

Outback Bowl: Indiana vs Ole Miss

Saturday, January 2, 2021

Tampa, Florida, USA

Raymond James Stadium

Coach Lane Kiffin

Ole Miss Rebels

Ole Miss 26, Indiana 20

LANE KIFFIN: Really an awesome day for us to come down here, obviously out a lot of players, a starter on defense and I guess four -- our most four productive players in the receiving game on offense. Got to come away with a win versus a top-10, -11 team in the country, was really awesome. Credit to our players, and we said, look around the country, there's teams that are stepping up with players out, there's teams that are making excuses that they don't have players, so we want to be that team that stepped up, so it was awesome to see, and really cool for our guys. Seniors that have been here four or five years that hadn't been to a bowl game. Really special.

Q. I imagine it's kind of a daily double for you today, the school announces you're getting a new contract and then you win a bowl game in dramatic fashion. Pretty good day in your football career?

LANE KIFFIN: Again, to win a bowl game after five years, not being to one, you know, contract extension, showing both sides' commitment to doing this thing, and like we said in the release, just getting started. It happened to get done this morning. It had been in the works for a while, and really good timing.

Like I said, just getting started.

Q. After all the accolades your offense has gotten all year, how happy do you feel for those guys on the other side that it was them that kind of stepped up to secure this?

LANE KIFFIN: Really happy. You know, we talked about it all week, we're going to need that. We're not going to go score 60 points. You just can't do that without all those weapons, and versus a team that shuts people down. I think they had a shutout last week, whatever, seven points or something. So this is a really good defense, and you're down a lot of players, so we knew it was going to be a struggle, and it was great to see the defense play like they did.

Q. John Rhys making those big plays at the end of the game, the 44-yarder but also the 3rd down catch that was contested. What did you think about him and him stepping up in that way?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that showed obviously we were down receivers. I think we were down to four scholarship receivers, and so practicing him all week, so for a guy to only play one week at receiver, come in, dropped the first one -- he's right here, so we can make fun of him.

But the 3rd down play was awesome. There was pass interference and he caught it, then obviously the big play after that. Just a remarkable kid to be able to do that. You just can't do that; this isn't like Pop Warner. We're in major college football playing a top-10 team. To just go play receiver for one week and go in and make plays is really special.

Q. (On finishing the game.)

LANE KIFFIN: We had been in a lot of these, should have won two for sure where we had the ball in four-minute and then we gave them the ball back and didn't stop them and had the ball in two-minute. So we were able to do that today on both sides, scored and then stopped them. So it was good to see and hopefully springboards us into doing that in the future.

Q. What do you feel like a win against a team like that does for the future of this program and this team?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I just think it's exciting for recruits, for fans especially. Our fans have been through some rough years here lately, so it's awesome to win the Egg Bowl and then win a bowl game. That's about as good as it gets in year one, and now we've got to get better.

Q. Coach, to follow up a little bit on that, how big is it to win a bowl game when it comes to recruiting, especially when no one has been able to come to your campus?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I think it's normally a little bit bigger because it used to be we hadn't signed everybody until February, but we're like 90, 95 percent done, so it's a lot more for the next year, and you see that all the time. So like a team wins the National Championship, the impact is a lot of times a year from now in recruiting, so hopefully this is.

Q. When you talk about people opting out and everything and that the bowl is meaningless, there's a bunch of guys in your locker room that don't think this game is meaningless, do they?

LANE KIFFIN: No, I was like, I think they won the Super Bowl the way they acted, so it was awesome to see, and we celebrated it. A very hard year for a lot of people. It was a cool moment.

Q. Lane, after the defense gives up those two touchdowns back-to-back, what do you and the coaches tell the players before they go out for that last drive to try and make the stop and win the game?

LANE KIFFIN: Stop them. Don't give up another touchdown. That's about it. But really we just revert back to the way they were playing early. You guys have stopped them the whole game, so let's do it again. This is what you worked so hard for in the off-season.

Q. What specifically was the defense doing differently today that maybe you hadn't seen from them most of the season?

LANE KIFFIN: Explosive plays. I think we really limited explosive plays today and made them drive the length of the field and forced a long field goal and did a good job that way.

Q. It kind of gets lost, but Casey Kelly had six catches in the first half, the touchdown. This is a guy that stepped up in place of Kenny when he opted out. What have been your thoughts about him and how he's really stepped up to the plate?

LANE KIFFIN: Great job. We talked to those guys last night in the meeting about these are guys that haven't played a lot, just like John at receiver. All of them want to play more, and now they get a chance to play, and they made plays today, and it was awesome to see.

Q. Lane, could you talk about the job Henry Parrish and Snoop and even Kentrel Bullock did today at running back without having Jerrion Ealy?

LANE KIFFIN: A really good job. You're talking about really young guys, a sophomore and two true freshmen playing, so it was great to see, against a very good defense that's very complicated, does a lot of things. And people have struggled against them. You look at what people have done, outside of Ohio State a lot of people haven't moved the ball at all.

Q. What about Casey Kelly moving ahead? He had a big catch against LSU, big day today. Does that make you feel better about your tight end position going into next season?

LANE KIFFIN: It does. There's been guys stepping up, so Casey has done a good job. We told these guys, you're really good players, you just haven't had an opportunity to play because there were guys in front of you. So it was really good to see guys step up.

Q. He's still a non-scholarship player; is that right?

LANE KIFFIN: He is.

Q. Going back to the contract extension, can you tell us a little bit what made you want to sign that extension this morning?

LANE KIFFIN: We had just been talking about it for a while, and just really love it here, love the direction of the program. Keith has been amazing to us, has a great plan for the future here, and we're on the same page about we're just getting started. We want to build a championship program, and there's a lot of things we need to do to do that.

Q. Just the way Matt has matured this season, it seemed like Indiana was giving a lot of those same drop-eight looks that he struggled with early this season. How did you see him progress from struggling to kind of being MVP today?

LANE KIFFIN: I think the numbers show, 31 of 45 shows patience. That's what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to learn from your mistakes. Again, we're talking about a sophomore, so to do what he's done, outside of two games, has been as good as anybody in the country.

Matt Corral – Outback Bowl MVP

Ole Miss Rebels

Ole Miss 26, Indiana 20

Q. Matt, when you realized that you're going to win this game, what were the emotions going through your head at that point when you've worked so hard for a win like this and you finally get it?

MATT CORRAL: You know, I was very excited. A lot of people stepped up, not only on the defensive side but offensive-wise, too, from the slots to the tight ends. They're playing a lot. We had maybe five receivers, six receivers that were in rotation, probably four, and they sucked it up. They were tired, they were hurting, but so was Indiana, and I think that's just what kept them going, just knowing that they're not the only ones tired. They really pushed through and just trusted the coaching and really just got their confidence within a week. JR was out there in the slot for a week and then he's out there just the third play of the game against a Division I defense. So just hats off to those guys, really stepping up.

Q. How do you feel like your game matured throughout this season?

MATT CORRAL: Really just not being surprised by anything. Being better at reacting to what's happening instead of just thinking about what's happening, and just taking what they give you. You have a bad game; it is what it is, learn from it, go on to the next. Knowing that my teammates got my back, my coaches got my back, I can't lose.

Q. Can you contrast what you're feeling today versus what you were feeling when last season ended, not only for the team but you as an individual as you're widely considered to be one of the top quarterbacks returning in the college game going into next year?

MATT CORRAL: You know, it's a blessing to get the accolades or just to be in that conversation. But really it's going to come down to 2021 Ole Miss football dot-dot-dot. Again, and just like this year was 2020 dot-dot-dot, how do you guys want to be remembered, what type of team do you guys want to be known as, and it starts January 18th when we come back and get ready to work.

Q. You were named Outback Bowl MVP, and you're coming off a game that was really tough and against a team that was one of the best interception teams in the country. What was this game like for you as far as management and what were you seeing out there to have a more controlled game?

MATT CORRAL: You know, they were bringing the same thing every single time. They do bring a lot of pressure. They do a really good job of disguising it, and they're very well-coached. But I mean, we didn't know what they were doing every single time, but the majority of the time we did know who was plugging, who was coming from the -- like they were either bringing a corner cat or the Mike or boundary backers plugging or you get the field fist. Based on what type of blitz it was, you would know what coverage it is, and our coaches did a heck of a job.

Hats off to Lebby. Just really -- I don't know, something happened with his family, and he could have easily just left this game, and we all would have understood, but he didn't want to leave us. We're really thankful for him.

Q. This is kind of a strange follow-up, but John Rhys Plumlee as a wide receiver, what's your evaluation of him when you saw him running routes?

MATT CORRAL: I trusted John just because he's a quarterback, and he thinks like one, as well. Just because he's at receiver doesn't mean he's not thinking like I am. He knew what I was looking for. He knew he was in the right spots and went at the right spots at the right time. He held his own for sure, and he's only going to get better. It's really only up for him because I know he's a hard worker and I know when it's a want-to, JR is going to do it.

Q. So many times this year you guys have had the ball late with the lead or with the score tied and it didn't go your way. What was different with this last drive this time?

MATT CORRAL: The difference was that the defense stepped up and they made the stop. The defense won us that game. It's plain as simple. They finished it for us. We didn't need to go out on the field again. We did, but we just needed to take a knee, and that's the easiest play in football.

Q. It seemed like after the game you tried to high-five every single person in the stands, every single person on the field. What did it mean to you to get to be the leader and kind of celebrate this one?

MATT CORRAL: It meant a lot. You know, God is good for putting me in this position and putting me on this type of platform that I have. My family was here. A lot of my family was here, and I'm very thankful that they got to make this game.

First thing I thought about for one is where's LeBBY. It was an emotional after the game, but it was good emotion. It was happy. It was happy tears. I've never felt this type of relationship on a team before, ever in my entire life.

Q. Coach Kiffin gets a contract extension, you win a bowl game in kind of dramatic fashion, the defense rises up at the end. What kind of excitement does that provide for you guys going into next year?

MATT CORRAL: You know, it's really only up from here. We know what we have to do. We know what to get better at from this season 100 percent, and it's just going to come down to working and how bad you want it. The coaches are going to give us everything, the tools we need and the guidelines to get to where we want to get to. It's going to come down to us and how hard we want to work and how badly we want it. Not only my leadership, but every leader in every room, every position room is going to step up, and I will make sure of that.

Q. Casey Kelly might have surprised a few folks today with the impact he had, six catches I think in the first half, some key blocks thrown. What have you seen from him in practice, and what was your take on how reliable of a target he was for you today?

MATT CORRAL: Casey is a hard worker. He shows it. Always asking questions, always locked in, not a big -- doesn't mess around a lot, really. He's really -- he's a serious person. I trusted him just based on how he prepares for a game and just in practice, always asking me questions on certain routes and what am I looking at, and I just know that he's always locked in, and I know that he's a hard worker, so that really helped with the trust out there. I couldn't think about if I could trust him or not; I was just going to give him a shot and let them play. That went for 17, that went for 5 and 81 out there today.

Q. Can you tell us a little bit about what that Outback Bowl MVP means to you personally?

MATT CORRAL: You know, it means a lot. I wouldn't have done this without the guys stepping up. They started -- they were a little discouraged after a few drops, and the O-line, a few loafers here and there, but I wasn't perfect at all, and I told them that. I told them that I need them to be -- I need them to execute for us to win. I need them to win the route. I need them to win that play for us to win, and I told them that. "You four are the only ones I've got." I looked them in the eye and I said, "You guys are the only ones I've got." I need you guys to make this happen for me, for us, and that was the conversation. They looked back at me, and they said, "Matt, I've got you." All four of them did.

Q. Talk about the quick pace that you guys played with. It seemed to catch IU off balance.

MATT CORRAL: I mean, that's just our philosophy, moving the ball -- moving fast, snapping the ball really fast and getting them tired, getting them winded. Around the first series you could tell they were getting tired, and it showed with all the injuries, I guess, falling on the floor and then trying to get a break.

John Rhys Plumlee

Ole Miss Rebels

Ole Miss 26, Indiana 20

Q. John Rhys, just making the move and making the plays at the end of the game, what all played into that for you, and has this been something that you've been working towards throughout the year?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: I mean, just the past week, you know, been praying for opportunities, you know, because as a competitor you want to be on the field, be making plays with your teammates. The opportunity opened up at wide receiver with Kenny and Elijah opting out to go do really big things in the NFL. Just really thankful for the opportunity that opened up, and feel really blessed to have the athletic ability to do it.

Q. Do you see a potential future there at wide receiver or do you still think that quarterback is home?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: You know, I really enjoy quarterback, and this week has been really fun at wide receiver. It's a really quick turnaround to just say, hey, this is what I want to do for the remainder of my athletic career as a football player. I just feel really blessed to be in the situation that I am, to have two right answers.

To give you a definite answer, I'm not sure. I've got to do some praying about it to see whether I want to be a quarterback or be a wide receiver or try to do both. Just got to do some praying about it.

Q. What's it like going over the middle to catch a pass for the first time in a live game in a January bowl?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: You know, I've been -- as a running quarterback, you get hit a lot from guys that you don't necessarily see all the time, so I told Matt that -- I told him before the game that I wouldn't get alligator arms, and so I tried not to when I go over the middle. Just tried to look in and focus and make a catch and take a hit if that's going to be what it is.

Q. What did you see on that long gain on that last drive?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: Are you talking about the slant or the deeper pass?

Q. The deeper pass.

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: You know, it was a play that we drew up earlier in the week. We had a couple of routes out of the backfield for me and that was one of them, and Matt did a great job of looking off I think it was the safety to open my way up. Just we were wide open; great job game planning for me by Coach Lebby and Coach Kiffin. When you're wide open, those are sometimes the hardest catches, when you've just got to focus on catching the ball. I'm thankful I did, and I wish I would have scored, but thankfully we got in anyway.

Q. John Rhys, how soon do you put the baseball cleats on and report full time over at Swayze?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: So January 2nd is the date of today, so we report for baseball January 3rd so I'll have a couple hours off, be able to really eat a good meal and then go right back into it. I can't wait to get over there to Swayze for sure.

Q. Team-wise Lane said the celebration was like winning the Super Bowl. What was the locker room like and what was the celebration on the field like after the game?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: It was unreal. To be able to celebrate with your teammates like that, it's something special. You celebrate a lot of things, but I think celebrating with your teammates after a win is one of the best feelings you can have, especially when it's the last

one, and you've got guys like Royce Newman, you're putting them out on top, and it's a great feeling for sure.

Q. For guys like Royce it's been five years since --

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: I know, I know. He's been here for a while now.

Q. What do you think this means for the locker room to have tasted this, to know what winning a bowl game feels like?

JOHN RHYS PLUMLEE: You know, it's been a while since Ole Miss has been able to do this for the fans. They've been kind of thirsty for this to happen, and thankful that we could have the opportunity to do it. I think it kind of propels us into 2021, and we're really excited about it.

Jacquez Jones

Ole Miss Rebels

Ole Miss 26, Indiana 20

Q. Jacquez, the defense seemed like it kind of put everything together today. What went into having your best performance of the year on the biggest stage?

JACQUEZ JONES: Really just everybody focusing on and locking in. I feel like we knew we had the ability, but we never came together and really did it, but I feel like this game is just a stepping-stone where the defense can go.

Q. What did you see in practice this week that made you think this kind of performance was possible?

JACQUEZ JONES: Really just -- it's really Coach Durkin. Coach Durkin had us do about 20 walk-throughs a day, so I feel like that helped us out a lot. We knew what was coming, and I feel like we showed it on the field.

Q. The area of vindication, you guys go out there and do this on the biggest stage today, your best performance of the year; how does that feel to maybe show that the defense is turning a corner?

JACQUEZ JONES: It feels great. It feels great. Like we prepare like no other, especially during this bowl. We had the Christmas break, but we came in that Saturday and got right back to work, so I feel like the defense is headed in the right direction.

Q. Jacquez, Cedric making that sack, that's a true freshman stepping up; he's been coming on throughout the year. Just your thoughts on him and how he's come?

JACQUEZ JONES: Cedric is going to be a beast. He's a freshman and he can run like no other, he can jump. That man is going to be special. He's a special talent.

Q. And then Otis getting the interception, this is a guy that waited so long to get on the field. Is that kind of what you've been seeing in practices even when he wasn't able to suit up with y'all, that playmaking ability?

JACQUEZ JONES: Yes, most definitely. Since he hasn't been able to play the rest of the year, he's been out with the scout team, but as soon as he came over he's been all over the field, and that's my roommate so we talk about making plays every day, man. He finally stepped up in the moment.

Q. What was it like when their last play came up empty with about a minute left? You guys have heard all the accolades for the offense all year. What was that like for you guys to be the ones that kind of secured the win?

JACQUEZ JONES: That's what we've been wanting. We knew the game was going to come down to us when the offense scored, so that's what we wanted, and I feel like that's what we got. Big Sam, Ced, all them guys rushing the quarterback, they came and blocked them for us.

Q. What did you and the other leaders say before that last drive to try and secure that last stop?

JACQUEZ JONES: Finish. Finish. That's what Coach loves, that's what all the coaches preach to us, to finish, no matter I know -- during that third quarter we were sitting gassed, but get that second wind, it's time to go. We've got to bring that bowl championship back to Oxford.

Q. You're a vet, man. You've been here a while. Getting this bowl win and getting this moment, what does it feel like to you? What does it mean to you?

JACQUEZ JONES: It's special. It's a special moment for me and the team, Coach Kiffin. I know he just got the extension, so that's a great plus for him. But I feel like this is just a starting point. We're trying to go to a bowl game, beyond a bowl game. We're trying to go to the playoff next year.