

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Texas

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Texas Longhorns

Coach Steve Sarkisian

Jahdae Barron

Quinn Ewers

Postgame Press Conference

Georgia 22, Texas 19 OT

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Quinn, throughout the game, why do you think the offense had some struggles punching it in, settling for field goals?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Before we start peppering our players...

First of all, this is the life of a competitor, okay? You get into this arena, you compete at the highest level against quality opponents. There's going to be sways and flows in a ballgame that are sometimes going your way and sometimes don't.

I think the challenging games like this is to maximize the opportunities when you get them. In the first half we had some great opportunities and we just couldn't capitalize the way we would have liked.

Clearly the penalties were an issue in the first half where we stalled out on some things and for the in some third-and-longs and whatnot.

Our defense played a fantastic first half. I think it was like 260 yards to 54. But the score was 6-3. Clearly we went capitalizing on the opportunities we had.

They made the change at quarterback. I think it sparked them some, provided some different style of offense running the quarterback. I thought our guys showed a great deal of resiliency and fight today to fight back to force



overtime.

But at the end of the day we weren't effective enough in the high red to put touchdowns on the board. I think that in and of itself was probably a microcosm of the game because we had plenty of opportunities, but we didn't capitalize on them.

The beauty for us is this stings, it's hard, but we get a chance to regroup in a couple weeks and get into the College Football Playoff and go compete for a national championship. I think we're plenty good enough to go win that, but we're going to need to get healthy so we can put our best foot forward to make that happen.

THE MODERATOR: First question.

Q. Quinn, why do you think you struggled to capitalize on the opportunities?

QUINN EWERS: We were moving the ball well throughout the entire first half. Like Coach Sark was saying, we had plenty of opportunities. I think, again, we just shot ourselves in the foot a couple times, got in some third-and-longs down there that are hard to get out of, yeah.

Q. Jahdae, Tre Etienne had two touchdowns today and had three in October against you. Why was he so hard to corral?

JAHDAE BARRON: I think we just needed to do a better job on defense. We were doing a good job in the first half. I think throughout the second half we lacked tackling. That's something we'll correct on this two-week stretch.

Q. Even though you're disappointed in the moment, you still have had a successful season, have a chance to rebound from this in the Playoffs.

JAHDAE BARRON: Just because of the level of the culture that Sark created here. Knowing we still in it, we still have opportunity to make things right. It can't just be poor me's for the next two weeks. You got to get back to work. We'll fix what we need to fix.



Q. We hear about the stats. People who watch this game, kids, adults, the way you guys fought until the very end, take us through that. How did you have the gumption to not give up.

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, I think the coaches do a really good job of putting us in stressful situations, whether that's be in winter during workouts or in summer during the summer workouts.

I mean, ultimately that honestly just carries onto the football field. I mean, again, I think we did a really good job of fighting till the very end. Some plays didn't go our way.

JAHDAE BARRON: Piggyback off what he said, just about our culture. He always tells us adversity will strike, we don't know when it will strike, but at the end of the day we have to be back and fight for our brothers. We'll continue to fight and we'll just fix it.

Q. Quinn, the windows get tighter in the red zone. Did it seem like anything that Georgia was doing that made things tough down there? Or your guys' inability to capitalize on opportunities?

QUINN EWERS: No, I mean, I feel like we had a good plan going in, for sure. We just didn't capitalize at the end of the day. I think it was all on us. We had plenty of opportunities to go capitalize. Some games go that way. We're definitely going to take a look at it and go from here.

It's cool, the new 12-team Playoff, we get to keep playing ball.

Q. When you looked down on the interception, what did you see?

JAHDAE BARRON: Yeah, I seen green grass.

Q. Jahdae, how difficult is it to deal with a backup quarterback who you had not prepared for, a different skill set than the starter?

JAHDAE BARRON: I mean, we just got to go to adjustments and trust PK's plan.

I think we just lacked tackling the second half. That's something we have to correct our end. It's just a one, two thing.

Q. Quinn, with their pass-rush being pretty effective, how do you feel you handled their pressure today, considering your ankle?

QUINN EWERS: Starting with the O-line, I think they did a good job of handling all that stuff they do on defense, especially with their backers, all the stuff going on in the front seven. I think they did a good job.

I think we moved pretty well in the pocket. Again, that just goes back to the O-linemen making pocket for me.

Q. Coach alluded to it. Now you got the shot. You have to win an extra one to get back here. Do you feel like you're built for this because of the way you are made?

JAHDAE BARRON: Yeah, everything we been through, it started off in spring ball, going into fall camp. We built something here, culture. It's not building a relationship on the field, it's building something off the field. Knowing what we've been through together...

Even when adversity strikes, you have to get back up. He always tell us it's how we respond. We just have to respond in the right fashion.

QUINN EWERS: Again, our culture is battle for this. We're built for the moments we're going into. I have no doubt each and every guy in that room believes the same thing I'm saying right now.

I said it earlier this season, it's 10% what happens, 90% how you react to it. I think we do a good job of handling adversity.

Q. Quinn, from on the field, was there anything you saw at the line of scrimmage that was difficult to run the ball against? Anything you saw from the line of scrimmage that they were doing differently?

QUINN EWERS: No, I mean, they do a good job of crafting one on ones in situations like that. We'll watch it and check it out.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. We'll continue with questions for Coach.

Q. Steve, how excited are you to see what your team's going to come back and do? You have two weeks to challenge them to fix this. How excited are you about this challenge?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I have no doubt these guys give me no reason for pause that they won't rebound and play really good football in two weeks.

They've done that over the last two years. This group will always bounce back. Our backs were against the wall a

year ago. We had to win out to get to the Big 12 championship game. This year our backs were against the wall. We had to win out to get to Atlanta. They did that.

Their ability is to respond to adversity, as they touched on, not hang their heads, get right back to work. It's something that I continually am impressed by the resolve that they have.

Like I said, I have no pause they'll come back ready to work here next week. We got to manage these two weeks the right way. We've got to get as healthy as we can get for a four-game season.

Q. In the high red, from a play-caller's perspective, did it seem something Georgia was doing or inefficiency on your guys' part?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Probably a combination. They're a good football team. They've got good schemes, good players. There were a couple bang-bang plays we weren't able to get.

I think the negative plays kind of hurt us when we got there. I think a couple of the penalties when we got down there hurt us, as well. You're playing behind the chains, which is never where you want to be in the red area.

Anytime you're in third-and-long in the high road, red, those are difficult circumstances to be in.

I wish we could have executed a little bit better earlier in the game and stretch the lead when we had some better opportunities. Late in the game, at the end of the ballgame, some of those throw-type situations...

The overtime was kind of a microcosm of the game. We couldn't put the Bailey in the end zone. We had to settle for a field goal. That opened the door for them to score and win the ballgame.

If we're fortunate enough to see them again, we're going to have to improve in that area.

Q. I can sense your emotions. Tough loss. The regular time in the game, was over going into overtime, you left it all on the field. Can you talk to fans who might be listening, what were you going through? It's like you never get to see somebody fight like that.

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, no, this was a heck of a football team. Like I said, I have a ton of respect for their program and their team. What Kirby has done here for seven, eight years now. We knew it was going to take 60 minutes. I didn't know it was going to take 60 minutes plus

overtime.

We challenged them on Monday about whatever you got in your tank, we got to empty the tank Saturday. We'll have plenty of time to recharge our batteries and refuel our tank.

I think every guy that was out there battling, competing, left it all out there. That's all you can ask as a coach.

Q. Whether it's the false start or Jaylon not getting that block on that return, how do you clean up those little things?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think they're two separate things. We've had an issue with false starts on field goals. We have to clean that up on timing. I think that's the second time in two or three weeks that's occurred.

In the midst of a play in game, your football reactions just kick in. Sometimes you make the block, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you see things happen, you didn't see it happen.

I don't know. I have to look at the tape on that particular play.

But then there's other heady plays, like the last play of the first half, Anthony Hill is lateraling the ball to Barron, we're trying to get in the end zone because our guys knew it was the last play.

I think our football awareness is pretty high. There's some things clearly we need to improve upon because I think we had, I'm not sure, maybe four holdings or something in the game today again, which was something that had reared its ugly head kind of mid-season. I thought we had it rectified. Tonight it showed back up again.

Q. When you guys have the best record in the SEC in regular season, do you feel like you should have to play in this game to win the SEC in the 12-team Playoff era? How do you feel adding another 60 minutes of wear and tear on you and Georgia?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I really value this game. I think this game means a ton to the Southeastern Conference. We joined this conference. I was fortunate enough to be part of this conference as an assistant, coached in it twice.

This is a heck of a game. It's an honor to play in it. It was an honor to play in it today. We didn't come out on top.

Especially the way it's structured where not everybody gets to play everybody. I think it's probably the right thing to do, to have a championship game.

Now it's our job to kind of regroup and get ourselves as healthy as we can to go compete in a Playoff.

We have time. We essentially have a bye to get ready for that game. We'll do the best we can. I know our players will from a rehab and recovery standpoint. We'll find out who we're playing, put together a plan and go to work.

Q. It's hard to do big picture perspective right after a game, when you look at the season, the success you have had this year and last year, the disappointment of the Georgia losses this season, where is your head at as relates to where you are now and how do you press forward?

STEVE SARKISIAN: We're going to compete for a national championship. That's where my mind is at.

Q. On the fake punt, at that point in the game, the ball is on the field, what were you seeing?

STEVE SARKISIAN: We had a return set up. They ran a motion. I thought we actually defended it relatively well. We had a return on where we were doubling the gunner. We lost some of our edge containment there. I thought Jahdae did a heck of a job of chasing the motion. The kid they flipped the ball to is a 10 200 meter guy. I know him well, recruited him out of high school. It turns into a foot race at that moment.

It wasn't like we got completely duped and had no clue. By the same Jahdae could make that tackle, it was fourth and five or something, and they might have gained six or seven yards on the play. It was a bang-bang play. Nice play by them. Good execution.

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