



## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, Texas



### QUESTIONS FOR OC CHIP LONG

*Q. Chip, I know you have the game to prepare for. But do you expect Brandon [Wimbush] to transfer?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** You really got to ask him. Him being a grad transfer is completely up to him. That's what I told him, "I'm behind you 100%, whatever you decide to do."

*Q. This period of football seems to be tough on defensive coordinators. What separates Brent Venables, aside from obviously the fact that he's got great players? But why was he able to be successful when so few guys are?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** I think Clemson does a good job offensively of staying up to date with their offense, too. Those guys are seeing it every single day. So week in and week out, there's not really a trend that comes that they're not going to see. I think that helps an overall team.

They've got great players on offense. They've got great players on defense. So build your team and being able to change up the looks, they're able to go into games with confidence. They've seen certain things and know how to adjust to it and play defense.

*Q. So many places across the country, when there's a quarterback switch, you see one obviously transfer or the guys not have a great relationship. What did you observe about the way that Brandon [Wimbush] and Ian [Book] maintained a friendship and have been able to help prepare each other?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** They've been great. Ian was right there with Brandon when he was the guy. Brandon is a great teammate, great person. He loves being around his teammates, and he loves Notre Dame. And that's why he came to Notre Dame, is to be a part of it. He's won a lot of big games for us.

To go in and have to go through that and still come in and play as well as he did against Florida State, it's just a testament to him and the kind of person he is. That's why he's going to be a success the rest of his life.

*Q. Will that change your approach at all, Dexter [Lawrence] not being there?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** They hit a couple of shots, 50/50 balls that made some plays. guys broke a couple of tackles. Had one play scrambling one way, throws it back across the field and safety makes a play and go 80 yards. Have chump plays like that, looks like

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they exposed the secondary where there was a lot of good luck and just some missed opportunities by Clemson. Not necessarily a schematic advantage.

*Q. Anything in that game you can take and use potentially?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** You know, not really, to be honest with you. Like our last game against USC, you had two tired football teams playing football. A lot of swings and two teams healthy, it's going to be a battle is what I take from it.

*Q. What were your main observations from the two teams that had the most success against Clemson, A&M and South Carolina? What were your take-aways?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** Two great battles. Clemson going on the road playing Texas A&M. Like any big-time game, you're going to have a lot of big plays, chunk plays. You know, you're still figuring out your team by that point and they hit some big plays and made some adjustments.

*Q. Do you think the narrative that Clemson's secondary, their corners are their weak point, do you think that's silly at all?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** Absolutely, I think that's silly.

*Q. What have you liked about them?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** Their corners are tough, physical, they do a great job mixing up their looks and they play -- they're around the football. They're not just cover guys. You know, their size helps and their safeties are really good tacklers. You know, it's everything you expected when you talk about defense. All of them will play in the NFL one day, no question about that.

*Q. Have you met Brent Venables before?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** I haven't. He's done a great job everywhere he's been. Guys, players, feed off of his personality and he's been successful everywhere he's been, K-State, Oklahoma, and Clemson.

*Q. How challenging is his scheme when you look at it, the different pressures he brings and because of all the Clemson athletes?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** He does a great job, game plan for each game, mixes it up well. Like I said, he has his players playing hard, which is half the battle. but he always

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tries to stay a step ahead and he does a really good job. That's why he's one of the best in the business.

*Q. I know one of the things he likes to do is wait until the last second to make that call. How challenging is that?*

**OC CHIP LONG:** We've seen it a few times. We go at our tempo and stuff like that. And that's just, you know, his way of doing things. So we see both and it doesn't really affect us offensively as much, you know, to be honest with you.

### QUESTIONS FOR QB IAN BOOK

*Q. Have you taken any time to contemplate how both quarterback situations are similar, both you and [Trevor] Lawrence taking over three or four games into the season? And obviously the decision worked out perfectly for both teams.*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Actually, a couple days ago I was thinking about it. Both of us are very fortunate, couldn't be in a better situation. And the season goes by so fast. And there's certainly times where you sit back and realize where you are and, again, just how fortunate we are to be here and playing in such a big game.

*Q. What were the biggest obstacles for you personally to overcome when you take over a team that's undefeated and then all of a sudden, boom, you're the guy that's taking things over?*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Yeah, it's different obviously. You know, I'm just excited. And I've been waiting for my shot ever since I got Notre Dame. Struggles come into every game. There's plays you want back every single day even in practice and games, and that comes in college. There's a lot of pressure that come with being quarterback. You have a bigger target on your back, but it's something that I dreamed about since I was in about third grade. So just feel really fortunate.

*Q. Is there an immediate comfort level as far as being a starter or is there a process to command the huddle and be the unquestioned leader of this squad?*

**QB IAN BOOK:** I felt extremely confident my first start. Even when I wasn't starting, I tried to get myself ready for the opportunity.



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*Q. Was it a big deal looking back now? Obviously it was a big deal, but it seems like it was pretty seamless, not like the offense changed or anything.*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Yeah, I think it was a big deal for me. It was my chance to play and show my skills and show the offense that I can lead this team to victory and be a leader for the guys.

*Q. What difference does it make to have the playmakers already there?*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Huge, helps so much to be able to use Miles [Boykin] and Chase [Claypool] and those guys to go out there and make plays and have a backfield like we do and an offensive line. Sam [Mustipher] is a huge leader. Definitely a great situation for me to step into.

*Q. It makes a difference knowing that you're taking over not to have to make every play.*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Oh, yeah. Like I said, to have all those playmakers making plays every day, it helps me a ton. And just to have the leadership already on the offense, I can come in and be a leader as well. To have so many leaders on the offense just makes it that much easier.

*Q. Looking at that Clemson front four, what stands out about those guys?*

**QB IAN BOOK:** Obviously the D line speaks for itself, very big athletic guys, a lot of experience. It's going to be a great challenge for our guys. And I know personally with the offensive line, everyone is just excited for the challenge.

*Q. Is there any one of those four that kind of stand out to you?*

**QB IAN BOOK:** They all do. They're all good players. They're going to go play at the next level and just present a great challenge for our offense.

### QUESTIONS FOR OL SAM MUSTIPHER

*Q. How much film did you study for today? And what was your reaction when you heard the Dexter Lawrence news early this morning?*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** I studied a lot, you know. Watched just about all their games from this year and a few from last year. I mean, he's a good player and I'll believe it when he doesn't show up on Saturday. But, you know, every game I've gone into it, I've learned a long time ago you have to prepare to play the best. No matter whether he plays or not,

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we're going to do the same job.

*Q. I know there's a lot of talk about the defensive line and there's a hole, but how much of an impact does that make?*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** Definitely a lot. They're talented and I have no doubt in my mind that Coach Venables is going to bring someone up to fill in that void, if he's not playing. And if he is there, then he'll be attacking the same area he was on film.

*Q. When you are prepared to play one or two players like that, one might not show up, you have to start preparing for another one. I mean, how is that transition? How does that impact you?*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** Really, we're just focused on executing what we do and our fundamentals and technique. If we play what we're capable of, I think we'll be fine. When a guy goes out, it's not changing our fundamental -- it's not the fundamental things. Here's what he does differently than the guy in front of him. He escapes blocks differently. It's just learning those things. A lot of the backups we've already studied, so we know what they're going to do when they come in.

*Q. A lot of players want to play the best on the other side. What's the biggest, best challenges. Are you like that, you want him to play, kind of thing?*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** Absolutely. As a competitor, you want to play those guys. This is the type of stage you want to be on and face these guys. Like I said before, I'll believe it when I see it. But, you know, they have a talented front and it's deep. That roster is so deep in talent I'm not concerned we're not going to get a good challenge up front. I know we will, and we're looking forward to that. We've seen a lot of press this year and I think this is the way it's going to go down. The best teams play press.

### QUESTIONS FOR WR MILES BOYKIN

*Q. How does Clemson's secondary compare to some of the units you've played this season?*

**WR MILES BOYKIN:** I don't think they compare. I think they're a lot better than the teams we've seen this year. I do think that, you know, the pressure that they bring, it makes it a lot harder on the receivers. Because obviously the ball is not going to come out perfect and we've got to go play plays.

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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*Q. Dabo [Swinney] said that his team should be preparing as if Dexter Lawrence won't play. Are you preparing as if he will play?*

**WR MILES BOYKIN:** Yeah. We can't prepare whether he's going to play or not play, you know. Their D line is going to be great, regardless. They have a lot of players up there. So, you know, if he plays, he plays. If he doesn't, he doesn't. That's not in our hands. We have to prepare as he is.

*Q. Where have you seen Chase [Claypool] developing the most of the season?*

**WR MILES BOYKIN:** I think his mentality. He's matured over the season and he's been a huge player for us.

*Q. Obviously a couple nights ago, I think it was Christmas Eve, the report came out that Brandon [Wimbush] was going to transfer. Did that catch any of you guys by surprise? Did you talk about it as a team? Is it true?*

**WR MILES BOYKIN:** We didn't talk about it as a team at all. And I haven't even talked to him about it. No. We're all kind of focused and he's focused, too, you know, on winning this game. He's going to do whatever it takes to win this game as well. We'll cross that bridge when he comes out.

*Q. Did that make you mad that it came out Christmas Eve, the middle of the week, right before the game because maybe you hoped it would come out after the championship or after this game?*

**WR MILES BOYKIN:** Yeah, I -- like I said, I had no clue that was going to go down. I mean, I'm -- I would bet he's a little bit upset because he's such a team guy and doesn't want any attention on him or anything taken away from the team. So he's probably a little upset.

### QUESTIONS FOR DC CLARK LEA

*Q. Coach, before you started watching film of Clemson, had you seen any of Trevor Lawrence?*

**DC CLARK LEA:** In season, I consume enough football from Sunday to Saturday that I don't tend to watch just for fun. So I had not seen much of him. I remembered him out of high school. Honestly, that hair stuck out, being a guy that's challenged that way. (laughter) But I hadn't watched him much. Obviously, in preparation for the game, I've been

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

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incredibly impressed with him, and I've been able to watch him for a month.

And so, in doing that, you see the first thing that stands out to you is the talent, the arm talent, and the athleticism, too. But just the way he gets the ball out and how hard he throws it, it's incredible the length of field he covers and in an instant with the ball.

But then, when you study him further, what almost is more imposing is his decision-making. He must be a really, really sharp player for the coaches. He can identify coverages. He gets the ball out. He makes decisions in the RPO game, off quick reads. When he has a matchup he likes, he puts the ball up and positions together. It's incredible. So I don't know that there will be a snap where we won't be concerned with their ability to go the length of the field on Saturday.

*Q. Have you seen him progress from game five when he took over to game 13?*

**DC CLARK LEA:** Absolutely. There's a comfort level you see, a confidence you see. He has evolved and grown and has been just so steady for a young player. It's really impressive. I think he's really well-coached. They, obviously, have a great program for development.

Then for a young guy that knows when he makes a mistake, he may be missing a read and handing the ball off to Number 9 [Travis Etienne], that's not a bad snap for Clemson either. He's going to throw the ball out to a receiver who can go get it for him. It's a really well-run operation.

*Q. Clark, how much have you looked at what Brent Venables has done as you progressed in your career, not in preparation for this game but just as a defensive coordinator trying to gain a little knowledge?*

**DC CLARK LEA:** Well, you know, we have had the luxury of kind of watching them against the opponent we were playing this year.

I've been really impressed how he calls a game, how hard his defense plays. I think more than that, when I think about him, I just think about the consistency. Like, you know, I admire his run there. I admire the level of defense they played for so long. He's a guy that in so many ways you hope you can model what you're doing after what he's done because what that consistently speaks to is a level-headed approach. He's a guy that concerns himself with player relationships and then, obviously, recruits really well, too. So what he's done to sustain the level of defensive performance there has absolutely impressed me and is something that I hope I can attain in my own career.

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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*Q. Which leads me into the next question. This seems like a difficult time to be a defensive coordinator. The offenses are crazy. People don't have to have a lot of patience. One team is here in the playoff and firing its defensive coordinator. It's a very big picture question. But when you step into this job that you love, do you sort of think to yourself, man, like, I'm giving up 28 points on a good day. How am I doing this job?*

**DC CLARK LEA:** You know, we joke a lot that we definitely chose the wrong side to do it. Obviously, it's a lot more fun to be an offensive coach these days.

But I think defense is a mentality. And, you know, I love defensive football. The challenge is inherent. And defending modern offense requires some ability to process and think and be creative. And I think that's a fun part of what we do. It's just a -- it's a game of strategy.

And there's, obviously, situations where a team can line up with 11 better players and it's tough sledding. But we have a lot of fun and trying to put our guys in the best possible position they can.

I think within that, you know, one of the biggest fallacies in defending offenses -- and the only reason I know this is because I've experienced when it's gone wrong is, like, the moment you come in and say, "Let's try this." Or, "Hey, we got them on this." It's just not about being schematically cuter than the team you're playing. It's about getting your players in positions where they're confident and playing with great fundamentals and playing really fast and covering spaces. Defense is still about your guy getting off a block and making a tackle. And you can't deviate from that.

Even as it becomes basketball on grass, you have to find the answers schematically. But I think more importantly you can't deviate from the fundamentals of the role that will allow your player to have success.

Last thing I'll say on that is I always think about this, too. You want your defense or your unit to take on your personality. Like, you want to put on the film and be proud of what you're seeing from a standpoint of effort and fundamental execution and physical play. Guys making tough decisions. And that's something that you have to spend time on in practice.

So those are things that have been helpful to us this year and in years past. And I think coming up under the coaches that I did and the situations that I have, I've been in a lot of situations where we've been outmanned. And you can't just throw your hands up and say, "We relinquish." We have to find an answer. And I think that's helped along my career.

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

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### QUESTIONS FOR LB DRUE TRANQUILL

*Q. Is there a larger story here where both quarterbacks started the season, one is transferring, one may transfer. Is that just the lay of the land these days, you start and depart?*

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** I mean, quarterback position is so unique, right? It's the most, I think, heralded position on the field. And so, you know, coaches are always looking for a guy they can trust to lead the team. And so if you're a second string guy, it's like, you know, if the coach trusts the first guy, your odds of playing are pretty slim. Especially if it's a younger guy that beats you out. And so it kind of becomes a game of well, I don't have that great of a chance to see the field, especially if the guy starting ahead of me is younger. So I think that's why you see a lot of guys making that move.

*Q. I talked to Ian [Book] about that, and I asked him was there a point where he had to win the locker room before winning the job because I compared it to Tua [Tagovailoa] last year. He throws that touchdown pass to win the championship and everybody goes nuts and Nick Saban says at some point he's going to have to win the locker room.*

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** We had a similar situation where DeShone [Kiser] took over Malik [Zaire] and our locker room just split. And it was awful. It was everything you hoped to stay away from in regards to just team camaraderie and togetherness. It was like there were two different camps almost. And maybe the guys in the locker room wouldn't admit to that, but I think looking back, that's kind of what happened.

This situation has been totally different. And maybe that comes with experience. We all experienced '16. Both guys, you would think the guys were best friends, Ian and Brandon [Wimbush] they're always trying to make each other better, always talking, always dabbing each other up. And our guys, some guys on the team are better friends with Brandon but it's like they equally support Ian, and it's been great for us.

*Q. I asked Chip [Long] about that. He said in a "Sports Illustrated" story, it got to the point as far as the quarterbacks go where it was about the other ten and not just one to keep morale high. What do you think that meant?*

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** I mean, I think what that means is you've got guys like Sam Mustipher, Miles Boykin, Dexter Williams, Tony Jones, all these other guys around him. It's not everybody puts so much of a focus on the quarterback position. There are ten other guys who not only make him better but make the team move forward as a cohesive whole.

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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I think Coach Long is saying it isn't like the quarterback getting us up and inspiring us on a daily basis. Let's have the other ten guys help pick him up and move forward.

### QUESTIONS FOR LB Te'VON CONEY

*Q. Is there anything about Clemson's offense you think might be undervalued?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** I think they're overall a great team. Their offense is really awesome. They have a lot of playmakers. To have a team like that, it comes with problems. They're going to really challenge. We understand that. That motivates us to be our best and execute our game plan the coach put together to be in the right places to succeed.

*Q. What stands out to you about the running back [Travis Etienne]?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** Very fast, has great eyes. You give him a lane to cut into, he's going to cut into it. He's a great player. He has great feet, and he can get to the edge really fast in a hurry. So he's a great player.

*Q. How much impact do you feel like it is to not have Clemson's star defensive tackle? How much does that impact the defense? Chip Long said it probably won't impact the game plan. But being a defensive guy how do you think that would change things?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** I mean, we're a team. On our defense, we have 11 guys. We play with 11 guys. We don't play with just one guy. We understand that if someone goes down, it's a man up. He's going to be ready to do his job. The important thing about our defense is we all do our own job. We understand that and go out and do the things we need to do individually to help our team win.

*Q. When you look at Clemson's offense what is it that you see that kind of stands out with them?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** Very explosive, can score in a hurry. They have great receivers, have a great running back. It's really hard to relax. You have to play hard all game because they're really good and they can put a lot of pressure on you.

*Q. Talk about Trevor Lawrence as their quarterback.*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** He adds to the team being a great player and being able to get the ball to those playmakers on the edge and the running break. Him being able

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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do that really makes the offense hard to stop.

*Q. When you watch them, can you tell he's a freshman or does he look like an older guy?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** He looks like an older guy. He looks very comfortable in their system. He looks like he's been in the system for years where he knows to make the checks. He knows where to get the balls for certain plays and understands downs. And he's a complete player at a young age, which is very impressive. He's a great guy.

*Q. When you see Number 9 running back [Travis Etienne], does he run bigger than he actually is?*

**LB Te'VON CONEY:** He breaks a lot of tackles, looks like he has a short, lower body. So it's going to be hard to bring him down. We're prepared. We'll do everything we can to go out on Saturday to win. We respect those guys. We know that they have talent on that side of the ball, but it motivates you to work harder.

### QUESTIONS FOR FS ALOHI GILMAN

*Q. Clearly you're on the other side. Have you seen much of a difference in your offense since Ian [Book] and just Ian as far as being a leader of the team?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** Yeah. I mean, Ian stepped into a role and next man up. He didn't stray. There's a depth to that and surround behind that. And he has been able to make things happen back there. He's a baller. He's not afraid to make mistakes. But, at the same time, he's not afraid to make plays.

*Q. What do you think of [Trevor] Lawrence? He's a freshman. This time last year he was in high school. At this point in the season does that matter?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** I don't think it ever mattered for me. I once was a freshman as well. I was able to play a lot as a freshman my freshman year. And I've been able to do some good things as well. So for me it's not -- I'm not looking at it as freshman and senior. Anyone that steps in with the right mindset can make plays. So I think that's what his mindset was going in. And he knew his ability and he was confident.

*Q. Workouts in the off-season, is there one that you think has helped power you guys most to get to 12-0, to get here, whether it be the Storm or Stadium Run? I think a lot of people talk about the Storm. But Drue [Tranquill] and Khalid [Kareem] both said*

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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*Stadium Run. That was, like, I think more than maybe you would have thought when you started?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** I think I'll go with the Stadium Run. But the Stadium Run was a cool one to experience just because we walked into the stadium probably, like, 6:00 in the morning. And it was like there's no way we're going to do this. Coach said, "Yeah, we're running the whole stadium."

And after everyone finished and we all did it, it was pretty cool to see as a team how we were able to push through something like that. And that was a cool indicator for us of who we are as a team and what we could do

*Q. Was it easy for you? Hard for you?*

**BY FS ALOHI GILMAN:** No, it wasn't easy at all.

*Q. Drue mentioned, like, skill guys finished. A bunch of them you go back and encourage them. Do you remember doing anything like that?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** For sure. Specifically, my young buck, Darnell Ewell. I finished the run with him after I finished mine and went back. And he was about half way done when I got back. So I was able to finish it with him, help push him through that.

*Q. You did one and a half stadium runs?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** Yeah. We were going at a little slower pace, but just for my guy, Darnell.

*Q. Why do you think that was significant for the year? What do you think you got out of that? It is more than just conditioning, right?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** Obviously, there's a bigger purpose of that stadium run. Coach gave us a challenge of adversity. We thought there's no way we're going to finish it. And then to finish it as a team, not individually, but as a team was something cool for us to understand and just be aware that any obstacle that comes in front of us, we're able to accomplish.

That's been the headline of a lot of our games this season. We went through a lot of challenges and adversities. And we were able to look each other in the face and go to week 12 at USC in halftime and look each other in the face and say we have a challenge in

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## Notre Dame Breakout Interviews

Wednesday, December 26, 2018  
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front of us and we're going to do it.

*Q. What have you seen on film from Clemson's offense?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** Clemson's a balanced team. They're able to put together drives and not just one face or the other. They can do it all. Obviously, their running game is excellent. Trevor Lawrence, the quarterback, can make any throw on the field. So they're a balanced team. And they're explosive when they see things, you know, in terms of passing game. They're great on the perimeter. And they can make any throw. So you've got to be able to stop that.

*Q. What do you think about Clemson's receivers and what they bring to the table?*

**FS ALOHI GILMAN:** It exemplifies who they are. They've got guys in the slot who are able to make separations. And they got guys who can stretch the field as well. Number 5 [Tee Higgins], number 8 [Justyn Ross], bigger guys as well. They're a versatile receiver core. And that puts a lot of pressure on us. And that's a great challenge for us.

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

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