



Clemson
Head Coach Dabo Swinney
December 31, 2017



COACH SWINNEY: Well, I have no idea what we're going to talk about today, but I'm here. I want to just kind of relate what I said yesterday. We have had a really good week, a great experience here in New Orleans.

I was just saying a second ago, these guys are on point around here. I'm very appreciative of all the people who just make it such a smooth operation around here. I mean, a lot of folks that you don't really ever see. But, man, pulling up and people pulling cones out of the road, there's a lot going on.

And this bowl here, they do a phenomenal job. I have never been to the Sugar Bowl as a coach. So it's a new experience for me with the Sugar Bowl people. And, man, it's an operation. They are on point in every regard. So we had a great experience. It's been a fast week. I mean, today is Friday for us. So that's where we are from the mind-set standpoint, kind of getting ourselves ready for a great day tomorrow. I'm very excited about the game day getting here. I know Alabama is as well. It's a long time to prepare for the game. And I'm sure both teams are at this point just ready to go play. And let's see what is going to happen.

Q. Coach, I was wondering what went into your decision to practice over at Tulane instead of choosing the [Mercedes-Benz] Superdome, seeing as how you had the choice?

COACH SWINNEY: Well, when Mike Dooley told me what my options were. I said, "Well, let's go to Tulane." You know, the Dome is huge, first of all. Just like yesterday, you go down there and you spend all of your time kind of looking around. I just wanted a little smaller environment. And, to be honest with you, that's where we practiced in '92 as well. We practiced at Tulane. And that's what I had in my mind, so it was great.

It was a very good practice setup for us. The first day was a little cold, but that might be the best practice we had all year. Our guys just loved it and embraced it. And then it was beautiful the rest of the time.

But just a smaller setting. I just felt like maybe it would help us out a little bit with focus. We sent our kickers and punters and punt returners over there on our Tuesday practice, whatever day that was on the calendar here. But we have done that.

Then we will go over there and work out today as well. And then we did Media Day over there, so they have had some experience in there. But from a practice standpoint, I wanted to kind of keep it as much like home as I could and have a really good focused setting.

Q. Dabo, what has your encounters with the fans been like this week? And what does it mean that they followed you all across the country these past couple of years on this adventure?

COACH SWINNEY: It's been great. We all walked down Bourbon Street the other night, I guess the first night we got here. And that was quite an experience but a lot of fun. I got to see fans from both sides, and it was great.



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People come from all over to see us play. And I just think that we're very fortunate, obviously, to be at Clemson and Alabama to have fan bases that are going to show up. This will be an awesome environment. And people pay a lot of money to get tickets. And they're just passionate about it. And, when you have a job that other people are passionate about, I mean, that's a blessing. It's awesome to be a part of that.

Q. Dabo, Jeff [Scott] and Tony [Elliott] had a great relationship before you promoted them. How have you seen it grow as they have gotten more in sync coordinating the offense?

COACH SWINNEY: They're great. They're easy to work with. They work together easily. Everybody is in sync. We're all on the same page. Everybody does it together. The game plans, Danny [Pearman] and Robbie [Caldwell] are as much a part of it as anybody, putting the plan together, and supporting Tony and Jeff, and [Brandon] Streeter as well. Streeter, I mean, he has been a coordinator. He is right in the middle of it. I'm involved. We're all a part of it.

But Tony and Jeff just do a phenomenal job of kind of blending it all together and then on game day executing the plan and bouncing things off of each other. And I'm just really proud of those two guys. But very seamless working relationship, easy.

Q. Dabo, based on what you have seen out of [Alex] Spence this week, the confidence level/consumer level, throwing him out there in a high-pressure situation tomorrow night?

COACH SWINNEY: He has been under the gun. I was kidding the other day. I don't know who I was talking to. But our season is kind of broken down into two segments: Pre-Costa [Drew] and post-Costa, before Costa and after Costa. So he has been great since Costa joined the team for whatever reason. And he has made big kicks.

He made a kick, I think, down there in South Carolina and made a 46-yarder against Miami. He has hit six out of his last seven. So, yeah, he has practiced really well. He has been about 88%, 87% since post-Costa. So he has been very consistent in practice, and it's not as much this week. He has been fine this week, too. But really the whole back end of the season he has kind of hit his stride, so he is prepared and ready to go do the job.

Q. Dabo, talking about seeing both sets of fans on Bourbon Street and them coming up to you, there seems to be a healthy amount of respect between these two fan bases where it doesn't degenerate into the hate and vitriol that you get with South Carolina, Alabama gets with Auburn. How much of that is the success? How much of that is that you have got a foundation in Alabama? And what is your sense of that healthy respect?

COACH SWINNEY: Oh, there's no question. Obviously, my background at Alabama I definitely think plays a part. Because a lot of people -- I think more for Clemson and this is an uncomfortable situation. They're a little conflicted. This is a unique rivalry from that standpoint.



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But I go home for Christmas every year, and Christmas Eve I always go shopping at the Summit. It's just what I do. It's my shopping day. I eat lunch at Taco Mama there at the Summit. And I have got all kind of people looking at me.

To your point, I'm in Birmingham. And I had a lot of Alabama people come up to me with great respect. I mean, they want to win the game. But they had very nice things to say. "You guys have got a great team" and such and such. So I think there's a lot of respect.

But I think, at the end of the day, Alabama people respect good football. And I think that they know that we've got a good football team, and we're going to compete. Even when we lost a couple of years ago, we're going to lay it on the line. And we know they're going to do the same thing.

So I think, at the end of the day, there's a healthy respect on both sides. And for Clemson people, I mean, they know I'm a two-time graduate of Alabama. And my wife is a graduate and obviously played there. Danny Ford is from Alabama. Charlie Pell is from Alabama. Hootie Ingram is from Alabama. Frank Howard is from Alabama. There's been a ton of coaches that have coached at both schools.

So there's just these unique ties, relationships that cross over. And we haven't competed against each other a lot. But all of a sudden you've got this three-game series that has just happened at the highest level. And this is kind of a rubber match. But, to be honest with you, this is probably not going to be the last one. There will probably be more of these down the road, and I think that's great.

I think it's a fun game. Again, this is big-boy football. You have got a lot of incredibly talented football players that are going to be on the field, and they all want the same thing. I don't have any doubt it will be a great game. But from a fan standpoint, I think it's a very healthy respect on both sides.

I know there are some places that, if I went shopping, a lot of people probably wouldn't be so nice.

Q. Dabo, you lost a lot of guys from last year's team. Yet, you're back in the playoff and the number one seed. How proud of you of the fact that you not only had success at Clemson but you have been able to sustain it?

COACH SWINNEY: I think that is probably the thing I am most proud of, everything that we have done, is our consistency. To me, I think to be great at anything, you've got to be very consistent for a long period of time. And so that's been one of our number one goals since I got the job, was to build a consistent program.

And you know what? We're not going to win it every year. But we want to compete for our conference. And we want to be one of those teams that has a chance, that is in the conversation year in and year out. Because, if you can kind of live there, you've got an opportunity certain years to get it done. If things go your way, you stay healthy, whatever it may be.



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But this year it has been very gratifying. Because, obviously, there was a lot written all spring, all summer about who wasn't here anymore and very little written about who was here. And I love the mindset of our team, that we have a program and a team where guys have learned to think the right way. They don't really get caught up in the things that people will write about, "There's no way they can have a good year this year because this guy is gone and this guy is gone and this guy is gone. There's just no way."

And then vice versa, "Man, they're so great. They have this and that." Our guys know at the end of the day it comes down to performance. It's not about what people write or say or about potential of what you did last year or what you didn't do last year.

It's just really about a daily commitment, and it comes down to performance. You have to play the games. We've recruited guys. Sometimes guys have an opportunity early. Sometimes guys have to be patient like with Kelly Bryant. Sometimes guys walk on, like a Hunter Renfrow. But, at the end of the day, you just have to believe in yourselves and what you're doing.

This team has been really special because, again, this is a so-called rebuilding year for us. We weren't supposed to be any good this year, and these old boys didn't get the memo. They just kind of went to work. And, yeah, we found ways to win games. So it's been great. I'm really proud of them. And we've only got six seniors. We're one of the youngest teams in college football. We have six scholarship seniors that came to Clemson. So I think we have a chance to be pretty good next year if we don't screw it up.