

CFP First Round: Alabama vs Oklahoma

Friday, December 19, 2025

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium

Oklahoma Sooners

Ben Arbuckle

Offensive coordinator

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama - 34, Oklahoma - 24

Q. Can you just talk about John's play tonight, and obviously it felt like he was really ripping it there for a bit and then the pick-6? What exactly happened on that play?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I thought John came out. He came out ready to play, was seeing the field really well. Executing at a high level. Was leading. Was playing pretty fearless.

On the interception, there was just an execution error, and the corner for Alabama made an awesome play. Kudos to that kid. It was a really big momentum shift there in the game. But kudos to that kid from Alabama for making a great play.

Q. Talk about Jer'Michael Carter and Deion Burks, both had big nights. Hit or miss a lot of the season, but the last few games they've come up big for you guys.

BEN ARBUCKLE: Those two dudes were remarkable tonight. And I think it's just more of a testament to the kids they are and the players that they've been, because like you said, it's been a little bit of up and down for them this year. But never once have they changed who they were.

They show up every single day. They go to practice. They attack the preparation. And they went out there and they played really, really well tonight. I couldn't be more proud of those two guys, in specific stepping up making big-time catches, making big-time plays whenever it was needed. Really proud of those two.

Q. First year, SEC and then playing in the College Football Playoff tonight. Out of all of these things, what's the biggest lesson you've learned this year?



PLAYOFF FIRST ROUND

BEN ARBUCKLE: That's a great question. I think the biggest lesson I have learned this year is sit back and appreciate whenever you get to be around unbelievable, young, young men, unbelievable players and you get to be around a staff that you really love spending time with, guys who are all like-minded, guys who believe in Coach Venables' mission -- pull the rope in the same direction and attack every day for those incredible players that we get to coach.

That's the biggest lesson I've learned, is just really sit back and enjoy getting to be around such a special group of kids.

Q. You mentioned the communication error on the pick. What was the communication error? How did that happen?

BEN ARBUCKLE: They were locked up. Whenever a defense does that, there's a few different things they could do. They could bring blitz zero and bring everybody on the line, so you've got to be able to get it out quick. Or they can bail back, and whenever teams do that, they bail back into a 2 shell.

They did it a few times earlier in the game. In fact, I thought they brought zero six times in 30 plays, which is way higher than their normal frequency. And we went to make a check on it, and at the end of the day, I mean, we just didn't execute the check that happened.

It's nobody's fault but mine. I've got to make sure everything's a lot more clear and more concise whenever something happens in that moment. It's not John's fault. It's not Keontez's fault. It's nobody's fault but mine. I've got to make sure I put them in a better position to be successful there.

Q. Offense really was humming pretty good first quarter and a half. After that, it looked like John had less and less time, was under the gun. Was anything besides lack of time to throw? What else fell off offensively?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I mean, there's a few things that you can point at in those first two drives of the second half.



... when all is said, we're done.®

Some bad eyes on his part, some -- I probably could have done a better job of putting them in a position to keep the defense off balance in some certain things.

But I think there's about three plays specifically in those two drives right there that we'd either like to have back or we wish we could have executed a little bit better. But that was it. It was execution problems right there.

And Alabama did a great job, like you just said, of applying some pressure, too. I can't just say it was us not executing because they're really well-coached. Those kids were playing hard. But we definitely feel like we could have been better in those moments.

Q. I think third quarter, the dropped pass by Xavier, John turns around and gets away from the sack, and he's got third-and-3 and he's got 20 yards in front of him. Would you rather see him run that football or would you rather see him try to create an even bigger play and throw that thing?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I'm not mad with the decision that John made. It's easy to say in hindsight, I wish he would have just ran. But he saw a wide-open man down field and really delivered a really good ball. It's one of those things where X has shown up time and time again this season and made big plays.

I ain't mad at either one of them right there. In hindsight, yeah, go run, get the first down, but we catch that, probably score, and who knows how the rest of the game looks?

I'm not going to say either way which way I'd rather him -- what decision I'd rather see him make right there.

Q. We saw some new wrinkles out of the offense, some sugar huddle and some different plays. What did you like about the game plan going in? How did it get hung up when suddenly guys had trouble running the football and there was a lot of pressure on John at the same time?

BEN ARBUCKLE: Yeah, I mean, I love the game plan we had going in. All of it was really designed just to really keep the defense off balance and never let them feel like they could get their feet in the ground. Again, answering Barry's question, it's kind of what happened those two drives right there. Alabama got a little bit of momentum and we didn't execute whenever we needed to. So that's kind of what happened right there.

Q. You talked about John's performance tonight, what you liked, what you didn't like. I was curious, as the season's now over how you reflect on his season as a

whole and everything he had to fight through?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I think I've said it a lot about him, but I'm incredibly proud of him. I'm proud of the young man that he is and the leader that he is, the competitor that he is. And I think John got to learn a lot about himself this year, whether it was facing adversity or battling back from adversity or having humility or just continuing to find different ways to be a leader.

Again, I've said it, I think he's an elite competitor. I think he's an incredible young man. And I couldn't be more proud of him.

Q. I know this may be a little unfair because your season just ended, but as you think about sort of where this offense is and you think about next steps, what do you hope for as you look ahead to improve upon and things you think about the next iteration of this offense here?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I think there's going to be a lot of really good things to reflect on. I think there's going to be a lot of areas that we can develop and continue to get better and keep on pushing towards the standard, which is best right there.

But I think there's going to be a lot of good things to reflect upon and be able to reflect upon the unbelievable kids we get to work with, too, and keep finding ways to put them in positions to be successful, finding ways to help them along growing as a young man but also growing as a player, as a football player. There's a lot of things.

It starts with me, too. I've got to really sit back, dive in, look myself in the mirror and see exactly where I can help these young men continue to get better.

Q. The running game never really clicked this season. Frankly, some big-time programs, Alabama is not a great running team. What's the key to getting the running game better for next season that you think you'll have to do?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I think there's a lot that goes into it. Continue developing the guys that you have. Running the ball is a mindset. You have to continue to develop the mindset that you want, that physical, violent, fast-attacking mindset.

And it takes time. It doesn't just happen overnight. We have to continue just pushing towards the standard of what we want the run game to look like. And that starts really almost immediately.



Whenever the players get back from break and all of that, we just continue developing that aspect of it. But it's all just a mindset and you have to attack that mindset every single day.

Q. What's the next couple of weeks like for you guys, addressing what you may lose or want to address in the portal? And do you expect it to be active in the portal for you guys on the offense?

BEN ARBUCKLE: I think that's really more of a question for Jim and Coach Venables. But at the end of the day, we love the players that we have in this building. They're all incredible young men. Are there going to be areas we look at where maybe we think we need to bring somebody in for whatever reason? Probably, absolutely, but we've got to make sure that those kids are the right fit, not just as a player, but that they fit the culture of the young men that sit in this room. Ultimately, that's the biggest thing that matters.

Yeah, that will probably -- a lot of conversations will be going on over the next month. But that's about all I've got to say on that one.

Q. We've seen Brent's defense get so much better because he's had, if you will, home-grown guys that have developed, come out of high school that learn that system. You're not really working with that advantage right now, just coming in and bringing a lot of transfers. How important is that to start building depth from guys that know your system as John does and just having more of those guys in your room?

BEN ARBUCKLE: Yeah, it's huge. The longer you can, especially in today's day and age of college football, the longer that you can be around players and keep them in the same system, be able to develop them and develop them into the vision of what you want your offense to look like, I mean, is the best-case scenario.

The more people we do that, the better depth we're going to have, the better competitive depth we're going to have. Whenever we get to spring ball, it's not going to be a whole lot of teaching anymore. It's going to be a whole lot of refining, developing instead of, hey, guys, here's the offense, now let's learn it before we can really start developing.

So that's the thing that I'm probably most excited about, is just to continue to get back to work, because like I said, we've got a bunch of unbelievable young men in that locker room who crave hard work. They crave accountability.

And just being able to give them the opportunity to be able

to be in the same system for two years now, I'm excited to just see the strides that a lot of those players can make.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

