



UCF Football Postgame Quotes - Sep. 7, 2024

UCF 45, Sam Houston 14

UCF Head Coach Gus Malzahn

Head Coach Gus Malzahn's opening statement:

Real proud of our team, convincing win, that's a quality opponent. They've got good players, that's a hall of fame coach. He's won two national championships. It was a good measuring stick of where our guys are. They put the game away early, I think offense scored on six or seven drives, or something like that in the first half, you know, take away the penalties. We overcame some of the penalties early but, you know, five penalties on offense, we've got to correct that. There's only one penalty on defense, the defense had two interceptions. I don't think they got across midfield, I think until late, once we put some of our threes in with that. But overall dominant performance, we talked about improving from game one to game two, we did that, so we're progressing in the right way. We still got things we gotta clean up, there's no doubt about that, but when you're able to run the football effectively, like we ran the football that really helps. We had a couple of explosive passes. I think we had the one that we caught, but it called a face mask on and all that. But, you know, we threw it down the field some and the defense did a good job of controlling a pretty solid offense.

Coach Malzahn's thoughts on KJ Jefferson's improvement from last week:

Yeah, there's no doubt, you know, he's settling down, he's understanding the offense. He ran the ball extremely hard and physical, got a power read early on, he threw the ball vertically down the field very good and of course we figured that would happen. So, yeah, we're real pleased with his performance and, like I said, I mean, when you can run the football, like we've been able to run the football the last, two games, that opens up everything.

Coach Malzahn on RJ Harvey:

Yeah, his own run. I mean, he's as good as his own runner, probably there is in college football with his patience and his vision and everything that goes with it. So, he had a big time night. Miles, he had a big time night again and then Penny, you know, he's getting used to the offense and got in there late and you can see he can really impose his will downhill too.

Coach Malzahn on penalties:

It was good, and you know you want to get off to a good start. Obviously, we took the ball when you take the ball, you need to go down and score. We had some penalties right there we had to overcome but, our guys hung in there. They handled themselves well and I mean, there's still a lot of stuff we got to improve on. But we did improve from game one to game two and like I said, we beat a quality opponent pretty soundly and so I'm really pleased.

Coach Malzahn on preparing to match up with Big 12 play:

There's no doubt. I mean, TCU, they're a really quality opponent. I think everybody knows that. So we go on the road for the first half, that's a big challenge for our guys. We've got to raise our level, there's no doubt about it, but it's good that we know what we do know from these two first games. I mean, our guys know we're gonna have to raise our level. That's part of conference play and going to a place on the road that played for a national championship two years ago. And you know one of those either rivals or 24/7, they got as much talent as anybody in our league. As far as all that goes, their coach is really good too. So that'll be a great challenge for us.

Coach Malzahn on having Evan Morris on kickoffs:

Yeah that kick in the stands? He may be our kickoff guy from now on. He used to do that at Michigan State and so we tried him out this week and he kicked it out of the back of the end zone so he may be our new kickoff specialist. Not that Boomer didn't do a good job, he did a great job, but being able to take some things off his leg, you know, I know last year, he got a little worn down in the second part of the year because of that. So we'll see what happens. That may be the biggest kicker in college football

Coach Malzahn on partnering with Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital and the decals used on the helmets:

Yeah, that's who we are as a program. I'm real proud of our players. What a great cause and using their influence in a positive way, that's what we talk about. And, you know, that's a part of our community and real important to us and I couldn't be more proud of our players

Coach Malzahn on what defensive players stood out:

Yeah, I think it was a collective effort really. We knew their quarterback, he ran last week, did a lot of quarterback draws and things like that. So we knew we had to control him. He was a junior college quarterback, I think he won a championship. So it really started stopping him running the football and I think for the most part we did a good job with that.

Coach Malzahn on Xavier Townsend:

There's no doubt, you know, we got to find ways to get him touches. I mean, he's electric, I think everybody sees that. And so you know, he's a dynamic player and he's a really good return guy too.

Coach Malzahn on KJ Jefferson last week vs. this week:

I think more than anything he's just comfortable. You know, he had a really good week of practice, like I said, and just understanding kind of the nuances of a new offense. You know, he's learning his third new offense in college football. He's learning his new teammates and everything that goes with it and he's a veteran guy and I thought he had a very quality game tonight.

Coach Malzahn on "packing your lunch" to every single Big 12 game:

A: Well, I mean, we'll find out where we're at next week. You know the steps we've taken is straining the crud out of our team. In fall camp, be more physical, you know, tackle better and everything that goes with it and just our overall approach and we'll see where we're at now. I mean, we're gonna play one of probably one of the better teams in our league at third place next week, so we'll find out a whole lot.



**Malzahn on Nyjalik Kelly:**

I think he had a lot of tackles. I think he was in on that, that fumble right there, so he's a, a guy that's played and I think he had a very quality game.

Malzahn on last year's road challenges:

I think what I'm hoping for is that we have a more experienced team than we had last year and then we went on the road in conference, you know, we didn't have our starting quarterback either. I'm really hoping that those things will help us with our experience. A few more playmakers on the defense, I think will help too. But we're still growing as a team. I mean, you know, anytime you have 50 players, new players, I mean, you're still growing and that's where we are, we're progressing. We got to keep trending and that's our big challenge and that's what I told our guys, but I'm really proud of them. I mean, were 2-0 and we took care of business tonight. I think for the most part, I don't think there were any major injuries or anything like that. So we're trending in the right direction. But like I said, we'll figure out exactly where we are this week.

Malzahn on his confidence with his special teams:

That was a big time kick Boomer made that 50 yard field goal right there. And you think about the way we ended our season right there and he is back, there's no doubt. Mitch flipping the field a couple of times and every time Xavier gets in his hands, he's got a chance. We just got to continue building and returning like that.

Malzahn on what he thinks about this team:

I love our team. I mean, I like our players. I like what I've seen chemistry wise, picking each other up. You know, like I said, we're just getting started, but so far we have some really great things.

Malzahn on the decision to put Dylan Rizk:

We started out with Dylan, we used him late, we're going to play both. If something happens, Dylan's had a great week and half of practice, doing some really great things. That's our plan going in that if something happens to KJ, we're fortunate enough to get him out and play both those guys. Dylan did a great job executing and I thought Brown did a good job too.

UCF Running Back RJ Harvey**Harvey on scoring four touchdowns:**

I felt great, all praise goes to the offensive line, I am just super blessed for them to have done their job tonight, no doubt.

Harvey on the on how the running back room performed through the first two games:

Yeah we love it, we are going to each and every practice and we are pushing each other hard each and every day. I am so grateful for them because they push me, they make me a better running back. Miles, Penny, Johnny, you know, we loaded at the running back room and I'm just so blessed to be around such great guys.

Harvey on how he contributes besides scoring:

I try to lead those guys each and every day. You know, the young guys like Stacy, Cam, Preston. Me and Penny and Myles, we've been doing this for a while now and we make each other better each and every week. I try to teach them, and they do the same for me too.

Harvey on UCF's special helmets:

Yeah, it's a special feeling, we did it during the spring as well and we just wanted to give them the seat. We just wanted to give them something to feel special about, they're going through a lot right now and we're praying for them, and I just hope that great things happen for them.

UCF Defensive Back Mac McWilliams**McWilliams on his first interception at UCF:**

Coach Roof, at practice, he always was discussing this team was a trick 'em team, you know, they like to trick path and do different things. So, you know, all week we were just going over the little things, you know, just to keeping the eyes, just staying disciplined, you know, so I felt good to get a new pick. 1st at UCF and I'm looking for more.

McWilliams on the defense earning four interceptions so far this year:

Film study. You know, that's what it goes back to, just getting a great film, watching a great film, getting together with the guys, just going over to new players, going over their plays and, you know, just executing.

McWilliams on where the defense stands after two games:

We still have a long way to go. We came in, gave up three points to, New Hampshire and came in today, and gave up two touchdowns. But at the end of the day, you know, we just gotta be the defense that we are, the defense that coach would want us to be and just going out there and executing like at the end of the day, that's all that matters.

McWilliams on how the defense will be used on the road:

I say we a feisty defense, you know, we like to get to the ball, we like to play the ball, yeah, just being feisty. I just say that's one word for the defense.

UCF Defensive End Nyjalik Kelly**Kelly on his first strip sack of his UCF career:**

Well, when the play started, I knew it was pass. So, last week I went toward the target, I missed two opportunities. So this week, in practice, I was just repping, repping with Coach Ingram, toward the target, stepping on the O line feet instead of widening out and then I was able to get a sack. It felt good getting a sack after being injured last year, only playing five games and finally getting back out there with my teammates, and coaches believing in me.





Kelly on the identity of the defense:

Being disciplined, Hitting hard, rallying to the ball, 11 man to the ball, make it feel like 12, That's our identity.

Kelly on how exciting it is to see his forced turnover ended in a score:

It's always exciting when I make a play and when it get called back and then another person make a play. Everybody just happy for everybody. Everybody just love when everybody,, playing at their best.

Kelly on what the team needs to show after two early season wins:

Well, it's always, more to improve. We just need to go back in the playbook and just read our keys, just be disciplined. Get in the film room. There's always room for more.

UCF Quarterback KJ Jefferson

Jefferson on if he felt more comfortable:

I did, I felt a whole lot better. Just coming in, I had a great week of practice, preparation. So I knew just coming in to this, fell in love with the game plan and I knew we was gonna start off fast and get into a rhythm quick. So, just a great game plan by me and also the coaching staff as well, just me communicating things that I like, plays that I like And so we just came out there and just executed.

Jefferson on running more tonight:

It just, it just kinda happened, I mean, just the lane open up, rushing lane open up. So I just took advantage of it, just knowing that I can create plays with my legs and also keep my eyes downfield on one of them, I scramble to hit Randy. So just make sure that when I do break the pocket, make sure I still keep my eyes down the field because I mean, busted play busted coverage can happen.

Jefferson on converting third downs:

Of course, I mean, we wanna stay on the field. So, I mean, that's the main thing. 3rd down is a big down for us. We put a lot of emphasis on it. We go got different scripts throughout practice with third down and stuff. So just making sure that we make a big emphasis on it because I mean, college football third down is a big down.

Jefferson on what it's like to be a quarterback with UCF's running room:

It's a blessing. Like I said, like I always say, take the stress off me. I can just hand the ball out to those guys and just, and just let those guys do them, let them just, just showcase their talents. I mean, just having a running back room like those guys, they, their all iron sharp and iron. It's no jealousy in that room. They all feed off each others energy. So it just iron sharp and iron in that room.

Jefferson on what it's like to have a security blanket like Kobe Hudson:

It's good. We were just in the locker room just talking about it just then. I mean, if he don't get the, the past the face mask, I mean, probably more than that. But I mean, no, I just love Kobe. I mean, just like I said, like I always said, when I first got here, we was just two peas in the pot. I mean, just finally getting that connection going and me having that confidence in him and he having that confidence in me and to actually go out there and execute at a high level like we did tonight and me finding him on different things and getting the ball in his hands as quick as possible I mean, these things are gonna help our team grow.

Jefferson on in-helmet communication:

Not really. The main thing is just making sure coach Mahlzan not having it too close to his mouth. He get, he get a little too excited on certain plays and he just get the hot and then I, I can't hear him, so, other than that though, I mean, it's all good. I really enjoy it, I mean, but like I said, just keeping coach Mahlzan I keep trying to keep him down a little bit.

Sam Houston Head Coach K.C. Keeler

Coach Keeler's Opening Statement:

Yeah, we're not delusional. We knew we were playing a very good football team, and we thought our best chance of winning was to execute. And when the bullets were flying, boy, we did not execute. The number of blitzes that we didn't run that were called, the number of line movements, the number of routes that weren't right, I mean, when you play a good team, your best chance of winning is to execute. We played to the end. We played hard. I don't think we'll look at the tape and say we didn't play hard, but boy, we didn't play very clean. And that's disappointing considering you're coming off a performance last week where we had two real penalties, and we played so clean on both sides of the ball and on special teams. So again, I mean, a lot of it's inflicted by a really good opponent. That's what happens when you play a really good opponent. But for us to have a chance in this game, you know, we had to play clean. I thought we also had to get some breaks early or make our own breaks early. We had two third and longs or third and reasonables or unreasonable where they converted on that first drive. I wanted to take the ball because I wanted to see if I could get, you know, one less drive for their offense that first half. Well, if we could have gotten three and out or four or five and out and gotten the ball back, you know, just a little bit different mindset in terms of, you know, your team. Instead, you know, they converted those third and longs and they went down and scored that first drive. And obviously it gives them a lot of confidence. And also we're talking about, you know, maybe they're as good as what we saw on tape. So you guys did such a phenomenal job. You got such a good football coach. Their staff is really good. They have really good players. And my disappointment is, again, we just didn't play clean when the bullets were flying. And we had to do that to have any chance tonight. So we have a 24 -hour rule. We will suffer for 24 hours, and then we go play whos ever next. And we'll take care of it on Sunday.

Coach Keeler on the trick play for a touchdown:

Yeah, we wanted to show something on the perimeter. And we had our whiteout come in and crack the safety. And as he's coming down to crack the safety, just sort of comes back on a little bend route. And it's a tough play to defend. And Noah Smith is a former high school quarterback. And so he threw a really good ball, and Simeon got it in there. So that play was





a one that, OK, OK, let's go. We're kind of back in this thing now, you know? And we just didn't capitalize enough off that play. But, yeah, I mean, it's a tough play to defend when you have a guy like Noah Smith who runs a lot of Jet Sweep, and then all of a sudden he can pull it up and throw it. And it's a tough play.

Coach Keeler on how difficult it was to deal with UCF's running game:

Those running backs are different now. You know, our hope was we can make them a little bit one dimensional and you know trying to have them throw the football, not dimensional the other way. And we were— they were swallowing us up. They did a good job of swallowing us up and we were getting off of blocks and those running backs are special. If you look at that group and you put them up against everyone in the country, that's a top ten group. They're pretty incredible. So yeah, that was the mindset you know, play a bunch of cover zero, try to get as many hats to the ball as possible, and just too many times there was a little seam there where they put their foot in the ground and they can get north/south in a hurry. And there were times where we had a really good defense call... and they just outran us. Their guy was better than our guy. The plan was to try to make them one dimensional but not one dimensional like they became, one dimensional where they had to throw the ball around. We thought we had a chance. If we could make them one dimensional and they had to throw the ball all over the yard, we thought we had a chance. But obviously we didn't do that.

Coach Keeler on how UCF's defense affected the team's routines:

They're just really good up front. I was disappointed, I thought we would do a better job blocking them. If you look at what we did the week before, I thought we did a good job with what they thought was a good defensive front against Rice, I thought we'd handle them pretty easily. We knew going into this game— we weren't delusional. We knew this was going to be a good football team on both sides of the ball. Especially offensively with the weapons they had, their running back. But you know, we just didn't execute. As soon as some momentum got going in their direction, boy they— it was a great crowd, I think they fed off their crowd, it was a really cool environment. We played BYU last year and we played Houston last year, I think they'll have a pretty good run in the Big 12. That was our thought when we saw what we saw on tape and in person we were like, "This is a good Big 12 team." I won't be surprised if they're, at the end of the season, in contention for something.

