

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Boston College vs Nebraska

Saturday, December 28, 2024

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Nebraska Cornhuskers Coach Matt Rhule

Press Conference

Nebraska 20, Boston College 15

MATT RHULE: I want to thank the Pinstripe Bowl. This will be a week full of memories for our guys they'll have for the rest of their life. Even to be in the Yankees' locker room, Aaron Boone allowed me to use his office. Just iconic to walk by and see all the Yankees, where they've signed things, whether they've signed the wall, to see the rings. That in and of itself is amazing. I want to thank the Pinstripe Bowl. I want to thank the New York Yankees. They've been awesome all week.

I want to thank Bad Boy Mowers. This is the first time a lot of our guys have done this. Great events. Even to see the 9/11 Memorial and Museum as a team together was something I thought brought our team together.

Grateful to all of them. Grateful to Dr. Gold and Troy Dannen and really all the staff and people. This was a big endeavor. Our staff worked really hard to put this thing together, coming to a bowl game. There wasn't really a manual about how to do a bowl game, and we haven't been to one in a long time, and they worked tirelessly to get it done.

Finally, just grateful to our players, our seniors. A lot of times we talk about who's not playing or who decided to leave, and I'm grateful for the guys who played, grateful for the guys who stayed. I told Ty Robinson, I don't think I'd play. I think he should be a first or second-round pick. And he was like, I didn't do all this to not play.

In a world where some guys don't want to do it, those guys wanted to do it. And they wanted to be here, and we wanted to play, and we wanted to play well.

I'll probably get a little bit emotional saying this, so please forgive me, but Rahmir has never allowed anyone really to



know what happened to him this year. But a year ago, he got hurt and missed the whole season. And I sat there with him in my office as he wept, and the opportunity came to come back this year, and he decided to come back with really no guarantees.

His mom was really, really sick for the whole season. I asked him to go home. President Gold intervened and got us in contact with doctors here that were taking care of his mom as she was preparing for hospice. And I asked Rahmir to go home, and he wouldn't go home. He had to play that game. He had to stay here with his teammates.

Went home bye week, asked me not to tell anyone, didn't want to be a distraction, only Emmett know. And he lost his mom in November.

I mean, those are the kids that got me into coaching. Those are the kids, men that keep me in coaching, and he's awesome, for him to go out there and do that today, for him to have that run, for us to have to get him out of the stands to get him to accept the MVP trophy. But it was never about him.

So forgive me for that, but I told him I was going to share that because it's never been about him. He loved his mother. He lost his mother. He cares about this team. I think this is a fitting end for him. I hope he wears his pads home on the subway and goes to his apartment, takes that MVP trophy and takes it out tonight somewhere. With that, that was long, I'm sorry, but I love that kid. I love those seniors, and I'm grateful for them.

With that, I'll take your questions.

Q. There was a lot of things that happened in this game. This was a full football game. When you think about, okay, why you won it, what do you feel like the determining factor was given everything that happened?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I mean, I think in a game where you turn the ball over twice, you're probably not going to win the game in the first half. But the times where we didn't turn the ball over, we scored the other two drives.



I thought we were able to up front, they weren't really able to give any pressure. We were able to protect, we were able to get the ball out. The field was wet down the one end, so we weren't ever able to win on the deep ball. We started hitting some crossers. I thought the defense played really well. We couldn't really get off the field on 3rd down. Credit to their quarterback, they had a good plan.

But we made some key 4th down stops, and we made the plays you need to made. We had the sack fumble, the 4th down stops. We were in significant control of the game, and obviously they came back.

And I was fired up for our offense. It was the first time the offense took the ball and said enough is enough and went down the field. Dylan pulled the ball twice on that drive, which is what quarterbacks are supposed to do. They're supposed to go make game-winning plays.

And then we ran power. Ty Robinson, D-tackle, goes over there, old-school football. I hope Nebraska fans are fired up. We won the game in the I-formation. Ran power and we made a great play. We made the plays you need to make to win the game. Obviously a lot to probably correct, but it was the last game of the year, so I can enjoy it.

Q. How does a game like this kind of sharpen your team moving forward into the off-season into spring and then into next season?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I think for us it's a little bit more in that we haven't ended many seasons on a win in a while. To go to a bowl game, you have to get used to going to the pro season. We wanted to go to the College Football Playoff. We want to national championships.

But playing that last game, going back out on a Tuesday, we came to New York City, we had no distractions, no one was late to anything, no one missed anything. All those things are how you win moving forward in my mind.

It was an experience we needed. And we played a lot of young players. Vincent Shavers was all over the field. Donovan Jones, he redshirted this year and he played corner for half the game. Got some young players some experience.

I think just the mindset of hey, we got it done in the postseason prepares us for the future. We've played a lot of young players, so now they have perspective, and this was a really good three or four weeks for us.

Q. Can you just talk about your defense in the red zone, obviously the stop on the 2-yard line, and at the

end of the first half that stop you had, too.

MATT RHULE: Yeah, John Butler, first-time coordinator for us, first time calling it, I felt like it was seamless. There was no drop-off. Obviously there was a couple players that didn't play in the game from the season and the other guys stepped up. John did a great job.

At the end of the day, Boston College did a nice job with some screens. They hit us on some screens that really hurt us. But for the most part, I thought the defense played really, really well. Down there we were trying to make them force -- they only kicked four field goals coming into this game this season, and then they obviously missed the first one. So we felt pretty good about our opportunity to, hey, they're not going to kick a field goal, it's going to be four downs. Kind of knew how to address it, and John did a really good job.

Q. The blocked punt at the end and the two-point score on the extra point, how do you initially assess all of that in the context of some of the stuff you've also had happen all season on special teams?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, it wasn't very good. You can't get a blocked punt. I didn't even see necessarily how it happened or who was wrong or right. So I have to see that. I have to go back and see that. Obviously DeShon is on the punt team, and he came off. But I don't know if it was him, have to look at the replay. Will have to go back and look at that. Just a bad snap. We've had snapping issues all year long. I think we've tried to address that already for next year.

But I thought we did some good plays, too. Obviously the fake punt was kind of a big call, gutsy call that they've worked and executed, and then the faked field goal was -- probably should have just dropped back and thrown again, but we had the numbers there. Just the kid made a good play.

Yeah, there's no secret, to be where we want to be next year, we have to be the same defensively, probably a little better in some areas. We have to really improve on offense, and I think we're all seeing sometimes signs of what it's going to look like, and then special teams we need a complete and total overhaul of that. We have to be better at that.

I always put those things on my shoulders. We'll get it done. But it has not been good enough this year.

Q. Matt, Jahmal Banks came up with several big catches today. What did you like about that one-on-one match-up and the way Dylan targeted that



today?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, you know, Boston College came out and played a lot of man, a lot of pressure. And we did a nice job picking those pressures up. And then you need guys to win one-on-one, and Jahmal was able to win several of those plays. Had another one that got called back for the hands to the face on us or whatever it was.

But Jahmal is another one of those guys, man, he's out there every day at practice. He's a leader. He's made that room better. If you're in that room with him, you can't say you don't know what it looks like because he's made that room better. He does everything right. It was a big catch for him. He played really well, won on a slant versus man, won on a go ball versus man, made a great one-handed catch. That got us going. Appreciate him very much.

Q. I was just wondering, what do you have to say to all the players as a collective group and then also all the fans that showed up today for you guys?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, the fans were awesome. They've been awesome all year. I heard our guys early on in the first drive, they're like, hey, this is going to be a home game. So I think that sends a message to our guys that hey, we'd better play well.

I can't thank the fans enough. It was cool just being downtown, walking around seeing people wearing Nebraska colors in Times Square. Very cool.

Then with the players, my message to them was the old-school things of hard work and -- they work. They're better now than they were earlier in the year. They're better now than they were three weeks ago. We have big plans when we come back on January 20th or whatever it is. We're going to work. We're going to double down on what we've done. That's the only way to make a jump. And I think they all understand that, and I think they all have aspirations of something really special at Nebraska.

Q. Pass rushes affecting the quarterback takes two pieces, you've got to get there and then you've got to defend on the back end. Felt like today you did that with a lot of young guys. The way that those young guys played today, coupled with obviously Ty playing, how encouraged were you by the pass rush and what it can be going forward?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, we believe that the game is won primarily at the line of scrimmage. You have to be able to run the ball, stop the run. You have to be able to protect and affect the passer.

That's why they ran so many screens, because we had good rush. The quarterback I thought played really well. He stepped up. He ran a couple times. As you said, we won on the back end. They were hitting us on sort of a dagger route they hit repetitively, and John was yelling it out, and they still hit it, and finally we settled down and started taking that away.

Those players are good players. We believe in them. And we believe they're just going to get better and better and better.

It was good to get them a chance to play. Donovan was playing safety all year. Bye weeks took a couple reps at corner. And he's really taken off.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

MATT RHULE: We'll see. John has some interchangeable pieces. Amare Sanders got in there. He's a redshirt player. Caleb Benning got in there. He redshirted. All those kids who played, they also redshirted this year. They've got a lot of football ahead of them.

Q. That last Rahmir Johnson run, that 4th and 1 to seal the win, what was that play call, and how do you think the offense executed that?

MATT RHULE: I mean, I didn't see the tape. So probably when I watch the tape, I'll say, oh, we should have done this better, that better.

But there was no secret. It was almost like 4th and 2. It was probably a long -- they called the penalty, taken it back. So it was a little wonky out there in terms of what to do.

But the guys wanted it, and they wanted that play. Ty comes in, called that play stud right 30 hammer. It's been called that since Temple. It's our play. I think we scored on that on the touchdown that Kwinten Ives scored, and there again Rahmir at the end. Everyone has to do their job on that play to have a chance. It was a great run. Even then five points ball security, he knew the situation, he knew four-minute, and really good play.

Q. Obviously you know how much this program means to Dylan and his family. Just to see the elation he showed after the game, what does a game like this do for his development? How do you put this past year in perspective for him?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I mean, I think he's had a great first year. Playing quarterback as a freshman in the Big Ten is not easy. One of the things I told Dylan was, hey, you can

go some places where the team at the present moment is significantly better than all the teams around them, and then you're going to have to maybe once a year or twice a year make a throw to win a game, and then you're going to get drafted by probably the worst team in the NFL, and they're going to say, hey, put every game on your back.

So you look at the great players in the NFL, the Mahomes, every game that Mahomes was at Texas Tech he had to go win the game for them to even have a chance.

So Dylan has had those opportunities this year. Dylan, for us to have a chance, you're going to have to play well. Everyone else has to do the same thing, but that last drive, for us to win the game, he had to go play well.

For him to pull the ball -- the one he pulled the ball, we never suspected he was going to pull it there, has that run, gets hit, pulls the ball on the second one, now he slid, but still he did the things that are hard to do to win a game.

And that's what I'm looking for in a quarterback. Everyone is talking right now about who should be the first pick when I'm watching TV and all that stuff. Like tell me the guys, tell me the guys who do hard things to win, and that's who I want to be my quarterback.

I was really happy for Dylan that he did that. He's gotten so much better as the year has gone on in terms of his feet, his movement, those things. And he'll have a great off-season, and he'll make another huge jump. Really the sky's the limit for him.

Q. Boston College has a lot of wrinkles in their offense. I want to talk about and can you talk about the defense playing with disciplined eyes and coming down the lane and protecting the outside?

MATT RHULE: Yeah, we knew one of the big things in this game would be, if they could, they'd run the ball 60 times. They have a tremendous run game. I thought we did a good job of that early on. Obviously, as I said, the screens hurt us. The deep end cut hurt us.

But I thought our guys, to your point, did a nice job. We made the play on Vincent Shavers, made two or three great plays on screens, getting over the top, making the tackle. Even the hustle play he made at 3rd and 1, 4th and 1 led to that stop.

You're right, you have to do a lot of things really well. And then even the one that DeShon had a chance to pick and unfortunately dropped it, that was a double move they ran on Donovan. He's a freshman. He's out there playing corner in Yankee Stadium in a bowl game and he gets a

double move and he plays it.

The guys made the plays that you have to make. I thought they did a nice job of continuously moving the chains. We just didn't give up a lot of big plays, and obviously we did a nice job in the red zone.

Q. I know you talked about the emotions for Rahmir today, but what went into the game schematically for him to have his best game of the season today?

MATT RHULE: I mean, Rahmir was banged up down the stretch. So I think since Dana has taken over, having backs who can run multiple run schemes, obviously run inside zone, outside zone, power counter, they have to be able to run those runs, but then are also viable in the passing game, that have great hands and can protect.

So Rahmir is that true sub back that can do that. He can run the football. He can also get out, catch the football. Emmett is the same thing. Emmett had some great plays. Rahmir had some great plays.

I think the biggest thing was we threw our way to success. We threw a lot of over-routes. Once they were defending the go ball, we got away from that, and we went to more crossing routes. Dana made a great observation. Obviously it worked out. And the backs were a big part of that, picking up blitzes but also getting out and catching the ball.

He's a true dual-threat versatile tailback.

Q. (On sending off the seniors.)

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I don't think you should say 6-7. That's such a miserable thought right now. Be positive, guys. We won a bowl game. I'm with you. But seriously, that was in our head. Again, the program is still going to do what the program is going to do moving forward. We have the right plan. We know what we're doing. The guys know what they're doing.

I think the biggest thing was we were sitting out there -- it took five years, but I can say I'm a winner. I can finally say, I'm a winner. They're winners in everything in life. You go out there, they keep score, and they've got to make plays.

Even as the game -- I said three things to them yesterday. I said, number one, I want you to wake up excited. Bowl games are usually about who's the most excited team.

Number two, watch all these games that are happening. One team gets up, another team comes back. No one wants to play 60 minutes -- once they get up, they think the

game is over.

I said, three, there's going to be a time in the game where, oh, here we go, and I said, double down. Enough with the I'm nervous and just say we're going to do this.

Even when they blocked the punt and ran it, it was a one-score game. I was like, we're going to find a way to get it done.

I think that's the biggest thing, is that finally, finally they can walk off the field and say we got it done.

We'll have a lot of momentum heading into the off-season. I think we're doing really well in recruiting right now. I think we're finding the right guys. And I think you see with Sam's play, you asked earlier, there's some guys on this team who are the right guys. We'll put the picture together really well, and I'll let you guys have the rest of the off-season to ponder what we'll look like next year.

I'm excited, though, about where we're headed.

Thank you, guys.

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