

Big 12 Conference Football Championship Game: Arizona State vs. Iowa State

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Arlington, Texas, USA

AT&T Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Kenny Dillingham

Postgame Press Conference

Arizona State 45, Iowa State 19

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations on winning the Dr. Pepper Big 12 Championship.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Opening comments.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It was a great game. Players played really well. Our players are good, and they're good people. It's a good combination.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Congratulations, Coach. After the performance today, do you think the team is worthy of a first-round bye in the playoffs?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: In the judging last year, they left a team out because of a quarterback, and I think our play, we're 11-1, with our starting quarterback having beat four ranked teams, having won the Big 12 Championship. So I do think because we've made a standard that the quarterback is that valuable, I think there should be a real chance we get a first-round bye. I definitely think we should host a game.

Q. Coach, I just wanted to ask you about Cam Skattebo. What has he meant to the team, especially heading into this match-up, where you don't have Tyson. You know a lot is going to be on him. How did he prepare?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: He prepared the exact same way he always prepares. So mature. He's grown up so much this year. You can see the speed there throughout the game, which he didn't have last year, but that's the work



that he put in to get to that point.

But preparing like he always prepared. A whole bunch of people stepped up. That's the best part about tonight on offense was not just one person stepped up. X stepped up, Stovall stepped up. The O-line. Sam Leavitt is an unbelievable football player. Chamon Metayer stepped up. I could go on a list of offensive players.

The defense gets three takeaways to start the second half on their side of the field. Like are you kidding me? It's kind of like a scene from a movie.

Q. Kenny, have you seen a team improve as much as this one has from the beginning of the year to the end? You talked about wanting to see your team blow out opponents, which hadn't happened until the last two weeks, and then you did that easily.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It's been great to see our guys play better in the second half. They took it kind of personal after Week 11 when we let another team come back. They took it personal, and they wanted to start finishing games better. They've been harping on it, they've been talking about it. They've been kind of living it. Not just rah-rah, but real focus in the locker room at halftime that we've got to come out and play a good second half. The growth on this team is remarkable. I've never been part of a team that's grown this much.

Q. Kenny, you came here hoping this was possible. Did you think it could happen this quickly?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: No. To be honest, we just got two really good players. That helps. He's got way more belief than I do. Like I said, these guys are good.

Q. Coach, earlier in the first half, you guys faced a similar situation as you did in your first conference game, fourth and 1 in your own territory. Both plays, you guys decided to do a shot play.

Could you go into the decision-making and the difference between then and now and the confidence in your guys?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I had nothing to do with that. That was Coach Arroyo. He called it. I was like oh, crap. All right, bud, let's do it. You watch more film than me when it comes to offense right now. I trust it. I trust our quarterback. I trust our players.

He thought that was the best call for that situation. I almost wanted to say, just hand it to Skat, just hand it to Skat. But I trusted him, I trusted our quarterback. Incredible play call, incredible execution, great pickup up front, great throw by Sam. That's a game-changing play right there.

Q. Coach, congratulations. The competition you faced in the Big 12 this year, what do you think it did to prepare you for the extended competition you'll see in the playoffs?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: This is a really, really deep league. Every week, anybody can beat anybody. That's why it's difficult to get through unscathed. You go to real college environments. All of the environments you play on the road are real environments. Our Texas Tech loss on the road was a real environment. First away Big 12 game.

Then we go on the road at Cincinnati's homecoming without our starting quarterback, which is a real environment.

Then you go to Kansas State after they have a bye. That's a real environment.

So I just think the difficulty is not just the teams, but it's the environments you go into as well, which is why the Big 12 consistently, you know, people lose one or two games in the league because it's just so competitive.

Q. Coach, in all your years of being in this profession, and obviously it's still a really young team, the seniors kind of left things where they left it. How do you see the future of this program just based on how fast the young guys caught on to your message, and has it surprised you that they caught on this fast?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think we've shown great leadership. You think our leadership council, our players, the guys up here next to me are unbelievable competitors, unbelievable leaders.

When your players run your program, you're good. You can force coach-led leadership, which is needed at times. At the same time, if your players aren't feeding the rest of the team the same vision, the same message, you're only going to be capped at how good you can be.

I think these guys have an unbelievable maturity about

themselves to lead their team. What other team has their players giving pregame and halftime speeches? And that's not fake. That's just what our team is.

Q. Coach, two weeks ago, Javan made a big play for you against BYU. He sparked you guys in the second half with the turnover. Seemed like that was a snowball effect after that turnover. What did that turnover mean to you guys that early in the third quarter?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It was huge to get the takeaway and for the offense to score. The exciting thing was the response in the second half to come out fast. It was a few adjustments we made defensively to combat their check-with-me stuff. And the fact that our guys could go out there, take what we took at halftime, apply it, it worked, and then capitalize on it. Our offense going and capitalizing, that's just a really good team football. That's what good teams do. They play off each other.

Q. Kenny, when you go back and reflect on your time when you first got here in November of 2022, guys like Trent Bourguet, Caleb McCullough, guys like that who trusted you and stayed through the process, what does it say about those guys believing in you and believing in what you were building to get to this point now?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It's pretty cool to watch those guys celebrate today. Trenton went on the field and took the knee at the end, which is cool. Talk about a full circle career for him. And then Caleb, to just continue to make plays. He could be one of the most improved players on our football team from where he was 24 months ago to where he is now. It's just incredible.

Those guys believed in the vision, though it's hard to believe when you're not very good and you're 3-9. Not many people believed with that. But we had a sense of belief because, like I said, the guys next to me, the leaders on our football team create a sense of belief with the work they put in.

Q. Kenny, if you could have a last-minute message to the playoff committee, what would it be?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I would say these guys have worked so hard. These guys have accomplished things that I don't know if any team's ever accomplished, being picked 16th out of 16 and winning a championship.

We're 11-1 with this kid to my left. We're Big 12 champs when he's on the field, and I think if you were to look at our résumé with Sam Leavitt as our starting quarterback, I

think you can look deep and hard to see where we stand with champions, where we stand with conference champions because we've already made the decision that quarterbacks are very, very important to the college football committee. I think it's time to double down on how important the quarterback is and look back on our season as our quarterback played.

Q. Coach, it really felt at the end of the first half you guys got going in the defense. In the second half, you got three consecutive turnovers. Earlier, you talked about attack, attack, attack. What change going from halftime to the second half to allow to gain the momentum and swing the game in a different direction?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: To be honest, I thought they had a good plan early. A lot of check-with-me, getting themselves into good plays, good numbers. I think Coach Ward did a nice job combatting it. Then our players got comfortable.

Early, you're in the best if not the best stadium in the country that they're playing in. A lot of our kids are from Texas. They dreamt of the playing in the Big 12 title game. To say there's not going a little nerves is delusional. There's going to be a little bit of nerves. It's what they dreamt of.

I think they calmed down, I think we made adjustments as a staff and they went out and executed the rest of the game. It started in the first half and continued through the third quarter.

Q. Kenny, what can you say about the way Cam played today and the end of the season. Do you think he should be in New York for the Heisman ceremony?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I do think he should be. Want to turn on the tape? I mean, he's really good. Like he's good enough to be there. I don't know. What did he finish up today? Oh, he was 0 for 1 passing.

(Laughter.)

KENNY DILLINGHAM: He had two catches for 38 yards, one touchdown. He basically had 200 yards of total offense and three touchdowns. That's incredible. I think that's his third time in a row he's gone for over 100 yards and multiple touchdowns in the first half, potentially.

I don't know what else you can do to put your name in the race. Obviously, there's two other guys that are really, really high on that list, and I don't know if he should ever surpass those guys. Should he be on that list? Should he

have the opportunity to go there? Yes.

Q. You've always been so much about process, focusing on one week to the next. Can you please just describe when you guys got the ball back with two minutes left and you started making your way around the sideline hugging people and congratulating people, what that feeling was like?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it was pretty cool. I mean, it was pretty cool. The process was over. We got the job done. It's just a pretty cool moment to see those guys.

Q. Kenny, can you take me there a little bit about that Skattebo pass, what was going through your head? Sam, if you want to chime in too, what were your thoughts on that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I'll take it.

Don't do it. That was going through my head. That what makes Skat Skat. He does incredible things. You know what? To his credit, like, they pan out. I don't know how. Last year, we called a punt with him as our quarterback, because it was an absolute amazing situation we were in last year, and he checks a throw to Elijah Badger, and it's complete. I'm like what's just happened? Like is this real life?

But that's Skat. It defines Skat. He's just one of those guys that he works so hard, he finds a way to be successful. What was going through my head was oh, my gosh, this is not good. This is not good. Oh, it's getting worse, it's getting worse. Then it was incomplete. I was like holy cow.

Q. First of all, congratulations. What does this moment mean for long-time Sun Devil fans? What does it mean to people who have been with the program from the first year up to now. Knowing the job isn't finished, what does this mean?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It just shows what we can be. With the right direction, with the right players who are committed to the program and committed to work, I think you can achieve anything here.

I've always thought that. People have always said this place is a sleeping giant, sleeping giant. Well, you're not a sleeping giant, right, if you never wake up. You're a dead giant, right?

It just hasn't woken up for so long. Finally, I think these guys have bought into not just Arizona State, to the city, to the community, the weather. They're over here talking

about the weather the other guy. It's like they've bought into everything that the Valley, Tempe, Arizona State has to offer. That's what's special is these guys are members of the people. Like they love it there, and I think that's special.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports