



Clemson Arrival Quotes

Monday, December 24, 2018
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic.

Coach, the Tigers arrived last night. We noticed a lot of your student-athletes are wearing cowboy hats. Looks like they're getting into that spirit of Texas.

COACH SWINNEY: We're excited to be here. We really are. It was a long day yesterday. But we actually got everybody back, had a little practice at Clemson, some meetings. And then had a great trip out. And guys were in great spirits. I think all the specialists wore their Christmas suits. And we had several guys wear their hats. And it was pretty fitting because, last night, they were able to -- I think all the staff ended up getting boots.

So we're happy to be here. It's an amazing hotel that we're staying at. And just all the Cotton Bowl folks. This is a bowl I've always wanted to be a part of for a long time. So to actually have the opportunity to experience it firsthand and for our players to get such a wonderful experience -- these guys have been in Orange Bowls, Fiesta Bowls, Sugar Bowls, national championships. They've had some amazing experiences. And these two, in particular, because they're both fifth-year seniors, were also in the Russell Athletic Bowl. So they've had some great experiences, but this going to be amazing.

I mean, just this press conference. Usually, we show up to practice and we just gather up outside a fence or something, but everything is bigger in Texas, I guess. So here we go. We're excited. I can't wait to get out on the field and check this place out.

MODERATOR: Coach, if you would, please introduce your two student-athletes and tell us a little bit about them.

COACH SWINNEY: We've got Kendall Joseph. This is our starting middle linebacker, number 34. He's an unbelievable leader for us. He's a captain of our football team. He's a fifth-year senior, and has been a three-year starter, a very, very talented and dynamic young man. He's a graduate. Hopefully, he'll have opportunity to play some ball in the NFL, but he's got a really, really nice job waiting on him if he chooses to do that. He's from Belton, BHP High School, in South Carolina. And, again, just a great leader and has been a very productive player.

And then Hunter Renfrow -- yep, that's Hunter Renfrow, for those of you who don't know him. He's a fifth-year receiver as well. He's from down in Myrtle Beach, Socastee area, in South Carolina. Same thing, a graduate. He's a captain, just an amazing young man, both from great families, and one of the most productive receivers we've ever had at Clemson. He's got the most starts ever for a receiver, the most catches consecutively in the history of Clemson,

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just a very productive football player.
And, again, two great leaders and representatives of our program.

Q. Hunter, how much more dynamic do you think this offense is this year compared to a year ago when you guys were entered in the semifinal?

WR HUNTER RENFROW: Yeah, just a little different, a little more experience, I would say. We still have Justin [Mascoll] outside that's a freshman, and a few more freshman pieces. But I would say, just the experience we have and just being on that team last year and not finishing the way we wanted to, I think it's definitely going to help us as we finish, hopefully well, this year.

Q. When you went through the quarterback switch, what was that like? And what has Trevor [Lawrence] brought to the offense as a freshman? And does he play like a freshman now, or could you describe him to us?

WR HUNTER RENFROW: That quarterback switch seemed like three years ago. I mean, it seems like so much time has passed. But I would say that, yeah, I mean, Trevor has had 13 games under his belt. And so he's a freshman, I guess, still, but he plays like a sophomore.

He's had a whole year under his belt. And he's really just gotten better every week. And that's the thing I would say about Trevor is, every week, he's come and he's gotten better. And just seeing his preparation from week to week. I got to spend some time with him in the quarterback room. And so just seeing from the third week to the fourth week to the fifth week, just how he slowed everything down, how he was able to process everything and really just command the attention of the team.

I think, after Kelly [Bryant] left, it was just a big improvement from that standpoint, Trevor kind of getting all the guys together and leading the charge.

Q. Dabo, is everybody on the roster here present and accounted for academically, eligible otherwise?

COACH SWINNEY: Yes, everybody is here. We've got -- we do have an issue that we're dealing with. And, you know, I think that the best thing is to just be transparent in that. This time of year, they obviously do -- I mean, we test all year long. But, on Thursday, Dan Radakovich was notified by the NCAA we had three guys that, you know, had a -- there was an issue with their drug testing. And so been dealing with that since Thursday.

And just -- I think that the biggest thing is to make sure that, you know, everybody understands. Because I've had guys fail drug tests before. And, usually, when you

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say a guy fails a drug test, people write their own stories. And they have their own innuendoes and their own narratives, and those type of things. And, a lot of times, those things are accurate.

But, in this case, I think it's important, very important, that the message is accurate and that the truth is told because these are three great young men, three great young men, that I believe in and that I know, without a doubt, have not intentionally done anything to jeopardize their opportunity or this team. And I want to make that real clear before I even give you their names, because I know that's the story.

But the letter that came from the NCAA said that these three young men had a slither, a trace of some substance called Ostarine. I have no idea what Ostarine is, O-s-t-a-r-i-n-e. But I have become almost an expert in it in the last three days. There's plenty of stuff y'all can look at. But I would be willing to bet that there's a likelihood that, if they tested all of us right now, we might all -- or some of us have something in our system that we have no idea how it got there -- a slither, a trace, a fraction. All right?

This particular substance can come from anything. And these three players have no clue -- in fact, they thought it was a joke when I called them. They have no clue how this has gotten in their system. It could come from hair products. It could come from a cream. It could come from protein. It could come from a product that you order or buy online that you think there's nothing wrong with it. It could be anything. Literally, it could be a drink -- something in a drink. It literally could be anything, as I have come to learn.

And, in fact, I think there's been 40 or so athletes over the past year or so that have had to deal with this same exact thing. And several have later come back to be vindicated. They had no idea. Then they found out where it came from.

So that's what we're in the process of doing. We're trying -- we're going to do everything we can to figure out if it is in the system. Heck, I don't know. I mean, who's to say that it is there? I mean, that's what we're being told, but there's -- they all will have legal representation, and there will be a process to go through to find out.

But where we are right now is we got the three letters. And they have the -- this trace. And so the next step is there's a B sample. And the B sample, they will test that. And we probably won't know until Wednesday or Thursday on that. So we're just kind of at the mercy of the process. And then there's an appeal after that, but that doesn't really help with this game. Maybe it helps for next week or, you know, next year, whatever. But that's what we're dealing with right now.

But I want to be very clear that these guys, this is not street drugs. This is nothing

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like that. But the players are Braden Galloway, Zach Giella, and Dexter Lawrence.

Obviously, Dexter is a starter and a very, very significant player on our team. Even though Zach hasn't played as much and Braden is a freshman, they're still missing out on an opportunity that they have worked extremely hard for.

And, again, I don't know how -- if it even is in their system, how it got there. But I do know that these three young men have not intentionally done anything. And there's, again, plenty of precedent where the same thing has happened across the country with other people. So, you know, there's a process in place. And we'll work through that.

But, from a team standpoint, we have to get our team ready to play football. We got to get our team ready to play our best four quarters of the season. That's our goal. So we have to prepare as if it's an injury and get the next guy ready. And that's exactly what we're going to do. So that's -- I think it's just best, again, to be transparent and honest. Because I don't want there to be any speculation at all on what we're dealing with.

That's exactly what we're dealing with. And I don't really know what else I can say about it other than I love all three of these guys. They're three special young people. And, again, I know they've not intentionally done anything. And, again, this is a hair of a trace of whatever this substance is.

And so we'll deal with it accordingly, hope for the best, hope that the B sample will come back and they'll be cleared to play. But, if not, we treat it as an injury. We've got to get ready to move forward. And our goal has not changed, just to play the best four quarters of the season.

Q. Just to be clear so we understand that, are you expecting to get some clarity on the B sample before the Cotton Bowl?

COACH SWINNEY: Yes. Probably Wednesday or Thursday.

Q. And then I know it's something you've discussed about at length during the course of the season. I don't want to belabor it. But both teams made quarterback switches, and both teams made the Playoffs. In your case, you had a veteran starter coming back. How difficult was that decision, and what were the factors that played into it, in your mind?

COACH SWINNEY: Yeah, it was a very difficult decision, for sure, because, you know, you've got a guy that has won for you and all that. But, at the same time, you know, your team changes every year. And, at the end of the day, my job is to play the best guys.

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After four games, we felt like Trevor [Lawrence] deserved the opportunity to start the next game. I didn't know where it would go from there, but our quarterback decided that he wanted to move on. And so that changed the dynamics for our team.

But, really, just performance, really nothing more than that. Just how he had played after four games. And, in particular, the game at Georgia Tech that we had just witnessed because it was close going into the season. And then, after four games, we just felt like that he deserved the opportunity to run out there first. And it's not that Kelly [Bryant] would not have played. He would have definitely played and may have ended up going back. Who knows? But that's just where we were at that time. And so really nothing more than that went into the decision.

Q. Coach, Charlie Waters played at Clemson and played here and also played for Coach [Gene] Stallings here. And he said that you remind him a lot of Coach Stallings. Giving admiration for Coach Stallings, what does it mean to hear someone say that about you?

COACH SWINNEY: Well, that's kind of surreal for me to just even hear you say that because, in my seven years with Coach Stallings -- and y'all have heard me tell Stallings stories a lot.

His favorite all-time player was Charlie Waters. He used to talk about Charlie Waters all the time. I didn't have a clue who -- I mean, I knew Charlie Waters when he was a Cowboy, but I didn't know much more about Charlie Waters than that other than Coach Stallings every year would talk about Charlie Waters.

"Brother, hey, he couldn't run, he couldn't do -- I tried to cut him every year, but we couldn't cut Charlie Waters because he was smarter than everybody else, he played faster than everybody else, he saw it, he anticipated." And he would brag on Charlie Waters and his knowledge as a player.

I didn't know until I got to Clemson that Charlie Waters came from Clemson. So, really, kind of neat. And I've had a chance to meet him once or twice. So really special. That's another great thing for me personally that we're here in Dallas is I know Coach Stallings will be able to come and be at the game and, hopefully, maybe can make it to practice. He's just down the road there in Paris. So that's kind of neat, too. Coach Stallings' grandson is with us. And it was actually in the Cotton Bowl that Coach Stallings, his Texas A&M team, beat Alabama and Coach [Bear] Bryant early in his career. So it's pretty neat to be in this bowl.

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