

Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game: Clemson vs. Georgia Tech

Tuesday, September 6, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Clemson Tigers

DJ Uiagalelei

K.J. Henry

Press Conference



Clemson 41, Georgia Tech 10

Q. D.J., your left foot was taped up a little heavily. Did you maybe possibly hurt your ankle --

DJ UIAGALELEI: I had a broken ankle. No, I'm playing (laughing). I just had my ankle taped. I had both of them taped. I don't know, I guess for support. Yeah.

Q. K.J., I saw when you all were drawing five or six false starts on Jordan Tate with those penalties, and I saw you specifically pointing with the line movement you guys were doing. Was that something you guys came up with as a defense, or did you get that from the sideline?

K.J. HENRY: Definitely something we're trying to incorporate as a defense. We're trying to add new layers. We have a more experienced group this year, so just trying to add new layers to everything we do.

Didn't know it was going to work that well, but it was a very successful night when it came to that category and moving around, so that was good in Game 1 that it worked to our advantage.

Q. What was the defense doing in the first half, particularly to make things difficult on your offense? Was it much different from what you saw from them last year?

DJ UIAGALELEI: They did a lot of similar stuff. They threw a lot at us. Dropped a lot of guys, buzzed a lot of linebackers, a lot of spinning with the safeties, spin the one high, one weak, three rat. Did a little bit of 26 invert a couple of times.

They had some good calls dialed up for when we had plays

on third down. One of them dropped right into each window we had for the routes, and I did the check-down, but they did a good job in the first half. Did some really good stuff.

Q. DJ, can you take us through that play you had to improvise off the blitz and then you had the lateral to Shipley and what that did momentum-wise for you guys and what you saw in that play?

DJ UIAGALELEI: What was it, third and four or third and five. Third down. We had a play-call called up. Had a good defense to it.

Tried to get out of the pocket. Kind of got stopped. I was trying to buy time and be able to get the ball away. I was going to the ground and looked to my left and see Shipley standing right there and pitched it to him. He did the rest. Made a great run, getting the first down. Just kept the drive alive. I think we scored a touchdown on that drive I think.

Q. It seemed like the offense was starting to improve and get more into a groove as the game went on. How important is that to you, and what are you noticing within the game as it progresses?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I feel like as an offense we got more comfortable, especially coming out after halftime. We had two big drives we put together. A lot of third down conversions.

I feel like we just hit our rhythm. First game, kind of got to get your feet wet a little bit, but I feel like as an offense we did a good job keeping the drives alive.

We kind of shot ourselves in the foot at the beginning of the first half a little bit with easy stuff. As the game went on, I feel like we got more comfortable, and that was a good thing to see.

Q. DJ, for you in particular in the second half, do you feel like you started hitting a rhythm, and at what point did you feel like, man, I'm starting to really get comfortable out here?

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DJ UIAGALELEI: I definitely feel like the second half. I feel like those two big drives really felt good. Throwing the ball, I felt like I was just out there playing having fun. I felt confident out there.

The game kind of slowed down. You know, sometimes when you play as a quarterback, receiver, running back, anybody on defense, the game starts to slow down. So when the game starts to slow down, it's a lot of fun. It makes game a lot easier.

Q. DJ, how satisfying was this for you if particular because, obviously, as a quarterback you receive the praise and the criticism. So for you how satisfying was this win for you?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I feel like, man, it was exciting. I was just having fun. It was exciting. Kind of look at all that, I'm just excited to get a team win. I feel like as a team we played great tonight.

Special teams had an amazing job. I mean, they had two blocked punts. Coach Swinney said I think it's been 15 years since we had that in a game. We had two blocked punts, and it gave us short field.

Like Coach Swinney said, the main objective each week is to play complimentary football. I feel like we did a really good job on defense. The defense only gave up 10 points tonight. We put them in a couple of bad spots a couple of times, but, man, they played a great game.

Offense, I felt like we did a really good job. We moved the ball when we needed to and scored points and had drives when we really needed it. I feel like it was a great day today overall.

Q. That first play with Andrew Mukuba and that interception, how did that set the tone for you guys, and how important was that to just get off on the right foot?

K.J. HENRY: Yeah, I thought that was a great play by Kubs by one. Just a great job of finding it in the bright lights and making the play.

I think it set the tone for the game, honestly. Like DJ alluded to, didn't get to the best start on offense, but at the same time it let us know that we were here as a team. Not just as a defense. Once they came in and really picked it up, then the ball just kept rolling.

It was exciting. I mean, it should be illegal to have that much fun in one sitting. I thought it was crazy, but that was

a good time.

Q. DJ, on your touchdown run and you turned around and looked at 97 as he was trying to come after your feet. It was a big moment I'm sure for you. What were you thinking during that run, and what were your emotions? Were you letting out some frustrations finally breaking through there?

K.J. HENRY: Boy, you disrespectful.

DJ UIAGALELEI: I was hyped. I was excited. I think it was Walker, he had a great kickoff block on the wheel right there and then great block. Made it easy on me. It was kind of a walking touchdown. I was excited. I was real hyped up running into the end zone.

Probably won't do that next time. I might get a flag, but I was just excited.

Q. DJ, I know everybody made a lot out of your slimming down some this offseason, and part of that was being more mobile. You did get to run a good bit in this game. Did you feel comfortable doing it, and how do you feel like that part of your game impacted the overall offense?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I feel like I run the ball all right. I had a couple of good runs, but sometimes, man, it tripped me up. I was kind of pissed. I feel like if I could just get my knees up, I could have had a lot more running yards, could have exploded, and got a couple more first downs.

One of the calls went out. I think it was, like, a draw. Should have pressed the block a little bit more, stayed inside. Could have had a bigger run.

Overall it was good. I thought I ran the ball solid. Definitely a lot to work on, but it was good, though.

Q. DJ, what did you see from Antonio Williams tonight, and how can he continue to be more a part of the offense?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I feel like I've seen the same stuff I've seen in practice from Antonio. He has done an amazing job this whole summer and fall camp. He has done an amazing job making plays. Whenever he gets the ball, he makes the most of it, and I feel like he did the exact same thing tonight.

It was exciting to see. I figured he was going to do that. He said he was a grown man, and he showed it tonight.

Q. DJ, the fumble there in the first half, it looked like

you might have been down. The call on the field stood. Do you feel like you were down on that before the ball came out?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I don't think it really matters. I have to cover the ball up and do a better job being in the Red Zone. Even if I was down, if I wasn't, that's a careless mistake by me. I have to do a better job holding ball down, going to the ground, being aware of that knowing that defenders are going to punch the ball out. I just have to do a better job of that. That's on me.

Q. Curious, how much did you talk to Cade during the game, and what did you think of that last drive that he had?

DJ UIAGALELEI: I thought it was a great drive, man. He did exactly what he does in practice.

I think it says he went, I don't know -- I think he had 49 yards passing, a touchdown. The one play that was really good to see was on the roll-out where I think they went Cloud Strong and hit the hole shot on the switch vert and did a good job of that.

He is just poised out there, man. You can tell he is out there confident, playing with a lot of confidence. He looked great. I didn't expect nothing less from him. Had a great drive. And excited to see. He is going to be a baller. He is a good player.

Q. K.J., being that this is your last year, how much of an appreciation for every W you put up do you have going into every game?

K.J. HENRY: Man, like I said the other day during my first media session, every win, I'm dancing my tail off. That's what I was doing. I was going crazy in there. You should have seen it.

Just such a great appreciation. Like Coach Swinney alluded to last year, there definitely were times where himself and I felt like that we just expected to win knowing that just like Georgia Tech and every other team we play they have scholarship players too that are coming from families that want to see them do well as well.

Any time we can have a successful day, do our part, and bring it together for a win, man, you just got to celebrate it. I'm excited to get back to that.

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