

**January 6, 2014**



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A Postgame Interview With:

## **AUBURN HEAD COACH GUS MALZAHN DEE FORD TRE MASON**

THE MODERATOR: Pleased to introduce Auburn head coach Gus Malzahn as well as Dee Ford and Tre Mason.

GUS MALZAHN: First of all, I'm very proud of my team, proud of these guys beside me, how far they've come from the very first game to getting here, and just being on the brink of winning the whole thing, I'm very proud of them.

At the same time we've got a lot of competitors in our locker room. They're disappointed. It went back and forth, a lot of little plays swung, but you've got to give them guys credit. They drove the field and they scored towards the end and found a way to win.

**Q. Coach, talk about the kickoff return. That was uncharacteristic of your team this season. Did you see anything in particular that went wrong on that play?**

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, they cut it back and they hit a seam. There was some good execution. Obviously we didn't cover it very well. That was a big play in the game. But you're exactly right, that was uncharacteristic, but at the same time you've got to give them credit.

**Q. When Tre was able to score right there with a little bit more than a minute left, was that one of those things you felt like if we could just get a stop -- what was your feeling like after that touchdown?**

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, felt pretty good. Our offense went down and scored on that run, we felt like we had the kickoff and we covered the kickoff well and felt pretty good at that point.

**Q. Your defense for three, three-and-a-half quarters was all over Jameis Winston. Talk about the job that Ellis did getting them ready to play and also about the job the players did, especially that front seven.**

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, our defense the first half, they played their tail off. As a matter of fact they did a good job. The third quarter offensively sputtered and they kept us in the game right there. They put a lot of pressure on the quarterback.

**Q. I guess in hindsight and given the benefit of looking back at all, do you regret maybe not being more aggressive there in your final possession of the first half with two time-outs and pretty much all the momentum in your favor?**

GUS MALZAHN: Any time you lose you always look back, but really I felt pretty good. Felt we were trying to get a 1st down, get around midfield possibly and throw it in the end zone.

**Q. I want you to talk about Nick Marshall's performance, came out firing the first half. How did you feel he played, and I guess long view, what is his upside as a quarterback with another off-season to prepare in your offense?**

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, I felt Nick did a very solid job. They were daring us to throw the football early in the game and I think we hit that big one down the middle and it kind of loosened him up a little bit. He's done an outstanding job this year, not going through spring and leading us to the National Championship with a chance to win it. He's got a very bright future.

**Q. I know it's disappointing now, but**

**when you look back, what do you think this team will be remembered for?**

GUS MALZAHN: Well, I told them in the locker room, equally the biggest turnaround in the history of college football, and they've been playing football for a long time. There will be a lot of great things and great memories that our seniors have led us to be. We're just on the brink of making it one of those magical seasons, but there's so many great things that we'll take. I just told the seniors they laid the groundwork for our program moving forward, and our program is very bright right now.

**Q. Talking about moving forward, is that tough to think about right now, or --**

GUS MALZAHN: Yes, yes, very.

**Q. But you said the future is bright. Talk a little bit about where this program is headed in your opinion.**

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, there's no doubt. We're going up. The experience that we had and we got most of our guys coming back, recruiting is going great, and our goal is to get back here, and I really believe we'll do it.

**Q. Dee, you got to Jameis early and on of. You guys were pressuring him. Talk about starting off the game getting him rattled a little bit.**

DEE FORD: Yeah, that's one thing that we prepared for the entire 30 days that we had to prepare. You know, we was able to execute pretty early, and that's what we really wanted to do. I'm still proud of this defense, man. We affected him early and often the entire game.

**Q. Can you just talk about what this season has meant for you? You guys have been two of the biggest vocal leaders about having the biggest turnaround and leading this team.**

DEE FORD: It means a lot for me to go out my last year. In the entire time we set a goal to have the biggest turnaround in college football history, and it was an amazing journey for me, and I'm definitely proud to be an Auburn Tiger right now. I'm kind of emotional. This is my last time. But I couldn't be any prouder of this team, and I couldn't be any prouder of this Auburn family because we stuck together and we got through last year and we made it here. We started from the bottom, now we're here. We didn't win, but at the

end of the day, I'm still proud of my team. Like I said, it's great to be an Auburn Tiger.

TRE MASON: Same for me. I'm proud to be an Auburn Tiger. But this season meant a lot to us. We all bought into having the biggest turnaround in college football, but I apologize to the Auburn family and the rest of the fans that we didn't finish. We didn't finish what we started. That's a great team, and they deserved to win. They found a way to win at the end, and I'm happy for them. But like Dee says, I'm still proud to be an Auburn Tiger.

**Q. Dee, what did you see from Jameis that told you he was rattled?**

DEE FORD: He started holding the ball. He started second-guessing his decisions, and that's exactly what I knew -- at the end of the day, he's a freshman, and I think tonight we kind of exposed that, and we just wasn't able to finish in that last drive. Very early, I saw that he was a little hesitant.

**Q. I know it's hard to think about it right now, but have you made a decision about going to the NFL? When will you make that decision if not right now?**

TRE MASON: Emotions are everywhere right now. That's not really what's going through my head right now. Right now I just feel like I let the whole Auburn family down by not finishing. That decision will probably come later on, but right now I'm not thinking of that.

**Q. Why do you feel you let them down? You're a Heisman Trophy finalist, broke Bo Jackson's record tonight.**

TRE MASON: Because we told them we'd have the biggest turnaround in college football, and the biggest turnaround would be winning that crystal ball. We owed them that because of the season last year. I just want them to know that I gave it all I got, but I still feel like I let them down.

**Q. Talk about breaking Bo's record tonight on that touchdown run.**

TRE MASON: It's a blessing to surpass his yards that he put up, but it would be great to do that with holding the crystal ball in the air. But that's just the way it is.

**Q. Dee, is Tre being too hard on**

**himself saying that he let the Auburn family down?**

DEE FORD: Yeah, he is being too hard on himself, but he's a competitor. I don't expect him to be any other way. But that's why we're a team. That's why we're brothers. I'm able to really talk to him. And the Auburn family is going to do the same thing. But yeah, he's down on himself. That's expected. We're competitors. I'm down on myself. But we just can't really show the emotion, and we wanted this thing so bad and it was so close. It's expected.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

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