

Stanford University Football Media Conference

Saturday, November 25, 2023
Stanford, California, USA

Coach Troy Taylor Postgame Media Conference



Notre Dame 56, Stanford 23

Q. Coach, just thoughts on this one, just last game of the season. How do you feel about the way this one shaped up?

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, knew we were coming and playing a great opponent, very well coached, talented. You know, we hung with them for a little bit; just didn't make enough plays.

That's a credit to them. They created those things. So proud of how our guys fought. Not satisfied with the outcome obviously, but just for this team in general, since I've been here they've continued to compete and give everything they've got.

Very proud of that. That's something to build on. Can't wait to get started tomorrow on getting ready for next season.

Q. What is that process going to be like starting tomorrow?

TROY TAYLOR: We have a banquet tomorrow, so have a team meeting and talk about moving forward in the future. Got some exciting things coming. \$3 million facelift to our weight room that will start immediately, which is incredible. Great support from our university and leadership.

Our guys will get a little bit of time off and then we will continue to recruit. Got an unbelievable recruiting class that we're excited about that we're going to sign on December 20th. We will get bigger, stronger, faster, and we'll improve as a coaching staff, and really excited about the future.

Q. Just kind of thoughts on what you guys got from EJ today? Seems like he had one of the more productive games of the season.

TROY TAYLOR: EJ is a guy that's very versatile. We've known that. He's got really good receiver skills. Good ball

skills, great in space. So it was good to see him make plays and make some big plays. It was a good evening for him.

Q. Forcing turnovers is something you guys have struggled with all season. You guys forced three in the first half to keep things interesting. What were you able to do that was effective there?

TROY TAYLOR: We did. I think guys were playing hard and running to the football and that was big. We had I think three and I think we converted at least two of them into points which was big and kept us in the game.

Then unfortunately we had a turnover there at the end of the first half that was pretty crucial and critical, and then kind of got away from us from there.

Q. Just talk about what Notre Dame, Audric Estime, what he did that makes him such a talented running back.

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, very physical running back, physical offensive line, quarterback experienced and steady. And I think the best -- probably the best defense we've played all year. Felt that coming into the game. Our staff did. We faced some good ones. There are some good ones out there.

Very solid team. Very well coached. Very disciplined. I focus more on the defensive side of the ball, how they play and their eyes and leverage and tackling, so we were able to get some big plays, which was good.

Against a team like that you can't turn the ball over. You got to maximize every opportunity that you get.

Q. I know it's hard, the season just ended. How would you evaluate your first season here?

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, I mean, like I told our guys when I took the job here, there was a lot of people that left the program, a lot of players. It kind of scattered. These guys that stayed, they gave us and me every single thing they had from day one.



I'm indebted to them, and I told them we will be champions here. It will happen. Obviously didn't happen this year. Some of them won't be here physically when it happens, but they are a part of it.

I think what I'm feeling right now is just gratitude to them for giving it all. You know, when you give everything you have and put everything into it, you're not guaranteed a tangible reward. That's just not how life works.

These guys continued to do it each week. A lot of respect for them, and excited to get moving forward.

Q. You've been asked this a bunch of times, but the Pac-12 is officially -- your last game in the Pac-12 is over. Early thoughts on the ACC. Next time thing you guys will play you will be a member of that conference.

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, excited about the ACC. I think there were some dark days obviously with the Pac-12 and trying to find out where we were going, but our leadership was incredible. I'm so excited about joining the ACC. I think it's an incredible conference, great teams, institutions. So we're excited. Players are excited. Our university is excited.

It's going to be a fun ride.

Q. I think you had something like 26 seniors that you honored before the game, but 25 are eligible to play next year. What's the timetable and process like for talking through the future with those guys?

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, so we have one player really that's exhausted his eligibility, Spencer Jorgensen, who came here as a walk-on and was put on scholarship. So we're going to miss Spence.

And then we have some guys that their bodies are pretty beat up from playing a game they love that they're probably going to retire. They have been through enough. I support them in that. Then we got some other guys that got some decisions to make and we have some decisions to make as well. So we'll figure that out, the roster and all those things. We have time.

We're going right into recruiting, and so all those things will play itself out. We have the transfer portal as well. A lot of moving parts, but right now it's about gratitude for this group of young men that gave their all for an entire almost year now.

Q. This is purely an esthetic question, kind of, just on the new uniforms you guys wore tonight, how does

that -- when do you guys find out about these? Do you find out a week before? Two weeks before? When do you know you're breaking these out? How does that process work?

TROY TAYLOR: Found out it was possible about, you know, six weeks ago, that it was possibility, and then Mr. Muir said it was possible and they were going to be able to finance it. Our guys were excited. We did not share it with them until I guess a week ago. Showed them the helmets and they were excited.

So they're appreciative of being able to have a red helmet. I thought it looked really good.

Q. Ayomanor passed the 1000 yard mark on the season. What does that accomplishment mean?

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, I mean, a young guy hasn't played a lot of football that has so much in front of him, and I think we all got an opportunity to see what he's capable of.

There is so much growth potential, so much more improvement that he can bring and will bring, so excited. That's an amazing accomplishment, getting over the 1000 yard mark, and his better days are ahead of him.

Appreciate you guys. Go, Card.

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Stanford, California, USA

Elic Ayomanor

Postgame Media Conference



Notre Dame 56, Stanford 23

Q. Just how would you personally kind of evaluate this season? You just completed here as a redshirt freshman?

ELIC AYOMANOR: I would say there is a lot of ups and downs. I think I showed a lot of potential, but at the end of the day I think I need to be a lot better for our team to win more consistently.

But one thing I do know is that I attack my weaknesses very relentlessly in the off-season. I doubt those weaknesses will persist in the future.

Q. You've kind of evaluated your performance. How would you evaluate the team's performance this season?

ELIC AYOMANOR: Yeah, I think the same thing stands for the team. We showed a lot of promise at points, and sometimes when we execute things look beautiful, but we need to continue to get better and just raise the expectations and that level of execution.

One thing I will say is that every single man on this team would fight to the end, and I'm happy to say that they all did fight until the end. That's one thing we have to be proud of.

Q. If you could, just what does an off-season look like for a football player? How much time do you take off? What does that regimen look like?

ELIC AYOMANOR: Yeah, I think it's different for everybody. For me, the off-season has already started. I'm already evaluating myself, seeing what I need to improve on. I think I already do know a lot of those things.

You watch the film back, watch the season back, you see exactly where it is that you had missteps and you make sure those things don't happen again.

Although the season is in the past, you can't forget those

emotions that you had when things didn't go your way, and you use those emotions to fuel you in the future.

You never forget those and use it you push you forward into the next season.

Q. Obviously been a lot of really great receivers and pass catchers to come through the Stanford program over the years, and you're the first Cardinal since 2018 to have 1000 receiving yards in a season. What does that mean to you personally?

ELIC AYOMANOR: Yeah, I wouldn't say it means a lot. Like I mentioned earlier, I need to be a lot a lot better for this team to have continued success.

I think maybe people on the outside might think that's a significant thing, but when I watch back the tape -- there are moments that I'm proud of, and overall I need to be a lot better, and like I said earlier, I will be a lot better because those weaknesses will certainly not continue to persist.

Q. Just on the game itself, thoughts on Notre Dame's defense, what you saw from them and what made them a difficult defense to go up against?

ELIC AYOMANOR: Yeah, they're a very good and very talented team and very disciplined team. They play a lot of man coverage and they blitz a lot, which sometimes at times can be hard to pick up. They're very good man coverage DBs, so they live and die by that and obviously tonight they lived by it.

But I think when we get the opportunity to face them again we will capitalize on those matchups and we will have this loss in the back of our minds for a long time.

Q. This is my last one: Just thoughts on the ACC, early thoughts on that. Going to be playing cross country. Early thoughts on joining that conference and what that is going to be like.

ELIC AYOMANOR: Yeah, I hope it'll be a little bit colder. I do enjoy these cold games being from Canada. I haven't



really been keeping up with any of the teams in the ACC, but like I said, the off-season starts right now, so I'm looking forward to just seeing what those teams bring to the table and how they'll challenge us and how we'll be able to attack them.

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Notre Dame

Coach Marcus Freeman

Postgame Media Conference



Notre Dame - 56, Stanford - 23

COACH FREEMAN: It was amazing to be able to celebrate that victory with that group of guys. And we put a huge emphasis on finding a way to get that Legends Trophy back. And I don't care if you were here last year or you weren't, I wanted to remind this group how important this rivalry is to both institutions, to everybody that's associated with Notre Dame and how much we wanted to make sure that the Legends Trophy got returned to South Bend.

So our guys went out and earned it. They earned it. And as I told -- I wasn't upset about the effort that we played with to start the game, but we gotta take care of the ball. We have to take care of the ball. And they did a couple things on offense that we had not seen and they made some big plays.

But our guys were able to regroup, come out of the locker room with the intensity we needed and finish this game off the right way.

So really proud of this group. A special, special group. And really proud of the way we finished off this regular season.

Q. A long time it didn't look like you were going to be in the lead at halftime. What was your message at the break?

COACH FREEMAN: It was on offense, just take care of the ball. Hand the ball to the officials is what we say. That means don't turn the ball over.

Defensively we had to make some changes, and it was, here's the corrections, now go execute. Here's the correction, go execute.

Special teams, have got to be special. We can't turn the ball over on special teams.

Don't beat Notre Dame. That's something you'll hear me say often. Every time we do that we'll be successful every time.

Q. (Indiscernible) workhorse. Right before halftime did he want to be in to score the touchdown?

COACH FREEMAN: We had that communication before the series, that it's a 2-minute situation. Gi'Bran's been our 2-minute back. I said, that's good, let's go, keep him in there. And I get a little frustrated when we put the ball on the ground, and got on him, and Coach McCullough a little bit, hey, the standard is to hand the ball to official.

They reviewed it and called it touchdown. But they have a high standard for making sure we have great ball security. And I kind of reminded them of the standard we have.

But Audric is -- what a tough, physical, special football player. Obviously he'll have a decision to make here after the season on what he's going to do. But I'll tell you what, he's a special talent that has given Notre Dame everything he's had the past three seasons. So grateful to have him and have him be a part of this team.

Q. (Inaudible). Since then, how much has this team improved get this brawl going and get the trophy back. How much have you seen them improved since then?

COACH FREEMAN: You try not to be so outcome-driven. If you don't look at the outcome you say this team definitely has improved tremendously. There was a couple games between Tennessee State and now we wish we could have run it back and do it over but we can't.

But we've learned and we've grown from those mistakes and those opportunities. I'm so proud of this team. We're reaching our full potential. That's something you'll hear me say. We haven't totally got there, but, dang, we were pretty close today. And we've got a couple of weeks to get ready for this bowl game, whichever one we go to.

Q. (Inaudible)? What happened on those plays and (indiscernible)?



COACH FREEMAN: I can't remember every single play. But one of them they had a unique formation where they put the running back in the B gap and leaked him out on a deep pass. And something we haven't seen. And they did a good job.

Told the coach before the game, he's done a great job. Looking at what they've done this year at Stanford offensively, what they've done at Sac State, what they've done there, they have done a good job in terms of their offensive scheme.

Very challenging. Coach Golden, the defensive staff did a great job correcting mistakes and making sure our players execute.

Q. You mentioned Jean-Baptiste had his best (indiscernible) end of the season but also surging in November. Is he a player you can use as a model for bringing in a grad transfer that improved all the way throughout his team here and really upped his status going forward (indiscernible)?

COACH FREEMAN: Yeah, I'm so proud of him. And he came here from an opportunity. And he's taken full advantage of them. He's been a great example and has improved throughout the season, is playing his highest level of football right now.

So it's a testament to his hard work and his relationship with his coach and what Coach Washington has done with him. And I'm glad to see he's reaping the fruits of his labor.

Q. I don't know if we'll talk to Audric, I want to ask you, what sense do you have, the motivation he took from not being on the Doak Walker (indiscernible)? Does he seem like he -- he at least tweeted that after what's happened, was motivated by that. How do you channel that motivation in the right way?

COACH FREEMAN: We all are competitors, and we all find different ways to motivate us. And I'm sure that motivated him, and as I tell them, I wanted to motivate you to work, motivate you to do the proper work to get the outcome we want that we all want. I told them all the time we all want.

We all want more, we all want greater, but not everyone is willing to work. And I know he was motivated. I just continued to remind him, be motivated to prepare, be motivated to work and you'll get the desired outcome you want on Saturdays.

Q. Obviously a big game on the ground today. Can

you comment on the offensive line (inaudible)?

COACH FREEMAN: To see Ashton Craig and Billy Schrauth, they played for us last week in their first starts, and they're just getting better and better and better. It's a great testament. You don't know when your number is going to be called. But you gotta be ready.

And their number was called last week and they performed at a high level. And you see them this week continue to stack on that performance that they had last week. And Coach Rudolph has done a good job with that offensive line. That unit, it's tough because such a cohesive unit, and when you add two new guys week 11 to the starting lineup, it's a challenge. But they put the work in and they performed really well.

Q. I don't think we asked you last week about (inaudible) the stats, the (indiscernible). I think he was 24 yards away from the single-game rushing record at Notre Dame. I don't know if you were aware of that on the sideline, if you would have given any thought to that. He was there at the end of the third quarter. Any thoughts on playing him (indiscernible)?

COACH FREEMAN: I didn't know that. If he came up and said, Coach, can you leave me in because I'm 24 yards away, that would be a decision I'd have to make. But there's two things I want to do, what's best for Notre Dame and what's best for Audric, too.

But I did not know that. I knew he was getting close to the single season TD record. He set that. I don't know how many he rushed for, 200-plus.

Q. 238.

COACH FREEMAN: 238, that's a lot of yards. I don't know what record he was chasing but that's a heck of a performance.

Q. (Inaudible) single game (indiscernible)?

COACH FREEMAN: What he did today? Pretty good, man. Good player.

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Audric Estime

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Notre Dame - 56, Stanford - 23

Q. During the game, did you feel this pregame, or did you have some type of motivation to have a game this extraordinary?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I feel like it was another game, but this game was definitely different. Last regular season -- for the 2023 season. So we always pride ourselves to finish strong, start fast and finish strong. We were talking about the game in particular, but it goes to the season, you've got to start fast and finish strong. I feel the team did that and represented at a high level today.

Q. How badly did you want to be in there in the first quarter? Did you realize you were that close to setting a yardage record?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I realized it toward the end, but I'm not really chasing records, honestly, or stats. It's nice to get it, but at the end of the day, we got the job done. We won by like, what, 40 points? We had over 300 rushing on the ground as a total offense. That's all that matters at the end of the day.

Q. Big decision for you coming up, obviously. Really recent after the game, not much time to think about it. What do you think your timeline is, and when are you going to make that decision?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I don't really have a timeline right now. I'm just worried about coming in on Monday, getting a lift in, going over this game, see how I could have done better and we'll start having conversations then.

Q. How did you find out you weren't a Doak Walker semifinalist, and how much did it motivate you?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I found out the night before. It was pretty hard. It was definitely a goal of mine, but it wasn't the end of the world at that point. We still had some football to play, which is all that matters. I just have a bunch of guys that rely on me. So I couldn't shut down no

matter what.

Just have to keep on going. Had to come in the next day at practice like nothing happened, just keep on rolling.

Q. Do you feel it fueled you in any way?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I'm not going to lie, it definitely fueled me. I definitely feel like I'm one of the best running backs in the country, if not the best. And I would definitely want other people to notice. But I feel like after today I feel like a lot of people notice.

Q. Obviously a lot of (inaudible) at the game. As one of the leaders on this team, how do you attack that and (inaudible)?

AUDRIC ESTIME: So Coach Freeman always prides, was our main message to come out fast today. We did come out fast, I would say, but we had things we're shooting ourselves in the legs, like turnover. Our main pillar, first pillar, is the ball. Have to do a better job taking care of the ball. But offense played a great game. Defense played a great game. Special teams played a great game. We just didn't let the negative plays run our whole game, just took one play at a time, kept on going.

Q. What was the message that Coach Freeman was trying to pass on to you at the end of the first half?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I'm the leader of this, one of the leaders of this team, I'm the leader of this offense. I'm the leader of the running back group. When a guy like that fumbles the ball at the 1-yard line, it's a reflection on me, reflection of Coach Freeman. That's Coach Freeman holding me and our running back group to high standards. I appreciate that. And just great coaching, something that everyone needs to take their game to the next level. That's what he was doing.

Q. You must have been pretty excited it was overruled?

AUDRIC ESTIME: I was happy about that. Happy for Gi'Bran to get a touchdown.



Q. How much more frustrating is it to know that Ohio State lost today and you guys are in a much better position with the comeback you had?

AUDRIC ESTIME: It was a good game. Both teams, Michigan and Ohio State are good teams. But it's hard to go back in time that far down the line because there's a couple things we could have done better. But at the end of the day, that's football. The ball goes out of the way. You just have to bring it every other game. This week our opponent was Stanford. We handled business. We'd love to have that back, but it's life, have to keep moving, have to find ways to improve from that.

Q. The tweet that said "bet," what did that mean?

AUDRIC ESTIME: Exactly what I meant today. Bet.

Q. Bet on you or --

AUDRIC ESTIME: No, it was just really -- I felt like I was kind of cut short. So that "bet" was just, all right, you guys don't think I'm one of the 10 best in the country, I'm going to show you.

Q. (Inaudible)?

AUDRIC ESTIME: They did an amazing job. I couldn't do anything without them from Joe Alt to Patrick Coogan, to Ashton stepping up and Billy stepping up and Blake. Those guys did a phenomenal job for me all year. I'm so thankful for them.

Honestly, I told them I've got to take them all out to eat. I gotta do something for them. I'm so thankful for them. Those guys are hard workers, led by (inaudible). Coach Freeman always prides that we're an O line- and a D line-driven program. And they do a great job us leading us as leaders. They're the first ones in on practice on Monday, last one out of the facility because they're always having meetings. They just do a great job, and I am really appreciative of those guys.

Q. Do you recognize a couple (inaudible)?

AUDRIC ESTIME: Yeah, definitely Eli stepped up with Holden not playing, and Mitch Evans getting down, Eli doing a great job. And David Sherwood and Cooper playing, they've all done a great job. Sky's the limit for them because those guys are young, they're just now getting their groove. I'm excited to see where it's going to take them.

Q. What does it mean to you to have the single season

program record for rushing touchdowns?

AUDRIC ESTIME: It's amazing. Coming into this school, coming in as a freshman, coming in as Notre Dame, I always pride myself when I say I'm going to give them something to remember, do something legendary and having a record like that has my name stamped in the history books forever.

So that's amazing for the whole offensive line to help me get them and Coach Freeman, Coach Deland for trusting me, giving me opportunity to put me in a position to be successful. I'm thankful to God and everyone who helped me along this way.

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