

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Rutgers vs Miami

Monday, December 18, 2023

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Miami Hurricanes

Jalen Rivers

Offensive Lineman

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will continue with offensive lineman Jalen Rivers.

Q. Jalen, since you're playing in the game, I'm wondering if that's a good sign about 2024? Have you made any decisions about what you are going to do next season yet?

JALEN RIVERS: I didn't publicly make any announcement or anything, but I was planning to play in this game, and then I do plan to come back for another year too. I just didn't publicly announce it.

Talking with Coach Cristobal and talking to Coach Mirabal, I see where the program is going. And it's going in the right direction, and I'm glad to be a part of it. So that's why I've made the decision to come back another year.

Q. I was going to ask about basically the same thing, but just how tough of a decision was that for you? What were the factors that you were considering? Obviously the NFL is an alluring destination. How difficult of a decision was it for you? How long did it take you to kind of weigh your options and stuff?

JALEN RIVERS: I was thinking about it really for a while, like a couple of weeks at the end of the season. I just talked with my parents, the coaches, with other people as well, getting information, a lot of feedback, what I'm projected.

I just wanted -- depending on what the grade was or anything, I just wanted to come back another year just to hone on my skills more and just to get better.

That was my biggest concern. Am I fully ready? Do I think I could leave? Do I want to come back another year? I felt like it was best for me to come back.

Q. Obviously you guys Coach Guidry was just talking about how he had to reshape the whole secondary. On your end you are going to, I assume, not have Javion or Matt for the bowl game since I assume they're opting out. Can you talk about some of the guys who are working there and how confident you are in those guys at left guard and at center?

JALEN RIVERS: I'm confident in the guys that are stepping up. Like center we have Ryan Rodriguez right now and Matt McCoy. We have Lou Cristobal. We have a lot of guys filling in those spots, seeing what the best fit is for that position.

It's a competition every day, so there's nothing set in stone just now. But they knew that when Matt was leaving and Javion was leaving, they knew they had to step up. They worked a lot being good leaders. We saw them every practice getting better since they've been here.

They've been working at it, and I feel very confident playing next to any of the guys that stepped up and are planning to take that spot. Yeah, they're ready and prepared, and they've been working at it for a minute now.

Q. Great news about you coming back.

JALEN RIVERS: Yes, ma'am.

Q. With a new quarterback starting, does it feel like a whole new team in a way? A lot of guys have left. How is the transition? I'm wondering how Jacurri is doing, first of all.

JALEN RIVERS: I mean, it's great. It doesn't matter who was at quarterback with me. We just have to protect them. That's the biggest thing as an offensive lineman. It doesn't matter who is behind you. We just have to protect them. We have to trust them.

It's next man up. Tyler left. Unfortunately Henry got hurt, so we knew J.B. was going to have to step up.

So it's not a whole new team. It's just we have to pick them up. The O-line has been there this whole time. We

have a new quarterback behind us, just like when we had Emory behind us. Next man up. We trust you, we're going to help you and encourage you. That's what we're there for.

Q. How is he doing, though? How does he seem to be doing so far?

JALEN RIVERS: He's doing good. He's getting better every day, and he's building that trust. We're building that trust with him. He's building that trust with us and getting better each day.

Q. Then the bowl game, you know, UM hasn't had a lot of luck in bowl games. Why is it important? I know every game is important, but what can a bowl win do for you?

JALEN RIVERS: We haven't won a bowl game in a minute. I don't know when that was, but it's been a minute. It's important to just change that trajectory of us not winning bowl games.

This will be an important step in the right direction, and it's a step in the right direction leading into next year as well so we can showcase what we have and what we put on film right now so we can have a better opportunity, a better confidence going into next year as well.

Q. Then I'll just throw some of them out here. Playing at Yankee Stadium, what will that be like for you? Have you ever been there and all that stuff?

JALEN RIVERS: It will be very special, and I know they're going to put on a great bowl for us. It will be a good challenge for us going against one of the best teams in that conference, Big Ten Conference, Rutgers.

I've been to New York this past summer, but playing in a game there, it will be really special and great to be there during that time of the year. It's one of the best years to be in New York right now, so I know it's going to be special, and it will be a great game.

Q. You talked about center. Left guard. Were those guys also playing left guard -- with Javion gone, who are some of the options there?

JALEN RIVERS: Like I said earlier, right now left guard nothing is set in stone, but Matt McCoy, Lou Cristobal. We have other guards too, like Logan Sagapolu. Some other guys as well. Right now we just don't have a starting five or starting left guard, starting center just now.

Q. Yeah, kind of touching on that same subject. You

guys on the offensive line this year, everyone was healthy all year, knock on wood, which is not something that's common for an offensive line. How much of an adjustment is it to be playing with guys who haven't started, and then how much do you think that will help going into next season where some of the guys might be starters on the line next year?

JALEN RIVERS: It's very important because, like I said, next man up, but also it changes a lot.

During the season we all were healthy, but it could have been a time where, hey, you have to play next to somebody that you're not used to. I could have played next to somebody that wasn't Javion. It is what it is at the end of the day.

That's what we're treating it like now. Matt and Javion is gone. Next man up. You have to readjust and teach those guys that position. You have to learn off each other and be a cohesive unit like we were all year.

That goes to show our leadership. Me and Coop have to step up. Me, CC, and Coop, it doesn't matter if you are a freshman or not, you have been playing this whole year against some guys. We have a center and a left guard we need to get readjusted to.

I feel like it will be great, and I feel like we're handling that challenge really well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Jalen.

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