

Pop-Tarts Bowl: Miami vs Iowa State

Friday, December 27, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Mario Cristobal

Matt Campbell

Coaches Press Conference



MARIO CRISTOBAL: Good morning, everybody. Again, thank you for having us here and having such a warm welcome to Orlando, but I really want to thank Florida Citrus Sports for again putting on a first-class event and taking us in, and the Pop-Tarts Bowl committee staff, everyone. From the moment we arrived, the entire process, our players have enjoyed it. Even though we are not here for a real long time, certainly the resources, the treatment, the accommodations have been excellent.

And again, as mentioned last night, we have the great honor of playing a great football team with a rich tradition, great tradition like Iowa State led by Coach Campbell – a ton of respect for him and the job that he's done with his program. And certainly, I'm proud of our players, the University of Miami and always proud about being a Miami Hurricane, and looking forward to a great opportunity and a great game tomorrow.

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, obviously we would echo the same thing. You know, from Steve Hogan, and, really, the entire staff here that does such an incredible job making these experiences really special for our football program and our football team. We are uniquely -- third time we've been able to play down here. Each experience has been absolutely incredible, and a lot of it is because of the people.

I think one of the great things about this Bowl game is the impact that it makes on this great community. You know, it's bigger than just a football game. I think the ability to make such a profound impact in the neighborhoods around the stadium and really what this stands for, it's great to be a part of something like that.

You know, as Coach Cristobal said, the respect we have for Coach Cristobal and his staff and the great competition and great team that Miami is, it's just an honor to be part of that.

We're certainly proud of our football team. It's been a really special year for Iowa State Football. Got great leadership, great senior class and a really great coaching staff. It's an honor to be able to finish up our season here against just a tremendous opponent and a great Bowl game.

Q. Conventional wisdom says in this day and age that kids that are going to be projected as first rounders don't play, and every indication from Cam [Ward] has been that he will play tomorrow. Why do you think he may? It's unfair to ask you to speak for him, but why do you think he made that decision to go one more time with you guys?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think modern day conventional wisdom sometimes clashes with principles and values of what is right. Nowadays in college football, we are compensated at all levels, right -- coaches, players, administrators -- and to do a job, you must finish the job.

I think Cam's DNA, his upbringing, everything that he is made of and stands for is the right kind of stuff; the stuff you want your team made of. He's had a tremendous impact on our community, our team, our program, alumni. And so he understands the importance of finishing, and he understands the caliber of opponent that we are playing and the importance of playing at a really high level to give ourselves the best opportunity in this game.

Certainly a credit to him and the rest of those seniors.

Q. Similar question for both coaches. There's been few, if any opt-outs. Why do you guys feel like this game is important to finish the season?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I would just say from my standpoint exactly what Coach just said. I think both programs are built on values and principles and team and the reality is team is all the way until the end of the season, not till halfway through the season.

I know we are very fortunate that we've got a great senior class that has stood for the right thing for multiple years in



our football program. I think when your seniors believe in those values, it really trickles down from the top down, and so we are really fortunate to have great leadership.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That's very well put, and I would echo the same sentiment. So, as much as talent acquisition is really important to building a program and sustaining a program, so is having some really highly, I would say, effective productive and committed culture, right? Making sure that our task is not only to develop great football players and win games but also to develop young men and do what is right and doing things the right way.

Can you imagine ever telling your own son you can start this but not finish that? I don't think anyone in this room would approve that have type of directive. I think what you're seeing is we have the opportunity to play against a great football team that has great culture. That's why is it's become very important for our players to have not only great practices but to exhibit great culture because this is going to be a great football game.

Q. You just kind of got into it, talking about the culture, you coached against Iowa State before. What comes to mind when you think of Iowa State University?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think it's a team that first benefits from tremendous coaching. And you see it layered the right way. You see strong senior classes, junior classes, sophomore classes due to retainment and development. That means the belief in the program is strong.

So systems have been in place for a while; so guys know what they are doing, how they are doing it and why they are doing it that way. Not only do they have great individual athletes, they play great as a team. They know where their help is. They know where each other is supposed to be and they are there, and on top of that, they are very, very physical and they play extremely hard.

So you could tell that certainly it means a ton to them.

Q. I know that Iowa State and Miami are playing for the first time. Could you see yourself down the line entering a scheduling agreement where these two teams will play trade one at home, one away, like as we saw, how important strength of schedule is to try to be able to get into the College Football Playoff?

MATT CAMPBELL: Obviously that's a great question. I think the world we enter right now, and I know both conferences that we play in are really strong. I think any time you get an opportunity to strengthen your schedule

and play great opponents, and I'm sure that will be something we look at down the road.

Again, I think it comes do you believe to a respect factor and as Coach Cristobal said, the respect for both and belief in each other's program, there's a tremendous amount of respect for those quality opponents.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: No doubt. It would obviously be great to look at those particular options. Except for late November up there, aside from that, I think it would be a great idea.

Q. Coach Campbell, welcome back to Orlando. Five years ago you were in this game under a different name and didn't have anything as cool as a trophy toaster. You've been an essential part of building the program in Ames. What in your mind has it meant, the season, in the progress of building that program?

MATT CAMPBELL: This has been a really special year for us. You're talking a lot of firsts in the 133-year history of Iowa State Football.

I would say we probably have at times had maybe more talent but I don't know if we have had the quality of team that we have this year. This team has been ravaged with injuries and challenging situations, and they have never flinched. To me, that's been one of the great joys as a head coach and being at a place now nine years, which I know is hard to do in today's world and to be able to do it where the young men stand for something and believe in something.

This year, I thought was the epitome of what our program has stood for when it gets really hard and tough and you face really adverse situations. Man, how do you work through hard. And it takes great leadership, and our senior class is as special as it ever been, with Jaylin Noel and Beau Freyler, the captains, what those two guys have meant to Iowa State Football and how they have exhibited leadership, and the senior class on top, has been really special to watch.

We are grateful, and it's been a rewarding season and to be able to be here in a really special place against a really special opponent is awesome.

Q. When you first arrived at Miami, it was seen as a rebuild in its own right, one game away from the playoff. What did that mean in your process, and what you've brought to the Miami program?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It's been a ton of process. I had been away for a long time almost a 27-year journey to get

back to what was always the end goal and it was one of those things, I've said it ad nauseam, one day I woke up and said, I'm tired of watching from afar. I want to be part of the solution; a part of the solution.

And so over the last three years, there's been a ton of progress and then a year of a lot of firsts for us as well. First time Miami has been undefeated at home for a long, long time. First, or second ten-win season in maybe 20 years. State Champions for the first time in a long time, and a lot of things accomplished and a lot more to accomplish.

And then most importantly, the establishment of some standards, right, some benchmarks and some cultural, I would say, goals that won't be compromised. I think credit to the seniors understand, credit to the staff for making those things possible, and now we find ourselves with a great opportunity.

You have two programs fighting for an historic 11th win. That means a ton to everybody involved. All programs, fan bases, alumni, everybody.

So I think that it can't be emphasized enough; the importance of the postseason; the importance of the approach; the growth and development of programs in the postseason; the experience for players because I get it. We are all in a hurry to move on in life and be pros and whatnot. You only have a certain amount of time to still be a kid, right, and enjoy the things that come with being a college football player, and this is the last 36 hours that our guys get to experience that, for a lot of guys.

So all in all, between the accomplishments of the year, the ability to be in this game, all focus, really, is on this opportunity, and certainly, again, just an honor to have this shot.

Q. Coach Campbell, special teams played a crucial role in determining the outcome of the game. How important do you see special teams in the season's strategy, and what specific impact do you anticipate for tomorrow's game?

MATT CAMPBELL: You know, I think for us, it's always been critical. We have to play great team football to be successful, and offensively, defensively and special teams, it's got to be a huge piece of architecture football program. You're playing a team that has great special teams and obviously great specialists. Our ability to be able to counter that within the football game and to be able to hold our own, it will be critical for us to have success.

Q. Fans and critics alike, being the way they are, that

line of thinking, consider the season for both your teams a disappointment or a failure in regards to the CFP. But how difficult or discouraging is that for you guys when you consider you won ten games, bone teams won ten games?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I don't think anything outside of the walls of the program and the people that put in the daily work is -- you mentioned the word "disappointment." For us, if you don't win every single football game, win every single rep, there's disappointment in the right kind of way where you build positive anger and you want a better result through process.

But in terms of players' efforts and accomplishments in process, there is no disappointment. For us, as hard as we've worked, and mind you, no one wants to win more than the players and the coaches in our respective programs, and no one puts in the amount of time away from family and obligations outside of football. No one puts in more time than what we do.

So I think a question like that, it's almost a little foreign, like almost undigestible. Because those trains of thought don't creep into our processes, our way of thinking. All we think about is finding ways to get better, doing right by our people, helping those grown men grow and develop and win football games, and continue to make progress in our organization.

MATT CAMPBELL: I would say I chuckle at that comment to be quite honest with you. I mean, think about what I just said, 133 years in our school, and we have never won ten games. We've been in two Big 12 Championship games, and you know, the last four years. Nobody even thought that was possible at Iowa State.

To say something like that is ridiculous to be quite honest with you. I think for our end of it, we have always talked about in our program is, man, can we get to the end of the season, and really have tried to become the best possible team that we can become, and we'll define that once the season comes to an end.

I think what this team has overcome, and I think Coach would echo this, the adversities you go through for us in a 12-, 13-game season, man, the opportunity to go through it and become your very best, it's such a great reward. That's our world that we live in, and it's awesome to live in it because you've got 18- to 22-year-olds that you see just continue to grow as great men.

And you know, we'll leave on Saturday. We'll have 20 seniors that are going to leave and they are going to go be great fathers, husbands. But the one thing they are going

absolutely be able to do is they are going to be great leaders of people because of their experience and what they have been accomplished in the season. And man, the pride that they will be able walk out of that locker room with no matter what the result is on Saturday about what they have been able to do and accomplish at Ames, Iowa, I'm really proud of them.

Q. You've seen the program go from non-existent to basically mediocre to back-to-back Elite Eights and a Final Four under Coach L. What did yesterday's news from Jim mean to you and what's his legacy at the university?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Man that was a hard one, really was. Love and respect him. I mean, he is iconic. He is legendary. Certainly just put that program on his back and went to work. He will be missed tremendously. I'm going to raid his roster for tight ends and defensive ends. (Laughter) I think he's an exceptional human being.

I look forward to getting with him and picking his brain on leadership and on team building and culture and getting him over and having him in front of the guys. I know he always want to be involved in the University of Miami.

But you couldn't ask for a better human being and for a leader for our program and young men than Coach L.

Coach L., love to you, man. Certainly, hey, I look forward to seeing you here down the line but really appreciate everything you've done for community, for program, for the University of Miami.

Q. Is it sad when you hear a bunch of these big-name basketball coaches in the last couple years saying, This is not what I signed up for? How do you process the changes and how it's really affected -- it seems to have more of a profound affect on basketball and basketball coaching than maybe other sports.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I'm sure we've come across a few things that are not likable, borderline detestable. But we love football more than we love the issues that have arisen due to just changes in the game. One thing that has stood the test of time, you either adapt or you die, right.

So we are in adapt mode, and this period of time, no one knows how long it's going to last, when there's going to be some type of order associated with it. Until then, and hopefully this, too, shall pass in just the uncertainty of how to navigate. Because there is no handbook. We were probably all groomed by coaches and we worked under people that gave us blueprints that we use, and now that blueprint is out the door and you have to create a new one

that is changing every other week.

Honestly I think you're looking at programs that, you know, don't flinch. We just go.

I didn't answer your question. I went all over the plates with this.

But I think you know what I'm saying. You go, man. You adapt and you keep going forward.

And you know what's undefeated? Working your butt off and doing right by people. And if you stay along those lines and you're willing to understand that you'd better have tough staff members because the hours of longer and the days are longer and the off-seasons are shorter, then you know what you're going to find a way. And hard work and good people have been undefeated over the course of time.

Q. I've been covering the economic impact these games bring to the community. I'd love to hear your thoughts about what this game means for the City of Orlando, the money that it brings to the community and especially the local non-profits and the exposure that it can give to the city.

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, again, I know I started this off in my initial comments but Steve Hogan and what they have the vision of impact, not just from the game day experience, and I know it's tied in with the Citrus Bowl and the next experience, but the reality of it is just the impact that they have taken these experiences and given back to the local community and the impact of really making a difference. I think that's pretty powerful for our kids to here.

Because again, our job is to take 18- to 22-year-old young men and send them out to the world and make an impact on the lives of others. And to watch a Bowl game and Bowl experience, and that's actually happening and that money is being reinvested into young people and making a difference in communities, I think that's really powerful.

Man, I think Orlando they are getting a lot of things in Orlando and you get a lot of visitors and you get a lot of tourism but to watch a Bowl game and Bowl games have a powerful stance to create an impact and create real change, that's certainly great for us to be able to sell our kids and our program and see that actually happening.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Not only on top of that, the present impact, but future impact, how many families are here and intend to come back because they have had such a great experience.

From an economy standpoint, that's always a bonus and a tremendous plus. I want to reflect on the fact that the impact that the community has had on us. I mean, you have two teams that are going to be competing at the highest level tomorrow on the same field and yesterday we're in the same theme park and contributing back and giving back to the community, spending our time with a lot of kids, some under privilege, some fans. That's super impactful.

It's all tied in together, right. I mean, impact, growth and development reaches the economy but also reaches the individual. It's transformational. I think that combination, you know, I think it's been impactful for both the community and for our program.

Q. I know you're sitting next to your opponents for tomorrow, so you're not going to give away anything but have there been any players in the Bowl practices over the last month who have stepped up or taken that next step?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think that's what you always see during this time, the extra practices, when school is out, right, because a lot of these freshmen, school and college football, that's a lot so there's a little bit of paralysis by analysis. Just a lot of going on in that head and a lot to juggle for the first time in their lives.

And I think what you see now you see guys that certainly they have earned the opportunity to play more. They have earned the trust of their teammates and their coaches. To get into specifics would be difficult. But I think it will be reflected in some of the position groups tomorrow that we watch.

Q. Tying into that question a little bit here, I asked you this last week, you wanted me to ask you again closer to the game. Younger guys that have stood out in Bowl practices, and also, your last time down here, it was kind of the first time for Jaylin Noel, the first time for Beau Freyler. Who are some guys maybe tomorrow afternoon that will maybe be the next Beau Freyler or Jaylin Noels and have big games?

MATT CAMPBELL: I think the thing for us when you look at it, I think some of those young guys that red-shirted, we talked about it a little bit last week on the O-Line, the Helton twins are two freshmen that I thought really had great Bowl prep. Not to say those guys will be playing tomorrow but I think those guys have really helped themselves out for what their future has a chance to look like in our football program.

You look defensively, I thought Alijah Carnel and Jace

Gilbert are two defensive linemen that really stood out. I think, Sleh, Goodwin, not that you're going to see those guys tomorrow, but again I think those guys' future has a chance to be really bright.

Everyone else freshman-wise with the injuries we've had have had to play and you've seen them and you've watched them. You know, you've got to see some of those five guys. Who stands out tomorrow, I think the same roster that you've seen play quite honestly over the last part of the season because they have been forced to have to play for us and be contributors and help our football team be successful.

Hopefully all those experiences and a lot of those injuries that have occurred I think will pay off down the road for Iowa State Football. But obviously tough to go through this season, but I think grateful that it happened, and we had the leadership around it to support it through this journey.

Q. Overall, just from a season like this, obviously with individual success from Cam, from X, for example, what moments have you had to reflect on individual players and moments like this?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think reflection will take place after the game. Somebody asked earlier, how do you balance getting forward are a game, transfer portal and recruiting and what's the balance; there is no balance. You've just kind of got to go and whenever you pass out, you pass out, and you do it again a couple hours later.

In terms of -- the most important thing I think is to really emphasize how appreciative we are for the effort, the commitment of players that have been through a lot. You know, a couple of coaching changes. Certainly some ups and downs, injuries. Guys that stuck together and put together a really strong team that has accomplished so much and has set a standard and has elevated our program to where now, you know what, Miami is a real thing again. There's national prominence associated with Miami.

Now they get to take part in a game against a nationally prominent program like Iowa State. Those things, you can't put a price tag on that. Those are monumental steps and a accomplishments for those guys. So I am forever grateful. Some of those guys will be missed sorely.

But like I told them, we already had Senior Day and the boo-hoo'ing and all that stuff. Days like today are super important, as we get refocused once this press conference is over, to make sure we are doing all the right things to make sure we give ourselves the best chance for success.

