

2021 Orange Blossom Classic: Florida A&M vs Jackson State

Friday, September 3, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Jackson State

Coach Deion Sanders

Shedeur Sanders

Nyles Gaddy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Prime and student-athletes Shedeur Sanders and Nyles Gaddy.

COACH PRIME: We're thankful, we're happy, elated to be here in Orange Blossom Classic. The Classic has been nothing but hospitable, accommodating and has been a number one operation.

This is pretty much my first Classic, and they really set the bar high. They've set the standard. And I'm thankful, our student-athletes are happy to be here. And, Ashley, thank you for what you've contributed to this wonderful institution, making us all feeling welcome and being accommodating and setting the bar and setting the standards. It's going to be hard to bring this up once more.

I'm at a loss for words because my mind is going. I'm ready for play. I'm not ready for talk. I'm ready to play ball. I'm tired of the hype and the promos. I'm ready to get down.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Can you just talk about, I know one of the reasons you went to Jackson State was to help promote HBCUs. And how big of a deal is this game to be on Sunday on ESPN to showcase your team and FAMU, and just an overview what a big deal this is going to be on Sunday on national TV?

COACH PRIME: I think we had a wonderful opportunity -- we have one. A couple of HBCUs played last Sunday, I believe. The ratings went through the roof. I was happy. Was it, A&T and Alcorn? Central and Alcorn. I'm elated

because exposure is what we need to be seen and heard and understood is what we're trying to accomplish.

It was a time where -- a turbulent time in our country. That's one of the reasons I chose to sit down and for our AD to really stabilize and make me understand what's needed for this time, in such a time as this with Jackson State. It was a match made in heaven.

So it was time. And God spoke to me in my heart that this was the place. It was no other place that presented the opportunity like this one did in all facets that we could provoke change instantaneously. So that was one of the main factors, contributing factors, in coming to Jackson State.

Q. Question related to NFL scouts. Do you know if there are any scouts present?

COACH PRIME: They would be a fool if they wouldn't. I think the Dolphins are right across the street. They would be a fool if they didn't walk over. And I pray to God, even the Miami Herald -- so you're from the Rattlers or from the Herald?

Q. Miami Times.

COACH PRIME: I'm just messing with you. But they would be a fool. Great talent. Comb Simmons is a phenomenal coach and he has a phenomenal staff. And his guys are going to be prepared. And you're here in the Dolphins' backyard. They would be remiss if they didn't choose to come over and scout our kids.

Q. Related to the magnitude of this game on ESPN, what do you think it would take to have more games on like ABC, NBC, CBS?

COACH PRIME: Ratings. Ratings. Everybody doing their part. Guys going to the next level. Us pulling together instead of pulling apart. Us finding a solution instead of being divisive. Us being as one instead of being separate.

And that starts with ratings. That starts with -- really I can't



wait until we play this game because I'm pretty sure I'm going to see phenomenal players for FAMU. And I'll talk about them in the conclusion of the matter in our press conference, and highlighting them as well as our kids.

We're all in this together. And the better it is for everyone I think everyone is going to win. The goal is for these kids to win on and off the field. That's the goal.

Q. I want to ask you about what it's been like to coach your two sons. What is that like to have two sons on a team and what advice are you giving your quarterback freshman son?

COACH PRIME: It's been joy and pain. And you pick out the ones that brought me joy and the son that brought me pain. (Laughter.)

But, no, it's been wonderful. My kids, I've coached my kids their entire life. This is not new to us. Keep in mind that when we're between the lines I'm Coach Prime. Outside of that I'm dad. They don't mix the two. They don't call me that in the line of battle. They know there's a difference.

But I feel like Mr. Gaddy is one of my kids. I love him as such. I'm going to chastise him and stay on his butt as such because I want the best for him. So if you start to identify which is my son without their name on the back I'm not doing my job because I need to treat all of them accurately. But I'm happy. I'm happy.

Q. Shedeur, do you feel extra pressure? You've probably had pressure your whole life with that last name and you look a lot like your dad. What --

COACH PRIME: He better. He better.

Q. What's it like having the national spotlight on you at such a young age? You're not only trying to play well for yourself and your dad but also the whole idea of choosing Jackson State for other reasons to promote HBCUs, that's a lot of pressure on a young guy's shoulders. How do you see that?

SHEDEUR PRIME: I don't see it as pressure, I just see it as I'm built for this moment. And all it takes is just to prepare the right way and there's no pressure.

Q. Stating the obvious about this being a highly anticipated game, but I wanted to know did you find any difficulty in keeping the team's focussed or was all the hype just extra momentum for Sunday?

COACH PRIME: Yes, definitely, I can keep 70 guys focused in Miami. You try that. Try keeping three focused.

It's tough to keep all of them focused, but you've got to understand there's a standard we've set. There's a standard we must live by. There's a standard that we must practice by. We must coincide by. There's a standard that we're trying to achieve.

And they understand the standard. Now, the guys that understand the standard that wants to take this to the next level, they're straight. The guys that don't, they won't. And we'll handle that as such.

Next trip they won't be on the trip. And the guys that understand the standard, they will. It's as simple as that. It's mathematics.

Q. Nyles, can you just talk about your team in general? What should fans expect from Jackson State on Sunday, and what's it been like to play for such a legendary coach?

NYLES GADDY: We'll have an explosive offense and our defense will be shut down. That's how I see our team coming together.

It's crazy to be able to sit up under Coach Deion. Get to learn so much and he has the connections to bring somebody out that you won't ordinarily be able to be around. So you've just got to suck up everything that he brings to the table and everybody that he brings to you. So it's just a learning point every day.

Q. As far as spring football-related, coming into the fall season, what are some things that you all learned that you grow from in the spring ball that you'll use to your advantage coming this fall?

SHEDEUR PRIME: I learned the speed of the game. I feel like this spring it was good for me to sit out and just watch and see -- I'm just getting out of high school. I just played my season. My last fall season of high school. Just seeing the speed of the game and just being able to read the defense and be more confident. And I felt my growth from the spring to now is tremendous.

NYLES GADDY: Same thing he said. Just being able to sit back and watch and see how the actual game of the SWAC is play. It kind of hurt not to play but you have to be a motivation for your team and not sit back and be down because you can't play. The whole team we boosted it up, we're ready to go.

COACH PRIME: It was a wonderful opportunity to evaluate our men, to evaluate our entire program. And we did as such. We made the necessary changes and we feel like we're right where we want to be. This spring was very



well needed.

Q. What are you expecting from FAMU as far as tactically, if you could give us -- I know you're not going to give away too many secrets, but a little scouting report on FAMU and what are is the biggest challenges with their team?

COACH PRIME: First of all, they're well-coached. Willie Simmons is a wonderful coach, upstanding man. I dare to call him a friend; he's a dear friend. His staff, they're good.

His kids will be fundamentally sound. They have won't make many mistakes and they're going to play fast. They're going to take advantage of tremendous opportunities that we would allow them. Special teams are going to be suffice. They're going to give it their all and they understand they're in their home state. And he's going to preach to them that: Do not let them come to your home state and take back a W with them to Mississippi.

He's going to play on their emotions -- not play, but he's going to reach the inside of them and try to touch their emotions to get them motivated for this. But I don't know why you have to get a young man motivated to play at the Crib, a game of this magnitude and multitude. He'll have them ready I'm sure he is. You can count on that.

Q. Following up on that I think there's more than 25 players on FAMU roster from Florida.

COACH PRIME: That's good.

Q. Can you talk about that, knowing as you've been a college football player yourself, what will it be like to so many guys on the opposing team playing in front of their friends and family in Miami?

COACH PRIME: It's going to be great. We have 12 to 15 that's from Florida that's going to be playing in front of their friends and family as well. They have a coach that's from Florida that's going to be playing in front of his friends family and homies as well. So ain't nothing changed, nothing ain't different.

It's going to be homecoming. It's going to be a home going as well. Ain't going to be no competitive advantage because they're from Florida. We've got some Florida boys too. And we're recruiting tonight, as a matter of fact.

Q. Just related to the SWAC, a SWAC-related question, as far as you all making the jump, having FAMU and Bethune join the conference, what's the outlook you see for the SWAC making the next step?

COACH PRIME: We love it. The more the merrier. The president of the SWAC, he's been doing a phenomenal job. And I like what he's doing. I love his vision. I love what he is thinking. Personally I wish the MEAC would fold up like a tent and just come on so we could really do this thing like the SEC. That's my hope. That's my dream. I'm pretty sure that's not going to happen no time expeditiously.

But when we think what's best for everyone I think that would be best for everyone, some way to merge. I don't mean fold up, because they're not a great conference, they are. But I just wish some way we could unite and make this into something really special and spectacular.

Q. Outlook in the future, probably five or 10 years from now, do you see --

COACH PRIME: I don't look five or 10 years, my brother. I ain't doing it like that. I'm looking for right now. And today is going to prepare me for tomorrow.

Q. You spent some time in Tallahassee during your college years. Did you spend some time at FAMU campus?

COACH PRIME: Yeah, I got married to a woman from FAM and got divorced from a woman from FAM. We have two kids from a woman from FAM. Great time in court with a woman from FAM. (Laughter.)

But we're all good. I love it. FAMU provided a wonderful outlook on a lot of players from Florida State. FAMU has no idea, Florida State should be paying FAM for what they provide for Florida State, young men. They really do. It's a wonderful place. It's a wonderful scene. It's a wonderful culture. It's great because what we didn't get at Florida State we got over at FAM.

Q. As far as what made you choose Jackson State? And what are some HBCU players that you look up to?

SHEDEUR PRIME: For me it's obvious why we chose Jackson State. You see the attention. You see the national spotlight it has on it right now. You see -- just everything, everything about it, the coaching staff. The years of experience and all that. You come here to learn. You come here to get wisdom from. Coach has already been where we're trying to go. Why not choose Jackson State?

NYLES GADDY: Like he said, Jackson State is, I feel like it's home for me now. It's the best thing I could have did for myself. I'm glad I came here. It's a movement now. And I feel like if people ain't understanding that then they don't need to be in the scene.

Q. With recruiting, how important is it for recruiting -- South Florida has always been historically a hotbed for football players -- how important is it to play this game for both FAMU and Jackson State for trying to recruit local talent from South Florida?

COACH PRIME: First of all, we look at trying to win the game. Secondly, then you start thinking about those other necessities. Kids from South Florida fundamentally are dogs. We all know that. Everyone in the country recruits from South Florida. But you've got to understand, it ain't like a lot of Florida schools killing it right now, except for the University of Florida.

So you've got to keep that. In fact our motto is: Tough, fast, disciplined. We're not just trying to recruit just kids from South Florida; we're trying to recruit kids that are tough, fast and discipline. And these kids eliminate themselves by not having one of those attributes.

But this is a hotbed for talent. Everyone knows that. You've just got to make the proper selections and know what you want.

Q. You spent some time with Coach Saban during the AFLAC commercial and you were coached under legendary, the late Bobby Bowden. What's some coaching tactics that you've learned from them that you plan on using in the future?

COACH PRIME: Coach Bowden was so consistent as a man. He was the first man who came to my hometown that I had really visualized and seen on TV that wanted me, that meant a lot to me. I had never seen that before. Coach Bowden was a family man, a man of faith and wisdom and of great timing. He was a man that could unite people together in any atmosphere.

Coach Bowden was a father figure being away from home. And I loved everything about him. We never bumped heads. He never had to get on my butt. Never had to get on me because I did my job but I knew what he wanted and I wanted to please him.

Coach Saban, having the opportunity to shoot a commercial a couple days back to back and spend time with him, not only did I spend time with him, my staff members spent time with his coaches to glean from them, to understand what makes them so darned successful.

I want to know those type of things. I want to glean from the top and learn because I want it to trickle down. So we humbled ourselves, we submitted ourselves for those couple of days and then more from the staff to understand

everything about the University of Alabama, how it functions.

So it was a tremendous opportunity for us. I didn't just take it as a commercial shoot. It was a business trip for me as well.

Q. In 1978, FAMU and Jackson State played in a historical game. It was the semifinal rounds of the FCS playoffs, the last time the two HBCUs have been at that level. Do you feel that now is the time for both of these institutions to rise back to that level?

COACH PRIME: I would hope so. That's the only reason we're here. I don't know what got down in 1978, but I know it's going to get down on Sunday. So I don't know those type of things, but I do know that these are storied universities. These universities tell a wonderful tale.

It's so much tradition. And we're elated when my AD told us upon hiring me, you know, we're going to play in the Orange Blossom Classic. First he had to explain it to me what that was, and the magnitude and the multitude of that.

Once I embraced that, I said this is a tremendous opportunity. And everything has been nothing but first class. For these young men to get on a chartered flight, and a four- or five-star hotel and accommodations be as it is, it's unbelievable. They are getting a Power Five experience daily. And that's what they deserve. Why not us?

Q. What do you have to tell that high school athlete who stuck between choosing the HBCU and a Power Five school, what do you have to say to them?

COACH PRIME: Great question, my brother. We have to stop saying and start showing. Another thing to tell someone something but to be that something that you tell them. Two things I want to know when my kid was choosing a college where is he going to lay his head and what is he going to eat. Let's start right there.

Is the place accommodating that he's going to lay his head down on every night. You don't want to leave the hood to go to the hood. You want leave the hood to go to something good.

Secondly, what's he going to eat three times a day? Is the nutrition part of it going to be part of it? Because the game, they know they have talent, they know they've got game. They can take their talents anywhere and come out. But those are the necessities that we've got to take care of as HBCU people, SWAC people.

That's the way you level the playing field. Now, once you get that down, let's start talking about the combinations. They want to know what kind of practice building and uniforms. What are the things that's going to level that? Because this college is showing them that, you've got to show them that and it's got to be real. It's got to be equatable.

You don't want them to suffer and just take a risk on you and they really don't know you like that. You've got to be believable and it's got to be authentic. And they know I don't lie. I told them last night, I'll cry to you before I lie to you. I'll keep it 100 at all times if we can't match that I don't want you here because I don't want you to come here saying you sacrificed, you gave up this for that when you really want that.

I want you to want this. I want you to want me like I want you. That's love. Want me like I want you. That's some relationship advice. I know that because I've had two divorces. That's love. I'm sorry, son. I ain't talking about your mom. I'm not saying nothing about your mom. (Laughter.)

Q. Do you feel that because you guys played spring you might have a little bit of advantage?

COACH PRIME: No, it's no advantage. There's no advantage, whatsoever. I think we played spring to get to know our kids a lot more. To get to know who are our type of kids.

And we had to remove a multitude of kids that didn't have our character. Didn't have what we desired. So I don't think it's an advantage to having played spring. Because they've spent more time with their kids than we have with ours.

Q. From what you anticipated it would be like to be college head coach to what it really is, what are things that surprised you, or is it what you thought it was going to be or what parts of the job have been different or surprising from what you anticipated?

COACH PRIME: I don't get down with the titles. What does a head coach mean? What does it really mean? I get down with the work. I get down with the toil. I get down with the expectation, with the dream, with doing stuff on a daily basis.

I'm not about titles because these kids could tell you, I walk around and pick up trash off the field like I'm the custodian. And as in the locker room I can't ask them to do nothing that I'm not willing to do.

But it's been more than I expected. I love it. I have not worked a day yet at Jackson State University. And I absolutely love the people I'm surrounded by, that I get to touch on a daily basis. Not everybody but the people I get to touch on a daily basis, I absolutely adore it. I can't get enough of it.

And I love these kids. And I wanted to see them blossom. I want to see them blossom, Orange Blossom -- that was good. I want to see them go to the next level in every phase of life. Not just as professionals on the field, professionals off the field. I want them to shine and get the bag. I want them to get the commercials and endorsement.

I can't wait until you see this joker play on Sunday. I can't wait because I know what he's put into what he's trying to accomplish. And he's going to accomplish it. I can't wait until everyone gets an opportunity to see it.

I can't wait to see the FAM players. I can't wait to see them get down and do what they do, what they're blessed to do. We're on national television. We in the spotlight. This is what you wanted.

Do what you do and you get what you want. Just do what you do. It's a wonderful stage. It's a wonderful opportunity. And we're not ever going to down this person or down this person or make us feel bad. I want FAM to shine, too. Now, I want to win, but I want them to shine too. I want their kids to light the thing up as well, but we want to win.

Q. What's your favorite restaurant in Miami?

COACH PRIME: I had a good one right there but I couldn't say that because I'm a head coach. (Laughter). I really don't have a favorite.

Q. Prime 112 maybe?

COACH PRIME: I ain't answer that. I'm not into the hype. I like hood stuff. I'm sorry, I like hood stuff. I like to sit down with a roach on the wall crawling up. Somebody hit it with a fly swatter. I like that. Some cussing in the back and all that stuff. I like that. That's what they like, too.

SHEDEUR PRIME: I like steak.

COACH PRIME: He likes steak. Raised him -- he's had housekeepers all his life. What you like Gaddy?

NYLES GADDY: Country food. Soul food.

COACH PRIME: He's so smooth and so cool -- soul food,

country food. Until he gets on the field. Then he turn into a killer.

We appreciate you all. We thank you. Anybody here from the Orange Blossom. It's been phenomenal and it's only just begun. We love you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

