

Big Ten Conference Football Championship Game: Oregon vs Penn State

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

Oregon Ducks

Coach Dan Lanning

Bryce Boettcher

Dillon Gabriel

Tez Johnson

Postgame Press Conference



Oregon - 45, Penn State - 37

DAN LANNING: I don't know what to say except for how proud I am of these guys. We've talked about moments this year where guys had to put each other on their backs. I thought the offense tonight did an unbelievable job.

I thought the defense made a critical stop when it mattered most.

But I'll say this, the belief in our team throughout the game, it never wavered. We have a bunch of guys in there that love each other and worked their tails off tonight to come out on the other side of victory. Kudos to them.

That offense is really hard to stop. They do an unbelievable job over there. It was a battle, a battle to the very end.

I'm really proud of our players and proud of their resiliency. Proud of this dude, third-and-1 when it mattered most, making a play, fourth-and-2, making a huge play for our team. And proud of the guys on the stage with me. And I know they'd be the first to tell you they couldn't do it without their teammates.

Q. Dillon, throughout your career, you've had some of your best games on the biggest stages. What is it about this stage that kind of brings out the best in you?

DILLON GABRIEL: You live for these moments. In a

lifetime of being a kid and throwing in the front yard or in the street and you dream of these moments and want to be in them.

I just want to take full advantage of it, especially when we go to work with these guys and see how much time and effort everyone puts into this thing.

You just want to represent them the right way. And I felt like we did. I look at this and I look at just a bunch of guys with something to prove and an edge to them that wants to be great.

I'm appreciative of them. I'm appreciative of everyone coming together. It's a special group. And as you just take a step back and look at the moments we've had this season, our big-time players made big-time plays in these moments. I love that part about it.

Q. Dan, going back to being in this building at Big Ten media day, you opened up saying, Oregon's mighty different. Now you're the mighty champion. You've gone through a journey that was eight games in eight weeks. No one else in the country had to do that. You had to play the scheduled teams you've never played before. Bringing in a quarterback for one year. The O line's rocky to start the season. How do you encapsulate achieving what you achieved this first year?

DAN LANNING: I'm really proud of our players. They accomplished this. I didn't have anything to do with it. I just get to keep the train on the tracks. We have unbelievable leadership. We have an unbelievable coaching staff.

And the Big Ten's tough. I think tonight's game is a great example of that. This is a tough league. It's hard to go out there and win. And to be able to do what our guys did tonight, I'm really proud of their effort, to give just a little bit extra. I thought everybody gave a little extra tonight, and that showed up.

Q. Tez and Bryce, last year in Las Vegas and that game that emotional game, could you speak to how



that shaped this season and this run and makes tonight even more special maybe?

TEZ JOHNSON: For me, I knew I wanted to get into the stadium a little early, just check out the lights. Get on the field, just live the moment before the moment happens.

I just know we took a loss in Las Vegas last year and it just didn't sit right with the whole entire team. And I just know my teammates, my coaches, they pushed us to the limit every week. And like you guys know, Tuesday practice is not regular for us. We played a game within a game on Tuesday. Saturday it was just a showcase for the fans.

Q. You mentioned a prior interview that your biological family saw you play tonight for the first time. What did that moment mean to you? And then to have the performance you did in this game and the magnitude of it?

TEZ JOHNSON: I told them, like, this is the first game y'all coming to, I'll give you all a show. I promise you that. For me, it was just, I don't know if words can explain it, my mom, just seeing the tears in her eyes being able to watch me play on a stage like this. My family had never seen it before.

Just being able to get them to the game, words can't explain, bro. It's something you dream about. And when that time happens and it's being able to get checked off your bucket list, you don't take it for granted.

Q. Dillon, three touchdowns to tight ends tonight and that big fourth down completion to T-Ferg. What can you say about the tight end group that maybe doesn't get the love it deserves all the time?

DILLON GABRIEL: Maybe the love you don't see. I love those guys. They're extremely talented group, but just very unselfish. And I think all year they've waited their time in terms of touchdowns, but they've helped us a bunch, a ton in the run game and the pass game.

Just ready for their moment, each of them. And I'm proud of them. Obviously guys that I think very highly of and how they work and how they go about their business.

But they just maximized the moment. Kenyon making an unreal play when we needed it the most in that second-and-long. And him getting it as well in the left side of the field.

And Ferg, I've said it enough, that dude's special. He's a special person. I love him to death. And I'm proud of him because we talk about it all the time, a guy I trust and

anticipation, trust him when he's going to break and be right where he needs to be and he was.

Great route, even better catch. And you just see him make a play in a big-time moment. That's the trust aspect of it.

Q. Coach, in the postgame, you're kind of wandering around in that blur of people and that mosh pit and you're hugging people. You talked to Phil. And there's your parents. You got a little emotional. What's that like? What was that about and what's that like for you?

DAN LANNING: When you get to be a part of games like this, I think you start to think intrinsically about the journey you've been on and being there. But what brings me joy is the people that you love that get to enjoy the journey with you -- these guys up here, Phil, my parents.

For them to be part of a night like tonight, I know what that means to them. That means a lot more to me than any success that I ever have, them getting to be a part of that success.

Q. Dan, you said at the beginning of this year that this team was talented enough to win it all. And now you have kind of checked this box on that path. What has to happen now, do you think, to win another championship this year? And does it feel more tangible and within reach to you and your players now that you are here in this moment?

DAN LANNING: I'll be honest, this is the furthest thing from my mind right now. I'm worried about tomorrow, I'm worried the next day, the next play. I think that's how you get there. If you start putting the end goal in sight -- I don't think it's any secret what this team wants to accomplish -- but you don't get there by just looking at it. It takes work.

I'm thinking right now, how can we improve and get better. And there's a lot more we can grow from in that game in all phases. That's where my focus is at. I think when you focus on the process, the rest takes care of itself.

Q. Can the four of you all speak to what Phil Knight means to this program? I imagine he's been electric all year just with the energy and the team winning, but you've all had more interactions with him than the common person would. What's he like, and what's he like on the stage when you all are winning the way you've been?

DAN LANNING: He loves this university. He means the world to this university. I think so often Phil gets acknowledged for what he does for the football program,

but when you talk about a philanthropist and what he does, him and his wife Penny, what they do for the greater good of the world, what's college sports look like without Phil Knight? And what's athletics in general look like without Phil Knight? And what's cancer research look like without Phil Knight?

I don't know that you can put that into words.

We're grateful for his contributions. And certainly a big part of us having success is making sure that we get the opportunity to acknowledge him.

BRYCE BOETTCHER: He's Eugene. He's the University of Oregon. He's Nike. He's all of it. He's helped us this way. He's the reason we're here today. Without him we wouldn't be Big Ten champs. We wouldn't be doing what we're doing today.

Every guy sitting here and in the locker room are very grateful for what he and his wife does for this program and as Coach said, throughout the world. We're forever in debt to him and forever grateful.

DILLON GABRIEL: I think these guys spoke enough about him. But he's just a special guy in our lives and what he means to the program.

I think when you take a step back and you look at what he's done for everyone involved, you know, he's an unselfish guy, never wants credit for anything. But we definitely acknowledge it in a huge way because his presence, a guy who comes around, has just been so great in his lifetime, you're appreciative of him and all he does for us. So only good things and happy that we have him in our corner.

TEZ JOHNSON: They pretty much said it all, but that's Uncle Phil. You love him. He's Eugene, like Bryce said.

Seeing him at practice, you don't really -- like he's Duck dog, but when you see him it's, like, oh, that's Uncle Phil but he's a great guy. Love Phil Knight. He's everything.

Q. Bryce, I want to ask about the offense and the challenges they provided? And what the relief felt like when that final interception took place?

BRYCE BOETTCHER: We were prepared to face the best. And they're a great offense. Credit to our offense for sticking it out and scoring a lot of points in that game. But our preparation was unmatched.

They're a good team, too. That's what people forget. So we try to do all our assignments. Obviously there's some

errors on tape we've got to fix up and be ready for a couple weeks from now. But at the end of the day they're a great team. Credit to them. We came out victorious, so credit to our offense.

Q. Tez, you see every day in practice what Kenyon Sadiq brings to this team. What's it like when on the first drive of the game he has a hurdle like that, a play like that? How much does that fire you guys up?

TEZ JOHNSON: That's normal for Ken. He did it in the spring game. He did it the first game. When he did it this game, it didn't really surprise nobody. We expect that out of Ken. He's a really talented tight end that we have, along with Ferg and P-Herb.

Just the ways he contributes to the team is unbelievable, a young guy like that. His future is really bright.

Q. Dillon and Dan, that's the most passing touchdowns against a top 10 pass defense by any quarterback against any top 10 pass defense in the country this season. And it's one of the most efficient performances as well. What all did you see and make work to have that kind of performance on this stage? And, Dan, with all that he's up for this week in Vegas, New York, in between, just where does your quarterback rank right now?

DAN LANNING: This guy deserves every single thing that comes his way. I told him that earlier this week when he got player of the year in the Big Ten. If anybody can't watch that performance and recognize how special he is. And maybe the most special play to me was the third-and-one when he wanted it in his hands to get that tough yard.

This team believes in them. They're grateful every day they get to step on the field with them. He's about connection and people first.

But the poise he shows in big games is unmeasured. I haven't been around players like Dillon. I'm really grateful that I get to share the field with him.

DILLON GABRIEL: I would say trust, belief and confidence in everyone that I go to battle with. The time and energy we put into this thing -- and you get one moment to make it happen. And I'm not going to let that moment pass me by. I know how much time and energy I put into it. But I also know the guys around me.

And I touched the ball every single play. So the trust, belief and confidence in my guys. But also it's got to be reciprocated for them in knowing that I'm going to make the

right reads, I'm going to put the ball where it needs to be. And when the game's on the line, I'm going to make it happen.

Q. One of the things that stood out standing next to your sideline today is it didn't feel like at any point in the game you guys got too high or too low. Is emotional intelligence something that you guys emphasize as a program? And if so, how do you establish that or implement that?

DAN LANNING: I think our guys do an unbelievable job of understanding the reset button. Like, the next play is the most important play.

As emotional as the game of football is, they do an unbelievable job of knowing that the job's not done until the job's done and being composed, be ready for the next moment. That's something we really pride ourselves in.

Q. Dillon, Dan mentioned obviously you're somebody that values connection. You've talked about that all season with a lot of different guys on this team. How has your connection with Tez evolved through the season and what can you say about him working his way back and having a night like you did today?

DILLON GABRIEL: He's special. He knows it. I think when you're around a talented individual, you appreciate it because just the person he is, he's electric, and when he gets the ball in his hands, he's going to make a play.

But more than that, you appreciate the person. As everyone knows, I've played football for a long time. And when you're around people that love the game, love life, and do what they do in a special way, you appreciate that. And Tez is a huge part of what we do. And him being on the field makes us a lot better. I'm proud of him. I'm proud of the leader he is. I'm proud of the way he fights through adversity and a guy that we've been through a bunch together within a year's time, but the growth together is enormous.

I look at 181 yards. I'm surprised but I'm not. That's a guy who is capable of that and he's special. So I'm proud of him.

Q. Tez, to do what you guys did tonight, the three of you being seniors, in an NFL stadium, did that mean a little more about what's to come?

TEZ JOHNSON: Games like this for us is expected. We know it's not going to be handed to us. We go out there like it's a Tuesday practice every Saturday. Things like this doesn't really, like, get too big or too high for us. The

coaches prepare us each week about games like this. Like I said, it's not going to be handed over to us. That's pretty much it.

DILLON GABRIEL: I'm just smiling because we're Big Ten champs. I'm smiling because we took advantage of an opportunity we had. Shoot, we could have done it at Eugene Country Club, 100-yard field, if we had to, but we're appreciative of the game. How about a dome in this weather, right?

I know James is happy he didn't have to be all cold and frizzled up in a jacket. So there's a lot of positives. But more importantly, when that confetti came down, we were smiling.

BRYCE BOETTCHER: He hit it, we could have lined the ball up on the sandlot across the street, no fans, just be Bloody Tuesday all over again. We were thankful it was in a dome without the weather. Probably benefited them that it's not the cold weather because we're from Eugene, we're used to that. But we got it done. And go Ducks.

Q. I'm sure you'll review the rush defense and areas you might not like, but on top of the game plan, I would imagine that not allowing any TFLs to Carter and no touchdowns to Warren, who really didn't do much in the second half, would be successes. How did you guys scheme out their two biggest weapons?

DAN LANNING: I think they had moments that maybe they missed. We have to acknowledge that. They have an unbelievable scheme. They do a really good job there.

I will say that we wanted to make sure we always knew where 44 was at. And certainly we always wanted to know where 11 was at. Credit to our offensive line. Credit to Coach Stein and the job he did there, and credit to our guys on defense, knowing where he was at. But there's a lot of room for improvement for us. That's what I'm really excited about, is the opportunity to attack that growth.

Q. Several of the players were talking about the idea of becoming the keystone species of the Big Ten. What is that? And how have you guys kind of become that this year?

DAN LANNING: That's something coming from us, something we started at the beginning of the season, talking about how you get an opportunity to invade a new environment and somewhere maybe you didn't belong and get the opportunity to take over that environment. We said this is the last step for us to become that. I'm really proud of our guys buying into that thought and building off of it.

But, again, motivation is overrated. These guys have to go out and execute. They did that tonight.

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