

TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Wake Forest vs Rutgers

Friday, December 31, 2021

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

Rutgers Scarlet Knights Coach Greg Schiano Johnny Langan

Press Conference

Wake Forest 38, Rutgers 10

GREG SCHIANO: I would like to thank our players, first and foremost, for the effort that they made to reconvene back in New Jersey and get ready for the game. It didn't go the way that we wanted or planned, but I'm proud of them. Also, our coaching staff. The amount of work that they did to get this thing together, all our administration, our athletic director, Pat Hobbs; our president, Jonathan Holloway, who signed off -- he and the board signed off for us to come play.

Really cool to see all the Rutgers fans. It means a lot to our players and to us that that many people in eight days' notice found a way to get to Jacksonville and get to the game. I'm really grateful.

Disappointed that we couldn't pull it off, but hats off to Wake Forest. They have a really good football team. Fifth-rated scoring offense in the country. You can see that. Quarterback is a real fine player. So is the receiver, No. 9. You talk about elite players.

Overall I thought this was great for our university. It was really, really good for our program, the fact that we can get this experience and build upon it, really good. We had some young players that stepped up today. For many different reasons, a lot of our guys didn't play, and young guys stepped up, and I'm really proud of them. Proud of the way they attacked things.

I'll answer any questions that you have and try to help.

Q. Greg, you talked about having to play a lot of guys. I know without Bo, without Isaiah, without 03, was it all hands on deck in the game planning stage, and can you assess just how all these young guys played?



GREG SCHIANO: I won't get into particulars with every guy, but I think it definitely was all hands on deck. We knew the temperature and the opponent was going to wear us down. Especially their style of play on offense.

I think that for a while there we played really good complementary football, and then it got away a little bit. Really, I think when you are going against a good opponent, coaches always look at it only from their side. They're a good football team. They won 11 games this year.

I'm proud of those young players that stepped up, though. It was something to see them go out and play with confidence. That's what I wanted to see. We have some really young talented players on our program. You never know how they're going to play until you put them in, and they stepped up.

Q. Coach, you're exiting the field after a 28-point loss. You're raising your fist in the air to fans who are clapping. That's not a typical exit from a game like that. Could you talk about what you were feeling at that moment?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I think what we did has never been done before, and we had the expectation we didn't come down here to keep it close or make it look good. We came down here to win.

Our fans, I was amazed. Honestly, I didn't notice -- I was so into the game, I didn't notice until I was coming off the field, and I saw all our people in scarlet, and I was taken aback, like, wow, that's really cool that they would travel and do that.

We'll never accept losing. That's not what we do, but in this situation I was grateful for their support.

Q. As a follow-up, 10, 20 years from now, will you remember more that you weren't able to win this game, or will you remember more what you did to get to this game?

GREG SCHIANO: I will remember more about what we



did to get to this game. This is the hardest week of work that I've ever done as a coach, and I've done it for 34 years. So, yeah, I'll remember everything it took and all the people who made it possible because I wasn't alone. It was a whole staff of people that went -- I don't even say above and beyond because that wasn't even -- almost a little bit, you know, unhealthy. But they wanted to do it, we wanted to do it, so we made it happen.

Q. Speak to the character of your team and how you feel it's going to bode as you enter into the 2022 season.

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I am encouraged that our culture is growing and the foundation has been laid in our program. It means nothing -- as I always tell our team, it means nothing unless we learn from it and get better from it.

I don't believe there's such thing as failing, unless you stop, unless you quit. You just keep failing forward until you are successful, and that's what we're going to do. We're building something here, and I thought this week was a very big, good step in our building process.

Q. Greg, this was the first extended look we had of Gavin there. Was that always the plan, and overall, what did you think of the way he performed?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I had a different job today, so there were times that I was kind of just halfway paying attention. I was calling the defense and doing all that stuff, and we did it together, but I had the say, so I can't really tell you. I saw one time when he took off running, and I said, oh, he is going to get caught. No, he doesn't. He is a talented guy. We all know that. He is a great kid.

I think it's going to be a great competition come springtime, but I thought Noah played well. I didn't think Gavin got many opportunities. It just didn't kind of come out that way. But we planned on playing all three quarterbacks. That was the plan.

Q. I guess you mentioned the other day how excited Johnny was to play in this game. I guess what was it like to see him have that type of game today, and how valuable is it to have a player who can do that? We've seen it all season, but just what it can do for your offense?

GREG SCHIANO: It's great. He is a football player -- if you looked in the dictionary, Johnny would be staring you back under "football player." He loves the game. He is very talented, can do a lot of things, and we have to continue to grow with him in the program.

He made that switch to a full-time tight end, so I think he can be talented there along with Matt and Victor. That room went from being one that we were really concerned about to being one that we're counting on.

Q. I think we asked you like a month ago to assess the season. Now having the bowl game and having just a little bit of time to kind of let it all sink in, just how would you assess the season overall?

GREG SCHIANO: Nothing has changed from what we assessed at the end of the season. There was an additional game and kind of what I summed up today. I was really pleased. I thought I was going to have to wait until springtime to see that, and we actually got to see it against live competition against a really good football team. So that gives me a nice game to study and watch some of our younger players.

As a player, it's always nice to watch someone on tape do the technique, but it's really cool when you get to watch yourself do it. And I know that you should learn from other people, and they do; but when you watch yourself on the tape, that gives you another -- I think another step in the learning. Some of these guys got quite a few plays on tape today.

Q. I know you're going to kind of play aggressive on offense, but whose idea was it to change quarterbacks five plays in a row?

GREG SCHIANO: Sean had that one. I said to him -- he said, You sure? I said, Coach, you do what you think is best. And Sean is not afraid to be imaginative and try to do things if he thinks it's going to help us to win. He doesn't do it just to do it, but there was reasons behind everything.

Like I said, I'm grateful to our staff, how hard they worked, right up until the last play, trying to teach our players that you never ever let up. I said it in there. I didn't think our guys flinched at all. And they were disappointed about stuff, but they didn't flinch during the game, and that's part of chop. You got to be able to do that.

Q. We saw Wake Forest came out very, very fast, very fast tempo. Hardly any time between snaps. How difficult was that to prepare for, especially with the very limited time that you had to prepare for that offense?

GREG SCHIANO: My hat's off to our scout team, our young coaches that run the scout team. They did an incredible job. I told them at the end of the week, I said, You guys overtrained us, which is good. Our scout team

was going faster than they were, so I was really pleased with that.

I think fatigue got us a little bit in the second half. It adds up. Especially in the heat that they're not accustomed to right now. There's no excuses. It's just what happened. But we knew that was going to be the game, and we decided to play in it. And I can tell you that every single guy in that locker room fully expected to win. That's why we came down.

We're disappointed, yet encouraged.

Guys, I appreciate it. It's been a great week. I want to thank everybody in the city of Jacksonville. It's really been -- our kids have had an unbelievable time, and to the bowl committee, Greg, I appreciate everything. It's been a heck of a week. Thank you.

Q. I think you started the game at H back. You played running back. You played tight end. You played wide receiver. How difficult was it preparing for it, and just how do you think you did overall?

JOHNNY LANGAN: Definitely preparing for three different positions comes with some toughness, but I've been playing football my whole life, and it just comes natural to me.

Q. Johnny, could you take us through before the game. Coach said you were the one sending out the Gator emojis, the most excited to play. What did you think when you heard you might come here? Just take us through that whole --

JOHNNY LANGAN: Definitely I pride myself as a football player, and if there's a chance to play one more game, I'm all for it. Once I heard that there was a possibility of us playing another game, I reached out directly to Coach, Coach Schiano and Coach Gleeson, and I'm just really happy we had another opportunity to play football.

Q. Johnny, can you kind of just describe what this week was like between getting back to campus, I know you don't live far away, but just getting everybody back to campus, the limited practice time, getting down here, the entire experience and how strange it all was? What was this all like for you?

JOHNNY LANGAN: It was definitely a rush, a rush to get everything in. Normally you have a whole month to get ready for the bowl game. So definitely got short-changed a little bit there, but it was just a great experience, and definitely opened my eyes to what it's like to be in a bowl game and definitely motivates me a lot more to get one

next year.

Q. As a competitor, the outcome was not what you expected. What are some additional take-aways you can take from today's game that you feel is going to help as you go into the spring and as you go into next season?

JOHNNY LANGAN: We had a lot of guys out and a lot of young guys stepped up, and I think it was a great opportunity for them. Obviously, the score was not the outcome we wanted, but there was some good things to take from the young guys, and, yeah.

Q. Along those lines, you were in the huddle with Gavin, his first extended look. What did you think of the way he played?

JOHNNY LANGAN: I thought Gavin played great. He just turned 18 like a month ago or something like that. He is going to get with Coach Gleeson, and I'm excited to see what he does in the future.

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