



USC  
**Post-Game Quotes**  
USC vs. Ohio State  
Friday, December 29, 2017  
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



**QUESTIONS FOR COACH CLAY HELTON, QB SAM DARNOLD,  
AND ILB CAMERON SMITH**

**COACH HELTON:** Really good game by Ohio State. Credit Coach [Urban] Meyer, his staff and those players. I thought they played an excellent football game. We kind of shot ourselves in the foot in this game. I don't think -- any time that you turn the ball over three times, especially two in the negative yardage area, you're putting a hurt on your defense and it led to points early in the game and a separation early in the game.

Got a little momentum back. Got a little momentum back with the turnover on the punt return being able to get that in, cut it to a three-score game. And really just challenged our team in the second half. We knew we were going to have to play pretty much perfect football being three scores down. And I absolutely love the effort that the kids played with, especially defensively.

I thought you look at that offense that puts up 500 yards a game. And for them to hold them in check in the second half and really give us an opportunity to be able to try get some points on the board.

And the name of the game was, in the first half, we had turnovers. Didn't really get our run game started. And the second half we get it down in the red zone three times and don't come away with any points. And that's the difference in the game.

But credit our seniors. I can't tell you how proud I am of them for the foundation that they have laid. And I can't tell you how proud I am of the effort the kids played with tonight.

*Q. Sam, what happened on offense tonight?*

**QB SAM DARNOLD:** Turnovers. Whenever you turn over the ball that much, it's hard to win games. I made a bad read on the pick six. I shouldn't have thrown it, obviously. He jumped inside of the receiver right after the ball was snapped, and I didn't see him. And it was a bad play on my part.

Then the strip fumbles. When I'm in the pocket, those are tough. And then, yeah, it's just little things. Coach said it to our whole team. We're going to watch the film. And one little thing is going to make or break a whole play.



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I missed a couple of throws, too, that I'd like to have back. That would have switched the momentum. There was a lot of stuff where we shot ourselves in our foot.

*Q. Sam, had you ever had to be that decisive before that quick?*

**QB SAM DARNOLD:** I mean, they're, obviously, a really good defensive line. They're probably the best I've played. But our O-line for the most part did a really good job of picking everything up. I just missed a couple of throws, like I said.

*Q. Sam, now that the game is over, what's the process that you will be going through regarding your future?*

**QB SAM DARNOLD:** Just talking to my family, talking to coaches, people who have been in my position before. And that's kind of how I'll go about it.

*Q. Cameron, defensively, what were you guys seeing differently from Ohio State and on your end to be able to hold them in the second half?*

**ILB CAMERON SMITH:** I think differently on film that we kind of maybe assumed what they were going to do is looking over to the sideline more and start checking the line of scrimmage. And I think we were prepared for that. But, for the most part, I think they did a lot of what we saw on film. And they executed when they needed to and put enough points on the board.

*Q. Sam, how difficult was it to get any sort of momentum? It seemed like after every big play you guys had, there was a negative play or turnover very shortly thereafter.*

**QB SAM DARNOLD:** It's tough. As an offense, we try to create drives. And we had the ball, like Coach said, three times in the red zone. And we didn't put up points. Those are tough. It's going to be hard to win ball games like that. So sometimes that's just how the game goes. And we'll look at the film and get better.

*Q. Guys, obviously, not the outcome that you wanted. And, Sam, how does tonight's game impact how you're going to go about debating whether you feel like you have some unfinished business for next year or what you're going to do next? How will this game impact that?*



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**QB SAM DARNOLD:** Right now I think I'm really just focused on just hanging out with my teammates for the next couple of days and really just saying bye to the seniors because they've put together such a great season. But it's tough. I'll look at everything and make my decision after that.

*Q. Cam, how proud were you of your defense tonight? And did you feel that your defense held in there despite the problems that the offense obviously was having its challenges?*

**ILB CAMERON SMITH:** I'm always proud of our defense. I think we prepared really well. And there comes a time in games when your back's against the wall. And I think it's our job to answer that and to get the ball back in our offense's hands.

And I think, for the most part, we played with great energy. It's always a great time being with those guys. And I think we've developed such a great bond. I'm very proud of them. And it is what it is, but I think we played well. I'm happy for that part of it. But, obviously, the loss is rough.

*Q. You talked a lot in the second half about the things that were better than last year, like winning the Pac-12 South and the Pac-12. Last year you finished third in the national rankings. You won a New Year's Day bowl. You won nine straight. So can you make an equal case that maybe there wasn't the progress this year that you had last year?*

**COACH HELTON:** We've had 11 wins. We've won a Pac-12 championship. We're proud of those accomplishments. But are we satisfied? No, we're not. We won't be satisfied until we win a national championship, and that will be our goal.

Like I told our seniors in the locker room, they've laid the foundation for us to move forward. They moved us forward by winning a Pac-12 championship by having 11 wins. And they've laid the foundation for the next step, which is making it to the playoffs and winning a national championship.

So proud of our seniors' accomplishments but will not be satisfied until we win a national championship.

*Q. Clay, early fourth quarter, fourth and 4 from the 10, were you debating whether to go for it there when you ended up kicking?*

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**COACH HELTON:** No. You try to make it a two-score game. And I thought it would give us momentum, to be honest with you. Had plenty of time left in that game. And we got the ball right back. I think there was about eight minutes and some change on the clock there. You kind of do a two-score game. We actually got the ball back with high 6:50, I think, was left and that's what you wanted.

At the end of the day, like I said, I thought the difference in the game was the early turnovers that created 14 really easy points for Ohio State, not getting the run game started.

And then the second half when our defense was playing so good, just not finishing in the red zone. You have a defense that holds people to 290 yards, you look up and you're putting yards all over the place. We just didn't finish today. That and the turnovers cost us.

***Q. You knew that Ohio State had a very good pass rush. Did they do anything that you didn't anticipate? And, secondly, what did you do to really shut them down offensively?***

**COACH HELTON:** Well, I'm going to credit -- their defensive front is so talented. And you watch them -- you see their stats on paper, you watch it on film, but until you see it in person -- blown away by not only their talent but how well coached they are.

We didn't have a lot of mental assignments tonight. What we had was just physical beats. And they did a tremendous job. They held our run game in check. We've always had issues when our run game does not go. And when it was passing situations, they got to the quarterback.

I credit Sam. I told him in there in front of the team, I thought he was a warrior tonight. To get off the ground that many times and make the plays that he did, he showed his true class and character.

But credit that Ohio State front. I was blown away by them tonight, and they're truly a talented bunch.

***Q. Clay, the situation toward the sideline at the end there, what did you see and what was your thoughts, especially about a late hit on Sam [Darnold] at that point in the game?***



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**COACH HELTON:** Just an unfortunate situation. And tempers are going to flare in that situation, especially when your quarterback's over there. There's nobody that's maybe more loved on this football team than Sam. And it was just in the heat of the game, both sides. Both sides started some shoving and pushing, and it happens in the game. Unfortunate, unfortunate that it happened late; but it is what it is.

***Q. Coach, what role will you play in Sam [Darnold] deciding his future? And what do you think you would say to him at this point?***

**COACH HELTON:** Sam and I will talk. And the majority of the time what I've done, I've went through this situation last year with Adoree' [Jackson] and JuJu [Smith-Schuster] is just to provide correct information, to provide the information of, one, where he could be drafted; two, the next step moving forward, where it could be, what it could be. What could happen if you come back? What's left out there? And just be a shoulder to lean on.

I've always felt, when you're in this situation, just getting the correct information, like he said, whether it's from former players that have been in that situation, put him in contact with those players. NFL evaluation coming back. Being able to talk to anybody he needs to, to get him on the phone with them.

He's got all the time in the world. And right now, it's just nice, like he said, just to go back and be with your buddies and kind of be with those seniors that are hurting right now.

And we'll sit down. We've got plenty of time. We'll let this one sink in. This one hurts a little bit, but we'll sit as a family. He's a good man, and he'll make the best decision for him and his family.

***Q. It seemed like the Notre Dame and Ohio State games were kind of similar in terms of the physical play. Was there something that you saw in common between those games?***

**COACH HELTON:** I thought defensively holding them to 277 yards was really good. If you remember, that offense is one that averages over 500 yards a game. And I thought defensively did a wonderful job being able to hold up in the trenches and especially in the rushing game and in the pass game. 163 yards rushing, 114 passing.



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So where I thought we could have been better was in the offensive front. We had some physical beats there. And, like I said earlier, when you look at the difference, I really felt that turning the ball over early and not scoring late was really the keys to it.

But, I mean, anytime you hold a team that's putting up 42 points a game and averaging over 500 yards to 277, something's going right on that defensive front. Could we have played better offensively? Yes, of course.

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