

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Boston College vs Nebraska

Friday, December 27, 2024

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Matt Rhule

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. Before we take questions, just wanted to open the floor to you to maybe briefly talk about what happened today at the Stock Exchange.

MATT RHULE: Well, first, obviously on behalf of our team, President Gold, our athletic director Troy Dannen, it's been an amazing week. Today was really, for me and Ty Robinson, Jahmal Banks, Isaac Gifford, an amazing opportunity to be at the heart of our country's economic system and be at the Stock Exchange.

Growing up here, if you would have told me that in one day I'd be on the floor of the Stock Exchange ringing the bell and then a couple hours later be on the field at Yankee Stadium, I never would have believed it. But it's been really, really great.

Very appreciative to the Yankees, to the Pinstripe Bowl, to Bad Boy Mowers. They've been first class all week, and we're really excited to play.

Q. You guys have had some newcomers join you guys for bowl prep over the past month. What's been your initial evaluation of those guys? And also, what kind of experience are they gaining not only from the month of practices or however long they've been here, but the on-site stuff with you guys out in New York?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, they were not able to practice until school was over here, so that was Saturday the 21st. They had to go through like that acclimatization phase.

So they haven't done everything in terms of on the field, but they've done a lot. It's been a great opportunity for them, obviously being here, being around the team, being in meetings. It's a jump start to their career, having a chance to meet the guys, I'm sure getting to know them



better and being a part of all the trips we've done.

You think about it, in one week we've taken our team to practice at the Giants, we've taken them to a Knicks game and they're here obviously at Yankee Stadium, three iconic franchises in pro sports, at the height of professional sports, so those freshmen, what a way to start college.

Q. Coach, just wanted to ask you, I know you've had a lot of exciting experiences this week. Any level of concern, or how do you get these guys focused for tomorrow amid a whole lot of good distraction?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I think the message that we sent to the guys was we're coming here to play a football game. That's why when we landed we went right to practice. The first thing we did upon getting here, we literally drove and put our pads on and started and hit. I think that's the message from day one.

We've given them some free time. We've done a lot of cool things, celebrated Christmas together, but at the end of the day, this is an opportunity for us to finish our season the right way versus an excellent football team in Boston College.

As a coach, I trust these guys. I think they'll be ready to go.

Q. Just curious your thoughts on BC as a whole, what stands out on film, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and just overall thoughts on BC?

MATT RHULE: Well, I think when you watch them offensively, they can run the football as well as anybody. They're physical, tough. They create alignment concerns with their use of tight ends and formations and edges.

They can run it on a day that it could be wet and cold. Obviously that's a good recipe for winning. They consistently win the turnover battle, which is probably the number one factor in winning football games.

Then defensively they're excellent pass rushers. They're physical. They're tough.



I think obviously when you see that football team, you think of Coach O'Brien, who he is. I think they're a mirror image of him. It's a really good match-up for us in terms of testing us to see where we're at.

Q. How have you seen John Butler navigate the changing parts of this month in his new role as the D-coordinator?

MATT RHULE: You know, it's been a lot of work for him in that he's coaching the secondary along with a couple of our young guys. He's been without a D-line coach this month. I started off doing it in Indy, going back to my roots, and then Phil Simpson came in to take the edges and has been taking the D-linemen, and Ira Lewis, our graduate assistant, has done a fantastic job.

But I think for John, building a staff, doing the transfer portal, recruiting constantly, getting ready for the game, game plan-wise, and then also being down a few coaches, I think he's just had to work more. But I think he's excited for it, and he's excited for this opportunity just to be our coordinator.

Q. Matt, just wanted to ask you about your impressions of Yankee Stadium serving as a football venue and your players being there. I'm sure there were a few moments where they had to look around and be taken aback by where they were?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, today is the first day that the players have been here. We even just gave them a few minutes just to walk around and look. To be here is amazing. To be in the Yankees' locker room is amazing. You're surrounded by greatness.

I know that we came on Tuesday night for a welcome event with Boston College and the people from the Yankees, from the Pinstripe Bowl and from Bad Boy Mowers, and seeing it for the first time from the upper deck -- a lot of times you play a football game in a baseball stadium, it's kind of shoe-horned in there. When they rebuilt Yankee Stadium, they certainly did it right because it fits perfectly, and I think it's going to be a great sight lines for people. It'll be a great football game.

Q. This is the program's first bowl game in almost close to a decade. How is this game a step in the right direction for the future of this team?

MATT RHULE: Well, I think when you play college football, you're wanting to obviously get to the postseason. We all want to win a National Championship. We all want to get to the College Football Playoff, which is the new,

obviously, path towards that.

This starts with our first opportunity to go to the postseason, to navigate the distractions and the opportunities and the challenges and the schedules and traveling and all those different things that you have to do.

It's the first time that we've won enough games to come here. I think that's really the biggest thing is that you have to earn the right to come to a bowl game, and we were able to do that this year, and now we have to go play well, and we have to go win. We have to train ourselves to show up in moments like this so that we can continue to win more games and hopefully qualify for things to come.

Q. Just how would you sum up the last few days of practice and maybe the level of focus you've seen from the team with their bowl game preparation?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I think we practiced really well. The guys have been on time. They've been attentive. They've managed -- again, they're walking around New York City. There's a lot of things to do that can pull you away, but they've been where they're supposed to be. They've done everything right, and they've practiced well.

We started the first Tuesday once we knew we were in a bowl game; we didn't wait. We've been practicing for several weeks now, a lot of practice, because that's what our young players need. Now we're here, getting into game prep, and I think the guys will be ready to go.

Q. Matt, going forward with the newer guys and their opportunities during these bowl practices, with Isaiah Neyor moving on, has there been a receiver or two that have emerged and maximized the increased opportunities they've had in those bowl practices in Isaiah's absence?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I think Jaylen Lloyd is a very, very talented player, and this has given him some more opportunities. Obviously given Jacory opportunities. Jahmal Banks has been really a starter for us all year but gives him some more opportunities. Then some of the young guys, the Keelan Smith who's really developing and coming along strong.

I think it's been good for all those guys to have some opportunities. Isaiah Garcia-Castaneda has done a really nice job, Alex Bullock. But I think Jaylen probably as a young player and Keelan have gotten some more opportunities.

Q. You've talked about it, but just the significance of inviting some of these former players to watch this



game tomorrow, what that means to you, why you decided to do that.

MATT RHULE: Yeah, you know, I showed up here two years ago and those guys didn't know who I was. They either decided to stay or they came in and joined us. We didn't quite get it done last year, but not for lack of trying. It's really not for their effort.

We made that promise to them that when they made a bowl game this year we'd bring them here. We've got guys coming from -- Noure is coming from Germany. We've got guys coming from all over.

It's a special group of young men, and I know they're rooting for us. Julie and I wanted to do some small way to tell them thank you, and I'm anxious to see them.

Q. I know you also talked about how beneficial getting these bowl practices would be for the overall growth of the program. I know you've had a lot of changes with transfer portal, coordinators. How have you seen or have you seen kind of that marked improvement that you were looking for out of this extra month?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, no doubt. You think about it, we started playing in July, and here we are December 27th, we're almost to January, and it's a lot of football.

But the guys have responded. As I said, we started right away the first Tuesday after the last game of the season, and I think you see guys getting better. Every day you're out there it helps. That competitive stamina, the ability to stay focused for this many months, to weather with the highs and lows, that's what great programs do.

So I think it's a good learning opportunity for our guys but also just the reps, just the practice has helped us.

Q. I'm just curious, you guys have had now a full month with the new calendar that you guys have in terms of not being on the road and recruiting and doing the things in December. What are your thoughts now going through this being in Lincoln the entire month of December versus having to navigate being on the road recruiting, and what's the schedule after the bowl game for you guys?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, it's different. I think seeing how fast the transfer portal is moving, I don't know that you can be on the road in December. You're basically starting first thing in the morning and you're working until -- into the evening, and you have people coming in -- we had people coming in pretty much all of December, also getting ready for the bowl.

We'll be back at work on the 1st, so there's no break, there's no vacation, there's no time away. It's the game and then we'll be ready to host people that first week.

Q. I just also wanted to ask, you what would it mean for the program to get that first bowl victory since 2015?

MATT RHULE: I mean, I think it's really, really important. A, kind of like you said, that's one part of it. I think also for our guys, we're playing an excellent football team, so to do that we'd have to play well, and to take all the practices that we've done and go out there and play well, that's what we're working at right now.

Our team knows how to practice. They know how to work. We're still figuring out how to win. So playing an excellent team like Boston College gives us another chance to do that.

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