

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Washington vs Alabama

Saturday, December 31, 2016

Chris Petersen

Washington Huskies

Alabama - 24

Washington - 7

THE MODERATOR: We'll take a short opening statement, go right to Q&A.

CHRIS PETERSON: They kind of are what we thought they were. Really, really elite championship defense and, you know, good players across the board.

Really pleased how hard our guys played, especially on defense. You know, everybody on that field, both sides, played extremely hard. But I thought we played really elite defense. Didn't tackle one time and the back made a great run, broke about five tackles. We had him.

Other than that, I thought those kids really played good. They beat us with our own game. They got the two turnovers, really three with the last one, but two were ten points right there that we gave them. When you're playing this type of game, when the margin for error is that small, those things are going to show up. So yeah.

Q. Coach Petersen, did you sense more of a commitment from them in the second half to running the ball, and what did you try to do to stop it?

CHRIS PETERSON: Well, we kind of thought they'd run the ball. That would be their plan. That's kind of what they do, and that's what they're good at. They keep you off balance with some bootlegs and those type of things. But they're all about running the ball.

I thought our guys did a good job of just shedding blocks and running to the ball. And they did run the ball effectively, but we played good enough defense to keep them out. The turnovers and then the one big run really got us on our defensive side.

Q. Coach, you had a couple of near turnovers, an interception and a fumble you almost recovered. How pivotal would those have been?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah. I mean, if you can make them, they're game changing. You don't know what's going to come out of them, but it's game changing. I



mean, they had their two turnovers, and it was a field goal and a touchdown.

You feel with that type of field position, that type of momentum, good things are going to happen. Our guys know it. We just couldn't quite make the play for whatever reason.

Q. Coach, how big of a momentum changer was that interception returned for a touchdown right before half?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah, that was, you know, that was hard. There's kind of those hidden quarters in the game, and the last five minutes of a half is always really important that you at least get a stalemate. You don't want the momentum going against you at halftime, but that was really big.

They did a great job. They brought the blitz and we had all guys out and Jake tried to get rid of it and the end that peeled did a great job, made a great play.

Q. Even with your understanding and expectation that this is an elite defense for Alabama, how disconcerting is it for you when you see your offense that you're accustomed to seeing 31 or more points, getting stopped after the opening drive?

CHRIS PETERSON: It was disappointing we didn't move the ball better. We've studied every snap that they've had this year and the tape doesn't lie when you watch that much tape. I mean, that's as good a defense as there is out there in college football, and they played like it.

Would we have liked to have moved of the ball better and do we think we could have, we'll put the tape on. There's always stuff that you think you can do better.

Q. Just to follow up on the interception, was it more of a misread or that was where the ball was supposed to go and the guy just made a great play?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah, he made a really good play. Jake was just trying to get it out of his hands. A lot of times, ends peel and it's either incomplete or we get it to the back on an end. But they timed the blitz good. For that blitz, we don't really like that play. So they had us.

Q. Chris, just your thoughts on the scrum at the end. Couldn't really tell what happened there.

CHRIS PETERSON: It's an emotional game. I don't really know what happened. I just didn't appreciate how our guys reacted. What are you going to do? It's not the game. They're not going to fight. What are we talking about? I just didn't appreciate that.

Q. Chris, obviously, there are no moral victories, but can you just talk about where your team is now compared to when you first took over at Washington?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah. Feel good about that. From this time last -- I mean, we ended this time last year on a positive note, playing a real strong game and felt good about ourselves. Any time you don't win the game, you feel really not good.

I mean, but I think when you step back and look at the big picture, the bar's been moved up, been moved forward. Kids know it. I think we go back to ground -- square one, ground zero in a few weeks when we start training again.

That's the thing we noticed last year with these guys is they had a chip on their shoulder and there was a mindset that did not go away all season long from a year ago.

And so I think hopefully they've gained good confidence from this season, but I think there's also some lessons to be learned in this game, you know, what we have to do to truly compete on this elite level.

Q. To piggyback off that, Chris, how much does it help that now your kids do know what it takes to get here. Does this set up a situation where next year, this is their expectation?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah. You know, I think their confidence -- I mean, they've seen it. They've felt it. They've tasted it a little bit. So that's good. But I think our job as coaches will be to take them back to what got us here.

The bar has been moved forward, but we don't pick up with our new team next year right where we are here. But I feel good about the guys that we have in that locker room that will be coming back, and some really good leadership. So we feel good about all those things.

Q. Alabama is obviously at the top of the mountain. Do you have a feel now how close or how far you might be from that level?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah. It's hard to know. That defense is good. I mean, you're going into this game

knowing this is going to be tough sledding. This is going to need to be a low scoring game for us to be able to win, because they're so good against the run and they might be better pass rushers. I don't know.

And our defense, like I said, they played the game that we needed to play on defense. If we just could have got a turnover or two more -- you know, one of those turnovers could have helped us.

But really, on offense, we just hadn't turned the ball over, I think that would have changed at least the feel of the game.

Q. Obviously, you got a heartbroken locker room. Is there anything you can say to them? What did you say to them to give them any sense of peace, even?

CHRIS PETERSON: Yeah. We always talk about this. If we've played as good as we can play, if we prepared as hard as we can prepare and we really did those two things and then we just lay it on the line and someone beats us, we don't like it, but we got to be able to be okay with it and learn from it, and that's always been our message. And so that happened tonight.

Along those lines, you know, we also talked about the bar has been moved in that locker room, and they get that. So they got a taste of it. And so that's awesome, and so I think that can change your mindset. But it's not like we -- when we go back to work, we're the same team. So it's a balance between knowing that they can do some special things if we kind of go back to our humble roots of starting over.

THE MODERATOR: We'll end it there. Thank you, Coach.

CHRIS PETERSON: Thank you, guys.