



Clemson

Post-Game Quotes

Notre Dame vs. Clemson
Saturday, December 29, 2018
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



QUESTIONS FOR HEAD COACH DABO SWINNEY, QB TREVOR LAWRENCE, DE AUSTIN BRYANT

COACH SWINNEY: All right. I'm just thankful that we got the opportunity to be up here (on stage) because that means that we won the game. We achieved our goal. I'm really proud of our team and our staff. Just an amazing performance. A dominant performance. Obviously, had some adversity. But these guys stepped up and did an awesome job.

I want to congratulate Notre Dame on a phenomenal year. They had a great year and a heck of a football team, for sure. And I certainly know they're disappointed, but a very well-coached team and nothing to be down about. Those guys have got it going in the right direction there. But just proud of our guys for the grit and toughness and heart they played with.

I want to say thanks to the Cotton Bowl folks. We've had an amazing week here. The hospitality has been incredible from the hotel to the police officers, everybody. So we just appreciate everybody's effort to make it a great week for us.

And then I want to thank our fans. They were awesome tonight. I mean, it was an amazing crowd. And the energy from our fans was tremendous. But at the end of the day, it's about these guys (indicating players on stage). And we've got a freshman [Trevor Lawrence] and a senior [Austin Bryant].

Our seniors, what can you say? They got their 54th win tonight. I mean, the leadership is special.

And then Trevor [Lawrence] -- him and number 8 (Justyn Ross) got it going early. That was the spark that we needed. And the big plays were definitely the difference in the game.

Notre Dame came into this game hardly giving up any big plays, and we were one of the leaders in the country in big plays. So really proud of Trevor and his poise and how he managed the game the whole way through.

So phenomenal night. We're going to celebrate this tonight. And we're going to load up and get back to Clemson and get ready to go to California.

Q. Trevor, seemed like you were really attacking the middle of the field tonight. Was that something that you were reacting to what Notre Dame's defense was doing? Or was that something you caught on film in your preparation?

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QB TREVOR LAWRENCE: A little bit of both. They did a good job giving us some different looks than we expected because they had a bunch of time to prepare. But I feel like we made adjustments well and just kind of saw that soft spot and took advantage of it.

Q. Trevor, you're up 9-3. You get the ball back with a little under five minutes left in the half. Are you thinking you can score twice at that point? What's the objective there

QB TREVOR LAWRENCE: No. Just wanting to score every time we get the ball. Wasn't really thinking about the next drive at that point. Just trying to score on that drive. That was awesome. We were able to put a lid on that drive and get the ball back. Defense played great and then gave us another chance at the end of the half.

Q. Austin, all the pregame talk was about missing Dexter Lawrence. I know you miss him as a teammate, but it looked like you didn't miss him at all on your defense all night.

DE AUSTIN BRYANT: Those guys that stepped up -- Albert [Huggins], Jordan [Williams], Nyles [Pinckney], they did a phenomenal job. It was the next man up mentality. Of course we miss Dex (Dexter Lawrence). He's a great player and a great personality to have on your defense when times get tough. But those guys stepped up and did an awesome job. I'm just proud of them and proud of Dex for cheering them on and being there for them whenever they needed someone to lean on. We all came together and played our hardest and just thankful for the opportunity.

Q. Trevor, just wondering what the luxury is or the advantage is to throw to a bunch of 6'4" guys and the plays they can make?

QB TREVOR LAWRENCE: There's a lot of them. You saw tonight. It's just -- those guys are unbelievable. Just everybody on the offensive line, receivers, running backs, everybody. But they made a lot of plays. Just throw it in their area, and they'll come down with it. They did an awesome job, and it just shows how good those guys are.

Q. Austin, just talk about how you controlled the Irish running game. Because they had that [Dexter] Williams guy who ran pretty well against Syracuse. What did you guys do to control him?

DE AUSTIN BRYANT: Going into the game, we knew that we were going to have to stop the run to have a great offensive line. Got some great running backs that can make stuff happen. We had a great plan. We prepared well and put the work in throughout the time we had to prepare for this game.

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And I think it really showed tonight by us being able to dominate in the running game. I think it goes to show the work we put in. Coach V (Venables) gave us a great plan, phenomenal plan, and it worked tonight. Just grateful that he put us in position to make plays.

Q. Trevor, what is it about you, what is it about this team that has allowed you to flourish as in start number ten and that this moment was not too big for you at all?

QB TREVOR LAWRENCE: I mean, you said it. It's just about this team. It makes it a lot easier on me when you have guys all around you that are just great players and take that load off of you. So there's not much pressure when you have guys this good playing around you. So just that. And the coaches have helped me a ton, just helped me prepare and get me ready for all these situations has been really good.

Q. Austin, the fumble on the kick-off kind of a sudden change. You guys are getting ready to go back out there, and they overturn it. Can you describe the sense of relief, or what was the sense on the defense at this point?

DE AUSTIN BRYANT: Yeah, it was definitely a sense of relief. But we were ready to play. We practice that all the time, sudden change. So if we had to go out there and play, we would be ready. They looked at it and overturned it, so we didn't have to go back out there. But we were definitely prepared. We love to play. And it was just another opportunity for us to go out there and play and have one. So it's just how you perceive things and how you look at it. And, thankfully, they did overturn it.

Q. Trevor, just wanted to ask you, when Julian Love goes out of the game, how quickly do you guys identify that and try to go to work on his replacement?

QB TREVOR LAWRENCE: Probably the series, after we came out that series, we noticed he didn't come back out there after a few plays that he came out. We didn't know if he was hurt for sure. Then he stayed out for a while. I'm not sure if he was injured or what happened. I know he came back in the second half. We identified that, but it didn't change much. We still attacked them in the ways we thought were best. So, obviously, he's a great player. And a bunch of guys on that defense are great players. But it didn't change much for us.

Q. Dabo, so when you hand Trevor [Lawrence] the job -- don't hand, but when he earns the job in September, do you envision not just him leading the team but being sort of the focal point of the team in a playoff win?

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COACH SWINNEY: I mean, to be totally honest with you, all I envisioned was him starting that next week against Syracuse. I thought he had earned that opportunity. I didn't have any vision beyond that. I really didn't. I'm a week-to-week guy. But, obviously, the situation changed. But I just think he's gotten better and better all year long.

But I definitely envisioned him being a great player. There's no question about that. That's why we recruited him. I saw that back in the spring. And after four games I felt like he deserved to go start. And he gave us the best chance to win and play at an explosive level. He had great understanding and command of what we were doing.

So my vision was for him to lead us that next week. And then, when things changed, well, okay, well now we'll see what he does for the rest of the year. And he just has done an incredible job.

[Brandon] Streeter has done a wonderful job with him as well. But he's just so poised. And he's 6'6". He just sees it. And he's got a gift of an arm. But I just love his humility and how consistent he is with his demeanor and his preparation day in and day out. Easy, easy, easy guy to coach and easy guy to get behind and support. His teammates love him.

Q. Dabo, I don't have the exact number in front of me, but I think in your Semifinal wins you guys have beaten teams by a score of, like, 100-20 or something roughly like that. And a lopsided game isn't that rare in these semifinal games. Why do you think the Semifinals end up being lopsided more often than not?

COACH SWINNEY: I don't know. We got our butts beat last year. I'm just thankful that we got back and we had a better result tonight. I don't know. I mean, we've played well. It's all about these four quarters. And I think our guys understand. We believe in how we prepare. We believe in kind of our system as far as how we get ready for these type of games.

But we make every game the biggest game of the year. We really do. And so, when you get to these moments, it's just kind of another game. Our Friday is we tried to create as much routine -- and, obviously, when you're playing in these, the margin for error is not very big. But we go in every week with that mindset. We really do. And that's probably the best thing I could say.

And then I think how we practice. How we practice. What we practice against. Our structure. Our daily structure prepares us for this moment. I always tell them, we're built for this. I mean, we're built for this by how we train, how we run our program from January to this point. It doesn't start in August. It's everything that's a part of that, to answer your question.

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But, certainly, our experience, too, is definitely a great teacher. And we've got a very veteran group. But the biggest thing, if you look over the last eight years of our program, I just think the consistency in these type of games has come from just the culture of our program, our daily focus and how we go about on a weekly basis. And then again how we practice.

Q. Coach, talk about the game plan that Defensive Coordinator [Brent] Venables put together for you, especially with the absence of Dexter Lawrence. Because it didn't look like you missed much.

COACH SWINNEY: No, we had six sacks, which I believe is a bowl record. And we held them to 88 yards rushing. So the big thing for us was, if you can't stop the run, you ain't winning these games. It's just that simple. The first play, actually, was a little cutback on us. But we really settled in, and we played well.

I thought Albert Huggins did a great job. We have got good depth. We went into it. We didn't change anything.

I didn't even tell Brent. Brent had no idea that we weren't going to have Dexter until Sunday. When we got on the plane, I told him. I didn't want to ruin anybody's Christmas. I found out Thursday. And I didn't tell anybody until Sunday because I knew what I was dealing with Thursday, Friday, Saturday. I didn't want to put that on my staff. I wanted them to just enjoy their time with their families and have a couple days off there. Nobody flinched.

We're confident in Albert, confident in Nyles [Pinckney], confident in Jordan [Williams]. And Dexter did a great job of putting on a coaching hat and being a great teammate.

We pressured the quarterback. We didn't do a good job early. He's a slippery guy, man. We took some of the easy stuff away. Their really quick passing game, short passing game, a lot of screens, everything is built off the run. And we took that stuff away and made him hold the ball. But he still popped some on us. Up the middle we didn't do a good job. But we finally kind of settled in, choked our rush down a little bit, and were able to contain him and get some pressure on him.

The interception in the second half was a big play for us. They had good field position right there. And Nolan Turner's play was huge. Brent [Venables] and our staff, they do an amazing job.

And our secondary. Everybody -- our secondary has been reading for three weeks how terrible they are. I mean, Good Lord, we have one sub-par game that you win by three touchdowns and all of a sudden our secondary is terrible. I thought they were ready,

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played well. They took ownership of the plan. We lined up properly, corrected some of the mistakes that we had earlier in the year.

Q. Dabo, you said you have a veteran group, but all of your playmakers other than Hunter Renfrow were freshmen/sophomores tonight. How were they so ready to contribute at such a young age?

COACH SWINNEY: Well, Justyn Ross is just a special talent. That's why he was one of the top receivers in the country. He's big, strong. He's confident, and he's well-prepared. He's one of those guys that loves to be coached. And for a young player to make an impact, it takes a certain level of maturity. And he's got that.

And Trevor's [Lawrence] the same way, physically just beyond what a normal freshman would be. Both of those guys, just gifted mentally and physically. So that's the biggest thing.

And, again, their buy-in, their maturity, their love to be coached, and how they prepare.

So again, I thought Justyn Ross was the early spark. I think he set a bowl record for Clemson with yards per catch. Amazing what he did, 24-something yards a catch and a couple touchdowns.

But our playmakers all stepped up. We're a fun team, because we've got this great veteran leadership with [Hunter] Renfrow and the Mitch Hyatts and that group. And you've just got this energy and enthusiasm and eagerness from some of these young guys like Xavier Thomas, Trevor [Lawrence], even Lyn-J [Dixon], even Travis [Etienne]. Travis is just a sophomore. Tee Higgins is just a sophomore. So it's a lot of fun to see these guys go out there and compete.

Q. As you were preparing for this game, did you feel like -- obviously, you played better than Notre Dame tonight. Did you feel like you had four touchdowns more talent than Notre Dame? Just in terms of the raw material, did you feel like there was a big gap in this one?

COACH SWINNEY: I didn't think in any terms of a gap or anything. All I thought about was what we had to do to win the game. I felt like we were good enough to win, but there was no doubt in my mind Notre Dame is good enough to beat us. We were going to have to play well, and we played well.

They're a stingy defense. I think they were one of the top ten scoring defenses in the country, not giving up many points. Hardly ever give up big plays. Big plays were a rarity. I think they had only given up maybe two 40-yard plays all year. Two or three? Is that what it is? And I know we had at least two tonight.

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But they're just really well-coached, and I didn't have any margin of victory in my mind. Our team had a tremendous amount of respect for Notre Dame. This is the best team we've played, the best front we've played. I think their secondary is really good. Those backs are really good. Those big receivers they've got. I thought they were as complete a team as we've seen.

But we won the turnover margin. We won the big-play margin. And we finally got the running game going a little bit to support it. Then, defensively I thought we just won in the trenches. Simple as that.

In these types of games, all of the sudden the momentum can get rolling against you. And the 48 seconds with one time-out, that score I thought was critical. That was a huge, huge score right there.

Notre Dame is going to battle us every single time. It just -- that's the way it was tonight. And Notre Dame's a heck of a football team.

Q. Coach, it was tough sledding there for Travis [Lawrence] in the first half. They were playing with their safeties in a lot. Did you just have the feeling it was only a matter of time before he broke a big one? And that 62-yard touchdown run tied him for the nation's lead in touchdowns and also broke Wayne Gallman's single season record. How special was that?

COACH SWINNEY: It was awesome. We broke the rushing record for our team. And he broke the single season rushing record. You have to stay patient. I thought he was a little impatient early. He bounced a couple of things we needed him to not bounce.

But you keep giving that ball to Number 9, [Travis Etienne] if you give him 15 touches or more, something good is going to happen. And simple as that.

He was close on a couple of them where the safety was the unblocked guy that got him down. But on that third one there, man, he just popped it. He was gone. But that's what he can do. That's why you just make sure he gets enough touches. You don't give up on it. You stay patient. I thought our guys did a good job. Because I think he had 17 yards at the half. We had not run the ball well.

But I thought Trevor kind of sparked us a little bit. We had a lot of RPOs where they were giving us things and keeping the balls out of Travis' hands. And they gave us some quarterback run, which we took.

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Their plan was to try to bend but not break and try not to give up some of the big plays. Some of the big plays we got were two safeties, deep coverage. We just made plays over the middle and took what was there.

And then we had a couple where they were manned up. And the one before the half they played one-on-one, and our guy made a play. But they played a lot of coverage as well. And we just made the big plays.

But it was good to see Travis get going. We just hung in there with him. We told him at halftime we're going to stick with it, and we're going to pop one. So for him to finish with 109 yards, had 17 at the half, I think that's all you need to know about that guy. Just keep getting him the ball.

Q. Nolan Turner had his first career interception today, and you promised his dad you would look after him. On the field just now he told me that he looks at you as a dad figure, as a father figure. What does that mean to you to nurture him in a way that his dad wasn't able to throughout his college career?

COACH SWINNEY: It's a blessing that the Good Lord has given me that opportunity. I know K.T. (Kevin Turner), he may not be here in the flesh, but I know he's here in the spirit. There's no doubt. I know he's bouncing around heaven tonight for sure proud of Nolan.

But not bad for an old guy that nobody wanted. He's just a raggedy old guy from Vestavia (Hills, Alabama) that nobody wanted except us. He's a heck of a player. He's just a sophomore and, I mean, a really good football player.

He made another great play battling to get the ball out. He's got a bright future. Every time I look at him, I feel like I'm back in 1989 all over again because he's the spitting image of his dad. But I'm just thankful that the Good Lord has given me the opportunity to be a part of his life and to help fulfill my promise to K.T. I'm just so proud of him. I mean, what he's doing on and off the field, the young man that he is, the brother that he is to his sister and little brother, and the teammate he is and the football player he's developed into. It's so cool for me. So that was an awesome, awesome moment to see him make that play.

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