



**Allstate Sugar Bowl
Clemson
Offensive Coordinator
Press Conference
December 29, 2020**



Q. Can you tell us what you did exactly for Michelin? Maybe where you were based, what your job duties were, and how and why you returned to coaching.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: When I started, I was hired on as an industrial engineer. That's what I graduated from Clemson with, a degree in industrial engineering.

Part of my job was just trying to figure out how to optimize some of the systems and the processes they had in place. In particular, I was working with a production unit. The plant I was at was actually manufacturing all the rubber that you ship off to the tire plants where they actually build the tires. So we were just trying to optimize the weight per palette of the fabricated rubber so we can maximize the weight on a shipping truck so that we can cut down the cost.

That's where I started. From there, that was my first -- when you go to work for Michelin as an industrial engineer, they put you in a program. So I had a six-month study. That was my project there. Once I finished that, then I just integrated into working with a couple of business units within the plant and just trying to help them figure out how to optimize everything from the raw materials, the machinery, and then also the human input.

Q. I was just wondering, with Taisun [Phommachanh] and the situation his family went through, how did you all try to help him? And what's it been like for you guys on offense trying to help?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: It's a really tough situation. I remember just thinking back, I know Grady [Jarrett] went through a similar situation.

But as it relates to Taisun, biggest thing is we were able to get a waiver to be able to contribute to the GoFundMe page for him and his family. You think about all the immediate needs that you would have in a situation when your house burns down, things we take for granted.

The biggest thing is just trying to support him emotionally as he goes through that difficult time, and then those who were able to contribute, just trying to help them reach their goal on their GoFundMe page.

Q. Some of the names and faces on Ohio State's defense are the same from last year but they've moved around a little bit. One in particular, Pete Werner, who was their Sam linebacker this year moving over to Will [Brown]. Anything that jumps out at you on film about him in that new role and what he means to this defense?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: Pete was a guy that, going into the game, you don't realize just how good of an athlete he is. Watching him on tape is -- when you play him in person, you see that he's a guy that's got a big body, but he can move like a safety. He can cover. Then what you see now with him playing inside the box, he has natural instincts. He can find the ball.



**Allstate Sugar Bowl
Clemson
Offensive Coordinator
Press Conference
December 29, 2020**



Obviously with his movement skills, he moves quickly so he can get around blocks. Then he's also big enough to be able to set the edge, too, if he's ever in that situation. So just he's a guy from last year that, after the game, you had a lot of respect for him and then some of the other faces, too.

It's been tough too. I understand it. They've been battling issues with COVID. He's been asked to play a lot of different positions, such as Brown has been asked to play a lot of different positions.

All those guys are doing what it takes to be successful. And the structure looks very, very similar. As you said, some of the names and faces are new, but the product looked very, very similar.

Q. Piggybacking off of that, obviously, the personnel has changed. They were so good in the middle of the last year, so good on the edge. Do you see a lot of similarities there with how they try to attack and the success they've been having?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: They were very good in the middle, on the edges, and on the backend last year. And they are very, very similar.

Again, a lot of the faces and names may be new, but the structure, the tenacity they play with, they're very, very well-coordinated. Everybody understands what their role is, how they fit. They're not out of position much. They fit their gaps. If you are lucky to be able to make the step up in pass protection, they know exactly where they need to go. Once they diagnose, they know their drop spots, their reading routes. A lot of this stuff is very similar to last year, with a difference. Only difference is just the names and the faces.

But what you can tell, they understand structurally, offensively, what you're trying to do. They have their guys very, very well prepared. You can tell Number 32 (Tuf Borland), tough in the middle, very, very smart linebacker helps those guys get lined up.

They have had to play some different guys inside and on the defensive line throughout the course of the year. You can't really tell a difference between those guys. 11 (Tyreke Smith) and 0 (Jonathon Cooper), I mean, they pretty much were spitting images of each other. Then you have got the length of Number 9 (Zach Harrison) on the edge. They know how to play the zone read. Again, I know the coordinator may be different but the product is very, very similar.

Q. As a Clemson lifer and a guy who knows the program and knows the history, I don't want to read too much into sort of what fans think about things. But for a long time, as this level of success continued to grow, you guys were the good guys, fighting against the Alabama evil empire in a lot of fans' minds outside of Clemson fans. It feels like maybe this year more than ever you guys have sort of been in that cachet of the bad guys, too, because of all the success you've had.

Is that something that anybody takes notice of inside the program? I know Dabo [Swinney] always likes playing the little old Clemson underdog card as a way of motivating things. Does being the bad guys be its own motivation a little bit?



Allstate Sugar Bowl Clemson Offensive Coordinator Press Conference December 29, 2020



OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: I don't think we look at it from that perspective. Coach always says that right is right; wrong is wrong. So when Coach Swinney believes in something, he's going to say what he believes and he's going to act accordingly with what he believes. I know there's been a lot of back-and-forth with some comments from last year and then some of the things with Coach's ranking.

He believes it was the right thing to do. It wasn't anything in disrespect to Ohio State, but it was just based off the totality of the season and the sacrifices that a lot of teams had to make.

For us, several years back we adopted the mantra "embrace the target." We were no longer going to be little old Clemson that would sneak up on people, that whenever we stepped on the field, we were going to get everybody's best. For us, it's about embracing the target, staying true to our fundamentals on the field, but also our fundamentals and core values off the field. And then understand that, with success, comes scrutiny but always resetting every single year back to what the foundation of the program is and then building off of that as each team creates their own identity throughout the season.

Q. I'm wondering if you feel like you know more about the Ohio State defense based on the game last year or based on the film you've seen this year.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: As I said earlier, in response to some of the questions, the structure is very, very similar. Obviously, I know there's two different coordinators between the last time we played them and this season. But they still have the similar structure. They play the same coverages, very similar pressures.

I anticipate they're going to have some things that we've got to adjust to throughout the course of the game. But it's the combination of getting ready for this one, making sure that we understood from last year's take where we needed to improve because, obviously, it's professional courtesy. They're going to try and attack some of the things they had some success attacking last year. And we've got to make sure we fix those. And then they're going to build upon the strengths of this team.

Even though the structure is similar, each team, just like us on offense, each unit will have its own identity. They are going to play to the strengths of their identity. They are going to test and make sure that we corrected the issues from last year. But I think it's just going to come down -- at the end of the day, you get to this point doing what you do. You're not going to get away from what your base offense is. You're going to have a couple of game-plan wrinkles.

But at the end of the day in this one, on the biggest stage, when the lights are bright, there's going to be a lot of emotion in this game. You got to make sure that you put your players in a position to be successful. And the best way to do that is to just do what you do and do what has gotten you to the point to be in this game.



**Allstate Sugar Bowl
Clemson
Offensive Coordinator
Press Conference
December 29, 2020**



Q. If Deshaun [Watson] is remembered as the guy who helps orchestrate the program's next step from 2014 through 2016, what do you believe Trevor Lawrence's legacy or long-standing impact will be when his time ends at Clemson?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: That's a tough question because Deshaun was great, and he took us to the promised land. It's not a situation where Deshaun didn't win a national championship and then Trevor has won one and having an opportunity to play in another.

I think the biggest thing for Trevor, his legacy will be his record, being all-time winningest quarterback in school history. More important, I think it's going to be the impact he made on the game of college football with some of the stances that he took, in particular, this season.

Most importantly, he's just like Deshaun. They're humble young men. They love to win. They love to compete. They love to do it the right way. And they are about service to their teammates and their community. I think the legacies will be similar. As time goes by, you know how it is, the legends is always going to grow.

I'm actually looking forward to what that legacy is down the road.

Q. Dabo [Swinney] mentioned yesterday that the wide receivers didn't exactly play their best game versus Ohio State last year. I know it's largely a different group this year. Is that something that you can point to just kind of to challenge them going into this game?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: No doubt. Really, the wide receivers, the interior of the offensive line, Travis [Etienne] in pass protection, we put a couple of balls in jeopardy in the passing game. Fortunately, we were able to put enough plays in the end to win the game. Everybody will be challenged to play better because we know they're going to come in and they want it just as bad as we do, and we're going to have to execute.

The wide receivers were challenged last year. I made reference to that in a previous question. They are probably going to try to attack us the same way, I would imagine. Get up there and press our guys and see if they can have more success. Who's going to have more success? Their corners or our receivers in terms of winning the matchup at the line of scrimmage.

Biggest thing for us is making sure that we don't try and do too much, but we're well aware of the things we need to improve upon, and then have the right state of mind. Because last year, I think going into it, they came out and they punched us in the mouth. It's been a while since we've been in a heavyweight fight. In reference to last season, it bloodied our nose. It took us a little while to rebound and then really kick it in gear.

This game right here, we are not going to be fortunate enough to be able to have that mind-set. We have to come in and set the tempo early with what we're doing on offense. We have to match their physicality and their intensity in the trenches, and then guys have got to go make competitive plays.



**Allstate Sugar Bowl
Clemson
Offensive Coordinator
Press Conference
December 29, 2020**



Q. There's a reason the wishbone isn't run anymore, the veer isn't run anymore. Will there be a day that defenses sort of, quote/unquote, catch up with to the spread in RPO? Because, you know, guys like Brent Venables are game-planning against it every day.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR ELLIOTT: Right. I'd say in reference to this question here, it may not be the wishbone, but there's a lot of option principles still floating around, even at the college level, and it's even trickling back up to the NFL level.

I think it's always a cat-and-mouse. Just as they're going to try and find ways to stop the new trends, we're always going to be looking for new trends. Then we'll recycle things. I even think the (Kansas City) Chiefs put a bone formation out there a couple of times this season.

So I think that it's just -- it's a revolving cycle. Things come and go, and it's cat-and-mouse, and everybody is trying to stay one step ahead. But just as tempo -- you know, tempo was a new thing. Defense has figured out how to be able to call their game even with the element of tempo. So then you have to transition there.

I think it's just constantly going to be cat-and-mouse going forward. And, offensively, we're trying to stay ahead of the curve, just like defensively they want to see if they can get the advantage as well.

At the end of the day, football is always going to be about angles and numbers, when you boil it down, and winning one-on-one matchups. Schemes are great. But when you get to this point in the season, schemes, you're going to have to have them. But at the end of the day, it's going to be the Jimmies and the Joes that are going to make things go.