

Vrbo Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Saturday, January 1, 2022

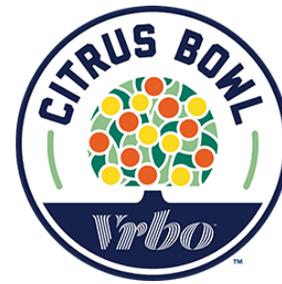
Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Tight End Sam LaPorta

Press Conference



Kentucky 20, Iowa 17

SAM LaPORTA: Good group of guys led by our seniors. Was a tough way for them to go out today. I think the team showed a lot of character today, and we fought our butts off. Not the way we wanted to go out, but you can't fault our effort or our toughness I'd say.

Q. Can you talk about the offensive line and running game?

SAM LaPORTA: Yeah, we talked about it a little bit. We set it up throughout the game. I basically got escorted into the end zone. I didn't get touched until I got down there - that's a credit to the big guys hustling down the field. It is not easy. It has been a long game, third quarter, fourth quarter, whatever that was. For them to bust their butts and get down the field for me, I appreciate that.

Q. Sam, in the second half, you guys seemed to really be rolling offensively; what helped you guys establish that and move forward?

SAM LaPORTA: Obviously with the 15-minute halftime, we got to draw everything up over the break. We kind of got to talk a little bit more and communicate the looks and what we are going to get and how we were going to approach the second half.

Felt like we executed a little bit, and I think our conditioning and our preparation definitely helped with that. I felt like we had an edge there for a little bit. Yeah, then, things were rolling for us. We were converting a lot of third downs, making the easy plays. So, yeah, just got rolling there for a while.

Q. There were some young players stepping into big roles, especially, Gavin Williams and Leshon Williams. What did you see out of them stepping into a big role for the first time?

SAM LaPORTA: It's really cool to see those guys step for us when they need it most. They have been working hard all season. It doesn't surprise me the efforts they showed today, because we see it every day in practice. They worked hard like everybody else. Over time, we develop guys, and they were ready to hit the spotlight today. They ran their butts off, and we are really excited about them.

Q. What was your reaction to seeing somebody as durable as Tyler Elsburly go down in the fourth quarter with that injury, and have you talked to him since with how he's doing?

SAM LaPORTA: No, I haven't. Obviously, I was out there for the two-minute drive. He is one tough son of a gun. You can't take him out of the fight. He was the rock in the center of that offense the entire year, and he was our leader out there. It was really tough to see him go down. We tried to bounce back for that first drive, and we got that three and out, which was really tough. He was the core of the guys, and you can't fault his toughness.

Q. When did you know that Spencer Petras was going to start, and what did you think of his performance today?

SAM LaPORTA: Spencer, he competed his butt off today. We have worked really hard all week and all of Bowl prep. They were a great team of course. They had some obstacles that we had to work around, and I thought Spencer commanded the offense really well today.

You can fault him on a couple interceptions, I guess, but we don't. It's a team effort. There are 11 guys out there. You can say what you want about him, but he is a competitor and he is tough as heck.

Q. What would be the one thing that you want to see the offense work on in the off-season and spring ball? What do you think you guys need to work on?

SAM LaPORTA: I think there is a lot of things that we can work on. Starting with me individually, I mean, but then to the team as a whole, we have to be a little bit more

consistent. We went backward a couple times today which is really hard to overcome, especially when you have those long third downs and things like that. Negative plays are always a drive stopper, so we can always try to work on that. Obviously, consistency is the key. It's a game of inches, so you can't go backwards.

Q. What were the emotions of the final couple of minutes like where you have the elation of feeling you are about to win the Vrbo Citrus Bowl and then it goes the other way? What was that like?

SAM LaPORTA: It is a big swing of emotions. It's really tough, especially when you feel like you're going to come out on top, and then the offense always tries to stay locked in. Especially, when the defense is out there and there is a possibility that they could call on us for a two-minute drive or something like that.

The emotions are really high and then low and somewhere in between. You try to stay level-headed as best as you can. Yeah, it is just a big swing of emotions.

Q. I know obviously you are coming off an emotional game just now, but as far as the NFL Draft goes, have you thought about that at this stage of the game for you?

SAM LaPORTA: I've really been focused on the Bowl prep these last three weeks. That is something to look towards, I guess, in the future. I will consult my family with that decision, of course, and then make the best decision based off of that.