



## Clemson Media Day

Thursday, December 27, 2018  
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



### QUESTIONS FOR HEAD COACH DABO SWINNEY

*Q. It's now Thursday and everybody wants to know if you have heard from the NCAA about the three players.*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Not yet. Should hear something today. But as of 8:09 -- of course, it's early. I think the place is somewhere in L.A., so they're about two hours from where we are. So we'll see. Hopefully today some time.

*Q. Coach, it's old hat for you guys to show up and do these things now. Can you talk about the preparation you guys are going through? Has anything changed? Is it just the same 'ol, same 'ol, day of the week, name of the week kind of thing?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Well, the timing changed. Dealing with Christmas, that's been a little different. And as far as the -- again, just moving the game up, that's changed a little bit of the length of time to prep by a couple days. So that's really the biggest change, is just kind of managing Christmas this time as opposed to the last few times that we've been in this game.

But it's been fun. It really has. It's been a great experience. I really have enjoyed all of it, honestly. And I've been very intentional with that, to just truly enjoy the journey. I've tried to challenge our guys. And just all of it, the preparation, our meetings, our practices, just spending time with these guys because we know we're not going to have much longer with this group.

Hopefully it goes our way Saturday night, but this could be our last time together with these guys. Hopefully we can earn one more game. But this has been an incredibly special group of young people to be around and just the daily grind of hanging with these guys and watching them all season has been just a real joy.

So our prep has been really good in Clemson. It has been really good here. The Cotton Bowl folks have been amazing. They've just made this such an easy experience for us. They have taken great care of us from the transportation, the police escorts, just being able to get to and from practice, to be able to stay on schedule with our itinerary. All those things have been really, really good.

And to be able to practice here, I mean, this has been amazing because this is very different obviously. So to get acclimated to it I think has been a positive for our guys. But overall, great experience.

*Q. Ian Book yesterday was talking about the privilege of pressure. I assume you*

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*pretty much see things the same way there?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, I think it is a privilege when you're in situations like this that are so-called "pressure." At the end of the day, I always say it's a football game. It's important to all of us. We put in a tremendous amount of work. Both teams want to win, I promise you, to the nth degree. But somebody's going to lose; somebody's going to win. And if we're fortunate enough to win, I mean, Notre Dame has had an amazing year. If they ended up winning, we've had an amazing year.

And you can't let the pressure of a moment steal your joy, you know? I think the biggest focus is just stay focused on the joy of doing, you know? The fact that we're getting the opportunity to do this that very few people get. And the joy of competing at the highest level, I mean, this is what it's all about.

So, yeah, when you have this type of "pressure," it is a privilege because that means that you are really getting a chance to experience something and be a part of something that's unique and something you know you're going to remember for the rest of your life.

*Q. If you had to put a percentage on it or the way you're looking at Dexter's [Lawrence] availability coming up, how are you feeling about the chances of him playing? How are you trying to move forward and prepare as you get a couple days away?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I have no idea. I have no clue. But as far as our team, you know, we move forward as if, like I said Monday, it's an injury. If they say he can play, boom, that will be a cherry on top.

But we've got a bunch of good players. And Albert Huggins is a co-starter for us anyway. I mean, he's a great, great talent. And I don't have any doubt that he'll step in and do a great job for us, as will Nyles [Pinckney] and Jordan [Williams]. So just more opportunity for those guys. No different than any other position. If you have an injury or somebody can't play for whatever reason, you get the next guy ready.

So as a football coach, that's all we can control. That's how we've gone into the week. So hope to hear something today, but we've prepared fully to go without him.

*Q. Where did that substance come from?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I don't have time to worry about that. We've got a game to play. We got a whole team of people who will figure that stuff out. But we spend a

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lot of time with it over the past weekend while we were off when I first got notified last Thursday. So we're going to look at anything and everything. I mean, because it could literally come from anything.

The only thing I know is these guys have not intentionally done anything. That I know. If it's in their system, how it got in there, I have no clue of that. But we'll have to figure that out some way, somehow it could come from anything, anything, literally.

***Q. Just wondering if you are surprised you still have Tony Elliott and Brent Venables on your staff and they're not head coaches somewhere at this point.***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Not really. I think everything is on God's timing. I think Brent -- he's had several opportunities to be a head coach. He just hasn't had the right opportunity that has gotten him fired up. Brent's not going to do anything if he can't be fully passionate about it. So that's just kind of how he's wired. He loves what he does. He's the best at what he does.

But we got a bunch of guys on our staff that are going to be great head coaches. Tony, you said, Jeff Scott. We got a bunch of guys. We've got [Brandon] Streeter. We got several guys. You go over on the other side of the ball, I think Todd Bates and Mike Reed would be great head coaches if they got the opportunity. I can go on and on and on. I've got a bunch of guys on my support staff that we're going to look back 15, 20 years from now and they're going to be great head coaches.

So, you know, I don't know. And several of these guys have had some opportunities. It just hasn't been the right fit for them to walk away from where they are. But I love to see my staff get opportunities that they want. And at some point, that will happen for them.

***Q. Do you think this is going to be another BYOG (bring your own guts) game, minus the rain?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** It's definitely BYOG game, ain't no doubt. They all are. We won't have a hurricane in here for sure, I don't think. This is definitely a game that's going to take a lot of guts and courage, a lot of heart. And, again, those are things individually you have to bring yourself.

***Q. Back to Albert Huggins, can you talk about the process he went through since he came to Clemson and what it took for him to buy into where he's at now?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Well, obviously, a really talented player coming out of high school down in Orangeburg (South Carolina). He was a defensive end, and that's

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kind of what he wanted to play; but, pretty quickly, we realized he wasn't a defensive end. His mind was saying defensive end, but his body was saying D-tackle. So it took a little while to transition him and for him to really kind of buy into that.

He's unbelievably strong. He might be the strongest guy, but he's in the top two or three, probably him and [Gage] Cervenka. His strength is unbelievable across the board in all of his numbers. So he's just got a lot of natural gifts for the position. But it took a little while for him to buy in. And then just -- I don't think he was as focused on doing what it was going to take to be a great player at this level. I think he had just kind of always been the bigger, stronger guy. And now, you know, he's got a bunch of other big, strong guys around him that I think, early on, worked harder, were more committed, more focused, more disciplined, that loved the meetings, loved the off-season, all that stuff, whereas, Albert [Huggins] did everything that he needed to do. He's a great kid. He's always been a great kid. He just wasn't an above-and-beyond guy.

But a lot of guys are like that when they come in as freshmen or sophomores, but the light kind of went on for him after that sophomore year. And his junior year, he started to transition maturity-wise into, hey, all right, if I'm going to be a great player, I've got all these tools. I got to -- I've got to prepare a little bit better. And that's what he's done. And it's been awesome to see the transformation in him. I've seen many, many players that the light just comes on, and that's what's happened with Albert.

He's bought in. He's put the work in. He's grinded. And then the fact that, you know, he stayed. I mean, because when you're as talented -- I mean, Albert, he's a high-NFL-caliber player, big time. And the fact that he stayed to be in a rotation with Dexter [Lawrence] and Christian [Wilkins]. I mean, those are two first-round guys for sure. And then you got Albert, who's -- he's not far off of that. He's a really, really, again, high-level guy for the next level.

And the fact that he stayed and bought into just playing in the rotation of those three guys, all of them have worked well together. I'm really proud of him. And, hey, you hate it for Dexter in this situation he's dealing with, but, man, what an opportunity for Albert to really make a statement here down the stretch.

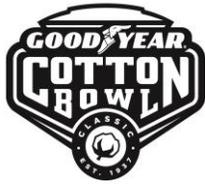
*Q. When you played Notre Dame in 2015, that was kind of a pivotal game for your program at the time. Can you kind of share your reflections from that night and also discuss how that's kind of springboarded your program to where it's gotten to?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, I don't really see that as a springboard. I think the springboard to our program was 2010, to be honest with you. That sounds crazy. We won six games that year. But that's kind of, for me, when I knew that we really had the

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foundation in place, just how I saw our team handle that season, how they competed. And then, the very next year, we won the ACC in '11. To me, that was kind of the -- we won the division in '09 and then we come back in '11 and win the league, win ten games for the first time. Now we're at eight 10-win seasons in a row. To me, that was kind of the pivotal moment. You know, Tajh Boyd taking over in '11 and leading us to that first title. We just kind of went from there. But, certainly, that game in '15 was one of those steps.

I think we've made a lot of steps along the way, and that was definitely one of those steps, because it was game day. Both teams had been off for 16 days, if I remember correctly. For whatever reason, we had this crazy layoff. And I believe we had just won up at Louisville, a big win. We knew we had a good team. It was Deshaun's [Watson] sophomore year, and we were somewhere top ten maybe, nine or ten. And they were two or three or somewhere up in the top five, if I remember correctly.

It was one of those games where, if you lose it, you weren't going to be out of it, it was early in the season; but if you win the game, you got a chance to really position yourself well at that stage of the season. But it was just a lot of emotion in that game. It was game day. And Clemson people had been looking forward to that game since it was announced because they hadn't played them since the late '70s, Joe Montana, last-minute drive, big shocker there. So it was just a lot of buildup to it, a lot of energy, a lot of emotion for both teams. And then it was a hurricane on top of it.

I literally remember late -- sometime in the third quarter, you literally could not see across the field. I mean, it was unbelievable. But it was one of the funnest games I've ever been a part of. It's an epic game. It's a shame that somebody had to lose.

But for it to come down to a two-point play, and I still have visions of Ben Boulware slapping his head and doing forward flips all across the field, getting up, celebrating. It was -- it was an awesome moment. Travis Blanks and Kevin Dodd, all those guys that were in on that play, it was special.

And I think that was, again, a national win for us, if you will, out of conference, that gave that particular team a nice little boost going into the rest of the season. But there were a lot of big wins in that season, for sure. There was some big ones, a lot of close games.

*Q. Given that this is your fourth straight year in the College Football Playoff, Notre Dame has never been here before, just how much does that experience help you guys?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Well, I think we're a veteran team, for sure. And I think

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experience is definitely good. But it still doesn't have anything to do with the game. I think, at the end of the day, you got to play well. You know, it's just as simple as that.

When we got here in 2015, we had not been in this situation either. And we beat a really good Oklahoma team, and Baker Mayfield and all that. You have to play well in this game. It's a few plays in games like this. So I'm thankful that we've got an experienced team. But I still -- it still comes down to how you play on that particular day.

***Q. As a head coach, do you remember what was going through your mind in the moments leading up to kickoff for your very first playoff?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah. We try to prepare for all these games the same, to be honest with you. You just obviously have a lot more time, but once we get into this point right here, this is Thursday for us, it becomes very routine. And there's just certain things that we do. This is obviously not routine. But when we're done with this and we get back to our meetings and practice today, it will be very, very routine for us all the way till kickoff. So, you know, it's exciting. You just embrace it. It's fun. This is what we all work hard to do, and there's only four teams that are getting a chance to experience this particular setting. But, you know, we try to treat it like any other game.

***Q. As far as just how unique the situation is with Dexter [Lawrence] and the other two guys, how difficult is it to be as transparent as you want to be when it comes to just what happened and how this whole thing kind of came about?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Not difficult at all. I can't be any more transparent. I really can't. I laid it out. Got a call on Thursday, "Here's what happened." The rest, I have no clue. I can't be any more transparent than that. This is exactly what it is. I've never heard of it. I could have easily said whatever violation for whatever rules, but I felt like, again, that it was important to be specific because I just -- I know that these guys have not intentionally done anything. So I don't know how more transparent I can be than that.

***Q. How has the independent research gone as far as just -- are you close to finding an answer?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** I'm focused on Notre Dame. That's it. That's my job, to coach the team. I'm not a chemist or scientist or nutritionist or AD or lawyer or any of that stuff. I'm the football coach, and that's it.

***Q. I know that you said you were focused on Notre Dame, but did you get a***

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*chance at all to see the TCU-Cal game last night?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I did not. I was at the Mavs game. So I was watching the Mavs and the Pelicans and watching J.J. Barea and Luka Doncic tear it up for the Mavs. It was awesome.

*Q. Dabo, you talked about, when you first got the Clemson job, you paid a visit to Texas. Mack Brown showed you around for two days. He's back in the ACC now at North Carolina. One, what do you remember about that visit to Texas back then? And, two, what do you think of Mack coming back to the ACC?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I'm super happy for Mack, he and Sally. I'm pumped that this is something that they -- I don't think he would have taken any other job but that job. I think it's a great way for him to finish on his own terms, the way he wants to finish, to help build their program back. I don't have any doubt he'll do that. He's going to be awesome for our league. I'm excited about the meetings, to be in that setting with Coach Brown.

But, specifically to your question, I got the job in December of '08. So we went through our very brief recruiting process that we had. We signed 12 guys that February. And I reached out to several coaches to try to go visit just, really, prominent head coaches that I didn't know but I felt like they did things the right way and I just wanted to go and pick their brain.

And Mack was the only one that said okay. And I didn't really know Mack, but I just remember calling him up and left a message. He called me back. And he was just very congratulatory. He said, "Man, I'm really happy for you. I actually kept up with you," which I thought was kinda cool that Mack Brown was paying attention to what the interim guy was doing at Clemson. He said, "Heck, yeah, come on out." And so I did, brought the whole staff.

And it was awesome. It was great. Their staff was very gracious. And I was just hoping to get a little bit of time with him, and he spent several hours with me. I'll always be so grateful for that. I mean, here's a guy that has been there, done that numerous times. And I just had a lot of specific things that I wanted to pick his brain on and took pages of notes and just had great conversation, and came away with some confirmation and came away with maybe some different thoughts as well. So it was just -- it was an incredibly meaningful meeting for me as we came back and really kind of kicked our new program off going into that first spring.

*Q. I remember you saying you still had the file marked "Mack Brown" that you sometimes looked at. What was the biggest takeaway you got from meeting with Mack or the biggest takeaways?*

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**COACH SWINNEY:** I don't know of the biggest takeaway, probably just be who I am. And just time management, that had been a real challenge. Going from the interim, as you can imagine, and just trying to figure out where I needed to put my time, because there's a lot of plates spinning. So he was just -- he was great in all aspects. That was probably two of the biggest things right there, was just kind of managing my time a little better, being able to say no, just kind of talking to him about how he managed some certain things and requests. It can be a little overwhelming. And then just being who I am.

*Q. Did you have a sore neck at all after your first practice in here from looking up at the Jumbotron all the time?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Not really, because I was out here on the field and I was a little frustrated. I think they should have put it on the bottom too. You know, I just looked up, and I couldn't see anything. I guess, if I stood on the sideline, maybe. I was kind of always out here on the field, and I couldn't really see anything.

*Q. With these types of games, is it nice to have a few days where you come in here and practice in the stadium so you get used to it instead of it being a brand-new experience on Saturday for you?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, especially for this situation. This is really unique, the lighting. I'm anxious to see the timing of when we play, what that's going to look like in here from a sun standpoint.

But it's really unique for your receivers, the way the lighting structure is in here, the punt catchers. Even your kickers and punter, I mean, they're not used to kind of having something over the top. But I'm going to tell you, we punted that thing. That's up there. It looks -- it's a lot higher than you think. I think just the magnitude of this building makes it look a little lower, but it's really high. But it's super cool.

Yeah, it's been great. And I think our focus has been good. We've had plenty of room to do what we need to do. We got a great weight room. We pretty much have had a workout every day too. So it's been nice.

*Q. You obviously have gone through this numerous times with your team, but do you ever allow yourself to have a moment or two where you are reminded of being a fan and you're like, hey, we're here, I'm coaching in the playoffs and I'm coaching against Notre Dame, a program you grew up watching, I'm assuming, as a younger coach or a younger person. I don't know if you were coaching in the '80s or not, but you never know.*

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*Do you ever let yourself have a moment or two where you're like, hey, this is kind of cool?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I was in high school in the '80s. I graduated '88, and then I went to Alabama. Absolutely, every day, every day. Every day, I have a moment. Every day, I get to walk on this field. Every day, I get to hop on the bus and watch those crazy people on those police motorcycles fly around and ride side to side. I mean, it's awesome. I just appreciate every aspect of it to the nth degree. I try to get my players to be the same because it's such a privilege to be here.

And I've been in college football now for a long time, since '89. I've had a lot of great experiences, and I have an appreciation for how fast it goes and how fleeting time is. And none of us are promised tomorrow. So absolutely, every day I wake up, I thank the good Lord for another day and for the opportunity to do what I do.

*Q. So the one big question I think a lot of us, if not all of us, here are really wondering: Carolina or Texas barbecue?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Let's see. I'm trying to think. I don't think I've had Texas barbecue yet. I don't think I've had. So I got to go with the smoking pig back in Clemson.

*Q. With the ascension of Travis Etienne this year, just your thoughts on how Tavien Feaster has kind of -- it seems like he's really remained positive, remained humble, hasn't been a problem as far as chemistry. And this is a guy that could probably be a featured back at most any other college in the country.*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Oh, No doubt about it. I mean, you know, Feaster is a starter for us and started a bunch of games over the last couple years, but was hurt in camp, was a little banged up in camp, and it took him a little while to get back to 100%. And Travis just took off and really won the job.

But, as I said, coming into the season, I felt like our backs were going to be a real strength for our team. That was the one position that I thought, when the season was over, people were going to say, man, what a year we've had at running back.

And we have. We're one of the top ten rushing teams in the country. And it's a credit to all those guys. Obviously, Travis has just been just amazing, unbelievable. Feaster, as he got healthy, has had some very impactful moments as well, as has Adam Choice.

For sure, the chemistry in that room is special. They're all close friends. They all

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support each other. I think all three of those guys will play at the next level. And I think if you look at any great team in the NFL, or any great team here, there's more than one guy. That's just the way it is. There's usually two or three guys that kind of carry the load together. And that's certainly the situation that we have here. But we're very confident in any of those guys going out there and being a starter for us at any particular time. But Travis has certainly separated himself and had an All-American-type season.

*Q. As far as Tavien [Feaster] specifically, would it have been easy for a guy like that to kind of go sideways a little bit with the way things have panned out with Travis [Etienne], with Tavien being the starter last year and probably figuring he would play his final two years looking to really do some big things as an individual here?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Well, I think in a world of individual, yeah, it would be easy. But this is -- we have a close team. And I think our culture is all about the right things. And, certainly, Tavien is a competitor. He knows his talent and we know his talent. He is a tremendous football player.

But he's a great young man, high character. At the end of the day, you got to compete. It's as simple as that. You get better. Wayne Gallman was a starter for the Giants last year, and they drafted Saquon Barkley. You know? I mean, you just go to work and you do your job. And you do it in a positive way to the very best of your ability and you stay confident in who you are. That's how you handle things. That's how you respond. You don't run from those challenges.

And I think that that's exactly what Tavien has done, is just taken advantage of his opportunities and shown up every day and competing his tail off. But he's got a bright, bright future, for sure.

*Q. Has Tavien [Feaster] discussed with you at all the possibility of maybe moving on to the NFL draft after this year?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** No, no.

*Q. I just wanted to ask about Hunter Renfrow. We've done this before, but, since he's arrived, how much of the program has changed and, of course, he's been a huge part of that. Not a reflection, so to speak, but just kind of the impact he's had on the program here these last four or five years.*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, so I guess he came in '14. That was his first year. He red-shirted that year. So he's had a heck of a run, that's for sure. It's been an amazing journey for him, both for our team and for him.

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But, I mean, he's had complete transformation physically, first of all. He was 155 pounds when he got to Clemson. And now he's a massive, strapping 182. So he's 27, 28, 30 pounds heavier than when he arrived. And he couldn't hardly bench the bar when he got to Clemson. I think he can maybe do 225 maybe five times now. So he's Hulk.

It's just amazing. He really is. I mean, he is one of the most unique stories that you will ever see in college football. And just a great young man. First of all, just a great teammate, and one of the hardest workers we've ever had. He's always the same guy. I've never seen him have a bad day, ever. Even when he's -- gets hurt or something like that, he just always has such an incredible spirit to him.

He loves his teammates, but he's the most normal person you would ever meet. You would never in a million years meet him and think that he -- and then watch a highlight of him and be like, that's that guy? You know? He's so unassuming, very humble. But I'm telling you, he has become a superstar on the field.

I mean, it's just absolutely incredible what he has done. We've had some amazing receivers come through Clemson. And we got a team full of them right now, but he's the most unique, without question. And has just been clutch time and time and time again, very skilled. He's fast. He's explosive. He's not a tall guy, but he plays long. He's got great length. His lateral ability is special.

And he's going to be to be a great pro, man. I mean, I can't wait to see -- the game is going to be easier for him at the next level because of the way the rules are. I'm telling you, he's going to be -- what you're seeing right now, he's going to be beyond that at the next level. The guy is just a brilliant football player. I can't wait to see him and what he's going to do after Clemson.

But his transformation has been awesome, and he's been a part of every step of the way with our program as it's grown.

*Q. And then the other one I want to ask you about is Tee Higgins, his development this year and just your perception of how much better he has gotten, the impact he's had on your team.*

**COACH SWINNEY:** He was obviously a highly recruited guy coming out of high school, very talented, as we knew. But, really, just -- and had a really good freshman year, but just needed to get in the weight room. He was a basketball guy that needed to become a football guy.

And that's exactly what he's done. So the experience he got last year was priceless

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for him because he had a vision for what it looked like and what he needed to do to become a great player at this level. And, man, he put the work in in the off-season, very focused, very mature, high character, and just a young man that knows exactly what he wants. I'm really proud of him, good student.

But he has grinded this entire season. Boy, has he been dominant. To me, he has been as good as anybody out there. He's a big-time boundary receiver for us.

***Q. Now, there's been a huge controversy going on right now. And that controversy is, who has better hair, me [Justin Falcinelli] or Trevor Lawrence?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Let me think about that. I'm going to have to go with you, Falci, because, simply, you're the more mature. You're a little older, a little more seasoned. Your hair has been around longer. So I think that, you know, you don't really put as much effort into it, so it comes a little more natural to you. And he probably has all kind of products and things like that to make his look beautiful, and you're just kind of all natural. So I'm going to give the nod -- shout-out to the O.L.

***Q. What's the latest on Dexter [Lawrence], and how has your team been handling it?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** We don't know anything. There's no latest. Should know something today. We have just been preparing like it's an injury.

***Q. When you see him here talking to the media today and saying "I can't do anything about it, but I wanted to make sure to come talk," what message do you think that sends?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** I gave those three guys the option just because, you know, they don't want to be a distraction. And they know that if they walk in here, there's going to be a million of the same questions that they really can't answer. But Dexter [Lawrence] was pretty adamant that he wanted to come just simply because he's a leader on this team and he loves his teammates. And he's a very mature guy. And he has nothing to hide. The other guys don't either.

But, like I said, Dexter's role as a leader, he felt like it was important that he be here to support these guys.

***Q. He said when you called him that he said, "Are you crazy?" What did you feel like when you were calling them?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** I mean, I couldn't even believe it. I thought my AD was

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joking with me when he called. But, really, they all three had the same reaction, just total disbelief. So then it was just trying to ask questions, trying to get to the bottom of any possible way that it -- just kind of going back through anything, from a hair product to whatever, and then let Natalie [Honnen] and them kind of step in and take it from there.

It was tough because you know this is something that they've worked hard to be a part of, an incredible disappointment, just heartbroken and disbelief. And same with the parents and so forth. So it was a very difficult phone call.

***Q. Has he mentioned any appeal other than the B sample showing a different result couldn't be done before Saturday? Do you think the NCAA should change that rule so in the future they would be able to fix it in time?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Yeah, I think they have a process that's in place. I mean, my big thing, I think there should a common sense committee, to be honest with you. There should be a common sense committee that could look at this situation and say, "All right. Let's have some common sense here." But I don't think that's part of the process. I don't think that committee exists. I think it's just more of a set process, it is what it is, and we're all at the mercy of that process.

***Q. I spent some time with Dexter [Lawrence]. He has really been a stand-up guy through this whole ordeal. That's who he is?***

**COACH SWINNEY:** Dexter is one of the sweetest young people you'll ever meet in this world. He is an incredible young man, incredible. Great family, great student, great teammate. Your heart breaks for him, for sure.

But that's exactly who he is. I've been doing this a long time. And, trust me, I wouldn't stand up here and stand up for a guy that I didn't know without a shred of a doubt the type of person he is.

***Q. What are your thoughts on Number 23, Drue Tranquill, on the Notre Dame defense?***

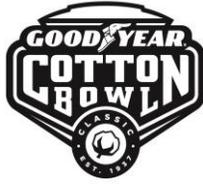
**COACH SWINNEY:** He's a great player. He's active. You can tell he's an unbelievable leader, really special young man as well. He's one of those Campbell guys like Christian Wilkins. This guy, he's just a winner. And you can tell that he's one of the heart and soul guys on that team, but heck of a player.

All those guys, I mean, their entire defense, this is the best defense we've played, for sure. They're very well-coordinated, very well-positioned, very seldom out of

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place, and don't give up hardly any big plays. But he's a sideline-to-sideline guy.

*Q. As far as those who are on the outside alleging something nefarious with those three guys, what would you say to those people?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** I'm not going to say anything. People can say whatever they want. It doesn't matter what anybody says. There's always going to be people that make their own judgments, and there's nothing to say to those people.

*Q. What does the All Black culture from the rugby team in Australia mean to the program?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** Well, I read that book a couple years ago. It was just -- the coach actually came through Clemson, which was really cool. I got that book. And I knew zero about the All Blacks until I read that book. And pretty fascinating to read the book and the culture that they have in place and how they've won so much games over the years.

And just little things, you know, how they clean the sheds, so to speak, after a world championship. So I just think that they've always done the little things probably better than everybody, and they've focused on their culture and take a lot of pride in that. So it was a great book for me to read.

*Q. How does a world champion rugby coach and a national champion football coach connect?*

**COACH SWINNEY:** He was in town visiting our rugby -- we have a club rugby team. And, for some reason, he was over here touring the States and doing something, and he came through Clemson. And the rugby coach at Clemson brought him over. And, again, I didn't have a clue who he was. I literally didn't know anything about him, took a picture with him. And so then fast-forward, this book gets sent to me. And I pick it up and I'm like, holy crap, that was that guy that was in my office. So I felt like an idiot then. So he was like Tom Landry of rugby or something.

### QUESTIONS FOR QB TREVOR LAWRENCE

*Q. How did Cartersville High School kind of get you going towards Clemson? What are your memories from back there?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** A lot of good memories. Met my best friends, obviously, growing up there and all that stuff.

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But just -- I had a really good coach and a bunch of really good coaches in high school that I'm still really close with today. So definitely helped a tiny bit, helped prepare me for moments like this. We have a lot to be thankful for sure.

*Q. Do they still reach out to you after big games?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** They're good. They know how busy I am. They're respectful of my time and how busy I am. But we'll talk. And they've been busy. We don't get talking time. But, when we do, it's nice to keep those relationships.

*Q. Obviously, you know, long line of successful Clemson quarterbacks. Do you go back and watch film of Deshaun Watson?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** We have a lot of off-season preparing and tapes and stuff to look at. Teaches us stuff like showing clips of what he did. So stuff like that.

But I haven't really just gone back and watched his games. Seen a lot of tapes.

*Q. Obviously, there's probably some of the same plays and things like that. Do you watch how they were executed by his teams?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Yeah. Definitely. The success that he had and that team had all the time he was here is definitely something to look at and look at what they were doing and take a little bit from that.

*Q. Do you talk to a lot of those former guys?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Not a ton. Me and Deshaun have talked a little bit. But not a ton, obviously, because he's busy playing and we're both in season right now. So it's tough. But, yeah, he reached out to me little bit earlier in the season.

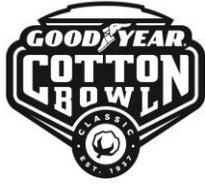
*Q. So this is not a first experience for this team but it is for you. How's the moment been so far?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** It's been really good. It's been cool to just be out here in Texas. And, obviously, in a stadium like this it's pretty awesome. Unbelievable. But yeah, it's just been cool to see all the guys. We've been having fun hanging out but also to see how focused we are. We know what we're here for. But also being able to enjoy it and

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be out here the whole week and kind of just soak it up.

*Q. It's been an interesting time for you to get to where you are right now. Talk about how things are now compared to how they started with the growth over the course of the season and some of the things that have gone on.*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Obviously, things are different enough than at the beginning of the season. Things have changed a lot. But just helped me grow a ton, though. I feel like it's helped the team grow a lot as well. We've had to go through stuff. And it's helped us to go through some adversity and made us stronger. So it's all been for our good.

*Q. Talk about your relationship with your wide receivers. Obviously, you have a pretty good one with Tee Higgins.*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Those guys are a close group. And they're just fun to be around. They're goofy, just like to have fun. But they work hard. And they're smart guys, so it's cool just having a group like that. They're so -- you know, they're not selfish. They're selfless. So it's just cool, just playing with guys like that. We have so many good receivers. And, obviously, only one guy can catch the ball at a time. It's cool seeing how they've been supporting each other and look at each other.

*Q. Any good or interesting advice you've gotten from these guys along the way as far as prepping for the game coming up on Saturday and just everything else surrounding it?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** I think just getting ready to play in this game. Just another game. So I don't really think that's been a big thing. People have been trying to help me just getting ready to play. But, as far as little details offensively, obviously, older guys like Hunter [Renfrow] and other people have been talking and trying to figure things out because they've been in games like this. But that's more specifically not just atmosphere and all that stuff. I think I'll be fine with that stuff.

*Q. When you look back at this season as a whole, where do you think is the point where you started to grow into the leader you've become?*

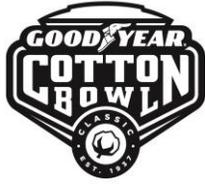
**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** I think the whole time. It took off feeling like I didn't want to step on anyone's toes, trying to respect and all that stuff. But when I got started, I feel like it gave me more freedom and just more comfortable being a leader.

*Q. All the stuff going on with Dexter, you think about the stuff that happened*

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*with Kelly [Bryant] earlier in the year, the tragedy with C.J. [Fuller], how did you manage to take all the things that have been speed bumps in this road and stay undefeated and get to this point? It seems like you guys have kept your focus forward.*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** It's been a tough season. It's been awesome just what we've done and the success we've had. But, yeah, there's been some crazy things and tough things happen along the way. But, like I said, I think everything has just grown us together. And we've all driven towards that common purpose. We got a team full of guys that love each other and want to play for each other. And it helps a lot.

*Q. Obviously, regardless of what happens, it's been a pretty crazy year for you, culture shock of the whole thing. What would you tell people was the difference between what you thought you were getting when you came to Clemson and what you've now realized since you've been at Clemson?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** I mean, to be in games like this and to be playing at this point was one of my dreams and goals. So it's not that I didn't expect it. But I guess, just like I said before, how everything happened, how everything unfolded has definitely been different than I would have thought. But, I mean, it's just been awesome. Really blessed to be in a situation. Really helped. And I'm grateful to everyone who helped me get here and everyone who is with me here now.

*Q. With these wide receivers, you've got so many. Do they all try to get a leg up on the other one and see if they can get a few more balls?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** That's the funny thing. We have a group of guys who are so selfless, it's awesome. Obviously, we have so many good receivers. Only one guy can get the ball at a time. The way I've seen them just throughout the year, just being so selfless, it's been awesome.

*Q. Did Hunter [Renfrow] use his veteran advantage to coax you to throw it to him more?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Yeah, no. You know Hunter. He's just gets open so well. He's a great player. Really smart. So that's the cool thing about me and Hunter is we're always on the same page, and we kind of feel things out and adjust a little in game.

*Q. Last time you talked to us after the game, you were kind of excited to get away from it all and get in the playbook more?*

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**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Yeah. It's Thursday. We're getting close. I'm just excited to do that. And it's been fun being out here a week. We've been preparing the whole time, but now just to kind of narrow it down a little bit and really get focused. Yeah, it's exciting. We're getting close.

*Q. Have any of the other quarterbacks reached out to you, Tajh [Boyd] or Deshaun [Watson] to give you a couple pointers.*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Not for this game. Deshaun reached out for the South Carolina game. I see Tajh around. But no, they haven't reached out for this one.

*Q. I was working on this thing about Peyton Manning because when I watch your body and how you throw and how you move, you just remind me a lot of a young Peyton Manning. Do you see any of that in yourself? I notice you wear the same number he wore at Tennessee?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** I wouldn't say I necessarily see that in myself. But he was definitely one -- he was my favorite quarterback growing up. And I grew up a Tennessee fan and grew up watching him and the bolts and stuff.

*Q. Is that why you wear 16?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Yeah, you were right.

*Q. Anything that changed since the beginning of this year, just physically, I'm better at this or I've put on weight, any changes in you?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** Yeah, there's been a lot of changes. I would say more just mentally. Understanding things better. That kind of stuff. I haven't really put on any weight. It's tough in the season. But no, just understanding and making better decisions, when to throw the ball away, stuff like that.

*Q. Coach said that you were exceptionally mature coming in. You already had such a good overall command of offenses. Why are you like that? What was it in your young life that's allowed you to be more mature from a football perspective?*

**QB TREVOR LAWRENCE:** My parents, just how they brought me up. They've always instilled that in me. And just never letting anything get too big or too little. They've always instilled that. Just stay level-headed. And just the Lord has really blessed me with that trait and personality just to be able to handle things. So just really blessed.

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### QUESTIONS FOR RB TRAVIS ETIENNE

*Q. Let me ask you a loaded question. Who is your favorite offensive lineman on the team?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** They all are. I don't have favorites. I don't get into favorites.

*Q. I told you it would be a loaded question.*

*That performance in Pittsburgh, you set the tone early.*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** It was just really great just to go out there and score on the first play. Coach is always talking about starting the game early. There's no other way you can catch that earlier than that, just to go out there and have that. Credit to my offensive line coming out there ready to play.

*Q. Do you take pride in the fact that of the top 10 running backs in the nation you got the fewest carries, 176 carries. Everyone else has more than 200. I think it speaks to running back depth, but what are your thoughts on that?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** I didn't know that. But I just speak to the group of guys I have around me. Most definitely just them being able to come in and keep me fresh and gives me the ability to go hard each and every play and have success I have.

*Q. You set all kinds of records this year. How do you think that's going to play against the Notre Dame defense? How are you going to get around these guys?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** I mean, previous factor I get -- it's a new game. I had zero against them the first time we played them. So I just bring my A game and be ready to play each and every play. They're a very physical defense. They have a very physical front. And I mean, I just have to be ready just to play. Be ready for a physical, tough, old school game.

*Q. What challenges do you think Notre Dame can present to you on Saturday?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** They represent a lot of challenge. They've got a great defense, and they're going to give you a big hit. So you've got to take what they give you. And they're a very physical defense. And you're going to see -- they're just very physical. So four physical quarters of the game are going to be tough. And, I mean, you have to bring it each and every play.

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*Q. What do you think of the whole thing? People don't know where the Ostradine came from?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** Yeah. I didn't hear about it until Coach brought it up. It could be from everything from daily products you use each and every day. It can come from that. So it's really eye opening. And you got to watch what you put in your body when you go to the store to buy hair products or acne stuff or whatever. You just have to be more aware of your surroundings.

*Q. What are the challenges of trying to block out the noise with your teammates?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** We just have to treat it like an injury, next man up, and rally around them and win the game for them and just try to put them on our back and just take them with us.

*Q. We talked about the stadium. You've got the 60-yard scoreboard overhead. As a running back tell me about this track. Is this a fast track?*

**RB TRAVIS ETIENNE:** Yes. It definitely felt fast through the week throughout practices. It's definitely a fast track.

### QUESTIONS FOR WR HUNTER RENFROW

*Q. What an incredible run you've had. Every year you've played, you've been in a major bowl game. Even the Russell Athletic Bowl that first year. And now you're back in this. It's got to be nice knowing the final ride you have a chance to get back to, quite possibly, another national championship.*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Yeah. It's been a blessing just to be in contention every year to go play for a national championship.

We won the one in '16. But just having that chance is special. It's something that when I was in Socastee (South Carolina), I dreamed about but never really knew because the Playoff wasn't even a thing, I guess, when I was in high school. So, just to be able to have the opportunity is pretty neat.

*Q. When you guys look back, have you ever had a chance to really kind of sit back and think about what you've gone through so far? I mean, just because of the National Championship, the catch, you know, all that?*

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**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** You take a second. But you get refocused real quick. We have more goals this season. And that's something we have. We hit goals, and we have to make new ones. And so it's something I will look back on in a number of years and look back on. But right now we just focus on finishing.

*Q. What's the difference between this team and last year's team? Because the way you guys ended was not the way you wanted, especially the performance.*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** A lot of people make a big deal about last year's team, how we didn't finish the way we wanted. And we didn't. But I thought we had a great year. And I thought that we were in position. And the way we practiced last year, we just did -- somewhere on game day, we just didn't perform well. So I think we can take lessons from that, from last year in that game. Everything is working towards that game, not just having a good week of preparation. We have to have a great week of preparation. But we have to have -- we have got to focus in on game day instead of losing.

*Q. Where did you see Notre Dame in defense compared to some of the other teams you guys faced this year?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** I think they're the best defense we faced. They're in the Playoff for a reason. Extremely talented, extremely elite in that regard.

And so we're going to have to play our best four quarters. If not, then it might end up like last year.

*Q. When you have a chance to go and play here at the Cotton Bowl, it's one of those stadiums, one of those places. It's historical. What's it mean to you and that you get a chance to play this game?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** The first day coming in here it was hard to focus at practice. You're just kind of looking around at the jumbo board and looking at the ceiling, all the lights. And everything in here just so nice.

And then, when you really start thinking about it, it's just like at Socastee. The field is the same length. I was looking -- the lines took me back to being in high school with my dad on Saturday. We painted lines on the practice field. At the end of the day, it's the same. We talk about that a lot. But I just think about Monday, just looking at the line and taking me back to where it all started.

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*Q. Your dad is probably still painting the lines?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** For a few more years.

*Q. Hunter, what kind of advantage do you guys have? What kind of advantage do you have having played here before?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Obviously, you'd like to think you have experience. But, at the end of the day, experience doesn't win on the field.

People make a big deal about the experience we have. And it's something that's going to bode well for us in the preparation process. But, when the ball kicks off at game time, all that goes out the window and you have to go and play well.

*Q. Do you want to be known as the best walk-on, with what you did after you got your scholarship, because you won that trophy this year.*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Yeah, that was a cool trophy. Burlsworth was generous and just an awesome event and awesome award and what it represents.

But yeah, I mean, I just try to be my best whether I was a walk-on or on scholarship. Really didn't matter. Just trying to feel like I belonged with the team and have my teammates count on me.

*Q. How do you not think about, as a team, getting back to Alabama, not beating them, per se, but getting back to having a chance?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Yeah. I mean, we have our five goals at the beginning of the season -- win the opener and then the State and then the Atlantic and ACC -- or I guess it would be the division and then State and then ACC and then the closer. So we really just focus on those. We try to keep it simple. We try to not have a broad brush and just kind of throw it against the wall and see what sticks. We try to have specific goals that we want to accomplish. And, if we can attack those goals one goal at a time, we'll be successful.

*Q. You might have the most famous play in the short history of the College Football Playoff. What's the best commemoration you either have maybe at home or that you've seen with that catch?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** I feel like, as a whole, just all the Clemson fans

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coming up and getting me to sign "Sports Illustrated." So I can kind of have a little bit of me with them and a little bit of that team with them. Because that play just represents so much. Not just me and Deshaun [Watson] off the line, but everybody on that team. I was part of that team. That's kind of how we wanted to finish, and we did. So it was fun.

*Q. After years now, like you mentioned, being kind of an evolution of Clemson, how much has it changed since you started here and where is it now?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Yeah. I've talked to some people about the Notre Dame game in 2015, how that was such a big game for us and kind of a turning point. Whereas, early in a lot of seasons leading up to that year, we would lose early and we kind of regrouped and went on to have a successful year. But that year we did lose early and beat Notre Dame. And we were able to kind of stay on track and get to 4-0. And then -- we eventually went 14-0 and lost the National Championship.

But this is building. I don't think that this surprised anyone. I think maybe on the outside. But that's just how Coach Swinney is. He said the other day that his dream is just getting started. This isn't the top of the mountain. We have some mountains to climb. So it's just been cool to be a part of it.

*Q. For you, maybe the running joke is the guy is still in college. For you does it feel like how quickly or maybe how much have you been able to enjoy the process?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** It has. I understand. They're warranted. I've been here for a while. But I've been here just as long as Christian Wilkins and Kendall Joseph and a lot of those of guys. But I feel like time flies when you're having fun.

But it has been a long time. Because I've had one group of friends when I was a walk-on, lived one life. And then I got some notoriety and they graduated. And I have another group of friends. So it's been cool to have two experiences in college.

*Q. Report on the guy you go up against, Tee Higgins. What makes him so good, and what's your perspective?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** He's special. A lot. Like I feel like he has body control.

But he also has feet like Deon [Cain] last year. And he's kind of a hybrid between those two, but he's special. I saw early on from my first days whenever he first got here, that he gets faster when he gets to the wall.

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And I think that's -- it's interesting to see. You throw up a deep ball. And is he going to get it? Is he going to get it? And he just accelerates to it. And, when you do that, you know you're special.

*Q. Any time you go to a bigger game, you're treated great. What's been the best part about coming here?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** It's been unbelievable. I think it's fun to practice in here. I know it rained yesterday. So to be able to have a place like this to practice out of the rain, get a lot of work done.

*Q. How is this bowl game different from the other experiences you have, and does it change the fact that it's your last one? Or could be your last one?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** I don't think it changes that it's my last one. I think that we try to go play our best four quarters every game regardless. As far as experience, it's first class. It's awesome. Yeah, this is one of the best in college football. I heard that coming in. And everything I have seen has agreed with that.

And so just being in a place like this, being able to practice in a facility like this is pretty special. So they do everything top of the line. It's pretty cool.

*Q. What do you think it is about these games late in the season? Clemson has relied on you so much in the past to kind of make big plays? What's your mindset? And why do you think the team counts on you for these big bowl games?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** Hopefully, because I prove it in practice. I don't try to do anything special or do anything different in the playoff or at the end of the season or any other time. I try to play every game to the best of my ability.

I think that maybe they come to me more because I just try to stick to the fundamentals, just with what got me here. I don't try to do too much. I just try to go do what I do on the practice field every day. So I don't know.

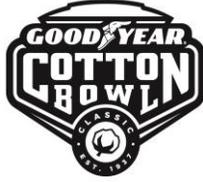
*Q. We've heard about your journey from a walk-on to where you are now. Especially in these moments, do you pinch yourself even more and take the time to reflect on your whole journey? And how would you do that?*

**WR HUNTER RENFROW:** You have a great appreciation playing for games like

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this and having a career which started as a walk-on. Nothing is guaranteed. It's just every day just coming out and just having fun.

### QUESTIONS FOR DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS

*Q. How much does this experience playing, the fact that you've been here, been in cities like this, how much do you think it's going to help you out to get through the week and all the controversy? How much does being in AT&T Stadium inspire you for Sundays, to come back and see this place in an NFL jersey?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** No, I mean, it's definitely -- experience is always a good thing. It can be a good and bad thing. A little complacency can set in. I feel in our case, got a lot of veteran leaders who know how to handle themselves and kind of know how to take care of business and show up and grind every day, put their best foot forward and bring the young guys along, and so that's definitely great. And it's just fun.

This is an awesome venue. The Cotton Bowl does a good job. It's an awesome venue. It's going to be a lot of fun. A joy practicing on it and you can see the lights and the cameras and just everything. Everything gets going and it looks really good, looks really cool. It will be fun. Look forward to the game.

*Q. How much do you talk about last year? Nobody has talked about last year's semifinals. Should you talk about that or that's another team?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** That was last year's team. This year is a whole new team and we've got a different opportunity. Yeah, that happened, whatever, that's last year's game. This is a different team, different year, and we're looking forward to this team's opportunity and what we'll have a chance to do and being the best we can be.

*Q. And has the Dexter [Lawrence] situation been a rallying point for you to do what you need to do on Saturday to keep it going?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** Really we're just behind Dex, too, obviously and the other guys as well, too. We have to keep the main thing the main thing. We still have to focus. We obviously feel for them, but we still know we have a game to win, a game to play, so we can't let that be a distraction for us. But we're obviously there in Dexter's corner and the other guys' corners.

*Q. What are two or three keys to get that W on Saturday?*

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**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** Games like this always come down to the trenches. That's obviously where it starts and where it ends, in the trenches. Both sides of the game have to be on -- our offensive line and defensive line have to play well because they're so talented and good. We definitely have our work cut out for us, too. Special teams, I feel like games like this come down to playing special teams. That's my experience. You can set the tone for the game on special teams and, you know, that's where so many different things can happen.

*Q. You could be playing on Sundays too right now. Was there a reason you wanted another year of college? You graduated already. So one of the bigger surprises heading into the season was that you did come back. Do you think you had more to prove or you wanted to do it for your team, you enjoyed college?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** Just like I said, you know, just one of my reasons, like I told you now, putting an exclamation mark on my career, finishing out the right way and enjoying my experience.

*Q. So what do you think that you were missing that you accomplished this year to add to that?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** Really this year I mean I just feel like I improved in a lot of ways, got closer to my teammates. You know, and a lot of things just -- this has just been my most enjoyable year by far in college. Just with my team, had the most fun and, you know, I just my experience is just great. You can't put a price, you know, on just the relationships I've built and that's been awesome for me.

*Q. Sitting here in an NFL stadium do you think about the future? Do you think about Sundays? Do you think about maybe did you improve your draft stock and things like that?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** No, I'm always present in the moment focused on the task at hand. Focusing on being the best I can for my teammates. If it results in improvement as a result of that that's cool. I really try to be present in the moment, be the best I can for my teammates so I can try to lead as well as I can so we could put the best result out there on the field.

*Q. A year ago you guys were back in this spot, you've been in this spot several times, did you think you would be back here?*

**DT CHRISTIAN WILKINS:** I definitely felt we had a shot at being back in the situation for sure. Our goal at the beginning of the year is always to be the best we can. And if something like this is a result of it, that's great. I know, I just feel like that was our

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mind set. I really felt like at the beginning of the year this was a chance we had to come back here. So no, I'm definitely grateful that we're in the position that we're in. You know, we've definitely got our work cut out for us coming up in a couple of days because Notre Dame is a good team so I'm looking forward to that opportunity.

### QUESTIONS FOR DE CLELIN FERRELL

*Q. I know you guys have talked all year about just the strength and bond that you all have on this team. What do you think is the reason why you all have developed that close bond and friendship?*

**DE CLELIN FERRELL:** Because before we step on the field we've been friends. I live with these guys every day and it's not just about being teammates. As far as for us, we want to share a bond that's deeper than that. That way we can translate it to the field and make them want to do more and be selfless on the field.

*Q. How would you, Clelin, describe the culture of the Clemson program? That's a word that gets tossed around a lot. And we visit a lot of schools that talk about it but don't see it, but at your place it's pretty evident that there's something special there in terms of culture. How do you describe it?*

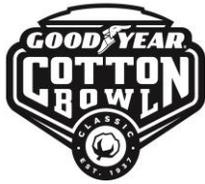
**DE CLELIN FERRELL:** I feel like it's one of a kind. I tell people the story Dabo told us when he was interviewing for the job with the Board of Trustees. They said, Coach, how are you going to make us like the big programs like the University of Michigan and the Ohio State Universities and the Alabamas of the world. And he stood there and looked them in the face and said, I don't want to be like them. I want those programs to be like the Clemsons of the world because we're going to do things the right way, recruit good people first and win a lot of championships and graduate our players.

It starts with recruiting good people from the jump. That's why you see things like Dexter [Lawrence] is going through, the love from his teammates, the way we talk about him and people interviewing and they're asking us because we're friends first. That's my brother for life. My relationship with him is way deeper than football, you know what I mean? I couldn't really care less if -- I care whether he plays or not, but that won't change my thought process because he's going to be in my wedding one day. His kids are going to be my nieces and nephews one day, because that's the type of relationship we have. I feel like it starts with that. Anytime you really go out there and put your body on the line for somebody else, it has to come from a self love within. So that's where it really comes from.

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*Q. The last three trips, can you compare the bowl experiences between the three?*

**DE CLELIN FERRELL:** Every one is very different because when you go through it, it's a new team every year. You know what I mean? I can't really compare. I mean, because the first two times I went, we had Deshaun [Watson] at quarterback. The last year was Kelly [Bryant], and this year is Trevor [Lawrence]. It's a whole new scenery of people. And that's what I remember the most, the people. Not so much this, who we're playing or the bowl experience, stuff like that. But it's always the people that I'm doing it with. It's never the same, but it's always a new experience, which is the best part about it.

*Q. Is it better being a veteran at the bowl now, you can show the other guys having a new experience what to expect?*

**DE CLELIN FERRELL:** It's always better because you want to become that, but a lot more comes with it, you know what I mean? You have to speak up, which I enjoy, but it's a lot of times you kind of got to be the voice for the whole entire group, which you kind of got to get everybody -- formulate decisions as far as how you want to be represented. So it's been good, man. I enjoy all of it. It's the best.

### QUESTIONS FOR LB TRE LAMAR

*Q. What's the difference between the preparation this year versus last year?*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** I would just say we have more senior leadership. All the guys are coming around us and making sure we're keeping on track with our preparation and our focus. This isn't, we should just be happy that we got here, not to be satisfied to get to the game which is a national championship.

*Q. Notre Dame should be -- they have skilled guys. This is a good test for you Saturday?*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** We're looking forward to it. It's going to test our defense for sure. We think we're ready. We don't think we have any weaknesses they can exploit. We're excited for this game.

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*Q. Talk about how you defensively have rallied around what has taken place with Dexter [Lawrence].*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** We've tried to put our arms around him. He's having a tough time with this decision, obviously. But he's just really stepped into a vocal leadership role, and I think he's doing a great job staying positive. And the defense has rallied around him and the rest of the guys.

*Q. What's the one thing about Notre Dame that concerns you the most?*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** They have a very balanced attack. They have a lot of skilled players and a good offensive line as well. You can't select one game over another.

*Q. You guys have been fortunate enough with your success to travel around the country and play in monster games. Tell me about the first time you walked in this place.*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** I was nervous. It feels brighter in here than outside. It was insane. It took me a while to stop looking at the Jumbotron. I was definitely nervous. I was happy to be able to practice in here beforehand.

*Q. When they bring Notre Dame in, how do you feel about their running backs and your ability to get on them and you said Notre Dame has a very balanced attack. Are you balanced enough to drop into coverage if you have to?*

**LB TRE LAMAR:** Absolutely. I think I've been doing so all season. I get as much credit for that part of my game but I don't think I'm ever a liability out there for coverage. I feel like I get out there and cover anybody. So I don't really worry about that.

*Q. They're quick when they come down. Do you think you can get a good pop on them and make them think twice?*



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**LB TRE LAMAR:** That's what I'm looking forward to the most. I think it's going to be a physical game, and that's the kind of game we thrive in.

-- College Football Playoff Semifinal at the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic --

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