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An Interview With:

TEXAS A&M

THE MODERATOR: Offensive coordinator, Jake Spavital; defensive coordinator, Mark Snyder; quarterback, Johnny Manziel; and defensive back Deshazor Everett. I'll ask each coordinator to start and then maybe get some comments from the players. Coach Spavital, if you'll give us some notes on your Bowl experience so far and what you guys have been up to.

COACH SPAVITAL: Definitely. I would say we arrived on Christmas, it was our travel day. We spent, I would say, about eight practices in College Station and we arrived here. We've been treating it like a full game week. We started off with a Monday practice on the 26th.

We have gone with a Monday, Tuesday, it's kind of funny, it's Sunday but we are treating it like a Thursday now. We have a tough task ahead. Duke is a very good opponent. I don't care what league you're in; if it's a team that can win ten games, that's pretty tough to do. At one point they were one of the hottest teams in the country with an eight-game win streak.

Defensively, they are a very well-coached team. They are very sound. They don't give up very many points. They play very hard. They have three guys that have over a hundred-plus tackles, which you don't see that very often. And I think they do a great job of getting their best players involved with the game plan and we have a very tough task ahead but I think we are very excited to get to Tuesday and lead into the new year hopefully with a victory.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Snyder, talk about your experience in whole week so far and how this has compared to others?

COACH SNYDER: It's been a great week. Chick-Fil-A has done a great job, kept us busy and I think the kids are having fun, excited to go play.

THE MODERATOR: Johnny, we'll start with you, what's been your favorite Bowl week event so far and how good a time are you guys happening?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Having a good time, the other night with both teams, the Madden Challenge, watching our players go against theirs. It was a good game, down to the end, pretty excited about it. Pretty good event to do with the Bowl every night, and looking forward to another one getting to drive some go-carts and have some fun again tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Deshazor, what's been your favorite event so far?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: I definitely enjoyed Johnny -- (Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: I thought we were going to make it all the way to the questions until that came up.

DESHAZOR EVERETT: I've had a good time at all the events. The shake making, that was something to watch, our players making shakes. The Madden game was exciting all the way to the end. It came down to the end. And probably the only place you can get Chick-Fil-A on a Sunday, so that's exciting, too.

Q. Jake, can you tell us what might seem difference on offense than we've seen in the past?

COACH SPAVITAL: There's not going to be much difference out there. I believe that we might play at a faster pace just due to communication of cutting out the middleman, going from the press box to me to Johnny, which is now just a direct communication from me to Johnny.

It's mainly we are just going to try to get a lot of players involved and we are just going to have to find out early in the game who is going to -- who is hot and who is playing well and we are going to try to distribute the ball as much as we possibly can. I wouldn't see too many changes.

Q. Johnny, do you feel like things will

change now that you'll have Coach Spav call the plays directly to you and being on the sideline?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Just like he said, I think they will just come in quicker, hopefully get in more of a rhythm. And that's what we have to do if we want to win this game; complete some passes early and get things rolling and get our tempo where we want to. So I think coming in directly from the sideline will speed that up a little bit.

Q. Johnny, I know you're here thinking about the Bowl game but where are you in terms of looking into the NFL decision? Who have you talked to and where are new that process?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Nowhere even close, just where I was back in New York, back in Orlando. I haven't had any more time with the Bowl practice we had at College Station. Didn't get a chance to really do much.

Q. You did put your name in to get NFL feedback; correct?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Yes.

Q. What kind of impact or issues do you think you might have without dare January in the lineup?

COACH SNYDER: Well, I think Jordan has had a really good two weeks of practice. He's been backing up Darian anyway. His reps have increased over the last three games and I know the kid is looking forward to it. He's excited. It will be exciting to see what he's going to do. We were going to make this move in the spring anyway, so this is going to give him a first chance to get a start on a big stage and we'll know a lot more after we play.

Q. Johnny, I've been curious, going back to your redshirt freshman year, because you were excelling so much in drills, did you and Coach Sherman ever discuss you playing -- not taking time from Ryan Tannehill, but maybe playing some other position instead of red-shirting?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Yeah, back in my red-shirt year, Coach -- Tannehill was there, he was a starter, but he always kept telling me, no matter what game is was, just continue to be ready, continue to practice like you're going to be playing on Saturday.

So I didn't really know if there would be another position or really how that was going to work but they continue to tell me to be ready in case anything were to happen or if something came up.

Q. If you did come back next year, what do you think you could accomplish that you haven't already accomplished at the college level?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Well, there's a lot of team things we haven't done yet. I mean, we finished third and fourth in the ACC west, which is something that we would like to improve on, get to the ACC game and get to a National Championship Game. Obviously sitting here right now -- but there's plenty still left to be done. I don't think I just came into college in two years and just did everything I could -- not done everything I'd like to accomplish, so I think there's plenty out there.

Q. Duke's running game has improved dramatically over the last two or three years, what's your thought about their rushing talent?

COACH SNYDER: Consistency. Those kids have played a lot of football together. I think that's what makes the engine go is the front, playing together and seeing it on film. The kids have played a lot of games, started a lot of games. I think that's why you've seen an improvement in the running game, and I think their staff has committed to running the ball more, as well.

Q. And they are going to be playing without the leading rusher, Duncan, who was suspended from school; how will that impact?

COACH SNYDER: Well, it's more about their offensive line. They have lost an offensive lineman, as well, in the Florida State game. To me they have two, now three really good running backs, but it's the offensive line that makes that thing go.

Q. Jake, was the tempo a problem this season and on the sidelines, you've talked about how it can improve but if that was an issue, if it's going to improve that much, why wasn't the move made earlier to have the plays coming from the sidelines?

COACH SPAVITAL: I wouldn't say it was that huge of an issue. A lot of it has to do with getting in the rhythm of things. Past coordinators

I've worked with, that came directly from them, from the play caller to the quarterback and it's all about developing a rhythm. It was really up to Coach Sumlin. I don't really know about and deal with personnel and staff changes. That's completely up to him. You know, he decided to make the change and we've moved forward in that direction and we are trying to go in verse Duke and get a great rhythm established and mix it all up and see what happens from there.

Q. What have you seen from the Duke offense and the challenges they will present you guys?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: They have a very good offense. We have to stop both the run and the pass. They have some good receivers. We know -- inaudible -- their receiver and their tight end, so we are going to have a good challenge on our hands.

Q. Deshazor, you've been around Johnny for a while and you go up against him every day in practice. What kind of leader and what kind of presence does he have within the team?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: He won't quit and he'll go at you. He's not afraid to go up against anybody. And regardless of how many plays the defense made that day, if he feel like he can make a play against you, he's going to make that play happen. He's going to give it his best. He's going to give it his all and he won't back down from anybody.

Q. What have you seen specifically from Jamison Crowder on tape, and how does he compare to some of the best receivers that you've faced in the SEC?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: He has good speed, good routes, and he goes and completes the ball. He's a good receiver. I can't take anything away from him just because of the conference that they are playing in. But it's going to be a big challenge for us and we are just going to have to go out and play them just like we play every other receiver.

Q. This may sound kind of like a simplistic question but with all the eyes on you and pressure on you, have you been able to enjoy yourself this season and what kind of stands out to you when you think about this year?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I think I've absolutely been able to enjoy myself. I've had a great time in College Station just this year, had a great group of friends, great group of teammates that have been around me since things kind of changed back in August. But life's been good. I've been able to enjoy things in College Station. It's really mellowed out a lot and I've been able to go more places and do more and people are -- me being around and out in the public. It really has been a great year. I've enjoyed every second of it.

Q. Coach Sumlin mentioned about you being beat up a little bit at the end of the season and much has been written about your thumb, your shoulder. Can you tell us where you're at and how much that maybe did hamper you at the end of the season?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I feel really good today. I wish the game was tonight. I'm really tired and having to sit here and continue to practice and continue to wait for the game. I think we are ready to get back on the field. I think we are eager to play. So I was a little banged up. The thumb is feeling extremely well, as well as really everything else, so I feel like I'm healthy and ready to play in the Bowl game.

Q. Johnny, can you compare Duke's defense to what you've seen on tape so far to some of those tough defenses that you've had to see in the SEC, what type of challenges they will bring to you Tuesday night?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I think the biggest thing about Duke is they have a lot of fire. They swarm to the ball and they play good as a unit. It's hard to kind of compare who they would be like in the SEC.

But you look at what they did at the beginning of the Florida State game, they really slowed that high-powered offense down. I think they played hard more than anything and they played together as a unit.

Q. Coach Snyder, during the Missouri game we saw a lot of progress in the defense, thought that was a pretty good defensive game. Noticed a lot of younger defensive linemen, like Jay Arnold in the game; can we expect more of that in this game?

COACH SNYDER: Yes, yes, you will. Yes.

Q. Jake, could you talk about your mentors or who you're going to draw on when you become an offensive coordinator making the calls, who influenced your system or what you're going to go do?

COACH SPAVITAL: There's a lot to that. I've had the opportunity to work with Gus Malzahn and Dana Holgorsen and Kliff Kingsbury.

A lot of that has to do with the type of quarterback that you have. If you look at the past quarterbacks I've had with Johnny and Brandon and Geno Smith and Case Keenum, they are all exceptional quarterbacks, but you run the offense all differently with them. That's part of just sitting down next year in the spring and figuring out what type of personnel we have and that's the direction that it's going to go from.

But I would say that probably the biggest influences offensively for me have been Kliff Kingsbury and Dana Holgorsen.

Q. Johnny, who is the team that surprised a lot of country this year, if somebody had told you back in August before the season started that you would be playing Duke in your Bowl game, what would you have said?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I think they have done a great job of getting to where they were, and like Coach Spav said, they were one of the hottest teams in the country at one point in time, and you have to look and really give them credit for what they have done this year. I don't think I would have expected it. We thought we would be in a BCS Bowl, maybe a National Championship, but things went how they did and we are very, very happy to be here and look forward to playing Duke.

Q. At the beginning of the season, the suspensions early on defense, Darian has his troubles lately. How disappointing is it for you and what do you do moving forward in terms of -- I don't know if the word is tightening the screws or what have you in terms of your defenders?

COACH SNYDER: Well, it's a learning process. We are dealing with 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kids, and you go through a maturation process. As kids go through that maturation process at times, they are going to learn some tough lessons and you have to give them some tough love. It's kind of like raising your children and that's kind of the way we approach it.



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Q. Coach Spav, talking about a BCS Bowl, but how -- at least in this location, talking about it's going to be in the playoff format next season, how big is it to play well, especially in the location that is going to host one of those games?

COACH SPAVITAL: Definitely, this is my first time going into the Georgia Dome. It's a great venue and you can see why that it's going to be in one of those top games to compete with the National Championship.

It's definitely something that we have to take very seriously and this game, it's the only game on national TV at night and it's a great recruiting tool for us, too. If we go out there and execute the way we do and we come out with a victory, it's going to spark us in spring in recruiting and at this stage it's very important to have success.

Q. Can you talk about escaping pressure, and how did you develop that skill?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: That's something that just became natural when I played football in high school, just being able to improvise and extend plays and try to keep them alive and really move the chains and get downs and score touchdowns is the main goal. So trying to fight for these guys and extend the play and make things happen.

Q. Does Duke remind y'all of kind of yourselves last year?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Maybe a little bit. Obviously we had a big signature win last year towards the end of the year, but you look at what they did with a win streak and how we had a little bit of a run there going towards the end of the year.

I remember how we felt going into the Cotton Bowl and the momentum that we have and the confidence. I'm sure they share some of that, as well.

Q. For Jake and Johnny, have you guys been able to pinpoint what went wrong with the offense in the last two games, besides you being banged up, were you not getting enough people involved? What were the issues?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: I think

confidence. If I could pinpoint one thing, I would say just that would probably be the main thing, we were not playing with really the swagger or playing with the juice and energy that we needed to be.

Going into the Auburn game and how that turned out in that game, it has really deflated, and you look at it -- talk the next day, it was one that stung for a long time, especially offensively. Just going from that game and kind of transitioning to some other ones and some non-conference games thrown in there, we just kind of lost our confidence after that and never really could get it back.

So I feel like we've had a great week of Bowl practice and we continue to progress, especially since we've been here in Atlanta. So I'm very excited and I'm very confident in these guys and I think we are all ready to go.

Q. Daeshon Hall is a guy that has progressed as the season went along and had a nice run there in the end; what have you seen from him in Bowl preparations? Do you feel like he a guy that can have a breakout game?

COACH SNYDER: Well, hope so. I mean, Dae-Dae is getting better, just like all the young guns are. As you watch the season unfold down the stretch here, I feel like we've gotten better and our confidence is coming with our group and he's definitely a part of that.

Still young, first Bowl experience for a lot of these guys, so it will be another chapter in their lives and the season. Hopefully the last one for -- as a new experience.

Q. It seemed to go against every bit of your competitive fiber, whatever you want to call it. How difficult was it to teach yourself to slide, to get out of bounds and to do the things that everyone said you needed to work on in the off-season to become a better, complete quarterback?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Well, I want to play a whole game and I don't want to get blind-sided or take a shot like I did in the Auburn game that was -- could have been avoided. As hard as it is in that instance and such a quick second to make that decision, sometimes you just have to chalk it up and get down, and I needed to do that a little bit more.

But I think that you look in the NFL and you look at some of the greatest guys that do it, you know when to pick your battles, so I'm still learning how to do that and hopefully try and perfect that.

Q. Jake, as you guys look to get that swagger and confidence back, how important and how key can a quick start be, like we saw last year with coming out and making statement early?

COACH SPAVITAL: Definitely, that's huge and that's one of the main emphasizes that we do as an offense is the fast start. It's going to be very important to get a lot of people involved early in the game, and focus on getting first downs and hopefully that will lead into touchdowns. But those first few drives of the game are very important to set the tone.

Q. You talked about the sliding and learning to do that; someone mentioned yesterday that it was a little bit funny because last year you didn't do that but you weren't hurt and this year you did do it and did get hurt. Is it frustrating you worked on those things and still ended up banged up?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I haven't really thought about it too much like that. I ran the ball more last year but was able to really get down and avoid quite a bit of those and never really took all that many shots and this year, that's just been how it's been. Maybe people were out to get me and want to really rip my head off, but I haven't really paid too much attention to it.

Q. Two years ago, joining the SEC, would you imagine the program having so much success to start off with in the conference?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: With the hiring of Coach Sumlin, he's very good at motivation and getting these kids to play at a high level. I wasn't a part of it last year and I got to come in for the second year, and just -- I've been at programs that played Texas A&M, when I was at Oklahoma State in 2010. And just to see the excitement that this program and this university has after one year in the SEC has been huge. And that's just with the people that Coach Sumlin has put around and the fan base and support; it doesn't surprise me at all the success they are having in the SEC.

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I wasn't all that surprised about it. Last year we were excited and we felt like we let some games slip away before in the second half. We were pumped up.

We talked about it being the best

conference in the country and we were eager to get in there and see how we stacked up, but Coach Sumlin brought a great deal of energy and really gets the most out of us.

Q. Did you talk a little about how important it would be for this team to make it three straight Bowl wins in three straight years?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: Very important. The last game of the season is the first game of the next year. So we want to start off next year with a win under our belt, and we haven't finished the last couple games the way we wanted to.

So finishing this Bowl game is going to be the way we want to go out. So just being able to participate in this Bowl game is a benefit for our team, for the confidence level going into next year. We just want to finish strong as a team.

Q. Can you talk about the difference of this year not winning the Heisman Trophy and maybe the pressure being alleviated from you going into this Bowl game compared to last year when you did win it going into the Cotton Bowl?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I didn't feel pressure going into the Cotton Bowl last year. Just kind of the same that I am right now, is really eager to play and eager to get back on the field.

I think being a competitor, this time that we have off from the end of November to pretty much January 1, the new year, it's a lot of time of not getting out there on the football field and playing, playing against another opponent. We have seen a lot of these guys in practice; I'm really getting tired of going against him. He's been throwing everything in the world at us in practice.

So tired of that and ready to get back on the field in the Georgia Dome, which is a great venue.

Q. Can you talk about, you mentioned having those play calls right there next to you. Are you excited to get that tempo up and to get it back to where, like we saw it last year, where it was quick and you were getting --

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Yeah, my biggest thing is I want to get out and if we are going to come out and throw the ball early, get some completions and get a rhythm going and I think everything comes from there.

You look at some of our games earlier in the year, you start out a drive ten for ten, or five for

six, five for seven and you get some easy completions, you're just playing pitch and catch and you get to see the ball completed and really gets your confidence up and gets you rolling from there, and then we can really get first downs and take it step-by-step and do what we want to do.

Q. This is the time last year when things started just really changing for you after the Heisman. You mentioned how things have mellowed out at College Station; are you able to sum up the past year and what it's been like for you since this was the time it got cranking for you on that front?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Absolutely not. So much has gone on in between last year at this point and now. I feel like every week there's almost been something. It's been a little bit of a journey but I feel like I'm a lot better at handling it now than I was last year at this point. Still no regrets of anything in that regard, and I'm really happy and content with where I am right now.

Q. The last two games, the rain at LSU and Missouri it was really cold. Do you think playing indoors will bring the offense back better and how it affected the last few games?

COACH SPAVITAL: That's just football, part of the conditions we're going to be playing in. I see we're going to be playing in a dome, so I don't think there's going to be any wind hopefully in here. It's going to be a good atmosphere. It's a very fast playing field, and I enjoy that because I like to see our kids trying to play as fast as they can.

But there's not going to be any weather conditions out there so I think we don't have any excuses going into the game, so we'll just go out there and leave it all on the line.

JOHNNY MANZIEL: Georgia dome, the turf, it's really fast and we had fun, we're go out there running around the past couple days. So I think we are really excited about playing in that venue and getting to play in a dome two years in a row. It should be good.

Q. I know that Duke drove here but for you guys to be an SEC country and be playing in an SEC venue and to the Aggie faithful that will turnout for the game.

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I'm really excited. I think one of the best things about A&M, whatever

Bowl game we would be playing, I think we travel extremely well. Our fans are really passionate and I think they are really excited about this game.

Like Coach Spav said earlier, even on TV, there's going to be tons of people that watch us, New Year's Eve, the only game on television. I think I speak for me and Deshazor, everyone involved with the team, really glad that we get the fan base support that we do.

Q. Johnny is talking about confidence; are you seeing that confidence from that offense of them kind of getting back to their old ways a little bit?

DESHAZOR EVERETT: Yeah, you see it from all the receivers which I go against daily. I don't go against the offensive line too much. I try to stay out of their way.

The receivers, they are coming out, they run their routes and they are catching the ball in confidence. You don't see so many dropped balls out there. Johnny is throwing it on point and we are out there competing every day and the offense is definitely getting us ready.

Q. If and when your last game is, what do you want your legacy to be after you have left Texas A&M?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I just want to be remembered as one of the best to have played at A&M. Definitely don't like coming in second or being second best at anything, so hopefully with the things that we have done here as a team, hopefully get a third Bowl win, have a big win in the Cotton Bowl, Heisman Trophy -- inaudible -- we have four finalists going to Orlando this year.

So far as a team, the past two, three years that I've been here have been awesome. I think throw Bowl wins, what we did last year at a team with the Cotton Bowl and with the Heisman, I just want to be remembered as one of the best.

Q. Can you describe the relationship that you have been able to build with Johnny in this past season?

COACH SPAVITAL: The way I learned from Kliff and how you handle the quarterbacks, you've got to be very close with them, because Kliff always told me that if your kid goes out there and he throws an interception, everybody in the entire stadium knows he screws up. That's something, the relationship that you build with the quarterbacks are very, very close, because we

can't call perfect plays all the time and rely on him to get us in the right place.

So we work together on it and working with Johnny has been great. I've been pretty fortunate to come in already with it inherited and taught by Kliff and I just pretty much spent the time developing a relationship with Johnny, and figuring out what he does best and what he likes and pretty much those relationships will continue on forever.

Q. Coach Sumlin had told us you had kind of a newfound freedom this year; how much did you enjoy that this season?

JOHNNY MANZIEL: I just feel like beginning of this year, I was able to do what I was doing probably game eight or nine of last year, so more familiar last year with getting us into the right play and being able to do all the freedom -- more towards the end of last year and being able to have that the beginning of this year was nice.

I'm sure we did it more this year just because I was able to check and do things like that more, in more games, but I don't feel like it was too different. I feel like Coach McKinney and Coach Spav, between the two of them, got us into some pretty good plays this year. And if there was something I didn't like or a blitz or a bad look or something we looked at on film and saw we didn't like, then I would check us out of it. But I don't think it was much different than how I would operate the offense last year.

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