

Long, Buxton Lead Confident Syracuse Secondary Into Death Valley

By: Leah Masi

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Confidence.

The word Syracuse football's defensive backs use to describe their progress this season.

"We got our confidence back," said sophomore defensive back Braheem Long Jr. after a season-opening loss to Tennessee in week one. "We really fell short."

The defense has had a slow start, but things are looking up after promising performances against Colgate.

Across the board, players hit career firsts, including Long's interception and sack. He attributes his success on the field to his preparation.

"I knew it was going to happen before we went out there," Long said. "I was just talking to God saying we got this, I got this. I just made my plea, and I knew I could do it because I do it in practice."

He said moving into conference play this weekend, he's been preparing himself the same way.

"I feel like there's no difference between Colgate and Clemson," Long said. "I'm still going to play the way I play."

Long said he had conversations with head coach Fran Brown this week about his approach moving forward.

"Coach Fran's been pushing me too, to not let Colgate get the best of me," Long said. "He said 'keep going that was just a first.'"

Long mentioned the leaders in the defensive back room and how they lead by example.

"They preach but they play," Long said. "Extra film, extra treatment on our bodies, on the field they go hard . . . they push me, and I just watch them."

Junior defensive back Berry Buxton III is one of them, and he looks forward to what's next for Long.

"BJ's an extremely explosive player," Buxton said. "He's fast, you see the way he plays, he's all over the field. Post, half, he can do everything."

He said he's excited to see him play fast and watch him gain more trust in himself.

"Versus Colgate, he trusted himself a lot and that's why he made a lot of those plays," Buxton said.

Buxton had five solo tackles against Colgate and said he is still sharpening his skills each week.

“Not thinking I’m older so I don’t have to prepare like everybody else, but also bringing the young guys along with me,” Buxton said. “Communicating with them what I see, and what I’m expecting so that way they’re not caught off guard or underprepared when they’re on the field.”

He said there’s a lot of hope for the younger generation of defensive backs for the Orange and they’ve been putting in the work every week.

“Looking at a lot of the young guys, especially at corner, they're just really growing and taking every step,” Buxton said. “They’re eager to learn and they’re not too big in their own head thinking they’re better than they are.”

Both Long and Buxton are looking ahead into their matchup against Clemson hoping to accomplish some goals.

“First, we definitely want to come out with the win,” Long said. “For me, I want to be a team player and make my plays when they count. I’m not being selfish, I’m not being greedy for no interceptions, no sacks, I feel like I play my game as a team player.”

Even though the Orange came out with a significant win against Colgate, the offense was still able to put up over 400 yards on the defense. Buxton is hoping to keep those mistakes in the past.

“Going into Clemson, it’s about being disciplined, doing your job and not worrying about anything else,” Buxton said. “We did a lot of good versus Colgate, taking that into Clemson and knowing where our strengths are and what we need to improve on.”

For the Orange secondary, confidence is no longer a question — it’s the standard heading into Death Valley. Syracuse faces Clemson this afternoon at noon EST on ACC Network Extra.