POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Texas A&M Football Post Game Quotes

vs. No. 10 Miami 10, No. 7 Texas A&M 3
Kyle Field, College Station, Texas
Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025

HEAD COACH MIKE ELKO

Opening statement
They were able to find a drive and we were able to respond, and we just weren't able to finish. We weren't able to get it done. We came up five yards short. That's something we'll have to live with throughout the off-season.

Still proud of this team, proud of what they accomplished, proud of what they did. From there we'll open it up for questions.

Q. Coach, in your mind, what should the history books say about these 2025 Aggies?

MIKE ELKO: Yeah, what I just told them. I said to the seniors who just played their last game, they left a mark on elevating this program that will never go away. From where this program was two years ago to where it is now, I don't think that can be lost on people. I think it's made massive strides.

Then I said to the guys coming back there's still another major step we have to take as a program to finish. I think the last two games showed that.

It's a rallying cry to the guys who are still here and still have time to play, but I don't think we can turn our backs on the guys who just finished their careers here and everything they accomplished and everything that they did for Texas A&M football.

Q. When you think back to the offensive struggles, what do you think made it hardest on you guys to get points on the board?

MIKE ELKO: We lost the game at the line of scrimmage, and I think it got worse in the second half. I think we just couldn't keep them off of us. We couldn't get the run game established. We became one dimensional. Once we became one dimensional, they were able to tee off. I think they finished with seven sacks. We didn't win the line of scrimmage.

You can't play playoff football and not win the line of scrimmage. Obviously, they were able to get the run game going, and we wound up losing the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball, and you're just not going to win when that's the case.

Q. How much did you feel the wind was a factor? Could you feel it out there?

MIKE ELKO: I think it played a role, but it played a role for both teams. It was challenging to be precise with the football. I think it took some of the screen game out of the equation because of that, but it affected both teams evenly.

Q. What exactly happened with Le'Veon? Was it a reaggravation of what he had already dealt with?

MIKE ELKO: It was a reaggravation. He's good. Scans were good. Everything came away clean. He'll be fine going into the off-season for what he's going to do now.

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Q. I'm just curious, on the fake punt, is that something that you all had seen that you automatically do, or was it a case that you were thinking, hey, there's just not going to be a lot of points scored today and we've got to manufacture them?

MIKE ELKO: Probably a little bit of both.

I think it was probably a little bit of both. It was something we felt like we had a chance at. I think we did. It was something we wanted to run around that area of the field, and it just felt like the right time to try to see if we could get a lead going into halftime.

Q. On the final play, what was the look you were hoping to get on that last offensive play?

MIKE ELKO: It's hard to say. I think -- yeah, it's hard to say without watching the tape.

Q. Did you think that there should have been a stoppage before that for a targeting look?

MIKE ELKO: I don't think that matters.

Q. What happened on -- when Fletcher got loose for that 56-yard run that took them and set them up for that touchdown drive, anything specific happen on that, or did he just get loose?

MIKE ELKO: Yeah, he just got loose. They found some surfaces and some runs and started getting their receivers involved in inside gaps and really created a very, very -- it was a heavy power football they were playing with three wide receivers on the field. We just didn't handle it well enough.

Q. The way that your run defense had been playing all day, though, that play and then Toney's run around the edge, did you just feel like bend but don't break and they broke? What do you think?

MIKE ELKO: No, I just think we didn't make the plays we needed to make down the stretch. That's all.

Q. Marcel obviously had a great year. Ending didn't go quite the way you wanted it to. But when you look at his overall play, and specifically today, what do you feel like he needs to work on to become a better version of himself and what he can be?

MIKE ELKO: I think he's still a young quarterback. I still think there's a lot of room for development and growth from him. I think you saw major strides this year, but I still think there's a ceiling there that he's not close to hitting.

He's a great kid. He's a hard worker. I know he'll go back to work this off-season, and I think you'll get a much better version of him next year with another year of continued development in our system.

Q. How do you want this team and this group of players to be remembered moving forward?

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MIKE ELKO: I think kind of how we talked about the first question, that was the same one. I think they left a legacy in terms of redirecting this program. 11 wins, playoffs for the first time, and then a little disappointed that we weren't able to finish it down the stretch.

Q. After those 11 straight wins and being in the top five all year, how much pain are you feeling wanting it so bad and not being able to deliver today?

MIKE ELKO: No, it's not about me. It's the pain the kids feel. I'm fine. I'm a grown man. I can handle it. You hurt for those kids because you know how hard they work, you know what they put into this thing.

People will try to knock at what they did and what they accomplished, and that won't be fair to them, and they'll have to deal with that. That's life today, in this day and age. I hurt for them. It's a great group. I enjoyed being around them. It was fun to come to work to them every single day, and I'm going to miss being able to do that.

Q. What went into the decision to pick Zirkel as the field goal kicker, and what went wrong on that kick?

MIKE ELKO: It was just low. It didn't get the height it needed. It didn't get the trajectory it needed.

Q. Was there something in practice you saw that led you to pick him as the guy?

MIKE ELKO: Yeah.

Q. Just Marcel's play in this game, how would you kind of assess it? What were some of the struggles due to the trenches play you talked about?

MIKE ELKO: There was a lot of pressure on him. When you can't establish the run game, it's really challenging, and the last two games we haven't been able to run the football. That makes it really, really hard when you play good teams.

I think you see something very similar with us. If teams can't get the run game going, we've been able to tee off on them, it's the same kind of thing. So I think it starts with our inability to run the football. Marcel can't be our leading rusher. He can't have the most carries. It just can't happen that way.

We've got to go into the off-season and figure some things out and how to do that better. I think he'll tell you he was up-and-down a bit. The pressure impacted it. Give Miami credit, they certainly impacted it. They're a really good defense. We've just got to figure it out.

Q. In the first half especially, you all did a great job containing Carson Beck. He was having a lot of difficulty, you all were getting a great pass rush on him. Then loosened up a little bit there in the second half. Did you see the adjustments they made in the second half to allow him to do that?

MIKE ELKO: No, I think it was the exact opposite of what I just went over with us. I think our struggles were we could never get the run game going. I think what they were able to do in the second half was get the run game going. That let

them play in front of the chains a little bit more. It wasn't as many obvious passing situations. The third down distance change, we weren't able to put them in as many third downs as we were in the first half.

Then obviously he came out in the opening drive and made some throws. He's a talented kid. He was going to do that at some point. It was more they were able to get the line of scrimmage going and forced us into different looks run-wise. I think it was kind of more of that than anything else.

Q. Obviously this was y'all's first playoff game, and y'all were neck and neck for the most part. Do you think that getting these players more playoff experience or experience in big games like this will help you guys down the road to achieve the big goal?

MIKE ELKO: Yes. I think in order to ultimately complete the playoff quest, you've got to first get in. You've got to learn what it's all about, and then you've got to get good enough to win games in the playoffs.

Q. You guys, what were your conversations like at the half? You had some scoring opportunities there in the first half and deep in their territory that you came up empty on.

MIKE ELKO: I think it was just the one, right, in the first half where we missed the field goal. It just felt like we were having a hard time getting unhinged. We weren't doing a really good job in the field position game on special teams that had the big return that flipped the field. We had a couple low line drive kicks that didn't help. We weren't able to get the return game going. So their net punt was better than ours.

It felt like the field just kept tilting away from us in a defensive struggle, and that makes it challenging. We got the one drive down there. We weren't able to finish it. Then we got the field goal blocked. Then on the flip side, I thought defensively we went into some short field situations and really made some stands.

Then when you do that, then your offense has to come out and go a really long way. In that type of game, it just creates challenges.

Q. Were there any positive that's came out of this game, and what were they if you thought there were?

MIKE ELKO: It's hard to take positive in a playoff game that you lost that ends your season. I think there's positives in the big picture direction of Texas A&M, but I wouldn't say in this game.

Q. How frustrating is it to see a problem that you've recognized and dealt with all year, the run defense, come to this point. And the same thing repeats itself. A guy breaks off for 172 yards, and that's the difference in the game.

MIKE ELKO: I think that you're not really in a position to talk about these things as the year's going on because you're just trying to find ways. Clearly that was a weakness of ours that goes without saying. It's hard to make a weakness a strength in the middle of the season.

Again, we've got to look at what we're doing. We've got to look at how we're doing it? We've got to figure some things out this off-season. But when you're in the middle of it, it's certainly very challenging to turn a weakness into a strength.

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Q. I realize it's fresh, but what do you feel like are the biggest things you guys need to accomplish this off-season to keep this thing going the way you hope it's trending?

MIKE ELKO: I don't hope it's trending. It is trending. I see the direction it's trending. 8 wins to 11 wins, I see the direction it's trending. We're going to finish the season ranked. That hasn't happened in a while around here.

What has to happen? We've got to continue to elevate. We've have to continue to move this thing in the right direction. We've got to continue to make positive strides building this program.

We were not an elite program ready to compete for a National Championship when we took over. We're still not. We're working to become it. We're battling to become it. I think clearly these last two games have showed there's still room in areas that we have to continue to grow, but that's what this is. That's what this should have been.

I think it's a credit to those kids that they put ourselves in this position and got us to where we were, but we've got a lot of work to do to continue to develop this program into what ultimately it needs to become. We're still in the infant stages of that.

Q. I think in the last four games this season, you all end up minus 8 turnover-wise. What are the factors that you see kind of causing those problems? I guess when you're playing really good teams, how does that make it tougher for you guys?

MIKE ELKO: Yeah, it makes it really challenging. I think it's a huge part of it. I think we finished the season minus 8 in turnover margin. It's not a great stat. It's not where you need to be. You have to be on the other side of that ledger.

I think that some of it comes down, again, to we've got to figure some things out in terms of how to control the line of scrimmage better than we were able to do this season. That's really what it's going to come down to.

Q. You talked about having to live with this throughout the off-season. What do you think will nag at you the most about the way this ended?

MIKE ELKO: Just that it ended. I thought -- you know, we came into this season, and I think the very realistic conversation about this team was we were a really good team that was going to have a chance in every game they played, was going to have fairly small margins to be successful, but was going to have an opportunity to go out there and be successful.

I think that's exactly how it played out. We weren't able to tilt the margins in our favor the last two games. That's going to be a killer. One, to not go to Atlanta. One, to not go to the quarterfinals. So that's a killer. You've got to swallow it, and you've got to move forward, just like we did last year.

Q. You talked about some of the run defense issues there. We had talked to the players a lot throughout the season. They always felt it was gap integrity or some simple fixes. As you look at the season as a whole, was it just simple fixes, or was there more nuance as to why you guys struggled down the stretch there?

MIKE ELKO: Obviously there's a ton of nuance in it. If it was as easy as just simple fixes, we would have simply fixed it, not to be disrespectful. There's a lot that goes into where the struggles were. We've just got to figure it out. I'm sorry I don't have a much better answer than that.

Q. After being amongst the top sack totaling teams all season, what led to the inability to get to Beck tonight?

MIKE ELKO: I don't know if we had an inability to get to him. I think we sacked him twice in the first half. The problem was in the second half we couldn't get them into third down where he had to throw the ball.

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR COLLIN KLEIN, REDSHIRT SOPHOMORE MARCEL REED, SOPHOMORE MARIO CRAVER

Q. Marcel, what was the look on that last play? What were you looking for, and what did they do to mix that up?

MARCEL REED: We were trying to get an exchange with the receiver and tight end, kind of have a big body in the end zone. I tried to put it up there over some of their backers they like to drop right on the goal line and got it just over, but it wasn't in the right spot.

Yeah, they picked us off on that one, and that was the end of the game.

Q. With the way the season started and ended, how do you hope people kind of view this season?

MARCEL REED: I think it's just another step of this program. We took what we learned from last year, brought it to this year, and hopefully we can take from what we learned this year to next year.

This is a really good team, had some minor setbacks in some games, but ultimately this team worked over the off-season and had a goal in mind. We put our heads down and went the entire season. Regardless of what people were saying on the outside, we were worried about ourselves. We had a pretty successful season.

Q. You guys weren't able to run the ball consistently, at least I imagine as much as you'd like to. What do you think led to the struggles and being able to establish the run game?

COLLIN KLEIN: Credit Miami. I thought they did a really, really nice job of taking away a lot of easy opportunities, squeezing space, getting off blocks, making tackles. Because we were not able to get the wheels turning in some of those areas, we were in third and long way too much.

We knew that going in, they're too good of a defensive front to play the game in that field zone. Again, credit to them.

Q. Marcel, how would you assess your season, and what do you think you need to get better this off-season?

MARCEL REED: I think I had a pretty decent season, definitely better than last year. There's room to grow for sure. I'm going to go into this off-season and keep pounding, try to make throws in tight windows, stuff like that, make sure my feet are set, and just do that.

I don't think there's really anything tremendously that I have to nitpick on, but I'm just going to keep growing over the years.

Q. Seven sacks, just what were they presenting to you guys that was such a challenge from a pass rush standpoint?

COLLIN KLEIN: I think there's some things schematically, but for the most part, they create ways to get those guys in one-on-one situations. Again, it's -- we knew it was going to be a long day if we were going to play in that many third and long to go situations, right? Credit to them.

Q. Mario, I saw you had a pretty long embrace there with KC after. What did you say to him, and what has he meant to you throughout this year, just kind of being that one-two combination?

MARIO CRAVER: I just told him thank you. Thank you for everything he's done. I told him he made me a better teammate, better person, better player in all aspects of the game. I just told him thank you, just in case he won't be here next year.

Q. And just talking about the receiving corps as a whole, maybe one of the most talented groups that's come through here, how do you want this group to be remembered in that aspect?

MARIO CRAVER: I just want us to be remembered as explosive play guys, big play guys, get the ball in our hands and create plays in space. That's us.

Q. Marcel, I know you guys are disappointed right now, with you is there a sense of pride knowing that you got the Aggies to a place they've never been before and were able to do things that hadn't been done here ever?

MARCEL REED: Yes, definitely a sense of pride. There's lots of things, not only because it put us out, but it was a loss at home, and we were looking to go undefeated at home.

I think we thought this season obviously could have been a lot better than what it ended at, but we're proud of what we accomplished. Like I said earlier, we're growing. We grew from last year, and we're going to grow again from this year.

Q. Collin, as you and Marcel part ways this off-season, you took a big jump from last year to this year. What's his upside moving forward?

COLLIN KLEIN: Well, Marcel is dear to me. I couldn't be more proud of, first of all, the whole unit, but how he has grown into leading that unit. These two guys are two of the best competitors that I've ever been around. It was a joy and an honor coming to work with them.

I told them after the first spring practice, our first spring scrimmage, that we were here two years ago. I told him that he's got a chance to be as good as anybody that has come through this program.

I think the sky's the limit for him. I think his character and foundation is outstanding. It's extremely bittersweet.

Q. What has this Aggie family meant to all of you all, especially after a time like this?

MARCEL REED: As an Aggie family, you mean like everybody or -- just yeah?

Q. As a team.

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MARCEL REED: As a team, okay. This team is probably one of the best teams I've ever been on. I've been through -- this is my third year of college, and I was here for Jimbo and Elko, so just being here as a freshman and seeing the changes that have been made and the difference in the culture and how bought in our players are, it was great to see.

I had a talk with my roommate Dalton Brooks, and then Taurean York is just a really good friend of mine, we talked about this when we were freshmen that we were going to put this team in a position to go win it all. We kind of wrote out our goals and did all that for ourselves, and we just kind of spoke a lot of it into existence.

Obviously we wanted to do more, but we have made tremendous strides since our freshman year since we've been here. I love this team with all my heart, all the coaches, whether they're staying or leaving, I appreciate every single one of them for what they've done for me and this team.

Q. Marcel, it looked like you had a moment just by yourself after the game where you were sitting on the bench. Can you kind of take us through what was going through your head in that moment?

MARCEL REED: Yeah, it didn't really feel real. I don't want the season to end. A lot of changes are going to be made after this season, so I really didn't want it to end. It sucked. Just sitting there trying to avoid as many people as I could honestly. I just wanted to be in my own space at that point in time. So, yeah, just sat there with a towel over my head.

Q. For you and Mario as two returners, I realize it's fresh, but what are the biggest things this team needs to accomplish this off-season, you feel like, to continue taking steps forward?

MARIO CRAVER: I said it in the press conference earlier we have to finish, and that needs to be our motto moving forward. We need to learn how to finish games.

Q. For Mario, what would you say is the biggest lesson you learned in your first season here at A&M, and what will you take over next season as you potentially lead the receiving corps?

MARIO CRAVER: Just keeping a level head no matter what's going on, just keeping my composure because my teammates are relying on me, looking at me, seeing how I'm reacting to each and every play that's going on out there. So just staying level headed and becoming a leader.

Q. Collin and Marcel, you had a lot of good drives in the first half that you didn't finish. You had the false start before the fourth down try and the fumble on the broken play and the blocked field goal. Did you feel like you're trapped in a rut a little bit and the frustration kind of builds?

COLLIN KLEIN: Absolutely. It's kind of the story of this one. From a turnover standpoint and no points in the red zone, that's the way to get beat. It's hard when you're spinning your wheels because everybody's grinding at it and trying to get it done and then we weren't able to do that. So that was tough.

Q. Marcel, you heard Collin kind of get choked up there when he was talking about you. I wonder what you thought in that moment and just what that relationship's meant to you over the years?

MARCEL REED: I don't want this guy to leave, but I'm really happy for him. Everybody in the QB room always knew this was a dream of his to go coach at his alma mater, so really proud of him. It's going to suck, but things change. That's life.

I love this guy to death. He's taught me a lot of lessons. I'm always just talking to him. He checks in on me more than anybody besides my parents, and even when I come up there to just watch film with him, he's always asking me how I'm doing, how's my day been, and where I'm at with everything that's going on in the world.

He's really like a second father to me. My dad was a coach, so I'm used to having a coach as a father. This guy, he's done a lot. He's done a lot for me, him and his family.

Q. Question for Mario and Marcel both. A chance to play a playoff game on campus. Can you speak to just how much fun it was to play a playoff game here at Kyle Field?

MARCEL REED: It's an amazing environment. You never should be mad at having the opportunity to play at Kyle Field. This is probably the greatest place in college football to play at. Unfortunately, an end to the season at home, but we love all the fans here and the energy they bring.

Q. Marcel, just from your point of view on that incompletion to Rueben, did you feel like that should have been a targeting or reviewed or anything?

MARCEL REED: I mean, I thought so, but it's not up to my discretion. In the game of football, things like that happen, and you've just got to keep playing and go to the next down.

It's unfortunate, but you have to get to the next play.

Q. How did you see Le'Veon just kind of handle the last several weeks working his way back, and how tough was it for you guys mid-game to lose him again?

MARCEL REED: Honestly it's probably more tough for him than it is for us. It sucks to lose one of your best players on offense. He's been doing so much to try to work back and get to this opportunity. It just sucks that that happened and then also that we're not able to go on so he could be back again. That's really the part that hurts the most.

Q. I know 11-0, you guys reached tremendous heights and wanted to win a National Championship. What do you think will stick with you most as this thing comes to an end?

MARIO CRAVER: Just the brotherhood this team had. This team was a real family. These guys really accepted me coming in from the transfer portal. I just really love these guys, and it was an honor to play with every single last one of them.

MARCEL REED: Really what he said. This team, like I said, is probably one of the greatest teams I've ever played on. There's tremendous talent. We're always competing with each other in practice and always have things to say to each other, but at the end of the day, it's all love.

The locker room is probably some of the best memories I'll have for the rest of my life, and I just appreciate every single person that was on the team.

Q. Dalton Brooks was in here and talked about, as a roommate, just the conversations you guys have after every game of what went wrong, right, what you guys can do better. How do you anticipate this conversation to go?

MARCEL REED: Yeah, I really don't know what this conversation is going to be like, but it's going to be a long one for sure. York will probably be over at the house. We sit down and watch the game every time, after every game. We'll turn it on and just watch it, TV copy.

I don't know what's going to be said, but it's going to be a real long conversation. I think we're going to talk a little bit about the future too, just what's going to change and hearing what should have been done, what should have been done. At the end of the day, you can't change what happened already.

There's really going to be a lot of talking and really not much result that comes behind it, but yeah.

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DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR JAY BATEMAN, JUNIOR TAUREAN YORK, JUNIOR DALTON BROOKS, JUNIOR DAYMION SANFORD

Q. Jay and Taurean, it seemed like they only had two really sustained drives. What were some of the break downs you saw on the sideline and on the field on those two long drives that led to the scores they have?

JAY BATEMAN: The first drive of the second half, they went some tempo on us, got some easy throws. We missed a tackle. I thought we settled in pretty good. Then I think on the touchdown drive we kind of messed up a rotation and kind of let the ball get out on us. Then we had a chance to stop them on third down and didn't get it done.

TAUREAN YORK: I thought we played defensively sound football for the majority of the game. These guys are elite players as well, so they're going to have two good drives at the bare minimum. They go to University of Miami. They're going to recruit well as well.

They're going to make good plays and have good drives. I thought we did a good job of minimizing them. 10 points in a playoff game, it is what it is. We didn't score enough points, but at the same time, we gave up too many points.

Q. It seemed like their most success was in between the tackles with Fletcher. What did you see that enabled them to be successful that way?

JAY BATEMAN: We kind of went into the game with a little bit of a light box mentality, trying to defend some of the other things they did really well. I think it took them a while. I think they finally hunted it up. Then we were able to -- credit to Taurean and Daymion for handling a couple of the adjustments to how they were doing.

They gave us a little bit more pistol back than we had seen from them, and I thought once we settled into that, they actually did a pretty good job.

Q. How do you hope people remember this season with how it started and also how it ended?

TAUREAN YORK: You know it's a foundation setter. We have high hopes for our team. We're in year two, though, you've got to realize that. I think Ohio State won their first championship with Ryan Day, and he's in year eight. College football, it's a hard world to win in and especially winning at a high level.

This is just a start. We're in year two, headed into year three. It's going to be all right. It's a small bump in the road. But we have finally gotten to this stage, so we know what it feels like. So when we get back here next year, those jitters shouldn't be how they were today.

Q. Dalton, when you forced that fumble, how much did you feel like that could be a momentum shifter in this game?

DALTON BROOKS: A turnover is always a momentum shifter. You want to go down and score. That kind of would have flipped the game. Once you get the fumble, I feel like it's just a turnover and then keep playing.

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Q. Taurean, you talked about kind of about the trajectory going into year three. How does the end of this season, does it feel any different? Is there a different feeling than how last year ended and how you guys ended this year?

TAUREAN YORK: I feel it's unreal for sure. You have your first ever playoff game on a college field and then you drop it, but there's so much to build on top of this. We're really just scratching the surface of who we're going to become in the future.

Q. For the three players that will be returning, what do you feel are the biggest steps you have to make this off-season to take that next step?

DALTON BROOKS: Keep the culture. That's the big thing. You've got to keep the culture together, keep the players together, and really come back and start rebuilding just like we did last year. Keep it going, keep pushing, keep fighting, and keep everybody in it.

DAYMION SANFORD: I'll feedback on what he said, play for each other. This year we played for each other. We had a lot of guys return, and we had a pretty good run this year. I feel like going into next year we've got to do the same thing.

TAUREAN YORK: It's not the end all be all. It's unfortunate that we lost the playoff game, but we have so much to build on top of. We're going to have a lot of returning players. We're going to be alright. Texas A&M will still be on the rise. We're still going to be up and coming. We've got to focus on the right now. It sucks right now, but once we get back in January, we start meeting and it's just onto the next thing and that's how life work.

Q. Mr. York, you mentioned that there were jitters at the end of this season that you don't expect to be there next year. What do you believe contributed to those jitters this year?

TAUREAN YORK: I mean, this is like the first time we probably played on the biggest stage. Like this was a do or die, all or nothing type of game. So we played in a lot of big games, but we haven't played in a game to this magnitude yet.

I don't feel like there were many jitters. It's natural when you play a big time game. When you get out there, yeah, but when you take your first hit, you're like, yeah bet, we're playing football. Maybe leading up to the game we had some jitters, but just execution aspect on us is why we dropped the game.

Q. For any of you guys, any of the players, when you have such a great start and the ending doesn't go the way you want obviously, do you still feel like you had a great year, or does the ending change that, that feeling at all?

DALTON BROOKS: I feel like we still had a great year. Honestly this is something that hasn't been done at Texas A&M. We stamped something in history forever.

I feel like we had a great year, but you could always build off of something knowing that you could have done more.

Q. Taurean and Jay, today included, especially the way the game ended, what's going to be your takeaways about the run defense as a whole, and what you would want to change if you could change it and how you would have addressed it going forward in the future? At future schools or whatever.

TAUREAN YORK: I'll answer that question. Honestly it's just more so about knowing who you're in the fit with. Like it's all about leverage, numbers and leverage. You're tied at a certain number, certain player, that type of deal. If you know football, it's all about leverage and angles, it's that sort of deal.

It's about communication as well. Looking back, are you in the fit with me? If not, who's in the fit with me? Just like last year it was our pass defense, and we weren't communicating well. This year we sharpened up on that, and it kind of tanked our run defense. Now it's like, okay, heading into year three, how about we communicate in the pass game and the run game, and let's see how truly elite we can be.

Q. Taurean, what was the confidence level down the stretch? You guys are down 10-3 and Marcel's leading the offense down the field. What was your confidence level? Did you guys feel like you were getting ready for overtime?

TAUREAN YORK: For sure. We had a 1:50 left. How much time did we have left? 1:44. We work two-minute drill every Wednesday against the offense. They had a good offensive drill against us this past Wednesday. We had faith in the offense for sure, but at the end of the day, that's out of our control. All we can do is hope and pray that we score a touchdown and tie it up and go into overtime. It's like, yeah, we got scored on, but we gave them time to get the ball back and it's two-minute drill. It just didn't go our way. That's just how it went.

Q. Jay, obviously your last season here ended sooner than you likely expected, but what do you think is the biggest takeaway that you'll have from your time here in College Station as you move on?

JAY BATEMAN: I think the biggest takeaway is the ability to coach these players and how fortunate I am to coach the guys I've been able to coach here. This is a great place and a lot of great players coming back.

Q. For all three of the players, what is the conversation like when you guys are in a close game like this considering you guys have been in close games this season?

TAUREAN YORK: I would say do your job. Like I mean, it's not a secret. As long as you do your job, you're 1 of 11, the defense will be executed how it's supposed to be executed. I would say it's that short and simple.

DAYMION SANFORD: Our leaders on the team, they always preach do your job. He always said DYJ in the huddles and that sort of thing. Do your job.

DALTON BROOKS: And to piggyback off of that, keep it going. Once you do your job, keep doing your job the whole game. Don't make it one play. Keep the same focus and keep the same intensity the whole time.

Q. Jay, can you speak to kind of holding off the dam. They were in y'all's territory a lot, especially in the second half. To their touchdown, Toney, I know they got him involved in a lot of ways, but did that play catch you off guard thinking maybe they would run to set up a field goal?

JAY BATEMAN: We ran that exact same play on Thursday afternoon. I think we were ready for it. That kid's a really good player. They kind of got us blocked, changed the perimeter a little bit, and cracked on Dalton.

That kid, look, I think we did as good a job on that kid as anybody in the country's done against him this year. I think there were a couple times where they got some short fields and the way we responded, I thought was awesome. I think they missed three field goals. We were able to hold them, and that was the story of the game going into the final 10 minutes or so.

Q. Taurean, have you made a decision on whether you're coming back or going to the NFL?

TAUREAN YORK: That's probably going to be -- you know, I've never been through something like this before honestly. Nobody in my family has ever been into the NFL. We really don't know the ins and outs about it. That's what this week is for. When we get back from Christmas, I'm sure we'll meet about it again.

I'll just going to pray to God honestly. He's going to lead me in the right direction. Who knows what the future holds for Taurean York?

Q. If you do come back, what gives you confidence in your last year that you'll come back and sustain the success you had this season?

TAUREAN YORK: Because I trust Coach Elko. I really do trust him. I trusted him since I met him when I was 15 years old. Everything he told me was going to happen, he's made it happen. So my trust in Coach Elko ultimately.

Q. Taurean and Dalton, I know you guys are really close with Marcel. What did you maybe say to him in the locker room after today's game and maybe the biggest areas of growth you've seen from him overall this season?

DALTON BROOKS: I told him honestly it's over now. Keep your head up. You can't beat yourself up about it once it's over. Once it's over, it's over. I told him don't beat yourself up about it.

Well, I live with him. So once we get home, we'll talk about it. We'll talk it out, see what we could have done better on both sides of the ball. That's really how we do after every game. This one will be much different. We'll both be down about it, but I always try to keep him up in good spirits because he does, he runs this whole thing. If I could keep him up, I feel like I could keep the whole program up.

TAUREAN YORK: We're basically neighbors. They live together, and I live right down the street. We spend a lot of time together. Honest to God, I just told him I love him. I know you did your best. It didn't go our way, but it wasn't like you threw the game away on purpose. It just didn't go away, it wasn't our time yet. That type of deal.

You just have to learn from it. You got to remember how it feels. This is terrible. A Texas loss hurt, but this one hurt times ten because it's at home. Just words of encouragement for sure. Give him a hug, tell him I love him, and just we'll be back.

POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Texas A&M Football Post Game Quotes

vs. No. 10 Miami 10, No. 7 Texas A&M 3
Kyle Field, College Station, Texas
Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025

HEAD COACH MARIO CRISTOBAL

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Just found a way to continue to keep pushing through some difficult situations. The defense was off the charts the entire day. We found ourselves finally running the football and getting some chunk yardage. It took a while. We were up and down on offense.

Just a great response, turned the ball over, both by the defense, getting the ball back, and the offense going right down the field and scoring.

With that, questions, please.

Q. Mario, with Malachi, he fumbled the second to last drive and then you go back to him and he guess the touchdown. What did it mean to go back to him and for you to trust him to execute in that big moment?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You saw the entire team just go right to him after the fumble. Everybody trusts him. A lot of the reason why we're here today is because of his play making ability. He brings so much energy to the team. They trust him. They love him. They knew that there was going to be some more football to be played, and he was going to be a big part of the reason why we were going to have a chance to pull out the game.

Q. Last year you guys had so many issues defensively down the stretch that cost you, and then this year, this defense has been phenomenal all year but particularly today, keeping you in the game and sealing it with that interception. Did you envision all of this when you brought Corey in as the defensive coordinator?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, we knew we were going to get better because what he does really caters to our personnel. We're built to be a very aggressive front seven. Guys that are explosive, guys that have length, that have power and twitch.

He did some great work at Minnesota. They were a top-10 defense over there, and JMU, as well. Can you envision this level in year one? I think that's hard for anybody to exactly make it look like this, but nothing surprises us because of the way our guys just work and train.

Q. Mario, for Mark Fletcher to come up big at that last drive, what do you think that means for him and what he means to the program, and he was obviously running the ball early, to lean on him there at the end?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, Mark, 17 carries, 173 yards, man, he was such a difference in the game. What he means to the team, it was a rough year for him, you know that, with the passing of his father. He never flinched, stayed with his teammates, played the game that Saturday. That's about a year ago.

He's just the heart and soul of our football team. Everything he does is dedicated to his teammates getting better, to the team winning, and to see him just -- he took over. He took over the ground game in a game where we were having a real tough time moving the football.

They have a really good defense. That wind was all over the place. That blew some things out, both in the passing game and on field goals. But Mark Fletcher certainly wasn't affected by it.

Credit to the offensive line, also. They're whipping a bunch of pressure, the plus-one concept, safety blitzes, Will fires, Nickel fires, and we just got our feet in the ground and started moving them. I think we ran for almost 200 yards on 28 carries, 6.2 a shot. Something to certainly be proud of.

Q. How proud are you of the grit that your players displayed with the adversity?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That's the best part. It really is. Because a year ago, as was mentioned earlier, we had a tough time stopping people on defense. Man, I felt like you're always wondering, man, do you kick it, do you go, do you kick it, do you go, what do the analytics say, what's the feel for the game, what kind of defense are we playing, what's the caliber of team and their explosive capabilities?

It was one of those games where we felt, all right, we're holding up good and we're knocking them back. It's going to be one of those tight back-and-forth games and field goals are going to be critical.

I guess what I'm trying to say is the confidence that they bring to us and being able to call and manage the game is off the charts, and certainly they were the difference today.

Q. If you talk about a 1-0 mentality, you gave yourself a moment after you made the CFP to enjoy it a bit. This win, how long do you enjoy this, understanding what it means, that you've won a game in the College Football Playoff, you're advancing, you continue on with a chance?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The players, I want the players to enjoy the plane ride, with their families when they get back. As a coach, man, by the time you get back to the locker room, you're like, give me the injury report, let me know where the guys are at.

I think I'm more -- man, how do you say this? I'm more inclined right now to just make sure I congratulate each and every player on our team because the guys on the scout team did an unbelievable job because you're down numbers as the year goes on. You have a roster of 105. That's a massive cut from the previous years.

They are just as responsible for this victory as the guys making the touchdowns and the stops and everything else.

I want to take every minute I can today to thank, congratulate and love up our players for their commitment to the University of Miami and for validating all the hard work that they have been doing since some guys three, four guys and some guys that got here in January.

We're blessed to have guys of that caliber as human beings and as competitors to come to work every day and work with.

Q. Bryce Fitzgerald, two picks. What can you say about how he's stepped up over the last two months coming in as the starter?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The best part about him, he wasn't here in January. He went to Columbus High School, okay, and he doesn't get out until June. That's when he joined us.

Quick study. People always wonder, how is he going to be able to catch up. He was the only one that started late. He never flinched. He spends every waking minute. It's kind of like Malachi, just gets in there, studies it up, spends extra time doing it. When the lights come on, certain guys just kind of have it. He's that guy. When the lights come on, he knows what to do, how to do it, and there's no flinch in that guy at all. You don't sense any type of freshman reservation from him.

He's certainly a guy that we're really, really proud of, and looking forward to more great play from him.

Q. To make the playoff is one statement. To win a game in the playoff and advance is another statement. What does this mean for the overall build of Miami football in terms of where you're headed in the future, and do you take stock of milestone situations like this?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, I do. I think it's important. I think it was important, first, to get in the playoff. Then to go and win at a place like this, right, 100 plus thousand people, on the road, a team that was arguably top 2 or 3 until their last game, and to get it done in this type of environment, we needed that.

If you could draw it up how we wanted it, we wanted to go there. We wanted to come here and do it against a great football team.

What does it mean for us? Continued progress, the vision, and we've never altered the course despite all the challenges that come with it. But that's part of it.

Again, really proud of our players. It's all about them and that staff because, again, 40 plus days ago, we were lower than low and found a way to just bring a different level of energy every single day and lift each other and the program up, and here we are with a chance of keep playing, and that's all that matters now, 1-0.

Q. Back when you played in Miami's winning games like this with regularity, it was always guys stepping up in the moment, and today you were in a tie game with eight minutes left, and one after the other, Fletcher, Toney, Fitzgerald, they all in rapid succession stepped up and seized the moment. Your thoughts?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, they probably saw Andre Johnson and Edgerrin James and Michael Irvin on the sideline and said, hey, man, those were great days but now it's our turn.

There's no flinch in these guys and the way that they train, the way that we train collectively as a group, the belief in each other is extremely strong. We train and wire our team to be confident and aggressive in everything that we do. When you come into an environment like this, you have to find a way to take the momentum one play at a time, and it's probably going to be played 175, 180, 185 because they have a great team, they're going to keep coming.

We have guys that are about that life, that are about that type of training, that truly enjoy the situation that calls for them to be at their best against great players.

A testament to them. A testament to recruiting, development, because a lot of times that gets lost in the mix with some of you guys. Just flat-out just toughness and resiliency.

Q. Coach, just talk about that postgame smooch from Michael Irvin and some of the energy that he brings to the sideline.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That was disgusting. I mean, he's got a lot of energy, man. I couldn't find enough wipeys to clean myself. Mike is awesome. I remember being in high school and coming over to practice at the University of Miami and going, man, I want to be part of those dawgs. Those guys were dawgs. I signed with them, and I'm like, holy crap, these guys are good, I'll never play here.

That guy means so much to the program, to its fan base, to our community, and then to see other guys show up, as well, and all week long to see the pride returning to so many former players, to our administration that's worked so hard to put this all together, to our fans that traveled. I know these games are kind of tricky; they give you like five tickets and people got to be stuck up in the corner, but they traveled. They traveled well. They were felt. But yeah, the smooch, I don't know about the smooch.

But God bless him. Glad he's here, and glad he's here supporting us.

Q. There was about a week's worth of noise and debate about last teams in, first team out. What, if anything, do you feel like this result said about the committee's decision to put you guys in as last team in?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Look, regardless of what the result was today, they made the right decision. I said it a lot of times before. Last year we had to go to court, I felt, because we had a case, other teams had a case, but it was fuzzy, it was muddy. This year, what was fuzzy about it? We come down to the end, we had common opponents with another great football team that I'm sure would do great in the playoffs, but we did better against those common opponents and we won the head-to-head.

God forbid we should ever get away from the meaning of head-to-head because just look out there today how many guys were helped off the field? How many guys had to be carried or limp off or get on crutches? How many guys are seeing the doctor right now for competing head-to-head. Let us never, ever devalue the importance of head-to-head competition, please.

FastScripts Transcript by ASAP Sports

POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Texas A&M Football Post Game Quotes

vs. No. 10 Miami 10, No. 7 Texas A&M 3
Kyle Field, College Station, Texas
Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025

Coach Shannon Dawson and Coach Corey Hetherman

Q. Malachi, second to last possession, he fumbles it then gets his redemption at the end. What did that mean for him, for the team, to see him bounce back after one of the few rare mistakes he's made this year?

SHANNON DAWSON: Look, people make mistakes. It is what it is, right? He came off the field, he was obviously irritated himself.

I just told him, look, keep playing. Our defense is playing really well, we'll get the ball back, and you'll get another opportunity to change the game.

So ultimately, he got that opportunity, and he made the play that we all know he can make. Look, nobody panicked in this game. We knew it was going to be a game that unfolded similar to the way it did. We just needed to make a play at the end. Thanks to these guys right here.

Q. Shannon, how do you handle that situation going into that final possession, because there's a lot of people who say, oh, get down at the 1, play for the field goal. But in that game, can you do that? What did you say to those guys?

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, I mean, look, we missed two field goals, right? So it was one of those situations where we needed to score. I didn't feel comfortable personally being up 3. Being up 7 with no time-outs against those guys, I'd feel a lot more comfortable against.

Now, you could technically go down at the 1 or 2 and drain it down, and if something happened on the field goal -- you know, if you can score, in my opinion, you score, especially with no time-outs left, especially the way that game was going, and you get up by 7.

Q. Shannon, you were throwing everything at them today --

SHANNON DAWSON: I was. I appreciate you noticing.

Q. Pretty much everything.

SHANNON DAWSON: A-gap run ended up winning it.

Q. The A-gap run ended up coming through at the end. Just talk about both of those things.

SHANNON DAWSON: Well, we did. I'll give those guys a lot of credit. They played very well on defense, and they're a really good 3rd down defense. I was trying to stay out of 3rd down and long and didn't do a great job the first half, but the second half we stayed out of 3rd downs because we ran the ball better.

I wanted to lean more on that. I could see Mark getting some momentum, so ultimately, we knew a couple plays that was working, and we were -- that last drive I was not going to deviate from those couple plays.

Until we ran it at the end when they started crowding everybody down, I figured we'd toss it to Mally and get around the edge.

Q. Shannon, running the ball up the middle with Mark Fletcher works sometimes, but what does he mean to the team, and the fact that he was able to have this career game on this big stage, what do you think it means to the team and to him?

SHANNON DAWSON: I don't think anybody is surprised about him having a career game in there on that day. He's been that guy ever since I've been here, and it's awesome to have a guy like him that you can lean on at the end.

It was pretty clear when we threw the pick and they went out and stopped them, which they did every time, I told Mark, I was like, look, we're riding you down the field. It was clear what we were going to do by everybody involved, and he made people miss. Great for him.

Q. Coach, Pringle had some success at the end of the season, but you went heavy Mark Fletcher today and you even ran Malachi up the middle some. Was there something you saw in their defense that had you go ahead and give a game plan where we was just going to run at them?

SHANNON DAWSON: I did. I thought there was a handful of teams that had success with similar type plays. They're fast. Their defense tracks pretty well. I did think that we could have some success up the middle.

Now, the run to Mally, it was outside zone. It cut up in the B-gap, which I tried to explain to all of you guys, that sometimes outside zone ends up being a B-gap run. Nobody listens to me. But ultimately we did see some things where we thought duo was going to be a successful play, and you go back and watch that, and really the key to that play, because they were bringing safeties down the middle, our receivers came in and blocked those safeties up.

Both of those guys, Keelan and C.J., did an unbelievable job on that last drive eating up that safety pressure. If they don't do that, we don't have success.

Q. Coach Hetherman, Marcel Reed, what was the game plan going in to stymie Marcel Reed. What was your game plan?

COREY HETHERMAN: I think the number one thing was to try to contain him in the pocket, try to give him different pictures, try to do different things up front just to try to keep him caged up in the pocket so he couldn't extend plays.

I thought he did a really good job, especially later in the game, of moving around, trying to find things later down the field, scrambling and getting some yards.

I thought changing up the pictures pre-snap and defensively all game long, just trying to make sure he was uncomfortable and trying to not give the same coverage every time, try to move pictures around for him pre-snap, and I thought our guys did a really good job of handling that all day.

POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

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Q. Corey, that was a game where there was no margin for error. It was tight the whole way. Talk about what was going through your head throughout the game. Obviously you never want to let anybody score, but you called that game under probably a little more pressure than most games?

COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, I thought our guys executed really well. I thought our guys, they communicated well. There was a lot of different pictures. There was a lot of different things, communication pre-snap that our guys handled really well. They communicated.

I thought one thing was we had to limit the big play. Our special teams stepped up huge. We gave up the one big explosive early. We blocked the field goal there. Our guys responded in that situation. It was really just containing the quarterback, keep things top down, and then we needed to tackle.

They did a really good job. They have some really good players on the perimeter. They made us miss at times. But our guys swarmed to the football. They played inside out, and we swarmed the ball, we got them on the ground, and our guys kept responding all day, and I thought our offense did a really good job of moving the ball and keeping us off the field at times.

Q. Corey, along those lines, just describe the feeling of the defense playing this type of game in this stage and to have it kind of all come together at the perfect time when really the offense struggled a little bit early?

COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, I think our guys have continued to get better every single day. It's been different guys in different spots. We had some guys return back to the roster this week. We had different guys that were out with injury this game, and we're hoping to get them back next week.

But at this point in the season, a lot of different guys have played different roles. At this point in the season, a lot of different guys have played together, depending where guys were dinged up in certain weeks or where other guys had to step up to play certain roles.

We had a lot of guys in different spots, even on that last play of the game.

I think just guys being put in those situations earlier in the season, guys being put in those situations in different environments in league play this year, I think it prepared them for the situation today where no one panicked. Everyone just did their job, they stayed their role.

One of the messages going in was just play one play at a time. At some point they were going to make someone miss. At some point they were going to have a play. It was just respond and then just keep playing one play at a time and just -- so now what was really the message, and I thought our guys did a really good job of handling that today in a tough environment.

Q. Corey, Keionte thanked Carson Beck and the offense for getting them ready for that last drive. I'm curious, what is it like Wednesdays when you do two-minute? Is that level of competition pretty similar to what we saw on that last drive?

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COREY HETHERMAN: Yeah, this time of year is always interesting because how many practice reps are you going to get, how many full-speed reps are you going to get. The toughest thing for us is Tuesday-Wednesday. When we go against our offense, there's a lot of things I think look really good on the board and then they just expose us.

It's so hard defending our offense during the week that a lot of those pictures, a lot of those reads, the speed that they play at, getting those looks from our offensive line week in, week out, that's the hardest thing we do.

Going into the game every week, that Tuesday, that Wednesday prepares us, and it's Carson. It's the way he reads. It's the way he sees the field. It's defending our receivers, our tight ends, how well they run, our backs in space, our offensive line, how well they pick things up.

There was a couple other things I kind of wanted to throw at them today, and looking back, Wednesday, we get stuffed. I'm like, hey, maybe we'll hold on that and work it one more week.

I think that preparation that we see all the way through the year, from spring football, fall camp, going through the season every Tuesday practice, every Wednesday practice prepared us for that moment today on the road.

Q. Corey, this was a defense that was pretty maligned last year before you got here. At what point this year did you say, I think this is a defense we can win a championship with?

COREY HETHERMAN: I think our guys grew close. I think our guys came together after spring ball. Spring ball, I thought we saw improvement. Our guys continued to get better.

But I think when our guys this summer, Akheem Mesidor, different guys that came in, Kei, Mo, Wes, different guys in the back end stepped up, ZP up front, and then you look at the work ethic that Bain has and guys start following that because they see the successes those guys have had, and now they're starting to hang out more off the field. They're coming in there, watching more film. They're doing things together all the time.

Now that defense is connected, and now they want to play for one another. They want to go out and compete every single series. They don't want to let themselves down.

Then the offense, I think just as a team, special teams, the offense, the defense, I think our team is very close, and I think that's why our guys go out and compete the way they do, and I think that's why we've grown and we've connected more as a defense since I think what we were back in January.

Q. Shannon, maybe this dovetails with his answer a little bit, but beyond just what he is capable of doing when you put the ball in his hands, what is Mark Fletcher's role as the emotional bedrock of this team?

SHANNON DAWSON: Yeah, he's just steady. He's the leader of our group, along with obviously a couple of the O-linemen that have been here since the beginning.

But ultimately, Mark is a guy that's just as steady as you can get. You can lean on him in tight situations. I thought it was crucial today that we didn't have any pre-snap penalties in a pretty tough environment, and the communication from back to front and O-line to running back and running back to O-line was elite today.

We didn't play our best, obviously. We did just enough to win the game. But having a guy like Mark that you can lean on in the end is crucial.

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Akheem Mesidor, Rueben Bain Jr., Keionte Scott

Q. Given where the defense was last year and some of the struggles you went through, how good does it feel to win a game this way, and how much of a difference has Coach Hetherman made for you this season?

RUEBEN BAIN JR: I'll speak to that since me and him was here last year.

It's amazing what Coach Hetherman has done for not only the defense but the program, just turning us around and the monster he instills in us every day, being excited and being violent. It's crazy for us to win this game in this kind of way and play from the first round snap to the last. We were just sitting in the locker room talking about that. From the first snap to the last, the defense came to play, and that's the way it's going to be, especially when you've got somebody like Coach Hetherman, somebody like that, coaching us every play just to come out and give our best.

Q. Keionte, obviously to work your way back to being able to play today and playing so well, take us through the mental work, the physical work you put in over the last three, four weeks to make sure you were healthy for today's game.

KEIONTE SCOTT: Yeah, I definitely would say, man, a lot of focus on controlling what I can control. At the end of the day, being in there with them and being around my brothers and them pushing me and telling me to keep going and stay focused, and then also previously having to go through an injury previously in '23 and just knowing you can only focus on what you can focus on, which was getting better. I put all my attention to try and focus on getting better and getting healthy.

I want to give a huge shout-out to our strength staff, our treatment, our sports science. They did a lot of things, a lot of exercising going within the restraints of helping me get better, and I definitely feel better, and I'm excited to be back with my guys.

Q. Akheem and Rueben, talk about what this win means for you. Here you are winning a playoff game for the first time in program history.

AKHEEM MESIDOR: I think it means a lot. Last year we had the same record, but we got snubbed. It's not the first time I've been in this building. Last time I was in this building, I lost. It was great to come back, get a W.

The defense played lights out, man, D-line, linebackers, DBs. Shout out to young Bryce.

But it feels great to be able to get our first playoff win.

But honestly, it's really on to the next. You can't focus too much on it. You can be happy -- like a 24-hour rule. Tomorrow, get back in the building, fix what we messed up, and then on to the new game plan. You can't soak in this too much or else it'll take you down.

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Q. You guys are playing a game before 100,000 people in a stadium where it's really hard to win and in a game where there was no margin for error whatsoever. What did it feel like out there in the huddle, on the field throughout that game knowing this was going to be a game tight down to the end?

AKHEEM MESIDOR: We was just all locked in. We were prepared for it. As long as they don't score, they don't win. As long as you do your job, all 11 do their job, do your 1/11, you'll be all right.

But in the huddle, everybody was calm. We were listening to Coach Hetherman talk, whatever he had to say about whatever he wanted to do, me and Rueben besides JT listening to his coaching. Nerves are calm inside the huddle. We're just ready to play the next play.

Q. For Rueben and Keionte, obviously you talked to you on Wednesday about the talk that they were having last week. Now that you had the performance that you did, how did it feel to have that performance? And Keionte, to follow up on Bryce, your thoughts on how he filled in for you over the last few weeks and continuing to make strides since you've gotten back and he's had to rejig his role again.

RUEBEN BAIN JR: Well, first, like I said before, I don't take kindly to disrespect. My little reminder on my phone. The last two weeks I was on that, I was ready to play some football. Some guys in the media said some things they shouldn't have said, but they did, so God bless them. They were just running checks they can't catch.

KEIONTE SCOTT: Yeah, I feel like the Bryce situation, I feel like it's great for a younger guy to get some reps in that type of situation because now you see he shifts to more of a rotational role and still been able to produce. I think it was a great situation for us as a team to get Bryce some reps and to see him blossoming.

Speaking on what he does, he's the type of guy, he has to be on the field in a way, and Coach Hetherman and Coach Harris are finding ways to get him on because he's explosive and he can change the game for sure.

Q. Keionte, they counted you out. A lot of people thought you would miss the whole season. What does it mean to be able to get back here so fast?

KEIONTE SCOTT: Yeah, I would definitely say I seen a lot of that stuff, too, and that was kind of something that fueled me. I accepted the challenge of wanting to push the limits and see how healthy I could get myself.

Yeah, I definitely was upset with the way some of the things went down towards the end of the year. But at the end of the day, we've got to just focus on where we're at now.

Q. Rueben, is it true your notebook is going to look cool this weekend? Are you going to be able to see your notebook?

RUEBEN BAIN JR: Yeah, that was primed and ready, man. Yeah, there's some stuff in there. I'll just say fate, for the public view. That means forget all of y'all. You can replace it with what you want to.

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Q. Akheem, you said you were calm in the huddle, but on that last drive, what are you talking about? What are you thinking? How do you stay composed? They're marching down the field for the first time in the whole game to tie the game up trying to send it to overtime.

AKHEEM MESIDOR: You've just got to affect the quarterback. For us, D-line-wise, it's affect the quarterback. Within each other, if I like a match-up, I'll tell Rueben, let me get this side. If he likes a match-up, he'll tell me, let me get it. Or I'll talk to Mando, Armando, let me go inside you out here. It's all about affecting the quarterback.

I think we did a pretty good job. At the end of the game obviously we forced him to throw a pick.

RUEBEN BAIN JR: That and just trust in one another. Coach Hetherman says it's all about us. That's all it is. No matter what they're doing, they may have a little success here and there, but we got down in the red zone, buckled down, played our football, and caused a turnover.

KEIONTE SCOTT: I'll also speak on that. I would say shout-out to Carson Beck. At the end of the day, we get in that situation a lot in practice, every Wednesday, and he stresses us out in that situation. So we've been there before. Carson Beck has been driving it in practice and gets to the red zone. So we've been through that process so many times.

It's definitely a situation where it's like, all right, man, we all said when it was time and we knew we were about to have to go out there again, it's the same just like practice, two-minute drill, no time-outs, it's on the defense.

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Carson Beck, James Brockermeyer

Q. Can you describe the emotion?

CARSON BECK: Obviously an amazing feeling to be able to come into this environment and play against a really, really talented team with really, really good coaches. They had really good scheme, really good players. To be able to come in here and come out with a win, not only a win on the road but a playoff win on the road, it means everything to us and this team, and especially me.

Q. Carson, just the way the offense was going for that final drive, for Mark to get those big runs, for Malachi to get a little bit of redemption after fumbling the ball the drive before, talk about how that unfolded and the emotions of when you finally did get into the end zone?

CARSON BECK: Yeah, it was that type of game today. It was grind it out, playing against a really physical defense. We're a really physical offense. When you're playing smashmouth football, at the end of the day, at some point one side is either going to continue to push and push and push and then it just breaks open, and that's what we were able to do on that last drive, and then obviously Malachi was able to make the play to get it in the end zone, and then defense does their job and gets the stop and closes it out.

I thought we played really good complementary football today and just stayed the course and just played super physical.

Q. Shannon was throwing everything at them today. I don't know if there's any offensive plays that weren't run today. How was that for you guys leading up to the game and grasping that game plan, and also the difficulty of finding ways to pass the ball down the field in those conditions today?

CARSON BECK: They honestly stayed in a two-high shell for most of the game. There was a lot of quarters, and again, you have D-linemen like that, you have linebackers like that, a front seven that are really talented and can create different holes and gaps and things of that sort with their scheme, it can be difficult to throw the ball down the field.

I think we had like one or two one-on-one shots that I missed that I could have given them better balls. But at the end of the day, if they wanted to play like that, then shoot, we're going to hand the ball off. Mark Fletcher has an unbelievable game. We have an unbelievable offensive line. Shoot, we're behind them -- I've said that this whole entire season; they lead the way, and today they did.

Q. Carson, about Mark, getting to know him over the course of the last year, to see him have this huge game on such a big stage, what do you think it means for him, for the team? I think Shannon was saying he's one of the main guys on offense, one of the main leaders on offense?

CARSON BECK: Yeah, absolutely. From the jump since I've been at Miami, since January, he's one of the first guys that really came up to me, introduced himself. Not only that, but one of the first guys that I really clicked with and really meshed with. He's one of my best friends on the team. We constantly have conversations almost every single day all the way from January, February, about our goals, about what we want to do with this season and this team.

To be able to see him have that much success today, it's very expected, obviously, seeing the way that he works each and every day, day in and day out, to be able to go out there and execute the way that he did, it's expected, and again, I'm super happy for him to watch him be able to do that.

Q. James, you guys as an offensive line, you've had your share of some penalties, troubles here and there throughout the year. To come in here in front of 100,000 people and not have a false start, not have any kind of mistakes basically, how did you guys manage to accomplish that?

JAMES BROCKERMEYER: Yeah, well, we practice it every day coming up on to it. As soon as we learned we were going to play here, we knew it was a really loud environment. They've got great fans. We practiced it every day. We've got speakers 15 feet behind us in practice, and honestly, it's probably louder than it's going to be in the game.

We practiced it. It didn't happen on accident. We did a good job in practice, and it carried over to the game.

Q. Carson, you've been in a National Championship locker room. You know what it looks like, what it feels like. Talk to us about this locker room now. How does it feel to you right now? How does it look to you?

CARSON BECK: The energy is super, super high. Obviously for our team to battle and face adversity the way that we did during that middle part of the season where we slipped up and had a couple games that didn't go our way, the way that we responded from that just tells the whole entire story of who this team is and what this team wants.

We responded those last four games in honestly astounding fashion and proved that we should be in the playoffs, that we should have this opportunity.

Now that we have had this opportunity, we come in on the road in one of the toughest places to play, some would argue the toughest place to play in a road playoff, and come out with a victory.

Again, this locker room is everything. It's a real brotherhood. It's real family. There's real connection. You can see that in the way that everybody treats each other and the way that people are excited for other people when they make plays.

Again, I'm super proud of this team, super proud of the way that we've worked and battled adversity and handled adversity and excited for the opportunities that are to come.

Q. I bumped into you the other day and you said coming to Miami was one of the best decisions you ever made in your life. Elaborate on the decision to come to Miami and what it is.

JAMES BROCKERMEYER: Yeah, that period of my life where I was navigating the portal and everything was really hectic and chaotic. When I got here, I really didn't know what to expect. But the coaching staff, the players, everyone who works in nutrition, strength staff, et cetera, have all just been first class. They're just a very high standard here.

That's something that I've loved being a part of. That's something we're always striving to maintain. The people here are incredible. They've been so welcoming to me. I couldn't be more blessed and thankful for all the people here and being part of this team. It's been awesome, and I'm excited we get to continue playing together.

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Q. For both of you guys, I'm wondering, what was last weekend like, or two weeks ago when you're waiting to see whether you're in or out? What was that like? Then to get this win today after not knowing whether you guys were going to make it in or not, what type of feelings come with that?

CARSON BECK: I mean, me personally, just with the way that we ended the season and the resume that we had put together, I thought that we deserved to be in the playoffs and that we could compete with anybody. I said that after we beat Pitt, that I thought that we could compete with anybody, and we had proved that and showed that.

To be given that opportunity, obviously I was super anxious leading up to the selection show and watching the selection show I was still super anxious as it got down to eight, nine, and then obviously put us in at 10.

But to have this opportunity was everything for this team. We knew that we were prepared for the moment. We knew that everything that we had been through had led up to this moment and this opportunity. To be able to come in here today and do what we did and come out with a win is everything to me and to these guys, to these coaches, to this whole entire university, and again, to have another opportunity to play and another chance to play as a team is very exciting.

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MARK FLETCHER JR.

Q. Take me through the locker room after this win. What was it like inside?

MARK FLETCHER JR: It was turned. I wish you could have seen it. It was turned. You're probably going to see some screen recorded Instagram Lives, but yeah, we was turned.

Q. For you to have the performance you did today on a stage like this, can you describe the emotion of that given everything that you've gone through?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Yeah, no, it's just a blessing. I'm grateful for this opportunity. Man, I definitely wasn't expecting this, but man, I'm just happy that we won.

Q. Mark, can you kind of walk us through that 56-yard run that set up that game-winning touchdown?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Man, I just told the O-line and the wide receivers and tight ends, just put a hat on somebody and I'm going to be gone. I'm going to be gone. I'm going to handle the rest. That's the reason it opened up like that.

Q. With Malachi, to see him get that touchdown, get the redemption, what do you think that meant to him?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Yeah, for a second I saw a head drop down, I immediately rushed to him, and I said, man, God has put you through some adversity right now; that's it. It's just a little adversity. You see all that time we got on that clock, man, let's go win this thing and look at God.

Q. Your year has been very well chronicled, but your mom is outside the stadium. She drives to every game. She makes a sign that says "Freight Train Fletcher." I don't know if you saw it or not.

MARK FLETCHER JR: I did. She showed me.

Q. What does that support mean to you, really the two of you together?

MARK FLETCHER JR: It means everything to me. That's my rock. That's my world. I love her so much. We've both been -- it's been hard on us, but hey, she's always there. The fact that she even drives, man, that really shows me that this lady really loves me.

I have that great support system, and I'm not by myself on that field.

Q. How do you handle the emotions and how have you been able to handle everything the way you have over the last 13, 14 months?

MARK FLETCHER JR: I just know that every day when I wake up breathing, it's just another opportunity to make somebody's life better. God has just blessed me to be in this position, and I just want to impact anybody, any kids,

anybody -- grown people, too, who's going through something that guys, your story is not over yet. Your story is not over yet. Keep on waking up, keep on breathing. You just continue to keep fighting and keep moving.

Q. With you guys' defense, what's it like to go against them in practice, and what's it like watching them do what they do to opponents every week?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Going against them in practice is frustrating, very frustrating. This game is all around, second level, first level. They're playmakers. That's a great defense that we go against. They really get us ready for these teams that we go against.

Q. How many times today did you think about your dad, and was there a moment at the end afterwards that you felt his presence there?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Yeah, I think about him every single day, shoot, every second, honestly. That's what drives me. But like I told other people before, I had to switch my mindset how I would think about him. I would think about him and I would just get sad, even cry before some games. That's not how he would want me to play this beautiful game of football.

I had a talk with my brother, and I would tell him this. I just said, yeah, I miss my dad, but he would want me to go out there and have fun, play loose and just have fun, and that's what I did today.

Q. You've talked in the past about how much he just loved all the guys on this team. How proud does it make you how much he continues to inspire not just you but everybody in that locker room?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Extremely proud. There's a lot of them boys who probably never had that father figure, but he stepped in and he was there for them. That's what a lot of us can relate on. That's why they feel for me so much, that that was my actual dad, but a great person, great blessing, long live Big Mark.

Q. Three years ago you made the decision to come to Miami after not a good season. Sitting here today with a playoff win, how validating was that decision knowing how far the program has come since you decided to jump on board?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Yes, sir. Nobody believed that we could do this. We never really worried about those voices anyway, but we're just very grateful, very blessed that we're in this position, and we're 1-0 today, we're going to celebrate this and go 1-0 next week.

Q. When we talked about Coach Dawson earlier, he said going into that drive the mentality was we're rolling with you for that drive. What did it feel to have that trust, to go out there and make the plays when it matters most?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Yeah, that's everything that a running back wants to hear when they say we're going to give you the ball and you do your thing. I immediately went to my O-linemen, my receivers and my tight ends, and I said, hey, y'all know what to do, get them out of the way. Get them out of the way and I'm going to just do my thing, and that's what they did. That's why them holes opened up like that.

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Q. What does it feel like to run that offensive line, the trust in them to go and open up those holes?

MARK FLETCHER JR: It's the best thing in the world. Best thing in the world.

Q. When your receivers are clearing guys out the way they were today, what does that feel like? When you see it out of the corner of your eye a receiver coming down and just crushing a guy?

MARK FLETCHER JR: Man, it just turns me up. It's a team game, and I told them, y'all go just kill them DBs and they'll open up the pass game for y'all. That's how it's going to work, and that's just what we strive for.

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