

TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Notre Dame vs South Carolina

Friday, December 30, 2022

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

South Carolina Gamecocks Coach Shane Beamer Press Conference

Notre Dame 45, South Carolina 38

SHANE BEAMER: First of all, congratulations to Coach Freeman and Notre Dame. He's got a heck of a team, and what a football game that was out there tonight, and what a great environment. Congratulations to them.

Heck of a game. Certainly we had our opportunities. When you score twice on defense, you ought to win the football game, and had some sloppiness out there certainly at times, but just so proud of our football team. Played with, I think, 12 guys tonight on offense and defense that played against Clemson that didn't play tonight, so for us to be down that many players and for those guys to play their butts off like they did and leave everything out there like they did, I'm really, really, really proud to be their coach.

Just the fight, we just said in the locker room in there, we've got a hurting group of guys that left it all out there and played for one another, and it's special what we have in that locker room. Very few teams, I think -- I don't know, it's just unique what we have.

Certainly want to thank our fans that made the trip down to Jacksonville and Greg McGarity and the Gator Bowl and the week they put on for us. We had a great time. Not the outcome that we wanted, but what an environment that was out there tonight. So thankful for our fans and the way they traveled down here. We've got the best fan base in the country, and they showed it, as well.

Questions?

Q. Shane, after Xavier's second touchdown, the offense seemed to kind of bog. I think four drives minus-14 yards. Did they throw something different at you? Was it guys not executing?



SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, they didn't do anything different, we just didn't perform as well as we needed to. Had an opportunity there after the interception that Nick Barrett got, plus territory. I think we were up one score at that point. We've got to punch that in for seven at that point. Give them credit, they've got a good football team. They kind of did what they do, and we got beat out there on the perimeter a couple times on some perimeter plays, and just didn't execute as well as we needed to.

Q. From the press box it looked like Freddie was calling plays for you guys. Can you confirm that, and what sort of went into the game plan --

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, it was a group effort. The whole staff was doing a great job. Freddie and Nick Coleman did a great job throughout the game of doing stuff, along with the rest of the offensive staff. Freddie and Nick were in the office while most of the staff was out on the road recruiting so they were able to really do a great job of putting the initial game plan together, and then there was great collaboration on the headphones today amongst the entire offensive staff.

Q. How difficult was it to try to put a run game together when obviously you're missing some pieces?

SHANE BEAMER: It's tough, no excuse. They're good up front. They're hard to run the football on.

We were able to pop some runs in there early and not well enough, consistently enough, and losing Nate Adkins, I think we lost him in the third quarter for the rest of the game, and that was really, really, really, really -- we didn't have really -- we had one tight end coming into the game essentially, and we lost him to an upper body injury in the second half. That's not to make excuses, but that certainly affected our ability to do some things in the run game, as well.

Q. What can you say about the overall progress this season, what it means for your program, and can you say a little bit about Kai Kroeger today and overall this season?



SHANE BEAMER: I would hope the progress that we've made is extremely evident with what we've done to this point. That's why we put so much into this season, Gene, that's why that locker room is hurting like they are right now. But to be a team that was 1-2 and then to win seven out of nine games, to beat Kentucky for the first time up there in forever, to beat Texas A&M for literally the first time ever, to beat back-to-back top-10 teams in back-to-back weeks as an unranked opponent, that's only the seventh time that's ever happened in the history of college football, to come down here and play our asses off -- excuse my language -- my daughter back there is going to be extremely mad at me, but to play our rear ends off today like we did and -- we had guys at halftime that just the things they had to do at halftime to be able to go back out there and play in the second half, I would hope that it's very evident, the progress that we've made.

Eric Douglas said it to you guys in that press conference yesterday that we've laid a great foundation, but this program is just getting started, and he's exactly right. We're not happy about the outcome today, but to be sitting here and playing in a bowl game like this with a chance to win a ninth game, when two years ago when we took over this program, certainly we were a long way from having a chance to win nine games in Jacksonville and the Gator Bowl, and then Kai was awesome.

We've got to be better on the punt team, had too many mechanical issues today and penalties and they lead the country in blocked punts, so it was kind of a cat-and-mouse game out there and they certainly got us on a couple of them, delay of games, but Kai did an awesome job of controlling field position, and then another fake for a completion/touchdown, as well. That's something we've been working since literally last year, and finally got an opportunity to call it, that fake field goal.

Q. What were your thoughts on that fake field goal that ended up being the touchdown? Why did you call that at that point in time, and was that your own spin on Beamer Ball?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, it was just something that we had some options off that play and something that we felt good about going into the game. I just felt we had some momentum, and I forget what yard line we were on, but there was a little bit of wind out there and had confidence in Mitch being able to hit a field goal there, no question about it, but just something that we felt good about, and Kai's got some options off the play based on how they cover it, and we've got some pretty good athletes out there in Hunter Rogers and Mitch Jeter both and Kai has got a great feel for it.

Just wanted to be aggressive coming into this game, and that was an opportunity for us to do something. We knew special teams was going to be key in this game. They had a huge play on the fake punt, and we certainly had some opportunities to do some things, as well, and didn't get it done.

Q. It seems like the wide receivers and defensive backs played a lot of young guys. How do you feel like those two groups played with so many young guys, and can you take me through the end of the first half, the big 30-yard swing with the two penalties there?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, we certainly played some really, really young guys on the perimeter, on defense. Keenan Nelson was a guy that had hardly played at all this year, and he started today at nickel. Then O'Donnell Fortune and Marcellas Dial has played a lot of snaps, but OD hasn't a ton. We started three true freshmen in the secondary today with DQ and Nick and Keenan, and those guys did a great job, and then on the perimeter, as well, we went into this game with knowing that Leggett, Juice, AB and DK were going to be our top-four receivers, and after that it was going to be a combination of Payton Mangrum, who has primarily been a special teams guy for us, Landon Samson, who I don't think he's played, and then O'Mega Blake, who really hasn't played. Those guys got in there and battled and got thrown into some tough situations for sure, but certainly did a great job.

Then the end of the first half, hmm, had a return where obviously we got a great stop, awesome job by our defense getting a stop, we got them backed up, got a chance now for field position and had a return that DK is faking like he's catching the ball and trying to draw some guys up there, which we did, pulled their gunner off DK and then got a return started with AB, and I didn't see the replay, but I thought it was a tough call. If DK wanted to blow the guy up, he would have blown the guy up. DK is teaching what we teach, that technique, and I was told it was a blind-side block, which maybe it was, I don't know, but I saw DK trying to be a smart football player and not blow the guy up and kind of throw his back into it just to keep from getting a penalty.

Then I've got to be better. Can't cost us 15 yards there with a penalty. Thank God for John McDaid and the SEC and the officiating crews we had in that league. Disappointed with some of the things that happened. A couple of those guys did our bowl game last year, as well. I'm so thankful for John and his leadership in our conference. I'll say this, I don't believe I deserved to get a flag. I hate to see it sometimes when officials try to make the game about them, and I'll be honest, I think a couple times in the first half that took place. We got talked to

more in 30 minutes than we did 12 games in the SEC this season.

You know, the group of guys that were on our sideline in the second half, awesome, professional and all that. First half, disappointed with some things. But again, I've got to be better. I can't get us 15-yard penalties, and I told the team that at halftime.

Q. Going back to the big picture, you've been part of a lot of teams. When you think of this team, what are you going to remember most about this season in general?

SHANE BEAMER: Oh, man. Just so many memories. I know I told you guys and you all thought I was like a broken record every week, but they came, they loved to work, they love each other, they care about each other. We had an hour and 15-minute team meeting last night of just guys, the seniors talking about what people mean to them and the players talking about what the seniors mean to them and whatnot.

It's a group that just loves to work. When I told you guys every single Sunday night that they just came to work every single Sunday, win or lose, they did. We never had to motivate them to go practice hard or never had to motivate them to get out there and go back to work. They love to compete, they love to work. They don't complain.

We had some awesome practices this month, and that's what I'll remember. When we had adversity this season, we always responded. We lost two games, two of our first three games, and I'm getting asked about the give-up and stuff like that on this team, and what did we do, we responded and won seven of nine, like I said. Got a bunch of fighters, and anytime we lost a game, we always came right back and responded the next week.

It just says it all for us to play like we did against Florida and come back and do what we did the next week against Tennessee. It's just a group of guys that believe in each other and love one another, and I hope that showed, and I hope our fans, and I believe they do, can appreciate our team and the passion and joy they play with.

We need to -- tonight I needed to coach better and we needed to perform better in a lot of areas for sure, because I wasn't good enough.

Q. Buckner, their quarterback, hadn't played in a while. How different did he look today than the little film you did have on film, and how does he change them with that mobility?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, he's a good athlete. He was the starting quarterback at the beginning of the season for a reason, and I know how talented Drew Pyne is. When I was at Oklahoma we recruited Drew Pyne like crazy and were crushed when we didn't get him and I know how talented Drew is, so for Tyler, I don't know him, but for him to be named the starting quarterback going into the season kind of tells you everything you needed to know about him.

I don't know the severity of his injury that he had at the beginning of the season, but what a tough kid he is to go out there and run the ball like they did tonight. They made some nice calls with him, and he's a good athlete. He made some big-time throws, and they certainly caught our young DBs in some plays that were tough on us, and he did a great job of capitalizing on it, as well. But he didn't look a lot different to answer your question. He looked good the first two games, and he played well tonight.

Q. Can you tell us a little more about DQ and the season that he had, a true freshman, played right away and showed a penchant for making some big plays for you?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, DQ is awesome. Him and Nick both, to come in as true freshmen from right in Columbia and not be recruited at all, they're awesome. DQ is a guy -- he's a smart kid. He played nickel throughout the season. He played safety today. He was starting on special teams today. Same thing for Nick.

Those guys continue to get better each and every week, and they're big-time players, and excited that they're just freshmen. We've got a lot of young players that played out there today, and they're only going to continue to get better.

Q. I'm sure that's a hard moment at the end to get that unsportsmanlike. What is the message to the guys after you have a game kind of end unsatisfyingly like that?

SHANE BEAMER: On that, I know they had the personal foul, unsportsmanlike earlier in the draw that gave us 15 yards and I didn't see exactly what happened. I think they were being pretty aggressive with Spencer on the ground. Official said he didn't see that. But regardless, they're usually going to catch the second guy. So we've got to be smarter there and not come in there and retaliate and get a 15-yard penalty there.

But they made the call, but that can't happen. We've been a disciplined football team, and we told the team coming into the game that in bowl games it's like a first game because there is such a long layoff, whether it be special

teams plays, you saw that today, missed tackles, but penalties especially.

We pride ourselves on playing smart football, and we did today. We didn't retaliate a couple times and they got 15-yard penalties, but certainly that's a critical one when you're in plus territory and then you get an intentional grounding -- I guess it was back to back plays, intentional grounding, and then a late hit unsportsmanlike, that's a tough way to finish for sure.

Q. Obviously emotional ending to the season, but when you look at kind of what you were saying, the progress from year one when you guys take over in December, December 6, 2020, to now, what does that look like, and where do you feel like you are right now as a program?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, we've accomplished a lot, to come in, and very few people, I think, thought in 2021 that we'd finish the season in a bowl game, and we finished the season in a bowl game, in a bowl victory in Charlotte last year. There's a lot of people that probably didn't think that we were going to -- we had a tough schedule this year and people didn't think we may be that bowl game this year, and not only did we get in a bowl game, we've won eight games and nationally ranked coming into this game, so we've made a ton of progress, and it's just the beginning.

Certainly the depth is not where it needs to be right now, and the way that we're -- the young men that we have in our program, the people that we have in our program, the way that we're recruiting right now with the signing class that we just put together that signed in December and the head start that we're on in the 2024 class and all that, as well, we're -- Eric said it yesterday in that press conference, we're headed this way, and we're just getting started for sure.

It's a journey, and today was a bump and really, really a loss that really hurt, but we've got the right people in our program. You can tell that by the hurt that's in that locker room right now. There's not many dry eyes, to say the least.

Q. Spencer Rattler, last three games played extremely well. Today's numbers weren't quite as good, but he made a lot of big time throws. What do you think has allowed him to finish the season the way he has?

SHANE BEAMER: He's a great player. He's a competitor. He's a great young man. I thought he -- I don't know what his stats were in the second half, but I know at halftime he was lighting it up and was like 21 of 25 or 26 or something at the half. Certainly had some pressure, and we've got to

help him with some of the throws in the second half. But he's a heck of a football player that continued to get better as the season went on.

Certainly was a catalyst to us having the success that we had throughout the season, as well.

Thanks to again Greg McGarity and the Gator Bowl, everyone at the Sawgrass Marriott that we stayed this week, they were awesome. It's been a first-class experience. I want to send my thoughts and prayers out to the family of Joe Taylor in South Carolina that died unexpectedly yesterday and tragically. Somebody that has done so much for the state of South Carolina, somebody has done so much for the city of Columbia, lives around the corner from me and is a great friend and a great, great Gamecock. I talked to his son today and I told him we were going to try to get him one tonight and we weren't able to get it done, so hate that but thinking of he and his family and hope all Gamecocks are, also, and thanks to all of you. I know there's some new faces, but I appreciate all the beat people that cover us and have to spend time with me every Sunday on a teleconference and every Tuesday in the press conference and every postgame deal like this. I appreciate the sacrifices that you guys make and the hard work that y'all put in throughout the year, as well. God bless, everybody travel safe, and go Gamecocks.

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