

TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Wake Forest vs Rutgers

Thursday, December 30, 2021

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Greg Schiano

Head Coach

Adam Korsak

Julius Turner

Noah Vedral

Press Conference

GREG SCHIANO: It's just a great honor to be here today. I want to thank everybody with the Gator Bowl, the City of Jacksonville. It's been a great experience. I would be lying if I didn't tell you a very hectic one. It's not usually the way you get ready for a bowl game with eight days notice, but we take it any way we can get it, and we're really, really happy about being here. Excited about playing in the game. The players have had a tremendous time, and now it's time to play. We're looking forward to it.

Q. Coach, at this point can we assume that you guys are going to be okay from a health standpoint to play the game?

GREG SCHIANO: Sure can.

Q. Second of all, looking back over the last six or seven days, you talked about the hectic nature of this, if somebody told you this was going to happen, were you surprised you were able to mobilize this quickly, in retrospect, and maybe what does that say for the people involved in your program for the fact that you were able to do that?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, that's exactly what I was going to say is that I'm not surprised because of the people who work at Rutgers and the players that we have at Rutgers. When A&M pulled out of the game, jokingly, I called one of my guys that works with us, and I said, "Hey, you want to go to a bowl game?" Literally joking. A half hour later he called back and, "Hey, that may not be too far from the truth." I called the people who head the departments. I



said, "Can we do this?" They said, yes. I said, okay. I reached out and asked a few of the guys if they want to do it because I didn't want to be the only one that wanted to do it, and our players were great. "Let's go, Coach."

Before I could get to them all, Johnny Langan texted me, "Gator Bowl, let's go," with the gator emoji. These guys with the emojis. I kind of got the feel, okay, they want to do it, and then we waited to see if we were going to be the team that got to come.

Q. This is a question for Julius Turner. We've heard of the notion of "stay ready." How would you explain, let's say, the stay-ready mentality is helping you as you are preparing for this week's game?

JULIUS TURNER: What mentality? Stay red?

Q. Stay ready.

JULIUS TURNER: Stay ready. Oh, yeah. We have the kind of mentality, and we just always are ready for anything. Like Coach said, I wasn't surprised how we got everybody up here. During COVID we've been through a lot, and it's been so much that we have to be able to maneuver and work through. I knew he was going to have a plan and have us prepared for everybody else to get up here. Yep, we're ready, and we're chopping too.

Q. Do you look at a bowl game as almost like an homage to players or your veteran guys to get them in and start them, or as a building block and try to play as many young guys as possible and focus on 2022? How do you go into it from that thinking?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, the bowl experience I look at as a reward for your team. I think you have to make that something that they look back on as a great memory and enjoyable thing. Now, when you have the full time to get ready, we do it differently. We have a phase one, which is developmental phase, and that is always the young guys getting the predominance of the reps, so these guys would have come out maybe for 30, 40 minutes just to stay in shape and do some football stuff and then they would go in, and the young kids would then practice for an hour and



a half, two hours.

We didn't get that. We had four practices to get ready. This was truly a game week, but in a regular setting once you get to the site, we've always treated it, this is a reward for the guys, and that's why the game plan is always installed before you get there. Then you shine it up at the bowl site. This has been different. This has been putting the game plan together as we go, so that's why my voice sounds like it does.

Q. Coach Schiano, Dave Clawson the other day mentioned you made a little pit stop after his first year at Wake Forest. What's your recollection of how the team looked then, and how do they look right now worrying about the plan for tomorrow?

GREG SCHIANO: Dave and I have known each other for I guess it's been 30 years. He has made a few pit stops with where I've worked. Many pit stops, actually. My wife and I were laughing this morning. We were probably both, I don't know, 25, 26, had no money, so they came to visit. I was a GA at Penn State, and she made us -- I didn't remember this, but she said, yeah, I cooked all of your dinner, and you sat there and drew on the board. I said, oh, yeah, sounds like us. It's been 30 years and a great relationship.

Dave, I have the utmost respect for. He is a guy that I over the years have called and bounced things off and vice versa. When I was down there, it was when I got let go at Tampa, I kind of went around on a world tour and visited a lot of places. I really enjoyed that visit. Now I understand it's totally different. They had the little office. Now I hear the facilities are off the charts. Good for him. He has built a heck of a program there. He is, like I said, one of the guys that I respect most in this profession.

Q. Greg, we spoke a lot last season about how because it was so strange and needing to adjust quickly and pivot. How much do you feel like that prepared you guys for this current situation of just being ready to go as soon as you needed to?

GREG SCHIANO: Great question, Chris, and that's something that Julius referred to. We were one of two teams, I believe, in the Big Ten Conference that played every game on our schedule. That didn't happen by accident. These guys were unbelievable in what they sacrificed to make sure we could play, so that gave me great confidence that if they wanted to do this like they wanted to do that, we would be able to get ready and get mobilized. Now, I understand the disadvantages. We have a group that's been preparing and in football shape and all those things, but as I told our guys, who cares?

Right? We'll get it as good as we can, and then let's go out and figure it out. We'll figure it out on Friday. I think these guys are ready to figure it out.

Q. Adam, this is for you. Could you talk a little bit about your schedule? I was at practice yesterday, and you said you were in Australia and just what it took to get you here. And then, also, you're staying where the Players Championship is, and I heard you say you stay up until 3:00 a.m. to watch that every year. Can you talk about that as well?

ADAM KORSAK: To answer that last question, this morning I got on the 17 green, and I'm still on a buzz from that because of how good that hole is. About six or seven days ago I was back in Australia, and I went through LAX, and I saw a rumor on Twitter. Get on the plane, arrive in Sydney, get through customs and all that. Turn on my Wifi, and my phone starts lighting up. Like, come back, come back. It's not that easy, guys. Three days of quarantine, two negative tests, and then the next day negative again. Back on the plane. It's a lot of flying, but, obviously, it's worth it.

The great thing is I was able to stay punting, and I was able to work with Billy Taylor, who is a great long snapper, who is in a Senior Bowl, so we were working almost every day in our indoor facility, and then got a chance to have a few punts in Australia as well. Yeah, I feel great, and it's great to be here, and it's a tremendous opportunity.

GREG SCHIANO: He loves golf so much. I do bed check the night before games, and he is the only player in all my career that when I go in, he is watching the Golf Channel. (Laughing)

Q. Hit the green on 17?

ADAM KORSAK: I don't think I would hit the green. I would probably put it straight in the pond, but it was just great to be out there.

(Laughing)

Q. I know a lot of fans are curious how much you'll be able to play young guys. Especially Gavin Wimsatt. He has one more game of eligibility. Is he in your plan to get him out there?

GREG SCHIANO: We're going to do, Steve, whatever gives us the best chance to win because I promised these guys that we're coming down, we're letting it hang out. Is Gavin part of that? Certainly. We're going to play a ton of guys because we have to. It's going to be 80 degrees. We left New Jersey, I think it was 34. We hadn't practiced. We

had two practices in the bubble. We tried to turn the heat up a little bit, but we're going to play everybody that we think can help us win the game, and Gavin can help us win the game.

Q. Just as a follow-up, besides the reward for the players, what is the single most important thing for the bowl game? Is it recruiting exposure? Is it showing the program to high school players? What would be it beyond that?

GREG SCHIANO: I think it is a reward for the players. That's the, by far, so it's not 1 and 1A. It's 2s down here, but it is that the program put itself in a position to do it. And why? Because the academic work that these guys did. We didn't win enough games to be bowl-eligible, and we own that. What we need to know is the work they did in the classroom is what allowed them to be first up when an opportunity opened, so I tell them all the time. There are no coincidences. We talk a lot about you reap what you sew.

Q. Being from New Jersey, I know my parents were following along diligently with all the reports that you guys were struggling to find an airplane. Can you kind of walk us through when you guys knew you would have a plane?

GREG SCHIANO: That's a great story. We always do this, right? Our theory is you divide and conquer. Everybody has a job. Go do it. Because our defensive coordinator left, my job kind of got harder, so I literally would see Will Gilkison, who really runs the program. I don't know what his title is. Senior something something something. He runs everything, and I would be walking past him in the hall. "Got one; got one." Then he would come back after the next meeting. "Ah, they canceled. We can't do it." It wasn't, obviously, the planes. It was crew. It was staffing the planes. Finally, we found one. We had to go on two different planes, so myself and a couple of guys and then the whole squad of players, we came down from Newark, but the rest of the staff came down. We had to drive up to White Plains to get the plane, and then we sat on the runway for two and a half hours in Newark, and that was interesting. The kids were great, though. They just kind of did their thing. Literally when the wheels got off the ground, I looked at Gilkison sitting next to me. I said: "All right, this is official. We're going." I didn't know if we would. There was a lot of funny suggestions, like, well, you can take a train. One guy wanted -- why don't we get a cruise ship and take it -- I said, we'll do all those things. You got it.

Q. Love it. Then, also, if you could just describe the emotions for you. Not only having coached in Tampa

and also recruited this area so heavily during your first tenure at Rutgers, the emotions for you coming here to Northeast Florida.

GREG SCHIANO: I check the weather right away. I love Florida. I think it's a great place, and I told these guys right away. I said, it's going to be in the 70s all week, and they've had a chance to enjoy it. I have not seen it, but my wife told me there was a bunch of guys at the pool and having fun. That to me is what it's about. It's a reward. I'm thrilled for them.

Q. (Off microphone)

NOAH VEDRAL: Wake has a great offense. They have a great team. They're 17th in the country. They deserve a lot of respect, and our coaches put together a really, really good game plan to take advantage of some of things we've seen on tape, and we've been really working hard this week to kind of knock some of the rust off, but at the same time being aggressive and being confident in what we do. We have a lot of banked reps this season, and we're going to rely on that. We're going to use that to carry us through a lot of the game, and we're going to try to maximize our opportunities while minimizing our risks.

Q. Going back to the rust part of things, as quarterback, the most rhythmic position on the field -- I mean, still working out, but getting back in the rhythm of things. How do you expect to go back out there tomorrow?

NOAH VEDRAL: From a physical standpoint, I can speak for a lot of our team, we feel good and rested and we're excited to play. I would say the thing I was most stressed about was reading signals. It's a language you speak, and when you don't speak it for a little bit, it gets rusty. The good news is that one comes back probably faster than anything. Other than that, I wouldn't say we're very rusty at all at this point. Feeling really good.

Q. Coach, I know Pitt and Rutgers haven't always been the best of friends, but in the ACC Championship game they really helped kind of expose some flaws, I guess, for Wake. Have you modelled the game plan after what they did?

GREG SCHIANO: I think it's hard. Sometimes people say, well, just do what they did. If that's not in your system, it's not the easiest thing to do. That's why you break down multiple opponents, and that's why time is a nice thing to have when you are getting ready. A regular preparation for a football game, our young coaches are always a week ahead, so you have the stuff done. When you get on the

plane or you go to your hotel at home, the whole breakdown is done except one game, the game that your future opponent is going to play the same day you're playing. We had none of that. What we just tried to do was get as many -- as soon as we thought we might go, I told our young guys, I said, you've got to break down these games. I said, I got to be honest, we may not use any of it, but it's not going to hurt you. It's going to make you a better coach because this is a really good team, and you'll learn some things. I think they were probably as happy as anybody that all their work got to be used, but you can't really copy something that you don't do. You could, but I don't know how good you would get. Noah used a term that we're very fond of, "banked reps." Cumulative repetitions. Football is a game of repetition. The more you do something and it becomes second nature, you can do it under stress. When you make the changes, there are coaches and teams that do it. We haven't figured out how to do that.

Q. Julius, I think this will be your 58th game. A career record that will never be broken unless there's another pandemic that we don't know about all the time and they give a sixth year senior another year of eligibility. Can you put in perspective just how you've been able to play every week, week in, week out. And I guess as a follow-up to Greg, as a guy who has seen a lot of football, how impressive is it for nose tackle to do it, to play 58 games in a row?

JULIUS TURNER: Basically, it's really just staying in the treatment room. Just being able to get my body right, but honestly, I think I'm blessed. I'm a big believer in God, so I think I'm blessed. We were on the way here. Adam was talking to me and said, we go to a bowl game, I'm going to break your record, right? I'm, like, what? I had to look it up and count his games. It might get broke next year if they go to a bowl game. I'm just blessed to be here.

GREG SCHIANO: It's a great point, Keith. The position that Julius plays I would say 80% of the time every play you at least start by getting blocked by two people. To stay healthy that many games and to be able to show up each week, and I can promise I say stay healthy, this guy is a tough guy. He has played with a lot of pain because of the love he has for his teammates and our program, so that doesn't go missed by me. We're very appreciative of the toughness that he has displayed every week.

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