

Capital One Orange Bowl: Tennessee vs Clemson

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Clemson Tigers

Coach Dabo Swinney

Cade Klubnik

Will Shipley

K.J. Henry

Press Conference



I have a great respect for how they competed. They never backed down, either side. I thought both teams competed hard. Our guys fought. It was very frustrating with some missed opportunities, but they continued to compete all the way.

I thought defensively they gave us a chance really most of the night, and then when we got a one-score game right there in the fourth, they popped a couple runs there, and that was probably the worst defensive possession that we had.

Good football team, and a lot of missed opportunities.

Then obviously missed kicks, too.

Took some sacks, made some mistakes. My man Cade who's not in here yet, you can easily see how talented he is and what a great player he's going to be. He made a lot of great, great plays, but he also had some just mistakes, simple as that. Just took some sacks on some hots, took a sack on a sprint out, obviously the situation right there at the end can't happen.

These are all things he'll learn from. But what a great opportunity, what a great moment for him to be able to go and play and compete.

Again, did a lot of good things. Made some big-time throws.

Didn't go our way tonight, but definitely -- it's always sad when it comes to an end. It really is. It's always a sad situation because it's kind of the last time you're going to be with a lot of these guys, especially when it doesn't go your way. But even when you win it's sad because you've got some relationships that aren't going to be in the room next year.

But I'm thankful for our seniors. I love those guys. I'm proud of how they competed.

I'm better and Clemson is better because of those young men who spent the last four, five and in some cases six years as a part of our program. Very thankful for that.

Tennessee 31, Clemson 14

DABO SWINNEY: Well, first of all, congratulations to Tennessee. They did what they needed to do to win the game, earned it. Two teams had really good years, both teams earned their way here tonight, and they earned the win on the field tonight. We did not.

Incredibly disappointing. Just name of the game; a lot of missed opportunities, simple as that.

First half, I think we had six scoring opportunities out of seven drives, and we got one field goal out of it.

Against the No. 1 scoring offense in the country that you know at some point is going to hit an explosive or two, you have to capitalize. The one thing that we've been probably the most consistent at all year and have probably done the best is red-zone scoring, and we just did not take advantage of plus-territory opportunities. Again, seven drives, we had one punt first half, sky punt, seven opportunities, six scoring opportunities, and we come away with one field goal.

Really disappointed with the missed opportunities there. We had 101 plays and 480-something yards, and you don't get any points for yards. That's why on the stats, name of the game is points. Just like I tell the receivers, you don't get any points for getting open. You have to finish and execute.

We did not do that.

I will say this. I thought our guys competed their butts off.



... when all is said, we're done.®

Again, didn't end the way we wanted to tonight, but an excellent year, 11-3 and ACC champs, especially coming off a very challenging year last year and a lot of transition and a lot of change.

We're not anywhere near where we need to be or going to be, but we got better. That's something that we can take away from it.

Again, congratulations to Tennessee and Josh. Man, I thought, again, they did some good things. What a great year for them.

We'll take your questions with that.

Q. The decision on that opening drive to go for the fake field goal instead of -- the 44-yard field goal, was that something you saw on film, or was it more of a feeling, the respect for Tennessee's offense and the fact that you needed to score a touchdown?

DABO SWINNEY: All of the above. We knew field goals wasn't going to win the game, and we came into the game, we felt like we had it there, and want to go and look at it as far as how we executed it.

But just to come out and be aggressive, and again, knew especially early that a field goal was not going to be the difference in the game.

Then obviously we ended up missing three and made one, so just the plan coming in.

Q. Tennessee had a lot of pressure on you guys, on Cade. What did you see in terms of the pressure they were able to get? Was that anticipated in what they were doing to create pressure in this game?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, a couple things. He took a couple sacks on a couple hots where we don't have somebody for that guy. So those are things we'll learn from. Then there was a couple times where I know we got beat one time, just got beat outside at right tackle, got ran by him, and then there was a couple times where we've got to scramble a little bit better and help our tackles a little bit.

There's a lot of things. But hey, they got some pressure for sure. We've got to give them credit for that.

Q. Cade, how overall do you rate your performance, and what kind of motivation does it give you for this off-season?

CADE KLUBNIK: Yeah, just super proud of these guys

right here. We gave it all we had until the very last play. There's a lot of plays that I want back, but just super proud of how everybody competed. Just thankful for these seniors. Man, there's so many guys that they all just don't get to see every single day that just have such an impact on me, from everybody, Coach Swinney, Hunter Johnson, Chip, K.J. There's so many times that I need help and they're there for me, and just so thankful for these guys. Wish we could have sent off these seniors with a win, but I think we gave it all we had until the very last play.

Q. Will, you really battled it out throughout the whole game. There was one play that really, really stood out, you had that acrobatic play in the first half. Let's talk about the athleticism and how you just always will yourself every single play no matter what.

WILL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I'll just start off by saying I do it for the guys around me. I wouldn't want to play for any other university. I love my brothers. That's truly who I do it for.

I go out there, make a couple plays, but I missed a couple, as well, that I wish I could have back. 4th-and-1 earlier in the game, missed a signal. I shouldn't have those mistakes, especially mental errors.

But at the end of the day like Cade said, we competed, and there's absolutely no doubt about that. But there's a lot of improving to do on my end and just all around, but I love these guys, and I'd truly do anything for them.

Q. Cade, a lot of people are going to talk about the missed field goals. Do you feel like not being able to score touchdowns when you were on the other side of the field, when you were making progress and moving the ball up and down the field, do you think that was an issue that kind of eventually started to wear on you guys a little bit?

CADE KLUBNIK: Yeah, I mean, the name of the game is points, and you get points by scoring touchdowns. We needed to score touchdowns, and we weren't doing that.

Part of that was on me. I took a sack on third down. There was just a lot of missed opportunities.

Tennessee did a great job on disguising and disguising their blitzes and their coverages, and there was a lot of opportunities we had, especially in the red zone. But just we needed to finish. That's what we needed to do.

We were driving on them every single drive. Like we just were. For some reason when we got inside the red zone, we just couldn't finish it.



Q. K.J., I know this one hurts, but I imagine at some point you'll look back on the season, the fact that you won the ACC Championship. Will the way this game went factor at all into your decision whether you come back?

K.J. HENRY: Not at all. That decision time will be made at a later date. Right now it's just about appreciating, like you said, what we've done this year. Coach Swinney said it in the locker room, 11 great days and three bad ones, and we'd be fools to really just focus on the bad three. As competitors, that's what we're going to do because we just want to win them all. But I'm really proud of this group of players, this coaching staff, really everybody -- we was counted out at the beginning of the year. I look back at some photos I had taken, one commentator picked us to win the ACC and probably nobody had us finishing in the top 10.

Really just happy. Happy the way these guys fought until the end, and regardless of the outcome, I wouldn't trade one play or one coach for what I was able to be a part of this year. Really was special. I got to appreciate every moment.

Q. K.J., what did you think of Tennessee's offense, what were your impressions of going up against them?

K.J. HENRY: Yeah, great group. First, shout-out to our coaching staff. I definitely feel like we were prepared for at least the tempo aspect of it. Obviously a great focus that Tennessee does a great job stressing their opponents. I felt very comfortable in that aspect.

But with that being said, obviously a physical, big up front. I thought we did a good job from a front seven standpoint of really holding the line and not too many big runs given up, and when there were, it wasn't a matter of physicality, more just us being outside of our gaps. They're good enough to capitalize on our mistakes, but also obviously Joe is a great player, and that's kind of what I said before the game. A lot of people haven't gotten to see that because he hasn't gotten to play a lot this year, but I was very aware of what he could do.

It was a good night, I think, on the defensive side. Obviously could have been much better, but they did a great job of capitalizing on some of the mistakes that we had, and we'll just have to learn from it.

Q. Cade, you ran the ball an awful lot tonight. Was that an opportunity that presented itself within your reads?

CADE KLUBNIK: Yeah, I think it just happened during the

game. I think there was just plays to be had, and I don't think that was really the game plan coming into it, but ended up running some more inside zone, some more zone read, and just kind of happened.

Q. People will say the Clemson program is slipping compared to where it was just a few years ago. What would you say to people who would look at your program after tonight and say that it has fallen from the elite?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I mean, I can't really -- I don't really know what to say to them. We're 11-3. Sure, I wish we were undefeated, but we've won the league seven out of the last eight years. I think that's only happened one other time, and that was in the '70s by Alabama.

We've been pretty consistent, and we're going to continue to be consistent and keep trying to do everything we can to be undefeated around here.

I think we won 11-plus games -- in 1981 we won 12. I think we went 31 years before we won 11 games again at Clemson, and we did that in 2012, and I think we've done it eight times in the last 11 years, so I think we've been incredibly consistent.

Disappointing tonight for sure, but hey, we've got high -- nobody out there has higher expectations than what we have. I promise you that.

Again, we'll keep battling. We'll keep working. There's a lot of great days ahead. A lot of great days ahead. People say what they want to say. Always have, always will. We're just going to keep doing what we do. I've heard all those things before.

We're off to a good start this decade, and if you look at the totality of our program, we've done a lot of great things.

Then on top of that, we had 90 guys make a 3.0 this semester. 90. That's a school record. We had 17 guys make a 4.0 or better. For some people, it's all about the scoreboard; for our program, it's about really developing them in all areas. We've been able to do that consistently. Nobody has been more consistent than us.

We're not perfect; we work hard and try to win every game. These guys bust their butt. Y'all saw what this kid has got the ability to do. He's got some plays -- we all got plays we'd like to have back, but you got a chance to see how special he can be, and you see the heart of these guys. You've got a freshman, a sophomore and a senior sitting up here, and they are three of the greatest ambassadors that any university could ever have.



Again, you want to win every single game, and when you're a competitor, that's what you strive for. But at the end of the day, seasons come and go. Every year is a new journey. We got better this year. We didn't get where we wanted to go, but we got better, especially coming off of a very challenging season last year.

Man, I'm, again, thankful for the opportunity that we had to get here, and a lot of young guys to learn. I appreciate our fans that drove. We had a lot of fans come and support us, and really appreciate them and also appreciate the Orange Bowl people in making it a great week.

We're all disappointed. My focus is on the young men in that locker room and making sure that we learn from this and that we keep getting better, keep moving forward.

Q. Dabo, how do you encourage the players not only in a winning situation but also in a losing situation? How do you keep them all together, the whole team?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, you're honest. We all take ownership. We stay together. You win and you lose together.

When you step into a competitive arena, especially one like we compete in, you're going to win and you're going to lose. That's going to be part of it. You have to just keep -- you've got to manage the success and you've got to manage the failure, as we always say.

Obviously we failed tonight. We've got to manage that. We've got to own that. But we also have to create the right perspective, because at the end of the day we're teachers. We always have an opportunity to teach.

Like always, you watch the tape, you apply the lessons, and now that the season is over, you're going to study everything about our season, and we start back over in January. January the 13th we'll have our first team meeting, we'll reset, and the 2023 journey will be upon us.

We'll get back in the fight and go back to work. We hit three out of our five goals this year. If we hit five out of five, you win the National Championship. We'll get back to work and see if we can have a better year next year, see if we can keep getting better.

You just try to keep them together, be honest, and keep a good perspective.

Q. K.J. and Will, as two of the leaders on this team all year long, how will you sum up the season and what are the things you will remember?

WILL SHIPLEY: Yeah, I think the toughest part about it is you just remember the relationships and kind of what you got from those. I think about K.J. and what he's done for me. He took me under his wing right when I got here, and I've learned more from him than I could ever ask.

I think that's the biggest thing for me is just the relationships. I'm going to miss all the seniors, but we're coming back hungry. There's no doubt about that.

Looking overall on the year, it's not where we wanted to get, not where we wanted to be, not where we wanted to finish. But there's no doubt that we competed. I think we've got a bunch of dudes on this team who are hungry, hungry to come back next year and prove something.

We've got to keep our heads down, got to work in the off-season, get right back to it, but there's no doubt that we've got what we need in that locker room to get where we want to go.

K.J. HENRY: As for myself, when it comes to this year, like Coach Swinney said, just want to look back and know we got better, know we grew in the right direction. Been a part of a lot of great teams here, and this will go down as one of them, just inside out.

Like Ship said, all the relationships and all the great moments we've had, the love that had been shared on this team was probably the best and the most genuine out of all my time here. I'll remember all the free popcorn that I could have (laughter) when we had movie nights before the game. I love popcorn. I really appreciate Coach Swinney for allowing that for the team. It's really been a blessing for my life.

Yeah, there's just been a lot of great times, and I'll have a lot of time to look back and really enjoy and think about those times.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

