



**2019 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Georgia
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2019**



COACH SMART: I'll open with the City of New Orleans and Sugar Bowl staff. They do a tremendous job. Give our guys a lot of opportunities to grow. And so many people talk about the fact the bowl games don't mean as much anymore. Our players had an experience this week that they'll remember the rest of their lives. It's one of the best bowl games in the history of bowls.

And I know these guys aren't happy, nor am I, with the performance we had. We didn't come out and play the way we're capable of. But I certainly want to thank the people of New Orleans for hosting us.

I also want to congratulate Texas. Tom [Herman] did a great job with his team and his program. They've gotten better throughout the season. They played more physical than us, and it showed to me that they wanted it more than we did. And you've got to give them credit for that.

Also, I want to thank my seniors. We've got a group of seniors on this team that have -- they came in as 30-something signees and it's down to about six or seven or eight guys that are actually playing now out of that senior class, and that's all that's left is that group.

And they bought into what this staff has wanted to do. They've led. They've done the hard things. And they've won a lot of football games, and they've helped turn this program the right direction. We've just got to find a way to finish it and do it the right way, and we'll do that moving forward. Thank you.

Q. Coach Smart, did it necessarily surprise you how physical they were on both sides of the line of scrimmage tonight?

COACH SMART: I wouldn't say it surprised me. They're league (Big 12) guys. People don't respect their league like we do, especially from a scoring standpoint. They do a great job in their league of up tempo, fast.

But when they have to play physical, they played physical. They did a good job of that. I thought their quarterback managed the game well with his quarterback run play. He really hurt us. We missed tackles and didn't finish on him defensively. And then we weren't really able to run the ball like we like to consistently and give Texas credit. They did a good job stopping that.

Q. Do you think that the not getting into the Playoff thing overtook the focus from this game?

COACH SMART: I think that would be easy to say, but I certainly don't think that when you go to a meeting that's what you're thinking about. You're thinking about Texas. When you're on the practice field, you're thinking about Texas. We're prepared for Texas.

We prepared for Texas for a long time. That would be an easy excuse to use. I'm not touching that because it has nothing to do. We had an opponent to play, a good football team in which our team was focused on ready to play.



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I think in the world of social media it's easy to say things. But 15, 20 years ago you didn't know what kids were thinking because they didn't have the ability to tweet it out or show it. Now, their thoughts change every ten seconds.

So just because they tweet something emotional during that time, that doesn't matter. It gives the other team motivation. But our team was motivated to play Texas. Texas outplayed us, outcompeted us. They outcoached us. They out physicaled [sic] us. They did a lot of things better than us, and I think you give Tom [Herman] a lot of credit.

Q. Seemed like everything kind of steam rolled there. Jake's [Fromm] knee touching the ground and then fumbled at the 12-yard line. Just seemed like everything that could go wrong went wrong that first quarter and got you in a tough hole.

COACH SMART: It did. Those are things that we controlled. We controlled the snap. We controlled Jake's knee. And we control whether we possess ball or not because people try to take it from you. But those are all the things you have got to be resilient about and go out and overcome.

If you prepare right and you go out there and play your best football game, you don't have those errors. You've got to be able to overcome those sometimes. If you think about this year, we didn't have a start of a game similar to like that really all year. We've got to do a better job preparing our players for that and go out and execute.

Q. It took you a little bit of time to get rolling. Was that Texas? Was that y'all, the receivers? Was it everything?

QB JAKE FROMM: Well, it was tough. They did a really good job game planning for us. They had an entire month to do so. They were showing a lot of different looks. They were constantly mixing stuff up. Did a really good job with some eye violation stuff and showing you one thing one way and bringing it from the other.

But I think at the beginning they game planned really well. They showed us what that game plan was in the first couple drives, but we just couldn't make adjustments quick enough really to capitalize on that.

Q. Coach, you've got a young roster. What do you hope your young players will take away from these last two games?

COACH SMART: I hope they learn you better show up to play every game because the teams you're playing at the end of the year are all capable of topping you. We've played in some really incredible venues with the SEC championship and then the Allstate Sugar Bowl. And there's a lot of young players out there that are growing and getting better.



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I hope this group buys in with really good leadership, especially the youth on the team, and grows into good leaders. We've got to have great leadership moving forward to get where we want to go. I think the guys leaving have set a legacy and set a standard.

Now we've got to raise that standard, and we've got to learn from the fact that when you go to play a game 30 days later, you got to be at your best. We didn't play our best game tonight, but you got to give Texas a lot of credit because they made it that way.

Q. Jonathan, what will your legacy be at Georgia after this four years?

DE JONATHAN LEDBETTER: I think it's simple. You know, Georgia's heading a different direction than it was a couple years back. I can say I was a part of that group that laid the foundation for that. Obviously, you see the standards changing, despite today, tough loss. Played a good physical team.

But the culture of Georgia has become something greater than it ever was. I think it will continue to do that way beyond when I'm gone. But I was start of it, and that's big for me. I'm grateful to be that. I'm grateful that the school allowed me to be there and took a chance on me and picked me as a leader for this team and just to get the thing started off in the right way.

Q. Jake, with the running game, a lot of your offense is predicated on that success. What were they able to do to take that away from you guys, or was it something that maybe you guys weren't able to execute?

QB JAKE FROMM: They were very physical up front. That's one obstacle you have to climb over. And the next thing they were slanting this way and that way, shooting multiple gaps. And we just had a tough time trying to figure out which way they're moving and trying to cut guys out of gaps. It was tough.

And we just didn't really do a good job of being physical up front, and it kind of hurt us not being able to return the football.

Q. Kirby, Divaad Wilson played tonight for the first time at Georgia and played a lot.

COACH SMART: He did.

Q. How did y'all get him ready for that, and what were the expectations coming in?

COACH SMART: Well, we wanted him to play all year, and I give the kid a lot of credit. He's been frustrated, and he wanted to play. He had the ACL injury in the spring, and we thought he was going to be a really good player. And he was cleared somewhere around the Florida week. But you can't just get cleared and basically go out there and play.

It's similar to Ben's [Cleveland] injury. It's an injury where you've got to take some time to get over it. We thought with a 30-day window that if we're going to get to where we want to go as a program, as a football



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team, we've got to get bigger at the nickel star. We've got to get more athletic and be able to play heavier guys, 200 pounds.

I can't say how he played. And Tyrique [McGhee] actually got injured during the game, so that's another guy out. So Divaad [Wilson] played hard, and he was excited to go over there and play.

Q. There was a report that you benched a couple starters during practice during the week because of lack of effort. Can you comment on that? And, also, [Mecole] Hardman said he thought the energy level of a bunch of guys seemed to be down at the start of the game. Can you comment on that?

COACH SMART: I didn't feel that way. I thought the energy level was really good at the start of the game. Guys were fired up. We sold playing to a standard and making a statement. We didn't do that. We were going to play for each other's back. And the guys that we wanted to go out there and play for were the guys that are seniors.

So we, obviously, didn't do that well. We didn't come out and start very fast. And like I said before you came in, I think, that we didn't have the kind of start that we had in most games. It was the exact opposite.

The beginning question was: Did I bench any starters? I thought our guys practiced really well leading up to the game since we came to the bowl site. We had a lot of starters injured. We had guys out. But there was nobody that got benched that was a starter.

Q. Nonstarter?

COACH SMART: No. If he's a nonstarter, how do you bench him? I certainly didn't feel that way. D'Andre Walker didn't play tonight, but D'Andre Walker has been injured.

We felt it was important to practice shorter and practice good on good. Because the looks you get from the scout team late in the year is not real good, and kids get lethargic and they get lazy and you get sloppy. So we did higher quality work with less quantity and got more competitive. So we had all our starters out there going against each other.

Q. Jonathan, the fast pace of the Texas offense, you think y'all were pretty well prepared for that? And also [Sam] Ehlinger, the quarterback, he was kind of hard to contain and all. What would you say about both of those things?

DE JONATHAN LEDBETTER: We handled the tempo pretty well. He's a good quarterback. Can't take that away from him. He threw touchdowns, and he's good running. He's a running back that can throw the ball.

We didn't contain. We didn't have a level pass rush most of the time. And we didn't get him on the ground. When you don't do that, he makes plays.



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Q. What do you think happened with D'Andre [Swift] at the beginning of the game? I've not seen him fumble like that in his time at Georgia.

COACH SMART: It happens, guys. I mean, I don't know. You want to say that he was wanting to fumble? One of them, the guy literally stripped it out. It was a great strip. We pride ourselves -- we're one of the teams in the country we start half our practices with defensive players ripping at the ball of the offensive player. The kid ripped the ball out.

The second one, he put his helmet right on that ball. And that one, you almost say that was a weird hit. He spiked and hit him right on the ball. The ball shot out. The first one he got stripped out. Can't happen.

I know D'Andre is just as disappointed as everybody and we didn't play with the same energy level that we usually do.

And that's a lot of credit to Texas because they were in our backfield several times. They penetrated and moved quick. And we weren't able to handle the penetration. And when they're in your backfield, that's how they cause fumbles.

Q. One, do you feel like you guys were able to flush away the loss in Atlanta before coming here? And the other part of it is, can you guys bounce back from this during an off-season?

QB JAKE FROMM: First part, no. I don't think it bothered us. We flushed it. We went back to work. We realized what had gotten us to this point, and that's going to work, that's grinding, and really going hard at practice. And I thought leading up to this game, we practiced really well and had a lot of good things in. Just didn't play well today.

Q. Can you just turn the page from this during an off-season going into next year?

QB JAKE FROMM: Absolutely. We're definitely going to do that. Myself, a couple other of these leaders, we're going to step up, and we're going to have a great off-season, come back better than ever. And I'm fired up for it and can't wait for it.