

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

UCF vs Auburn

Monday, January 1, 2018

Gus Malzahn

Auburn Tigers

UCF - 34, Auburn - 27

GUS MALZAHN: First of all, like to congratulate Central Florida and Coach Frost, very good football team. They played very good today.

Just with us, you know, looking back at the whole game, the first half was very uncharacteristic. You know, we had one of our worst halves that we've had all year and that was disappointing. I think we were sacked five times on offense. We had six penalties. That was very uncharacteristic.

I am proud of our team. They fought back in the second half, and you know, hats off to their quarterback. He made a lot of plays in the second half with his feet and he threw the ball very accurately and all that.

I'm hurting for our seniors. This senior group has been very special. Helped get us to here. Helped us win the SEC West and just really disappointed for those guys in that locker room that we couldn't send them out with a victory.

But overall, very tough loss, but you've got to give Central Florida credit. They are a very good team.

Q. What was the issue with the running game today?

GUS MALZAHN: You know, that was probably the main stat that was disappointing for me. I think it was 44 rushes for 90 yards, and that was very disappointing. You know, we had a lot of negative plays in the first half, too. We had a lot of third down and 11-pluses and just didn't do a very good job in the running game. You know, that's one of the main reasons I feel like we lost.

Q. Stidham was sacked six times in this game. Tell me a little bit about the protection breakdowns.

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, we had a tough time. There's no doubt about that. That's what I was kind of saying that in the first half, probably played as bad as we have offensively all year for a half. Had some miscommunication on some things right there that wasn't good, and we didn't do a good job protecting him.



Any time you don't do a good job protecting your quarterback, that makes things extremely tough; and added to the fact that we had trouble running the football. Their number 18 is a dynamic player. He's very good. I was very impressed.

Q. Will Hastings gave you a spark and a chance at the end. Can you comment on his production?

GUS MALZAHN: He did. He did a good job of getting open. They were playing two-man and Jarrett just kept finding him over the middle and just did a really good job.

Q. You guys beat Alabama coming here, you fall short against Georgia and Central Florida. Big picture with the program, how do you size things up?

GUS MALZAHN: Big picture, overall, when you look at it, we won the SEC West, which I think is the toughest division in college football. Obviously, the way we finished against Georgia was disappointing but they're a very good football team. And today we're disappointed, but you've got to give them credit.

But I'll say this, the future is still very bright. These seniors set the foundation for us moving forward. We didn't play our best today. That's the bottom line. We didn't coach our best today.

But you have to give that bunch credit.

Q. The team came out the second half really, really excited and seemed to put together a great effort. What was it about that caused them to not maintain that effort?

GUS MALZAHN: We had some seniors step up at half-time to challenge and we came out. I think you've got to give them credit. I think there was a time we went up by seven points and I think we went three-and-out, and then they scored to tie it up. And their quarterback, he made a lot of plays, you know, with the game on the line right there, and the offense just couldn't answer.

Q. Talk about Kerryon Johnson. Didn't look quite like his normal self today?

GUS MALZAHN: I thought Kerryon was fairly close to 100 percent today. We didn't do a very good job blocking up front. There's a lot of times that -- they had

some stunts early on and they got us before we got going. I thought Kerryon had some very good runs, some tough runs, and there wasn't a whole lot of creases like there normally are.

Q. Obviously you guys had trouble running the ball and protecting. Did they do anything that you guys didn't expect or was there something that they did that seemed to cause you guys problems?

GUS MALZAHN: No, they moved a little bit more up front but we figured they would. We didn't handle the movement very well early. We kind of settled in a little bit in that third quarter. They did a good job with the stuff they did up front, and probably the big thing is they did a very good job rushing the passer.

Q. Talk about just seeing the fans and having the fans here for this experience.

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, our fans are the best in the country, and they are unbelievable and they were there with us in the end and helped us get close to the end before that last drive, you know. But we've got great fans.



AUBURN PLAYER QUOTES

RUNNING BACK #21 KERRYON JOHNSON

On his shoulder injury:

"I barely felt it during the game. It is what it is."

On the first half:

"It was shocking, but I knew we would be in it at the end of the game. I had full confidence in us, we just didn't execute down the stretch."

On the difference in Auburn's second half performance:

"We knew we were shooting ourselves in the foot repeatedly in the first half and made up our minds that wasn't the way we wanted to go out. Play after play and position by position there was miscommunication happening somewhere. When we were communicating we executed and went down the field."

On UCF's momentum in second half:

"They're a good team and they responded. We had everything we could ask for at the end of the game, we just didn't come out on top."

QUARTERBACK #8 JARRETT STIDHAM

Thoughts on today's game:

"Very disappointed, obviously. We had a real chance to tie it up at the end and it is just very disappointing."

On UCF's defense and Auburn's offensive execution:

"We just didn't execute. That is really what it comes down to. We didn't really make a whole lot of adjustments at halftime. What we were doing was going to work if we would have just executed the right way."

On Auburn's locker room talk at half:

"We felt like it was nothing that they were doing specifically – it was all self-inflicted. We just challenged each other to come out and play a much better second half, which I think we did at times, but we did not execute the way we should have."

On big game moments to look upon and use next year in a positive way:

"We did a really good job at the end when we had to go into the two-minute drill. We have practiced that all year and haven't been put in that situation until now. It was good to see what we've practiced comes to life. We just have to execute better."

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN #73 AUSTIN GOLSON

On the loss:

"I think it was all us. We weren't communicating well. That's really all there is to it. Obviously, it hurts. They outplayed us in the first half for sure."

DEFENSIVE BACK #13 JAVARIS DAVIS

On the game:

"It was another game where the outcome wasn't what we wanted. But, overall, we did a good job. They just wanted it more and they came out and played like it. Hats off to UCF. They played great, just like they have all season."

"We're Auburn and we didn't play up to our standard. I'm just sorry that we had to let so many people down and let that game get away."

On UCF's performance:

"We had a good game plan, but they just played a good game. They had a good quarterback, and he was mobile and made some good plays."

On the season:

"We had a great season overall. I am so proud of this team, what we have overcome, and all the adversity that we face throughout the season. We knew this was a big game and we wanted to send the seniors off on a good note. We didn't do that, but hats off to UCF for playing a great game."

WIDE RECEIVER #33 WILL HASTINGS

On his touchdown:

"I knew I had scored a touchdown, but it doesn't mean anything at the end of the game if you don't win. I wish we could have pulled it out, but we will get ready for a new year."

On UCF's performance:

"They are a really good team. They played their best half and best game that they have all year and they won. It is great for them."

On Auburn's touchdown and blocking UCF's field goal in the second half:

"I was pretty excited. Field goals are usually made. Blocked field goals are pretty rare. When we blocked it I got up off my seat and we were jacked up."

On the season and winning the SEC West:

"It was a great season overall. Obviously, we wanted to get to 11 wins. A lot of Auburn teams have not done that. We wanted to be difference. I wish we could have pulled this one out, but we are going to come back even better next year."