



**Allstate Sugar Bowl**  
**Head Coach Dabo Swinney**  
**Post-Game Press Conference**  
January 01, 2021



**COACH SWINNEY:** Okay. Well, obviously not our night. Incredibly disappointed in how we played. But, man, super proud of our fight in the second half. Obviously the game got away from us and our guys continued to compete, all the way down to the last play. And I'm really proud of that. Proud of how they battled.

Some of those seniors, just continuing to compete. I do appreciate their efforts there.

We had great preparation but wasn't our night, and you have to give Ohio State credit for that. They were awesome. They absolutely dominated the line of scrimmage. You can't win games like this if you can't stop the run and the big plays.

And I think they had five straight touchdowns and just really couldn't respond like we needed to. Had a chance there in the third quarter. We got the score. Got the interception, got the score, cut it to two scores. So maybe if we could get one more stop and that was kind of our -- get one more stop, score again, now you've got a one-score game going into the fourth quarter. But it just wasn't to be.

And, again, the credit goes to Ohio State. They just absolutely dominated the game. You've got to give them credit for that. They were the better team, and they earned it.

But very disappointed, certainly, in how we performed. Not what any of us expected. But, again, congratulations to Ohio State.

On a positive note, I will say this, we win and lose as a team around here and we'll grow from it. It's a hurting locker room in there. It's a hurting locker room. We haven't lost many games around here in a long time, and this one hurt. And this was an opportunity to go play for a national championship, and we didn't get it done.

But I tell you what, it's a special group of people in that room. These guys, nothing about that scoreboard changes how I feel about this team and about the people involved in this team, our staff, our players. Their leadership, their commitment, their sacrifice this year has been incredible. We are 10-2. A lot of people didn't think we would even play. And we've been through a lot.

We're 10-2 and ten 10-plus win seasons in a row, been to six of these playoffs in a row. And this one didn't go our way. But you have got to have a chance to get here. And these guys fought their tails off.

These seniors went undefeated at home, first time ever in school history. Won 51 games in four years. Just a great group of people. We had the most graduates, the most 3.0s we've ever had this semester. We had 74 guys make a 3.0. This is a team full of great young people, great character, great heart. And nothing about the scoreboard changes that.

We're all disappointed. Really hurt for our fans. Again, this is not what we envisioned. But all you can do is give Ohio State credit because they just flat-out played a great football game.



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And we got off to a good start. Scored, I think, two out of the first three drives there. We just couldn't quite sustain it, and then they went on a run. I think it was five straight touchdowns. And we just got in a hole. And when we had a chance in the third quarter, just couldn't respond.

But congratulations to Ryan [Day] and Ohio State. I thought their team -- Justin Fields was awesome, his toughness, his grit, just a great competitor.

I tell you what, man, Trevor Lawrence, I know we didn't win the game, but you saw everything you need to know about that guy tonight. I mean, he just -- he wanted to play till the last second and give it everything he has. And that's just who he is as a person.

And so Cornell Powell, man, what a year he had. So many positives that we'll process. This is going to hurt for a little while. But we will step back and reset and get ready to start back over. This was a special year. A great football team, great group of people. And I'm really, really proud of them. So with that, I'll take your questions.

**Q. Dabo, do you think your coaches poll ballot had anything to do with their motivation? Either way, do you regret not ranking them 11th but just the way you explained it?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** No, I don't regret any of that. And polls have nothing to do with motivation. Both teams were highly motivated to play.

And, listen, they're a great team. As I said, that had nothing to do with Ohio State. I said they were good enough to beat us, good enough to win the whole dang thing. But I didn't think anybody that didn't play at least nine games, in my poll, that I wasn't going to put them in the top ten. So I wasn't going to change that just because there was a chance we could play them. So I don't have any regret about that.

Only thing I regret is obviously not doing a good enough job getting my team ready. But I don't regret anything about that at all.

**Q. I asked some variation of this before. But now that Trevor [Lawrence] and Travis' [Etienne] career are both probably over, what's the legacies they both left here?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** Unbelievable, man. It was a very painful moment in there hugging both of them and just telling them how much I love them, how much I appreciate them. And both of those guys just laid it on the line tonight. I mean, they absolutely laid it on the line, not just tonight but their whole careers.

And it's just been an unbelievable journey. I'm just so thankful that I got a chance to coach those guys and be a part of their journey. You know, both of them have such bright futures and a lot of football ahead.

I mean, Trevor Lawrence is a generational guy. He's going to be a great player for a long, long time. And so is Travis Etienne. And just to know that the good Lord blessed me to be a part of their journey, I'm just thankful for that.



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But both of them are leaving here. Trevor is the winningest quarterback in school history. Played for two national championships. Won one of them. Left here three-time league champion.

Travis Etienne, he's an all-time ACC leading rusher and got all kinds of records at Clemson. These are two unbelievable players that will be in the College Football Hall of Fame at some point, one of these days down the road. So I'm thankful that the good Lord blessed me to be a part of their journey.

We're all sad that it ended the way it ended tonight. And we wanted to end it in Miami with a victory and ride off into the sunset, but that wasn't to be.

I love those guys, and I'm so thankful for all those seniors. But Travis and Trevor, man, just incredible legacies. And they set the standard, I mean, not just their performance but how they worked, their commitment, their toughness. They didn't ever expect anything more from their teammates than they were willing to give. And just their appreciation of the opportunity. Both of them are graduates and, like I said, have very bright futures ahead. And I look forward to following their journey.

**Q. Can you talk to me a little bit about the targeting call? Do you think he (James Skalski) was just trying to use the technique with the head behind on his tackle and was just an awkward placement?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, I mean, it wasn't anything intentional. It was just -- But, listen, the letter of the rule or technicalities of the rule, they're going to apply it. But he certainly didn't -- he was just trying to make a football play, and it's unfortunate.

**Q. How do you feel about how Coach [Brandon] Streeter called the game tonight? And I guess, logistically, how much of an adjustment was it from what you're used to as far as making in-game adjustments and so forth?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** It was similar. The biggest thing was we couldn't really get consistency in rhythm as far as like -- like I said, they had five straight touchdown drives. Normally we'd get stops, and there was just -- We got out of the gate pretty good. We had one drive we missed a screen throw that was really a good play. And we missed Davis Allen. Ended up punting there.

Again, got off to a good start. Defensively we were really out of rhythm and too many busted big plays, big chunks, posts over the top, guys open, not stopping the run. And it put a lot of pressure.

Again, five straight touchdowns and we weren't able to respond like we needed to offensively. But Streeter did a great job. He really did. He did a nice job. We just got in a hole.

In games like this, that's not the position you want to be in. I thought we would be in a little better balanced game there, but it just got away.



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Momentum in games like this is huge. It's huge. It's like our national championship game a couple years ago out there in California. We weren't that much better than Alabama. We just -- the momentum, the big plays, the next thing you know, it just -- it gets rolling.

And it's a similar situation. Been on both sides of it. Tonight we were on the wrong side.

But, again, our guys kept competing. We kept battling. We did better in the seconds half, but just too little too late. But Street did a great job.

**Q. Aside from the legality of the play with [James] Skalski, how much did that particular moment as you talk about sort of the momentum and the shifts in the game and the opportunities you might have had, had that been a stop and had Skalski stayed in the game, do you feel like things would have played out differently than they did?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** Who knows. I'm not going to get into the woulda-shoulda-coulda. We had plenty of opportunity. They just kicked our butt, period.

He's one of the best players. It's like losing Trevor Lawrence. It was a tough play. It was a tough break. Like you said, you get the stop and now it's an automatic first down inside the 5 or wherever it was and get the touchdown. So it was a critical, critical moment for sure.

But losing him was a big loss for us. But that's -- like I said, nothing we can do about it. We've got to respond, and we didn't get it done.

**Q. You've been in situations where you're playing a team that beat you the year before and now you're playing them again on a big stage. Whether it's underdog or perceived slights, just the motivation that goes into a game like this. I know everybody wants to win, and you've said that this week. But how does that factor into a game like this? Does it? Or how did it maybe factor into this game?**

**COACH SWINNEY:** Certainly they're motivated. They're in the playoffs. And we had a tough game with them last year. We've beat them three in a row. And it's -- They got this one. I mean, all you can do is give them credit. I mean, they earned it. They went out and played an unbelievable game.

So both teams were motivated. Like I said, I've been doing this a long time. We had great preparation. I mean, tremendous focus, preparation. Like I said, we didn't play well.

Again, get in the game and all of a sudden a couple of things and the momentum, we didn't quite get it turned. We never could get it turned. And we were very just inconsistent and just didn't do some of the very basic things that you have to do to win games like this. Again, you have got to give them credit for that.



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We'll learn from it. We'll grow from it. Again, it hurts, but we had a heck of a year. We had a great year. To go 10-2 in this environment that we all just navigated in 2020, in a year where, again, a lot of people didn't think we would even play and these kids have been going 23 weeks straight, 23 weeks straight, it's been an unbelievably committed team.

And rare to see that type of discipline and sacrifice with a group of young people and all the things they had to give up. I mean, it's been -- there will be books and movies and all kinds of stuff written about this year and stories told about this year. I'm proud of our team.

Again, I certainly wanted to win the game. But our guys were ready to play, and we were not the better team tonight. That's just the way it is. And sometimes in competition you -- this is playoff football. This is four elite teams.

We got beat, and we'll grow from it. We'll get better. We start school on Wednesday. Our guys -- we'll have to give them a little time off here. Like I said, they've been going for a while.

It's going to hurt for a while, but we'll get back at it. And we've got a bunch of midyears moving in on Sunday, and school starts Wednesday. We've got our banquet on the 16th.

And I look forward to honoring this group of seniors in the right way, when that time comes and then, reset, get our eyes focused on spring practice, and getting back in the fight and going back to work.