



2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl
UCF Defensive Press Conference
December 28, 2018



Quotes for Defensive Coordinator Randy Shannon, Titus Davis, Richie Grant, Joey Connors, Nate Evans, Pat Jasinski

Q. A couple of guys we talked to said they were surprised by how aggressive UCF is on the frontline. Is that something you guys feel like you have taken some team by that?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: We just use what we have, guys that play hard. We rotate eight guys up front so that really takes a load off guys. They play 30, 35 snaps a game, and our offensive line is sound that way. The guys have fun, they enjoy playing this game, they executed, and they made adjustments on the football field, and during the game we have fun that way.

Q. What do you think when someone calls a bend but doesn't break defense?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: I don't know what that is. they just play defense, you know. Some days you have good days, some days you have bad. The objective is to win games, no matter who it is, to win games.

Q. You and Ed [Orgeron] were at Miami together.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: Coach O? Good friend of mine. Real good friends. we keep in contact even during the season. You know, through the games during the season, I'll text him, he'll text me back. Always been a great friend of mine. The person that really got me into this business, to be honest with you. I was released by the Dallas Cowboys and I was in the weight room, and Coach O. came up to me and said, "You want to get into coaching? Start coming out a little bit."

I volunteered because of Coach O. He offered the opportunity and Coach Erickson eventually gave me that opportunity, but it was really Coach O that got me involved.

I was just working out, just trying to stay in football, and that's what really got me into it.

Q. Talk about the turnovers.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: We work hard on them. We work really hard on them in practice. Once a week we go turn off the circuit, as far as strips, quarterback strips, running backs. First guy, second guy punch it. Everybody's trying to create turnovers. That's what we do in practice. That's a big part of the game. If we can create turnovers, that means field position. That gives opportunity to excel on offense.

Q. When you have an offense like that, you guys are back on the floor. Talk about the depth. You've had a mindset that you've prepared.



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DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: It is a mindset. The guys kind of take control. It's an opportunity to get taller stats. You may score, and you're back on the field in 30 seconds, now it is your turn to create a turnover. Tackle for losses, sacks, INTs, something that can change the momentum of the game. And they accepted the chances of getting those opportunities, because you never really have a lot of opportunities sometimes.

Q. Coach, why do you think more and more players are skipping bowl games today as opposed to five, ten years ago?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: Don't even know. That's a new mindset, a new situation. Everybody's going to tell you it is a business. You know, college is a time you're supposed to enjoy yourself and enjoy what you do and have fun. And guys make business decisions so early. That's up to them.

Q. Coach [Nick] Saban says the Playoff has minimized the Bowl games in the players' minds. Do you agree with that?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: It is all about winning games, winning the conference, and an opportunity to get to a Bowl game.

Q. How much you did enjoy the seven-overtime game?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: You know, the atmosphere was great. It was fun. Just when you have the opportunity to play in games like that, you always remember, no matter what the outcome is. You just play.

Q. Talk about the LSU-A&M game.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: That game. I watched it. A lot of excitement, a lot of scoring. Somebody has to make a play in overtime. That's what happens in the game.

Q. Does a game like that help?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: No. That's all red zone stuff. What they're going to try to do in the red zone as far as when they get down there. Nothing really.

Q. Do you try to implement something different, something that you know LSU will not have seen with your team throughout the course of the season to try and surprise them in a Bowl game but you have to stick with the bread and butter?



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DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR SHANNON: You always implement both sides of the football. LSU will run some new play, some new formation. Every week they've shown where they can -- whatever the team gives them, that's the formation. We have to expect a new formation, a new play to come up in this game. Just like for us, each week we may see something different in an opponent and how we can attack them. But what it all comes down to, it's going to come down what your base front is, what your base offense is, and play. That's going to be the big key to the game.

Q. They have players all over the country skipping bowl games. I couldn't imagine a UCF player skipping a Bowl game. It seems like -- I don't know, maybe it is because of where you guys came from.

TITUS DAVIS: So a lot of guys, man, they -- this game has become, over the years, a selfish game. And I feel like guys are taking control of their own life. It is very personal as far as student athletes and what they want to do with their career and how they want to do it. But I feel like we're one of the last real Remember the Titans teams left, just as far as how we approach games and how we prepare for games, and how we love what we do. How we love just practicing with each other. Just from the meetings to practice to just going out, enjoying Orlando, where we're stationed. It's the real deal. I feel like in college football, people are going away from those types of things, and it is becoming more of a me, me, business type of deal, and the fun is being taken away. But at the same time, you just want to maximize everything -- every opportunity we have together as one team.

Q. Do you think a lot of it or some of it has to do with -- a lot of you guys weren't five stars, you were three stars and you -- you weren't spoiled.

TITUS DAVIS: Like you said, a lot of us weren't four stars, five stars. Just having that chip coming out of high school on your shoulder, you think that you want to be great and you want to do something great. And how can you leave a legacy at your school? And honestly, you don't know how you can do it. But you put in the maximum effort, the maximum work to get there, and we've done so.

Q. You've had a chance to obviously help Darriel [Mack] prepare on the other side of the ball. We saw great performance against Memphis. Give your thought on how Darriel has handled preparation and the type of guy he is around practice with you guys.

RICHIE GRANT: He's great. He's been the same guy. On the field, he's been great. He stepped up to the bat. He's been the same guy off the field. He hasn't changed one bit. He hasn't let it get to his head. He's going to do good this game.

Q. You've had a chance to study LSU a little bit. Mammoth offensive line. Certainly can run the football. What's important for the defense?

RICHIE GRANT: Big guys. (I am stumped here) We have to stop the runs. They've got big guys on the outside, too. We have to win some contests out there.



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Q. When you came here, could you even envision what you're going through right now? Guys dream about this. You're in a major Bowl game. A smile. Can you envision what this has been like for two years now?

RICHIE GRANT: I can't say I've seen any of this coming but I definitely knew that this team was going big places. But what we've been doing since I got here, I love it, man. I'm enjoying every second of it.

Q. Whenever you're done playing which may be 15, 20 years from now, I'm guessing you're going to take some pride that whatever UCF has been building, that you're part of this. What will you hope -- and you have a lot of football left here -- but what have these years have meant here as you build something?

RICHIE GRANT: Just to be a part of this, man. Ever since I stepped on the field, I have loved the game. Just to be something part of that. College football is so hard to be in. A lot of people take that for granted. But I haven't took a loss yet.

Q. When you look at LSU's receivers, what do you see there? Going to throw it around the field like you're used to seeing at practice. What are your thoughts on that offensive side of the ball, receiving game?

RICHIE GRANT: I would say I think we have to be really smart. Because I feel they're running a little bit and try to get us up into the box and try to get in over our head. As long as we play our rules and do what we're supposed to do, I think we'll be okay.

Q. As a safety, is that what you've been seeing a lot, following Memphis' blueprint, trying to attack you guys with the rush?

RICHIE GRANT: Some teams tried it. Some teams -- some didn't. But ultimately, it comes down to us. If we do what we're supposed to do and worry about little things with each play, I think it'll be okay.

Q. You talked about your line earlier, leading interceptions, third in tackles for losses, they're great at getting into the backfield. What makes them so successful?

RICHIE GRANT: Trusting in our game plan. They're hungry just like I am for a football to come our way to intercept for TFL. We all know at the end of the day, it is not about me. It is about we. If you do what you're supposed to do, somebody else will be taken care of.

Q. Do people still underestimate the team, despite this win streak and what you all have accomplished?



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RICHIE GRANT: Of course. I feel like no matter how far this goes, we're going to be underestimated. People can say what they want to say. Like I said, it comes down to us and what we believe in.

Q. You feel like you're still trying to prove something like you guys were at the Peach Bowl last year?

RICHIE GRANT: I'm proving something every day. I say we're proving something to each other. Everybody in our room, we want to compete against each other, do better than we did last week. Make more plays than we did last week. So we're not looking too much out. We're looking in.

Q. Looking at the 25 teams you've faced over this winning streak, where would you rank LSU's offense? They're one of the better offenses you've faced because you guys have faced Memphis.

RICHIE GRANT: We played some pretty good teams. Like I said, the tape will tell that after the game.

Q. They have a pretty good running back. You guys have struggled at times against pretty good running backs. How do you limit the yards, the INTs this time around?

RICHIE GRANT: Got to wrap up the big guys. We got to play behind the line of scrimmage, and just using our game plan to make plays.

Q. We talked to some of the LSU guys earlier. They called you a bend-but-don't-break defense. Very opportunistic defense. What does that mean to you? Is that something you take pride in?

RICHIE GRANT: Oh, yeah. That's a good compliment from those guys. Sometimes we have a struggle. We don't get down on ourselves.

Q. One of the story lines for you guys this year has been adjustments Coach [Randy] Shannon has been able to make at the half and how you guys have played better defensively in the second half. What is that in the locker room? How do you make the adjustments week in and week out?

RICHIE GRANT: Oh, man. It is not really a -- we all know what we can do. We can make that play that we need to turn the momentum around. They've been doing a good job Just putting us in situations that we might get in the game. You've probably been through all of the situations. They just constantly did and kept getting it on us, and we came together and got through the situation.

Q. Your team has a lot of takeaways and yourself, too. Is that a big part of what this defense is built on, too? Getting takeaways?



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RICHIE GRANT: Yes, sir. I don't actually know the number. But I think we've had a turnover -- since I stepped on campus, we had a turnover every game. That's huge. Any turnover will lead to some points.

Q. What's your mindset when it comes to takeaways, like look for interceptions. What you are thinking back there?

RICHIE GRANT: I say a lot of field study put me in those spots to make the plays.

Q. Is there a moment where maybe you guys felt like you turned the corner in maybe in terms of bonding with this staff and buying into something? It doesn't happen on day one. Was it in spring, summer, early in the season? When did things feel like you guys were on a roll with this staff and their way of doing things?

JOEY CONNORS: I would say during spring with the new coaching staff. Coming off a season like that, you're still on that high. You're trying to get UCF coaching and how they coach, and every coach is different. So learning a new scheme. So that was going on. That was big. During the spring ball we didn't really get much time to bond, and obviously they were out recruiting, so we didn't get much time to spend with them. I would say definitely during the summer we got to spend a lot more time with being around them now and with him at camp. I think at camp.

Q. How important is it to start off strong and maybe not wait until the second half to start playing good defense? How important is it to put together a full 60-minute effort?

JOEY CONNORS: Coach [Josh] Heupel talks about playing all 60 minutes. It is important every game to start fast. You have to. We talk about it in the defensive room. Start aggressive. Getting off the ball and making plays. It will be important to start fast.

Q. Is there an offensive line that LSU reminds you of at all?

JOEY CONNORS: Like Auburn, they're big. They remind me of Auburn. They're big. Auburn liked to run the ball. They're very similar in that aspect.

Q. Everyone agrees, both teams want to run the ball. You look forward to that kind of game?

JOEY CONNORS: I love the challenge. I love -- the defense will be ready. Coach will have us ready to go. They're a great offense. They have a good offensive line. We'll be excited for the challenge.

Q. When LSU players were in here, they said they're here to win another national championship. Do you think you're trying to win another national championship?

JOEY CONNORS: No. We're just trying to go 1-0. That's it.



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Q. Do you have any concerns leading up to the game?

JOEY CONNORS: No, not right now. My main focus is watching film, getting prepared, going to practice. But at the same time just trying to enjoy it. It is the last one. Last one with the seniors. I want to enjoy it. Going out with a bowl game like this is something that we need to take in and enjoy every minute of.

Q. From what I hear, you guys have had a lot of success with your games. Are you guys -- do you -- are you a little bit nervous that you're going to the game -- you might lose the streak or not lose the streak?

JOEY CONNORS: No. I don't think that's anybody's mentality. Everybody's mentality is we're going to stay focused, and the word I'm sure you'll hear a lot of is going 1-0. That's the word in the locker room. Word out in practice, we say it to each other every single practice, is going 1-0. Right now that's our focus. We're going to do everything that we can to do that.

Q. Do you guys as a team all trust each other?

JOEY CONNORS: For sure. Without trust, I don't think you have a team. In my opinion, from going with three coaching staffs -- this is my third one -- if you don't have trust in the locker room, you don't have trust between players and trust with players and coaches, then you don't have a good team. That team will crumble when it comes under pressure. I think trust is one of the most important things that you need to have when it comes into college football.

Q. A lot of things have contributed to you guys having another undefeated season this year. Can you pinpoint one or two things? Because coming back, you lost some defensive talent after last season. It is hard enough to go undefeated once. It is much harder to do it two years in a row. Obviously you've got good players and the coaching change, too. What do you think has keyed -- maybe most of all, maybe the top one or two things, why you guys have continued the success you've had?

NATE EVANS: The main things I can say is somebody said earlier they see offense hang out with defense and defense hang out with specialists and things like that. Like I said, just that love in that room, that bond. Words can't really put it into -- you know what I'm saying. There is a lot of love going on in that room. We play for each other every week and every day out on the practice field. I would say the love, our bond for one another is one of the main aspects that is good in playing this game of football.

Q. In a game like this, how important is it to start off fast and not wait until the second half to start playing good defense?



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NATE EVANS: We're going up against LSU. You hit a name, LSU, powerhouse football team. Having a fast start, that's going to be a real key factor for us, and continue to have our foot on the gas. Never give up until the end of the fourth quarter.

Q. Being from Louisiana, you want to win. It doesn't matter who you're playing but does it add something special to the game?

NATE EVANS: Of course, definitely. Being from New Orleans, I know a lot of guys, offense, defense and special teams, so for me, this kind of gives me a little -- I don't want to say it motivates me because I'm always motivated, but it gives me that extra boost, that adrenaline rush. I'm just excited to get on the field and play against these guys.

Q. More excited for your family or your mom? Is she talking to relatives and neighbors and friends and is excited about the matchup too?

NATE EVANS: A lot of my relatives are all LSU fans, but I forced them. I'm at UCF. We don't do that in this family. They are all charged on UCF. Let's go Knights.

Q. Peach Bowl last year. Fiesta Bowl this year.

NATE EVANS: This team, we have not yet talked about a college playoff, going to a championship, anything like that. We just are enjoying the moment of being around one another, playing around one another. We built that tradition, and I feel like that's what's been a key factor to us. As long as we keep that tradition alive and keep the games, whatever happens, happens. We just having fun. We're a bunch of kids having fun. That's all that matters.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about expanding the Playoff to eight teams or something, which would benefit a school like UCF. You figure the group of five's best team will be in it. But then you talk about playing 16 games, which is the equivalent of an NFL season. Is there a point where the college football players would have to say this is too much?

NATE EVANS: Our bodies, day in and day out, sometimes we're tired. If that was to happen, it would be real exciting. I would like to see how it would turn out, you know, just to be a part of that. But that's really all I can say.

Q. Maybe the conferences would have to give up their championship games, but a lot of people say that's not going to happen because they make a lot of money from the conferences. You guys are the ones having to play.



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NATE EVANS: I mean, like I said, if the college committee was to give us a chance, a shot, and expand and add us into some different things and different ways where we could have a better chance, a shot at stuff like that, that would be cool. That would be cool as well. Like I said, I don't worry too much. I really just play the game. I play the game for the love of my brothers and the love of my team.

Q. Do you have a lot of people coming from Louisiana?

NATE EVANS: Yes, sir. Maybe 10 or 11 family members coming out to the game, coming to Arizona. That means a lot to me because those plane tickets weren't cheap and that drive is not short. Seeing them do that sacrifice, that just motivates me. I gotta give a lot back to them.

Q. About 1600 miles from New Orleans. It's a long way. Did you get home during the break at all or for Christmas or you guys had to practice and head here?

NATE EVANS: I was going to head home but I came down. My throat was getting a little sore. I was just going to stay in Orlando. I stayed in Orlando and got better. I watched a lot of film, did a lot of prep, getting ready for LSU. Just getting ready for this game, prepare for any other game. Just because it is LSU, you don't want to do anything out of the norm. That's when little mistakes happen. Little mistakes can turn into a big problem. It is the little things that come.

Q. Preparing for LSU, what do you anticipate you're going to try to do? Do you imagine you have to stop their running game? They want to come at you guys. Control the clock. Control the ball, run the clock. That sort of thing. Keep the ball out of your offense's hands.

NATE EVANS: I expect them to come out running the ball downhill full speed. Like I said, they have big physical receivers. They're going to try to make our DBs make plays in open field. As long as we can eliminate that and just play as a unit and communicate, we'll be all right. I've noticed with us, we thrive more when we communicate and we're playing as a unit. When you're on the field and not talking, that's when mistakes happen for us. When we're communicating and on point, we can't be stopped.

Q. There's a lot of talk this year -- always, about expanding the playoff, which would benefit a school like UCF, I would imagine. But does it ever become a point where it's too much for you guys? You would have teams -- if you went to eight, you would have teams playing the equivalent of an NFL schedule. Is there a point where it comes that college football players have to say it is enough games?

NATE EVANS: Every opportunity is one to be cherished and just played out to the biggest opportunity you really can. That's all they are. Opportunity to grow. To be successful. That's all you can ask for.



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Q. Can you talk about Nate [Evans] as a teammate and what he means to you guys on your defense?

PAT JASINSKI: Nate's been awesome. He's been here for a little while now. He's gained quite a bit of experience with the two staffs. But he's a hard worker. He's a smart kid. He's a great athlete. As a linebacker, I think he's got a hell of a lot of potential to just keep growing, and I think he just needs to play his game and feel comfortable with that. If he does, I mean, he has no roof as to how good he can be.

Q. What can you expect from LSU, what they want to do? Obviously you guys are a very explosive offense and they're missing some defensive players. Do you expect they're going to want to run the ball, play the kind of position game, that kind of thing? And to that end, their quarterback is not afraid to run the ball. He ran it a lot. What have you seen -- in general, what do you think they want to do and Joe [Burrow] as far as what he does?

PAT JASINSKI: I think they definitely want to run the line of scrimmage and get their run game settled. That's going to be huge. Their run game opens up their pass game. And I think if we can shut down the run, we're well off. But like you said, the quarterback is very -- is not scared to run. It's going to happen. We have to contain him. Even on drop-back pass, play-action pass, he's not scared to pull it and go. We need to do a good job containing him and winning that line of scrimmage.

Q. What's some interesting things about UCF that people need to know? That's an interesting tradition.

PAT JASINSKI: It is really cool, you know, seeing it. It is like wow. Some crazy people at UCF. But you know, they're huge. They back us and they support us big time. They love football and our team and just what we've been able to do. So it's pretty cool, seeing how excited they all get for that.

Q. Do you think football at UCF has kind of -- obviously school exists -- has an academic mission but athletics can be a positive thing to bring people together. Do you think your program has done that with the success you've had? Helped the school help its image, helped bring people together to try to improve UCF and make it grow?

PAT JASINSKI: I would hope so. I think that can be kind of a goal. Having athletic teams as a university -- have people get excited about it. Bring people all together to come behind one group. And we represent UCF, and everything we do as a team. And I hope that everyone back in Florida is proud of that and proud of what we do and put out on the field every week.

Q. Nobody says Central Florida. UCF, UCF. Just like LSU, LSU. One thing you guys have in common. No one says Louisiana State. You guys are UCF.



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PAT JASINSKI: Doesn't matter to me, UCF, Central Florida. Whatever you want to call us. I thought that they want to brand UCF and I do think that's pretty cool. Our athletics department and our administration over at UCF is doing a great job of trying to get us more out there. Trying to get everyone to know who we are. And really just backing us and supporting us. I think all of the students are hopping on board, too.