

Valero Alamo Bowl: Texas vs Colorado

Monday, December 28, 2020

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Tom Herman

Texas Longhorns

THE MODERATOR: Coach, I'll have you open it up with a few comments then take questions.

TOM HERMAN: Again, really excited and honored to be representing our conference, our university, in the Valero Alamo Bowl. I know things are a lot different this year, but we still had a blast preparing for this game, as we always do getting ready for bowl games. Just really excited to see our guys go out and compete.

I think I counted two games since November 7th, so close to eight weeks with only playing two games. Really excited to get back out on the field and compete, watch our guys play.

Again, I can't thank the Alamo Bowl enough for their hospitality and finding a way to make this work in a crazy year that is 2020.

Questions.

Q. With injuries and opt-outs, do you almost feel like you have a shell of a team that you played all year with?

TOM HERMAN: Not really. I think playing against Kansas State with the people that we had really gave us kind of a precursor to what we'll have available to us in this game. The guys have been great. Obviously the offensive line will look a bit different, as well as some different positions.

We played a game with similar personnel our last regular-season game. We've been practicing all week with the same guys in the same positions. Feel good about the guys that we'll be able to put out on the field.

Q. Is there one area you're most worried about as far as being thin?

TOM HERMAN: I don't know that 'worry' is the right word. I think when you're playing a really good team like Colorado, obviously up front is something we'll be keeping



our eye on on both sides of the ball.

Again, these are guys that have played in a game, have played meaningful snaps for us for at least one game and then throughout the bowl prep. Not really worried, but certainly going to keep an eye on both sides of the ball on the line of scrimmage.

Q. Back to last year, y'all probably felt pretty good about using the Alamo Bowl win over Utah as a springboard into the next season. Now that you're back here again, do you sense any disappointment or lack of enthusiasm that y'all have to fight against?

TOM HERMAN: No, not at all. Our guys are excited to play. Any time you play in a bowl game, it kind of serves two purposes: one, a culmination of a good season, an opportunity to send your seniors out with a great memory, and also, like you said, to springboard our young guys into the off-season of 2021 and get one last game under their belt.

Q. You mentioned Montrell asking you about the position choice. Do you expect him to get any run at all in the Alamo Bowl?

TOM HERMAN: Yeah, I don't know, to be honest with you, in terms of the rotation and all that stuff. That will be decided throughout the game.

Q. Might you be able to give us a rundown of the guys who will be filling in at some of those key positions? Would you be able to disclose that prior to the game?

TOM HERMAN: Well, we've got a few guys still dealing with COVID issues that I'm not really at liberty to talk about. But I can tell you that the lineup that you saw certainly after Derek Kersetter went down with his injury up front will look very similar. With Jerrin Thompson playing safety, Jett Bush and Reese Leitao playing the jack position. It will look very similar to the Kansas State game.

Q. What about Eagles? Is that a Tarik Black situation?

TOM HERMAN: I think right now Brenden Schooler will get a lot of the reps there. That's where he's been practicing most of the week.



Q. How different was it preparing for a bowl game? You typically get four weeks to prepare. You had maybe a week and a day. How were you able to pull that off?

TOM HERMAN: It wasn't terribly difficult. We were dealing with COVID issues certainly the week leading up to finding out where we were going to play. We got a few short workouts in with the guys that were available.

Even when you have a month to prepare or eight or nine days like we had, you're not going to spend the whole month, whether you know who you're playing or not, beating on each other in terms of the scout team prep, going against your opponent's looks. You want to keep the guys fresh, not bored with the game plan.

It worked out about right to where normally if you have a month to prepare, you're going to spend the last 10, 12 days working on the opponent. We had eight or nine of them. It wasn't very much different.

Q. I did not want to ask this in postgame, but given how mentally taxing this year has been, how do you envision January going? Do you give the guys time off or do you envision diving right into off-season?

TOM HERMAN: We don't start our semester till the Tuesday after Martin Luther King Day. Our guys, after the game, they'll have a good two and a half weeks off. Our coaches will get about a week and a half off to catch their breath. We'll come back in a week before the players, dissect the season, go through our self-scout, our program evaluations, all the normal stuff.

Our players will have the regular two and a half weeks off as any year would be.

Q. Do the guys come back and go into COVID testing before you can do off-season weight room and everything?

TOM HERMAN: Your guess is as good as mine. I don't know. The rules keep changing. I would imagine that to be accurate. I would imagine. When we gave them four days off the weekend prior to getting ready for the bowl game, when we came back, we tested immediately. We gave them the afternoon of Christmas Eve and the whole day of Christmas Day off, tested when we got back as well.

I would think January would be much of the same.

Q. You talked about the K State game being a precursor. Is there no concern about what team you might see when you take the field tomorrow?

TOM HERMAN: Not a whole lot. I mean, we've been practicing with these guys for the last 10 days at the positions that they're playing. We played almost all of these guys, played that position in the Kansas State game.

No, there's not a whole lot of concern in terms of who is out there. We've had a really good nine days of practice, whatever it amounts to.

Like I said, these guys have a game under their belt, and we'll be excited to watch them go play a full game. For some of them it will be their first full game, for some of them it will be their first start. There will definitely be a lot of youngsters out there, but some youngsters that have had some snaps under their belt, too.

Q. During your career both here at Texas and Houston, you've been in the underdog entering every single bowl game, with Florida State, Missouri, Georgia, Utah. That's not the case this year. Is there anything different in how you prepare or talk to the team in that regard? Do you try to make that like all your other previous bowl games?

TOM HERMAN: No, we don't know who the favorite is, to be honest with you, at any game. We prepare for each game, bowl game, et cetera, the same. I don't know who does the favorite and not favorite. That's really irrelevant to us in terms of the way that we prepare.

Q. Is there a feeling of just accomplishment getting to this point? I mean, all these conversations are so unusual for a football season, yet you get to that 10th game and get to play in a bowl game?

TOM HERMAN: Yeah, I think I heard something 15, 17 different bowl games being canceled. Obviously we knew this was not going to be a normal year. The culmination of the year is not normal either.

I hate to phrase, but I'm going to use it anyway: It is what it is. This is standard operating procedure in 2020. We've had, like I said, a really good week and a half of practice. I know our guys will be excited to play the last game of the year.

Q. I guess you don't get caught up in your opponent only playing five games.

TOM HERMAN: Wasn't a whole lot to go on in terms of video breakdown. Five games is a pretty good sample size to kind of figure out the personality of the offense, defense, special teams, what are their go-to calls and alignments, things of that nature. Then certainly the personnel, as well.

Five games is plenty enough to get a beat on your opponent.

Q. Do you have a starter named for the middle linebacker spot? With Juwan sitting with the targeting penalties, is there a way to coach that out of him or are those just unfortunate events?

TOM HERMAN: Yeah, it will be Jaylan Ford starting at Mike linebacker for the first half.

No, I mean, they're aggressive plays. Again, targeting, we're talking milliseconds and millimeters in when the contact is made, how the contact is made, all that.

We teach kind of the strike zone of where we tackle. Obviously you're tackling a moving target that can move at the very last split second, as well. Those things are unfortunate, but they're part of the game in today's football.

Q. We know the early signing date period is over. We do need to ask, how is your recruitment of Sam Ehlinger going?

TOM HERMAN: We hadn't really talked about it. We've had a few guys decide to come back for a second senior year. I would expect Sam and myself and other people close to him to have those conversations after this game.

I know this game is really important to him. I don't think he wanted to be distracted by any of that decision-making process. I don't want to speak for him, but I'm sure it's something we'll talk about after the game.

Q. As you're looking at Colorado film, Jarek Broussard has overcome two ACLs. What do you see from him? What sort of problems does he pose?

TOM HERMAN: Well, one, the offensive line does a good job. They don't ask them to do a whole lot. They hang their hat on a few different run schemes. When you do that, you get good at it. The O-line is really good in front of them.

Like I said a week ago in our introductory press conference, I've just been very, very impressed with his vision, his patience, his burst through the hole. He's got some physicality, too, at the point of contact.

Q. What have you seen from Tyler Johnson in these bowl practices?

TOM HERMAN: He's done really well. Really, really well.

Q. Has Juwan indicated to you guys he plans or returning? The guys before the year that opted out due to COVID concerns, do you expect those guys to be back with you in January?

TOM HERMAN: The few that did opt out? I don't want to speak for them. That's not my place. Juwan has told us that he plans to be back next season. But for the opt-out guys, we've had some conversations. Again, I don't want to speak for them.

Q. With Juwan coming back, DeMarvion, your impression or perception of the development, the growth those guys have made to where they are now?

TOM HERMAN: Light-years. I thought Juwan had a really good year. I thought DeMarvion continued to get better and feel more comfortable in that role at Will linebacker. He's kind of taken to that like a fish to water. He knows he's got to beef up a little bit this off-season to continue at a very high level for an extended period of time, as well as his career at the next level. I think he's pretty excited about that, as well.

Q. Jaylan Ford getting the start on Tuesday, what kind of opportunity is this for him against a team that runs the ball as well as Colorado? Is this something that's going to be an early test for him?

TOM HERMAN: Yeah, I think it will be a really good test for him. He's had a great nine days of practice. When Juwan got removed from the game for the targeting penalty, we felt like Jaylan came in and played pretty well. Now that he has been able to take all the reps throughout the last week and a half with the starting lineup, I think he just continues to improve and improve and improve.

It will be fun to watch him go out there and put all of his hard work into action.

Q. Are there any other seniors that I guess we don't know about that have told you they're coming back?

TOM HERMAN: Again, I'm going to leave that up to them. I don't want to steal their moment. But there are a few that have told us that they plan on coming back, a couple that are still up in the air.

Again, I don't know who you know about, but I don't want to steal their thunder, to be honest with you, if it's something that they're waiting to 'announce' at some point.

Q. That is just the new way of the world now?

TOM HERMAN: It's the new way of the world in 2020

when you get an extra year. These guys do have decisions to make. We've been very pleased with the ones that have decided to come back. I think I've told you guys, we had a meeting shortly after the Kansas State game where I made sure that all of them knew they were all welcome back. Some have already made that decision on one side or the other, and some are still thinking about it.

This is the way of the world in 2020. Chalk it up to another unique quality of this crazy season.

Q. Any hopes to get either of your backup quarterbacks in the game? How important is this game for momentum for 2021?

TOM HERMAN: Yeah, I think we always hope that you have an opportunity to get the backup quarterbacks in the game like we did against Kansas State and we've done in previous games. But you never know.

I think, again, like I said earlier, bowl games serve two purposes: one is to send the seniors out with a great memory and a great taste in their mouth, but also springboard yourself into 2021 with a lot of positivity and a lot of things that you can take from not just the game itself but the preparation and the work that we put into it is very invaluable.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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