

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

Sam Howell

Press Conference

Texas A&M 41, North Carolina 27

Q. This was another close game with a top ranked opponent. What do you feel like it's going to take to get you guys over the hump next season to where you're sitting in the seat that they are right now?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, we've just got to get better. Just everyone in the program just has to get better. I just told our guys in the locker room, remember this feeling, and everyone that's coming back, just use this feeling to motivate you in the locker room because we can get so much better. Everyone in this program has stuff that we can do better, stuff that we can work on. We were so close. I think we played a heck of a game out there tonight, we just came up short. Credit Texas A&M, they had a good team, they had a good plan, but we're right there, so we're going to work really hard this off-season. We'll be back next year.

Q. I just wanted to know from your perspective how much pressure did you put on yourself going into this game with all of the opt-outs and how do you feel you did leading those inexperienced players who had to show up tonight and fill in those shoes?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I didn't put any extra pressure on myself. I just tried to go out there and be the player that I am, just try to bring these younger guys along, try to get some confidence, try to get some younger guys involved in the game. I made a couple mistakes tonight. The interception early really hurt us, a couple other plays in the game that really ended up costing us the game, so I've got to get better myself. But for the guys that had to step up and play, I thought they played really well. Josh Downs is a young guy that had a heck of a game out there today; two running backs, British Brooks and Josh Henderson, they ran as hard as they could, and they're going to get so much better in the off-season. I'm excited for next year.



Q. It took the offense a little while to kind of get going. How much of that was just trying to understand and get a feel for the guys you had out there in new roles?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I mean, I've got to go back and kind of see what was slowing us down a little bit, but I wouldn't really say it was so much of that. I think we just had to kind of get adjusted to what they were doing to us. Once we were doing that, we were making some plays.

Q. You mentioned Josh Downs. Can you speak more to what he brings to the team and kind of what he did tonight?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, Josh is a heck of a player. I've known Josh for a long time now. I knew he was going to be a great player for us. Honestly I kind of expected him to get a little more touches than he did this year, but it's kind of hard when Dazz Newsome is in front of him. Dazz is a heck of a player, had a heck of a game tonight.

So yeah, Josh is a young guy. We know how special he is. We know how special he's going to be, so I'm definitely excited to work with him this off-season and for him to be one of the main guys next year.

Q. You mentioned the off-season. What things are you working on in particular to get better? What's been the focus for you as a quarterback in the off-season?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, you know, honestly I haven't put too much thought into it. I'm going to think about that a lot tonight and over the next couple days and try to develop the best plan for me to get better. Just a couple things -- I'm always just trying to get better mentally. I know one thing I definitely want to get better at is just being more comfortable in the pocket. Sometimes I move my feet a little too much. Sometimes I move my feet not enough, so just trying to be more comfortable in the pocket and trying to be a better quarterback from inside the pocket.

Q. What do you expect out of this team and what do you expect out of yourself next season?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, I mean, I expect big things. For myself personally, I have two years under my belt now, so I



expect for myself, I just want to be the leader of this football team and I want to take this team to great places, and I think we have a lot of potential in that locker room and a lot of younger players that are going to work harder than anyone in the country this off-season, and for this team I think we just keep going in the right direction. I know this program is going where we want it to go.

We came up short tonight, but that still doesn't take away from the great things we've been able to accomplish as a team. This is the first time in 70-something years since we've been to the Orange Bowl, so this team has accomplished some great things. I told our seniors in the locker room, they'll always be remembered as the guys who brought this program back to where we're trying to take it, and I promised those guys that we'll be back and we'll be on top next year.

Q. How do you kind of stop yourself from wondering what this game could have been if you guys had been full strength with all your stars and everything?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, honestly I'm not even thinking about that. I love all those guys to death. Most of those guys are my best friends. But it is what it is. I thought our guys out there played good enough for us to win the game. Eugene stepped up for Chazz and had a heck of a game. Just from sitting there watching on the big screen I saw him making -- he was all over the ball. Josh Downs, he played some more, Khafre played some more, just a lot of guys stepped up. I'm proud of those guys, and really they played good enough for us to win the football game. We just as a team didn't make enough plays, and personally I didn't make enough plays for us to win the game.

Q. Did Javonte, Michael or Dyami wish you luck before this game today?

SAM HOWELL: Yeah, definitely, every single one of them. All those guys, I'm close with all of them. They all wished they could have played tonight, but they had to do what was best for them. Those guys along with the seniors that played tonight will always be remembered as guys that took this program where we're trying to take it, and it's our job to keep it going in the right direction. But for the guys that opted out, I wish those guys the best of luck at the next level. All those guys are going to have really long careers in the NFL, so I'm just proud to play with those guys. It is what it is with the outcome tonight. Our guys played well enough to win, we just came up short at the end.

Q. When you mentioned you talked to some of the senior guys and you promised them that you would get back to a game like this, was there anybody

specific that you went up to and was there any specific message you wanted to say to those guys in particular?

SAM HOWELL: No, it wasn't really anybody specific. I just kind of went around to all the seniors and just thanked them for everything they've done because they've been a part of this program when they were winning one and two games in a season, and now we won eight games this year and came up short in the Orange Bowl, which is something that if you would have predicted happening two years ago, everyone would just call you a fool. So I just really appreciate all the work the seniors have put in. They just trusted the process. They trusted in Coach Brown when he came in. They trusted in me as the quarterback, so I'm just really appreciative of those guys and everything they've done for this program.

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