

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Rutgers vs Miami

Thursday, December 28, 2023

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Miami Hurricanes

Kiko Mauigoa

Jalen Rivers

Postgame Press Conference



Rutgers 31, Miami 24

Q. Tough way for the season to end for you guys. How do you think a game like today maybe helps you guys going into spring football, winter workouts, and everything?

FRANCISCO MAUIGOA: I mean, nobody really had an expectation of the new guys coming in, and I think these guys came up and stepped up to the plate and really proved themselves.

It didn't go our way. Rutgers had a good game plan too. They had good players, talented players.

We just have to finish better. We came with the mentality to win, and we didn't do that. Next time we'll try and perfect our craft to win games.

Q. Francisco, was this your first time in New York, and how would you recap the experience?

FRANCISCO MAUIGOA: This is my first time in New York. I enjoyed it. Pinstripe, it was an amazing opportunity to go around New York, showing us around. It was an amazing experience, but we have got to get back to work. Next year we're going to come back better.

Q. For you and your brother, how would you guys recap your first year at Miami and the work that you want to put in heading into next year?

FRANCISCO MAUIGOA: Oh, yes, you know there's still a lot of work to do. We a lot to improve on, and we're going to look at those, look back at the season, and fix the things that we need to work on and attack every day like it's our last day.

Keeping that mentality and just go day by day.

Q. The first question I have is for Kiko. Their running game, I think they racked up close to 200 yards on the ground. Just what was working for them in the run game?

FRANCISCO MAUIGOA: Oh, yes. Give credit to them. That was a really good running back. That's the No. 1 rushing team on the conference, and we just couldn't fit our gaps. We couldn't do our assignment. That's something we have to work on.

They game planned us, and we just have to adjust and fix the things that we didn't fix. That was all part of it.

Q. For Jalen, Jacurri starting at quarterback. A couple of linemen getting their first starts. Isaiah getting a start. How did the guys who kind of filled in this game -- how do you think they did running the offense? How do you think Jacurri did running the offense?

JALEN RIVERS: I felt like our new left guard, our center and Jacurri, they played -- I feel like they played great. They prepared for this moment since we told them, hey, Matt Lee is not coming back, Javion is not coming back, Tyler is in the transfer portal.

They took the opportunity to step up. They didn't shy away from it. They competed all during practice against one of our best defenses, which is our defense, and made them better. We had to step up to the plate because we're playing next to people that's new too.

So we had to be leaders. We had to show them the way and just bring them along with us. And blocking with whoever we had behind us, it didn't matter if it was a freshman or a walk-on. We had to make sure they were comfortable in front of us and behind us.

Q. Jalen, how have you seen Ryan Rodriguez come along leading up to today making the start? Obviously he has been here three years. This is a big moment for him.

JALEN RIVERS: When you are behind a lot of guys like Matt Lee, you look up. Matt Lee did a great job leading him and bringing him along, watching film with him and all that stuff.

I mean, when it was time for him to step up, he did a great job, and we made sure he was comfortable too, where some days he was like, oh, startled. We had to calm him down, like, hey, everything is going to be good.

I feel like he handled today very well because he got better each day.

Q. Mark Fletcher got hurt. How was that for your offensive line to take that moment in? What do you think about him as he can develop over the next couple of years?

JALEN RIVERS: He's a great running back. He does not play like a freshman. Obviously he played well throughout the season, and it's unfortunate he got hurt, but like we always say, next man up.

Henry had to step up even more, A.J., everybody that was in the lineup for running back, they had to step up. So I feel like they did a great job. One man down doesn't mean the whole offense is broken.

Q. Kiko, I wanted to ask you guys, you know, you guys don't often get the opportunity to play out of the conference against a Big Ten team like this. I just wanted to get your guys' perspective on the difference in style of game play and just what did that preparation look like this week heading into this game look like?

FRANCISCO MAUIGOA: I mean, this offense, they run the ball hard. I think that was the big difference. These guys came and just kept running the ball. We just couldn't figure out what was going on.

We kind of came back late, but it was too late. Credit is to them. They are very physical and up front, and they have a good quarterback that can run the ball and throw the ball too. So that's a big talent you can't shy away from. I think that was the big difference.

Q. Jalen, in your views from the offensive standpoint, obviously you guys kind of started slow. Jacurri eventually settled in. What do you think in terms of this momentum, going into that final quarter, maybe down to the last onside kick? What do you think about the momentum offensively you guys really gained today?

JALEN RIVERS: We went into this game like, okay, this is

the game plan. We did our game plan, and a lot of things, adversity struck throughout the game, so we had to make sure he was calm and we were all came. So when we had the momentum, we had to keep it up. When it didn't go our way, we had to come in the next drive and be, like, hey, we still have that confidence that we could pull this one win off.

Unfortunately it didn't come -- we didn't have the outcome we wanted to. The momentum changed, shifted a lot throughout the game, so we just had to maintain our composure.

Q. Jalen, how much could you tell Jacurri feeling more and more comfortable out there as the game progressed?

JALEN RIVERS: I mean, of course, it's his first game start in a minute, since last year I think. So it was kind of new to him, but he prepared when he had the opportunity to step up and when we got the call, hey, you have the start.

So he made sure he was comfortable. He came in the game. The games are different in practice, but the game, he settled in. We had to keep him comfortable too because if you have a quarterback behind you that's all over the place, that's not comfortable, then you're not going to do well. So we had to make sure he was calm throughout the whole game.

Q. X said on the radio a few minutes ago that he thinks the team is a lot better than you guys were a year ago and thinks you'll be a lot better a year from now. Obviously I'm sure you think the same thing or you probably wouldn't be coming back. What gives you guys the confidence to think this team is going to be improved a lot nine months from now?

JALEN RIVERS: You give credit to the guys like Coach Cristobal, the whole staff. Having that staff instilling the type of culture that we want to set, we have a standard, and you go into each year looking back at the last year wanting to get better.

So we learned from last year. We still have a lot to improve on, but we made a major step. Going into next year I feel like we can make that step to where we can come out with wins, at least outlast our opponents.

Q. The offensive line has come a long way from last year, and you still have a lot of young talent that either hasn't seen the field, has been injured. Guys like Anez, Samson, Frankie even. How do you feel like the youth of the O-line is developing, and where do you see the sky being the limit?

JALEN RIVERS: The guys you see now, you don't even see half of the guys that have been hurt. Frankie T., Samson, he got hurt. You don't see a lot of them guys, so we're still developing them guys, and them guys are available, like Matt McCoy, Lou [phonetic], he came and transferred in, Ryan Rodriguez. You got to see them guys improve.

I feel like Coach Cristobal does a great job of developing everybody. Not just certain guys, but everybody on the line. Whether you are a walk-on, backup, you have to be ready for the moment so guys like Ryan and Matt McCoy and Lou, they have to step up. There's no major drop-off.

I feel like we do a great job developing our younger guys so when you have times like this, you have to step up.

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