

Pop-Tarts Bowl: Miami vs Iowa State

Saturday, December 28, 2024

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Miami Hurricanes

Mario Cristobal

Jalen Rivers

Press Conference



words what the class means, like what the stories mean to you and the impact of the group that won't be here next year is leaving behind?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Incredible human beings. Incredible competitors. Guys at the University of Miami, the orange and Green -- wearing it means everything to them, and they put it on display every single Saturday.

Again, these guys, a lot of firsts in a long, long time. They were undefeated at home. They won the State Championship, so to speak. They won ten games for the second time in 20 years, and all those were positives. Then in three games, we fell short by a drive, a play, a series. Those things are painful, and it makes you understand and realize how the details in football come into play against really good teams.

These guys have put Miami back on the map as a team that's rising, and their efforts, their resilience. The culture that they have set, they are early to everything. They do everything to the best of their abilities. They hold themselves to high standards. These guys are elite human beings, and they are going to be elite in life in everything they do. I look forward to watching these guys play for a long time on Sundays. They have certainly raised the standard and one that now, it's the next generation's turn to uphold the legacy and make it better.

Q. When did you and Cam decide he would play a half, and what did you view As the pros and cons of having Cam Ward play the first half?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think all meetings with players and decisions like that, we make them in private and we keep them in private. So, I'll defer to not answering questions as it relates to that.

I know he played his best while he was in there, and certainly Emory tried his best as well. Like Jalen said, we were rushing the ball really, really well, and just came up short.

Q. On Cam, after being with him for a full season, when you look down the road at what he did for you

Iowa State 42, Miami 41

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, again, feel for guys like this, Jalen Rivers. Guys that have really exhausted every ounce that they have for the University of Miami and have done a great job this year of finding a way to win ten games. We fell short in three of them in very close games.

Disappointed that we couldn't pull out a victory for them, and the rest of the guys in their final game, in the final game of the season, as well, for the rest of our players.

Certainly, these guys have always fought, have always competed in every single opportunity they have had. This is no exception, but really honored to have coached a guy like this and several others in that locker room. It's painful. It's as painful as it gets when you don't win. A lot to build on, a lot accomplished by these guys, and moving on.

Q. Obviously you would have preferred the victory but a Miami Bowl game record in rushing. What does that mean for you boys up front to do it in a game with this notoriety?

JALEN RIVERS: It would have felt better with the win, but, regardless, I dedicate it to all the O-Line. We have been rotating six guys and you've got to commend every single one of us, commend the running backs, commend everybody on the offense, really. I appreciate blocking for our running backs and blocking with my O-Line, too, and blocking for our quarterback and blocking for the receivers to get the ball.

It means a lot that we were able to rush like we did today, but it would have been better with the win.

Q. Win or lose, this was obviously going to be the last time you coached a lot of these guys, Jalen among them. It's probably too early but can you put into

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guys this season, what will stand out the most and what do you think his legacy with the Hurricanes is?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Even more so than the plays and touchdowns and the highlight reels were the fact that he played a major role, along with guys like Jalen, on bringing a team together, which as we know, again, don't want to beat a dead horse.

Came back to Miami after 20-plus years to make sure that Miami gets back to a certain level, and these guys have elevated it, tremendously.

His play was spectacular. But again, I think all the other stuff, the intangibles, the behind the scenes stuff, bringing players together, galvanizing a team and galvanizing a program and teaching guys how to watch tape, you name it. All the things that are required to be a really good Division I football player and great teammate. He was exemplary.

Q. We talked about a lot of the players that have made contributions throughout the year. We know Xavier doesn't play, obviously, today. Cam is headed to the pros. But to have guys like Andy and other guys that are definitely pro prospects, how much are you looking forward to tracking their progress as they move forward in their pro careers, whether it's the NFL or CFL or UFL?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I look forward to watching them be successful in everything they do. I gave each one of them a note last night letting them know besides the appreciation that we have for them; that we will always be there for them if they should ever need us. If you're a coach, you should be coaching these guys and be a mentor for life and that doesn't change. Good days or bad days, whether they go to a league or go off and do something else in life.

That's how strongly I feel about these guys. I would do anything for them. Painful that we couldn't get the victory for them. That's the part that hurts the most right now, and certainly not something we get over. We work ungodly hours and do ungodly, just, rounds and rounds of reps and effort and whatnot.

So, it certainly pisses you off and at the same time, respect to the team that we just played against. They do a really good job as well, but I think two really strong cultures showed up today, and just sometimes you just run out of time. They did a little bit of a better job than we did. But it is, to me, the biggest thing to take out of this is the heart, the toughness, the resiliency of our team to just keep coming, and they are going to keep doing that in everything they do in life.

Q. Damien limped off late in the game. How critical was that in your final few drives?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: He got banged up pretty good. He was hot. He was a hot hand. I mean, from his first carry all the way to when he got banged up. When a guy is running like that, Damien, Game 5, 6, 7 on, he was really something, and certainly would have been great to have him available.

Q. Seemed like this game followed a similar script as other losses where the defense struggled. I know this game only ended a few moments ago but what would you as similar issues that carried through the year on defense?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: When we win, we win as a team. When we lose, we lose as a team, as well. When you look at certain aspects of our game, yeah there were some issues. Sometimes it's communication and sometimes it's alignment. Obviously, it's nowhere near where what is the standard for us.

Now, when we go in there and as a team and we are in the middle of a game, we don't harp on that. We don't blame. We just keep going forward, and we try to make things work. But yeah, there were some issues, and it's not acceptable.

Q. Obviously Cam is leaving, one of the greatest quarterbacks this program has ever had. How do you feel about the position going forward, maybe some of the depth that you have at that position.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Quarterback-wise, you always assess every position on your team and do everything you can to make it better.

As it relates to personnel and personnel moves, and what we do in that, it's something I never discuss publicly out of respect for our program and the players involved.

But, we are always looking for ways to develop the guys within the program, and we are always bringing the best possible talent we can.

Q. As a guy who has been here for the past five years, where do you see the trajectory of the program going right now?

JALEN RIVERS: You've been seeing it ever since he's got here, we're getting better and better, we're going to get better next year and the years after that. We believe in and I feel like the whole program believes in Coach Cristobal

and everybody on the staff to get the right guys in and win games.

You see, we went from 5-7 to 7-5 to 10-3. Of course, this year wasn't the best that we assumed that it would have been. Next year is going to be even better, because we believe in Coach Cristobal and the staff and the guys that he brings in.

That's why I stayed. I stayed here all five years, because I saw something in this program and when Coach Cristobal came in here, I saw what he can do. Because, if he did it at the last place, he can do it at this place. I feel like the trajectory of this program is going in the right place.

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