



Post-Game Press Conference

January 2, 2017



COACH STOOPS: My compliments to the entire Sugar Bowl committee, the people in New Orleans at the hotel, the practice site here at the Superdome and on and on. It's just been an incredible week. And everybody has just been fantastic.

Compliments to Auburn, Coach Malzahn and his team having an excellent year. Very good football team and played a good game tonight. Can't say enough how proud I am of my players, the way they handled themselves not only this entire week but the whole month leading up to the game. They have been at a ton of meetings, and they have practiced hard and took care of themselves around New Orleans here this entire week. Not one guy was late to a meeting or anything else.

So they really invested in it, and it showed tonight. Really proud of the way they played in all parts of the game. I thought we were tough, physical. Both sides of the ball executed well, compliments to the assistant coaches who put together an excellent game plan and to these guys up here and the job they did.

I want to recognize Samaje (Perine). He doesn't want me to do it. But to be the all-time leading time rusher at a place like Oklahoma, when you look at the lineage of running backs that we have had through the decades, to be the all-time leading rusher is really something special. So the entire team took a lot of pride in that.

Q. The first two drives of the game the offense couldn't get anything on. But from there on it seemed like you were pretty much unstoppable. What changed after that first quarter?

COACH STOOPS: Really just execution. Same thing defensively. The execution early. I think the pace of the play and the different formations they gave us, just got us -- even though we prepared for them, we were not ready to respond quick enough. And then we settled down and did. The same thing offensively. Once we settled down and recognized what they were doing, we handled it really well.

Q. Auburn's pass-rush seemed to be intense the first quarter, quarter and a half. You evaded it pretty well. But the longer the game went, the less intense that pressure got. What were you guys doing that sort of made their pass-rush wither?

QB BAKER MAYFIELD: It is how the game goes. As the game goes on as well as the run game, it wasn't what we wanted in the first half. But our backs pound people, and so it wears on people. And you have to worry about stopping the run, that's when we were able to drop back with some play action and get the ball downfield and vice versa. It opens up the run game and the run game opening up the pass game.



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Q. The decision to go for it on 4th and 4 and the pass to (Dede) Westbrook, can you talk about what was the thinking going into it and just the execution. And how big of a play was that in the game?

COACH STOOPS: I have great confidence -- probably the biggest factor is confidence in Baker and the offense. The other factor, as you saw, we missed a much closer field goal later in the game the game, that I didn't have great confidence in long field goals lately for us. And so it made it an easy decision for me.

QB BAKER MAYFIELD: We had practiced that look. Coach Riley did a good job of setting that play up, giving us a good look. And the scout team guys did as well. And they tried to switch off the coverage with Dede (Westbrook) and trying what we call a combo coverage, and just recognition throughout the week. And we practiced it I don't know how many times. And so we recognized that and were able to get the ball downfield, and Dede made a great play.

Q. Samaje, I know you don't want to talk about it. But we have to ask you: It's such a great honor. With all of the great running backs at Oklahoma, and you're going to set atop that rushing leader. You're such a classy guy. Talk about the fact that you're now the all-time leading rusher at OU.

RB SAMAJE PERINE: It really hasn't hit me yet. And I don't know exactly when it's going to hit me. I'm just excited that we got the win and we got it in the fashion that we did. And I'm just ready to celebrate with my team.

Q. How much of some of the missed reactions, some of the things with Dede in motion -- seemed like there were a lot of things we hadn't seen.

How much of that was new, and how much is just in the playbook you hadn't gotten to this season?

QB BAKER MAYFIELD: We ran a lot of motions. Normally throughout the year we had a bunch of two-back motions, where we motion one of the guys out of the backfield. And we saw some stuff on film that we liked where other teams, throughout the year, had some success rushing receivers. And try to create some confusion, and that's what it does. And that's part of our offense. We had a lot of motions, a lot of shifts, stuff like that. And for that reason, we just translated it to the receivers this time.

Q. After everything Joe has been through the past couple of weeks, what was it like to see him perform the way he did and see the team kind of unite around him the way they did every time he had a big play?



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COACH STOOPS: It's pleasing. He's a great young man. We've talked about it a lot. He has a second chance, and he's making the most of it. He is a great teammate to these guys. He's one of the most popular guys in the locker room because of the energy and the positivity he gives to the other guys. And so it was great to see him go out tonight and have another excellent game.

Q. Jordan, Oklahoma, in general, has been at the forefront of this SEC narrative the last couple of years. And you guys are 4-0 the last four years against the SEC. So do you have any sort of motivation going into this, something you want to prove? You guys belong at the top of that conversation like that?

LB JORDAN EVANS: Football is football at the end of the day. I don't think anybody cares what conference you're in. As long as you guys line up and play the way you're supposed to play, the better team is always going to win. Tonight, I feel like it was us, and that's why we came out on top.

COACH STOOPS: Maybe just bury that narrative.

Q. Jordan, you gave up a touchdown on the first drive of the game.

COACH STOOPS: Didn't come easy to them, but they scored.

Q. You kept them out of the end zone until the last play of the game. What happened between the first series and the rest of the game where you guys sort of took command?

LB JORDAN EVANS: Like Coach mentioned earlier, it was just some technique stuff and execution stuff that we had to fix on our side of the ball. Once we started doing that and lining up right, we started shutting down their running game and putting them in situations and keeping them out of the end zone.

Q. Jordan, along that line, you were guy the other day that said his pride was kind of hurt from the Texas Tech AD said your defense wasn't good enough to be in the playoffs. How much of a statement did y'all feel like you made tonight, except in the first and last drives, I guess?

LB JORDAN EVANS: I think we just showed that we can play. It set us up for next year. All of the young guys that made a lot of good plays tonight, they want to just take over and just keep this thing rolling next year.

Q. Bob, I don't know if you ever had a season quite like this one. You have had -- you know, coming off of two national championships in '05; you've had '09 where you lose your Heisman trophy; you had '06 where you kicked your quarterback off the team. But I don't know if you've had this much turmoil in one season. What does it say to you about the guys on your team, the players, that were able to win 10 in a row to finish the season?



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COACH STOOPS: Well, it shows the strength, I think, of our character overall. We're a prideful team. They're a very close team. Guys care and respect one another. And we're a confident, regardless of the people that try and rattle the cage and shake your confidence.

We kept confident the entire season. We stayed positive with each other the entire season and trusted our system, trusted our methods and the way that we do things. And we built on it. We improved as we went through the end, and we fought through the outside noise and then kept to ourselves.

And in our building, it can't be any more positive. And that means a lot. We take that to the field.

Q. Coach, I just wanted your thoughts on the playoff system in general. Do you think that we will expand from four to eight? And, if you do believe that, realistically, when do you think that would happen?

COACH STOOPS: Well, I think if you went from four to eight, just get rid of the championship games, they become insignificant. And that's probably a positive.

And I don't think the players' schedule accommodates more games. They're not NFL players. Some of them have NFL bodies right now, but not the bulk of the team, to start playing 15 and 16 games at this level. And I don't think their academic schedule and turning point schedule and everything else accommodates that. So I think it's right where it ought to be. And I would hate to see conference championship games become insignificant.

Q. Baker, in the postgame, when you were named MVP, you also saluted Samaje. Could you talk about what it was like to be in the huddle? You always seem to be a guy that knows where he is at a little bit, even though Samaje may not and not care. But you seem to know a little bit. So what was the sideline? Like, what was the huddle like as you guys were getting close?

QB BAKER MAYFIELD: Right before that last drive, I had talked to Tyler (Tettleton) on the sideline and asked him to give me an update on the yardage mark, because I knew he had to be somewhere close. And he was 30 yards away. And I told the offensive line. And they kind of geared up. And they said we still have to finish it out the right way, but it's just extra motivation for you.

So the record means a lot. So when you drive down the field and kind of doing the math in my head. And he finally made that last long run, and it was just enough. And I went and hugged him.

It meant a lot. Like Coach Stoops said when he talked about division of running backs that come through OU, he will never talk about it, but it's pretty special. And just to be out there on the field with him, it's pretty special to me.