

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

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Hard Rock Stadium

Mack Brown

Press Conference

Texas A&M 41, North Carolina 27

MACK BROWN: First, as we always do and should, congratulations to Texas A&M. They've got a great team. We knew that coming in. They should be a playoff team. I think that watching them and watching Notre Dame, they're so similar that you feel like that we should expand the playoff, number one, so more guys will continue to play at the end of the year and it'll help the bowl games. And number two, Texas A&M deserved to be in the playoff, so give them credit for the year that they've had. They beat Florida. They lose one game to Alabama, like everybody else that's played them has lost to them, and they're big and they're physical, and they do a great job coaching. They've got really, really good players.

For us, I thought that, number one, our coaches did an outstanding job of trying to take what we had and figure out how we can get the ball in other people's hands. They rushed for 225 because they ended up beating us down there at the end of the game. We missed a couple of tackles. We rushed for 90 yards, so that usually tells the story of the game right there.

We knew we were going to have trouble rushing. We were just hoping we could throw it well enough to have a chance to still win the game. But Josh Downs got the ball in his hands. Dazz Newsome got six catches. Josh got four. Garrett Walston gets four and Khafré has two and then had the one that he dropped that had a chance deep.

So I did think our coaches in a very short week figured out a game plan to give us a chance.

And then you start looking at Eugene Asante, I thought he did a good job tonight. Did he mess some things up? Of course he did because he hasn't played, but he showed that he's got a chance to be a really good player.

I asked the players to be physical, and they were, against a



very tough SEC team that's the No. 5 team in the country.

I asked the guys to play with confidence and they did. We had the ball with seven minutes left and a chance to win with a tie game, and then we go for the 3rd and 2 and don't make it. We go for the 4th and 1 and don't make it, because it was under three minutes and the clock running, and we didn't feel like that we were stopping the running game much at that time, so we felt like that we had to take our chance to try to go for it on 4th down and then we came up short, and we felt like that was our best chance to win. It gave them another touchdown, but again, this is a game you're supposed to win.

I'm really, really proud of the guys. I'm proud of the turnaround in two years. I told them in the locker room a few minutes ago that I'm proud that they got us here, and now the next time we come we need to win, and that's what it's about.

We've had wonderful learning experiences here at the end of the year with Notre Dame, with Miami and with Texas A&M. No. 5, No. 2, and we were in a fight with both of them. And we've got a lot of people coming back, so I congratulated the seniors and thanked them for playing in the locker room, but there's a bunch of young guys out there tonight that got a lot of experience and should gain some confidence watching this film because they can see how close we are to beating a top 5 team.

They let Achane -- we let him gain 141 yards rushing, and then Smith, who we knew was really, really good, had 125 yards catching. The ended up being the tough thing. The big play in the running game and the couple of big plays in the passing game really hurt us on defense.

And we still didn't force a turnover. We got a couple of sacks in the first half. They changed some protections up in the second half.

But I really feel like that Sam led well. He played well. He was tough. Phil used him as a runner more than he has in the past because we had lost some of our runners, so we got some rushing yards out of Sam. You start looking at he had 50, he lost some there at the end, but at least he got half of our rushing yards tonight.

If I can answer any questions.



Q. They had 204 yards, 24 points in the fourth quarter. Fewer points and almost that many yards in the first three quarters. What happened in that fourth quarter defensively?

MACK BROWN: I think they wore us down. I mean, we hung in there, but you miss tackles -- we had a lot of young guys out there and it was a hot night, and I think -- same players for them, same players for us, and we had trouble moving it in the fourth quarter, and we had trouble stopping them, so I think, again, give them credit.

Q. Kind of spinning this forward, given that you relied on so many young guys tonight - Grimes, Conley making plays, Downs with the touchdown, Khafre had a couple big catches - how close do you think you are to kind of getting over that hump and being the team that beats the top-10 teams?

MACK BROWN: We don't talk a lot about what we didn't play with tonight, but we lost 4,000 yards coming into the game and still had a chance against the No. 5 team to win. This is going to be a special team. Our three-and-a-half quarters against Notre Dame showed that. Tonight we showed that. We've got to get more experience. We've got to get more depth. On January 19th we'll have 12 more guys coming in that'll have a great spring practice and they'll get ready. But we're about to be really good, and I'm excited about that.

I told the players that tonight. Thanks for getting us here. Thanks for giving us a chance to win. When we come back, we want to win.

Q. What was the players' mindset coming in? You mentioned the other day kind of having the motivation of people overlooking the team because of the opt-outs and because A&M is supposed to be in the playoff. What was their mindset coming in and what were you trying to kind of preach to them about what this opportunity presented?

MACK BROWN: Well, there's 110 of them, so for me to tell you what their mindset was, they'd probably have to tell you because it's hard to read the minds of 110 young people. But I do think that even if we had not had guys that didn't play, people were going to give credit to the No. 5 team over the No. 13 team. So I think that's just the way it was.

We would have come in as an underdog, and we haven't been that many times. You really look at it, maybe Miami, but Notre Dame and then against A&M tonight, were about the only two times we've been an underdog. So I do think

that their mindset is to make sure that people start recognizing us nationally, and I think they did that tonight. They understand that they showed people how hard they're going to fight, and they do that every week. That's who they are. We haven't been flat for a game all year. Maybe we didn't play good a couple of times, but we weren't flat.

Q. I have a question about Sam: How did you see his performance tonight?

MACK BROWN: I thought Sam played great. We didn't get off to a good start with the interception, and then they made two 4th-and-1s to go ahead and score up early, but we had to get that out of the way because we're a new game plan, we've got new players against not a good defense, a great defense that's really well-coached. And I thought after that we settled down and played really well throughout the night. We didn't have our same running game, so when we got behind, it was harder to protect.

But when we had chances, Sam is the reason we were in the game. He hit three touchdowns, and he avoided some sacks a couple of times to get outside the pocket, and the one he hit to Josh Downs down the field was a great picture of what next year could look like. And I thought Dazz Newsome competed his rear end off for a senior that could have not played, could have worried about getting hurt, he came and he competed really, really hard all night, and I'm really proud of him.

Q. You mentioned just developing a new game plan. Did you think the first half in some ways was about just trying to figure out what you had on the field, how it was going to look, what you could do and then sort of trying to settle into the game? Was there a lot of in some ways figuring it out on the fly a little bit?

MACK BROWN: I thought it was. That's why we never use time-outs, and we had to use all of our time-outs or two of them because we couldn't get lined upright on offense. We had so many new players in there and they were all confused and anxious and nervous. So I'm in charge of time-outs, so I'd wait and wait and wait and wait, and I hate using those time-outs before we have them at the end of the half and the end of the game, but we had to use them because we were having trouble lining up in the right formation.

Give Sam credit. He had a bunch of new players out there, he didn't have his normal running game and he still gave us a chance to win.

Q. I know if the play works it's great, if it doesn't it's consider not good, but I want your thoughts on the 4th and 1 play call and the 3rd and 1 play call late in the

fourth quarter there.

MACK BROWN: Yeah, they were more physical than we were, and if you're going to be a top-5 team you've got to make a 3rd and 2 and 4th and 1. It's just that simple. We went for 4th and 4 and made it earlier. There's no question that you have to go for it and you've got to make it. If we have a zone read like we did against Clemson and we don't make it, it's a bad call. If you run it up the middle and you don't make it by six inches, it's a bad call. So we got to do a better job. We'll get to watch all this and study it.

They've got really good players. We even had a trick play that was wide open tonight for Garrett Walston. They blitzed us, and nobody ever saw it because we didn't get it off. There's a lot of things like that that happened during the ballgame, but we'll -- I'll be watching this tonight and I'll have a better idea of what happened on the 4th and 1.

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