

# TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Notre Dame vs South Carolina

Thursday, December 29, 2022

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

**South Carolina Gamecocks**

**Coach Shane Beamer**

**Eric Douglas**

**Jovaughn Gwyn**

**Brad Johnson**

**Dakereon Joyner**

**Spencer Rattler**

Press Conference

TOM NORTON: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the press conference for South Carolina.

I'll hand it over to you, Coach, to open it up.

SHANE BEAMER: Thanks to everyone for coming out. Certainly want to thank Greg McGarity and everyone here involved with the Gator Bowl. It's been a fantastic week. What a first-class group they are, and what a great time that we've had down here.

It's been smooth, and we've had a fantastic week of fun and preparation. Appreciate them and the bowl that they put on.

Certainly want to thank our group outside, the Dream Team from Dreams Come True. Certainly I know I did, I think I speak for these guys, had a blast outside with them here these last few minutes. Certainly puts things in perspective as well about what's really important in life. Really enjoyed getting to know that group.

Also had a good week, like I said. Obviously we're 24 hours out from kickoff. Excited about the opportunity to play a really, really well-coached and really, really good Notre Dame team. Ton of respect for Coach Freeman and what he's done in year one and the challenge they present.



I know our guys are excited and eager to get out there and perform in what should be a great crowd of garnet and black out there in that stadium tomorrow.

Really fortunate to be joined up here by some fantastic young men and leaders on our football team in these guys. Appreciate everything that they're about as players and people and the way that they've led our football team, guys that joined us this year like Spencer, then some older guys like Eric and Brad and Jovaughn and DK, guys that did not have to come back for this season and chose to come back because they had higher goals and higher expectations in what they did last season.

Have a fantastic opportunity tomorrow to cap things off and finish this thing on a really, really, really high note as well.

With that, be glad to take any questions you guys have.

TOM NORTON: Questions, please.

**Q. Shane, you've got a young man there as a wide receiver, but he completed all nine of his passes in a bowl game last year. A punter who has never thrown an incomplete pass. You have a defensive tackle who caught a pass and faked field goal. I don't expect you to give me your game plan; however, does all this serve a purpose, does it help run your base stuff with the threat of all that out there?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, absolutely. All those guys that you're referring to are really, really good just football players in general. You referenced DK, what he's done throwing the ball, catching the ball, running the ball. He can do so much. Certainly from a defensive standpoint, he presents problems to defenses because he can do so much.

Then the other guys that you've talked about, Tonka and Kai Kroeger, absolutely, whether it be from a special teams standpoint, the threat of fakes and things like that, absolutely.

We want to be aggressive in all three phases: offense, defense, special teams. When you have guys that can do



different things, it certainly helps for sure. The more you can do as a football player, the better. Those guys are all really good football players, really good athletes.

You referenced those three. I'd say we got a lot of guys like that as well. Particularly when you get in bowl games, the more you can do the better when you have rosters that aren't quite the same as what they were at the end of the regular season. It helps them in their future, the more things you can do in all three phases, the more value you bring to a team.

**Q. Eric and Brad, you guys have been here for a combined dozen years. Last ride tomorrow. Has that even crossed your mind, going into this prep?**

BRAD JOHNSON: I mean, yeah, it has a little bit. I've tried not to dwell on it too much. I think I was asked the other day in an interview kind of like what my thought process was going into it, kind of this being my last game.

Yeah, I said that I was just going to enjoy every moment of it, especially like with my teammates, just trying to soak in every single moment of it. It's a special opportunity to be able to attend a bowl game and to play in one. This being my last one with these guys, I just wanted to soak in every single opportunity and every single moment I can possibly soak in.

These are special times. These guys, times with these guys, you don't get those back. So, yeah, definitely I've not been focusing on it being my last game, but definitely focusing on just emphasizing everything and being able to soak it all in. That's been my thought process.

ERIC DOUGLAS: Like Brad said, I started my first bowl game experience in Florida, my last bowl game experience is ending in Florida.

The first time was pretty good. I'm trying to go out here with these teammates, brothers I've been with, like you said, six years, some of them I met this year. I want to go out there and emphasize what we've been building. Know what I'm saying?

This is the reason we came back for. This is not the height of this program. Far after we gone, it's going to keep rising and keep going up. That's what we want to do, that's what we set.

**Q. Spencer and Dakereon, a lot of folks on the outside make a lot of guys that aren't here. How much does it mean to you guys to have the guys that are here? What do you talk about as far as trying to make the most of the guys that are around and playing in this**

**game?**

DAKEREON JOYNER: All we got is all we need. Know what I'm saying? The guys that are not here, but focus on the guys we do have in our room, on our staff and stuff like that.

We're here to focus on the game ahead, you know what I'm saying? Worrying about our preparation and getting ready for the game.

SPENCER RATTLER: Yeah, what DK said, we got a lot of new faces on the offensive and defensive side of the ball, special teams as well. We've been just helping these guys. They're great ball players. They've been showing up throughout practice, just bringing their confidence along, showing them the way. Knowing they'll make plays for us on Saturday or tomorrow, on Friday (smiling).

SHANE BEAMER: I like the way you think. He's in game mode there (laughter). It's normal Tuesday, normal Wednesday, today is our Friday.

**Q. Shane, what's been giving you the most headaches, preparing a team that's different because of the opt-outs and transfers, or preparing to face a team that's going through the same thing, different than they were in the regular season?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, they both present challenges. Certainly Notre Dame is different on offense and defense with some of their guys. Special teams as well, because some of those guys were key contributors.

It certainly presents some unique challenges for us, guys, like Spencer said, that are in different roles. It's an awesome opportunity for a lot of guys.

To me, I just look at it kind of the way college football is now. When you turn on bowl games, sometimes it's a completely different team in some ways. We're not nearly in, I don't want to say as bad of shape, there's a lot of teams that their whole roster is gone. That's not the case here. We've got some guys that played meaningful snaps against Clemson that aren't here, but I just look around our room and I see a whole bunch of dudes that have made a ton of plays for us this season that are here.

You look at some of the big plays in that Clemson game and Tennessee game, throughout the year, the guys that made plays in those games are still here in Jacksonville with us right now.

It is certainly different, but it's exciting, too. There's a lot of guys that have done a lot of great things for us this season



that will continue hopefully tomorrow, too.

**Q. Shane, we saw you Monday. You say Jalen Brooks was doubtful. Any chance he could still play?**

SHANE BEAMER: I would say he's out at this point, for sure. Certainly he's been here working really hard for us this week. Don't expect him to play tomorrow.

**Q. Spencer, a lot of players opt out this time of year. Why was playing in this bowl game so important for you?**

SPENCER RATTLER: I mean, just like it's the right thing to do. We put in all this work throughout the season. This is family, these are my brothers up here. Playing for Coach Beamer, we want to finish this thing out right for this season with this team.

We put in a lot of hard work in the off-season and in the season. We're excited to cap this thing off with a big game tomorrow.

**Q. Spencer, Juice has talked a little bit about your decision being a factor in his decision. How important is having that connection between the two of you especially in a game like this where you're thin at running back, tight end?**

SPENCER RATTLER: Most definitely. Juice is a big-time weapon for us, just like DK, a lot of these other guys on the team. He's definitely a factor for us. He's been working his tail off this week.

I'd say neither of us are thinking about our decision right now. Our focus is what can we do to help this team the most tomorrow. We've been preparing. We got another day today out on the field. All of us are going to sharpen it up today, roll in to tomorrow confident and ready to go.

**Q. Jovaughn, you could still have the option to play beyond this season for South Carolina. If you look back at your time at Carolina, what has stood out to you?**

JOVAUGHN GWYN: What stood out the most is the relationships I created, whether it's coach, player, the people at the Dodie, nutrition, even like our janitors and whatnot. Just meeting those people, building those relationships over the years. Like I'm still friends with people that are here, that are not here no more. I'd say that's the biggest thing, just the relationships and the people I met.

**Q. Spencer, when do you expect to announce your**

**decision? To clarify, whether or not to come back to South Carolina or go to the NFL, or is the transfer portal an option?**

SPENCER RATTLER: No, the last thing I want to do is talk about my decisions. We got a lot of guys up here ready to play tomorrow. We're focused, like I said, on the game tomorrow, the task at hand. For all of us, our decisions after that will be made.

Like I said, we're locked in on this game tomorrow.

**Q. Shane, you said thank God for Nate Adkins a bunch these last couple weeks. What has he meant to this program?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, Nate has been a stud. He just does so much. He wasn't flashy, but we knew when he decided to come what a great football player we were getting just from a toughness standpoint, in the run game. I think he's one of these guys that said earlier in the season they loved him because he was like an extra offensive lineman with his mentality in there.

He's got the respect of his teammates because of what he does. He's really a better athlete, as he showed in the Clemson game, than people give him credit for from a pass catching standpoint.

You guys probably noticed when we had some running back injuries, he really became a running back from a pass protection deal. We threw a touchdown pass to him from the running back position against Clemson because he was lined up as will be against Tennessee to help with pass protection and things like that.

He's a Swiss Army knife that does it all, and he's really, really good on special teams. He's been a starter on our punt team, our kickoff return team. He really can play everywhere. We got to be smart with how we use him for sure.

He's just steady, like these guys are right up here with me. Just consistent day in, day out. Just a really good football player. Extremely valuable to this football team on and off the field.

**Q. Do you want to say who is calling the plays tomorrow?**

SHANE BEAMER: No.

**Q. Spencer, as far as the last month of the season goes, your play, was there something different that clicked? At what point did you feel like some of those**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**games were still out there for you?**

SPENCER RATTLER: Yeah, just hard work. Like Coach Beamer says, staying consistent, knowing that time will come for all of us when it will just pop.

We got hot towards the end of the season when it was most important. Like Coach Beamer said, they remember November, and that was our biggest month for us. That's why we're here right now.

I would say it clicked for all of us. We didn't really change too much, we just changed a few things, and it worked out for us, yeah.

**Q. Coach Beamer, we're talking a lot about the X's and O's. Can you describe the experience and what it's been like this week.**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, it's been great. I'm a bowl game guy. Love bowl games, what they mean to college football, for sure. I've been a part of a lot of different bowl games. This bowl is first class with the way they do things, the excitement level here. I think they've done a great job of giving our guys activities and things to do but also giving them their free time. We're staying out by the beach. That's been great. We've really enjoyed it.

To me, that's what bowl games are, you're there to win a football game, it's a lot of work, but there needs to be some fun and enjoyment as well because these guys have worked their butts off to get to this point.

The fact that we were 1-2 at one point. I was getting asked questions about whether this team had given up and quit. Since that point, I think we're 7-2 since that point. They've earned the right to be here because of their leadership and the way that they've played.

We're here to win a football game, but we want them to have some fun, have a chance to finish this season the right way because of all the hard work they've put in to getting to a bowl game like the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville. That's exactly what this week has been.

It's no surprise, my dad coached in five of these, I think, as a coach at Virginia Tech, five Gator Bowls. I know every time he came, he had an amazing experience. It's only gotten better with Greg and the rest of his staff's leadership.

**Q. Shane, I'm sure probably it's on a case-by-case basis, but do you have a policy as far as when guys opt out, do they have the potential to come back -- excuse me, enter the transfer portal, do they have an**

**opportunity to come back? If somebody wants to enter the transfer portal, can they play in the bowl game?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, in regards to entering the portal and playing, no. I don't let them. Whether that's right, wrong, indifferent, that's kind of how I feel. To me, I don't want somebody that's one foot in, one foot out. Frankly, we had a couple of the players on our team that entered the portal and asked me if they could enter the portal and still play in the bowl game. I told them no, you're either with us or you're not.

I don't want somebody down here spending half their time thinking about where their next stop is and things like that.

In regards to entering the portal and coming back, I think each situation is different. I'll say this, the guys that are in the portal for us or have entered the portal, I'll tell them that I'll help you in any way, if you want to reach out to somebody, I'm glad to help you and I will.

I don't continue to have contact with them where I'm texting them and asking them to come back. If they enter the portal for a reason, if for whatever reason they want to reach out and talk about coming back, we can have that conversation.

Haven't had that with anyone yet. I wouldn't say I anticipate it this year either.

Again, I wish them well. A lot of these guys I get texts from, whether guys that left last year, Jason Brown, E.J. Jenkins that I still hear from or guys that are in the portal now, I'm pulling for them. They've got to do what's best for them as far as their situations, but I've always got to do what's best for the Carolina football team program.

**Q. Eric, you mentioned this game not being the height of the program. Can you talk about the progress you've seen over your career that this program has made? What's next for it?**

ERIC DOUGLAS: Just looking at what Coach Beamer has built. Everybody in the locker room, they believe in it. It shows. You see the enthusiasm. You see the fight, the will that we go out there with.

Like Spencer said, they remember November. We went out there, and a lot of the world didn't believe in us, but we knew what we had in that locker room. We locked on and threw away all the trash that was going on. We locked in.

Like I said, this is not the height of the program because you see what Coach Beamer is bringing in. We got guys



out there was just in high school two weeks ago, out there looking like grown men, you know what I'm saying?

When I say this is not the height of the program, I mean that. Everything that this man right here is building, a lot of people believe it.

If anybody out there doubts and they say they a fan of this team, they not, so...

SHANE BEAMER: I appreciate that. Anything we do from here on out is going to be because the foundation these guys laid and their leadership as well. This group will always be remembered here at Carolina, and rightfully so.

**Q. Spencer, we're trying to get to know Sam Hartman a little bit. The QB1 experience, that documentary you went through, would you have gotten to know Sam at all from that? Did you ever talk to him about it, what it was like to go through it? Do you know Sam? How did being part of a documentary make you grow up faster?**

SPENCER RATTLER: I mean, it was what it was. I never talked to Sam about that. I met Sam at the Manning Passing Academy this summer. Great dude. Hung out a lot with him, competed with him. He's a great guy.

Yeah, that's all I really got to say about that.

**Q. When you take a transfer, an experienced transfer quarterback as the face of your program, what kind of questions do you have once he's there? How does he earn your trust? How did Spencer earn your trust?**

SHANE BEAMER: Brad is playing sick today. You're asking all the offensive guys. Let's get some love for the defense. Then DK.

DAKEREON JOYNER: Spencer, it was so easy for Spencer to come in and join with us. His character, his leadership fit well with our culture. It wasn't hard at all. We accepted him with open arms.

We knew what kind of guy he was. We knew what kind of talent he was. He came in and embraced our culture. It was smooth sailing for him.

BRAD JOHNSON: Spencer is a real good guy. Me not knowing him before he came here, just a little bit from his previous season at Oklahoma, I knew he could play, I knew he could ball.

I feel like for everybody who arrives at a new destination, whether it's a job or a sporting club, whatever it is, I feel

like you got to prove yourself. You feel me?

I don't think it's like anything is given. That's what he did. He didn't come in and expect people to be like, I know y'all know who I am, I already got my respect.

He came in, had his head down and he worked. As soon as I seen that, he pretty much had my respect. He also put it on display on the field, which is the other side of that.

With those two things, ever since then we took off. He's another one of my brothers that we added on this year that I just met. He proved himself. He didn't expect anything to be handed to him when he got here. He proved himself.

**Q. What are your early impressions of Pup? How is he going to take over in the linebacker room?**

BRAD JOHNSON: I don't know why they call him Pup. He's huge. He doesn't resemble a puppy at all.

He's young, 17 years old, which blew my mind. When he first got here, I was 17. I went through my first fall camp when I was 17 years old. I kind of resemble with him in that.

But, yeah, he's a great kid. He's a quick and fast learner. He's like a sponge really. Anything that he can try to pick up, he's trying to pick it up. We're in the meetings and we're getting ready for Notre Dame. Of course, he's not playing in the game this week, but he's there and he's with us in practice.

He's asking just as many questions as we are about pickups on routes, run fits, stuff like that. You can tell he's one of those guys, he wants to learn, he wants to be better, he wants to be great.

Coach Beamer found a great one. He's got him at a young age. Continue to be developed by great coaches. The sky's the limit for him.

**Q. Dakereon, what has this past year been like for you after winning the MVP? Swiss Army knife of this team. How has that changed from your first three or four years?**

DAKEREON JOYNER: Definitely been a blessing for me. I've embraced every opportunity, moment that I've had. I'm thankful for the role I've played on this team. I'm a guy that whatever is going to help the team win, whatever is going to benefit us in the best way possible I do.

I never question my coaches' thoughts. I'm a guy that just wants to help our team win. You know what I'm saying?



Give us the best chance to go out and compete at the highest level, go in big games.

I'm prepared for every moment, ready for every opportunity, and go Gamecocks.

TOM NORTON: Thank you, everybody.

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