

Valero Alamo Bowl: Oklahoma vs Oregon

Sunday, December 26, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Oregon Ducks

Coach Joe Moorhead

Anthony Brown

Travis Dye

Alex Forsyth

Steven Jones

Press Conference

JOE MOORHEAD: To my left we've got running back Travis Dye, quarterback Anthony Brown, offensive lineman Steven Jones and offensive lineman Alex Forsyth.

We're very excited to be participating in the Alamo Bowl, a great reward for a fantastic season by our young men, and the opportunity to reach that 11-win plateau is something that's very hard to do in college football.

We've had a good couple weeks of preparation at school. Started off with a great day today, and like I said, when you're playing a great storied program like Oklahoma, it's an unbelievable opportunity, and I know our guys are excited.

Q. Joe, now that you've disclosed what transpired there the morning of the Stanford game, this will be a multi-parter, but walk us through what actually happened, like were you experiencing stomach pain of some kind for a couple of days? Did this literally wake you up? And in terms of the chronology, the timeline, how fast are you there and how quick are you going under the knife and you're calling Jen? How quick are these guys learning what's actually happening that day?

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I have a pregame ritual that I know through every night on Fridays just going through the calls and making sure everything is on point for the next day, and around probably 10:00 or 11:00 that night I started experiencing a little bit of stomach pain and thought it was just that and tried to lay down and go to bed and



relax, and it went away a little bit, and I woke up the next morning to get ready for our staff meeting, would have been around 6:00 or 6:30, and it was just absolutely debilitating, could barely move. I hopped in the shower, got dressed and went down to see Chief and Doc Davidson in our training room, and they did some tests, just kind of poking and prodding around and sent me to the ER, checked in, and they were hoping that they could do something to alleviate the pain and get me to the stadium to call the game, and then they took me back for a CT scan, and that was definitely not going to be the case. So I went from hoping to get me back to the game to we're going to get you back for surgery in like 45 minutes, and they took me through the three things that it could be, and none of them were good.

Yeah, called my wife, called my family, went back, I think the surgery lasted around six to eight hours, and then next thing I know, woke up in the recovery room.

Q. When you turn on the tape of Oklahoma, four of their front seven opted out. What's that process been like trying to prepare for the guys who are going to step in across the front seven?

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think with the combination of opt-outs and guys that are in the portal, I think there will be some different faces in there, but at the end of the day these are all young men who were recruited by the University of Oklahoma, and the roster is filled with four- and five-star guys.

Just like us, I'm sure they espouse a next-man-in mentality, so we have a depth chart, we have guys that we're anticipating that we're going to see, but at the end of the day they're still going to be running their defense, and the things they do present an incredible challenge for us offensively.

Q. Just your thoughts on facing Oklahoma and the challenges they present and the preparation for this game.

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I'm sure these guys can talk a little bit more in depth relative to the different levels of the



defense, but they play a mix of three- and four-down fronts. They basically stem every play. There's a ton of post-snap movement by the front four. They do a great job with their pressures and they mix up the coverages, play some zone, some man and some combination coverages. Between those three things, the pre-snap movement, the post-snap stunts and line games from the front and mixture of coverages, they make it a very challenging team for which to prepare.

Q. Just wanted to ask you again this game, Joe, how unique is it when you look at both coaching staffs, new and interim coaches, what's going on with the coaching staff, and secondly, do you have a prior relationship with Bob Stoops?

JOE MOORHEAD: You're asking about the unique aspect of there being two interim staffs?

Q. Yeah.

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, it's the first time I've gone through it, so it's a new experience for me. Coach McClendon has done a phenomenal job in the interim head coach capacity, getting the team rallied, having a great plan, and I think the kids have responded phenomenally well to his leadership, so on our end it's been a relatively seamless transition because I think Brian has done a great job and he's done it before at Georgia.

Actually it was -- I think it was the TaxSlayer Bowl when I was heading into Penn State. I went as an observer but not as a participant, so I know Coach McClendon has done a great job there.

And did you ask if I know Coach Stoops?

Q. Yeah, just wondering if you had a prior relationship with Coach Stoops.

JOE MOORHEAD: He was the head coach of Oklahoma when we played them in the Fiesta Bowl when I was at UConn, so I've spoken to Coach a few times on the phone, but I'm not particularly close with him. I know his -- the Kentucky head coach much better.

Q. In that 45-minute-or-so span because you're obviously not thinking of something of that seriously, what are you thinking because you're calling family who's been in Eugene and I'm sure Jen is hopping on the next plane available, but you know you're going under the knife for something that's not good, and when you learned that day or the next day what had transpired and what Coach had, what were you thinking, Anthony?

JOE MOORHEAD: I'm 48 and I had never spent a night or a day in the hospital in my life, so I mean, not to sound morbid, but I was wondering if I was going to die. You hear about the things that would happen, kind of what the complications could be and then you wonder about going under anesthetic and you wonder about the entire procedure. You're questioning your own health at that point.

I know that the doctors there did a phenomenal job, and I came out of it no worse for the wear, but at that point, you're just hoping you're going to wake up when the surgery ends, and you don't have a chance to talk to your family or your wife or your kids, that was the part to me that was the most troubling, that it happened so quickly and I wasn't able to talk to my wife, my kids or my parents or brother or sister.

ANTHONY BROWN: I would say just like with the entirety of the day, it was kind of hard because didn't get to hear anything from Coach Moore head either that night or even the next day. His wife texted us, but just like you said, I'm one of the closest with him. It was hard not hearing from him. Didn't know if he was okay. Hearing it from other people was one thing, but not being able to hear it from him was different.

It was tough to say the least.

Q. Steven and Alex, if you could address the middle of the season, it felt like the offensive line lineup was changing every single week. You've had some continuity now the last say month of the season. Just for both you guys, how you guys feel as a unit right now, how are you communicating and what kind of confidence are you guys playing with together?

ALEX FORSYTH: I think right now this is the closest we've been the whole season. Like you said, we had a lot of moving parts to that offensive line. I know I went down and we had some other guys kind of dinged up there, so guys just stepped up and I think that made our whole unit, our whole room better because it forced guys to step out of their comfort zone and really step up, so I think the group that we're going to send out there on Wednesday is going to do a great job and ready for the challenge.

STEVEN JONES: Same thing he said. I think we're all ready for the challenge that's coming up. Like middle of the season when the rotation started happening, it didn't really affect us that much because Mirabal has been training us since January on how to play multiple positions just in case someone did go down. As soon as he went down, next man up mentality, and whoever that was

stepped in and did their job, so...

Q. Travis, your thoughts on the year for you individually? I know all you care about is winning, but you've had a huge year yourself individually. Your thoughts on your season, your progress and growth, and what it would mean to have another big game this end of the year for this team?

TRAVIS DYE: Yeah, you know, it was nice that guys looked at me to step up after CJ went down, and it was just nice to put in the work and the results come out like the way you want them to, like any running back wants it to. But like you said, all I care about is winning, and the rest of the stuff will come.

Q. Anthony, what have you seen out of the Oklahoma secondary when you start to break them down?

ANTHONY BROWN: Very physical, talented. They play through the ball. Very instinctive. They've made some plays I would say where sometimes they take a lot of risk, which can be a good and a bad thing, but they've been good with it all year.

Other than that, I just feel like we just have to step up to the challenge because they are talented, like I said.

Q. Travis, walk us through Wednesday night, and why was that the right time, and was it a give it is away that you were wearing jeans since you so hate wearing jeans?

TRAVIS DYE: Yeah, you know, she had no clue, but the 23rd -- 23 has always been a special number for both of us, so it was just nice to do it on the 23rd, close to Christmas.

You know, I had a nice setup for her right when she got into the house, and it was just a nice moment. I was very, very nervous, and it was difficult to do, but it felt like a weight lifted off my shoulder after I did it. I'm glad she said yes. (Laughter.)

Q. Alex and Steven, your thoughts on Jackson as a defensive lineman; what do you guys see out of him?

ALEX FORSYTH: Yeah, Jackson has done a great job. He's just the definition of a football player, Jackson Powers-Johnson. He loves to play the game. You know when he throw him out there he's going to be physical. He's going to get after it. That's just what he's done at practice, so I know he's going to go out there and do exactly what he does during practice, which is play with incredible effort and intensity, so it'll be fun to watch him.

STEVEN JONES: Like he said, Jackson plays with a lot of passion for the sport, so I feel like when he had to go over to the defense, it wasn't that big of a deal for him because he just wants to be on the field and play because that's what he loves to do. He's a great kid. It's nice see him on defense. He gives us a really good look whenever we go against him, so I'm excited to see what he does this week.

Q. Anthony, as a quarterback how much do you study other quarterbacks, and if so, can you give me just some thoughts on Caleb Williams at Oklahoma?

ANTHONY BROWN: I've actually been able to watch him a lot this year because we had a lot of late games. Caleb Williams is a very talented quarterback. I feel like he's going to end up being one of the best quarterbacks in the country by the time he leaves college. He's very fluid, very fluid thrower, makes some crazy, instinctive plays, and just as young as he is, it's very impressive.

I feel like he's a special talent in the country.

Q. Steven, we've asked a lot of the guys about what their future plans are. Have you decided what you're going to do for next season and are you enrolled in class for Monday?

STEVEN JONES: Yeah, I mean, as of right now I'm ready to come back for one more season, get after it with my O-line brothers, so I'm excited.

Q. Coach, just want to ask another Caleb Williams question. Being such a young quarterback, just your thoughts as a coordinator and just what he's able to do and really kind of absorb the game as quickly as he has?

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, we recruited Caleb coming out of high school down in D.C., so he's a guy I think won the Elite 11 and did a lot as a high school player. But he was given his opportunity; you can see he's very well-coached. He plays in an excellent scheme. He makes plays by design or improvisation, so I think that's the biggest thing that when he's playing within the construct of their scheme and throwing on time and on rhythm and going through his progressions, you can see him affect the game in that manner, but I think he's just as dangerous when the play breaks down and he escapes the pocket and they start to scramble and guys pop open or design run plays. In this day and age of the, quote-unquote, dual-threat quarterback, he is truly a guy that can beat you with his arm first and foremost and with his legs, as well.

Q. Alex, you were just nodding there. You said you



were going to give you guys recruiting pitches this week, but between knowing you're back, Sala is back, Steven is back, I won't let you speak for Ryan but I think we understand where he's probably leaning, as well, what does that mean to you as a guy we've heard from probably more than anyone in the offense this season that basically the whole line is basically back other than George because sooner or later he actually has to leave?

ALEX FORSYTH: Yeah, I'm super excited. There would be some issues if George ended up coming back for, what, an eighth year? No, we're really excited to have all the guys back. Like I said earlier, I'm going to give my best recruiting pitch to Ryan and T.J. to come back, but now that we've got Steve, me and Sala back, we've got a good core group of guys, so I'm excited to get after it again next year after we take care of business this week.

Q. Steven and Alex, we were talking to Oklahoma's defensive coordinator and he said that you guys are probably the best unit that they've seen all year long. Going the other way, what do you see out of Oklahoma? Where do you think they stack up with some of the defenses you've played this year?

ALEX FORSYTH: Yeah, they've got a really, really talented front seven. Like coach Moorhead was just talking about, they're loaded with four- and five-star guys. They're the reason Oklahoma is always one of the best in the country. So I think for us, they do a lot of movement, a lot of stemming, but they also just have great players, and a lot of the time when you play teams that like to move, they get out of gaps and they can kind of get out of sorts there, but this team, you watch it and they hit their gaps, so the front seven is as good as anybody in the country from this Oklahoma front, even though I know they had a few guys opt out. But even with that, they've got some guys that haven't played a whole lot yet that are going to play a lot when those guys opted out and decided to leave.

They've got a lot of talent, so it'll be a great challenge for us.

STEVEN JONES: Like he said, they're a really good defensive front. They did have some guys opt out. We don't think there's any drop-off in competitiveness or players, so I think it's going to be a really good challenge coming up this week. They move around a lot. They're very physical, they active, fly to the ball, so I'm excited.

Q. To be real here for a moment, how do you kind of encapsulate and sum up your season, everything, by the things that were going on off the field that haven't necessarily gotten out there but a lot of family is

starting to speak to what happened in the stadium and those things, but when you're like the No. 10 rushing quarterback in the country and you're a 10-win team there's a lot of success, but you've faced as much criticism as any quarterback in the country. How do you sum up this year for you?

ANTHONY BROWN: I would say looking back at it, the criticism makes the season seem a lot more worse than it is. Like you said, we're a 10-win team, which is very hard to do in college football, played in the Pac-12 Championship, and top 10 in rushing in quarterbacks. I would say just the voices alone make it sound worse than it is.

Watching the film, studying myself, I would say just -- it's never as bad as it seems and it's never as good as it seems. It wasn't as bad as people would say, and it made me feel that way for a while, until I actually just paid attention to it, paid attention to what actually mattered.

Hell of a ride. I wouldn't have changed it. I wish it was a dream. I wish it was perfect. But life isn't perfect.

With everything from off the field to on the field to in the stadium, whatever the case may be, I wouldn't change it because I know down the road it's going to be better for me.

Q. Who did you reach out to when the more serious stuff off the field was happening because it's one thing to lean on Coach or Cristobal or Moorhead about certain things on the field or Quincy some things on the field, but I'm talking about more off the field, the threats, when those were happening, who do you reach out to, who do you lean on? I'll ask for Alex in particular and Travis to also speak to when you know what he's experiencing and also you were close with Tyler, and again, being real, guys, you went through the past two years and this program and every Pac-12 program had everything with COVID going on worse than Oklahoma or other places had to deal with, and you know what he's experiencing. But first for Anthony, who do you reach out to and how do you guys react for those who have been in the program for as long as you have?

ANTHONY BROWN: I reached out to my parents, my dad, my mom, a few of my cousins, a couple of my uncles, and just -- really it was really my family and some of my teammates because those are the people that are won here, and my family at home are the people that understand me the most. So just being able to lean on them was very important for me, and without them I wouldn't have kept going.

ALEX FORSYTH: Yeah, I think in the age of social media we've got a lot of keyboard warriors that love to just talk on Twitter and Instagram, but in reality they wouldn't say anything to any of our faces. I think at the end of the day it just goes back to who's the man in the arena. I think there's a lot of armchair quarterbacks out there that love to pick at what AB has done, and I think he's a quarterback that took us up into Columbus and did something that's really never -- well, it's been done there, but it very rarely happens. He led us to a Pac-12 Championship.

I know he knows how I feel, but I'll go to war with him every day and any day of the week because I know he's got my back and I have his back, and I know that's how every single person on our team feels.

I think for us it's just cutting out the outside noise. We know anybody who's tweeting about it can't do it better, so their opinion doesn't matter.

STEVEN JONES: Yeah, I always try to let him know that he's my quarterback and there's nobody else I would rather be out there, period, and that's just like Alex said, you've got a lot of keyboard warriors out there, and they really don't know what they're talking about. Playing quarterback is a very hard position, and you're going to make mistakes, but I would 100 percent want AB out there battling for us than anybody else.

Q. Joe, a lot of teams talk about culture. Just the last couple weeks and everything that's gone on outside of the football field, how would you describe how the culture of this team has been able to keep things going?

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think in a lot of ways in this profession, the change is inevitable, and I think you just have to consistently remind yourself that it's about the players, and I think that we've got tremendous leadership on this team, and the guys are incredibly tight and play for one another. You look at the practices that we've had and the camaraderie of the bowl and the things that these guys have done, not throughout the season but in particular the last couple of weeks, I think it speaks volumes to their character, to their belief in one another, to their resolve and their resiliency, because change is hard. It's difficult in any aspect of life. But I think the credit goes to these young men because they've stuck together, and they've found a way to keep moving forward.

Q. Alex, I wanted to ask you, Coach Odom, the defensive coordinator of Oklahoma, said this game could come down to who wants it more. These are two programs that had really high expectations in

September. Would you agree with that statement, that it comes down to who wants to finish their season the best way and who's going to fight through this week and this game?

ALEX FORSYTH: Yeah, a hundred percent. I think that's one of the universal truths in every single game you're going to play in football is it comes down to who really wants it, who has more on the line, and I think the more you invest, the more you have to play for, and I've always believed in that. Whoever has prepared the best and going to go show out on Wednesday is who's going to want it more because they've got more on the line.

Q. Joe, what I was asking AB about and these guys about, how do you sum up his season but knowing what he was going through off the field, because you went through -- not just the stuff this year, Joe, but you went through Mississippi State, and you've been through where players can be criticized, you were criticized. You were combative at Mississippi State, but you're getting paid, and there's a difference there. How do you sum up his season, and how do you respond to the criticism -- this isn't just criticism, this is way over the top sort of thing.

JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think there's an old adage that says if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. You know, there is an aspect of what occurs to players and coaches, whether it's realized or not, that it hurts you. There's spots deep down in your soul where it's hard to stomach and fathom some of that stuff and to overcome it. You need to be strong in your belief and your resolve as either a coach or a player and continue to press forward because it's tough.

Just going back to Anthony, you look at the 12 years that he's been in college (laughter), it's by far his best statistical season. He's completed almost 65 percent of his passes, closes in on 3,000 yards, I think a three- or four-to-one touchdown ratio and how well he's run the ball, not many quarterbacks in the country have led a team to a 10-win, and hopefully if we do well an 11-win season, a win in Columbus and an appearance in the Pac-12 Championship game.

Some of this is subjective and some of it's objective, and when you look at the objective aspect of it and you take away that subjectivity, Anthony has had a phenomenal season. We talked about it very early on, that he and I and everyone who's played the position, you consciously made the decision to play the most scrutinized position in all of organized sports, good, bad or indifferent. It's a different microscope of what you're under, and whether a running back fumbles or an O-line misses a block or receiver drops

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a pass or a D-lineman gets knocked 10 yards off the ball or you miss a tackle or a DB gets run by, there weren't calls for other people to be replaced, but that's the nature of the world that we live in as coaches and quarterbacks.

I would make the argument that we're not in a position to be where we are or do what we did this season without Anthony Brown, rather than the alternative. I'm proud to have been his coach.

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