



Allstate Sugar Bowl Head Coach Ryan Day Post-Game Press Conference



January 1, 2021

COACH DAY: Yeah, you know, obviously very happy for this team after such a long journey to get here after last season. It's something that weighed heavy on us after this game, so to come full circle against a great team in Clemson. You know, Trevor Lawrence, one of the best quarterbacks to play in the history of college football and against a great program, to come back and win after last year, with all the trials and tribulations we've been through in the last 12 months, just couldn't be happier for this team. Showed so much character. I got to tell you, it was hard, and this team really showed what they're made of, and it was fun to be out there tonight.

Q. What's sweeter tonight, the breakthrough against Clemson, or the chance to play for the title? And what did Dabo [Swinney] say to you perhaps as you met at midfield?

COACH DAY: Well, coming into this game -- after last year, we wanted to come back and have an opportunity to play in the CFP and then go on to have a chance to win the national championship.

And that's where we're at right now. Because of the way it all played out, because it was Clemson, you know, just like we played them last year, I think that had a lot of added flavor to it. And a lot of guys left that field feeling like they let one get away.

In life you don't typically get an opportunity to get a second chance, but you can't miss the second time. So I don't know what we're more excited about, the fact that we have a chance to play for a national championship or the fact that we avenged that loss. But we're going to enjoy it tonight, have a great champions meeting, and move on from there.

And to answer your second question, Dabo has always been nothing but professional to me, said, "Have a great game. Go win it all."

Q. Question about Justin [Fields]'s performance tonight for you. Obviously, he takes a huge hit and he kind of grimaces through the pain, but he also turns out a record-setting performance, six touchdowns. Can you just walk us through the conversations you had with him during the game, checking on him, making sure he's well, and then the attack mode that he showed, going downfield, keeping Clemson on its heels. Run us through his night and the highs and lows of it all.

COACH DAY: I think in Justin's career, last year, he didn't play in the second half of a lot of games. And then, this year, we played him in six games leading up to this game. So he hadn't played in a lot of big games like this before.

So the Indiana game kind of bothered him. And then, last week, a lot of people talking poorly about him as a quarterback. And that bothered him. He didn't play well in that game, and he knew it, but he learned a lot about himself as a quarterback this week. And he got right back to work. He felt sorry for himself for 24 hours.

And the conversations we had was, you go out and play good in this game and you win this game, nobody is going to remember the Big Ten championship game; they'll remember this one. And they'll remember it for a long time in the history of Ohio State football. And what does he do? He goes out and he throws six touchdown



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passes. He takes a really tough hit. He just looked at me, and I said, "How are you doing? Are you going to be able to make it?" He said, "I don't have a choice; I have to."

At that point, we had to figure out what he could and couldn't do for a while. We kind of figured that part of it out. He couldn't do everything, but what a gutsy performance, what a tough and special young man Justin Fields is.

Q. Could you tell us how bad the ribs were? Were they sprained? Were they broken? Were they sore? What kind of treatment did he get at halftime to be able to come back out there?

COACH DAY: I don't know exactly what it was. I said, "What happened?" He goes, "I took a shot and it kind of hurts over here." I said, "Well, why don't you go get with the doctors and we'll kind of figure that part of it out." He's tough. We'll get an assessment here tonight, maybe into tomorrow, and figure out exactly what it was and what happened. But I really don't know. I just asked, "Can you do it?" He says yes, and we kept rolling from there.

Q. I know it's hard in this moment to kind of put perspective on things, but Ohio State had not won a playoff game since 2014. Alabama and Clemson had kind of risen to the top. How big was this for the program, to get over this hump, to beat Clemson and now to be able to do what you have a chance to do?

COACH DAY: I think it's huge. I think it's huge. We still have another game to play. This thing's not done yet. But I do think this was big for us. This was a statement for us as a program to win a CFP game, especially after what happened last year. And to play the way we did, it means a lot for our program.

But, again, we're not done. We have a lot of work to do. Got to get on this film, figure out some things to adjust, because we got a really talented 'Bama team that we got to go play.

Q. Let me squeeze two in here real quick. Number one, of all the sights you saw from Justin tonight, which is the one that will stick with you? Maybe I'll just leave it at that. What, from your unique vantage point, will stick with you from this performance?

COACH DAY: It was kind of a blur, but there was a time in there when he came off the injury, went back in, and then threw the touchdown pass. I'm like, "Can you throw?" He says, "I think I can."

I said, "Well, here we go. We got to go. You've got to give me some information." He says, "I think I can do it." And he throws a frozen rope in there, and he's kind of holding himself as he runs off the field.

I'm just thinking to myself, This kid is tough. He comes back from the game last year from the knee injury. He does it again in this game. So much of being a great quarterback is being tough, and he's tough.



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Q. When we talked to Justin [Fields] earlier in the week, he seemed to have kind of a little bit of an edge to him in a way we don't usually see from him. What did you get from him just in terms of demeanor and just sort of his conviction or whatever in this last week to ten days?

COACH DAY: Well, yeah, he had an edge to him. I mean, this is a competitive guy that's had a lot of success. So to come off of that game, not playing his great game, that doesn't sit well with him. He doesn't like hearing people talk ill will about him. It didn't sit well with him at all. He had an edge to him all week. That's what great competitors do. So really cool to see.

Q. Coaches always say they never know what they're going to get until game day, but every facet of your team tonight was on fire. When did you know that that was the way it was going to be?

COACH DAY: I don't know. Maybe midway through -- no, I guess right around the second quarter, I guess. I mean, it wasn't a great start. We went three and out, three and Gatorade. They're going right down the field and scoring. So we kind of got some rhythm going. I felt like we had a pretty good rhythm calling the game. Kind of caught them off-guard, I think, a little bit early on.

Then Justin [Fields] started getting in his rhythm. Certainly got a little concerned when he took that shot. So it was somewhere there, beginning of the second, midway through the second. Again, it all becomes a blur to me. But when we probably scored, we got into that 21 range right there and the defense started getting some stops, we started to feel like maybe we got a chance to really roll in this game.

Q. I meant coming into the game. Did you know sort of that these guys were primed?

COACH DAY: No. No, I mean, you don't know. We hadn't really played a team like Clemson coming in. We hadn't played a lot of games. We hadn't played our best game on offense. We hadn't played our best game on defense. We hadn't played our best game on both sides. So there was a lot of anxiety coming into the game.

Q. I know everybody on your roster had a unique journey and a lot of adversity; but, for Chris Olave, the way he walked off the field last year, missing the game two weeks ago, it has to be special for him and for you to see him do that. How important is he just to the overall success of this team?

COACH DAY: Oh, yeah, that game didn't sit well with him, the way he came off that field. You know, how many times did he have to watch that play -- he and Justin [Fields] watch that play over and over again, the kid [Nathan] Turner getting the touchdown at the end of the game. It just made them sick. They're such great competitors that they were hungry. They wanted to come back and win.

So we were really nervous, when we went down with COVID, we weren't going to get him back. He practiced, didn't really practice fully. So it was a little dicey going into the week, but started to get his legs back underneath him towards the end of the week and then comes out and plays the way he does in a big spot.



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One of the more clutch players, I think, as a receiver in maybe the history of Ohio State football when you think back on it. Wow, what a player he is.

Q. When you consider all the different aspects of tonight, where does this performance by Justin Fields rank among the quarterback performances you've seen?

COACH DAY: As high as I can think of right now. Coming off the game, I'm biased, but for him to come in and play like this against this defense, amazing. He was 22 of 28, a couple throwaways. The interception, that was my fault. I should have run the ball. I shouldn't have put him in that spot. 385, 6 touchdowns, yeah, I don't know if there's a better game, but I'm obviously biased right now coming off the field after the way he played.

But I think this performance, not only by Justin, but this team, hopefully will go down in Ohio State history as a landmark game, because we want to go on to win the national championship. But there was a lot of tough days, a lot of tough days over the last six months.

And this team stuck together. And the people of Ohio and Buckeye Nation and all the people who love the Buckeyes, I hope they were able to at least watch the game tonight and get away from what a crazy year this has been and celebrate this game with us, because that's a huge part of why we do what we do, even though we haven't been able to see them. Maybe there's some young kids out there who want to be like Justin Fields and Chris Olave and Tuf Borland and Jonathan Cooper. And that's what this thing is all about.

Q. Coach, tremendous sentiment right there. I think a lot of people appreciate that. I want to ask about your defense. In the first half, you gave up two touchdowns, and then you got one stop after another and kept them at bay, allowed you to build the lead and get the cushion you needed to win this thing.

COACH DAY: I thought the game plan was excellent by our defensive staff. I thought our defensive players really spent a lot of time putting it on the field, and they executed at a high level. I thought our D-line was awesome. I thought the plan going in was excellent. We knew they were going to make plays. We stuck together, though. We didn't flinch when they got a couple touchdowns. We just kept going after them. Was it perfect? I don't know. But it was gutsy. And they played really good. And we played complementary football tonight.

When you go up the way we did, kind of you're hanging on a little bit at the end. I thought what our defense did a good job of, they didn't give up the big play. They kept it in front. They kept making them go one more play, one more play, one more play. And that's the idea. I think we learned our lesson from that Indiana game there. And because of that, we were able to play the way we did and finish the game the way it should be.

Q. I'd like to ask you about Trey Sermon. Obviously, Trey statistically had another pretty impressive game tonight, but it felt like he really kind of announced his presence. When you guys needed a shot in the arm the most, your first score, it felt like the offense was struggling a little bit at the beginning of the game, and then on a three-play drive, and two of those were big plays by Trey Sermon in particular. Then obviously he went on to have a big game. Just what has Trey Sermon meant to you guys that maybe we haven't been able to see, because the last two games have been pretty special performances from him?



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COACH DAY: Yeah, I mean, it started at the Michigan State game. That was the first one where he kind of -- I guess coming-out party is the best way to put it. I think it was where he got his confidence. And then the last two games, he's been excellent. He's been a difference-maker. He really wasn't early on. I think he was kind of finding his way. But wow, I mean, whether it's in the pass game, whether it's in protection, and obviously running the football, he's been special.

But, again, you got to give a lot of credit to our offensive line and our tight ends. There was a point there where we weren't going to run Justin [Fields], and the defense knew it. We weren't getting the extra hat. It was ugly, but we had to make it work, and those guys played good.