

Tigers' Swinney doubles down after caller criticism

By Ian Taylor

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CLEMSON — Clemson football coach Dabo Swinney made waves Monday night during his radio call-in show “Tiger Calls,” a weekly show that often goes by without drawing much attention.

But when “Tyler from Spartanburg” questioned the Tigers (4-4, 2-4 ACC) and their struggles just days after they lost on the road to N.C. State — as well as Swinney’s salary, humility and coaching hires —Swinney was not shy in sharing his opinion.



Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, seen during the Tigers' win over Wake Forest on Oct. 7 at Memorial Stadium in Clemson, parted ways with a pair of assistant coaches on Thursday.

Associated Press

"The expectation is greater than the appreciation, and that's the problem," Swinney said. "We've (had) twelve 10-plus win seasons in a row. Clemson ain't sniffed a national championship for 35 years. We've won two in seven years, and there are only two other teams that can say that — Georgia and Alabama. Is this a bad year? Yeah, and it's my responsibility. I take 100 percent responsibility for it."

He added he has been a target for criticism for years, but the results speak for themselves.

"I'm sure you didn't want me to get this job, and 15 years later, I'm still here," Swinney said. "And I'd say the results are what they are, and I stand on them. If you don't like how I run the program, don't be a fan. I don't care. But I'm the head coach, and I'm going to do what I believe is right for the long term of this program, what's best for the players and what I think is the best for the moment. If you've got a problem with that, that's fine."

While Clemson's poor performances throughout the season — with turnovers seemingly plaguing it at every step along the way — have increased the amount of criticism being thrown at Swinney, his complaints about the high expectations of fans are nothing new. Just two weeks earlier, Swinney said that most, but not all, of Clemson's fans are "amazing."

"98.5 percent are amazing, but the other 1.5 percent, they create a lot of problems," he said. "They are part of the problem, not part of the solution."

Even in February, during the introductory news conference for offensive coordinator Garrett Riley, Swinney lamented that Clemson fans had a "loss of perspective" when it came to winning things like ACC championships but not national titles and called the indifference to non-title-winning campaigns "sad."

"Our program has never been better — ever," Swinney said at the time. "We're off to a better start this decade than we were last decade. But again, sometimes people can lose perspective. We've raised the bar here, we've changed the standard, we've changed the expectations and I love that. But as we strive to meet and exceed those expectations, every single year, we've got to keep the right perspective and we've got to have joy in the journey."

And while his thoughts were more melancholy in February, the interaction on his call-in show Monday fired the veteran coach up, and he was still bothered Tuesday morning during his regularly scheduled weekly news conference.

"I had some idiot go Old Testament on me, and he got an Old Testament response," Swinney said. "I know who I am. I've never flinched, and I ain't gonna flinch now. I'm sitting here not because I've listened to all the people, all the criticism, all the people that want me to do this, hire this guy or that guy or that guy. If it doesn't work, I've got nobody to blame myself. But I'm going to always do what I'm convicted in, and some people say I'm stubborn, I say I'm convicted in my beliefs."

Looking back at that “1.5 percent,” Swinney called them a vocal minority that his players need to block out.

“I've always tried to fight against that,” he said. “Don't let the expectation become greater than the purpose of what you do. When that happens, you lose your joy in what you do. You have to be happy. I've always said the fun is in the winning, and that's why this is a good reset. It's a good pruning for everybody, because it's gotten to a point here that even when you win, people are miserable.

“Now the fun's not in the win — the relief is in the winning. It ought to be fun to win.”

He added that with the season being as tough as it has been, it is an opportunity for the Tigers to “reset.”

“It's hard when you take everybody's best shot for 12-plus years,” Swinney said. “We've done a great job. There's not many people that have been as consistent as coaches or as a program in our world. So, it's been great. We've had a great opportunity to teach a lot of lessons, and this will be another great opportunity.”

The Tigers (4-4, 2-2 ACC) will host No. 12 Notre Dame (7-2) on Saturday (noon, ABC) at Memorial Stadium.

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