



**2018 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Clemson
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2018**



COACH SWINNEY: I appreciate it. Obviously, I'm very disappointed. We came here to win and just incredibly disappointed in our performance.

But the credit goes to Alabama. Congratulations to Alabama. They were the better team today. No question about it. And we had opportunities, just really had awful field position at the first of the game. I think their first three possessions were right around the 50, the kickoff return, and our punt team, our punting. We did not punt the ball well and flipped the field when we had opportunities. But just really disappointing in the first half, especially.

But as bad as we played, we still had an opportunity. I thought our defense kept us in the game and really played pretty good. They only had 260 yards, I think. Those good backs, we knew that was going to be a big challenge for us. They had about a hundred yards rushing, the two combined for that.

We did some good things. I was proud of Alex [Spence] for making a couple of kicks. A young guy going out there in that setting making a couple of kicks is something he can build on. But at the end of the day, championship football is a game of a few plays, especially when you're playing Alabama. Alabama is the number one scoring defense in the country for a reason. And you have to make the critical plays, and we didn't do that. We did it last year. We didn't do it this year.

We had some opportunities. We had a big drop on third down early in the game. We got a chance in the second half. We come out, and we get the turnover, and we got a chance. It's a 10-6 game. And we've got the right call, no safety defense. We got a post route probably getting ready to throw it for a touchdown. And we get a sack, fumble, catch, and a penalty. It's like a 42-yard play.

One thing that we have done a great job on all year is points off of turnovers. And we gave up 14 points off of turnovers. And one of them was, obviously, a pick-six. And another one they got great field position and went on to score. Fourteen points off of turnovers. And if you just play kind of even football as bad as we played, it's a 10-6 game in the fourth quarter and you have got a chance.

But tough slug when we get behind like that against Alabama and the clock is against you and they're going to play a lot of team safety. And just a tough day all the way around for us, a lot of penalties and again just misplaced five sacks. We didn't protect our quarterback well at all and could not run the football effectively. So that's really the story of the game.

But, again, the credit goes to Alabama. They did a heck of a job. And they're a great football team. We all know that. But at the end of the day, I will say this, I know we didn't score right there at the end. But I'm really proud of our defense and our offense and how they competed down the stretch in a tough situation. I think that says a lot about who they are, the character of our team.



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And I'm very thankful -- or hurt. It's a very disappointed locker room, but I'm very thankful for our seniors. And this is a team -- nobody picked us to be here this year. This is a team that went to their third playoff in a row, their third ACC championship in a row. They won 50 games in their career, 40 in the last three years. So I'm very thankful for my seniors.

It didn't end the way I wanted it to or the way they wanted it to, but this is a great group of young men that I'm going to miss deeply. But we will bounce back. We will learn from it. For us it's always about what is next.

And this is a disappointing end to a good season. 12-2, a 12-win season, another ACC championship, and another playoff opportunity. And the lesson is, again, championship football is a few plays and a very small margin for error. And you have got to be able to run the ball effectively and take care of the ball. And we didn't do those things tonight. And you're not going to beat a good team like Alabama when you don't do that, especially some of the mistakes that we had in the special teams as well.

So with that, I will take your questions. I will say this, too. I would like to thank the Sugar Bowl people. It's been a long time since I have been here and experienced this -- I never experienced it as a coach. And I thought our folks here at the Sugar Bowl did a great job. It was a great experience for us this week. And, hopefully, we will have an opportunity to get back here sometime in the future.

Q. Kelly, at any point did you feel like you had the opportunity to establish a rhythm possession to possession?

QB KELLY BRYANT: It was hard early. It was making a few minimal mistakes out there, couldn't really get in the rhythm. And that was pretty much the thing for us. We put together a drive and felt like we shot ourselves in the foot. It was kind of frustrating. But the mindset over there, we stick together.

We talked about that before the game. And there was going to be adversity early in the game. Just make sure that we stay together and battle through it. But you have to give credit to Alabama. The mistakes that we made, they capitalized on it. And so it's a learning experience for us.

Q. Coach, you mentioned it briefly in your opening comment of that immediate turnover in the second half. How vital do you think that was? It turned out to be negative yardage. But you still got the field goal but were not able to get seven off that turnover to start the second half.

COACH SWINNEY: That was critical. Like I said, it gave us a little shot in the arm, gave us momentum and great energy. I really felt like we were -- I know we had a negative play right there on the first play. But the field goal, 10-6, we're right there in it and then we get another stop. And we put a good drive together.

We will be sick when we watch it on tape. Kelly [Bryant] is getting ready to pull the trigger and throw it. And we get sacked. The ball comes out. They get it. So, again, it's a game of a few inches. And they made the plays and we didn't. So just really that simple. That's what it comes down to, missed opportunities. But they forced those missed opportunities.



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Q. Coach, the guy at the end of the table there, Clelin [Ferrell], had a sensational season and will have a tough decision to make. How much has he meant to your program these last couple of years?

COACH SWINNEY: I'm so proud of Cle. It's been fun to watch him mature and grow. You get to know these guys in the recruiting process. And he was just kind of a shy kid coming in. And just to watch him blossom into a great man, he is a great leader. He is one of the best leaders we have on this team. And, obviously, he is an outstanding football player.

But I'm just really proud of who he is as a young man, what he's all about: His heart, his will to win, how he prepares, and how he pushes and holds his teammates accountable. I mean, he's a grinder, man. And I'm just really, really proud of him.

Q. Kelly, if you could comment on what you saw on film compared to what you saw in live action here tonight. Was there any difference in what you saw on film compared to what Alabama brought game plan-wise tonight?

QB KELLY BRYANT: It was pretty much the same thing. It transferred over to the field. But we knew we were going to get into -- prior to the game, it was going to be a physical game. And we were going to have to make plays and make contested plays. But like I said earlier, just Alabama made those plays which we should have made.

Q. Clelin [Ferrell], how physical was that game?

DE CLELIN FERRELL: We knew coming into the game it was going to be a grown man's game. We didn't really feel overwhelmed because we understood what we were getting into. We played in this game the past two years, and we understand how physical of a game it was going to be. Like we said, the game was going to be won and lost in the trenches. As a team, we just feel like we didn't do a joint effort together to come out with a W. And the scoreboard showed it.

Q. Coach [Dabo] Swinney, you mentioned in your opening comment that not many people were predicting you guys to come back here to the playoffs, third straight year. Ultimately, how would you like this team to be remembered?

COACH SWINNEY: They had a heck of a season. I mean, it didn't end the way we wanted it to. You're never happy when you don't win that last game. But at the end of the day, when you step back and take it, this is a disappointing moment, man. This is not what we came here to do. We put a lot of work into this and didn't get it done. So it's very disappointing.

But at the end of the day, when you take a deep breath and you step back a little bit, this will be one of the best teams that we have had. I mean, this has been a remarkable team. It really has. You look at what Kelly Bryant has done this year, his first year playing quarterback. We had a lot of young guys step up. I thought our



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defense had a chance to be really, really special and they were. And, offensively, it was going to be a group that was going to have to grow and get better. And we, obviously, lost a lot of guys.

But this has been a fun team to coach. I have thoroughly enjoyed being around this group of guys. They have been easy to coach. They have come to work all year. They have had an unbelievable attitude and work ethic and belief. And it's been fun. They really have -- again, this was a bad night. But that doesn't change how I feel about the type of season.

It's hard to win 12 games. And certainly with 130 teams, there's hard to make it to the playoff. And these guys earned that. We earned a butt-whipping tonight as well. But we also earned 12 wins and three ACC championships in a row. And especially those seniors. To see those guys win 50 games in their career and 40 in the last three years, it's been a heck of a run. So we have not lost a lot of games. So it's really disappointing when you have to kind of process that when it happens.

But I tell our guys all the time, it's always about what is next. And we're going to learn and grow and always get better. And my expectation is to be right back here next year, right back in the middle of it, right back in the thick of it. We have got a heck of a team coming back. We're going to have a much more experienced team next year than we had this year. And they will be eager to get back to work.

So our season is ending the earliest that it has ended in a while. But we will take a little time and decompress a little bit. School starts back for us on the 10th. We will have a team meeting on the 11th. We will have our banquet on the 13th. I'm really, really excited about honoring these seniors in a proper way as opposed to a very disappointing locker room.

We will catch our breath, and we will get our perspective where it needs to be. And I will be excited to get back to work and start over, new journey, and, again, go see if we can finish a little better next year. But at the end of the day, there aren't many 12-win teams in the country.

And we lost to Alabama. We lost to a great football team, and we will own that. And I don't think this will be the last one. We will see. Everybody talks about the trilogy and all of that are like somebody is fixing to die or something, like the world is coming to an end. We will be back and so will they. We will have probably several more opportunities to hook it up with these guys, and we look forward to that.