

**December 29, 2013**



An Interview With:

## **DUKE**

**THE MODERATOR:** Offensive coordinator, Kurt Roper; defensive coordinator, Jim Knowles; defensive end, Kenny Anunike, and guard Dave Harding.

Coach Roper, why don't you start us with an opening statement, maybe just talk about your Bowl week experience so far and compare it to other trips that you guys have had.

**COACH ROPER:** We've had a great week. It's a lot of fun, they keep you busy, but that's what you look forward to, learning about a city, learning about a Bowl. They have been great to us. The hospitality has been great.

The practice setup has been great. As always, for a coach, that's always a big concern how that's going to work and the people in the Georgia Dome have been great to us all week.

So it's been an outstanding week. I've been on, I think this is my 11th Bowl in about 18 years, I've been on quite a few of them and this is obviously an outstanding place.

**COACH KNOWLES:** For me it's just given me longer time to look at Texas A&M and really amazed at what they do offensive. That extra week sometimes for defensive coordinators can be not a good thing because you keep trying to look at different ways to come up and stop their potent offense. A lot of times, that's not a good thing.

But I know for the families and for our players, which I consider the Bowl to really -- for guys like Kurt and I, we just work harder and work harder and work harder, but I think what Chick-Fil-A people have done and everybody on the Bowl is really taken care of our players and our families. They are having a wonderful experience and every now and then, they let Kurt and I out to be a part of it, too, so we get to have fun, also, every now and then.

Practice setup, like Kurt has said, has been really exceptional, really exceptional. Has

not affected our routine at all and that is something that you concern yourself with when you're trying to get a team ready.

**THE MODERATOR:** Dave, talk about the experience from a player's perspective and maybe what's been your favorite event of the week so far.

**DAVE HARDING:** It's been a great experience, starting from the night we got here, everything's been set up really nicely for us and they have made the transition into really becoming an Atlanta resident pretty easy.

Like to reiterate what both coaches said in practice, from a player's standpoint, has been kind of a seamless transition and been able to get better this week. You know, the Bowl events and all the fun things have been great, and they have also allowed us to have meeting time and practice time necessary to focus on our top priority and our No. 1 objective.

**THE MODERATOR:** We need somebody to break down what happened in the basketball skills competition last night.

**KENNY ANUNIKE:** That was part of the battle for the Chick-Fil-A -- here in Bowl week. We had a few of our guys, Jamison Crowder and Isaac Blakeney, quarterback Anthony Boone and DeVon Edwards versus Johnny Manziel, a few other of their players and it looks like we were going to win that thing. I had a nice slam dunk to start it off, DeVon had the free throws. And then they gave the ball to Texas A&M and it was their turn, Johnny Manziel, runs up there, he goes up for the lay-up, he missed.

**THE MODERATOR:** We covered that in the first session, belief me.

**KENNY ANUNIKE:** That kind of cost them some time but they rallied back -- at first the lady said we won but then somebody back there from Texas A&M had something to do with that and they changed the tally, so they won. But it's all good. We still have two more events. Today we have the Andretti car racing. We have some speedsters on the Duke Blue Devils squad and then we have the Family Feud to top it off.

**Q. You guys are seeing some mobile quarterbacks this year but none more so than Johnny Manziel. What's the defensive strategy to limit his wild scrambling ability?**

KENNY ANUNIKE: Well, obviously this is my defensive coordinator here --

COACH KNOWLES: You'll be playing. I will not be making any tackles.

KENNY ANUNIKE: You'll be living vicariously through me. Basically Coach Knowles philosophy on this and Coach Petrie is always telling us on the d-line, collapse that pocket, make sure that he does not have a scramble lane. Because we know that Johnny Manziel, like you said, is a mobile quarterback and he likes to get out of the pocket, scramble, make plays, put on a show.

So we just have to make sure that we get in there and get some power rushes, keep the up field (indiscernible) shoulder and just make sure he stays right there in that pocket and keep that lockdown coverage in the back end.

COACH KNOWLES: Yeah, he's the best, obviously, that I think anyone has seen in our profession at ad-libbing and extending plays. We usually talk about five-second plays, and we are able to count many occasions during the games that he plays where the plays become ten seconds long, and particularly on our back end -- Kenny is right.

We have to work hard on our contained rush and really change it up with different people spying and triggering at different times and certain type of blitzes that maybe, maybe, can predict which way he's going to go, but it is so hard with him because he is so dynamic.

But the most important part is in the back end, so get those guys not to be watchers; you know, don't watch the paint dry in the back, because he does put on a great show. But our guys need to cover in the back. They need to cover in the back and let the people up front chase him all over.

So we'll be playing plenty of guys, because that's the other key to it, too, is you've got to stay fresh because people have to chase and run and those plays can become ten seconds long.

**Q. You guys have had a couple of personnel losses on offense with Duncan and Simmons; any concerns about the running game being as effective as it has been before without those guys?**

DAVE HARDING: Obviously those guys have been major role players in our offense and the success that we've had this season, but one of the things we've been talking about all year is the depth that we have in both the offensive line and at the running back position -- in our stable of running backs.

We are confident in the abilities of Josh Snead and Juwan Thompson to come in there and carry the load. They are confident in their abilities, as well. And as far as the offensive line is concerned, Lucas Patrick has been our sixth man all year long, filling in for me quite a bit, coming in at tackle positions. Really the only position he has not played is center but he's been taking reps at that in practice, and so he's done a great job of filling in for Perry at right tackle.

And then as far as his backup, we have just been shifting some people around, me included. So we've got guys that are ready to step up to the challenge, a lot of experience, offensive linemen won't be phased by a position change during the game.

**Q. Who in your career does Johnny Manziel most remind you of in terms of what he can do in extending plays and the pressure it puts on you guys?**

COACH KNOWLES: I wouldn't say in my career, but when I was a kid, I was a Minnesota Vikings fan, and that's a long story, because I grew up in inner city Philadelphia but I ended up being a Vikings fan. There was a guy, all of the old-timers will remember Fran Tarkenton and I was just amazed as a kid at the way he ran around, extended plays at a time when that was very unique and different.

Now we have an era of running quarterbacks, but defending Johnny is completely different because these are not -- these are not called runs most of the time. It's just him ad-libbing and making plays. It becomes more of like a basketball on the football field, and you have to have -- having one guy form is not enough. You really need to have two to have a chance, and like I said, try to pressure him in different ways.

But the first guy that comes to mind really is Fran Tarkenton. I guess that goes keep back to me when I was a kid. Loved watching him, and he was extremely successful at doing it. Johnny Manziel is the best that I've seen as a coach or player.

**Q. How much are you trying to soak in the final couple of days with your Duke family before you head off to Gainesville?**

COACH ROPER: It's been a great six years. I told the players this the other day; it's been the most magical season I've ever been a part of, and I've been a part of a National Championship season.

But this group of guys, I think what we all enjoy the most is the friendships that we create and there is a coach/player relationship, but these guys are my friends and I'll stay close with these guys for a long time. Going to miss them. That's what it really gets down to.

I think you try to enjoy every day with these guys the same. I have not really put it in those terms in my mind of soak it in, but I'm going to miss being around this group of offensive players and quarterbacks. I think if Dave was staying, it would be harder but he's walking out the door with me.

I tell you what, it's been a great group of guys. I love them. I love them to death.

**Q. Jim, could you talk about how satisfying is it for you to be sitting here with Kenny after all he's gone through and to have him enjoy the success that he's had?**

COACH KNOWLES: You know, I look at Kenny and Mickey and I see our program. You can look into his eyes, you can look at what his body has been through and you see Duke football. You see a program and a man where it's taken a lot of hard work, a lot of perseverance, an attitude to never quit; a positive attitude.

Kenny and I have been through some tough times together where we have taken the field and really been out-matched and we have lived through those. It's great for me to see him be recognized and to see his team and his defense be able to step up and say that we can play with anybody in the country. Kenny has put a lot of time into this program and he kept coming back when other guys would have walked away.

So now he and I are at a press conference at one of the premiere Bowls in the country, and for Duke, it's an incredible success story, and he embodies the whole of it.

KENNY ANUNIKE: Appreciate that, Coach.

COACH KNOWLES: Night Train, too. He goes by the Night Train.

**Q. You talked a little bit about losing Perry but what kind of role has he played since the injury in working with the rest of the offensive line, and particularly Lucas, making sure you guys are all prepared for this week?**

DAVE HARDING: He's been at every practice and every meeting. He's been very visible and vocal throughout the whole Bowl preparation. He's a leader of this offensive line and of this team. He's a little quieter than some. He's not a vocal leader but he's somebody that you can count on to be there early and to give it his all and to just be committed to the process.

So he's been a huge help to Lucas and to all the young tackles that we have. We have a lot of young guys coming up through the system and they have bright futures ahead of them and Perry realizes that and he has a chance to leave his legacy in a different way. He's been a huge help to me as well watching film. He'll come over and say, hey, why don't you try doing this; he's a really smart guy and has been able to contribute and even in his absence from the field.

**Q. You've faced a lot of good quarterbacks in the ACC. How challenging is it for you as a defensive lineman to play somebody like Manziel where you want to be aggressive but at the same point you have to be disciplined and balanced in the heat of the competition?**

KENNY ANUNIKE: That's exactly right. As Coach Knowles can tell you, I'm a very aggressive guy coming off the edge.

When you are playing a quarterback like Johnny Manziel who will take advantage of something like that and has a good game, then you have to limit your rush. Certain things you just can't do. You can't zoom high, and when we say zoom high, it's going -- taking off behind the offensive tackle and trying to get the quarterback from behind, because Johnny Manziel steps up in the pocket and his line will continue to block and he will take off right up the middle, and that will hurt us and that's how they hurt teams in the past.

So Coach Knowles and Coach Petrie always talk about leveling your rush so, when you get to level the quarterback, try to use a long arm, try to get back in his face and you just have to coordinate with your other defensive lineman. If I'm going high, then I have to make sure my left hand adjustment spot is going to come low so we

can contain him.

So it's all just about collapsing that pocket, and like Coach Knowles was talking about, making sure our guys stay locked in in coverage, don't watch the show, because that's how the receivers keep the play alive and they can hurt you.

**Q. Could you talk about the pressure Johnny Manziel puts on your unit to keep him off the field and score more, does it change your philosophy at all?**

COACH ROPER: I think you always go into the same game with the same thought process, let's take care of the football, let's try to make plays when the opportunity is there to make plays and get the game into the fourth quarter. But you never know how a game, the flow of a game is going to go.

So obviously if he's having a lot of success, then you've got to try to match that success. It's not a lot different than when you play an option team like Georgia Tech who has the ability to minimize your possessions and put points on the score board obviously.

So does it add any pressure, no. It's the same thought process as a play caller, but I think your thought process has to change based on how the game is flowing.

**Q. Do you take anything from the LSU and Missouri ballgame where the A&M defense struggled sometimes or does the time that they have had to recover erase all that?**

COACH ROPER: Well, obviously you watch a lot of tape you and plan and you try to come up with your best plan. I think the best teams find out what their identity is and they hang their hat on that identity. Our identity is different than an LSU.

We are going to be a team that plays with more spread formations, more space, and we are going to try to put guys in that space. But while we're in spread formations, we still like to be a physical football team. And so we are going to be true to our identity. We are going to be ourselves. We are going to run the plays that we have run all year and go try to execute them.

**Q. I guess you got to see a pretty good running quarterback in practice a lot in Brandon Connette, how does seeing him in practice help you against a guy like Manziel, and also, who is running the scout team quarterback for you guys as Manziel?**



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KENNY ANUNIKE: Yeah, that's definitely getting a good look from a guy like Brandon Connette, who is a pretty fast quarterback. And then like the offensive coordinators tell those guys, sometimes hold the ball and not pass it and scramble. So we have had a scramble drill with Coach Knowles, and that's helped tremendously, especially on the scout team quarterbacks, one of the scout team quarterbacks, Quay Chambers, he's a very fast guy, and that scramble drill was extremely tiring. We ran it over and over again so now we are used to it.

But that's a tremendous help and those guys on our scout team, they go in the film room and study guys like Manziel and the backs that they have and try to emulate exactly what they do so we can get the best look possible, so when it comes to game time, we are ready; we've already seen it.

**Q. What has back-to-back Bowl games done for the Duke program?**

COACH ROPER: Well, I think it's been the most satisfying experience of my career the last two years, and Coach Knowles really said earlier: It kind of embodies Duke football now.

It was a challenge when we got here six years ago and guys like Kenny and Dave had to say, we believe in your vision. When you're selling a vision as a coach, you don't always 100 percent know if it's going to come true. You don't know that.

You work to try to accomplish those things and when it does come true and the guys that believed in you and bought in, there's nothing like it to say, hey, thank you to those guys for believing. Like I say, it's been the most gratifying experience of my career.

COACH KNOWLES: I think it's amazing what you can accomplish with a group of guys when no one cares who gets the credit, and that's what we have. We are losing Kurt and that's a big deal to me personally and to us, because there are no egos on our staff.

We came into Duke and we all knew what our goal was and that was to be sitting here and we didn't know how long it would take but we knew we had good people. Kurt and I were together at Ole Miss, and so we all know how to win and what it takes and these guys believed in us, they listened, they are coachable. So it's been a joy.

Now we all know in life, a lot of times it still

doesn't work out. The good guy doesn't always win but we feel like we've done things the right way, with good people, with no egos, nobody had a separate agenda of where they wanted to be or what they wanted to do, and everybody was really pulling in the same direction.

**Q. Once again, Duke finds itself as underdog for this game, a position you've been in all season. What does it mean to get another chance to disprove that, except this time on a national scale?**

DAVE HARDING: I think the implications for this game are huge, reiterating what both coaches just said. This program has come so far since I first got here. We've improved so much.

A lot of that has been changing a culture around with our fans who support us and the people in North Carolina and across the country really realizing we are serious about football at Duke University and we are coming into every game expecting to win and having prepared to win. This year has been huge for that, having an historic season and racking up ten wins has been great. You can slowly see the perception of our program change, which is a lot of fun.

But with that being said, it's nowhere where we want it to be. We have a lot of work to do and we know that as seniors and as coaches, that we need to leave the next year's team in a good position, and the best way to do that is to get that 11th win, something that's unprecedented around Duke University, and we know that this is the biggest stage that we have played on, the date, primetime, on New Year's Eve, and we have a lot of recruits watching and a lot of naysayers, and we are ready to prove them wrong, just like we have the rest of this year.

KENNY ANUNIKE: Like Dave said, this is an opportunity on a national scale to show the direction this program is moving in. We have accomplished tremendous milestones along this journey and it's been a magical journey. We are looking to cap it off with a win here against Texas A&M.

I tell you, being the underdog, we've been underdogs my whole career since I've been here. That's nothing new. Has not changed. But what has changed, though, is the expectations. This team, it's something different. Going into every game, we expected to win and the results have been awesome, as you can see, going up against ranked teams like Virginia Tech and Miami, we went into those games with a different mind-set

than we have in the past. We went into those games expecting to win, and the outcome has been great.

So this game, we are not going to treat it any differently. We are going in with an expectation to win, and that's the culture, the culture that Coach Cutcliffe grew since me and Dave since the whole coaching staff has come to this university to embark on; and that was to change this culture and just really make it a place that's just used to winning, just like our basketball team.

Now going around campus, people are talking about, man, we are becoming a football school. To hear that, it's awesome. It's really just -- it blows my mind. I'm just so proud to be playing my last game as a blue did he have I will against Texas A&M Aggies here in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl. Can't wait.

**Q. So follow-up on the Florida State question -- what impressed you the most after playing -- that you didn't get a full picture of on film that when you're actually playing them you get a better sense of?**

KENNY ANUNIKE: I was just going to say, actually the speed, the speed of their offense. Their running backs, their receivers, you could tell a lot by what you see on tape but when you're actually out there, it's just a whole different ballgame. Because whatever the team has done in the previous games, they might switch it up on you; you never know. That's why we are defensive players, we react. We react to anything you throw at us.

I would the overall speed -- and they were strong. They were strong. But I think we just didn't play our best game. We didn't play to our full potential. I think that if we had done that, the outcome might have been a little different but that's in the past and we are not looking at that anymore.

COACH KNOWLES: Florida State across the board in all positions, that's what I would say, the depth of their offensive line is extremely impressive to me. We knew their receivers and their quarterback -- he's a lot bigger and stronger in person. But they don't have any real weaknesses. They are playing for the National Championship and they deserve it.

**Q. Playing in a dome sometimes changes the pace and the tempo of a game. In**

**what ways do you think that favors your team and in what ways do you think that could favor Texas A&M?**

COACH ROPER: You know, I don't see the tempo being much different than what we've done all year. We are going to -- like I say, we've done this 13 games, now going on our 14th game, so we are going to be us.

So the tempo is going to be the same. We are going to be no-huddle. We are going to be at times really fast and we are going to be at times a little slower, but we are going to play with some tempo in this game.

So I think the only benefits you see after playing 13 straight games is our guys have a comfort of what we are asking them to do.

COACH KNOWLES: Yeah, I think we have a beautiful new indoor at Duke, and being in the dome does feel a lot like all the practices that Kurt and I had where our offense goes and can go as fast as anybody in the country. We were able to work a lot of things out defensively as Kenny can tell you, in terms of getting lined up, getting into the right place, not giving the offense anything, because of how we practice.

If you've seen our practices, they all feel very much like they are in a controlled dome, almost laboratory kind of environment because it's extremely fast-paced and it's nonstop and there's music playing and blaring at all times. Guys like to make fun of me because I like to yell out on the field and tell guys what to do; can't do that any more but we have prepared for that because we blare music all the time. We go indoors a lot. So I think we are really prepared for this opportunity.

**Q. When you look at this A&M defense on film, could you talk about which players jump out at you as really might make a difference in this game?**

COACH ROPER: I think No. 72, defensive end, has a quick first step and he can really challenge a tackle. I think he's a guy that can get after your quarterback and make plays. I think No. 8 is a physical linebacker. I think they will miss 48 obviously, but I think 8 is a physical linebacker and likes to play the game in a box and really try to get after you.

I think No. 1, their corner, is aggressive, has some obviously really good speed, but I think he likes to challenge some receivers. That will be something that is tough duty for our wide receivers to win some one-on-one battles against him. I

think they have got talent players at each level of the defense.

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