

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

Saturday, January 7, 2023

Grapevine, Texas, USA

### TCU Horned Frogs

## Offensive Coordinator/QB

### Garrett Riley

CFP Media Conference



COLLEGE FOOTBALL  
**PLAYOFF**

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: For us it's execution. It's always there. I mean, we played -- we did. We played really fast. We were physical. You know, you were able to kind of see that throughout the game and to kind of see us sustain that in the second half was obviously key. But execution stuff. I mean, guys just not having to do too much. I think that's what it always comes back to. So, you know, that was kind of the focus this week kind of getting back to those things this week and trying to clean that up.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, I don't know if I'd call it rushed. I think we didn't score on the first drive and was able to go score on the second drive. Had a long there early there in the game I thought was key for us. So, yeah, I really wouldn't attest that to rushed. I think that was more of, you know, just trying to get into a consistent groove in that game against a really good defense.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah, Kendre's improved. Like I said, Coach Dykes mentioned this yesterday. Today is going to be a day where we get to see him at practice and see where he is. That will be a pivotal day for him.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, we're going to see -- you know, definitely going to see Emari, Trent Battle, Emani Bailey, all those guys, you know, have basically played every game. But we'll certainly see that trio of guys for sure.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: I think running the ball effectively, you know, and that means a lot of different things. But against a defense like this, you've got to have production there, which is certainly going to open up some of the other things for us. So we know that's going to be a big key for it. I know our guys will play fast and be physical and do what they've done all year from that standpoint. I think that's going to be one of the big keys for us and will help kind of set up and provide other opportunities to go attack a great defense.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: It certainly can be a huge weapon like it has all year. You know, whether that's designed runs or whether that's him scrambling and improvising on his own. You know, he's certainly got that element to him. And you saw CJ rack off some really big plays for them last week in that semifinal game. So it will certainly be a key to this game for sure.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Quite a bit, you know. Got some old Muleshoe buddies making the trip coming to LA. Yeah. I think they're fired up to come be here and experience this, no doubt.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.) Question regarding Lincoln.

GARRETT RILEY: No, not really. When you're in a small town like that, you're just waiting on your turn. So anyway, had a great experience there at Muleshoe and great coaches. But, no, never really felt the pressure of following big brother or anything.

#### Q. (Inaudible question.)

GARRETT RILEY: No, no. You know, we have our certain bragging rights I guess. But, no, that doesn't really get brought up too much. He's a better golfer than I am. Maybe I have that on Lincoln. That's up for debate I guess.

#### Q. Question regarding Georgia and what impressed you?



GARRETT RILEY: There's some resemblance I think with Michigan for sure. Their front's obviously very, very impressive. They've got guys on the back end that are, I think, elite guys. You know, front seven as a whole is hard to run on. Hard to find space against them.

So, yeah, I think they -- I thought Michigan -- like I said, I thought they played really well together. That was something that jumped off the tape, you know, going up against those guys. But kind of same thing with Georgia. I think they played very well together. Got a lot of speed, obviously. But the front is definitely the strength.

**Q. Is this your first time going up against -- (inaudible)**  
--

GARRETT RILEY: I believe so. Yeah. I think so. Yeah. Never I don't think in my past ever went against them.

**Q. You and Lincoln were on the same staff. What was that experience like being on the same staff together?**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Had a great experience there under Ruffin McNeill, a huge influence on my life, certainly on Lincoln's. But, yeah, was able to have a great time there. Really wasn't a hard working environment, I guess, with your brother or anything. So, I mean, we both just kind of went to work and did our jobs and was able to work under a great head coach.

**Q. (Inaudible question.) Question regarding Lincoln and paving own path. How important was that to pave your own way?**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, it's -- been very lucky, you know. I mean, I certainly did. Started off in a division 3 school, Augustana College was my first job about a month after I graduated college and got thrown into the fire, like most coaches. So I was lucky to get a foot in the door and carve my way throughout the years. So like I said, I've been very fortunate and very appreciative of all the experiences I've had so far.

**Q. Was there ever any moment you guys almost ended up on the same staff again?**

GARRETT RILEY: No, not really. That was it.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Emari's been one of the most important pieces for us offensively. He really has. He was one of the biggest surprises, you know, for us in spring football. He was a guy that we just -- man, we just, like, this kid, he's really got something to him. He's productive.

He's smart.

So for him to have the year that he's had, you know, kind of being the two-headed monster in the backfield with him and Kendre, he's been a huge piece for us. Obviously, the breakout game I guess last week for him was huge. Couldn't have happened for a better kid. But he's ready. Whenever his number is called, that kid is going to be ready no matter what. And we've got a ton of confidence in Emari.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No. He is. He's just one of those guys that's mature. He's got a lot of professionalism about him which is going to serve him well in the NFL or whatever he does. He's one of those guys that's going to be successful no matter what. He's persevered. He's stayed the course through some ups and downs and really, really proud of him.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No, not at all. No. He's -- you know, he's been great, just fired up and excited for what we can do.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Very little. I think it's more -- you know, there's just -- the only conversations I've kind of had with him are just kind of being in this experience, right, being in big time bowl games, being in the playoff and all that stuff. So that's really been it. Everybody's so busy right now with recruiting and all that, it's kind of hard to find time to dive into all of that.

**Q. Question regarding Sonny.**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. He's just -- he's steady. And he's a guy that's -- he's great to work for. Doesn't sweat the things that doesn't matter. You know, very matter of fact in his approach with his coaches and with his players. So we've got an older and mature group. I think they've fed off of that with Sonny this year. I think that's been a big part of kind of who we are and what our DNA has become as a team.

**Q. How did it feel beating the Texas Longhorns?**

GARRETT RILEY: That was a good day.

**Q. Pretty good day for you?**

GARRETT RILEY: That was a good day. Yeah. No.

Looking back when you're able to kind of reflect on the season, that was certainly a big game and a pivotal game for us. We certainly didn't play our best offensively, but we did enough and was able to grind it out in a game that that was the style of the game it became. And so, you know, looking back, that was an important one for us.

**Q. At what point in the season did this dream playing in the nationals -- (inaudible)?**

GARRETT RILEY: That's a good question. I mean, I'm talking to my wife last night. You played 11 in a row. So there was just really no stoppage. You know, we had our bye week early on in the season. We went 11 in the row and it was kind of on to the next one and such a routine and a process.

And then, you know, you had the long break going into the playoff game obviously. I guess at a point in time there, you know, able to kind of catch your breath just for a second and what all this means is really the only time. Yeah. And then after that game, then it's right into basically just another road game is really what it is after that, playoff game.

**Q. Most important question of the day. Best red-headed quarterback in the history of the TCU program, Duggan or Goff?**

GARRETT RILEY: No. I'm certainly going with -- with Duggan. He's our ginger. He's my ginger. So I'm definitely going with him.

**Q. (Inaudible.) I think you also sort of ran that offense in high school too. Was that -- was that the first basis of where the offense you now run kind of began?**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Yeah. Neosho being an hour away from Lubbock and where Leach was and having a -- you know, kind of having an insider there with Lincoln and that connection. So we were able to kind of implement some of those things early on and was one of the probably first high schools to do it, at least in our region. So, yeah, that was kind of the first experience to be in that offense. And, you know, for me as a player doing it at Muleshoe and able to see it there with Mike and Lincoln and Sonny and all those guys was pretty cool at that point in time.

**Q. As you and Lincoln are growing in the coaching profession, how much are you guys sharing ideas or really just kind of paving your own way?**

GARRETT RILEY: It's just hard. I mean, you're able to bounce ideas off a little bit, but just with -- with our schedules and being just so busy, it's tough. I mean, you

may be able to sit back and reflect or bounce ideas off in the summer, but that's honestly about it.

**Q. Anything you guys -- I know you're six years apart, but anything you guys always completed over especially?**

GARRETT RILEY: Not really. I mean, just really when we were back at Muleshoe together and just growing up, playing video games or fighting or playing football out in the yard or whatever it was, just doing brother stuff. No. That stuff's kind of stopped a little bit.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I think he can probably find his own. I think he can find a couple tickets. I think he -- yeah, he and his wife are going to come, so, yeah.

**Q. (Inaudible.) When you first took over the play calling responsibilities, was it intimidating at all because of Sonny's background?**

GARRETT RILEY: No. No. I wouldn't say it's intimidating at all. I think it's probably just more of a comfort thing just because I know he believes in what I believe in and what we believe in philosophically and how we approach the game. So that's what's awesome working for him. I mean, he truly let's us do our deal and trusts his assistants and trusts us to do our jobs. So what more can you ask as an assistant coach.

**Q. (Inaudible question.) Question regarding play calling.**

GARRETT RILEY: Sure. Sure. You're seeing that a lot in college football now. Over the last couple years, people have become more aggressive that way. Yeah, it's certainly a factor, a major factor in how you call the game and how you kind of approach those situations.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Yeah. No. I mean, there's definitely some field position that's obviously a factor in that but I think a lot of it too is kind of the flow of the game. And that's where with all this stuff with analytics and all those things, you've still got to take the human nature part we believe and have a feel of the game in order to kind of what you think is going to be the right decision.

**Q. You get down to fourth down, is that your decision or does Sonny have veto power?**

GARRETT RILEY: He's always got the veto power. You

know us offensive guys, we always want to go for it. Right?

No. Look, our defense is playing very well. They're an outstanding group. So it's not maybe like the typical era where you know where you're going to go for it every fourth down. Right? We believe in the rest of our team. We believe in our defense. So like I said, it's kind of the flow of the game is obviously a big part of that.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No. Not really. No. We believe in Emari. We believe in the rest of the running back groups. So, no, it doesn't really change. But obviously Kendre is a great player and a big reason of why we're here. But we believe in that group as a whole for sure.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: They've played -- they're playing good teams, you know. I mean, they're outstanding defensively. We all know that. They're great up front. I think they've got really good players in the back end. I just think last couple of teams just got hot a little bit. And, you know, so like I said earlier, I think still the key is you've got to be effective running the ball. And that kind of means a lot of different things.

Doesn't necessarily mean you need to run it 60 times a game. But you've got to be effective when you can take advantage of them that way. But, yeah, certainly big part of the game will be us throwing the ball and then having some ability to do that. And, you know, Max obviously with what he can do in terms of quarterback run game or scrambling or all those things, kind of improvising on some broken plays is always going to be an element that hopefully is going to serve us well.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. No. He's a big part of why we're here. Right? He's a dynamic player. He's someone that is obviously going to draw attention from the defense and, you know, he's a threat. He's a threat with the ball in his hands. He's a threat vertically. And that allows kind of the other guys on our receiving core to have their chances too. Right? You know, our slots and the offset wide receivers. So, yeah, he's a big part of what we do.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Every day. Yeah. He's exceptional. He's violent. He's shifty. He's obviously big and powerful. You know, he's definitely a problem. And he's been all

year. I think he's just an outstanding player. So we're going to have our hands full up there. We know that just like everybody else that's played them. But we've got a lot of belief in our guys up front too. We've got some really good players and guys that have played a lot of football together. So I think it's going to be a great match-up to watch those two fronts battling it throughout the game. Right? You know what I mean? We're going to make some plays. They're certainly going to make plays too. But I think who sustains it for four quarters and who gets stronger as the game goes on is going to be the fun battle to watch.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Got to try and mix it up, you know. And whether it's throwing the ball or running it or throwing it out wide or getting it out quick, just whatever that means. I think just trying to mix it up and just where those guys can't get in a great groove up front is, in my opinion, one of the best ways to neutralize it.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's one of the ultimate evaluations, right, is evaluating quarterbacks. And probably will always be that way. You know, for us, it's just always who's accurate. Who can process. Right? I mean, who can make quick decisions. All those things. We don't really care how big a kid's arm is. You know, obviously, if you have some athleticism, that's always a bonus. But I think the biggest thing is who's driven, who's mature, who can process things quickly and who's accurate.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Of course. Yeah. I mean, any time you got a kid like that, they may -- even if they may be a little deficient with some of their skill, if you've got that, that's going a go a long ways in college football. Everybody's good. Everybody quarterback room is going to be competitive, I don't care which school you go to. So if you've got somebody that's mentally strong, mentally tough, and understands those things, that's where -- that brings a lot of value in the recruitment part.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's certainly evolved from the beginning of the season. I wish I had been around this kid a long time. He's such an incredible kid, incredible competitor. He's very smart. He's one of those guys, you tell him something one time, he gets it. You know, he's a special -- special player.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, he's just impressive the way he's so steady, you know, his demeanor and the way he approaches every day in practice and all those things. That's what's impressive. As he's kind of going through all the attention that he's gotten, he's really just stayed the same. So that's credit to him and his parents and his family. He's done a great job that way.

But I think on the field stuff, I've said this multiple times, what's great about Max is he's consistently delivered in some critical moments, you know, and whether he's played a great game or a bad game, that's what's been -- when I look back at this season with him specifically, that's what stands out for me.

**Q. You mentioned his family. How about your family. (Inaudible question regarding Heisman winner.)**

GARRETT RILEY: So we got there that day and was able to grab lunch together and just kind of catch a breath and process, holy cow, we're in New York together with a couple Heisman guys. How unbelievable is this. It was really special. Our wives were able to go. It was cool to have everybody there together.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No. They're doing okay. So their house is kind of big enough to have a guest room. So, yeah, I guess we've moved up to where we can get off the couch.

**Q. Good luck, Coach.**

GARRETT RILEY: Thank you. Appreciate it.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: He's very important. Big reason of why we're here. He's a great player, I think one of the most probably underrated players in the country this year. And we believe in that whole room. We've gotten a lot of production from that room throughout the year. But certainly he's been one of the biggest ones. He's very important. He's one of those guys, one of those running backs that truly gets stronger as the game goes on, which I don't know a lot of running backs in college that can say that. And he's certainly one of those.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No. Very high with Emari and the rest of them. Emari is a guy that -- any time we ask him to do

something, he can deliver. And he'll certainly be ready for any moment, any time we're there to call on him. You know, so what's been good is we've had -- those other guys behind him have played a fair amount too all year and have been productive and haven't really been, you know, not ready for the moment, so to speak, either. So excited for that room. They're obviously going to need to play big and play well against a great defense.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Well, I just think -- I think the biggest thing is those guys were in attack mode offensively. I think they were -- they know they've got a great front. They know they've got great players everywhere. But I think you've got to be bold enough and really attack them and not sit back and play into their hand. And that's hard to do. Right? They're e an outstanding defense. They're well coached. They're always in great position. But I think that's the biggest thing I see is not necessarily the Xs and Os and the scheme of it. I just think they were in attack mode. And I think that's when those other teams were at their best.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I don't know if I still could say that, you know. Listen, we just -- we've both been very lucky, kind of being at the right place at the right time early in our careers. And I just think we've been around good people and good situations too. You know, his experience coming up was probably a little different than mine. But it's been cool to see the ride so far.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I just think it's probably nice to just have somebody you really, really trust, obviously, as a brother but in the business where you can bounce ideas off from one another if you need to or just have guidance with somebody that you absolutely trust. So that's obviously nice for us professionally.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Man, I love Todd. He does an outstanding job. I've known him now for a couple of years, and I just think the world of him. He's a great coach.

**Q. And then you being a young coach -- (inaudible question.) He's a Texas guy as well. Do you have any familiarity with him (inaudible)?**

GARRETT RILEY: No. No. I've never really been around any of those guys but have known of them for several

years now and just, man, can't say enough of the job they've done, how consistently well they've done their job. So they've got a great group of coaches over there.

**Q. Talk about Max under duress and improv (inaudible question) --**

GARRETT RILEY: He has a gift. Right? I think that's always the balance or the fine line you try and approach as a coach of maybe when to do some of that stuff and when not to. But for me, it's been pretty easy with Max. He's played a lot. He understands ball. You don't have to worry about him too much that way. You don't want to take that away from a player. Right? You can't make him robotic and try and make them something they're not. That's where I think we've gotten into a bit of a nice groove with Max this year.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: He's one of those guys that's truly going to lay it on the line every single play. Right? It seems like every game you see all his scabs getting ripped open, blood is everywhere. He's like this William Wallace character from Braveheart, so he's kind of got that deal going on. But, yeah, I mean, man, how can you not just fall in love with a guy like that.

**Q. (Inaudible question about offensive line and play calling.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, they're the whole key. Great group of guys up front. I think Coach Ricker's done an outstanding job with them as well in just developing a mentality that we needed to have this year. And now he had some great pieces to work with, you know.

I mean, we had a lot of guys that have played a lot of football up front. So any time you have that, you're going to feel pretty good about it. And they just have gotten better and better. And we just felt like all year long we kind of get better as the game goes on up front. And they've taken that challenge on really all year and that mentality.

**Q. (Inaudible question regarding successful quarterbacks.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It helps I guess that they're both coaches' kids. I think they understand. They understand the nature of college football and just kind of the nature of the quarterback room. And it's hard. But those guys are great teammates. Unique situations kind of going on for both of them from their perspective. But they're professionals, really. They just truly are. They're both mature. They both believe in one another. They're both in

each other's corners. So couldn't ask anything more from a quarterback coach.

**Q. Question regarding Max and mentality.**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, he -- just the way he plays and leaves it on the line. It obviously is infectious, and it's rubbed off on our team. And I think you're seeing it offensively and certainly defensively the way we're playing and what they're doing on that side of the ball. I just think it's just really infected our whole team.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, Ohio State's got great players. I think CJ, the quarterback, played an outstanding game. I thought he played really, really well. So that's going to be a big key.

Our quarterback is going to need to play well, as is everybody else. But he's going to need to have a good day against a very talented group on the other side of the ball. Like somebody was asking earlier, I think some of those teams did a great job of being in attack mode. That was something I thought they did well.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Well, I thought sky was the limit to have an elite athlete and receiver like him, someone who's truly, truly special with the ball in his hands, you know, with his frame and his length and his speed is very, very rare. So, yeah, I mean, just knew that having a true vertical and the size that he has, the vertical threat that he is can certainly open up a lot of different things for the rest of our offense and for a lot of our other players.

We've got a nice arsenal of weapons. So he's been a huge factor, obviously. But, yeah, when we first got to TCU, it was like, man, this could be -- be pretty fun to have a guy like him.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: He's a big key. He's a big key for us all year. Was one of the -- kind of the hidden gems, I guess, in spring football, you know, when we first got there and -- so I'm not surprised. I think he's ready for any moment. He's been productive for us all year. Been a nice one-two punch with him and Kendre in the backfield. So it didn't surprise me really the game he had last week.

**Q. Talk a little bit about the type of player and type of person that Emari is.**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. So he's kind of persevered. He's stayed the course and stayed with us and has been in college a long time now. I kind of joke with him, he's probably older than I am. But, man, he's so mature. I think that's the biggest deal. The guy's mature. He's steady. He approaches the game really well. Tell him something one time, he does it and he gets it, don't have to tell him again. I just think his mental toughness and his identify has really served us well this year.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. He's certainly one of the biggest influences on my life. And we were able to -- fortunately, I was able to go out there for the memorial they had at Mississippi State and to be able to see everybody there was very, very special. But, yeah, just -- I think about him a lot when you get to a stage like this. How in the heck are we here, just all those things. You can't help but think about him.

**Q. When you think about it, too, somehow one of his teams got to this point. That's got to, like, kind of -- (inaudible)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Yeah. No. I think, you know, he's certainly here with us and has his hand on us for sure.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, just totally the reason I wanted to coach. Was there at Texas Tech when the run they were going on at that point in time and kind of opening your eyes to cutting edge offense and an offense that was kind of taking college by storm and working for -- not working but playing for a guy that was as unique and entertaining as he was. It was like, hell, this coaching thing looks pretty cool. Maybe I need to try that. So, he was, like I said, a huge influence on me.

**Q. How would you describe what you guys do right now compared to what you did at Tech?**

GARRETT RILEY: I just think the overall philosophy and the way you game plan, the way you scout, the way you develop your players, the way you practice, like all that stuff is really some of the biggest carryover. They certainly -- our offenses are different, but there's a lot of things that are a derivative.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. So he's -- you know, you knew that in spring football and fall camp when the quarterback's not live, that puts Max almost in a disadvantage. Right?

That's where he can really show his greatness is, you know, being in game-like situations. So we knew that. And anyways -- I mean, just through the course of the season, he has done some things where, you know, I didn't know necessarily in spring football that he was kind of capable of. And I think he's just really gotten in a comfort with what we're doing.

It's all about repetitions with us. So he's just truly gotten better and better and more confident with kind of what we're doing and with himself. So he's progressed throwing the ball and sitting in the pocket and moving on through reads and those things. And so, I mean, I think that's just a credit to him more than anything.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, we were -- listen, we were very lucky to have the quarterback situation we had. Very rare when you look across college football to feel like you've got a couple guys that you really feel like can do it and can do it at a high level. So, no, we knew -- we knew he brings a lot of things to the table. And then when he came in the first game in Colorado and took the reins and never looked back. It's been impressive to watch.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. It's been a magical, magical ride for sure. But you got mature kids. You've got guys that have played a lot of ball together. A team that was open minded and had kind of an open heart to take us in. And so we just knew that there was a lot of talent here. But we knew that we needed to get off to a good start in our season. If we did, we would gain some confidence and may be in a position to do this. So we've been able to keep riding the wave.

**Q. (Inaudible question regarding players' led team.)**

GARRETT RILEY: That's just our philosophy. That's Coach Dykes' philosophy. You need players to lead this thing. We knew there was going to be some older players that we hoped could do that. You could see pretty quickly when we got here that there were going to be enough leaders that could handle that. And that's what's been really impressive as you transition into this job to be able to see that as a coach.

**Q. Being around college football so much, do you think that this level of buy-in in this situation is special?**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. No question. I mean, just to have -- to have that much buy-in in year one that quickly.



It's a credit to a ton of people, coaches, our strength staff, everybody around the TCU program. I mean, it takes -- it truly takes a village to do that. And it takes a special group of players, obviously.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Man, you better always be looking to get better as a coach. That can't always just be what's the new play. Right? Like what's the new scheme or anything like that. You can always kind of find some of those things.

But I think always just trying to find ways to just utilize your players as best as possible. That's kind of what I've really tried to focus on this last two years really of how we can do that. And so to me, ultimately, that's probably the sign of a good coach is developing them but also putting them in the best position to do things that they do well.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. They don't flinch. I mean, we've been in, you know, all the crazy games and comebacks and all that stuff, but a team that just doesn't flinch. You know, looking back to -- I think what I'm proud of is we are -- we're a very physical team. We're violent. We're physical. We can wear you down. And we've shown that several times all year long.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's a tall task. Right? They do a great job over there. They've got great players. They play well together. Coached extremely well. So I just think that the battle is going to be who can sustain it and who can get stronger as the game goes on. You know, up front, skill positions, throwing the ball down the field, their defensive backs trying to cover us. Who can make those critical plays and who can really get stronger throughout the game. I think that's going to be the battle to watch.

**Q. (Inaudible question regarding wide receiver match-up.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's going to be fun to watch. Right? I mean, two great players going at it. And their other corner is an extremely good corner as well. So, yeah, the battle outside is going to be huge for both teams. And that will be -- that will ultimately be a big, big factor in the game on who wins.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's been fun. You know, he's unique in a lot of ways. He's a driven person. He works extremely

hard. He's not this receiver that thinks he's got it all figured out or anything like that. He wants to be coached. He wants to be developed. And so I think that alone separates him from a lot of people.

And, obviously, his size and vertical threat and all that is extremely, extremely good. But I think just his most unique quality is just truly how good he is with the ball in his hands. To be that size and that long, it's hard to make that many people miss. And he makes people miss at a high rate.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I don't know if I could really answer that. I haven't been around him too long to probably answer that question. But, yeah, I mean, he's -- like I said, he's unique in a lot of ways, just from his personality and the way that he does work and the way he approaches the game. So I don't know about, you know, him looking up or whatever to smaller receivers.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: There's a lot of things that go into that. I mean, it's technique. I think it's truly believing in it. You know, it's not necessarily us calling a play to throw a deep ball. I mean, honestly, a lot of them aren't really designed that way. It's just kind of within the offense, you know. And we believe in it. We're committed to it. Max has done a great job of making that one of his true strengths this season. It was obviously a big part of why we're here. But, yeah, I think it's a team and a group that we've committed to it and, like I said, have made it one of our strengths.

**Q. (Question regarding talent in wide receiver room when seeing it for the first time.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It was very strong. I knew we had big guys and fast guys, knew we had slots that have played a lot of football. And guys like that truly give you some different match-ups against some teams. So to have versatility and variety was kind of the first thing that I noticed. It wasn't like this one-trick pony at the receiving core.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, you just got to run your offense. I mean, certainly you want to have some play calls where you feel like you could get a certain guy a touch or not. But at the end of the day, we know that all of our guys are going to be very capable of making the play when it comes to them. That's where we've been fortunate and lucky as coaches this year is you're able just to do





that, just to run your system.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. No question. He's just played a ton. He's steady. He's that guy you kind of think in the NFL that's your third down receiver that can make the play in critical moments. He's very, very critical to our offense. He's one of those guys -- played high school quarterback. So quarterbacks always have just a great feel with them. You know, he understands the game. He has great feel. He understands what Max is seeing. So when you have a guy like that as a receiver, it's always, I feel, an advantage.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: It's just good to have a guy like him that can rotate in there with Savion. Savion has been kind of one of those other unsung heroes for us this year. He's been productive for us and a huge part of what we've done all year of being opposite of Quentin and still being a threat. So, yeah, having Jordan come on and be able to get more snaps throughout the season has certainly helped us and helped Savion.

**Q. Feels like Savion has improved the most (inaudible)**

--

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, that's just -- you know, at the receiver play, that's a big part of what we do. We've obviously run the ball quite a bit this year. And they know we've got chances of busting big plays, whether it's running back or Max taking off or whatever. Those guys know they better do their job out there.

**Q. That touchdown to Barber and Johnson, were those the same play?**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Similar designs. Similar designs. And, you know, our guys did a great job up front and Max having to buy some time on both of those, he did a great job doing it. But, yeah, they were similar in designs.

**Q. Is that kind of the design for him to run away from the (inaudible) --**

GARRETT RILEY: No. That's -- that's Max being Max.

**Q. It's got to be a little stressful.**

GARRETT RILEY: Just a little bit.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Well, it's a good question. I think, obviously, defense will see it more. So any time they see it more, they can kind of come around and know how to stop it or what gives it problems. And so I think that's something that they've caught onto in the last several years since you mentioned Coach Kelly.

I think another thing, too, it's just the way the game has also changed in terms of refs stopping and not letting you play as fast has certainly changed, you know, from those early years with tempo. And that's a big part of it too.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I think any time you can mix it up on them and make them uncomfortable where they can't sub and get in pass rushers or a different package or whatever, I think it always helps the offense if you can minimize their call sheet. Right? So that's what you see a lot of teams try to do to Georgia or a lot of other great defenses.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. It's always -- it's always a part of the equation, you know. It's going to make defenses probably do something different versus a guy that can't run at all. So he's been a huge element for us all year long with some of those plays and the ability to run the football himself, whether it's designed or whether he's creating it on his own.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I don't know. I'm going to have to call him and tell him, yeah, I guess we'll have to.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. No. He's -- he's very, very steady that way. I mean, he's -- pound for pound, he's a strong, thick guy. He's smart. And so he's a willing guy too. I think that's a big part of it. You've got to find running backs that are truly willing to do it. He certainly is. He's done a great job that way this year.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. Obviously, it's huge. And whether it's running backs or you're trying to get other people to help on the edge, it's obviously a big part of the equation when you face a great defensive front like them.

**Q. (Inaudible question regarding carrying the banner for the state of Texas.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I would imagine a lot of the small towns in Texas are happy and proud just because you're kind of the smaller college or whatever in Texas doing it. So, yeah, I think there's certainly some pride with that. Obviously, there's a lot of pride any time Texas is mentioned. There's a ton of Texas pride. So, yeah, I think it's been special probably for a lot of people.

**Q. Garrett, I was talking to Max about this and you guys were talking about it here. (Inaudible question regarding mentality.)**

GARRETT RILEY: I mean, first, it's the players. You know, it's just a special group of people that believes in one another, that believes in their ability. It starts there. But I think also our staff has cultivated, you know, a culture where we believe in them too, you know. And we don't panic. There's not panic in our players. There's not panic in our coaches. So I think that's served us well this year obviously in a lot of nail-biting games.

**Q. What was your first impression of Max when you first met him? What stood out to you right away? (Inaudible.)**

GARRETT RILEY: You just knew he was very sharp. I mean, the guy's just played a lot of football. Coach's kid. He's been around a lot of different offensive coordinators in his time and college. So he's just a guy that's very sharp. You knew just kind of being around him and the way he carries himself. And obviously seeing him as an opponent, as a coach, you just knew the guy was tough as hell, you know. So, I mean, that's what -- those are obviously things you appreciate about him.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Totally comfortable. We'll do what we do and it won't change anything. We have a ton of confidence in him and, you know, the rest of our backs that we've had production from all year that have played. We have a ton of confidence in Emari.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah, yeah. You'll see -- you'll definitely see all those guys. Trent Battle as well. We'll look to get those guys out there as well.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. I mean, he's just -- I think that's just how he is, you know. Is there a meeting where, you know, he sat everybody down and said, hey, this is what

we've got to do in terms of that stuff? No. But I think it's just the way he carries himself, things that he does. Obviously, whatever he implements we know is important to him. So, you know, I think that's what -- you know, the rest of our staff obviously just follows his lead.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: We started doing that in fall camp in the evenings. And I'm not going to lie, it took me a long time to learn that damn song. But, man, it's awesome singing it after games.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Yeah. The best is when the young guys get up there and have to just kind of put it together. So, yeah, there was a little of that Hard Knocks deal dealing going on.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Oh, definitely. Yeah, probably more coaches than players. But, no, they've -- it's a good thing. We've had some practice at it. So hopefully we get one more shot to sing it.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: That's what's been awesome in working with him is he trusts his coaches. You know, and that's -- to me, that's one of the ultimate things you can ask for in an assistant coach is for your head coach to truly trust you to do your job. He's allowed us to do that. And that's what I really appreciate about Sonny because I know that's not how it is everywhere. That's hard to do, you know. But that's what's been great -- great for us, you know, for us to be able to have that freedom and not have to worry about that.

Now, if things go wrong or he has some input, of course he's going to let us know. That's his job. But that's what I've really appreciated about Sonny is him allowing us to do what we think is best.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Well, honestly, from him, it's not as much of the Xs and Os stuff. I just think ultimately, it's how to handle situations, just philosophically, what the approach is. And that's where this has been a great relationship between he and myself. So, you know, that's been some of the biggest things, just some guidance on probably more situational things or how to handle things.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: That's right. That's right, man. Yeah. Yeah. First job was in the triple option offense basically. So I was on the other side of the spectrum.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: No. He was quarterbacks. I was really running backs. Yeah. Yeah. I remember him. That's right.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: What a great experience just to get thrown in the fire as a young coach and go recruit Chicago, a kid from Muleshoe recruiting Chicago two months after he graduated college. It was awesome to get right in the experience of it all.

Rob Cushman was the head coach, first head coach that hired me. That was kind of back in the day where you just applied for a job. And at that level, it wasn't as much -- I'm sure it was about who you know, but that was really one of those deals that I applied, didn't know anybody, and they hired me. So I'm glad he did.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: He's just consistent. You know, he's been a huge part of our team all year long. I think he's one of the most important pieces for us. And to have a guy like him, you know, has a great one-two punch with Kendre, obviously. But he's just so consistent in his play, his demeanor, the way he practices. That's something that rubs off on a lot of the other guys as well.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: There's a lot. Obviously, the front is first and foremost. They're elite up there. They do a great job. They're well coached. You know, some of the scheme they do and those coaches dial up for them, they put them in great positions. So that's obviously the first thing you think of is that front and just the havoc they can cause.

I think just weathering that and kind of weathering the storm. They're going to make some plays, obviously.

I think they're elite in a lot of areas. I think just weathering that storm and really who can really get stronger as the game goes on. I think that's going to be the key up front. On the back end, some of the match-ups we're going to see with their defensive backs and our receivers. So, you

know, people are going to make plays early, big gain, a lot of momentum shifts I would imagine. So that, to me, is going to be the big key.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Dude just delivers, you know. He's played -- he's played in a lot of football games. So you just have confidence in him to get the job done, you know. And that's what's been awesome about Max all year long is -- I've said this before. I mean, whether he's playing a great game or maybe not having his best game, when it matters, when it counts, he's delivered time and time again. So we've just got to do that one more time.

**Q. (Inaudible question.)**

GARRETT RILEY: Oh, yeah. Totally. You know, I mean, we've been in games where we've really been rolling or maybe it's taken us a little bit to get going or get in a groove. There's just no panic. Our guys don't flinch. They know that over the course of a game, 70, 80, 90 plays, whatever it is, we're going to find a way to get going. I just think that's the confidence our guys have.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports