

# Aflac Kickoff Game: Clemson vs. Georgia

Saturday, August 31, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Clemson Tigers

## Coach Dabo Swinney

### Press Conference



Georgia 34, Clemson 3

THE MODERATOR: Coach Swinney will have some opening comments.

DABO SWINNEY: First of all, congrats to Georgia. It was a good first half. Tough, hard-fought first half. Then they just freaking kicked our tails in the second half. Congrats to them. They're a great team. They've been a great team. They showed in the third and fourth quarter what it looks like.

Just really disappointed. Biggest thing is when you don't finish, again I've talked a lot bit, thought we did some good things in the first half. There will be some things on tape. But you got to play four quarters. We didn't do that.

Biggest thing, when you get beat like that, that's on the head coach. That's on me, so... That's just complete ownership of just an absolute crap second half. Really disappointed. But I've done it long enough. Sometimes you get your butt kicked, and we did today. That's not what we came here to do. But you got to give Georgia credit. We got to move on, we got to learn from it.

Again, biggest thing to me was missed opportunities in the first half. We needed some early momentum. We had made a couple plays. We made a huge play. They said we weren't lined up right. They said we weren't quite up on the ball. He thought he was on the ball. You look at the tape, it's close. That was huge, huge, huge missed opportunity in the first half.

With a team like Georgia, where they are right now, you've got to take advantage of those opportunities when they present themselves. So we didn't do that in the first half.

Some critical penalties, just a couple details.

Then the second half, just defensively really poor. Just

really poor. Again, I thought lines of scrimmage, there's going to be a lot of good stuff we're going to see on tape, but in the second half just missed tackle. Something I was worried about coming into the game. But missed tackles, third-and-long.

Another thing I was worried about was their quarterback. I think he showed. He's a really, really good player. He's incredibly accurate. That's one of my concerns going into the game, was if we let him hold the ball on third-and-long, he'll find 'em. And he did. He made a couple huge plays on third-and-long.

I think they capitalized on a couple, we miss-fit a couple of their runs. We missed some tackles. That contributed to some of the big plays. Then we just kind of got in a hole there.

Disappointed offensively on the third-and-one there. Had a little miscommunication. They did fight. They didn't quit. They battled to the end. Like I said, there will be some good things we see on tape. At the end of the day we just got our butts kicked.

We got to battle back. It's a long season ahead. Again, Georgia is a great football team. I have no doubt they'll go on to have a great year. This is one game. Whether you get your butt kicked or you lose by one point, when you lose, you lose. It's 0-1. We got to get back to work on Monday, we got to flush it.

We all learn from it. I don't shy away from games like this. I don't ever shy away from games like this. I think when you play games like this, you got a chance to learn, you got a chance to teach. I think you can grow your football team because they get a chance to see right out of the gate.

We'll get back to work on Monday. We'll flush it. I really am proud of our guys in the locker room. Obviously they worked really, really hard. When you put in the amount of work that these guys put in and you don't get the result, it's incredibly heartbreaking and disappointing.

I'm proud of the comments in the locker room, the leadership that I saw. We certainly took one, punched right

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in the gut. But we'll respond. We'll get back to work. Doesn't get any easier next week. Probably as good of a Group of 5 team in the country coming into the Valley. Sorry for our fans. I feel terrible for them 'cause we didn't get it done for them tonight. Didn't play those last two quarters like we know we can play.

But I promise you this: we'll get back to work. Long season ahead. See if we can find a way to have a great Sunday tomorrow, a great Monday, and find a way to get on the other side of this thing and keep going there. One day at a time, one game at a time and we'll see what happens. But today was not our day, and all the credit goes to Georgia, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. How do you think Cade played?**

DABO SWINNEY: I think Cade played well. I think he did a lot of positive things, I really do. He did a lot of positive things in the game.

Starks made a great play on the one ball, box fade. That was a great play by a great player. The biggest thing is, we didn't help him early on. Too many third-and-longs. You're not going to make a living against Georgia on third-and-long.

I think there were a lot of bright spots with Cade. He's also one of those guys I'm really proud of from just comments in the locker room. That's what leaders do. That kid will show up Monday ready to go. He's just going to keep getting better.

I thought he competed his butt off. Thought Brady did some good things. Antonio, obviously had the one huge play that got called back. There will be some good things that we can take away from it that we can go build on for the season. That doesn't take away the fact that you just got your ass kicked in the third and fourth quarter.

**Q. How about the decision with the kickoff?**

DABO SWINNEY: Just one of things we talked about going into it. We felt really good about our opportunity to either go score or move that thing far enough to where they got to go 80-plus. Again, we had a couple critical penalties that really cost us. I mean, the motion call was same thing, it was close. It was close watching the video on the sideline. But they called it, so...

We kind of got in a little bit of a hole right there. We didn't anticipate that. But we wanted to take the ball. We've had a great fall camp. Coming out of the gate, then also they

led the country last year, or second in the country in time of possession. We wanted to get them out there right away and get them to play.

If we didn't score, try to pin them. But it didn't work out that way. Again, I thought defensively we did a heck of a job in the first half. I mean, they were physical. They held up well. But again, tale of two halves.

**Q. There's been a lot made about your approach (indiscernible). What do you say to people who point to that?**

DABO SWINNEY: People are going to say whatever they want to say. It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter what I say. People are going to say whatever they want to say.

But we do what's best for Clemson year in and year out. People can say. When you lose like this, they got every right to say whatever they want to say. So say whatever you want to say, write whatever you want to write. That comes with it. It's just part of it.

**Q. The last few years offensively in these big games, are you able to pinpoint why you struggle offensively?**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, we haven't done some of the basic things the way we need to do it. I mean, we didn't make some critical plays that we had a chance to make. When we did make a big, critical play to create momentum, we get a penalty. So just creating the rhythm. It's just disappointing.

That's where it is.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: He did. Showed up. Made a lot of plays. He's going to have a heck of a year. I think defensively we got a chance to be really good on defense. Obviously disappointing the second half with just, again, third-and-longs, missed plays. You also got to give Georgia some credit. They made some plays. Their quarterback, I think he's a special player. He's an experienced guy. He showed today what he's capable of doing.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I mean, that's what they can do to you. Again, they can expose you quick. You don't have a lot of room for error with a team like that. You got to play all three phases, you've got to put it all together.

Was happy Hauser got a chance to get in the game, get a

kick. It was good to see him go out there and make one. Just the missed tackles, missed tackles, a couple of busted assignments. They got us on the wheel route. We didn't fit up the reverse or the jet sweep, get off the block right there. Created a couple of big plays. Next thing you know bam-bam, it's a couple scores. It's tough. That's a tough thing against a great team.

Again, it's over. We got to flush it and move on to the next one. That's all we can do. We can't sit around and just wallow in it forever. We got a long season ahead. We still got a chance. There's not anything off the table for this team.

It will all be written when it's all said. Everybody can write everything they want to write right now, but it will all be written in November and December. So we got a lot of work to do. As competitors, that's what we do. We get up and go back to fight again on Monday.

**Q. What was the discussion halftime with Coach Riley and Coach Goodwin as to how the team was going overall?**

DABO SWINNEY: There was a lot of discussion (smiling). We all know what happened. That's what we do. Everybody's disappointed. But we take ownership of it. Starting with me.

**Q. How does this one feel compared to last season's season opener against Duke as far as the locker room? How you feel about your team going forward?**

DABO SWINNEY: I feel great about our team and the leadership on this team. Again, some people may say, He's just crazy, just got his butt kicked.

A loss is a loss. I hate to lose, period, to anybody, anytime, anywhere. I hate to lose. We work too hard. So it hurts. It's going to leave a mark. This will be one I'll never forget, that's for sure.

I remember every loss. Unfortunately sometimes you remember those more than some of the others. This is one. This is just a flat-out butt kicking. We just got our tails kicked in for two quarters. I mean, look at the score. You're going, Whoa.

Again, there will be a lot of positives. There's a couple things that, again, if you just do a couple little things right, you create a little momentum, a little confidence or whatever.

They all hurt. They all feel the same. They all hurt. You lose by one or 40. You work too hard. When you don't get

the result you want, it hurts. This is our livelihood, this is what we do. These kids, they work their butts off. When we don't get it done, we take ownership of it, go back to work, see if we can find a way next week.

Again, been in this situation many times. Been 2-3. Started 2-3 one year, and went on to the ACC championship. There's a long season ahead. I do think we have the right people in the room.

When you play a team like Georgia, you get exposed. That's what happened in the second half. Again, there's a lot of good things in the first half that we'll see. Then all of a sudden third-and-long, big play, boom, big play. This is a really good team. They're well-coached. Kirby did a great job, has done a great job. They kicked our butt tonight.

We'll see where we go from here.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: I'd say we got a long season ahead. That's what I'd say. I'd say tonight was bad. Georgia going to make a lot of people look bad. They made us look bad today.

But I do think that we'll get back to work on Monday. We'll go get better.

**Q. You didn't put the ball on the ground against a great defense.**

DABO SWINNEY: We took care of the ball. Starks, that was a great play. We took a shot on the box fade to Tyler. He made a great football play. Great player. We did a good job with that.

Then again, I thought in the first half the red zone defense was really good to see, too. There was a lot of physicality. There was a lot of good stuff. At the end of the day it's about getting the result that you want. That was two quarters of really poor football. I take ownership of that.

But we let that carry over. We got to flush it. 24 hours, flush it, get back to work on Monday. Same thing if you win the game. Got to get back to work. Got a long year ahead.

I think we've got a chance to be a really, really good football team if we will just improve like I think we will from this.

**Q. Is there an injury update on Martin?**

DABO SWINNEY: I think he's okay.



**Q. What was the injury?**

DABO SWINNEY: He just got, I think, rolled up.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, they got in there. When they got in there, made some plays. Those guys will continue to roll 'em in there. You'll see 'em.

**Q. What did you think of the wide receivers?**

DABO SWINNEY: We had penalties, two penalties right out of the gate. So I was disappointed with that. None more than the one that cost us the big play.

There was some good, some bad, just like every other position.

Really proud of Antonio, though. Thought he really competed, made a lot of plays. I was excited to see that. Good to get the young guys in there, both of them a chance to touch the ball. I think they'll continue to grow from there.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, came out a little quick. They brought some heat right there. Just didn't find it, track it.

**Q. You said you're going to be pretty pleased with some of the things at the line of scrimmage you see. Your overall thoughts on how the offensive line played?**

DABO SWINNEY: Like I said, I need to watch the tape before I make an assessment. I do think there's going to be some positives that we will see, that we can build on. Doesn't change the fact that the score got away from us in the third and fourth quarter. It was a very competitive game, you're one score away. Next thing you know, you're in trouble.

We'll watch the tape and we'll assess it and go from there.

**Q. What is your message to the team heading into the game next week?**

DABO SWINNEY: Put our eyes forward. Flush this thing, put your eyes forward, focus on what we can control. Stay together. Stay together. Leaders lead. So stay together, flush it, show back up Monday. You can't let this game beat you twice. You got to move forward. That's the nature of football. We got to wait all week, we lose a game

like this, especially when you get your butts kicked in the second half, there's a lot of noise.

You got to block all that stuff out and focus on what you can control, get back to work, one day at a time win a game, keep going. It's not a sprint, it's a marathon. It's a long way.

They didn't hand out a national championship trophy tonight. We didn't lose the ACC tonight. We got our butts kicked in one game, and we got a long way to go. Let's go play it out and see what happens.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DABO SWINNEY: Watch the tape. Missed tackles, first of all. Big plays. A few big plays and missed tackles. Really did a nice job, I thought we were very physical. That stat right there comes from big plays. The big plays, which is what usually happens when you miss some tackles or you don't fit something properly.

But I thought we held up pretty good when they tried to come at us. I thought we did some good things. Again, I thought their quarterback made a couple of nice, timely scrambles that created some opportunistic first downs for them, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

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