

TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Clemson vs Kentucky

Friday, December 29, 2023

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

Kentucky Wildcats

Deone Walker

Press Conference

Clemson-38, Kentucky-35

Q. What was the mood on that last drive? The defense had stood up so many times on those short fields, and then they were able to kind of break through on that last one.

DEONE WALKER: I would say the whole emphasis on that drive was put up or shut up. I mean, they got their best level and we got ours. We just weren't able to stick it out.

I still love my defense. I love my corners, my free safeties, my safeties, my D-line, my linebackers.

We were all still together, kept the morale up.

Q. It seemed like you all, the defense especially, came to this game wanting to make a statement. Did you all have a certain just kind of call to action that you all wanted to make sure that you were known by this game?

DEONE WALKER: Not really. As a team, we wanted to have our seniors go out with a bang. Like Ray Davis, I won't get to see him next year or play with him. Just not leaving our seniors with that sour taste in their mouth.

Q. Deone, was it demoralizing to kind of get those stops, but to see the offense turn it over? How did you all keep coming back for more?

DEONE WALKER: It's always frustrating when as a team we can't get it right, we can't get stuff going. I still love my offense. I love my OF COURSE. I love my O-line. I love my receivers.

Just trying to keep the morale with everyone up, just trying to stay together.



Q. The fans are typically pretty critical of the pass rush. You all got after it today. What kind of message did you send about how this defense can play moving forward?

DEONE WALKER: Looking at the 2024 season, we've got a lot of additions. We have a lot of experience. We're looking bright with the pass rush.

I love my D-line. We all work together, and you all can tell by the second half of the season we started clicking.

Q. Coach Stoops was saying how this is a very important offseason. The next few months are very important. What do you feel like has to be done between now and the start of spring practice?

DEONE WALKER: I feel like we have to get after it. The spring is when the championships are won. We just have to go after it at practice. First we have to heal up. A lot of people are playing with bruises, bangs. Maxwell, he got out because something happened with his hand again. We just all have to get back healthy and practice for these hard times like the game today.

Q. You heard your head coach talking about your leadership and the way that you practice. How do you continue that into the offseason specifically?

DEONE WALKER: Just being more vocal. Leading by example. Whenever we get ready to run, make sure I'm the first up there. Just making sure the morale is up even though we had this tough loss. Making sure everyone's hands are good, they don't have any complaints with the coaches because if they have any, they can go through me, and I go to the coaches. You know?

Q. Kind of same question. How have you evolved as a leader this season because being with you guys all year, it seems like you've really stepped up in that leadership role.

DEONE WALKER: Yeah, just leading by example, like I said. Just being more vocal. Being more outgoing. Being me. You know, being Big Deone. Just having that



outgoing, warm aura around me to make my teammates feel like: Oh, yeah, I can tell him about that; yeah, I have a complaint about this, how this coach has been acting towards me.

It weeds everything out.

Q. Deone, Ray was up here and talked how in the future he'll be able to tell people he played in this game, and it was a fun one. Is that harder for you to say because you're a defender? I don't feel like you enjoyed seeing that many points scored.

DEONE WALKER: Of course. A defense's dream is to keep them at a goose egg, but I'm thankful that we got picked for this bowl game. It was an experience. It was great. Ten out of ten. I would do it again next year, hopefully, if we get picked again.

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