needed them to play going into this game. So all around, him, you got Tank -- well, I call him Tank. Bo, you feel me. Jonah, you have all of us all around, you have Smitty, you feel me.

HERO KANU: Smitty.

JELANI MCDONALD: As long as we stay together, we have each other.

HERO KANU: It goes for both sides of the ball. You guys saw what has been going on the past couple weeks, a lot



of changes. We need a lot of guys to step up and just have to say, it is not an easy opponent, and you have got to come out here and play and be ready. These guys prepared the right way throughout these past couple weeks. I mean, we found out -- we played what was it, December 12th or so? So two weeks ago, these guys adjusted to the game plan, did their job and executed today.

Q. Jonah, you're going into your fourth season here at Texas. How do you feel like you've grown over the past three years and how will you use next year as one of the leaders on the team?

JELANI MCDONALD: Just me growing as a whole, man. It is just -- me stepping into the leadership role has, I feel like, helped me on and off the field. Connecting with my teammates. Telling them what to do on the field. Like I feel like it is going to be a fun year, man. We are going to turn it up.

Q. What's the confidence level in 16? He seems to know how to close a game out, two straight games he's gone the distance.

JELANI MCDONALD: 16, I trust in him, you see what he did, so we good.

Q. How would you describe the intensity of this game? A lot of people think Bowl games don't matter but sure didn't look like that. Curious if you enjoyed watching Arch from the sideline, too.

HERO KANU: I enjoyed every bit of this game, even the ups and downs. Colin said it earlier, there was a lot that was being said on the field. We had fun with it. It is a mental game, too. At the end of the day, we succeeded that game. Beat them mentally and physically. At the end of the day, we are playing football, and people always underestimate it as just a physical game. It's a mental game, too.

JELANI MCDONALD: Facts.

Q. What did y'all see from Ty'Anthony both in preparing for this Bowl game and today?

JELANI MCDONALD: His passion. His commitment. His consistency. His whole preparation from two weeks ago to now. He did that during practice. It is like nothing changed.

HERO KANU: He did a great job adjusting, just with the guys that left, and really being at starting position, executing, preparing, getting the defense right. As a linebacker, you have to be the captain of the defense,

essentially. You control all the communication from the front to the back and the back to the front. He did a tremendous job.

Same thing with Bo Barnes. I am just super proud of them.

JELANI MCDONALD: Thanks. Especially Bo.

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