

Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Penn State vs Clemson

Saturday, December 27, 2025

Bronx, New York, USA

Yankee Stadium

Clemson Tigers

Coach Dabo Swinney

Cade Klubnik

Press Conference



Penn State 22, Clemson 10

DABO SWINNEY: We just did not execute and get off to the start that we needed to have, so incredibly disappointing with the result. Big picture of the game, again, offensively there was drops, took a couple sacks we shouldn't have taken, but for whatever reason couldn't hang on to the ball.

Critical, critical drops at critical times and that kills drives. It's 1st downs that you don't get. It's more field position that you don't get. It's more opportunity to go score that you don't get. So really disappointed with that.

Offensively, I did think we found a little rhythm there late, but we only had one possession in the third quarter, so kind of stood over on the sideline the whole third quarter.

But hey, it's 6-3. It's 6-3 in the fourth quarter and you got every opportunity. Kind of an ugly game, but got every opportunity to go win the game and defensively just really poor. We played really good the first 29 minutes of the game, and from one minute in the first half through the end of the game, really poor.

Just poor critical awareness from some situational stuff. One minute to go and they've got no time-outs and we're just giving up the outside throw. I mean, just giving it up. No time-outs. Just poor awareness of what we need to do in that situation and they get a field goal. That's a critical field goal in that moment. So that was a really disappointing thing.

They had 269 yards in the second half, so didn't deserve to win the game. The critical stops, we didn't get them. It's 6-3, it's 3rd and 9 and it's a 73-yard touchdown, like Keystone Cops out there just banging into each other, knocking each other off. It was hard to watch.

Then we battled back, we get the score, and again, only had one possession in the third quarter. 3rd and 7, got to have it, got to get the stop, you've got a chance with plenty of time, plenty of time-outs to go win the game because they're going to have to punt it right there if we get a stop and it's another big play.

So that's kind of been the story of our defense all year. We just been really poor pass defense. We've been a pretty good 3rd down defense but they were horrendous today. 11-19, not going to win many games. So again, that leads to time of possession, that leads to field position. They didn't score a lot of points in the first three quarters, and then again, the two plays kind of kept them alive, the one big play touchdown and then the one on 3rd and 7.

So just not winning football.

Then special teams, I mean, just really disappointed in the miscommunication on the opening punt. It just shouldn't have happened.

I'll take ownership of that. But that's not something we called.

Just disappointed with that. Gave them three points; defense went out there and held them. And again, plenty of opportunity to win the game, but the 3rd downs, the big plays in critical situations, and then offensively just the drops. I quit counting at seven. I know there was at least seven, maybe eight. Just too many missed opportunities, and it's hard to win those games.

Both teams played hard, so disappointed with the result. But I'm still proud -- regardless of the result, I'm really proud of this football team. From where we were -- we did a poor job of winning close games this year. We just did. We had some close games and some opportunities to win some games early, didn't get it done, and we were a team that was disappointed and lost some confidence and you're sitting there 3-5 and looking at a losing season and kind of a gauntlet ahead.

Again, regardless of this result tonight, I'm really proud of



this team's fight and their heart, their will to get up and keep competing. I'd say the same thing about Penn State. We were both 7-6, and they had some heartbreakers this year, too. They're not that far away. They were a few plays, and then obviously they let the coach go and all that type of stuff, quarterback gets hurt.

Again, the season is over. That's a part of our story. That one is done. Now it's about resetting.

But again, I'll say this: I'm really proud of this group for their fight, for their effort. They could have laid down. They didn't do that. They never quit. They kept battling all the way to the end today.

I'm so thankful for these seniors. This is not a -- it's always sad when it comes to an end, when a season comes to an end, certainly when a career comes to an end because these are guys that you've done a lot of life with. You've known most of them since high school and they've been here four, five, in some cases six years.

I'm just thankful that -- it's been a blessing to just be a part of their journey and a part of their story. I also know, again, this season didn't go the way we wanted or the way they worked, and the leadership was tremendous and the results didn't match that, but these guys are so equipped for whatever comes next in their life, and I'm just forever grateful for them, thankful for them.

They're all going to do great things in life. They're all champions. They won the championship last year, so they've done great things. They've had big moments. This season will just be a part of their journey. They're made of the right stuff, so it'll develop them and take the lessons from it and take it into whatever next chapter that they're going to have as they continue to live out their journey and their story.

Really appreciate them. Then appreciate the Pinstripe Bowl, Bad Boy Mowers. Just so thankful for the opportunity to experience New York. It was an amazing trip. Didn't get the result but an amazing trip and an amazing experience, Mark, Johnny Mosley, Randy Levine, the Steinbrenner family. Just so appreciative of all their work that they did to make this a great week and a great experience for our team.

Our team did an amazing job. We had no issues all week. You're right here in Times Square with 100 something 18 to 23 years olds and they handled themselves well. No issues. No curfew issues, no late to meetings, nothing. They did a great job.

Just forever thankful for these guys, and I appreciate all the

people who came out to support us today. Apologize we didn't get the result that we all wanted, but that's football.

Now for us as a team, it's about we'll decompress on the season, already done a lot of that, and put our eyes on what's next. These guys will get a few days off. School starts on the 7th. We'll have staff meeting here the early -- obviously the portal opens on the 2nd so we'll have some recruiting we've got to do there, and then team meeting on the 9th, and it'll be a new team. We'll have a banquet on the 10th and we'll celebrate this group, this amazing group of people that mean so much to me.

Then we'll put our eyes on to 2026 and see if we can have a better season this time next year. With that, I'll take your questions.

Q. With Blake Miller today becoming the program all-time leader in snaps from scrimmage, this being his last game at Clemson, I was wondering if you had anything to say about him?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, appreciate you bringing that up. I think it was his 43rd snap, I think, when that happened. He's a finisher. All those guys, I so appreciate all these seniors. These guys, not playing was not an option for these guys. Man, I love that about all of them. They're finishers.

Blake Miller is a one of the best finishers I've ever been around. The guy missed two practices in four years. Two practices. I mean, he is going to be an amazing pro.

If there's -- I don't know how many tackles go in the first or second round, but if there's eight tackles better than that guy, I need to see it. He is a grown man, a great football player, a great teammate. He's always available. Man, just loves to play the game, and he led all the way to the very end.

He was elected captain, as was Cade, and I'm really proud of his growth off the field as much as I am on the field.

Man, I love Blake Miller. He's a warrior. You think about that, started every game in his entire Clemson career, from a true freshman, and now has played more snaps than anybody in the history of Clemson, and missed two practices in four years.

Q. Your statement a second ago saying that you've already been thinking for weeks about what is next, does that mean you already have in mind what your next steps are as far as coaching staff and where you go from here as a program?



DABO SWINNEY: It's really more about just big picture of our issues from the season. I know what's real. I know what's not. I don't read what everybody else writes. I know what's real. I have a good perspective when it comes to things that are in our control and what we've got to do better. We've got great people. I love all the people on my staff.

But you evaluate everything. That's just a part of our business, and it's a part of the end of a season is you step back and -- I don't make emotional decisions, but first and foremost, it starts with what happened and how do we -- is it personnel, is it scheme, is it bad calls, whatever. There's a lot of things you evaluate as a coach.

Again, I know we've got seven wins, but we're a lot closer than people think. That's one of them things, boy, if you say that you get torn up on social media, people rip you I'm sure. But that's the reality.

I know what it is, and I know how close we are. It's one more catch. It's one more good throw. It's a better call. It's one stop. Next thing you know, you win a couple of those games that we lost early, and now you've got confidence and momentum and all those things matter. We just never got that.

It certainly affected us. But again, evaluate everything, make good decisions based on what my perspective is, and I'll change what I need to change, stay the course on what I believe I need to stay the course on.

Again, it's never as good as you think, it's never as bad as you think. I've done this a long time, and this is the second worst season we've had in 17 years. There will be something good come from it just like the last one we had in 2010. We had a lot of great things come from it. We'll have a lot of great come from this one, as well.

Q. It's not often you guys play in 20-degree weather. Clemson is in South Carolina, the ACC. How big of a factor was the weather in your team's performance today?

DABO SWINNEY: I didn't think it had anything to do with it. In fact, we're 7-0 in school history when it's in the 30s. The coldest game in school history was my first game. It was 20 degrees in Nashville and we won that game. It was cold on both sides. That had nothing to do with it. We ain't got no excuses. The plays were there; we didn't make them. We didn't make the plays that were there to be made.

I don't want to take anything away from them, they deserve a ton of credit. I will just say that. I'm really thankful that I

got to meter Terry this week. I really didn't know him and I am really thankful that I got a chance to meet him. What a great guy. Congratulations to him and their team because they earned it. They earned the win. They made the plays that we didn't make.

Again, it's 6-3 in the fourth quarter and all of a sudden two plays kind of change everything. But I'm happy for him. I know he's been through a lot this year, and he's done a tremendous job of steadying the ship and leading them.

Again, we don't make any excuses. The weather is the weather. We've played in plenty of 30-degree games.

Q. For Cade, as you're sitting up here, what's going through your head and what emotions do you have right now as your Clemson career is now officially over?

CADE KLUBNIK: Yeah, just wanted to go out with a win. Just didn't get it done. Just didn't get it done. But just thankful for everybody that I've been able to spend life with over the past four years. Yeah. It's been a good four years. Thankful for it.

Q. Coach Swinney, quick question about perspective. I know you mentioned that a few times. Is there anything that you identified heading into this year and then as the year went on that you personally would look to change? Obviously not a season that you're used to, a very unique situation, but the team really hung on throughout the season and fought until the end. Was there anything at the end that you thought you might want to change heading into next season or work on yourself?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I'm not going to get into any of that. There's plenty of things, but I'll keep those to myself.

Q. Cade, just as you're sitting up here next to Coach Swinney, what has his leadership meant to you over your four-year career?

CADE KLUBNIK: Yeah, I think it's -- sorry. My favorite Coach I've ever had. Just really thankful for him. Just thankful for the way that he's always been the same person. I think that one of the biggest things that I admire in somebody is consistency and being able to speak the truth.

The best thing that I admire about Coach Swinney and something that I try to live after is he's the exact same person every single day, and it doesn't matter if we're coming off a day like this, if we're coming off an ACC Championship. Whatever day it is, he's bringing the exact



same person.

I try to do that. I try to show up and be the same person and show up and fight and just push to be the best me that I can be because I want to be the best Cade that I can be because of him. He saw something in me when I'm in Austin, Texas, and I want to go fulfill that.

I feel like I've done everything I can to try to be the best that I can be, and I get to leave this place with a smile on my face because of that. There's been a lot of great days and a lot of fun days and a lot of tough days, too, but to just have a man and a leader that has not wavered and has not changed is the reason that I keep coming back every single day and every year. To chase to be the best that we can.

Sometimes, like Coach said, sometimes you give everything you have and you still don't get the result that you want. But to be able to just be in the same room as him, to be up here in front of y'all with a person like this is something that I'll be forever grateful for and something that I don't take lightly.

Just so thankful for it, so thankful for his heart for the Lord. I've grown so much in my faith because of that because of him. Just really thankful. Sad that it's over but glad that it happened.

When Coach Swinney FaceTimed me at my house and I was home alone and FaceTimed me and offered me, I didn't think the next four years would look like this, but it did. But I'm so thankful for it.

It's been even better than I could have ever imagined.

DABO SWINNEY: Let me just say this about Cade: Man, I love this kid. He's a warrior, man. He's as tough as they come. He is the same guy every day. He shows up and battles. He shows up and competes every single day. He's going to be a great pro. He's just now scratching what his true potential is going to be, and I can't wait to watch it.

I think he's incredibly gifted. He's incredibly smart. He's a leader. Man, I love this kid.

Yeah, it didn't go the way we all wanted it to go. We thought we'd win a National Championship or two, but how many people did it go that way? Very few.

But he's grown. He's developed. He's had some football adversity. He's had a lot of football success. He's a two-time ACC Championship game MVP. He's won the league twice. We're a play away from winning a playoff game, having a chance to win it in the fourth quarter on the

road in Austin, Texas.

This kid has done a lot of great things, and it's easy to focus on what we didn't do or this or that. He's a Top 5 winning quarterback in the history of this school, 130 years. There have been a lot of quarterbacks play at Clemson. Everybody can focus on all the stuff that he didn't do. I focus on what he did do. I focus on the huge plays that he made, winning plays. You win as a team, you lose as a team.

Yeah, there's things he'd love to have back. There's a lot of things I'd like to have back. That's football. But this kid, he loves Clemson. He loves his teammates. He's elected captain. He's a Top 5 winner in the history of this school. He's a two-time ACC champion and an MVP, both of those.

Man, I love this kid. I love his family. Again, I wish he had another year. But he's played four years, and man, I can't wait to see him continue to blossom. Whoever gets a chance to coach him next, I don't care where he gets drafted, if he's first round, seventh round, undrafted free agent, which I doubt, this kid has got a lot more football ahead of him.

Whoever gets to coach Cade Klubnik will be better because of it. He's been an incredible blessing to me in my life, and man, I'm just so thankful for him. He's been a great example to other guys, and we've had a lot of great days, and that's what I hold on to. These were some tough days, too, but it's all good. It's all good in the end if you're built the right way, and he is.

I appreciate that, Cade, and I love you, man, and I'm just thankful, like I said earlier, that God has blessed me to be a part of these seniors' journey. Tristan, Parks, Big Ry, Adam Randall, oh, my goodness. These guys have been amazing. I'm so thankful for it. Look forward to celebrating them at the right time.

This is a tough day because again, we put a lot into this and had a chance all the way until a couple plays there in the fourth. But again, give them credit. But this guy right here, he's special.

Q. You mentioned the affection you have for the seniors, the affection you have for Cade. Obviously the big wins and the tough losses. What are the lessons that you hope they take away from Clemson from the tough losses, especially from the first half of the season before the turnaround?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I think one great lesson is sometimes in life things don't -- like I said, sometimes you can do your very, very best, you can give it all you've got



and not get the result that you worked for. But you know what? You go and give your best anyway. That's just part of life. You keep going. You stay in the fight.

Hey, this season wasn't great for us as far as what we usually like to do, but it'll turn. It'll turn. We're a lot closer than people think. We are.

But that's my job, to get us where we want to be and where we've been for a long, long time. 17 years of incredible consistency. Again, this was a year, second worst year we've had, and it'll make us better.

But a lesson of sometimes you don't start the way you want, but you always can make a decision whether you keep going or not and how you finish.

One of my favorite quotes is "failure is not fatal. Success is not final. It is the courage to continue that matters most." Whether you have failed or you've had success, it takes a lot of courage to get up and keep going.

These guys have done that. You're sitting there a very disappointed group of guys at 1-2 and pretty much all your stuff is off the table from a big-picture standpoint, and man, how are you going to respond? Then you're 3-5 and you've got a gauntlet ahead, two teams that beat us last year, got to go on the road.

To find a way to finish the season with a four-game winning streak, to get back to the postseason, to get seven wins, it was -- again, that's a lesson for the rest of your life is you don't give up. You don't quit. You stay together. You keep going. It's not always going to go the way you want it to go. It's not always going to go the way you plan it to go. I hope those are some of the lessons that they've taken.

I've seen our team grow in their faith this year. I hope that's something that they'll take with them, as well.

Q. Coach, kind of just building off that last question, hearing what Cade said, you see his admiration for you, his respect for you. How important is it for you to pour into these guys as men, not just as football players?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, that's my calling in life. That's my purpose. I know everybody wants me to win football games, but it's about how I win. That's what matters to me more than anything. Always has. It's never been anything different, never will be. That's my purpose in life, glorify God, be a great husband and father, and to use this platform of football and education to build great men through this game that we love. That's my calling. That's my purpose in life. That's never changed; never going to

change.

We've been purpose driven for a long, long time. We've won a bunch of games, a bunch of championships, more than most. We've won a lot more than we've lost and we'll continue to win a lot more than we've lost.

But that's what it's about to me. Even though it's sad when it ends because now I don't get a chance to hang out with these guys every day, I don't get a chance to be right there in their presence and help them just do life, whatever, I don't get a chance to speak to them as much, I also have peace because I know that they're prepared. Like I know, I know they're prepared for what's coming next in life: Marriage, the NFL, business career, whatever it is. They're prepared. Big failure in life, they're prepared for it. Big success in life, they're prepared for it. They've equipped themselves through their time here at Clemson. I'm thankful to be a part of that.

Q. Cade, Will Heldt grabbed you as you came off the field. You can tell you guys have become good friends. What did he say to you? He was talking out there, both him and Sammy, about using the sour taste of the season and looking ahead to next year and them becoming more vocal leaders. Do you feel like this program is in good hands with guys like those?

CADE KLUBNIK: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, those guys are going to kill it. They were great leaders for us this year. I think going through a year like this is just going to grow them, and it's going to make them just take off.

Both of those dudes are elite football players, but they're great dudes and great leaders that are really going to lead well for this team next year.

I don't remember exactly what Will said whenever he came up to me, but I think he just told me I love you and just proud of me. Yeah.

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