

# Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl Media Conference

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

## Head Coach Greg Schiano

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

## Head Coach Mario Cristobal

Miami Hurricanes

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. Again, tomorrow we have the University of Miami and Rutgers University playing at 2:15 p.m. at Yankee Stadium in the Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl. The game will be broadcast on ESPN nationally and also broadcast by ESPN Radio on a national basis and here locally in this market.

One additional note, earlier today Rutgers and Miami players rang the bell at the New York Stock Exchange. During this call we're going to send out a note about a media advisory for tomorrow's press conference, a pregame press conference that will feature school administrators and members of the Pinstripe Bowl executive staff.

With that said, we'll first kick it over to each coach who can speak to the experience during bowl week, how it's been for their team, the preparations, and also the activities they have been involved with.

We'll start with Miami and Coach Cristobal.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Thank you for having me. Thank you for having our entire team and our entire organization. All I can say is everything has been just a first-class experience from top to bottom for everybody involved.

From the moment we arrived, the way that we have been welcomed, the events planned for our players and the families of our coaches have been extremely entertaining, a lot of fun, a lot of energy. A lot of guys have never been to New York City before, so the energy of the city has certainly caught them by surprise.

Sure, they're really excited to play the football game, but spending the last four or five days up here has been just very different and an experience they'll remember the rest

of their lives and certainly are very appreciative of everyone's efforts for making our stay such a great one.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll turn it over to Coach Schiano.

GREG SCHIANO: Well, to echo Mario's comments, really everyone with the Yankees organization has done a tremendous job. I would like to thank Randy Levine, Mark Holtzman, and John Mosley especially. You guys have been awesome, and really your whole staff. Everybody has been so accommodating at every stop along the way. All the events that you had planned for our players, that's what bowl season is about.

To me, college football bowl games are a reward to your players for what they've done during the season. I just think that the bowl system is still one of the best things going, and we need to make sure that in college football we keep that intact.

People like the New York Yankees and the Bad Boy Mowers people that have made this just such a great event, we can't thank you enough, and now we're looking forward to playing this ball game against a really, really fine Miami team in one of the most historic sports venues in the world. So what more could you ask for?

THE MODERATOR: Coaches, thank you very much. Now we will begin Q&A.

**Q. This question is for Mario. Can you talk about -- you mentioned before how important it is to finish this season off the right way. For this team can you weigh in a little bit more on that? What makes it so important? Because this program has struggled in the last 11 bowl games. Also if you can, talk about how these bowl practices have been especially helpful for the younger players on the team? Thanks.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Anybody that's playing in the postseason has earned the opportunity to play in the postseason. That's something our team really takes to heart. Hard work pays off, and this team has certainly done a really good job of fighting through adversity and

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earning themselves an opportunity against a great Rutgers football team.

So for us, that's what it's all about. Any time we have a chance to play football, it doesn't matter where and when it is, our guys love to play football, and we're recruiting and developing more and more guys that love the game, that want to play the game. To have this venue and this type of environment and atmosphere is certainly a tremendous boon and a bonus for everybody.

When you have these practices, it's not only that you have practices. You have practices during the time of year where school is already out, final exams are done. So you have their full attention. You can really focus on developing technique and fundamentals, football IQ, spending time with your players, which it's a rare time; right? During the year, people don't realize, when it becomes a dead period, you actually have time to be around your players.

So for the coaching staff, for the team itself, for the development of this current team and the future itself, again, it's extremely invaluable. That's the best way to put it.

**Q. Coach Schiano, just the same thought. How does the experience of this bowl game help you next year? Not just the young players, but just the culture of being involved in the postseason?**

GREG SCHIANO: Well, as Coach said, it's critical; right? There's a lot of really fine programs that are not playing in the postseason, so we don't ever take it for granted.

At Rutgers our goal was, first off, to get it back to where this is an annual event where we're going to bowl games every year. Then hopefully you're playing for championships every year. That's the plan. But before you play for championships, you need to get into the bowl games.

That's what our plan is every year to make this something that our fans can take part in, our players certainly can be part of. When you get that postseason, part of that time is dedicated solely to the development of your younger guys or the guys that haven't gotten that many snaps in competition and to be able to be coached -- all the coaching is focused on them. Then all the video is focused on them. I think that's huge.

During the season they maybe have watched the guys that are playing on Saturdays, and they don't get to see themselves very much, and there's no substitute for actually doing it and then being coached off that video in

meetings.

So the development of the younger players, but don't ever lose sight of the reward that a bowl game is for your current team. The minute bowl games aren't a reward, then there's no motivation. At Rutgers there'll always be a reward.

**Q. My question is for Mario. Are there any guys who missed extended time during the season, Akheem Mesidor, Nyjalik Kelly, TreVonte' Citizen, guys who will be able to play in the bowl game tomorrow? Then, also, what have you seen from Matthew McCoy, Logan Sagapolu, Ryan Rodriguez, guys who are going to fill in for Javion [Cohen] and Matt [Lee] on the offensive line tomorrow?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Akheem and Nyjalik, they've been out for almost the entire season. They will not play in the game. TreVonte' Citizen is available. Up front I think all of those guys have done a good job all week long.

Ryan has certainly put in and invested a bunch of time, and his development has been incredible, especially over the last couple of weeks. When you start taking all those reps, like Coach Schiano had mentioned earlier.

Him, Logan, Luis Cristobal, all these guys are mixing and matching. They're getting a bunch of reps. They've done a really good job.

We're excited to watch these guys play. They work well together. I think the pride that's instilled by Anez Cooper, by Francis [Mauigoa], by Jalen Rivers, those guys really drive that offensive line, and they hold those guys accountable from the first line all the way back to the end.

We expect those guys to really put together a really strong couple of practices, walk-throughs that we have left, and put on a really good performance.

**Q. This is for both coaches. Coach Schiano, I'll start with you. Same question. In terms of the events of this week, has there been a favorite event for you or your team or a most striking event maybe for your players given all that you've done already before the lead-up to kickoff tomorrow?**

GREG SCHIANO: They've all been really super. They really have been. The events have been great. To see our two young men along with Miami's two players ring the bell is something very special.

I would say, and I have never been to the 9/11 Museum there. It was really something that took my breath away.

Having grown up here, having been coaching here when that tragedy occurred, to go through that and see it, it was moving.

I've already said I need to go back when I can spend a good part of a day and just take my time and read everything and listen to everything because it was very, very real. I mean, Mario can attest. He was here.

Right from our practice field you could see the smoke from New York City, and that's how close we are and how many people that were in our organization, me personally, that lost people that they were close to in that tragedy. I think that was moving.

We were talking today about it, actually. For a lot of these players, they weren't even born yet. So to make sure that it's never forgotten and that it stays current, I thought that was a great activity for both teams and both organizations.

But really there was no bad one. It was really a great week.

**Q. To both coaches: For Coach Cristobal, I want to run a spotlight on Jacurri Brown. You've had a lot of rotations at quarterback; right? Tyler Van Dyke is no longer with the program. Emory Williams, may he have a speedy recovery with the arm injury, but Jacurri Brown is the only scholarship quarterback that you have left on the roster. Just speak to what he has been showing at, practice and how excited are you for him to have his first game really all season, and what do you expect from him?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The whole team is excited for him. He is a tremendous competitor, and he has shown when he has gotten into games before that he is extremely productive and can really make explosive plays.

When a guy like that gets the opportunity to have not only the spotlight on him as you mentioned, but to have all the reps that he has had throughout the course of the last four weeks, it builds a lot of confidence. The confidence that he has in himself is reflected in his teammates and their approach to practice, and their energy and their enthusiasm that surrounds him when he makes plays in practice.

He has everybody excited, and he has everybody's confidence, most importantly, so we're looking forward to him playing tomorrow.

**Q. Coach Schiano, quick question for you. Two years ago you guys had the opportunity to pinch-hit for Texas A&M in the Gator Bowl on shorter notice. This**

**year you've known you've been going bowling since October. So for a lot of the players who had that experience two years ago, how is the preparation and lead-up to this bowl game this year been different?**

GREG SCHIANO: Well, it's been completely different. I mean, we had eight days to mobilize a team, get them back on campus, get some semblance of a walk-through and then get on a plane, which was almost impossible to find back then because it was kind of like the second wave of COVID, so you couldn't get flight crews, you couldn't get planes.

In retrospect, who knows if that was the best decision. I just love playing. I love competing. So we had a chance to go play one more that year, and we did it.

This year, totally different. It was our traditional bowl, the way we prepare, the way that we develop. All the events and all the things that we do here that make bowl games a reward. Night and day.

Now we have a great opportunity to play a really good Miami team at Yankee Stadium. We're really fired up to do that.

**Q. How many days practice did you guys actually have to prepare? How difficult is it when you are missing a lot of guys? How does it change the whole thing?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I believe we used 11, 12 of the days. Not all of them were in pads. Some of them were similar to what player-led practices would look like as well as skill instruction, some of the stuff you do during the offseason, but the way that we practice, I mean, heck, during fall camp we two-spot just about everything. So everybody is getting the same amount of reps.

When these guys were called upon to step up and play, they've done a really good job, and they've earned the confidence again of their teammates and the coaches. It's been fun.

Coach Schiano mentioned earlier, you can't underestimate how powerful and how impactful repetitions are. The more reps guys get, the more comfortable they feel, and all of a sudden they start playing faster, they start playing better.

It's been a lot of fun. It's gotten us really enthused watching some of these younger guys play because that's a really talented freshman class, and a lot of those guys are going to have an opportunity both on offense, defense, and on special teams to show that tomorrow. It's been really good.

**Q. Also, you touched on this a little and Coach Schiano did, some of the stuff you did was really cool this week. The 9/11. I know you went to Radio City, ringing the bell this morning. What do you think affected your players the most and why? The feedback you got and you also.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Oh, 9/11. I came here in the summertime. We spent almost the entire day there. So we have the windows. They provide a great window for us to get through there, but I can tell you, families and our players are going to come back to it to do it again and come back to New York and just in general to come back and do a lot of the things again.

The events have been off the charts. Everything just first-class. Everything. It just feels big. You know, it feels New York-ish. Our guys have really enjoyed it.

Some of them, the simplicity of Ray's Pizza right down the street, they've been killing that. Not only that, you know what, they've provided the ability to our meeting rooms, our practice facilities. Columbia has been super gracious. The New York Giants and their facility. We got a chance to catch up with some former players and former teammates there as well yesterday.

All in all, you couldn't ask for a better balance of both enjoying and earned bowl opportunity and also preparing at a high level.

**Q. Last thing is, I'm not sure if Adam asked you this specifically. Is Branson Deen playing in this game?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yes, he is.

**Q. Greg, you mentioned how banged up some of the guys were at the end of the season. What's this month been like for those guys in healing up, and have you been able to rest them, and do you expect to be closer to full strength come game time?**

GREG SCHIANO: That's a good question, Bobby. The guys that had season-ending injuries, obviously they're not going to be back. They had surgery, and they're on the mend.

The guys that were bumped up, and a lot of it was just overuse, right, over the course of the season. I think the way we do our bowl preparation allowed those guys to get really a few good weeks of healing in before they really put the pedal down in our preparation for the University of Miami.

I think we're definitely in a much better place physically than we were on that back part of the season, and I can feel the excitement from those guys because they weren't really playing at the level they're capable, and that's frustrating for them. To be able to go out and play at full power, full speed I think will be exciting for them.

**Q. Coach Cristobal, what feedback have you seen from the fans here in New York? I know you've seen some guys at the hotel taking pictures and all that. What are you expecting to see at Yankee Stadium tomorrow?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I expect our people to show up strong. Our alumni base here is large, and certainly they're very enthusiastic. Every year we have multiple events up here for our alumni, and so to have the opportunity to play up here and at Yankee Stadium, we expect to have a strong showing tomorrow.

**Q. This one is also for Coach Schiano. This is the third time that Rutgers is playing in the Pinstripe Bowl in the last 12 years. Second time for you as head coach of this program. What's it like to represent the New Jersey/New York metropolitan area as the, for lack of a better term, home team here?**

GREG SCHIANO: It's fun. It really is. You see a lot of people while we're in New York. Today at the stock exchange, while we're doing different events, Rutgers fans, Rutgers alums, people that are -- when you are in New York City, there's so many. We have 600,000 living alumni, and so many of them are in New York metropolitan area.

It's great. It's great for our fans. It's great for our families. We're all going to be able to take part in the game. So we need to go out and play a great game for them as well as for ourselves.

**Q. Mario, you mentioned the freshman class, their talent level and everything. I can't remember who I was talking to earlier during the season. They basically said, I think about Francis Mauigoa, that when you play every day the first year, by the time you get to the end of the year, you're not really a freshman anymore. Is that how you feel about this freshman class, especially the guys who have been playing a lot, the Mark Fletchers, Francis Mauigoa, Rueben Bain? Do you feel like they've taken a big leap during the course of the season in terms of not just playing ability, but also their leadership and the more mental and emotional aspects of playing every day?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Without a doubt those guys made

their way up to the leadership council very quickly. They knew. We were very honest with them. The biggest thing we had to address here in coming to Miami was making sure that we elevated the caliber at all levels and the depth of the caliber of student-athletes, of players that we had in the program.

When you do that, that first full class, those guys are freshman. Sometimes you lose sight of that. When they were brought in, they were told, well, unfortunately you're not allowed to have a normal freshman experience. We're going to have to accelerate that. You're going to have to approach this like a professional, while also having the type of fun that you have when you are a freshman. The type of stuff and the type of experience you are supposed to have as a student-athlete. Tremendous progress by them.

They're relentless. Those guys are special. They really are. They're unique. They want to win. They want to push their teammates. They love being challenged, and everything for them is just football is fun for them, and it's contagious. Really fortunate to have guys like that on this team.

**Q. Greg, we spoke around Senior Day about how much this senior class means to you and how they stuck with you and kind of helped this program get to this next level now. I know they had the Gator Bowl two years ago, but for them to get this the traditional way and to have this reward, as you said earlier, what has that meant for you and to see them have this?**

GREG SCHIANO: It's meant a lot. As I said earlier, we have some guys that they didn't choose to come play for me and play for our staff. They chose something else. Yet, when we came, they bought into what we believe in, and they bought into our culture.

It wasn't pretty. We didn't have enough good players. We didn't have the things we needed in almost every area. Yet, they stuck with us and slowly we improved in every area, whether it be on the field, whether it be in the classroom, personnel, all kinds of things that needed to get better.

We're not where we need to be yet, but it's a heck of a lot better, and those guys are the reason for that. The ones that have stuck with it, they've provided the leadership.

Again, Coach Cristobal was talking about the leadership council. You have guys on the leadership council from all different ages, all different position groups. To have some of those fifth and sixth year seniors on that leadership council having a huge say, it means a lot to me.

So this bowl game, as I said, is a reward for them. If they think back to when they were freshmen, going to a bowl game was one of the furthest things in their mind. Now for them to be the ones that accomplished it, I'm happy for them.

**Q. Coach Cristobal, Cam declared for the draft this week. How would you recap his career as a Hurricane coming from Miami, staying home, and also making a big impact in his community during his time at Miami?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: True Miami Hurricane. Local guy. His impact was just as great off the field as it was on the field. You see how engaged he is with the community now. He's always involved in something and finding ways to give back and inspire. You know, particularly youth, right, and underprivileged youth at that.

Then his play on the field matched that. A guy that always on game day or I should say even on practice days, right, through the tough stuff. Also was a guy that bought into everything that we brought with us when we got here a year ago.

So super excited for him and his future and what it holds. His banner hangs high in the indoor, right, as an All American, which is really, really hard to do. In fact, the first true sophomore to ever accomplish that. Hats off to Cam and the rest of those guys. Special, special guy.

**Q. Greg, this one is for you. You've talked at length before about the importance of the practices with the postseason practice. As a coach looking in now the past couple of weeks where you reflect, where do you feel the biggest improvement has been for this team as a whole?**

GREG SCHIANO: Well, you hit it on the head. With for those young guys to get that experience and to be able to watch themselves on film, to get coached every day in practice and be the focal point of the coaching. Not listening to the coach talk to the first or second string guy, but be the guy who is the man that's in the drill every single rep. That's huge to be going through it yourself.

When we got to game prep, it was a little bit more like in season, but those first seven or eight practices to me, those are invaluable, and you wonder why winning begets winning. Those practices, that's half of spring practice right there.

These guys, when they get to spring will have all those repetitions under their belt. More importantly, they'll be able to watch their own film this offseason. They're so

different. I think Coach Cristobal mentioned it. They're so different when they're at the end of their season than when they entered training camp. They've gotten that much better. Then to have all that video to watch and study this offseason is going to be critical for their development.

**Q. This one is for Coach Schiano. You talk about the best backs in the Big Ten. Blake Corum out of Michigan, Braelon Allen out of Wisconsin. The Big Ten rushing leader resides with your football program, Kyle Monangai. Can you speak on his impact? Again, he announced recently that he is going to come back for another year and play for the Rutgers football program. Just talk about his impact, and I bet you're excited about that.**

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I am excited. Kyle had a huge impact on our program. Not only this year when the results came where he led the Big Ten in rushing, but his entire time here.

Kyle was a guy that was not heavily recruited out of high school. He was in a back field with a guy who was heavily recruited, and his high school coach told me, You got to believe me on this one, trust me. I've known him for a long time, and I listened to him.

I sure am glad we did because he has built himself, but all along he has been a great leader. He's a really, really bright guy, in the business school. As I tell him, when you are done with the NFL, you're going to darn near own the world. Don't forget your old coach. He is really a special guy. I am thrilled that he's decided to come back for another season.

**Q. Question for Mario. First, I appreciate the reminder to get some good pizza while I'm up here. Second, though, just I know you obviously are looking for a portal quarterback. Just how are you feeling, you and the staff feeling, about those efforts right now? Are you optimistic you're going to be able to get a guy? I know you can't mention any names obviously, but a guy that you want.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I'm glad you enjoyed the pizza recommendations, but you know me well enough. I never speak recruiting, and I was taught that by the guy on the screen here as well, so...

THE MODERATOR: Coaches, thank you both. Appreciate the time.

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