

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

Monday, December 28, 2020

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA



Texas A&M

Hard Rock Stadium

Darrell Dickey

Press Conference

DARRELL DICKEY: Good morning. How's everybody today? Let's go right to questions.

Q. Two questions: First, do you all have any -- are you expecting any opt-outs or any players not playing in the bowl game?

DARRELL DICKEY: Well, you know, it's kind of part of what's going on in college football right now, but so far our team is intact offensively, defensively, special teams. We've got some guys that are trying to -- nursing some injuries, but we're expecting them to be back. You know, going into this game, I think we look like we're going to be at full strength, and we're going to need to be. We're going to need every able body, because that's our style of football here is to -- everybody has got to do their job, play their role, and so we need everybody on the field and pulling in the same direction, which we've done this entire season, and we're going to need to do it again Saturday.

Q. How would you describe or relate, you're now working with Kellen Mond and the kind of quarterback he is and his development over the years?

DARRELL DICKEY: Well, he's probably one of my favorite guys I've ever been involved in coaching with. Coach Fisher, our head coach, also handles the quarterbacks. We've got about four or five guys around here that are also quarterback coaches, including myself and Kellen is smarter than all of us. Him and Coach Fisher are on a different level.

But just to see the improvement that he's made in his football game, his maturity level, his leadership level, from day one that we got here until now ending with a New Year's Six bowl is just -- he's been kind of like the face of the program as far as how we've improved and the direction we're heading. And I can say this: He's been well-coached by the head coach, by the rest of us, but he's also spent some time off the field on his own.

He is as well-prepared a young man as I've ever been associated with. He spends time watching film on his own. He knows the players' strengths and weaknesses from the opponent. He knows our entire offense. He sees things happening on the field and comes to the sideline and talks about it.

That wasn't always true the first year, which year one with us, he had a really super year with some fantastic games but still had some younger-guy mistakes. This year some of the things that you don't necessarily see -- we've only had eight turnovers this year, which is tremendous when you spread the ball around and do as many things as we do. And four of those came in the first game.

That begins with the quarterback. He's taking care of the ball, which is very important. Our red zone and 3rd down offenses, those numbers have been pretty high. At one point this season I think in 3rd down we were No. 1 in the nation and then we had an off-game.

But a lot of that goes right through the quarterback. So Kellen's progress, his improvement has been one of the most remarkable things I've been associated with in coaching because -- you know, when we got here, he had played in a totally different system. A lot of people labeled him kind of a run-around guy, and he's developed into a true pocket do-everything quarterback that can also extend plays - what you're seeing in the NFL, a lot more guys that can stand in the pocket, throw the ball, make all the checks, make all the reads, and still be able to move around and make plays with his feet.

So it's been really impressive to watch. It's been fun to be a part of. Hope to finish it off the right way Saturday, and as I said before, our team is -- he is kind of a reflection of how our team has progressed, unselfish guys that just want to win and do their job and do their role. Kellen just happens to have an extremely important role in our offense.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the dynamic of the play-calling between you and Coach Fisher, how that works during just a series. Give us an example of how that works between you two.

DARRELL DICKEY: Well, Coach Fisher calls the plays.

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Everything goes through him. We've got a number of assistant coaches that during the week, during the game plan are providing information to him, ideas, suggestions. You know, we talk through them. We hash them out. Coach Fisher has an unbelievable volume of intelligence for offensive football. He's been doing this system for so long, but he's adjusted it to the different things and times that are going on on game day.

Mostly what I do is I'm just providing him information, down and distance, are they playing what we anticipated them playing. I've done that with other play-callers before, and where it was, hey, you need to run this play, you need to run that play. You don't have to do that with Coach Fisher. All you have to do is tell him, here's what they're doing. If it's the same as we anticipated, he knows what he wants to do. If there's something a little different going on, you don't need to tell him what play to run; he already knows. He takes the information and he processes it very quickly and is pretty much considered the best play-caller in college football.

Q. In terms of time of possession, going into a season, going into a game, do you all say we want to control the ball this much? Do you have a certain time? Because it's been pretty remarkable what you've done.

DARRELL DICKEY: Yeah, we don't have, quote-unquote, a certain number, but when you say that, if you look -- I don't know the last time I checked, but we were leading the Southeast Conference in time of possession by almost four minutes, and that is huge. Our last game that we played, our defense played 37 snaps against Tennessee, and that is remarkable in this day and time.

Now, there's a lot -- it's not just an offensive statistic, either. We take care of the ball. We don't try to snap it every six or seven seconds. We want to control the tempo of the game. We want to keep our defense off the field. But also they do a good job of getting three-and-outs and getting themselves off the field.

So 3rd down is a big down for both sides of the ball here. We don't really talk as much about we want to possess it 30-something minutes a game, but our style of play gives us the opportunity, especially when we're good at 3rd down, which we have been the best we've been this year. That keeps us on the field.

Obviously we would like some more explosive plays. We would take those one- or two-play or three-play drives in a minute and a half, but I'll tell you, sometimes when you open the game with a 13- or 14-play drive and go 80-something yards and take nine or ten minutes off the

clock, your whole team is pretty excited about that.

You know, we don't have a set number, but our philosophy here is we want to control the tempo of the game.

Q. You and other coaches on the staff, did y'all ever have any concern that the guys would be focused or want to play this bowl game, considering the situation that put you in it?

DARRELL DICKEY: Not at all. This group of kids loves the game of football, and yeah, we've all been through a very different season, a different year, just as everybody in the world has been. But we have to also look back and think there was a point in time where we were thinking we might not even get to play football. So I think these kids have enjoyed this season.

Now, it has been long, and we've had to grind through it and we have to push them through the practices, but there's nothing that's shown me any indication other than this football team is going to continue to practice this week, pointing towards Saturday, and go out and have a lot of fun playing a great football game against a great opponent.

I think we'll be ready. Everything shows that we will, and I think everything shows that these guys are excited about playing in one of the traditional big-time bowl games that college football has to offer.

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