

Valero Alamo Bowl: Oklahoma vs Oregon

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Bob Stoops

Bryan McClendon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Today it's my pleasure to have the head coaches' press conference. The visiting team this year is Oregon, interim head coach Bryan McClendon, and Oklahoma will be the home team with Bob Stoops.

Coach McClendon, will you start off, please.

BRYAN McCLENDON: Absolutely. I would like to thank the Valero Alamo Bowl again. This has been a wonderful experience for our guys, wonderful experience for the families. I said this before: as long as those two are the case, that makes it easy for the coaches to be honest with you dealing with the families and the players.

It's allowed us, especially through this time of turmoil a little bit, just kind of on both ends to be able to focus on something. That's been really, really good for the guys over there. Really appreciative of that.

Appreciative of coach. Coach has been awesome. Man, he's been awesome in helping in any kind of way that he can. Like I said, just really want to cherish the experience.

I mean, our guys, hey, we've kind of finished up the last little day of preparation as far as on-the-field stuff today. That's what I'm sprinting over here from. Again, man, I couldn't be more excited for the group of men that's going out there.

Gives us a great challenge obviously playing against an extremely, extremely, extremely good opponent, as talented out there as anybody. We got our work cut out. Again, very thankful for this opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Stoops.

BOB STOOPS: I would start again, much like what Coach McClendon just said, compliments to the Valero Alamo Bowl people, everybody involved with this bowl game and

organization have been fantastic in accommodating players, their families, all of us, practice sites. Everything has really been run in a really positive way.

My compliments to Bryan and his staff and the Oregon football team. I was on hand to watch them beat Ohio State. I mean, they flat out beat 'em in the Horseshoe. A really strong, good football team.

But my compliments to all these assistant coaches, too, Oregon staff and the OU staff that are taking different jobs and still are committed the last couple weeks of investing in these players, investing in these programs to help them finish the right way. They don't have to do it. In today's world, there's a lot of pressure not to do it with recruiting and whatnot. But these guys have all held true.

I think we counted up the other day, Bryan, in our room, our staffs were together for a dinner, of all the assistant coaches when they leave here are going to seven or eight different schools.

BRYAN McCLENDON: That's right.

BOB STOOPS: They'll be with seven or eight different programs next year.

Again, my compliments to those guys. We could not have done it without them and without the guys that remained and helped us. We appreciate them.

Anyway, we're proud to represent the University of Oklahoma here in the Valero Alamo Bowl. Looking forward to the stiff competition here with Oregon.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Bob, you've coached a lot of talented young quarterbacks during your career. What attributes do you consider most important for a young quarterback? In the limited time you've had with Caleb, have you seen some of those?

BOB STOOPS: Sure. As much as anything, great competitiveness and toughness mixed with the poise. He

can't run around like a linebacker, but he can have the same kind of fire as a linebacker. Toughness, a guy that players want to work with and work for. He's a leader and a worker.

Caleb is all of those things. The players love him. He practices every day with energy. Always ready to go. Always got a bright, happy demeanor about him.

He's got the characteristics and the talent. I'm just hopeful as he continues to progress, he'll continue to evolve as one of those great quarterbacks.

Q. For both coaches. Both teams fell short of their pre-season goals, lost a couple of games. Both teams underwent a little bit of upheaval in the coaching business obviously. Just wonder what's been the goal, the message the past few days for the players about this game, then what's the message going into tomorrow night?

BRYAN McCLENDON: One of the biggest messages that has been echoed throughout this time is this part of the year is about finishing. This part of the year is about finishing. You have a clear opportunity to be able to finish something that you start.

Goals are great. They're definitely great motivation. They're definitely a great tool to use to be able to kind of fuel different things within your program. And it does hurt at times when you don't get them. But you still have so much to play for.

When the bowl schedule comes out, you see that you're playing the University of Oklahoma, there's not much time to sit up there and be feeling sorry for yourself. That has helped tremendously also, just with the competition that we're playing, the team that we're playing against, the storied history of the program. It grabs your attention from the word 'go'.

As far as the coaching part of it, I mean, that's where college football has gotten. It really has. Me and coach had a good conversation about it, won't get all into it. This is just where college football is right now.

At the end of the day you just want to make sure that you're a great example. I was having this conversation with my nine-year-old daughter about why it's important to finish what you start, not do it half-heartedly. You want to go in there and do it to the best of your ability, make sure everybody around you is doing it to the best of their ability. You owe it to each other, the men that you work with, the guys that's playing for you, everybody in the program.

Coach said this, I'm still learning from him. When I got asked to do it, it was the only right thing to do, it really was. I jumped at the opportunity to be able to do that for the players, to be honest with you, for the players that we owe everything to kind of keep pouring this thing into.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Stoops.

BOB STOOPS: Our message has been similar: just represent each other the right way. You're playing for that logo, that helmet, that program. There's a big history there.

Anytime we take the field, we want to represent it the right way by the way we play, the manner in which we play, the toughness, the energy, how hard we play. Those things don't change. Even though they've been through, just as Oregon has, a little bit of upheaval in the last few weeks, the bottom line is we're getting ready to play. If we're going to play, we need to play the right way.

We're playing a great program in Oregon. Of course, that has our attention as well.

Q. Bryan, I wanted to confirm, the defenders we haven't seen at practice the last couple of days: Shipley, LaDuke, Addison, Popo, Keanu Williams. All those are unavailable, and those are injury or academic related, not COVID?

BRYAN McCLENDON: All of those will be one of those related. Keanu will be there, be available. Bryan Addison will be available. Of the other guys you mentioned, in one way, shape or form they will be unavailable for tomorrow's game.

Q. Bob, in recent years we've seen bowls douse coaches in mayonnaise, Cheez-Its, et cetera. What would you feel about a tequila bath, a rock'n roll tequila bath?

BOB STOOPS: That would be okay. What is the administration going to do, fire me (laughter)? I'll be sending Bryan some when the game's over. Some rock'n roll tequila, that's funny.

Q. Bob, I'm curious about how practice has gone overall. I think you came in and stabilized things. So did Brent. Once you got really back on the field, how much joy did you have, how did practice really go?

BOB STOOPS: It been great. The best part of it for me is you don't know coming in, being somewhat disconnected, how they're going to accept you. They've just been awesome. The players, I could not ask for more in how they've been respectful and appreciative. They've worked

hard.

It's been smooth. The assistant coaches, again, have done an awesome job. They deserve the credit. They've done the heavy work. And the players have responded to them and have been great to me.

It always to me is the best part of what we do, is being on the field with the players, around the locker room, around the building. I've said what I miss the most, hanging around the gang every day. For a period of time I've been able to join back in with them, so it has been fun.

Q. Bob, could you tell us a little bit about with the new coaches, you have some carryover on the staff of guys that are sticking around, Brent. Some of the new guys, will they be around tomorrow? How has that been working?

BOB STOOPS: They've been at practice watching, just observing. They have not influenced any meetings. They have not coached. Brent just got back yesterday after practice. He'll be watching us today at practice. But they have not had a hand in the game plan. Just been observing to see the players they're going to be working with.

They've been awesome. I can't say it enough how excited I am that Brent Venables is going to be here, leading our program. The passion is going to infect everybody in a positive way. I really believe he has a chance to bring us to another level.

Q. Bryan, it seems the speculation has been all over the place with 31 players missing practice. To hear you now, there's four players that for some reason aren't there. How do you account for the other 27 or 20 whatever? Are there 31 players that will miss this?

BRYAN McCLENDON: It won't be quite that much. I'll say this, they probably missed some time in one way, shape or form coming back from some injuries, things of that nature.

You get in Bennett Williams back, who he wasn't unavailable, but you're getting him back. They've missed time in one way, shape or form. To act like we're going in there how we were in Ohio State, that will be false also.

I mean, we're having to dig into some depth at some different spots. But most of it is all bumps and bruises associated with play.

I mean, I think what we have to do is make sure that the guys are able to step up. It's given guys some opportunities to be able to do that.

It's not 31. I don't know what the number is to be able to correct or rectify what's out there. I didn't even know that till you said that. We're not missing 31 guys right now out of 85.

I mean, like I said, we are now some guys, and depth could be an issue at some certain spots.

Q. Bob, from a missing player standpoint, you've had the four, good defensive players who are opting out for the NFL. What do you do defensively? Have you patched things up? Do you feel good going into this game?

BOB STOOPS: Absolutely. You're not going to play with nine, 10 guys. We're going to have 11 guys out there. These young guys want an opportunity and they're good players. I've loved the energy, the way they've been playing on defense and practicing. I think Coach Odom has done an awesome job with those guys.

Most of those guys are all up front. But we have some depth up there. These young guys that are going to get more snaps have to step up and play. But they're capable of playing well. It will be a challenge.

I love their front offense and defense. I mean, their front guys are darn good. You turn on the tape, we said it, I've watched it an hour with Coach Odom, loved the O-line. They play well.

Again, these guys got to step up and play.

Q. Bryan, can you speak on the two years you've been around Travis Dye, his growth, what he means to this team at this point.

BRYAN McCLENDON: He's a sparkplug. He's a sparkplug. He's the guy that very easily rallies the troops. It's because of what he does day in, day out, not just what he does over there on game days.

Just leadership and all that other staff is between all the stuff that has nothing to do with game day up until that point. He exemplifies that.

Great, high-character kid. Really, really high care factor which that drives a lot of how he operates just in his life. Really happy for him. He just got engaged over Christmas.

Like I said, man, just when you see him not just as a football player but when you see him as a person off the field, it definitely matches up. A guy like that, man, just always important to any football team, but definitely the

one that we have right now.

Q. Bob, you got into it a little bit, but I wanted to know what you thought about Oregon. Coach McClendon, when you turn on Oklahoma's tape, what do you see in the Sooners?

BOB STOOPS: Just talked about their offensive front, the line. They lose CJ Verdel, Travis Dye wasn't even the starter.

BRYAN McCLENDON: They rotate.

BOB STOOPS: They were rotating. They lose him, and Travis runs for 1500 yards. Really Anthony Brown can make some big plays in what he does.

Then defensively their front, both inside guys are first-team all Pac-12. I love their linebacker, Sewell, No. 1, a great, great player. They got all these guys in the secondary. Hopefully some of them aren't playing. I don't want that for you (laughter).

McKinley, leads the country in interceptions. Great player. You can't beat it when you have a safety that can make plays like that. They got guys at every level that are really good football players, have played well through the year.

BRYAN McCLENDON: First, being an offensive coach, you always start defensively. You just see their knack for creating negative plays, getting you behind the sticks. They fly around. I mean, some of those guys, like you said, are sitting out. I'm not too upset about that, about those decisions, to be honest with you, which the quarterback made the same one.

But those guys are physical, how they take on blocks, how they defeat blocks, how they cancel gaps. I mean, they have cover guys out there on the back end. That allows you to be able to do some of those things.

I mean, just schematically that's the first thing that jumps out at you, is what they do to make you play behind the sticks. I feel like it really gives those guys an advantage going into game they play.

Then the personnel they're doing it with. I kind of alluded to it, I feel like they probably have the best play-maker in the country in their quarterback. Regardless of how old or young he is, the guy I think is a phenomenal player. You see instantly what he does to everybody on the field. I mean, he truly makes you play the entire snap of football. Whether it's on rhythm, he can make the play. Whether it's off rhythm, he has to create some stuff, he can do that as well. Schematically what they do, they make you defend

the entire length of the field -- the entire width of the field, I'm sorry.

What they do, man, it's a challenge on both sides schematically. Then they have the talent to be able to do it. That's what makes these guys so scary to play. Not just what I'm saying, you see it week in and week out what they've been able to do. They do a good job.

They have great coaches, a good scheme. They got really great players to be able to go out there and do it with. Like I said, it's a challenge, it's a challenge.

Q. Bryan, how limited do you anticipate Bennett being tomorrow, if at all? What does it mean to have him back in any capacity?

BRYAN McCLENDON: Bennett, man, he gives you that instant toughness. Everybody likes to preach toughness. I feel like that's what these two programs are built on.

But he is one of those genuine tough guys, he really is. Getting his energy back and everything else, man, it's been great just because he was playing so well, then how he got injured, basically on a Friday before a game. I mean, you just hate to see guys get injured in general, but you hate to see a guy get injured in that manner.

Just being able to get him back has been a true uplifting for all the guys, not just defensively but definitely going to help on special teams. Those offensive guys, they feed off of that stuff as well.

It's been good in a lot of ways.

Q. Bob, when you retired, you did it in the summer. I know you're not one for sentimentality, any of that.

BOB STOOPS: Oh, sure I am (laughter).

Q. To have this sort of punctuation mark at the end, unexpected, but to be out on the field and have this moment after that happened, does it mean anything different to you to have that?

BOB STOOPS: When you take the field, you want to win. No, that doesn't change. I've enjoyed the time, all of that. Hopefully I had a positive impact on the players.

As far as do I need something to punctuate what I've done? No. That's not my style. You guys that covered me, ladies, know that's not my style. I don't count wins, I need this to finish my career. Not really.

Am I going to do everything I can to win? Absolutely. Try

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to give our players the best opportunity to win. But I don't look at it as a big deal as far as my career goes.

Q. Bob, Cale said yesterday he's never called plays before throughout his many years of being an assistant coach. How comforting is it to have someone who has been in the program that long in that role?

BOB STOOPS: Absolutely. Cale has great experience with all of our coordinators. Through the years he's been the guy in the box with the eyes suggesting plays, or the coordinator, I'm getting ready to call whatever, and how does it look? It looks good, go with it. Those kind of things.

Even though he hasn't been the one that's been coming out, he's been the one helping the guy directly that is calling the plays. Cale has been with us forever. He'll do a good job. I'm confident of that.

Q. Bryan, there's been a lot of positions that have had guys opt out or get hurt. Offensive line is one where there hasn't been that much turmoil. Speak to the significance of that for your offense. Will Ryan Walk be available, too?

BRYAN McCLENDON: Ryan won't be. He could be in a limited role, in a limited role. All those guys, man, have played so much football. The offensive line is a different group, you know what I mean? Those guys, they're the epitome of thriving on camaraderie, working together, having to communicate. That's where a lot of our leadership quite frankly comes from not just offensively but the team. Those guys thrive on being the example of how you should do things.

I just feel like, man, when you have not just a group of guys, but when you have that group of guys, that's basically the engine to this thing. That makes things as a coach a lot easier, too.

A lot of teammates, they might not like it, but I don't know if many of them want to try some of those big guys telling them, I'm not going to do it with you, I'm not going to do it the way you guys want it done.

Those guys do a great job of leading, being a great example, not just on the field but off the field as well. I'm really pleased for those guys. As I said, that makes our job as coaches a lot easier, as well.

Q. Bryan, with Troy and Dante, can you speak to the development they had this season, since they played more than Isaiah? What do they each individually

have to do to further develop next season?

BRYAN McCLENDON: I kind of alluded to this before. Both of those guys are extremely, extremely talented guys. Being their position coach, you felt really great about being able to get those guys in.

The thing that I can attest to as far as these guys go, this is not just them but a lot of kids, man, that's in this position, this is their first time playing football since being high school juniors because of COVID and their seasons and everything else being canceled as well.

Basically to go from being able to play as a high school junior, they're playing as a college freshmen. That should show you how talented these guys can be.

As talented as they are, they're made of the right stuff, too. They're smart, they work hard, very conscientious. They want to be great players.

As long as they do that, I feel like all of their dreams and goals and aspirations are attainable. Right now that's been the case. Been really pleased with those guys throughout this bowl practice. Bowl practice you get a chance to be able to get those extra practices in and keep developing guys. They've been able to do that. I've been really proud of the work those guys have been able to put in. It's always a work in progress.

To answer your question, it's going to take a good off-season and everything else, keep developing as far as all that stuff goes.

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