

December 7, 2013



**2013 FOOTBALL
CHAMPIONSHIP**

Stanford – 38
ASU – 14

An interview with:

COACH GRAHAM

COACH GRAHAM: Well, I want to congratulate Coach Shaw and Stanford. Tremendous team. They dominated the game. Beat us in every way you can tonight, so I want to congratulate them and give them a lot of credit. They're a championship team.

My thoughts are with my seniors. You know, just what a great group of young men and a group that's restored our program to double-digit wins. Wanted them so bad tonight to get this win, and I felt like I let them down. We didn't have very good preparation, obviously.

The number one thing that I'm disappointed about is kicking game. I mean, you can't have a chance in the championship game and play special teams like that, and that's ultimately my responsibility.

So I feel bad that I let them down, but just really proud of our seniors, really proud of our program. Proud of the Sun Devil Nation. I think the Pac-12 has seen what Tempe and Arizona State is all about tonight. A tremendous atmosphere. Really proud of our fans, and again, sorry we let them down. But couldn't be more proud of our seniors and what they've done and what they mean to me. Again, you're always into the emotion that you're feeling at the time, but I don't know that I've had a group of seniors that I'm closer to than these guys. Some of the best competitors. I'm not intense competitor and I love this game. Some of the best competitors I've ever been around that love this game with a tremendous passion and love this program, love being a Sun Devil.

Just really hurting for them right now, but, again, congratulations to Stanford. A first-class program, tremendous coaching staff. They obviously deserved to win tonight. They were the better team.

Q. Can you just talk about the chances you had there in the third quarter that kind of could have turned the game around?

COACH GRAHAM: Yeah, we drove the ball down. I started to go for it. Tried the field goal, missed the field goal. We haven't missed a field goal in I think, I don't know how many attempts. That hurt. Got down on the one-inch line and didn't score. I mean, you've got to score. That would have made it, I think, a ten-point game at the time. We got them 3rd and 7, called them timeout. Tell them the exact play they're going to run, they run it for 60 yards.

Again, made a lot of critical errors at those places where you look at -- it was a game where we had seven, nine guys playing at a high level, and a few guys not. They dominated the line of scrimmage. The defensive line was probably the story of the game. But you absolutely cannot play special teams like that. It's absolutely sad, because it doesn't give you a chance to compete the way you need to.

You know, even at that, they were the better team tonight. I think those missed opportunities, they could have been -- you only score 14 points and you're not going to have a chance to win. We got the ball to the one inch line, don't score, miss the field goal, that's ten points. That could have obviously made a difference.

I thought we settled down. What killed us the very first drive, we have a critical error -- a coaching critical error, and we gave up a 70-yard touchdown on misalignment. So we spot them seven point there's and we didn't have anybody out there. So that kind of stuff can't happen.

That kind of stuff you wish you had back,

but we obviously missed a lot of opportunities. We could have made a game out of it, but I really thought we would. It was 28-14 halftime. Two-score game. I thought we'd get the ball and go score and come back and win the game, but you can tell that they're the defending champion, and they defended it well.

Q. Touching on something you just mentioned. There was a lot of talk about Stanford being a physical team and that being a tough match-up for you. How do you feel you handled that element of it?

COACH GRAHAM: Oh, I think, if you'll notice tonight it's exactly the same things that -- there wasn't a lot of -- they ran the ball. They did some good things. We made some adjustments too. They obviously had a great game plan. They did some different things. They started running perimeter run. Obviously, they run a 70-yard touchdown there on a perimeter run at the very beginning.

Our guys, I'm proud of our guys. I mean, Will and Gannon and Davon and Carl, all those guys up front, Chris Young. I've never coached guys any more physical than that. Yes, Stanford is extremely physical. Best offensive line we've played. And there's just not much margin for error.

We had those critical errors on the perimeter that kill you, absolutely kill you. We had some critical errors inside that hurt us. I think that it was a very, very physical game.

I don't know. Obviously, they won that. Because you can look at the stats, but I don't think -- I think we've got a heck of a defensive football team. I think we've got a heck of an offensive line.

But obviously that's something that they were better tonight, they were more physical. I think they really dominated their defensive line really dominated the run game, and that hurt us. We moved the ball, we just couldn't score points. Got into getting sacked and all of that, so I don't know.

I think it was one of those games that we haven't had in a while. But the reason you have those games is because the other team is so well-coached, and so well-prepared and it's a veteran group. We just made too many mistakes. We had like eight critical errors just on defense in the first half. We did settle down and make some adjustments and really settled down. I mean, we gave up ten points, I think, in the second half.

But, in that, seven of those were off three more critical errors. Again, not making any excuses. They were better than us tonight. As far as physical, did I think they were physical? Oh, yeah, they're the most physical team that we've played. But I thought our guys inside all year long -- Will Sutton's never been physically dominated. Davon has played unbelievably, and again, Conway's played unbelievably. But you've got to have 11, and their 11 were more physical and better than our 11.

Q. It seems like special teams has just kind of been a thorn in your guys' side all year. You've put such a big emphasis on that. Has this been the most trying season you've had with special teams?

COACH GRAHAM: You know, just being honest with you, it's been the most frustrating thing I've ever dealt with in coaching. To work so hard and be so good on offense and defense, and to play like that in the games we've played, it's been so frustrating. And we spend a lot of time on special teams and worked hard on it. It's just so frustrating.

That's my responsibility. If there's anything that -- I'm pretty transparent about, obviously, when that became very evident was the first time we played Stanford. It was alarming. It's a little hard to rally. I think we rallied probably the best that we could, but that's absolutely unacceptable, and we can't play special teams like that. So, obviously, that's an area that we've got to improve dramatically before the bowl game.

We'll be the number one focus moving forward because, man, I've got to do a better job than that. I think you look at what we've done this year defensively. You look at what we've done offensively, and we've done some great things in special teams. But we've underachieved in the return game. We've underachieved with the punt return. Our coverage teams have been -- I mean, they've killed us, especially in critical games, not just against Stanford. Stanford is the best team in the league in special teams. They are the best special teams. But even against UCLA, it was a major deal.

But that's my responsibility. There is nobody responsible for it other than me, and we'll get those things fixed. But we're working as hard as we can. And I know our staff and our players, and I really appreciate our fans thanking the

seniors at the very end. I'm really proud of our guys in that they never, ever gave up. There's time out, there's seven minutes left in the game, six minutes and something. They're standing there, and we have our guys saying, look, we're going to play every second of this game and honor these seniors that are out here on the field and playing for the last time.

I think we've got a lot to be proud of as Sun Devils, and really proud of these seniors that are out here because they've done some great things for this program in the time that they've been here. We'll surely miss them. Still have another game left. We've still got a bowl game to go win.

Q. Is it hard to have perspective on the progress you've made right now?

COACH GRAHAM: I'm just a really bad loser, so I don't like losing. I don't think you learn a lot from losing. You don't want to do it anymore. But we haven't done it a lot. To be honest with you, I really thought we were going to win. I really did. I think that we made mistakes, and it took us a little long to make some adjustments. They did a heck of a job coaching. Obviously, I knew that coming in. They did some different things and did a super job.

But, again, I think the thing that doesn't give you a chance is when you face that kind of adversity in field position. It just absolutely kills you.

Q. Your spread offense, all spread offenses thrive on creating one-on-one match-ups. Is Stanford's ability to generate pressure with three or four make them so effective in limiting the spread?

COACH GRAHAM: Yeah, to me, spread offense is a very general term. We're a run, play, action, pass. I think Stanford's ability to stuff the run is really hard on our offense. That would be the thing that I will tell you is the hardest thing on our offense, and nobody else does that to us. So you've got to give them a lot. I think their defensive line and the veterans that they have, the depth that they have, they've got great depth in that forcing unit. They're just really solid.

So I think the thing that hurts our offense the most is them destroying the line of scrimmage and moving the line of scrimmage back. When you can't run the ball, it makes it very difficult for us, because we are a run, play, action, pass team.

So we've got a lot of respect for their

defense. Coach Mason does a tremendous job with them. Really good defensive football team.

Q. Can you just talk about not having Grice tonight in that goal line situation, and then those two play calls on the third and fourth down play?

COACH GRAHAM: What do you want to know about the play calls? Why we called them?

Q. Yeah, just sort of analyzing them a little bit?

COACH GRAHAM: Yeah, obviously, not having Marion hurts, but I think D.J. getting banged up hurt a lot worse, because I think D.J. is a tremendous back. You know, when you have both those guys, obviously, it helps.

But I'm not going to minimize that. That was not something we wanted to have. So hopefully we'll have Marion back for the bowl game and get those guys rolling together.

As far as the play calls, I mean, the third down, you're talking about the down at the goal line, it's third down and an inch, and we go quarterback sneak. I thought the linebacker was over the neutral zone, and who knows if he got in or didn't get in, so that one happened. Then we run the power and come up short, and you've got to be able to make a yard; and we didn't.

So we've got the best offensive coordinator in the country. I would never second guess or question him. You look at what he's done for our program and the amount of points he's scored this year, that would be really foolish of me to question his calls.

I'm ultimately responsible, and I think when you're down there, you've got to be able to make an inch. We had a quarterback sneak, and we should have gotten in there, and we didn't. You've got to give them a lot of credit. That's all about will when you're down there. Goal line defense is all it's about. It's not about what play call or whatever. It's all about getting in the end zone or not and willing yourself in there.

So don't have any regrets. We made a lot worse calls than those tonight. I can tell you that. Again, I'd rather focus on what our guys have done this season, and thank our fans. I thank the Pac-12 for putting on a great championship game. I'm very grateful that I got the opportunity to lead a team into this stadium to compete for a championship in our second year. I'm very grateful

to these seniors and to our staff for the hard work that they've put in this year. It's been fun. It's been fun with you guys as well, and we're just getting started.

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