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An Interview With:

CLEMSON

COACH MORRIS: It's definitely a great challenge ahead of us against a very solid opponent, that we feel is one play away from playing in the National Championship Game. And so we honestly are excited about this opportunity. I think it's a great gauge for our program and knowing that our guys are ready. They are excited about this opportunity and we look forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Venables, I know you've been to your share of BCS games in the past, how does your experience with the which I can fill a Bowl so far stack up?

COACH VENABLES: It's all about the people, it's not their first rodeo to say the least. We have been incredibly overwhelmed with the hospitality, the ease and the convenience of going from A to B to C, the daily schedule and the fabulous practice facility and great people and great hotel, and like Jeff said, the volunteers have gone above and beyond to make sure that we have everything that we need and our guys are enjoying themselves. Great activities, the function that the players and coaches can participate in, it's a very unique Bowl experience. They do it the right way.

THE MODERATOR: We were talking earlier with the LSU about the battle for Bowl week competitions, they got on the board yesterday, you must have had a down day at the buffet.

TAJH BOYD: Having a great time with it. I thought we came out on top, we had about 160 --

THE MODERATOR: No, you guys were 450 pounds, and you lost.

TAJH BOYD: It's been great. Again very well put together and one of the best Bowls we've been a part of in recent years and fun to be here. They do a great job. Had some great speaks yesterday, and it's just been a fun trip all together.

We've got one more piece left so have to make sure we fin tissue off right.

THE MODERATOR: Xavier, two more events to close out the battle for the Bowl week, have you guys got it in you to close it out today?

XAVIER BREWER: I think we do. I felt like we had it in us yesterday -- but for them, it was serious --

THE MODERATOR: They did almost 650.

XAVIER BREWER: We are excited about the milkshake competition and everything else we have going on. We are going to have a really good time here. That's what it's all about. Just trying to finish off a week of practice and be very well prepared for the game.

Q. Xavier, can you talk about how well you must be going up against a guy like Tajh, anything you see on Saturday or in practice? And Tajh, if you would, just comment for those of us you have not seen you in person, what you feel you bring in the field each week.

XAVIER BREWER: For me personally, the game has slowed down from the begriming of the season. Just moving the corner and especially having Tajh and Nuke to go one-on-one with them every day, that's one of the top combinations in the country.

So when I get into the game, it's time to slow down for me definitely when I play man coverage.

TAJH BOYD: Each week is a new opportunity to just go and present yourself as being one of the most explosive offenses in the country. That's what we pride ourselves on. That's what when Coach Morris came in, he wanted to establish.

We had a saying that for 80-plus plays in the game, the most explosive offense in the country. We are starting to become that. It's not a finished product at all, not even close but we are making great strides and just got to continue to work. There's so much more room for improvement but at the same time, I mean, I think

that it's to the point where we are getting to the point where we are hitting on all cylinders.

On this game, we are going to have to be on top of our game and we are going to have to come out and start off on fire. Coach Morris does a great job of preparing us and playing against these guys on defense over here, it's just been able to help us prepare that much more in practice with the speed of the guys and just the type of defensive coverages and blitzes that they bring, it helps us out tremendously. I think in all regards, Coach does a great job of preparing us.

Q. What do you think you have to do against this defense to be successful or to have the kind of success that you had in Tallahassee?

COACH MORRIS: Well I think you've got to execute. I think that's the biggest thing that we've seen as we watch what they do defensively, very sound, well-coached. They play fast. They play aggressive. And I think the biggest thing that you see when you watch LSU defense is you see a defensive front four that is not just four guys. They are rotating guys in. They are two-deep and they do a really good job of getting their guys in and out.

I think the thing that we have to do is we have to be able to come out and play our game and do what we do. I think anybody at this stage of the season, better worry about yourself. I've been saying that all year long is it's more about the Clemson Tigers than it is LSU Tigers, and we have got to make sure that we do what we do.

You're not going to come through the course of the Bowl, you're not going to reinvent plays and try to be somebody you're not. And so we have got to be able to do a good job of coming out and executing and eliminating the three-and-outs and playing fast and playing aggressive.

Q. The play-calling style with the placards and pictures, when did you incorporate that, what's the benefit of it, and whose idea was it to include Snoop Dogg?

COACH MORRIS: I think our players gave us several different pictures they would like to see up, from Snoop Dogg to all of the coaches wives up; I don't know, we had to ask permission on that.

But no, everything's got some significance. We have been doing that for I guess since 2003. You know, it's got its own unique feel to it. I can't tell you what it means or nothing like that, I don't

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know if that's what you're trying to get across, but they all have a significant meaning. Hey, you never know what picture we are going to roll out there this week.

Q. Tajh, how is that different play-calling style?

TAJH BOYD: When you first get the transition from the style of offense that we used to run to when Coach Morris came, it's a big move, it's a big jump. You know, for me personally, it's all about just -- the offense is build off of tempo. So as much as you can remember those cards and remember what the significant meanings of those, the faster you can go.

So it's to a point where it's just been great having that out there, because you don't have to worry about too much except for make sure you relay it back to everybody and just go as fast as possible.

Q. Coach Dabo told an interesting story yesterday, amusing story yesterday about recruiting you and saying, I need a quarterback, when you could have gone anywhere. What ultimately sold you on Clemson and how were you able to see it become the kind of offense where you can flourish as you have?

TAJH BOYD: Coming here, it was almost like coming off of a win. Coach Swinney had just been named head coach, there was a lot of unanswered questions in the program. But when I got a chance to sit down with them and talk to them, and hear about life his experiences, how he can help me grow, not just as a player but as a man, I don't think I could have gone anywhere else or a better place.

There's a lot of schools that are easy on the eye, you go out to Oregon and Ohio States, those are two of my favorites, and some place that any player or any quarterback wants to play in an exciting offense wants to play in. First couple years it was a different type of deal but when Coach Morris came in, it was a blessing in disguise. I've always wanted to play in an offense that had different abilities and when he came in it made it that much better. Again, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Q. Can you could talk about the challenge of preparing for a straightforward,

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physical attack like LSU, as opposed to maybe some of the more smoke and mirror offenses you might see?

COACH VENABLES: Well, they are very precise in what they are doing and that's what you have to appreciate and have great respect for. They do it with great intensity, very obviously very physical, very intense, physical and aggressive mind-set in how they run the football. They are running downhill to not just the isolation play but the whole mentality is being in attack mode and in the running game. They are great technicians at what they do. They understand leverage. They understand angles and very, very well coached and you can see it as an offensive team.

It's exciting, because again, they are not trying to trick you and their form of a trick play is a playaction play and trying to get the receiver in behind you. So that being said, we are going to have to really make a collective effort, we are going to play a lot of guys. Our guys have the mind-set of the inside drill -- (indiscernible) -- mentality and you have to do it for 60 minutes and that's the mind-set.

There's going to be a lot of ebbs and flows in this game, and at the end of the year, it's a huge stage, a lot of emotion prior to the game, and certainly there's ebbs and flows in the course of the game. If you can keep that mind-set, we are just going to keep playing ball and not get too high or too low, but at the end of the day, have an opportunity to win the game. That's going to be a real big part of this game.

They are going to make some plays, they are going to pop a run, our offense is going to make some plays, defense is going to make some plays and you have to keep playing ball. Sixty minutes, a lot will take place over that course of time, and that tough mind-set we have been trying to preach to our guys, that mentality and again, that approach like Coach Morris said, being aggressive in what ever we are going, not playing on our heels.

XAVIER BREWER: Following on what he said, very physical team. Watching film, seems like they get more physical as the game goes on and definitely know how to play with a hard edge the entire game. They will pound it on you but they will also take shots, the secondary is going to have to be very sound in our technique, not giving up any big plays.

Q. What have you heard from the scout team on the running backs?



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COACH VENABLES: We have used -- Toms is our fullback, and he's a good athlete, quick, close to 275 pounds. He does a good job -- and that's what we've done. They had one guy that doesn't play any more, got hurt I think earlier in the year, but they do a great job utilizing -- inaudible.

Q. Just curious, LSU has a much different offensive philosophy than Clemson, what's the challenge with the practice than a much different philosophy than you'll see on Monday?

COACH VENABLES: They want to run the football, so playaction is very similar. Guys have to stay on top of things in the back end. You have to be sound in what you're doing in defending the run. You've got to -- just like LSU is going to force you to get red numbers down there -- present one-on-one opportunities, this offense does the same thing.

They don't probably do as many motions, as many shifts in motions, but that actually helps you seeing that every day, because they force you not to allow your feet to get set. A lot of similarities in the run, pass and playaction game. Obviously our offense wants to get as close -- throwing the long ball and LSU, well documented in the last year, a little bit more aggressive in throwing the football and the run game has had great success.

I think they more than show that they can throw the ball when they want to; almost how however they want to approach, they will. If they want to do it from the air, the quarterback can definitely do it. They can make the shots if they need to, but it's a style and philosophy that they have embraced.

Q. You guys have put up huge numbers most of the year, is there any motivation going up against an SEC a team to prove that we can do against a team like this, a game like this?

TAJH BOYD: Not really motivation, just going out there and proving what type of team we are. You know, we are getting a chance to play against one of the best, but for us, it's more about the competition, the nature of the business, the nature of the game and going out there and proving who is best out there. That's what we pride ourselves on.

Again we want to be the most explosive

offense in the country. There's no better stage than the one we are on right now, one of the best Bowl games out there going against the best defenses.

I'm excited about the game, it's another great opportunity for us. We are just looking to go out and handle our business and everything else will fall in place?

Q. Coach said you guys were not getting caught up in the whole SEC thing, do you feel that way?

TAJH BOYD: I feel that way, our representation, not thinking about anything but Clemson. We owe a lot to our fan base, the great fans we have, and the alums, to our program, to our school and to our coaches and this game is about Clemson. If we are on the outside looking in, I'm sure there is about the talk of the SEC and all that, but again we are just trying to represent Clemson as best as possible.

Q. How did you warm up whenever it was for those of us who don't know about this spread-type offense?

COACH MORRIS: Well, I coached high school football for 18 years, and was fortunate and blessed enough to be around some great coaches and great players; that we had a lot of success because of that. When I took the job in Stephenville, we had just came off of four straight state championship appearances at two different schools. And after winning four state championships there, the very first year, we didn't go to the playoffs. And if you know anything about West Texas football, you know the fact that you won't be invited to too many Christmas parties if you don't get to the playoffs. So I wasn't on too many peoples' Christmas party lists.

At that point, I realized it didn't matter what or the success that I had had previous as a head coach, it didn't matter. What mattered was what was in the present and in the now. At that point, we had to realize what was the next thing; what's the next thing in the cutting edge of football, because the game of football is evolving and I think we see it. It's constantly evolving and you're seeing it in the NFL right now, you know, continue to evolve.

At that point we have to figure out what was on the next cutting edge and that's how this whole thing really started in 2003 when went up and visited another high school coach in northwest Arkansas by the name of Gus Malzahn, and he

kind of started at that point. Then it's just kind of grew from there.

Q. Could you talk about the tape you saw of the A&M game they played? They started out slowly, fell behind, and then from what I understand, they played a lot of six DBs and still got pressure and got themselves back in the game. Is that like a scary thing to see or have you seen that enough to feel like you're prepared?

COACH MORRIS: Well, we study a lot of film and obviously looked a lot at A&M. We have gone way back looking at a whole lot of film on different things and the way they have attacked different offenses in different years.

You know, when they played A&M, you know, you're exactly right, they did, they were still able to give pressure with three, rushing three and kind of disrupt the passer. Again, you look and you go back and you just pick up bits and pieces throughout your film study, but again, I've said it all year, it comes back to, it's execution and it's doing what you do.

I think you heard Coach Venables say that about them offensively. There's no surprise. You are who you are at this point in time in the season. You're not going to come in and create something totally different.

Ours is execution. We feel like from Tajh's standpoint, when you look at Tajh from year one to year two in this system and how much he improved, it's been unbelievable and we feel like Tajh is one of the best in the country if not the best in the country in making plays with his feet and knows the things that are going to have to happen. We are not going to call the perfect game and we are not going to call the perfect play.

There's going to be times -- at some point, our guys are going to have to go make plays. But as a coach, a coordinator, you have to put your players in a position to be successful and when you do that, you've done your job and we feel really good about the plan that we have.

Feel really good about Tajh and where he is in his game right now, and you know, where he is with this offense, you know, we have got about 80 percent of it in. But that doesn't mean anything. If Tajh can't operate 100 per cent of what we have got in. So we are excited about it.

But we have got to take what they give us and there's going to be times where they are going

to rush three and there's going to be times where they are going to rush eight and we have to be able to do a good job of picking those things up.

Q. Being in Baton Rouge, just listening to Tajh and looking at him, looks like he's 30, sounds like he's 40, just a mature guy I guess. Can you talk about his intangibles off the field and coupled with his abilities and what he's enabled this team to do?

COACH MORRIS: Well, they said we have to be through at 12:15, and I could talk all day about Tajh Boyd, and I could talk all day about what he means, not just to this program, but to our community, our university. He is truly the face of the university and he represents Clemson extremely well, not just the football program, but the entire university.

You know, being around Tajh for now, almost two years, getting to know him, and he and I have an unbelievable relationship, I think it's important that their coordinator and quarterback have a relationship that maybe you don't have with other players.

And so he and I have that, and have really grown close in being able to visit on different things, whether it deals with football or not. And for him to be able to feel comfortable, not just around me but my family and my kids, I think you see that with Tajh and because of that, there's a trust and Tajh has to trust the fact of what we are doing, got to believe wholeheartedly with everything he's got in the system that we are running and he's got to communicate that to the players from the offensive standpoint.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Tajh Boyd is not just the leader of our offense. He's the leader of our football team. We talk about it all the time: So goes our quarterback, so goes our football team. That comes with the position. He chose to play this position a long time ago and that comes with the territory.

Tajh means so much more than just being the quarterback of this football team. And I think the very first day that I got there, one of the things that we talked about was, it is a big deal to be the quarterback for the Clemson Tigers and we want it to be that way, and we want whoever comes next for it to be a big deal for them. If you're the quarterback for the Clemson Tigers, it's something to be said.

I think Tajh is playing that way. He's broken just about every record that there is. We have got a lot of work still to do. He can still

improve his game a lot, and he knows that and we talk about that all the time. I'm excited to watch him and as he prepares for this game and the preparation we have gone through for the last 15 practices, but when it comes to Monday night, we'll be excited to watch him and excited to watch him perform. It's the stage that he's been looking for and you can't ask for anything better than this.

Q. Predicated on you coming back next year, but with all these players coming back, there's 60-some freshmen, sophomores on the roster -- we hear about the springboard, analogy to next season what would that mean going into next year?

XAVIER BREWSTER: This program is one of the -- we have been doing some really good things here, but we are so close to being the team that we want to be. But ultimately all of the coaches, all of the players come here for one reason and that's to win a championship. If you're not winning a championship, you're not doing your job.

I mean, we want a National Championship. I think it's possible, and just have to continue to work and take it from there. This is a big game for us in a lot of different ways. I mean, also, we just want to win a championship. If everything just goes accordingly, we'll have the opportunity to play for that one of these years, and hopefully it's sooner rather than later.

Q. Sammy said at practice yesterday that he is going to be Sammy Monday night and we are going to see a lot more of him in a variety of ways. What can you share with us about what you have in mind for him?

COACH MORRIS: Well, I think he's ready for that. I think we all know looking at Sammy and the course of the way the year has went with him with the suspension early on, coming back for a game, didn't stick, having to miss a game, really was a hard time for him getting into the flow of the season. But we expect Sammy to be Sammy. Sammy needs to play well, and as they all do. We are going to turn him loose.

Q. You went out to Oklahoma State, to look at Justin and how he was utilized -- were you able to implement -- with the suspension and illness and all that?

COACH MORRIS: Well, I think you see

what Nuke has done this year and the success that Nuke has had, really picking up when Sammy was out for the three or four games that he was out there year.

So, yes, I think we are able to utilize some of it, but it was kind of hard to get into a flow, trying to evolve into what we really wanted to get into, because with the suspension and then he misses a couple more games being sick, it was really difficult. And then you got into the meat of your schedule and you had to do what you were doing in making sure you were getting good at something with it.

Yeah, we have, and we have had an opportunity to do some things during the 15 Bowl practices, as well, so we are excited about it.

Q. No mic.

COACH VENABLES: Positioning your own players, make trying to cover those up, and certainly-- so same thing, this season, most physical team we've seen up to this point. I think this goes out saying. That's not earth-shattering news. That's what they are known for. They are a terrific football team. When you have players that have played in a National Championship, they are not Johnny Come Lately, they are established, and obviously having three weeks to get ready for somebody, we are going to see the best from their guys and our guys want it.

Q. In your short time with them, how pleased are you with the development of Willard (ph) and does this game fit his style and his personality?

COACH VENABLES: He's come a long way, it's been very apparent, sometimes you see as a coach during the season, get to the next game and the next personnel group and third downs and everything else, there's not enough fingers and toes to plug up all the leaks. But he's been one guy that amongst others that there's been a steady improvement, very similar to Xavier, once we are able to settle him into one position and really allow him to use his skill set.

The thing that Xavier did, certainly fundamentally, he understands the system now more than ever, and where his health is, he can play aggressive and try to do things that he's not supposed to do and that allows really him to utilize his athletic ability. He's had a very strong season.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

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