

**December 31, 2012**



Clemson – 25  
LSU – 24

An interview with:

## **COACH DABO SWINNEY**

COACH SWINNEY: Sorry it took a while. 31 years since we had a celebration like that.

First of all, I want to start by thanking the Chick-Fil-A bowl. An awesome week. I've been to every bowl except the Rose Bowl, maybe I'll get there one day, but this is as good as it gets. Just wrap the buses, we'll be right there (laughter). I appreciate you, Gary. I thank you for a great experience. Our team had a blast.

This is a landmark win. This is a landmark win. 11th win for the first time in 31 years and only the fourth time ever. It's one of the things I talked about with our team, 1948, 1978, 1981. The 2012 team now hitches their saddle up with those three elite teams in our program's history in a hundred-something years. Not only did they win 11, but they did it in fine fashion.

This is a football team that got better all year long. Tonight we kind of grew up from some of the challenges we've had earlier in the year. I'm just so proud of them. Proud of our team, proud of our staff, for their preparation, proud of them for their commitment and their toughness, just their overall performance against a great LSU team. A great, tough LSU team.

I appreciate Coach Miles. I appreciate the class that he has. I really enjoyed spending the week with him. It was a hard-fought game. Could have gone either way.

One of the things we talked about, if you look at our two losses this year, when two great teams are playing, it comes down to a few plays, a few inches one way or the other. We've been kind of coming up a little short in the fourth quarter in those last two games. Played hard, competed.

But tonight we made the plays. Lord, did we handle some adversity. I told them we'd have to handle some adversity. Foolish to play a team like this and not think you'd have some adversity.

I had no idea it was going to come on the second play. Lose Sammy, give up a touchdown. You lose Giff. We have Brandon Thomas playing a position he hadn't played all year. I have a freshman out there hadn't played three quality snaps all year, blocking Mingo and Sam.

Listen, it wasn't pretty, but they hung in there and just kept playing all the way to 4th and 16. Quarterback stepped up and played like an All-American tonight. Our defense was unbelievable. Just unbelievable. It was a great finish for us. To win the bowl was a goal for us. Awesome to achieve that goal in this venue.

The tombstone win, we decided to bring a tombstone back to Clemson, and I think we have a chance to finish in the top 10 for the first time in 22 years.

Those are all really positive things. Set a lot of records. ACC record for points, total offense, passing. We had 32 first downs tonight against a top-10 defense. A hundred plays. Our guys were ready mentally, physically in every regard.

Hopkins tied his own record of 13 catches. He also set the ACC record for touchdowns. Tajh set the ACC record for touchdowns. 346 yards passing is a bowl record. Catanzaro, I don't know about y'all, but I didn't have any doubt. We practice that all the time, call it torpedo, he goes out there and knocks it down. He missed one field goal all year. It was a 48-yarder. Just a clutch player all the way.

Defensively, huge stat was three-of-13 on third down. They only had nine first downs the whole game. 219 total yards. Only 99 yards rushing. They got as good of backs as there is in the country. Set a season high of six sacks. Malliciah set a school record for bowl sacks.

LSU wins a lot of games by playing on a short field. That's who they are, that's what they do. They create field position, turnovers, play on a

short field, and they get points. We kind of played right into that formula. Got 10 points out of turnovers. That second one, we put them in a bad situation. To hold them to a field goal changed the game. Gave us a chance to win the game. I don't know how many three-and-outs they had.

Here is what was evident. Those of you who saw our defense play against Auburn many moons ago to open this season, that was a different group out there tonight. Those young bucks have grown up and played extremely well. Our depth showed up. Really proud of how they physically fought at the line of scrimmage, at the point of attack. Again, when we had some adversity, just kept playing and kept believing.

We had a few game balls we gave out. I gave one out to Terry Don Phillips. Myself or Les Miles wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Terry Don Phillips. He was inducted into the Chick-Fil-A Hall of Fame. He's going to get a game ball. I know he hired me and Les, but I sure am glad I'm the one that gets to give him a game ball tonight.

Gave a game ball to Alfonso Smith, our equipment man, 18 years, last game with us. What a great job he's done. 18 years, never seen a Clemson team ever win back-to-back 10-win seasons, never seen a Clemson team win 11.

We gave every senior a game ball. This group of seniors, not many of them, but this group of seniors, when they came to Clemson four years ago to play for me, there wasn't really much to sell them other than, Hey, you know, here is my plan. I believe. I just need you to believe. This is where we're going. This is how we're going to do it.

Man, those guys, they've taken this program where it hasn't been in 31 years. Won more games than any senior group in forever. Set a record for conference wins. Set a school record for wins at home. The thing I'm most proud of these seniors, every single one of them have their degree. They have won at a very high level on the field and they have won off the field.

I have no doubt that every single one of them are going to be incredibly successful when they leave here and take this next step in this journey of life. They're going to be great husbands, fathers, leaders, great citizens. There's no doubt they're equipped to be very successful.

They carried us. Those guys carried us. They just put this team on their back. Tonight it was awesome to see them perform like they did. That's kind of a little bit about the game.

Again, I want to compliment LSU. Obviously a very tough loss for them. Game could

have gone either way. It comes down to a few plays, a few inches. Tonight the Clemson Tigers made them and we were able to finish. We're very honored to have been able to play in a ballgame like that with LSU. I've got all the respect in the world for their program, their coaches. Both teams competed very hard and warranted it.

I think Sammy is okay. They said it was not fractured. That was good news. Giff just kind of retweaked his need. Ellington had an arm issue. He was trying to put in the other arm to finish the game. Came back in and made a couple big plays for us down the stretch there. They gutted it out.

With that I'll take your questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COACH SWINNEY: Well, that's what great players do. It's like I told them before the game. Everybody's got a role. When Kobe steps on the court, if he don't play, it's going to be a long night, you know. When Kobe and LeBron go against each other, there's going to be some wins, losses, battles. You got to play. That's what I told Tajh, You got to play, you got to fight for everything out there. It's not going to be pretty. Especially when we lost Giff, moving Brandon to right tackle. I got David Beasley trying to coach up Isaiah Battle. Oh, my goodness (laughter). That's what great players do.

What I told him going into this game, You're going to beat a team like this, that's open, and you got to pull the trigger. Boy, did he make some big, big, big throws. Made some huge runs.

As you said, it's not about how hard you get hit, it's about can you keep competing, can you keep getting up and keep competing. That's what it's about. That's what it's about in the game of football. That's what it's about in the game of life. It ain't always going to be pretty.

He kept competing, kept playing, going to the next play. 4th and 16, we had the one play we talked about at halftime, kind of been holding it. Let's go with it. It ain't over. It ain't over till it's over.

Put the ball out there. Newk went and got it. That's football. He was awesome. So proud of him. So good to see him step up and beat a top-10 defense.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COACH SWINNEY: Man, there ain't no doubt. Like I told you, you can't win 12 until you win 11. You can't win a national championship until you learn how to win games like this, till you learn the commitment and preparation, performance that you have to have every day, every play, every quarter.

You grow and learn from all your experiences. That was my challenge to them coming into this game. That was my message the whole month. It's going to be a few plays. It's going to be a game of inches. It's going to be four quarters.

We've played great in these tight games for three quarters, three and a half quarters. We got to finish. Tonight they did. We had to handle the adversity better than we had. Again, my hat's off to these players, heart, passion, toughness and desire to win they played with tonight.

**Q. Talk about the final drive.**

COACH SWINNEY: Well, we were very fortunate after the two-point conversion miss there, very fortunate, that I didn't have to use any of my timeouts. That was huge. Kind of rolled the dice a little bit on first down, kind of let it go, trying to hold 'em. Had an incomplete, a couple incompletes there. That was big. That was big.

So you get the ball. We work that all the time. You get the ball back. It was like 1 minute 39, three timeouts, field goal to win it. We do that in our sleep. We don't always make 4th and 16, but we certainly have been in that situation many times with just our defense.

It was great. It was just great to see them believe. It was great to see them keep fighting. I told them before the game, y'all may think this is crazy, but I don't really give a rip about the scoreboard. I know that's what I'm judged by, what my livelihood is based on, but I really don't care. What I care about is how they compete. That's what I care about. How do they compete.

Just to see our football team compete with the intensity and enthusiasm, perseverance that they competed with tonight, that's what it's all about. Hey, we don't make that play, I'm still loving them up in there, still loving them up.

Make no mistake, the fun's in the winning. They made the play. They had to finish the drive. We were trying to, what we call, torpedo the ball. Something we work every Thursday. Call a timeout at three seconds. Kick it through the pipes and let's move on.

It was just like we practiced it. He's missed one kick all year long, so there really wasn't much doubt. I want to give credit to our offensive line. They got the block, the extra point, early. That was huge. Great protection, great snap by Sobeski. Nobody knows who he is. If he made a bad snap, you would. Michael Sobeski. Spencer Benton made a great hold. Caps put it through the pipes.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COACH SWINNEY: Well, it wasn't supposed to be a pooch kick, first of all. It was supposed to be really high and short. But fair catch, all right? It was really low and short. It wasn't exactly the way we drew it up.

That 42, man, we had a hard time corraling him. I wasn't going to give him another chance. That was the decision there. Fortunately we got the stop, didn't matter.

Listen, I know there's probably people that will be critical of Coach Miles or whatever. Listen, I had three timeouts. If he runs it three straight downs, I'm calling timeout, timeout, timeout. There's about 15 seconds coming off the clock. Now we got more than whatever it was, 2 minutes or whatever. I know I would have had no timeouts, so there's a theory there.

But I think he was trying to win the game. I think he felt confident with the plays. All of us as coaches, you're going to dial up the things you believe in, the things that you practiced. I know he knew he needed to get a first down 'cause if he gets a first down, I got to start burning timeouts, the clock is burning, a whole different deal.

Brent and I talked right before that. He's probably going to throw it on second down. I felt like he would run it on first down, throw it on second down. So we were able to get the guy tackled on that first down. Like I said, I gambled a little bit thinking, All right, I'm going to use him here. Then we got fortunate to have two incompletes. That was huge. There's all kinds of strategies.

But Coach Miles has won a heck of a lot more games than I've won. I'm the last guy to second guess him. He's as good as it gets. A lot of different ways to look at that.

**Q. When you lose Sammy early, what does that do for your plans?**

COACH SWINNEY: Well, we didn't do

anything with the game plan. Adam Humphries, that guy can play. He's No. 16. He can play. We got all the confidence in the world in Adam. In fact, I guess it just wasn't meant to be for Sammy Watkins to play in the dome this year. He might need to avoid the Falcons at all costs. He played one snap in two games in the dome.

We got great competition with all those guys. Like I said, Adam Humphries is a baller. Charone and Jaron, all those guys can make plays. What it did is it made us very thin. Martavious was suspended. He's pretty good. Sammy is out. He's pretty good. So now you're playing about four guys. It made us very thin. They had to gut it out. We played a hundred plays.

We're in pretty good shape. All them people that have a conspiracy against Joey Batson, maybe they'll say something nice about him. Everybody wants to play Joey for every loss we have around here. Not everybody. There's a small pocket of those people. I wish they'd come over and work out with us in the summer. We'd invite them.

But we just played a hundred plays against one of the most physical football teams in the country and won it in the fourth quarter, 32 first downs. 6 Joey Batson deserves a credit of that for having our football team ready physically, emotionally, mentally, all that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COACH SWINNEY: Just matchups. We brought a little bit of pressure, mixed it up. We won some matchups, simple as that. We felt like we had good matchups with our ends on their tackles. Those guys played relentlessly. Corey, Malliciah, Grady Jarrett was a road grater in there. Josh, our depth showed up. They just won the matchups. It's that simple.

Happy New Year and go Tigers.

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