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Stanford - 41
USC - 22

An interview with:

**CLAY HELTON
CODY KESSLER
SU'A CRAVENS**

THE MODERATOR: We have USC here, with head coach Clay Helton, Cody Kessler, and Su'a Cravens. Coach, an opening comment or remark about the game?

COACH HELTON: Very proud of our kids and the season that they've had. To make it to a Pac-12 Championship is a great honor for us.

Very sad for them that we did not play our best game today against a very, very talented Stanford team. We've talked about our blueprint to winning, running the ball, stopping the run, and winning the turnover battle, playing great special teams, and we lost the rush game. We lost the turnover battle. Usually that, against a team like that, that's going to equal a loss.

Got some hurt kids in that locker room. They've given tremendous effort to get to this point, and obviously are extremely saddened by not finishing the job. I look forward to having a tremendous bowl game with a bunch of unbelievable seniors who have helped us get to this point. With that, I'll take any questions that you have.

Q. Coach, in the first half (Indiscernible) came up big in the game. But what adjustments did you make in the second half?

COACH HELTON: Well, I thought we executed better. We had a couple missed assignments and some physical beats in the front that cost us early and really took us out of rhythm.

And credit to them, they did a good job. There were some physical beats up front. Just at halftime we made a couple of adjustments and just tell the kids that if we do our job, the plays are there to be made. We could see them as a coaching staff.

Then we started making our plays and doing things right. So that was the biggest thing for the kids. Came back, took the lead. Thought

we had a good chance there, and then we had a critical error in pass protection that ended up costing us.

Q. Coach, what were your impressions of Christian McCaffrey? And how do you think your defense did?

COACH HELTON: Well, he's as special a player as we've played all season. His ability to break tackles is what stood out today. We talked about tackling him all week and we were going to have to. He's just one of those kids that finds ways to make yards and obviously add the back field and the passing game, and he's a mismatched nightmare. You know, when you play man-to-man against him, it's hard. And that was -- we decided we were going to load the box, try to stop the run with cover 1, cover 3, and they caught us in a couple man situations where he had big plays. Credit to him. He's one of the more special players in the country.

Q. Do you think he can win the Heisman?

COACH HELTON: There's a bunch of great players in the country. Does he deserve to be considered? Yes, yes, he does. I would anticipate he's one of those guys in New York. But that's up to the Heisman Committee to make those votes. But like I said, we've played a lot of good players this year, he's as special as any of them.

Q. Does it feel like just getting on the board before the half was able to change momentum when you came out in the third quarter?

COACH HELTON: Yeah, a little bit. We struggled in that first quarter, and credit to them, they had two very long drives and we had one series the entire first quarter. So we had to get our motor jump started a little bit. It was -- to have those three points, you get a little momentum there.

The kids were great at halftime. They knew that all they had to do was do their job, and they came right back out in that third quarter and really produced two touchdowns that not only got us in the game, but took the lead.

Q. Coach, you did a remarkable job from the start from the Notre Dame situation all the way to today, even though at this point it was a loss for you. What experience do you take from this?

COACH HELTON: What I take away from it is a bunch of players coming together as a team, you know, and coming together as a family. That is the thing that I'll take away from this.

We're very grateful to be here in this Championship game, but these guys are starting to play for each other, and that's what I'm most proud of in the whole thing. I reminded them in that locker room just to remember what this pain feels like, because it's our goal next year to be right back here next year, and I want them to remember how bad this hurts. If it doesn't hurt, something's wrong. What I see in there is a bunch of sad kids that want this more than anything.

We've got a bright future at SC, and it started with a bunch of seniors, especially the two kids that are up here, they led us to this thing. I'm sorry that we didn't finish it for them. But they've put us on track to be able to do some great things.

Q. What makes Christian McCaffrey so good?

SU'A CRAVENS: I mean, what doesn't he do is what you could ask me. He catches the ball in the back field, makes the guy miss, and take it to the house, and rush the ball inside and on the edge and really score with any play they draw for him. He's just a special guy. In my opinion, he should win the Heisman.

Q. Cody, the deep ball didn't seem to be too much of a threat for you tonight. Was there something that Stanford was doing that schematically took it out of the game plan?

CODY KESSLER: I think they did a good job of playing their safety pretty deep. They did a good job getting pressure on me too, which was harder for those longer routes to develop. But it was our job to execute those. And we called them sometimes at the right time and called them sometimes when they play the coverage and you get it, and you know you're going to win some and lose some of those.

But I think our guys responded in the second half so good. I mean, we ran the ball really well in the second half. And our receivers made plays and stuff. Obviously, we wish we had a little more deep balls, but we had to do what they were giving us, and that was inside run or outside run and throwing short passes. We just didn't execute enough of them.

Q. You fought back and took the lead, and then the third down pass that Christian had on the long one, what happened on that play?

SU'A CRAVENS: Just got caught in a man situation. I think 99% of the match-ups he has out the back field on the one-on-one, he's going to win it. He got to the inside and took it down to the red zone to the 4-yard line. So just they had a perfect play call for their defense.

Q. (Indiscernible) Stanford's offense was going on, did that make it difficult for you to get into a rhythm?

CODY KESSLER: Yeah, it was tough, but I told our guys that we have to make the most of our drives when we do get them. The first drive or the first quarter, I think we had one drive or something. But that's on us. We went 3 and out, and I think we got one first down and gave it right back. That's tough for our defense. We have to give them a breather and help them out. In the first quarter, we didn't do that.

In the second quarter, we did that towards the end of the half, and then second half we came out and played great.

Then in the third, and it's just something that it definitely hurts, because you know you have opportunities and you could have made them. But I think our guys played so well. They put everything they had on that field. I couldn't be more proud of them.

Q. Cody, you've had a sensational career and incredible stats. Could you summarize your career?

CODY KESSLER: Yeah, when I came into this school, I knew they were going into sanctions. I knew what was going to happen, but it didn't change my mind at all. I said it before and I'll continue to say it. I have absolutely no regrets. We've been through probably the darkest times that this school has been under, this university. And I was one of the guys, looking at me, and everybody looking at me and know that I'm going to stay consistent no matter what. So hopefully people will remember that.

Obviously I wish we would have gotten to the Rose Bowl for our last game, but, like I said, I fell in love with this school. I fell in love with this team, my teammates, this guy, all the coaches I've had. We've been through so many tough times, and I'll look back -- right now it hurts, but I'll look back some day and be proud of the person I became and the players I got to play with.

Q. Cody, you got swapped for a couple months because you wanted Clay Helton to be the head coach. Do you feel it was a let down when

you finally got what you were fighting for all that time?

CODY KESSLER: No, I think Stanford is a great football team.

This man right here is 100% no doubt at all the right man for this job. He earned it, he deserved it. I would play for this guy until the day I died, if I could. He's one of the best coaches I've ever played for in my life, and even a better man. He's taught me so much, and I'm so thankful for that.

Tonight we got beat by a good team. It wasn't his fault, the players or anything. We could execute here and there and made better plays, but -- he's going to take the blame, but it's not on him. These guys played so hard, but Stanford's a great football team. They really are, and we got beat. There are no excuses to make. They beat us tonight and they were the better team.

Q. Su'a?

SU'A CRAVENS: Stanford just beat us. You can't say much else about it. You can't blame Coach Helton at all. He gave his all, and we gave him our all. I don't think it was a letdown at all. When we announced him as head coach, it was a relief. We were glad we got our guy. That's who we wanted. We knew we were going to go to war with him, but just didn't get the result we needed. It's just football (indiscernible).

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