

Boca Raton Bowl: Liberty vs Toledo

Tuesday, December 20, 2022

Boca Raton, Florida, USA

FAU Stadium

Liberty Flames

Coach Josh Aldridge

Durrell Johnson

Kaidon Salter

Press Conference



JOSH ALDRIDGE: He's one of the guys that played every single snap tonight except a couple third downs. We were short at linebacker because of some roster stuff currently. At this time of year that's the nature of college football right now. I felt more comfortable with him out there, tired than I did with some other guys. Proud of Mike finishing his season. Mike has had a good year.

I don't think a lot of people understand Mike has been pretty nicked up the last 4 weeks of the season. He had a really good start to the season and he's been nicked up, so the Bowl prep allowed him to get healthy.

Q. What happened to him early?

JOSH ALDRIDGE: Ankle. Always tough when you lose him because like I said before in press conferences this year, what he gives you isn't just his ability to make plays. He helps everybody else around him get better. He's not the general just by nickname. He does do a great job. He's basically the quarterback of our defense.

So that hurt, but A'Khorri Jones is going to be a phenomenal football player, a phenomenal football player, probably one of the best safeties we signed since I've worked here. He did well from what I could tell on the sidelines.

Q. (Inaudible.)

JOSH ALDRIDGE: I didn't see it. I didn't see it.

Q. This is the most you've played since week three. How did you feel out there?

KAIDON SALTER: Practiced all week, I was tired a little bit, but had to go out there and do what I had to do for my team and fight through it. We just went out there and executed and tried to do the best we could do. They had some pretty good linemen that was giving me 50/50 reads, but the defense played pretty good today and was able to stop some things we had coming forward.

Q. Take us through the touchdown that you had late in the fourth quarter and how it happened.

Toledo Rockets 21, Liberty Flames 19

JOSH ALDRIDGE: You know, just want to start with giving credit to Coach Candle and his team. They had a great game plan. They played really hard. Had a lot of respect for them going in and still have a lot of respect for them.

Also want to give, you know, thanks to our administration for giving me this opportunity to stay through this Bowl game and help lead our football team. They have supported us all four years I've been here in the right way. We just -- we just made too many mistakes to win. You know, you look up and we only ran 41 plays on offense and that's partly because of not getting off the field on defense and some things that we were doing on offense.

Defensively, I thought we played good enough to win. But I think the difference in the game were the third downs down the stretch. We should have gotten off the field. We were getting takeoffs in the backfield. They were falling forward a little bit on us and we were losing our leverage in the back end some.

Would have loved to stop them obviously in that four-minute situation and give that ball back to our offense, but that's how it goes. For all the mistakes we made, we were still a two-point conversion away from being tied.

So a lot of credit to our guys on defense, especially a lot of guys who played every single snap because of how thin we were, and I'm very proud of that. With that I'll open it up for questions.

Q. I would like you to talk about the play of Mike Smith tonight, he was lights out, two tackles for loss.



KAIDON SALTER: They just lost the running back. We sent them the real motion with Demario. They had Demario, running back -- right past the linebacker in the middle of field and wide open, pass, touchdown.

Q. First two drives, what did you change speed-wise which led to three-and-outs?

KAIDON SALTER: They started picking up on our RPOs. Corner started biting on our routes pretty fast. They were giving me hard reads and I was in (inaudible) really.

Q. Fumbles, fourth straight game you've lost one. What's something that you can work on for ball security?

KAIDON SALTER: I've got to keep the ball high and tight at all times. I was going to throw the ball out of bounds. I made a bad read and the corner was playing off and he had an out, he bit on it. Tried to throw the ball out of bounds after I made a bad read and got hit from behind.

Q. Tonight seemed like they liked that -- the exact same play, the out-routes to the sideline. What gave you problems there?

JOSH ALDRIDGE: Several things. I think this is our worst third down game of the year just offhand from a percentage standpoint. But it was several things. One time we didn't adjust correctly. Another time we got two guys surrounding him and we don't keep our feet.

They had a good plan. They didn't do anything we didn't expect by any means, but they still had a good plan and we didn't get them on the ground. That's just the nature of it.

Q. End of the season, you've been through a lot the last weeks, what are your feelings about what you've have gone through and the fight they have?

JOSH ALDRIDGE: Man, I don't think -- I don't think losing the game is a testament to whether they have any fight in them. I think they did have fight in them. We just played the champion of the MAC and took them to a two-point conversion with a very depleted roster. If we had all our dudes out there, there's several some guys that would definitely have made some plays today, and we would have loved to have them.

But I love these guys. I've had the privilege of being a part of every recruiting class since Coach got here and I have a very intimate relationship with a lot of them. Sat on a lot of their couches. Seen a lot of them grow up and mature. I think they had a great week of practice, and I'm forever in

debt to them for what they have done in a 14-day span.

I still think they had a great season. Probably the two biggest wins in school history in back-to-back games. They will never be able to take that from us. But I think -- I think they had a lot of fight today.

Q. Bright spot there toward the end, C.J. with the pass, did you know that he had that in him?

JOSH ALDRIDGE: Yeah, I knew he had that in him. Glanced down there one time and saw us do that. I didn't know we were running it just then because I don't memorize our terminology and things like that. I kept close -- that Coach Klenakis was going to call plays. I thought he had a great plan especially in the run game. I thought we dialed up some good shots in the end.

Q. Just recap how your individual season has gone from start to finish, some of the positives that you got out of it.

DURRELL JOHNSON: I just learned when you're disciplined and try to be a good teammate, everything will fall into place. It's all about the attitude, that you wake up in the morning just being grateful -- got to do this extra work, I get to do extra work, because I want to do better. So that's just more how I approached it all season.

Q. Single-season record -- what does that mean?

DURRELL JOHNSON: I guess it means a lot because I didn't really have no accolades or goals coming into the season. I just wanted us -- I had no personal goals. I had goals for the season. I wanted a ten-win season and I wanted us to stay ranked towards the end of the season. But I guess that's a good thing to write my name in the Liberty record books and hopefully someone will come along and beat it some day.

Q. Thinking at the end of the season, reflecting with your family and deciding if you wanted to be here with your teammates; what will you remember about going through this Bowl trip and this game with these guys?

DURRELL JOHNSON: I'll just remember the smiles and memories we made here in Boca Raton. Everything we did. This is my last time with them, but I really enjoyed my time with them and I'm glad I came back, win or lose. I'm happy I came back for my team.

Q. The future is so bright for this team with Coach Aldridge coming in. What's your perspective?

KAIDON SALTER: I've got a pretty strong bond with him

since the first time I got here. I know the offense pretty well now. Just keep coming in and executing it. We get a new coach next year, but just got to learn that scheme just like I did this one. Be prepared at all times. I know my receivers and I know my running backs and we pretty much get the same O-line back, so we're going to be pretty stacked.

Q. With so many players coming back, how much does that help?

KAIDON SALTER: It's going to help a lot. We've all got a bond. We've been hanging with each other for a pretty long minute. As soon as Big Mike came in, everybody just loved him. Like he been here. All the transfers they come in -- be like I been here. Everybody got a pretty strong bond on and off the field. We hang out around each other.

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