



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

QUESTIONS FOR COACH MIKE ELKO

COACH ELKO: “Proud of our guys. Thought we came out tonight with the right energy and the right mentality to stay consistent and keep this thing moving forward. Wound up winning an SEC game going away, that's always hard to do and really impressive. We outrushed them 299-77. That's going to win you a lot of football games in this conference when you can control the physical matchup like that.

We were really good on third down on defense, which I think is critical against an offense like that, because the tempo and the pace can't really get going until they get first downs. And so if you can be really good on third down, that really helps.

We were really good on offense. On third down, it was our best third down night of the year, and so we won the time of possession 38-21. And that's another thing that's really, really big when you're playing those spread offenses that are trying to build reps and build tempo. And so thought we did a lot of really, really good things.

Obviously, offensively, wasn't the best first half. Thought we stayed with it. We kept pounding away, kept grinding at it; and obviously, I think we ultimately wore them down in the second half a little bit.

And, again, it's another 260-margin -- yard game. And so just got to keep grinding, continue to get better. And we'll have a really, really good Florida team coming in here next week, and we'll have to get ready for that.

So from there, we'll open it up to questions.”

Q. Mike, can you share with us what your disposition might have been like at halftime, and what kind of words of wisdom did you say to get them going?

COACH ELKO: “No, very calm. The thought that coaches come in and start throwing things, it really wasn't that. I think we had to find ways to get Marcel [Reed] settled down. I think we all knew that. He saw some things not clean enough, missed a couple throws. We had the turnover as we were getting in the red zone to score points. We had the fourth-down stop again as we were going in to score points.

It wasn't all negative in the first half, but we had to find ways to get into a rhythm. It really was more just about, like, you're in an SEC football game. SEC football games are not easy. They're going to be four-quarter football games. Get this out of your mind that this thing is going to go clean and smooth and just go out there and compete and grind. And we did that in the second half, and we were able to have some success.”



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

Q. And I wanted to ask about if you could share what kind of defensive adjustments might have been made after that first long drive for the field goal? They really didn't move the ball again until late.

COACH ELKO: "Yeah, I think there's always a little bit of a feeling out when you play that tempo in the offense and the pace that they go at, and it always usually takes you a drive or two to get settled in."

I don't know that we made a ton of adjustments or did things a lot different. I just think we were able to kind of adapt to how they were trying to attack us. I thought we had a good feel for how they were trying to attack us, and maybe our kids just got a little bit more comfortable with how to run the defense against what they were trying to do to us."

Q. Coach, obviously back-to-back weeks, Daymion Sanford stepped into a starting role here. Can you just talk about the impact he's made and what's allowed him to be so successful?

COACH ELKO: "First of all, he's a phenomenal kid. He works really hard in practice. Mentally he never, ever blinked. When he didn't win the starting job or he didn't have the role that he wanted to have the first few weeks, he just wanted to know what he could do to keep playing. And I told him, I said, "I love you. You just got to keep working. You got to keep grinding. Your chance is going to come, and you just got to be ready."

His chance has come, and he's played really, really well. So, yeah, had another really, really big night tonight."

Q. You guys scored more rushing yards tonight than Mississippi State did total offensive yards. Could you just speak more on the rushing game and how you'd say it's gotten to where it is now as opposed to maybe the beginning of the year?

COACH ELKO: "Yeah. Again, people were worried about it. I wasn't. We weren't unsuccessfully rushing the ball in the beginning of the year. We just weren't really featuring that part of the game for a variety of reasons."

But this is the second week in a row that in an SEC football game, we had to get big and physical. We were able to get big and physical and pound out yards. And yards are hard to come by running in this conference. There's so many big, athletic bodies."

Our offensive line is doing a really good job. Our backs are doing a really good job. It was awesome to see Rueben [Owens II] go out tonight and have the night that he had, running for 142 yards and really carrying the rock the way he did. It was really cool to see. It's a big part of success in this conference, and we've got to continue to do it."



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

Q. The season that Cashius Howell has put together, just what has kind of impressed you now with the seven sacks in five games?

COACH ELKO: "First of all, he's really good. We tried to tell everybody that in the offseason and nobody really wanted to hear that. But he's a really talented football player. He's really good at rushing the passer. That's something he does really well, too, and so it starts there.

And then I just think we've been able to get in some situations, especially the last couple weeks, where you get back into a more normal game where you can go after people on third down, they throw the ball on third down. The first two weeks were so strange with some of the third-down playcalling and how it all worked itself out.

Now that you're into a normal SEC world and you can scheme some things up for them, you can get them into some matchups and then allow him to use his skill sets and use his talents. And he was certainly able to do that tonight."

Q. And [Le'veon] Moss came out of the game for a little bit, came back in. Just where is he at. And you mentioned it a little bit, but Rueben [Owens II], what really stood out with his performance tonight?

COACH ELKO: "Lev got dinged up a little bit, so he was battling through some things. Should be fine coming out of it, but we wanted to kind of make sure he was okay.

And then Rueben was playing so well that it kind of made it an easy decision to just stick with Rueben, ride him tonight.

I thought he had his best two weeks of practice the last two weeks. I think he is starting to understand not just being a talented back in open space but how to hit lines and angles to get into open space a little bit more consistently. And I think you're just starting to see him become a more complete back.

He's got unbelievable open-field ability. He's learning how to become a back between the tackles, which will obviously allow him in this conference to get into open field a little bit more often. And so it's been really good to see his development."

Q. When the offense started getting going there in that third quarter, is that about as good of complementary football that you've seen from this team so far this season throughout the rest of the game?

COACH ELKO: "Yeah, I think so. I think when you look at the numbers and you look at how that game played out in totality, I think that was the cleanest, most largest margin of separation between both sides of the ball. There's still obviously a ton of things that we can fix and improve and get better at.



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

But I think, yeah, I think we played really complementary in the second half. We were getting stops on defense, which kept their offense on the field, which really kind of, I think, got them a little bit tired, and certainly got the crowd going, and really got a lot of energy into that building.”

Q. And you mentioned how you said at halftime y'all needed to get Marcel [Reed] settled in. From what you could see without looking at the film yet, what did you see from him in the second half that he was able to be more consistent in the passing game?

COACH ELKO: “He's a good player. He just -- in the first half, sometimes it was a rush. Sometimes it was a guy in his throw lane, and he just got a little bit fast with his feet and his mechanics.

In the second half, Collin [Klein] did a really good job of getting some rhythm throws, some things that were a little bit cleaner and quicker for him, a little bit less over the middle. We worked the outside part of the field a little bit more, which opened some vision for him, which was really good. I think it just kind of worked out that way.”

Q. Going back to Daymion [Sanford], what about his skill sets fit so well into this system?

COACH ELKO: “He's really athletic. He's really physical. I think he's starting to get more and more comfortable in what we're doing. That's been great to see. He's a really good blitz. He's got a lot of twitch and athleticism.

And so, yeah, he fits exactly -- he's a really good complement with Taurean [York]. I think the two of them play really well out there together. They're very comfortable together. And so, yeah, he played really, really well tonight.”

Q. And when you do have to have those kind of conversations that says "be ready," can you usually tell pretty quickly how well that's received from different guys?

COACH ELKO: “I think we have a really, really good culture and a really good locker room. I think there's been so many instances of that showing out in our two years here. And so, yeah, you can see it for sure. But it's been something that has played out really, really well for us.”

Q. Coach, felt a little extra loud in here tonight. How pleased were you with the environment the 12th Man was able to create?

COACH ELKO: “The 12th Man was phenomenal. Appreciate everybody coming out in the blackout. I went and put the black on just to represent for them.

It was awesome driving in, seeing how many people were wearing black tonight. It's really cool to see them -- you know, they're always behind Texas A&M football. But I think they're starting to get behind this program, specifically the Coach Elko version of Texas A&M football; and that's just really awesome.



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

And so we're always thankful for them. They always show up for us. I think I saw it was the fifth-largest crowd again in stadium history. I think that's the third time this year that we've hit a top-ten crowd.

It's a phenomenal place to coach. It's a phenomenal place to be because of them."

Q. Coach, obviously you appreciate touchdowns. But that effort on that [KC] Concepcion touchdown, the first one, what does that do for the team to just fight to get into that end zone?

COACH ELKO: "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think obviously, we were really struggling at that point, and we certainly didn't want to try to punch it in from the 2 at that point, because that wasn't really what we wanted to do.

And so there was an unbelievable effort by him, a second effort by him to kind of grind his way through it and finish that thing in the end zone. And then, obviously, going up high and climbing the ladder on the second touchdown when it was still a really, really tight game, that was another really big play.

He didn't have a ton of catches tonight, but the two big ones he had really impacted the game."

Q. Following up a little bit on Jesus' question, can you talk a little bit about the energy that KC [Concepcion] brings? I mean, like that pushing his way into the end zone on the touchdown, the returns where he's stutter-stepping his way up. Just the level of energy that he brings to the offense.

COACH ELKO: "Yeah. I don't know if it's energy as much as I would define it like strength. Like, he's a lot stronger than you would think, given his demeanor. And I saw that honestly firsthand when we played him when I was at Duke. The year we played him when he was at NC State. They played him at running back a lot, and they were handing the ball off to him between the tackles. And he was a really hard kid to tackle. And I think he's got really, really powerful lower body strength and I think he's got a really good ability to change direction.

You have an intense competitor who's got the strength to get through arm tackles and break more tackles than I think you would give him credit for. And then I think that kind of gives the energy behind how he plays the game, because when you break tackles, that gets the crowd going. I think that's kind of what you feel."

Q. You have always placed an emphasis on third downs getting off the field. Two SEC games, your defense has now allowed one first down on third or fourth down in 25 opportunities. How impressed are you with what they've been able to do to get off the field?



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

COACH ELKO: "We've been good so far. We've got six more to go.

No, I'm joking, of course. Obviously it's a big part of the game. It's a big part of what we do. We've been able to put together two really good plans.

Obviously, the distance helps, too. I think the last two games, we've been able to keep them in some more third and long type situations, and that's always helpful as well. We've got to continue to do that."

Q. So I want to go back to something you said earlier about the 12th Man community getting now bought into the Mike Elko era. What do you think has kind of driven this? You've brought in some of the biggest crowds now that Kyle Field has ever seen in these last two years.

COACH ELKO: "Obviously when you're winning, that helps. There's no doubt about that. I would hope maybe to some degree, it's the humility that this program is showing. I would hope a little bit that it's how this program is taking on me and Aggies and being part of this Bryan College Station community. I think those things go a long way.

And then I think maybe it's just -- I think we're trying to get a little bit clean and consistent with our messaging, so that the fans are very clear what we're asking them. I think we did a really good job marketing the blackout. I think everybody who came to the game tonight knew. You know what I mean? And I think those things maybe have improved here in the last year and a half. They've certainly been a huge emphasis for us to market this program at a higher level.

I just think that that's maybe altogether kind of tied into a bunch of people that have a lot of excitement and energy about what's going on with Texas A&M football right now."

Q. Coach, for this team to continue to stay poised after kind of a slow start there, what do you think that says about their ability to come out here, not really seem rattled, and to just keep plugging away?

COACH ELKO: "I think it shows that they've got a lot of confidence in what they're capable of. Again, we'd love to start faster. We'd love to make plays earlier. We'd love to create separation in the game earlier. But when you're struggling, I think the two things that have showed up consistently is anytime one side of the ball has been struggling, the other side of the ball has stood up. That's a really great sign for a winning football team.

And then I think there hasn't been panic from the time that the team has been struggling. If you go back to Notre Dame, on the sideline, there wasn't panic on the defense. There was just a look of, "Okay, what do we got to do? How do we fix this? How do we go out on the next drive and try to make a stop?" It wasn't pointing fingers. It wasn't frustration. It was just, "What do we got to do to fix this?"



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

That's kind of what you saw tonight from the offense. You didn't see this mass panic. You didn't see guys worried about it. It was just, okay, "What do we got to do? Get to the bench. Let's figure this out. Let's keep grinding away. Let's figure out what we've got to do." And ultimately we kind of unlocked the key gate a little bit and started having more success in the second half."



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

QUESTIONS FOR RUEBEN OWENS, II, DAYMION SANFORD, AND MARIO CRAVER

Q. What do you just feel like has allowed you guys to really open up this run game over the last two games in particular?

RUEBEN OWENS II: "We've been practicing hard, just pushing. We've got to push. You know what I'm saying? Once you just keep -- through the first and second quarter, once you just keep putting your body on a body, teams aren't going to want to keep doing that then. As we got later in the game, things were just popping."

Q. When you have guys like KC [Concepcion] and Mario [Craver] taking the jet sweeps around the outside, how much does that kind of open stuff up, up the middle to give you the middle of the running lanes?

RUEBEN OWENS II: "It opens it up a lot. Having guys like that that can get around the edge with speed, the team, they can't stack the box. So we just -- as the game was going, we was able to gash them, gain for longer goals."

Q. How do you analyze Nate Boerkircher's carrying ability so far?

RUEBEN OWENS II: "Good. He blocked his butt off, man, and I love it."

Q. Hey, Rueben. Did Coach [Mike] Elko say anything at halftime that kind of inspired y'all to have a big second half?

RUEBEN OWENS II: "He just told us, basically, we're hurting ourselves. Our penalties are hurting us. You know what I'm saying? We need to come out and just play the game that we were prepared to play. We were going to do what we did in the second half, and that's what happened."

Q. Rueben, obviously you're doing your thing and you're focused on that. But Daymion Sanford had another big night, back-to-back weeks. What have you seen from him in practice and his time here that has allowed him to be so successful?

RUEBEN OWENS II: "Daym is like one of my -- he's my best friend. Me and Daym, we've got classes together. We kick together whole fall camp. So I'm just like, bro, you just got to -- I just tell him, you gotta wear your opportunity. Like I knew he was a ball player. He practices hard. So him just going out there and showing what he can do, just show everyone what he can do really solidified him."

Q. Rueben, what did KC Concepcion's effort on that touchdown do to the team? And when you're watching that happen, what are you thinking?



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

RUEBEN OWENS II: “When I’m watching that, I’m just like, him -- KC is not really a big guy. But him able to push to get in the end zone for us, it just means a lot. You know what I’m saying? Not too many guys would -- well, not too many receivers would do that. So him getting in that end zone right there, it meant a lot to us.”

Q. Second straight week, another 108,000-plus crowd at Kyle Field. Just what does the energy from that crowd do for you guys?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “It does a lot. They come out every game -- every home game packed out. That just makes us want to go harder for them. And then when you make a big play and you just hear that crowd noise, it just hits different.”

Q. Rueben, when Le’Veon [Moss] kind of went out of the game for a little bit, they really started to lean on you. I’m just curious what your kind of mindset was at that time, and as far as wanting to kind of take over the game and establish yourself.

RUEBEN OWENS II: “When they went down, just -- you know what I’m saying, you never want no one to go down. But next man got to be up. You can’t be no fall-off. You got to be the same thing. You know what I’m saying? I’m just glad I was able to get the opportunity and then to show what I got.”

Q. And I know, I think it was your birthday a couple days ago.

RUEBEN OWENS II: “Yeah.”

Q. So how special was it -- I guess it’s kind of the birthday weekend. So how special is that to have a performance like that?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “It was real special. I was trying to get a touchdown. I really wanted a touchdown, but I’m glad with what we did. We got the win; so that’s a great birthday gift.”

Q. Rueben, you said that things started popping in the second half. Could you sense those guys starting to wear down up front as you guys controlled the line of scrimmage?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “For sure. As the game prolonged, you could just tell that they’re getting tired. The first half, safeties coming down trying to lay a hit on you. As the game come down, they don’t want to keep doing that. There’s body blows on body blows. Like Coach Troop (Trooper Taylor) says, we’re going to see who flinches first. They flinched first.”

Q. You mentioned the conversations you had with Daymion [Sanford]. Is it extra special to have a game where y’all both were kind of stand-outs on both sides from some of those conversations you had?



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

RUEBEN OWENS II: “Yeah, it is. Like I said, Daym, my brother, man. I'm glad he popped it like that. These past two games, he been going on. So it really meant a lot to me that he was able to do that.”

Q. You mentioned the conversations you had with him about him standing there and waiting for his time. Was that reciprocated back to you?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “Yeah, it was. We had the same conversation. He told me, “You got to wait for your opportunity.” And I would just tell him he got to wait on his opportunity. The time going to come and it's going to show.”

Q. Did y'all talk to each other on the sidelines or anything or after the game today about kind of the game y'all had?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “We were talking on the sideline. When he got that pick, we talked on the sideline then. When he got that first, I was like, “Yeah, bro, yeah. I told you”. Same thing. Vice versa.”

Q. Coach [Mike] Elko kind of mentioned you being really dynamic in space but still kind of learning how to run between the tackles. How would you kind of evaluate your development?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “I'd say just coming off that Lisfranc, I had to get my movements back. And then I felt like as the season has been going on this year, I'm back in shape, and I feel like I got all that downpat again. And I feel like I'm way more explosive.”

Q. Rueben, just how much of a luxury is it to have a defense that's able to do what they did in the first half while y'all are kind of getting your footing going, and just how big was that for you guys?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “That's real big. That's two games in a row defense has been able to get stops for us, and then getting stops for us so we can do what we need to do. They've been playing their butts off. It's just Coach [Mike] Elko, that defensive playcalling -- it's like that in practice, too. Going against that defense is something else. Now the whole world just gets to see it.”

Q. What are you just learning about this team as you guys are starting to stack wins and find ways to win in different ways?

RUEBEN OWENS II: “We're just learning week by week that sometimes -- some games you are going to have to lean on defense, some games you have to lean on offense. But once we get it all together, offense and defense, balling, there's going to be -- a lot of people are going to be in trouble.”

Q. Rueben, what do you think or suspect that the reaction in El Campo is tonight?



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

RUEBEN OWENS II: "I'm pretty sure everyone is pretty happy. You know, Aggies win. El Campo Nados (phonetic) had a good game. I'm pretty sure I got a lot of texts on my phone right now. I haven't even checked my phone yet, yeah."

Q. Hey, Daymion. Rueben [Owens II] was just in here talking about some of the conversations y'all have about just being ready for when your time comes. What do you remember about some of those conversations you've had and how y'all kind of bonded over being that next man up when you both had the opportunity tonight?

DAYMION SANFORD: "That was recent. We had a lot of conversations, because we have the same, kind of similar classes. We've just been talking about being patient, staying ready. When an opportunity comes, we just go and do what we do, and trusting our keys, and go out there and ball. That's what he did today."

Q. And when Coach [Mike] Elko comes to you early and says, "Hey, you're that next guy up, you got to be ready," what was your response to that?

DAYMION SANFORD: "My motto is always stay ready. You can't just be a drop-off, like the second guy in being a drop-off. I just stay ready, trust my keys, trust my coaching. Honestly, just go out there and make plays. That's all I did."

Q. Take us through the interception, what you saw. Was that the first interception you've had?

DAYMION SANFORD: "Yeah, that's my first one. I was in man coverage. Honestly, I knew he was going to throw the ball. But as soon as I saw the ball in the air, it was kind of wobbly. I just ran to it and prayed to God and caught it. I tried to go score, but my legs are a little tired, a little dead."

Q. What do you think has allowed you to maintain the success that you had these last three weeks starting with when you came into the game at Notre Dame?

DAYMION SANFORD: "I would say trusting my coaching, trusting my brothers around me. They helped me play faster. Communication and the brotherly stuff we have allowed me to play faster. So I feel like that plays a big role in my plays that I made."

Q. Obviously, in that first quarter, Mississippi State had that one drive with the field goal where they ran the ball pretty successfully. And then after that, they really struggled to run the ball. Anything that y'all did differently? Why do you think it was so much different after that? I guess it was the second drive of the game.

DAYMION SANFORD: "They had a big run on us the first drive. I felt like they had momentum to keep the drive going. Like the second drive after that, we kind of stopped the run and stopped their momentum, so they really couldn't get any tempo going. I felt like that."



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

Q. Did y'all do anything different?

DAYMION SANFORD: “No, we just did what we needed to do. Play our keys, play the run. We missed it. We mishit the run the first half, which allowed them to have that big explosive play, which allowed them to go tempo. The next drive we just played our keys and fit the right gaps.”

Q. Going back to what Owen was talking about, that very first drive, you guys had two sacks. What message do you think that sent to Mississippi State tonight?

DAYMION SANFORD: “I knew coming into the game we needed to bring pressure on the QB. The QB is their top guy, so getting pressure on the QB is going to really mess with the offense. So we just got after the QB.”

Q. Daymion, obviously, you've made a lot of big impact with the sacks and finding the way to the quarterback. What about this defense that has allowed you to flourish and do your thing here?

DAYMION SANFORD: “Really just, you know, like I said earlier, communication and trusting my coaching, trusting the brothers around me to do their job, and also everybody do their job and make plays.”

Q. Preparation-wise, when Scooby [Williams] went down, did it change your mindset at all how you approached it? Obviously, a big opportunity for you to step in here.

DAYMION SANFORD: “No, my approach wasn't really different. I'm the same person every day. My preparation is going to be the same. I just knew coming in I was going to stay ready and be ready. Ultimately, I stayed ready to make plays.”

Q. Daymion, what's your relationship like with Scooby [Williams]? And just how has he kind of helped you grow with you behind him?

DAYMION SANFORD: “Yeah, that's my dog. We talk every day. I learn a lot from him, like, during practices and stuff. He's a baller. He can ball. So we talk every day. He gives me keys. We do little side bets, not money bets but little side bets on plays and stuff, who can make plays. He keeps a competitive spirit in the room.”

Q. Just with this being the first time we've talked to you, what went into your decision to come to A&M and how do you think it's been for you?

DAYMION SANFORD: “A&M has been my dream school since I was a young. I didn't really think -- coming out of high school, I didn't really think I was going to come here, or get the opportunity to come here. But my mom played a big role in that she helped me through like my whole process, and she spent hours and hours and hours and long drives to get me to



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

camps and stuff like that. I feel like -- and she wanted me to stay home, close to home. That's a really big factor, too."

Q. With the way the first half kind of went with both offenses struggling a little bit, how much faith do you have in the offense that y'all keep getting stops and they'll eventually be able to turn it on?

DAYMION SANFORD: "Yeah, I have a lot of faith in the offense. They don't really hang their heads ever, so I have a lot of faith and trust in our defense to go out there and keep getting stops. So also trusting the offense, too."

Q. Daymion, when you have these guys around you like Cashius Howell and Taurean York, what have you been able to learn from them and how have they helped you grow your game?

DAYMION SANFORD: "I learn a lot from York. His preparation coming into the games every week, I learn a lot from him, just diagnosing plays and stuff like that."

And then Cash, I really don't be talking in the D-line room, but he got a competitive spirit. I'll take that and I learn from that. He keeps me going in all the sacks he makes and stuff like that."

Q. Mario, first, what was it like playing your former team, and did this one mean a little more to you?

MARIO CRAVER: "Those guys played great. It was a tough, physical game. I felt like a lot of those guys played great on the other side, on the offensive side. So, yeah, it was a great game."

Q. What really do you feel like changed there late in that third quarter that allowed you to have some sustained success on offense finally?

MARIO CRAVER: "Offense just started clicking. We started getting positive yardage on first down. That's what helped us a lot. Just getting the job going and just starting the drives that were keeping us going, keeping long drives and just putting it in the end zone."

Q. What was the message, if anything, at halftime that kind of had you guys flip the switch?

MARIO CRAVER: "Just go out there and play a perfect third and fourth quarter. Play as perfect as we can, because that first half, it was penalty-ridden, and it was a whole bunch of penalties, shooting ourselves in the foot. We felt like we weren't playing bad, we weren't doing anything to really hurt us, just killing ourselves."

Coach told us to go out there and just play penalty-free football, and we'll see what happens."



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

Q. On your touchdown run, what did that mean to you in this game against that team? And was that one drawn up to get you a score in this game?

MARIO CRAVER: “Definitely. It was just another touchdown. Nothing crazy, nothing new. Just another touchdown.”

Q. And how much do you feel like y'all's ability to kind of run those jet sweep rushes helps open things up for the running backs up the middle?

MARIO CRAVER: “Oh, it opened up things for the running back and the quarterback. That little option game that we have, it's just dynamic and a great option for us.”

Q. Mario, the question that I was going to ask has already been asked, so I'll ask you this.

First of all, what was [Mike] Elko like at halftime?

MARIO CRAVER: “Oh, he was fired up. On our butts about all the penalties. He definitely wasn't happy.”

Q. Okay. And have you noticed -- I guess maybe since the Notre Dame game, have you noticed defenses covering you any differently or taking a different approach, or is it just the same and sometimes you have big games and sometimes it's going to be KC [Concepcion]? How is that dynamic?

MARIO CRAVER: “Yeah. That's what happens when you have early success early in the season. Just the defense sliding coverage to me or doubling me, it just opens up opportunities for KC, ABR [Ashton Bethel-Roman], Terry [Bussey], a lot of the running backs. Yeah.”

Q. Mario, it looked like there were some conversations there with the defensive backs early on with you. Do those things kind of motivate you, and did that slow down a little bit as the offense got going in the second half?

MARIO CRAVER: “You can't motivate me any more than I already was. My job out there is to go win. Anything you say can't really change my thinking because I'm already going my hardest.”

Q. When the run game tallies almost 300 yards, what does that do for that passing game? Does it feel like it opens things up a little bit?

MARIO CRAVER: “Most definitely. I think earlier on in the season, people were thinking we can't run the game and our running was pretty inconsistent, but I guess they see now that we have the best running back group in the country. And also O-line. Can't forget my big boys.”



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

Q. Mario, speaking of running, what did you guys think when you saw that there were going to be sweeps for you guys in the playbook this week? Did you kind of enjoy that a little bit, just getting the ball and being able to run with it?

MARIO CRAVER: "Oh, yeah, most definitely. Just get the ball in my hands quick. Really no complications of "Am I not going to get the ball or not." It's just what am I going to do with it. So I really love that."



POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE

Mississippi State vs. Texas A&M

October 4, 2025

College Station, Texas

QUESTIONS FOR COACH JEFF LEBBY

Q. What do you just feel like has allowed you guys to really open up this run game over the last two games in particular?

COACH LEBBY: "First off, the way we played defensively for the first three quarters was exactly what our expectations were. Our guys defensively were ready to play. We played our butt off on defense. The frustration is offensively, we were so bad on normal downs with all the negative plays that we had no chance to sustain. We were on third and long the entire day, the negative plays without a doubt kept the game from going the other way and it was because of the situations on third down."

Q. On how quarterback Blake Shapen played tonight?

COACH LEBBY: "He played really tough. The one interception we have Brennan exactly how we want him and got a chance for a chunk play. We have to find a way to protect for just a half count longer. I thought he made good decisions. He took care of the football. The situational piece of it is we were so bad on first and second downs, regardless of what's going on. You don't give yourself a chance, especially with who we're playing and the way they're built on third downs."

Q. On guarding the defense now compared to the beginning of the season?

COACH LEBBY: "There were a couple of opportunities where we were in a good spot downfield and couldn't get the ball off. I was trying to convey to the guys, in the second half, it's not about what you can throw and who's open, it's about what you can protect. As a play caller, you have to protect the guy who's holding the ball every snap. We had the ability to create a bunch of chunks if we were better in protection, but we weren't."

Q. On the process of evaluating tonight's performance?

COACH LEBBY: "It's about finding answers, we lived it, it was real and it happened. Offensively the furthest thing from our expectation and standard. I felt great about the game plan, great about the week of work we had and we did not play or go the way we needed to. I'll go back and watch tape as soon as I get on the bus, it's going to be about fixing problems and putting people in positions for success."