

December 28, 2013



An interview with:

**COACH CUTCLIFFE
ANTHONY BOONE
ROSS COCKRELL**

THE MODERATOR: At this time I'll introduce head coach of Duke University, Coach David Cutcliffe, Coach, good to have you. And we have quarterback Anthony Boone, and cornerback Ross Cockrell that will be joining us as well.

Coach, I'll start off with you, and if we can get an opening statement, maybe you can talk about how your bowl week experience has been so far?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Certainly. First thing I want to say is I love hanging out with my two friends here. I'd go anywhere with them. Ross and Anthony are great representations of the Duke football team and the quality of the player and the quality of the young man. We cannot say enough about the hospitality that the Chick-fil-A Bowl people, Gary, you and your staff have been incredible. Everything is right to a Coach's liking, on time and efficient. Now, I love that, so it's really been a lot of fun.

Atlanta is a great, great venue as a city. The Georgia Dome has been incredible for practice. We're actually back in there today. I think our team the second year in a row as a bowl game has adjusted to bowl life a little. I think they've certainly enjoyed themselves as they should. But our practices, our work has been exceptional. Our meetings have been meaningful and exceptional to this point, so I'm very pleased with that.

I think the thing that I would attribute that to would be the leadership amongst our players. Our peer leadership in my opinion is second to none. When you've got people like Ross and Anthony and the other captains and other seniors

that are committed to the process, then you're going to get a great week of bowl preparation.

But it's been fun, great events. Certainly the Chick-fil-A people have treated us well. I got to change my exercise routine. I've been fed so well here that I've got to lose a few pounds now, but we've certainly enjoyed it.

THE MODERATOR: Players, Anthony, talk about what your experience has been like so far related to the Battle for Bowl Week, what's been your favorite event so far?

ANTHONY BOONE: I really enjoyed the team milkshake competition. That was a lot of fun just being able to root a group of guys on instead of like a one-on-one battle. That was a lot of fun for our O-line to battle their O-line. It was kind of like a battle of the trenches type of thing when I thought about it. But as far as the bowl, I really enjoy the competitive atmosphere that this bowl has brought.

THE MODERATOR: Ross, what about you?

ROSS COCKRELL: My two favorite events have been Dave & Busters visit that the whole team took. That was a great time. We got to spend a few hours in the arcade and just to hang out. Also I enjoyed the visit to the children's hospital. I think it's great for us to use our platform to help bring smiles to people who are in need. A lot of those kids were in need, and we were able to distract them, I guess, for a couple of minutes.

THE MODERATOR: Well said, well said.

Q. Obviously, you get the distinct pleasure of facing a Heisman quarterback two weeks in a row. What are the unique challenges you face when trying to prepare for Manziel?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: He is a very unique challenge to say the least. He's obviously surrounded by good players. They're extremely efficient offensively and well-coached. Then you throw in his ability to create. I've been doing this a long time. I don't think I've ever seen anybody

ad-lib on the field better. So the things that concern you are giving up explosive plays when you seemingly have a play defended. So you're almost having to defend two plays in one snap. The one that may be drawn up, which is difficult enough to defend, and then the one that starts when he starts ad-libbing and moving in and out of the pocket. That is extremely taxing to your defense. It requires a lot of discipline on people at the back end. I know Ross has been coaching his buddies back there to be very disciplined in all of his preparation.

Q. That sounds like a nice intro to you, Ross. Can you talk about this and how it compares to what you've faced in your last game?

ROSS COCKRELL: Well, Manziel and Winston are obviously two great quarterbacks. Winston is a much bigger quarterback, not nearly as quick and as fast, I think, but very mobile. The thing about Manziel that makes him tough is like Coach Cut said, when he's back there scrambling around, you can't really tell which routes the receivers are going to run. They could run left, right, down the field, come back up the field. A curl route can turn into -- a ten-yard curl route can turn into a 30-yard go route, that's what makes it so tough. You have to cover for so long, and your technique and your eyes are going to have to be perfect.

Q. Coach, could you talk about how you make losing your coordinator not a distraction this week?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Well, we didn't lose him this week, so that is the first start of it. We're in normal preparation, so Kurt Roper is doing his job as he always would and has. We're all kind of a product of the process. Our coaches too, we've been together a long time, so the process is continuing as it would.

We addressed any issues with that the very first day, and it really hasn't come back up, and it hasn't popped up into anyone's mind. Anthony can speak to that. I'm sure he'd tell you there is absolutely no difference in what we're doing.

ANTHONY BOONE: Coach Roper has meant a lot to me as far as quarterback and as far as a mentor when it comes to on the field and off the field. But as Coach Cut said, we really haven't talked about it. We talked about it once first day in the meeting. Since then it's been a normal going

in there, having a few laughs and going over the film and worrying about our game plan. He told us the first day, let's worry about getting this win, and then after that we'll keep in touch. As far as this week, we need to concentrate on this week and getting this win.

Q. With all the breakthroughs you've had in building this program and getting to the ACC title game and you've been to a bowl, how big is it to actually win a bowl game? How much of that is something you're emphasizing and talking about?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I think it's extremely important to these young men. There is a lot of significance. There are a lot of ways to look at that. You could say good for your program. It's a big issue. Hadn't done it since 1961, I believe, and all of those things are true. But the only thing that's really, really important about it is these guys get to win. And that is the way we're approaching it. We're preparing them. Their mentality has been outstanding. That is the reason it is truly important to go win this football game.

It's not just the seniors. It's our entire team, but certainly it starts with Ross and his classmates to leave on a winning note.

We all know the taste that was left in our mouth a year ago. I can promise you these guys do. I haven't lost it yet. So it's extremely important that we prepare well and play well, then the chips are going to fall where they are, but we're not going to leave anything out there if we can certainly help it.

Q. Could you talk about your match-up or the defense's match-up with Mike Evans? Does it remind you of anyone you've played thus far this year?

ROSS COCKRELL: Our last game we got to go up against somebody like him, Kelvin Benjamin of Florida State. They both have similar size, similar speed. But other than those two, I think it doesn't get much better than that in terms of size and speed and athleticism, it's the total combination.

So far defense, you have to play team defense against a player like that. Someone who can do as many things as he can, you're going to need to gang tackle, you're going to need to get pressure on the quarterback, and we've got to

make sure that we stay in our technique. If we can do those things, I think we can do a pretty good job.

Q. You're coming off Duke's best regular season and playing in the best bowl in history. Can you talk about what it means to your program and what Duke football will take away from this experience?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I think to start with it's certainly an important game for our program as well. I mentioned the reason it's most important to win this game. But we have now a class that came in a year ago that had gone to bowl games both of their years in our program. That needs to become a standard. Then once it becomes your standard, it becomes a habit, and that's all certainly capable of occurring.

We've built the program around that, around consistent success. So these are certainly huge steps in that regard.

As you move forward, what bowl games do over a four or five year in a row period, you start looking at the practice time. If you take a freshman that entered Duke when we weren't playing in a bowl, and you talk a freshman that entered into a school that's played in a bowl game every year, if you red-shirted after four years, how much more practice time has he had than a player that never got this experience? Also, there is no doubt, I've been around this a long time, when you taste bowl games, when you taste what a championship game feels like, you don't forget it. It's a whole lot easier to get back the second time than it is the first time to a championship game, I can promise you that. I hope we have created that. I don't hope, I know we have created that kind of hunger in our program.

Q. Coach Cutcliffe, you have been in the SEC for a long time with Tennessee and Ole Miss. Can you talk about what you expect the crowd to be like? I know that you drove here, but you're kind of in SEC country.

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Yeah, I've been in the Dome in some big SEC games. The intensity of the fans, the intensity of the crowd is going to be special. I certainly think our players will feed off of it. But for you to learn -- I've done a lot of years worth of work with silent snap count. Because if we took an Ole Miss team into LSU into Baton Rouge, or we took a Tennessee team into Birmingham back in the day or certainly into Florida field, you weren't hearing. That's why we

offensively do a lot of things with hand signals. It requires a lot of discipline which our team is capable of having.

Certainly defensively Ross and them know they've got to communicate. It's not as bad generally when you're on the road in an SEC game. It's really difficult on offense. Not as bad. But this Dome is a loud Dome.

I think everyone is going to be surprised at how loud the Duke crowd is in this ballgame. So certainly this thing applies both ways.

Q. How would you put Manziel into historical context? I know you're familiar with some of the greatest quarterbacks who have ever played in college.

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Well, to start with, to have a red-shirt freshman year and to come on the scene as he did and consistently put the numbers up, it's got to be the greatest freshman year up to that point that College Football has seen. The excitement meter in the way he plays takes it through the roof. So to become somewhat legendary in one year puts you right at the top of the ladder in the historical sense of what a player, an individual player, has meant to college football.

We are in an era that we all know that is so much more closely covered and followed, so with that, in fact, he may be the most talked about college football player in history. So he certainly has earned all of that on the field.

It's pretty incredible when you look at his two-year totals and numbers that he's been able to put together. So I think the other thing is he's exciting. He ad-libs. He's consistent. He plays really, really well every time he plays the game. I think that gets lost a little bit when I read descriptions of him.

Q. A&M has changed the person making the plays, calls, and offense. Does that change your preparation any? Have you crossed paths with Jake Spavital at all in your career?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: No, not at all and it can't change because you don't have a basis to form an opinion of what's going to happen or what the plan is. You start overthinking then you're not going to play very well. So we'll prepare our defense to play against whatever. We've watched all their games, all their tape. You're not going to change everything you're doing, so you just go

lineup and play football.

So the thought of who is calling them doesn't worry you nearly as much as who is executing them.

Q. We saw today that USA Today has ranked this bowl match-up as the sixth best of the bowl season. From your perspective, what do you think makes this an exciting match-up that would put it on par with some of the BCS match-ups that we've got this year?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I think they may have missed it by three or four. But other than that, I think it's a great match-up. You have two similar offenses that are very capable of getting a lot of people involved. Both teams have the ability to run the football; both teams can throw and make exciting plays. You've got some experience in both secondaries. Both secondaries have made critical plays at critical times.

I think certainly you look at two veteran and experienced offensive lines. The defensive line match-up, how well each defensive line plays is going to be very critical in this game.

And I think it's a great match-up in the kicking game. You have a great specialist on each side in the punting game. You have outstanding kickers on both sides. You have outstanding return men. I think it really when people are going to enjoy their New Year's Eve watching quality, exciting football that two teams that really do a lot of things well. I don't think anyone will be disappointed in any manner. So it's a game that when the match-up was announced and when I talked with Gary, I think we have certainly been excited since that time. And we'll challenge all of the things that A&M does well, but we want to put Duke football on display because our young men are capable of doing a lot of things extremely well.

THE MODERATOR: Anthony, what do you think stands out as far as match-ups on the offensive side of the ball for Duke?

ANTHONY BOONE: I just think our ability to go out there and be efficient and execute is our biggest challenge as far as this Texas A&M defense. Every week we know teams try to find ways to stop our zone read and find ways to shut down our passing game. We just have to go out there and be efficient and play Duke football.

THE MODERATOR: Ross, same question for you. What are your thoughts on the defensive side as far as how these teams will stop each other?

ROSS COCKRELL: Well, I haven't seen much of their defense, but I can tell you for us we look forward to this opportunity. This opportunity to go up against another Heisman Trophy winner. In my career I've played against basically four or five Heisman Trophy winners, so we look forward to this opportunity to go up against the best because we want to be the best.

Q. Coach Cutcliffe, having been in both leagues, do you think a true rivalry between the SEC and ACC exists these days?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I do. We bump heads regionally for the most part. Of course we're up-and-down the Eastern seaboard now. But regionally we're going to run into each other recruiting. Right here where we're sitting is one hot spot where that occurs, and anybody that's in this business, you're a competitor. So it gets your competitive juices flowing whether we're recruiting against each other, whether we're competing on the field. People keep score in that regard.

This bowl game, people have kept score as to what has occurred through the years. So I think everybody has a lot of awareness in that area. So being a part of the Southeastern Conference for so long and growing up in it, and now being a part of the ACC for six years, I'm very proud of who we are and what we're doing and where we're headed most importantly, that's why these match-ups are extremely important to us. We know where we're headed, and we have to make sure other people understand that.

THE MODERATOR: To follow that up, the ACC leads the SEC 11 games to 10 in this game since they've been playing, and the average margin of victory is right around a touchdown. So it's been pretty close and competitive here in our bowl specifically.

Q. Anthony, you hear all this talk about Johnny Manziel and this A&M offense, is there kind of a Chip on your shoulder? How are you guys going in wanting to prove against an A&M defense that's struggled at times this year that you guys can put up points too?

ANTHONY BOONE: It's not our offense or their offense, it's Duke versus Texas A&M. So we know that throughout the year our offense has struggled here and there and the defense has picked us up, and if the defense struggled our offense picked them up, and if our defense has

struggled we picked them up. So it's not a battle of our offense against their offense, it's Duke versus Texas A&M.

Q. Coach, Kevin Sumlin has mentioned that he's known you for a while. Just curious how you guys got to know each other, when, and how disclosure friendship is or relationship is?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I've talked with Kevin about jobs back when we were both younger. Assistants or he was a lot younger than me, I guess you could say, but I was younger then too. We talked when I was at Tennessee. I think he got a kick out of the fact that when I picked him up and gave him a ride around Knoxville or whatever, we were in my pick-up truck.

I think it was a little different for Kevin at that point in time. I think it probably told him a little bit about who I was. It was the kind of pick-up truck, because I like to fish, that to clean it you can open both doors, turn a hose on it and wash it straight through. That's a real pick-up truck. Not one of these that are fancy. You understand? Everything in there will dry naturally. So I think he got a kick out of that.

He is a quality person and an outstanding football coach. He's a guy that's this profession is important to me, whether it's through the American Football Coaches Association, I've been a member of the NCAA Football Issues Committee, and we need quality people in this profession that do things the right way, and Kevin certainly has been on that path, and hopefully will carry that path forward as a relatively young head coach.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, do you still have the pick-up?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: I am not driving the pick-up right now, because when I took the Duke job, I put my rods and reels in the attic, because I knew I did not need much fishing time at that point in time. We've had a lot of work to do in these past six years. So the bass have had to wait, and I'm letting them grow a little bit.

Q. I was wondering if you could speak to the uniqueness of this match-up? I'm here in Atlanta with a local affiliate, and we've never seen you two here before, just talk about the match-up here?

COACH CUTCLIFFE: Well, it is. I think the fact that Texas A&M is new to the Southeastern Conference, relatively new to the Southeastern Conference, that brings them to SEC

country out of Texas. Duke is new to the era of modern bowl football games. So I don't think anybody would have looked back in August -- now, Gary you'd have to tell the truth -- and said that Duke and A&M was going to be the match-up at the Chick-fil-A Bowl. If you could have picked that one, you wouldn't be sitting here. You'd be a rich person somewhere else.

But I think it's a great match-up. As we all know, SEC, ACC, but it's a little bit unique in regards that Duke has moved to the scene of representing the ACC in bowl games and certainly A&M has moved to representing the Southeastern Conference in bowl games. So we have a dream match-up, really, if you think about it in that regard.

THE MODERATOR: Not only is it our first opportunity to host both Duke and Texas A&M, but I believe the number is in a combined 220 years of football, this is the first time these two teams have played each other. So a lot of firsts in this game for everybody, I think.

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