

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

Tuesday, December 29, 2020

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Hard Rock Stadium

Sam Howell

Press Conference



a great opponent like Texas A&M who very easily could be in the College Football Playoff right now. It's definitely a great challenge for us, and we're definitely excited to play in the caliber of game like this. This isn't a game that people would think this program would be in a couple years ago, so it just shows how far we've come, but we definitely want to go and make a statement on Saturday.

Q. Sam, from the study that you've done on Texas A&M, what challenges will their defense present you guys on Saturday?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, they do a really good job on defense. Their defensive coordinator does a really good job, and they really on all three levels, they're really good. On their defensive front, their linebackers and their secondary, they're really good. They're an SEC defense and we know that that means something.

I think they're very good up front on the D-line, so that's definitely a challenge for us, and then they just have a whole lot of athletes all over that defense, so it's definitely going to be a lot of hard match-ups for us, and we're going to be prepared for it.

Q. A lot of talk leading up to this has been about the opt-outs and not Texas A&M. How do you keep your guys focused on Texas A&M and not on any of the distractions?

SAM HOWELL: Honestly it hasn't been much of a distraction. We kind of just move on. It is what it is. Those guys, they made the decision that they thought was best for them, and we all respect their decisions, but at the end of the day we've got a job to do. We have a football game on Saturday, and we've got to go win the football game. We really can't worry about any of that. We've just got to move forward. That's really the message I try to relay to these guys. We have a lot of guys that need to step up and make some plays for us this weekend for us to have a chance to win.

Q. We saw Texas A&M sit outside of that top 4 pretty much all season. To be able to play a team like that in the Orange Bowl, how much excitement is surrounding this game?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, it's definitely exciting for us to play

Q. Sticking with the opt-out theme, Coach Longo talked about him having to come up with a new game plan where he was going to switch up around 30 different snaps or whatever that were going to go to Michael and Javonte. Are you taking this game not only as an opportunity to build this program for the future but kind of show off the stats that you'll be able to bring to the table or whatever, now that you'll have those different type of play calls to play around with?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, for me it's nothing different. I'm going to prepare how I'm going to prepare and then just execute the play that he calls. I'm not going to try to do anything more than I usually do. I am who I am and I'll just go out there and play my game. I'm definitely excited for these younger guys to have a chance to really show what they've got because we really haven't seen them play any snaps that really mean anything this year.

So it's definitely a great opportunity for those guys, and it shows what we're going to be like next year with these guys leaving. So it's a great opportunity for those guys to get some good quality reps and see if they can make some plays for us.

Q. Mack talked yesterday about how no one is opting out of the college football playoffs but you see a lot of opt-outs in these New Year's Six bowl and other bowl games across the country. What does the Orange Bowl mean to you as a college football player? How important is it to win this game?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, the Orange Bowl definitely means a lot to me. It's a game I grew up watching. It's a game I always wanted to play in down there in Miami. Obviously it being a New Year's Six bowl, we know how prestigious the game is. We're not just happy to be going down there, we want to win the football game. That's the mentality of our team.

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With the opt-outs, I understand all the decisions that those guys made, but for us here, the guys that are playing, we want to go down there and win, so that's our mentality.

Q. Not to put you too much on the spot here, but I'm curious about your take with the College Football Playoff. Would you like to see it expand to maybe six to eight teams?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, I think that would be cool just to -- I mean, it's just a little more exciting, more teams, but I feel like once you expand to six, then whoever gets left out at No. 7, they're going to try to make a case at the end. I feel like you're still going to have the same issues you have now, no matter how many teams you have.

But I'm definitely all for expanding it. I think only good could come out of that.

Q. What do you see as the biggest challenges given that you guys last played almost a month ago it'll be coming up, and also having to work in guys for the three major guys that aren't playing? What do you see as the biggest challenges to finding your chemistry and staying in sync?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, it's just different without those guys on the field. We've had a couple weeks to prepare, but we really don't have that many game reps. I don't have very many game reps with the younger running backs. I know I've thrown to the younger receivers a couple times, but really just -- it's just not -- we just don't really have the same chemistry. So that's probably been the biggest challenge, just trying to develop that chemistry as good as we can before Saturday.

Q. And what also do you see kind of as the biggest differences with this bowl experience given that we're in the pandemic? Like you're not going down for these events with Texas A&M and all that kind of stuff. It's pretty much another glorified, maybe a little extended but a glorified road trip?

SAM HOWELL: To be honest with you, I hate it. I love bowl week. I loved our time in D.C. last year for the Military Bowl. That was one of the funnest weeks I've had in my entire life just being there with the team. So I'm definitely a little bit disappointed that we don't get to be down there for a week and spend time with my guys. But it is what it is. Our main mentality right now is to go win the game, so that's what we're going to try to do.

Q. Texas A&M is one of the best teams in the country. How are you going to try to work with Mack Brown in terms of installing the right game plan this week?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, it's really the same as every other week. It doesn't really matter the opponent. We go through the same process every single week as far as developing the game plan. We always try to come up with the best game plan as possible, no matter who we're playing. Obviously this is a great challenge for us. But yeah, really we just stick to our same process that we've been sticking to all year.

Q. Do you have a little bit of an underdog mentality just because people are kind of counting you out of this game?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, I guess you could say that. People aren't really giving us a chance anymore, especially with these guys opting out, so they're probably thinking it's going to be a blowout, but we know people are saying that about us, but we really don't care about that. We know the guys we have. I think a lot of people are saying that because they don't really know what we have behind those guys that have played here for so long, and we know the type of players we have here.

So I'm excited for those guys to get out there and really show everybody what they really have because there's been a lot of disrespect towards the guys who are going to have to step up and play.

Q. What do you expect from Khafre Brown, Emery Simmons and Antoine Green stepping in for Dyami Brown?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I expect a lot of big things out of them. Those three guys are going to have to come up with some big plays for us to have a chance to win the football game. Dyami is due for a couple deep ball catches a game, at least one touchdown a game. So they'll definitely have to make some plays for us to have a chance to win.

They've had a really good couple weeks of practice, and they're all three really good receivers, all three of them are definitely talented enough to be starters here. They're talented enough, they put the work in, so I'm excited for those guys to get out there.

Q. What can you tell us about Antoine? He's one player -- Emery and Khafre have caught a number of balls this year, but Antoine hasn't been as productive this year. What can you tell us about Green?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, Antoine is a really, really talented player. I think he had the injury his freshman year. He was kind of in and out last year with injuries, too, so he hasn't gotten to play as much as we would have liked him

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to play, but he's definitely capable of being a really good player. I think Antoine is going to play this game for a very long time. I think he's that talented.

I think he played -- I watched some of his freshman year when I was still in high school, and I thought he was one of the best receivers in the country, so he's definitely a freak. He's got -- he really is a really all-around receiver. He's got great hands. He can catch the deep ball, so I'm excited for him to get out there and get a lot of reps this weekend.

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