

Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game: Alabama vs. Miami

Saturday, September 4, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Manny Diaz

Xavier Restrepo

Kamren Kinchens

D'Eriq King

Zach McCloud

Press Conference

Alabama 44, Miami 13

MANNY DIAZ: Quite simply, just congratulations to Alabama. They played an outstanding game. I thought the difference in the game was third down offense. I thought their quarterback made some plays, keeping plays alive outside the pocket that extended drives that kept our offense off the field.

Offensively, we had a hard time getting in a rhythm because of that. I thought their front is as advertised. Gave us a lot of trouble getting going. I'm proud for the way the guys competed in the second half. Like with all films, there will be plenty of things to correct, but also plenty of things that I think will be positives that we can take going on to Week 2.

With that, I'll open it for questions.

Q. Hey, Manny. How is D'Eriq King? I know we're going to talk to him. What was your impression of him today playing for the first time? He got hit hard a few times. How's he doing?

MANNY DIAZ: You know, that's just football. He's a competitor so he's hurt because he came here to win the game. But I thought he was brave. I thought he was sharp. I thought he made some excellent throws. And we'll go on to next week.

Q. The follow-up is how are the players doing? What did you tell them and how are they emotional right



now?

MANNY DIAZ: They're disappointed. They came here to compete. They worked really hard for today. I think that's where you have to, when you go into film session tomorrow, you remove the result from the film and look at exactly what individual performances and what got us to that final result.

But we've got a close-knit group who has a lot of respect for the team coming in next week to our stadium in App State, and we'll get back to work tomorrow.

Q. Manny, you talked about learning lessons from games last year, like, well, specifically, Clemson, number one team. But really, by midway of the second quarter, it was basically a rout at that point. Were you disappointed in the start, in how this was kind of similar to that game.

MANNY DIAZ: Yeah, I didn't feel it was for a couple different reasons. Trying to explain why I didn't feel it was is not worth trying to explain why it wasn't. Like I said, I saw guys, and I'll speak for when they had the football, which they had for the majority of the first half. They were just making more plays than us on third down. I didn't see a lack of competitiveness. I didn't see a lack of toughness, fight. I saw football things happening in a football game that allowed them to maintain possession.

Q. Coach, you talked about things to take away positives. There's got to be the freshman play. It didn't seem too big for Andres or James or even Kam. What do you take away from that? Maybe there are others I omitted from other spots. What do you take away from that in recruiting?

MANNY DIAZ: Yeah, it's what we've seen in practice, you know. Really, the last two recruiting classes, which sort of make up the majority of our team. If we continue to stack classes like that, it's going to continue to be really positive going forward this year.

Andres, it was great to get that situation where he had to make a kick before halftime and made one second half.



That's going to give him a lot of confidence that he's done it. Excited for those guys getting a chance to make plays in their debut.

Q. Manny, I want to ask you about the sequence. At the start of the second half, you guys go down the field, get stuffed at the goal line, and then give up a 94-yard touchdown. Just the touchdown, I guess what did you see on that play and then just that sequence, how kind of crushing was that? Obviously a chance to really get back in the game there?

MANNY DIAZ: Again, you know, that's why I mentioned earlier, obviously there was separation on the scoreboard, but that was a hammer blow. I think it kind of got us off our rocker for a little bit. I thought we finished the fourth quarter well. But it just -- there's a couple bizarre things. The whole point is to try to catch. We're trying to go fast. We're trying to wedge it in there and jam it in. A couple things that happened, you know, and slows us down. That's the whole point is to try to catch them, and they made a good push to stop it and jam it in.

The touchdown was an outstanding play. We were in man coverage with outside leverage. They faked crossers, put a foot in the ground, and came back across the field. That takes lot of great protection. They throw it to a guy that was just, you know, a great addition to their team that obviously his speed is legit. That guy can run. And if it was 94 yards or wherever the ball was, we're going to have a hard time catching them. It was good execution against man coverage. We were going to play man to get off the field third down and four, three.

Q. Maybe better for Rhett tomorrow, but with D'Eriq obviously first live action, was there any -- I don't want to say conservative. Did you kind of feel you were protecting him a little bit and more comfortable as the game went on? I don't think he ran until the second quarter.

MANNY DIAZ: No, because some of the runs, there could be runs that are just give reads instead of pull reads. So I don't think D'Eriq would have put up with a game plan that would have protected him in any way.

Q. Manny, I came in a little late so I'm sorry if this is a repeat question. Do you have any update on Mike Harley?

MANNY DIAZ: I do not. I haven't heard anything. I don't know what you've heard but I haven't heard anything since he was removed from the game.

Q. Was there any thought at all of taking D'Eriq out as

the score got bigger and after he appeared to limp off the field when he got sacked, went in the medical tent? When he came out, was there any thought about we need to save him?

MANNY DIAZ: Yeah, we wanted to do -- on the drive that ultimately ended up with the interception, we wanted to just finish with one more good drive on offense. We did feel like we had moved the ball. We got down to the 1 and didn't score. Got down to the 5 and had to settle for three. We wanted to put one more good drive on tape because I feel like some of our guys had settled down. We're blocking them up a little bit better in the second half. But obviously, the drive that started with the interception, I think that's how he ended his day from there.

Q. Manny, is there any concern that the players won't be able to recover quickly from this game, you know, and move on to the rest of the season, which is really now more important?

MANNY DIAZ: Recover physically, you mean, or mentally?

Q. Emotionally, mentally.

MANNY DIAZ: I don't think so. This is not a -- college football is famous for overreactions after Week 1. That's not what this team is all about. You just don't get your story written after one game into the season. We're just not there yet. The guys in the locker room, if anything, what happened today will bring them even closer together.

Like I said, we've got a stretch of games coming at home. It's a big deal for us to get in front of our fans. Our fans, I thought, were great tonight to have them out there. D'Eriq King has never played in Hard Rock Stadium with our fans in it. We've got to have a great atmosphere next Saturday night. This team's story is not even close to being written yet, and we've got a lot of guys that have a lot of pride to make sure it goes the way they want it to.

Thank you.

Q. Xavier you got your opportunity in the middle of the game and made the most of it. Talk about what that meant to you, to get a chance to get in the game and then on those almost consecutive plays. First you fought for the penalty and got the touchdown?

XAVIER RESTREPO: Like you said, it's an opportunity. Coaches put me in a great chance to make a big play. It's about repetitions. In practice, we do it all the time. When the ball was thrown to me, I just caught the ball.

Q. Xavier, when those kickoffs kept going in the end zone, in the end zone, is that just procedure? Is there thought to maybe catch it after 17-0 and let's try to make a play?

XAVIER RESTREPO: We listen to our special teams coach, Coach Patke, with his game plan. Whatever he says goes.

Q. Xavier, Manny was just saying obviously your losses last year were all games that got out of hand quickly. You were down 17-0 in the first quarter. He said it didn't feel the same way. Did it feel similar to the games last year? You guys obviously went down early?

XAVIER RESTREPO: It definitely feels different. This team is definitely different. It's a new year. We're just, you know, first game, we're going to get way better, though, and I felt like we could have definitely come back. There was no, like, oh, we lost the game until the last second hit. And that's the difference of this team.

Q. Xavier, wondering if you could take us in the locker room. Obviously, I assume you're disappointed. How is the team doing and what has you confident you'll be able to move on past this and focus on App State.

XAVIER RESTREPO: What we're focused on is me and some of the guys were talking. Today is, yeah, we lost. But that's not the overall problem. If people don't come to work Tuesday, that's a problem, you know. So we're just looking to get back in the facility and just, you know, just work on App State.

Q. D'Eriq, obviously, his first game since the injury last year. What did you think of him? Obviously had an injury scare in the second quarter. What was the reaction on the sideline when he went down and came back in?

XAVIER RESTREPO: D'Eriq's one of the hardest workers I know, you know. Just seeing him recover from the injury, just like day and night. And I'm like wow, you know. I seen him in the training room every single day, and I thought I was a hard worker, you know. When you actually see him determined and head buds in and working, it's fantastic. It's amazing to see. He's a baller.

Q. When he went down, was there any, like -- I know he's only in the tent for like 30 seconds or whatever, but was there a moment where you were like uh-oh?

XAVIER RESTREPO: I knew he was going to get back up for sure. That's one thing for sure. He was going to get

back up.

Q. Xavier, you obviously had the lone touchdown for the Hurricanes. If you could take me through the play and how it went. Do you feel like you could have been more involved? In this game offensively?

XAVIER RESTREPO: Like I was saying before, coach presented the opportunity to me, and I just went out there and made a play, you know. Just what I'm supposed to be doing. Nothing special. What I'm supposed to be doing. The coaches, I felt like I had a real good role in this game and I'm sticking to whatever the coaches say.

Q. Xavier, I've been covering you for a long time. You've been making plays since youth football. Take us into the mindset and what it takes to go out in any size game.

XAVIER RESTREPO: Really simple. Just beat the man across from you. Take it out into consideration and feel like it's disrespect that the guy's trying to line up on you. Whup his tail every single play.

Q. Kam, talk about how it felt for you to get out there today and make a few plays and just get your feet wet in college football.

KAMREN KINCHEMS: I felt like this was a big opportunity. Big game, most fans you probably going to be around. You can't do ask for better, being your first college game. It was good. I knew if I could play against 'Bama and hold my own, I could hold my own against anybody.

Q. Kam, I know it was a weird play where you forced a fumble and were given a turnover chain on the sideline. Can you explain the high and the low of the situation?

KAMREN KINCHEMS: Yeah, of course I made the play, it felt good, but it was overturned. It is what it is. Let's get back out there and I was trying to make another play. It was all cool.

Q. Coming into the game, did you know, essentially, you were the third safety in the rotation and what went through your head when the targeting thing was going on?

KAMREN KINCHEMS: Coach told me throughout the week I was the third safety. I was going to get some reps. Not as much as I got today. He told me I was going to get some. When the situation happened, I knew it was time to play. You ask for reps. This is your chance to go out there and show what you got.

Q. Once you got on the field, you know you're a cerebral player. Alabama's offense, what did you think they were trying to accomplish once you could see it?

KAMREN KINCHENS: Kind of going at me. You could see the drives. They was throwing screens, trying to get in one-on-one tackles. They was trying to go at me. They knew a freshman safety was out there. See what you got. We start the run game. Gave them a few plays. They accomplished those, and see what happen.

Q. Alabama, you're probably not going to play many teams with that much speed that level of talent. What was it like the first college game to be thrown in that?

KAMREN KINCHENS: It was great, playing the best of the best. If I can compete with them, I can compete with anybody. It gives you an extra boost of confidence. I executed the plays, did what I had to do, let the plays come to me.

Q. You know it's going to be faster than high school. Just like what was that initial impression like being out there?

KAMREN KINCHENS: First play, I was kind of nervous because it was like all of a sudden, like okay, go out there, Kam. After the first play, it's like calm down. The game slowed down. I took a deep breath and was like, I'm meant for this.

Q. Kamren, what was it like in the locker room after the game? What did guys say, especially the older guys say to not let the team morale dip too low?

KAMREN KINCHENS: They didn't say anything negative. Only positive things like we gave it all. We didn't get the outcome we wanted, but it's time to go back to the drawing board. Everything starts back over tomorrow. We took a loss. But now it's on to App State and let's continue it. One loss don't mean you're out of it.

Q. When Bubba went down and you went down, did Bubba say anything to you? Was he supportive throughout the rest of the game?

KAMREN KINCHENS: Of course. More supportive than ever. As soon as the play happened and they told him he was out, he came up to me, was talking to me, like let's go. Ain't no slope from me to you. You gonna go out there and make plays just like how I make plays. That's what I did. I went out there and did my job.

Q. So to sum it up, how do you build off of this?

Obviously, you're not happy with the result, but like you said, you have a whole season ahead of you. How do you build off of what happened after today?

KAMREN KINCHENS: You could see some of the young guys, me and James got in, got to show what we can do. We know we can get in the rotation and help the defense as much as we can. The defense showed what a great defense we are going to be. That's it.

Q. I guess just what feedback did you get from Coach T-Rob after the game? What did he say after your performance?

KAMREN KINCHENS: I haven't talked to him yet.

Q. D'Eriq, we saw you early, maybe midway through the first quarter, you took a hit, limped off, came back in. What happened on the play and how important was it for you to take the hit and shake it off and come back more so mentally than anything else?

D'ERIQ KING: I just got hit from the left. I don't know what happened on the protection, but I got hit. Should have held on to the ball, but I got twisted up a little bit. Fell on my leg in an awkward way. It got retaped and I was good.

Q. D'Eriq, on your take, what happened in the first quarter with the offense? Seemed like it took a while to get things going.

D'ERIQ KING: Yeah. I mean, we started slow. I mean, we just started slow. Trying to, you know, get going. I think the first possession, we got a first down, tried to get tempo going, but we couldn't get in a rhythm. The first quarter was three and out, three and out, three and out. We've got to find a way to start faster.

Q. D'Eriq, take us into the drive in the third quarter, the first drive, when you get to the 1-yard line and you hurry up and call the quarterback sneak. Is that something you practice on? If you had a chance to do it, does it happen the same way? Is that just procedure, how you guys do it?

D'ERIQ KING: Yeah, we called an RP on third down and they gave us a good run box. Handed the ball off, got to the 1-yard line. We just put this play in the last week and a half. Just pretty much one yard, get in the end zone. I don't know what happened. I just didn't get in. Should have got in. Should have dove or whatever. Should have got in. I don't know.

Q. It seemed that you guys got going a little bit when you opened it up and were able to draw a few penalties

and get the offense on track. In retrospect, is that something you think to build on now moving forward? Just maybe being more aggressive down the field?

D'ERIQ KING: I think we were trying to get going, run the ball, get quick RPs on it. Second quarter, we started throwing the ball downfield, having some success. Got some penalty calls, but I think it's something to build on, and I think we have good enough guys to win. So, yeah, I think we're going to build on that for the rest of the season.

Q. D'Eriq, they really bottled you guys up in the run game. Obviously, we heard all about their front seven all week. But what made them so tough in that aspect of the game particularly?

D'ERIQ KING: They have good players, you know. Running the ball is important. Any football game, you want to win a game, you got to be able to run the ball a little bit. They had good players. Our backs and O-line, I don't think they did a bad job. We've just got to find a way to run the ball effectively.

ZACH McCLOUD: How y'all doing?

Q. Zach, Coach Manny Diaz really had a point of emphasis of tackling in fall camp. What's your assessment of you being one of the leaders of this defense, of this team and how they tackled today?

ZACH McCLOUD: I feel like we tackled like it was an opener and not like we had been doing it all through camp. It wasn't our worst performance as far as tackling goes, but definitely not where it needed to be. We'll improve on that as the season goes on.

Q. Zach, I'm curious, your take on Bryce Young, their quarterback. Seemed like he was really poised for such a young guy. Did you guys expect that? Seemed like he handled pressures and all that pretty well.

ZACH McCLOUD: I mean, we thought highly of him going into the game. Our whole goal was just to get him off the spot, really, and make him scramble and, you know, throwing the run. And he did a lot better at that, than we originally anticipated, probably.

But, you know, we have to do a better job as a D-line, finishing and capitalizing on those opportunities. Too many times we were in the backfield and it was right there out of reach. We've got to make those -- we've got to turn those into sacks.

Q. Zach, you're obviously a leader on this team. How do you guys find ways to build off of this and move

forward in the season?

ZACH McCLOUD: It's really something that you have to kind of instill that into the character of the team before you even meet this type of a situation. If you've never spoken about how to handle adversity or, you know, even handle the success to a team, then when they meet it, I've seen it time and time again, they won't know what to do with it.

We weren't in the locker room talking about losing, but any team has to face adversity, whether it be a situation or a whole game. We were making sure everybody, the young guys included, were able to handle any adversity that came our way.

Q. Secondly, that was probably a tough O-line to break in being a starting defensive end. How did you feel you held up and performed out there today?

ZACH McCLOUD: I did pretty well. Not good enough, clearly. I have things I want to clean up and sharpen up as we move forward. I anticipate having to come in during the season and, you know, get better as the week -- or as the weeks go on and really that's the most important thing. Not just for me, but the whole D-line.