

2021 LendingTree Bowl – Eastern Michigan vs. Liberty

Liberty Post-Game Quotes

Head Coach Hugh Freeze

Opening statement: “I’m just ecstatic, coming off the way we ended the season to watch our coaches, staff and players prepare for this game and come out and play the way we did with the passion we did and the execution to win our third straight bowl game makes me feel a lot better heading into the offseason. It would’ve been a long, long offseason had we not played well tonight. Not many programs can say they went to three straight bowl games their first three years in the FBS, much less to have won them against good football teams so credit to our kids, our staff and our administration and all the support we have.”

On if this is the best the team has played this year: “We were pretty good, we probably could’ve scored a lot more if we had stayed with our tempo; they didn’t like that a bit when we were going fast. I thought we were pretty efficient outside of a few drives where we had penalties offensively, it was definitely one of our better efforts this year. We protected Malik [Willis] decently, we were balanced. Defensively we struggled a little early on but started getting our cleats in the ground and playing with better pad level. It was a pretty special effort, I’m thankful to our coaches. We’ve got a good group of coaches and players.”

On the importance of Skyler Thomas’ interception: “It definitely helped, but I don’t think they could stop us. We probably could’ve taken a lot of shots, I thought our receivers could run by them. But it definitely helps when your defense scores points, it gave us a little space in there at that time.”

On the rushing game plan coming into the game: “It’s always a part of it, it just doesn’t always work out where you can block them. I love when we can stay balanced, I feel like it’s very difficult to defend us when we are balanced so it was important. We felt like we had some good run opportunities and luckily some of those popped for explosive runs. Rushing is always important, it was good we were able to do it tonight.”

On the performance of the team’s offensive line: “I thought they played as well as we have. They had two really good edge rushers, I thought we fared fairly well; I’d have to see the film to see exactly how well we did, but we were able to keep him [Malik Willis] clean most of the time and a lot of that resulted in big, explosive plays.”

Redshirt junior P Aidan Alves

On how big his punts were that pinned Eastern Michigan deep in their own territory: “I try to put the defense in the best position with every punt; tonight, I was able to do that. The wind and the rain held off a little bit in the second half. It was a good feeling.”

On what the win means heading into the offseason: “It definitely helps us get the taste of three-straight losses [to close the season] out of our mouths. It was a good feeling to see everyone celebrating at the end of the game.”

On the team’s mentality coming into the bowl games: “Our mentality starts from the leadership at the top. Coach Freeze does a great job taking care of us. We practice hard and practice well, but he also knows that bowl time is a fun time to have with your teammates and have a little fun at the same time.”

Redshirt junior RB T.J. Green

On run game: “The run game was a key factor this week. Coach Freeze harped on the fact that we needed to be able to run the ball. We were able to get a lot of push up front; those guys handled their business. When you’re able to run the ball, it makes it makes the passing game easier and the whole game easier.”

On his long touchdown run: “It was all because of the play of the guys up front. Trev [Trevor Hobbs] got a good block and was able to get through the hole and push his backer outside. I just came off his butt and it was green grass. I saw Noah [Frith] down field and just got behind him. Our coaches harp on blocking up front, blocking down field, and it showed tonight.”

Redshirt senior SS Skyler Thomas

On how the pick-six shifted momentum: “It was a big play. We came out a little rusty in our first game playing in a few weeks, and that was big for the momentum shift. After that we were all clicking – everybody fed off of what the offense was doing and that play.”

On forcing an EMU field goal early in the game: “Any time you get a stop inside the red zone on a team, it’s always great. If they get in there, just don’t let them get in the end zone – just bend, don’t break.”

On playing at Liberty: “I’m just thankful Coach Freeze gave me the opportunity, and all glory to God. This is my last college game, and to be able to go out in that magnitude is really special.”

Redshirt junior QB Malik Willis

On how special it was for him to end his Liberty career with the type of performance he had tonight: “It means the world to me to be able to see the look of the guys’ faces after becoming the first team to win three-straight bowl games in school history. We couldn’t end the season on a loss. That would hurt my heart forever and I didn’t want to go out like that. To be in a bowl game for the third time in a row in our third season of being FBS means so much to not only us as a team, but to our university and the people who support us. It’s not just about us. We take pride in Liberty University and the people behind us.”

On the importance the go-ahead touchdown drive had for getting the offense in rhythm: “We were just trying to go out there and execute. We weren’t thinking about the previous drives; we just tried to do like Coach Freeze says and play the next play. [Eastern Michigan’s defense] gave us a look that we had seen all week in practice, and it worked just like it did in practice. We just took advantage of the opportunity and DJ [Stubbs] did the rest.”

On the play of the offensive line in their protection and ability to create running lanes: “They were amazing and won the game. They blocked well in the run game, they blocked well in the passing game. They came into the game with a fire behind themselves and wanted to put this game on their backs. I’m very proud of those guys.”

On having the mindset of being all-in after deciding to play in the bowl game: “You can’t go out there half-stepping. If you’re going to play, you have to play full speed. When you go out there and only play half way, that’s how you get injured and that’s how things happen. You don’t want to waste an opportunity. We’re blessed with the opportunity to be able to go out there and play this sport. A lot of people won’t play again after today, so I’d be selfish and rude to go out there and not play to the best of my ability for my guys.”