

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Penn State vs Clemson

Friday, December 26, 2025

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Clemson Tigers

Coach Dabo Swinney

Press Conference



DABO SWINNEY: Good morning. Everybody. Hope everybody had a great Christmas. Ready for a white Christmas up here in New York, those of you that are here. Looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: We have Dabo Swinney here. Thank you for joining us. Hope you had a good morning this morning at the NYSE. That was a great event for media. We'll be sending out photos and video links shortly. We'll start with the first question.

Q. Yesterday in talking to Tyler Venables and Adam Randall, it seemed that these seniors have really brought this team together for this bowl trip, and Tyler was saying how enjoyable it's been. What have you seen out of this group that includes so many seniors that are playing their last game together?

DABO SWINNEY: A brotherhood. These guys, they care about each other. It has been a great trip. It really has.

For us in particular, we have two whole classes that have not had a bowl experience because last year's freshmen, we got beat in the first round of the playoffs. That's just like a road game. So they didn't get the bowl experience.

Then obviously this year's group, it's been really fun to see these guys all just enjoy this trip. It's been an amazing experience. I've been to a lot of bowl games. This is my 30th bowl game. But this is one of the most amazing experiences that I've been a part of.

It's Christmas in New York. When you have so many young people that have never been to New York, we have a lot of staff that have never been to New York, to experience it this way, it's been unique. The access that we've had, even just getting to go do the New York Stock Exchange this morning, who gets to do that? It was just amazing. Who gets to go on the field and play at Yankee Stadium? It's just been an awesome experience.

The players have had a ball. There's so much to do. Just seeing them just take it all in, it's been a lot of fun. I don't know that they had a very clear vision of what it was going to be like, but it's been a great experience.

Those seniors have led all the way. This has been a team of great leadership all year, great leadership, spring, summer, fall camp. Was one of the best fall camps I've ever been a part of. There's so many things.

Obviously we didn't get the momentum and the start in our season that we wanted, but at the end of the day, how do you respond to things? This group of seniors never flinched. They've led all the way.

So it's been fun to see them just have some fun. They've been able to finish the season with a four-game win streak, and from where we were at the time at 3-5, what a great turnaround for this group.

This is the greatest turnaround team in Clemson history. It is. It doesn't happen without great senior leadership and guys staying the course. So I'm really thankful that we've got one more opportunity to be together.

Q. With the snow forecast, what preparations are you guys making? It seems like you're welcoming the opportunity of maybe playing with a little bit of that; is that right?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, why not? It would be an amazing experience. It's something I've never done. A lot of things I've never done, and I'm getting a chance to experience this week, like going into the 9/11 museum. I hadn't had a chance to do that, the New York Stock Exchange, just experiencing New York at Christmas this way, I've never done that. Yankee Stadium. Then now maybe have a chance to get a football game in the snow. I've never done that.

It would be a really cool experience for our guys. Hey, they're ready to play. They've embraced everything that's come at us, whether it's next-man-up mentality with a lot of the guys injured that are out, to the elements. It's all part of



it, and we're excited about it all.

Q. Just in watching film of Penn State, obviously a new opponent you're not familiar with, a lot of changes, as you've had from a personnel standpoint, as well. What are some of the things that you've seen from them on film, and what are some of the challenges of facing them?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, well, I think Coach Smith has done a great job, first of all, in keeping those guys together. They had a great finish. They've won three in a row. They've got momentum. That's contagious.

But the biggest thing is they can run the football. They're big, strong, physical. They've got the all-time leading rusher in the history of Penn State. If you follow Penn State football, that says a lot. There have been a lot of people play there like Franco Harris and Saquon Barkley. They've had a bunch of great ones roll through there. So he's a big strong back. They're big up front.

The quarterback I think is a guy that has gotten better and better and better, and you see his confidence growing.

Defensively they're stout, one of the best rushing ends that we've seen in 33. I think he's a very, very good player.

They're multiple in what they do from a pressure standpoint. For us, they're a team actually similar to us. You have to be very disciplined post-snap because there's a lot of movement. There's a lot of disguise in what they do.

Again, this is a very talented football team. Indiana is sitting there in the playoff right now, and this was a team that -- and Indiana is obviously one of the best teams in the country, and this is a team that came down to the last play of the game. They've had some tough breaks throughout the year. They lost some close games. I think that affected them.

Then obviously they have a coaching change and all the stuff they've had to deal with, but this is a talented football team and it's a physical football team. We've got to be ready to play with the right mindset to have a chance to win this game.

Q. Coach, between Tristan, Ryan and Blake, that's over 100 career starts. I was just wondering what this unit has meant to this team over the past few years?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I'm so proud of those guys. Tristan and Blake, both elected captains and have played a million snaps. In fact, I think Blake needs -- I think he

needs 43 snaps to be the all-time snap leader in the history of Clemson football. I mean, the guy has just been an amazing player. He's started every game he's ever played in since the day he got here.

Tristan, a little different journey, redshirted, kind of came in a little behind, worked his way, and all of a sudden, man, redshirt sophomore year he becomes a starter for us, so he's a three-year starter.

Ryan Linthicum, he's one of those guys that just reminds you that the game is about development. Not everybody is ready to play as a freshman. It was really his redshirt junior year before he became a starter for us and has played some really good football for us these past two years. Has played a ton of snaps. Has been incredibly consistent. He's one of the smartest football IQ guys we've had in that offensive line.

I'm really proud of all those guys. They're a close group. I hate that Walker Parks isn't able to play to finish it up. But it's been a great group of seniors that have left their mark here at Clemson.

Q. You'd probably rather not have 25, 26, 27 guys out, but it's an opportunity for younger players. Could we see a lot of these younger receivers, offensive linemen, defensive linemen, secondary guys get a chance, and how big has it been for you to not only see them in practice but now to get some game film on these guys?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I mean, I think we are at a total of 21 injured guys that can't participate due to surgery or some type of injury or whatever. And then we've had a few guys that have opted out and a few guys that are transferring. So certainly it creates a ton of opportunity for some of these guys that haven't played as much, and it's been great.

One of the great positives about being able to play in the postseason is you get all this extra time to practice, and you can go at a pace that's different than the season. Obviously you've got to get ready to play a game. You've got to focus on the opponent, the guys that are going to be playing. You've got to get enough competitive work.

But then there's also more time where you can really kind of separate guys, call it the JV, if you will, to where you can spend more time with them. You can have some extra scrimmage work with that group that haven't played as much live football throughout the season.

It's huge. That development aspect of the postseason is huge. This is how you develop, man, guys getting to play



ball, guys getting extra work, and it creates confidence for a lot of those guys because it gets a lot of those people out of the way, and now you can really spend time with them on a one-on-one setting at a different pace.

All that's been great. Then for this game in particular, for all these guys, absolutely you're going to see a ton of guys get a chance to play that haven't played a whole lot at every position because we have guys out. We have four starting offensive linemen that can't play due to injury in Walker Parks and Brayden Jacobs and Elijah Thurmon, Collin Sadler. These are guys that have started games for us. So yeah, you're going to see guys that haven't had as much opportunity.

Same thing at receiver. Antonio is out. Wesco has been out. So you see more opportunity. Tyler Brown obviously is a guy that y'all ask me about every week. Now is his opportunity to kind of get back in the saddle, if you will, and then some of the other young guys behind him like Juju and Clark Sanderson and Chase Byrd, some of those guys, Fulghum, that you haven't seen as much, but we've seen them on our practice field. You'll see those guys. Logan Brooking has gotten into the mix at tight end as a true freshman, and then over on the defensive side you'll see all those guys. Everybody we've got left, you'll see them out there playing.

Q. You mentioned y'all having a great fall camp and you weren't able to build momentum early in the season. Has the way things unfolded early in the season after the LSU loss caused you to rethink maybe when you guys play the SEC non-conference opponent as an opener versus second game or third game?

DABO SWINNEY: I mean, it is what it is. Just play the schedule as it comes out and keep moving forward.

Q. Just going back to these opt-outs and some of the injuries you're facing ahead of the bowl game, I just wonder if there's anybody that's stood out in particular with the extra reps in practice?

DABO SWINNEY: I mean, one guy in particular is Juju, who we've talked a lot about. He's a guy that has really taken advantage of it. We've been able to move him around. It's been fun to be able to experiment with him a little bit, his skill set, and can he play inside, can he play outside, can he play in the boundary. That's been really good.

I think his development has shot through the roof. He's one of those guys, a guy like Darien Mayo, a defensive end, who we see a lot of promise in. Now all of a sudden

he's second-team reps the whole way. He's getting a ton of work. It's created a lot more opportunity for him.

A guy like Caden Story who hasn't played a ton but is a guy that we have always seen the flashes and the potential. He just hasn't really put it all together. Now he's getting a huge opportunity. He's a guy that you hope will step up.

Then I think we've got some guys at linebacker with Wade having surgery and getting hurt there, creating some opportunity for a couple of those guys to have a bigger role. Branden Strozier is a guy that has grown immensely throughout the year with AV out. It's been good to see him. I think he's been one of those guys that has stood out to me throughout the bowl prep.

But we've got several guys. It's been good preparation. Now it's time to play the game. Again, you've got elements. You've got a lot of things you've got to deal with. But at the end of the day, it just comes down to doing the fundamental things in football and doing them well, and that's what we'll focus on.

Q. With Tristan Smith's eligibility situation, are you guys kind of operating like this is going to be his last game, and how far are you guys willing to take that into the off-season to see if that can happen for next year?

DABO SWINNEY: Oh, yeah, we'll go as far as we've got to go. Obviously at some point he'll have to -- something will have to break there because he's got a chance to go play at the next level. I know he'd like to come back, but we'll just have to see how it all plays out and go from there.

Q. Cole Turner was in a yellow jersey last week at practice. What's his status for the bowl game?

DABO SWINNEY: He's going to be out. He's going to probably have to have a surgery, probably here in the next week. It's a lower body injury. So he'll be out.

Q. And Stephylan Green, will he be available?

DABO SWINNEY: We hope so.

Q. This off-season, how critical do you think this one is as you look over your entire Clemson team? Where does this one rank in terms of the expectations this year, what happened, and what needs to happen to get things going back in that right direction?

DABO SWINNEY: Start over, man. It's no different to me. It really isn't. Obviously, again, we didn't have the season



that we wanted, but we're closer than you think when you look at it and really know what you're looking at. You're a few plays away. Nobody wants to hear that, but that's where we are.

We've had some great seasons that were great where we made those few plays, and we've got to find a way to get that done. But every off-season is huge because you don't get to carry anything over. You don't carry any of the great stuff over. You don't get to carry the bad stuff over. You don't have to. You start over.

Every off-season is a new team. There's always new people. Recruiting is critical, as is always is. Obviously we've had some transition on our staff and some of our auxiliary staff kind of settling in with some new people. That's all a part of it.

Then you reset, man. It's your off-season. It's just going back through your whole process of everything you do. If you have a great year, it doesn't make it less important. If you have a year that's not as good as you intended, it doesn't make it more. They're always important. It's always critical to get off to a good start, to recruit your tail off, to reset the core values and the standards that you have in place in your program. That never changes.

For us, it's the same ol', same ol', man. We start over, and again, reset our whole team, reinstall the culture, reinstall the offense, the defense, everything that we do, strength and conditioning, nutrition, you name it. Again, you're going to have a ton of new people. Got 15 mid-years moving in on the 4th and then we'll have some other guys that will be joining us, as well. So a lot of new faces. We'll have some guys that will join us in the summer. So get back to work.

Q. On Clemson's side, the opt-outs, the inactives have been kind of set in stone for quite a while, but for Penn State it's been kind of a cascading effect, especially on the defensive side with players opting out kind of over time over the last week. Have you had to adjust your game plan or how you practice based on who has opted out in the middle of your preparation?

DABO SWINNEY: As far as who's opted out on our side or their side?

Q. On Penn State's side.

DABO SWINNEY: No, not really. You just prepare for what they do. You are who you are at this point. I don't think they're going to show up and run a different offense or a different defense. I think you've got to really focus on what everybody knows and then try to get the best group of

people that you have to go execute and do what they can do well.

Not really any change in our preparation, again, regardless of who the personnel is. They're still going to run their defense. They're still going to run their offense. They're still going to be a physical football team.

Q. Being in New York City in the wintertime, has it made you appreciate the north and the cold or does it make you miss the south and warm weather even more?

DABO SWINNEY: Oh, man, I've embraced it. I love the weather in the south, that's for sure. That's what I grew up with, and I love the elements down south. But this has been awesome. I've just embraced it all. I mean, Christmas in New York is special. I would be willing to say that there's probably somebody from every part of the world within three or five miles from where we are right now. People come from everywhere to New York at any time but certainly around Christmastime and New Year's, et cetera.

It's been amazing. I've enjoyed it. But I definitely prefer the warm weather.

Q. What was the story behind that beanie you were wearing with the laughing face emoji on it this week?

DABO SWINNEY: You know, the crazy thing about it, I bought that beanie, I actually bought it in New York for like five bucks at a street vendor back in -- it was probably 2016-ish, something like that. '16 to '19 I was up here for the College Football Hall of Fame. They used to do it here every year at the Waldorf before they moved it to Vegas post-COVID. Yeah, I was freezing one night, and man, I needed a toboggan, so I bought one, and I've had it ever since. That's my go-to. I wear it all the time. I've had it for a long time.

Q. Dietrick Pennington, is it correct he has a sixth year remaining, and do you expect him to use that with you guys?

DABO SWINNEY: Yes and yes.

Q. Considering Dietrick Pennington has a sixth year, are there any position changes for guys you might expect?

DABO SWINNEY: For next year?

Q. Yeah.



DABO SWINNEY: Not that I can think of. We've got some guys we might cross-train. We've had to do that for this game because we're really thin in some spots. So we've had to cross-train a few guys just to have -- got to have a plan A, plan B, plan C. Got to have a bunch of plans. Just as far as a total move for somebody, I don't see that right now.

Q. Obviously Penn State has had a disappointing season just like y'all. But Clemson is 1-0 all-time against Penn State. It's still a huge brand that they have. It's a longtime powerhouse in college football. You've beaten the likes of Oklahoma and Ohio State, Notre Dame. Just talk about the opportunity that you have to add Penn State to that list of big brands that you've beaten.

DABO SWINNEY: I mean, yeah, that would be huge. They're Penn State. They're one of the most iconic programs in all of college football. I think there's nine programs all-time that have won 900 plus games, and they're one of them. This is a tremendous football program.

At this point, it really doesn't matter what happened in September or October. It's about what happens Saturday. It's about this game. Both teams want to win, and it's going to go in the record books for Penn State and Clemson, whatever the result is.

Yeah, as you mentioned, I think we've only played once, so it's not something that's happened a lot. So looking forward to the match-up.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate the time. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for coming to the NYSE earlier today. We will see you tomorrow.

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