

Capital One Orange Bowl: Texas A&M vs North Carolina

Monday, December 28, 2020

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Texas A&M

Hard Rock Stadium

Kellen Mond

Press Conference

Q. Kellen, obviously you're going to get drafted and everything, but have you given any thought at all to coming back for another season? Have you thought that through at all?

KELLEN MOND: I've thought about it and it's kind of been something that's talked around the locker room a little bit. But I think just where everybody's focus is, we just want to win this game. We want to win off the finish season strong, and then kind of move on from there and decide what everybody else is going to do.

Q. When your career is over at Texas A&M, how do you want to best be remembered?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, I think early in my career, I wanted to just leave this place a lot better than when I came in. I could definitely say so far from the season that I've had and the impact that I've made on other people, whether it's on the field or off the field, I've had a huge impact on a lot of people. I mean, that was one of my goals coming to A&M, and I definitely think I've done that already.

Q. How have things been different in preparations for this game with the shorter period? I know coaches really hype up how important bowl practice is, especially for getting those young guys going. How have things been different in preparation for this game?

KELLEN MOND: For us, preparation has been the same. Just same type of film that we watch, just I think just a little bit longer period of time, just because we have two weeks from our last game instead of playing one Saturday then starting that Monday for another Saturday game.

I think just the only difference is just a little bit longer period of time. I think we have a long -- because of this long period, we're able to have a deep dive into what North



Carolina does and study a little bit more than usual.

Q. Is there any perks to having an extra day or extra days in College Station instead of getting out to Miami for a full week, like y'all normally do?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, I think the way that we're doing it is really good now, just obviously I think the last thing that all of us would want is us getting down there and then something, coronavirus pops up and then not being able to play. I think just with this odd year, I think that the changes that we have to make are beneficial for what we have to do to finish off the season really strong.

Q. With you guys getting so close to the CFP and missing out on that, do you come into this game feeling like you have something to prove to the country?

KELLEN MOND: I think our mindset each and every week is that we have something to prove. I don't think it's anything to prove to other people, but we just want to continue to get better as a team and continue to grow, and I think that's just the main thing in our mindset each and every week that we play.

Q. And how difficult is that, though, to get over kind of the hurt of missing out on the top four?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, I think it lasted less than a day, but at the end of the day you've got to move on and you can't let it affect the way that we play North Carolina.

Q. Kellen, a couple times during the course of the season you talked about changing the culture. Do you feel that this season has gone a long ways towards changing the culture of the football program at A&M, and how important is it to put an exclamation mark on this season in the Orange Bowl?

KELLEN MOND: We definitely have changed the culture, I think. I think I said it at the beginning of the year, just the combination of some of the veterans that we had and some of the younger guys who we have on both sides of the ball. I said that combination can be lethal with one change in the culture, but also our on-the-field play.

I think in the past everyone kind of wondered would we be

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able to win big games and how would we do in an all-SEC schedule, and I think we proved most of those doubters wrong. Each and every week we're continuing to grind on and off the field with studying the playbook, studying film, and we just want to come out here and play another good game.

Q. You've spent the last three years with Jimbo Fisher as your head coach. What's been the biggest thing that you've learned about him during your time with him, and what's the biggest thing that he's taught you about yourself?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, yeah, we've definitely spent a lot of time together. I think it's probably the one person that I've ever met who is so passionate about football and probably can be even more passionate than probably all the players that he's ever had, just because players, we have school and all these other things to focus on.

From probably 7:30 in the morning to late at night, he's doing something football related, whether it was watching film or probably some type of recruiting. I mean, he's probably one of the most passionate people about football that I've ever met.

Q. I don't want you to look too far ahead, but this will be your last game in an A&M uniform. Has that sunk in yet, and if so, what kind of emotions come along with knowing this will be the last time you put on the 12th man uniform?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, it's kind of -- it kind of feels a little different. It's something that me and a couple other seniors talk about. I'm excited to be able to finish off the season and just really maintain this level of focus and finish off the season strong for, one, myself individually but also this team and finish off the season really strong. A lot of people didn't really know what we would do in an all-SEC schedule, and like I said, I think we've proved a lot of people wrong.

Q. I just wanted to pick your brain. What's kind of your mindset going into Saturday's game?

KELLEN MOND: Same mindset every week. You know, study the film, understand who you're playing. Just pretty much go into the game, trust yourself, trust your eyes and just play football. I don't think there's any complicated recipe that I can come up here and tell you. Just go out and play the game that you love.

Q. You touched on this earlier, but in terms of you guys being so close to the playoff and just barely missing it, in terms of -- how do you feel in terms of

College Football Playoff expansion in terms of eight teams or 12 teams in the near future?

KELLEN MOND: I mean, I think every time something is changed, everybody always wants to change it to something else. I think when it was two teams, everybody wanted to go to four, and then now we're at four and everybody wants to go to eight, and probably if we go to eight, everybody wants to go to 16. Honestly, I have no idea.

Q. A lot of teams that are ranked fifth have seemed to not be as focused or intense in their bowl games, the teams that just got left out of the playoff. I think Georgia, Auburn. I'm sure you feel like A&M is focused, so tell me why is it going to be different? Why is A&M in your mind, do you think they're going to be -- you guys are going to be focused and taking this game seriously?

KELLEN MOND: Because we always want to have the same level of focus no matter what game we're playing, no matter if it's week 1 in the season or in the National Championship. Coach Fisher always talks about building National Championship habits, and no matter what game we're playing, I think that's what's important.

We want to be able to do that, and whether we're No. 5 or got left out of the playoffs or not, we want to play the best we can.

Q. So you sense your guys are all focused and going to be intense and ready for this game?

KELLEN MOND: 100 percent.

Q. When you look at the North Carolina defense, what is it that you see? What impresses you? What numbers that you see impress you on that defense when you look at them?

KELLEN MOND: Obviously Chazz Surratt was one of the guys who obviously impressed a lot, but obviously him opting out, going to have another guy who's got to be able to step up. But I think just as a whole entire unit, I think they play well together, and I think they play with a lot of speed, and I think that their coach does a really good job schematically.

I think just on our end, understanding what exactly we can get and just stick to your base fundamentals and stick to your base rules and just pretty much play football, I don't think there's going to be anything that's overcomplicated, but we feel like on our end we've seen so much football, we've just got to play and react and just trust our eyes.



Q. Talk about the North Carolina defense; what do you see? They play in the ACC; are they similar to anything you've seen in the SEC defense-wise?

KELLEN MOND: I would say the closest thing probably schematically is Arkansas. Arkansas, who we played and kind of posed some kind of fits, just with the front that they were playing. But I think that playing in the SEC and kind of playing against some of the top talent and so many different schemes, I think we're kind of -- we can go against a four-down team, three-down team and pretty much trust our roles that Coach Fisher has instilled in us.

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