

Valero Alamo Bowl: Texas vs Washington

Tuesday, December 27, 2022

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Texas Longhorns

Coach Kyle Flood

Quinn Ewers

Ja'Tavion Sanders

Jake Majors

Xavier Worthy

Press Conference

KYLE FLOOD: Let me start by just thanking everybody here in San Antonio and everybody associated with the Valero Alamo Bowl. Our experience to this point has been great. We've had no issues. The hotel has been great, the practice facility over at Trinity has been phenomenal, and really we feel like we've been treated first class with everything that they've done. We're looking forward to the game. We know it's coming up here pretty quick.

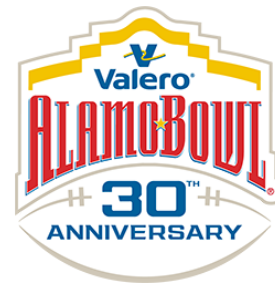
I've got some great players here with us today. To my left, Quinn Ewers, our quarterback; J.T. Sanders, our tight end; Jake Majors, our starting center, and Xavier Worthy, one of our wide receivers.

Q. Quinn, from what you've seen on film, what are your takes on this Washington defense and their secondary?

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, it's a good question. I think they play really hard. They don't do a ton of stuff like from recent teams that we've seen, but what they do they're really good at. I think that's their focus is stick to what they like to do and what they're good at. They play really hard and they play well together, and they're coached really well. Should be a fun match-up.

Q. Xavier, obviously there's been a lot of speculation about your future at Texas. Do you plan to be a Longhorn in 2023?

XAVIER WORTHY: I'm just focused on the game on



Thursday.

Q. Kyle, for you and Quinn, you just talked about what you've been able to get accomplished in the bowl practices. Sark talked about a training camp mentality at the beginning, kind of getting back to fundamentals. For Quinn, just what that's done for you because I know you've talked about your footwork and stuff like that, how good you're feeling about things after having these bowl practices.

KYLE FLOOD: There's no question that bowl prep has a spring practice kind of feel in the very beginning when you're working against your own defense. We're always evaluating ourselves, but during the season when you're putting in a new game plan every week, you don't always have the time to go back and focus on the absolute details of your position, things like the footwork you talked about at the quarterback position.

We've got some younger players that are going to have a bigger role in this game than they've had in other games this year for a lot of different reasons, and it has given them a chance to kind of absorb the game plan and get acclimated to the rest of the guys around them.

We're really pleased with the bowl prep to this point. I think the fact that you have an extended time to install the game plan and then go back over it is going to serve some of the younger players really well as we go forward, but the days in the beginning when you just start practicing after the season is over and they've had a little bit of time off to take finals and things like that, I think those are the days that are really critical to get back to your fundamental work.

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, kind of just to piggy-back off that, we kind of get to go back to the basics, and like Coach said, we get to understand what we're going to do on the offensive side of the ball, and again, a lot of reps for the younger guys, and they become a lot more comfortable.

Q. Coach, what stands out about Washington's front four? Their edges are pretty well known. What stands out about their defensive front?



KYLE FLOOD: Sure, I think you answered the question for me. I appreciate that. Those edge players are pretty good now. In my opinion they remind me of a pro-style defense, and when you work in the NFL and you work against defenses that have good pass rushers, what you see on 3rd down is you see a lot of them in the game at the same time. Whether it's 3, 8, 58, they'll play on 3rd down with three edge players at the same time. On 1st and 2nd down they like to be in nickel, but you watch the Oregon State game and they're playing base defense like an NFL defense, something we really don't see very much of in the Big 12.

Again, I think the bowl prep being extended has given us a chance to kind of go back to that.

Our defense doing that, as well, has helped us.

I think they're really good up front. Their sack numbers kind of play that out, and really everything they do starts with those front guys being so disruptive.

Q. Quinn, how were you able to establish such a good rapport with J.T.? Seemed like you guys clicked from the jump, and what have you guys been working on in this bowl prep to improve the vertical game with X?

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, me and J.T., we've known each other even before coming to Texas together, and we've thrown a couple times before we got on campus, and even in practices, we've just built a great connection.

With X, we kind of went back to the basics, like we were talking about before. These bowl practices, you really just kind of get that feel back, whether it's deep balls or just short game and stuff like that.

Q. Kyle, who's your backup center entering this game, and then also, can you evaluate how the true freshmen that saw a lot of conventional time between Kelvin, DJ and Cole played this year?

KYLE FLOOD: I'll start with the second question first and then we can go to the depth a little bit. One of the neat things about bringing seven offensive linemen in at the same time like we did last year was it created a lot of competition, and all seven of those guys have been in the two deep the entire year.

That's unique to me, and again, I've been coaching a little bit here. To have that many young guys in your two deep taking reps with the offense and not really on the scout team is a testament to them, how hard they worked when they got here last summer to absorb the offense and be able to function and play at a level that earned them that

spot. They weren't given those spots.

Kelvin and Cole have played more than the others. DJ would probably be next. As the season went on, he earned more and more playing time.

I think, again, this bowl prep for those freshmen has been invaluable, invaluable. I'm pleased with how those guys have performed, and I'm excited for what the future brings with them.

The depth chart at center, so Jake is going to start the game at center. Are you okay with that, Jake?

JAKE MAJORS: I think I'm all right.

KYLE FLOOD: So Jake is going to handle that part, and then after that you could see Cole Hutson at center, you could see Connor Robertson at center, you could see Hayden Conner at center, so we've got some options to work with there in terms of the backup.

Q. Kyle, Sark has talked time and again how important the tight end is in this offense. How would you describe J.T.'s evolution as a blocker, and then J.T., what's that process been like for you to becoming a complete tight end?

KYLE FLOOD: That's really to me what makes J.T. the player he is. I've said this line many times in my career: A tight end that doesn't block is just a slow wide receiver, and nobody is looking for that.

His physicality in the run game gives us a lot of options, and it creates this dilemma on defense. When we put two tight ends on the field and J.T. is one of them, do you want to play the game in base, which the team we're playing, Washington, has the ability to do and has shown that they will do it, or do you want to play the game in nickel because of what could happen in the passing game even though you're in 12 personnel.

His physicality in the run game gives us flexibility on offense and it creates dilemmas for the defense which we like. We want every skill player on our offense we want to create a problem for the defense, and to do it at the tight end position, you have to be able to do both.

JA'TAVION SANDERS: Yeah, that transition just coming from high school, it was kind of frustrating at first, moving to a new position, but just I appreciate Coach Banks, Coach Sark, Coach Flood just all staying on me, pressuring me every day in practice because they seen the potential, and I thank them for that because they helped me get to where I'm at today, how you said, being a true,

complete tight end.

I didn't know there was this much blocking coming from a tight end. At first I was like, no, I don't want to do this. But after I developed and matured, I definitely love the tight end position now.

Q. With you guys losing your top two running backs, do you think that makes Washington wonder if you're going to throw it a lot more?

KYLE FLOOD: I don't know that. I'm assuming they're going to have a press conference. You can ask them. I'd rather not try to predict what their questions are.

But I will say this, and I've said this all year. I think that's one of the more talented rooms in our building is that running back room. Keilan Robinson, Jonathon Brooks, Jaydon Blue. I'm excited to watch them in this bowl game. They've had a really, really good bowl prep, and they're all talented runners.

The depth in that room that we've talked about all year, now it's got to show up for us, and to this point, the only evidence in practice is that they're going to play at a high level.

Q. Quinn, can you speak a little bit about Jonathon Brooks and kind of what he brings to this team, what you've seen from him in practice over these months?

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, I mean, I think everybody kind of feeds off the way he practices. He's a hard practicer. Gives a lot of effort, and I think he has some of the best vision I've seen from a running back. It's easy for him to find those holes and kind of sneak through. He's good in the passing game, as well. He doesn't drop a whole lot of passes, which is a quarterback's best friend.

Q. Quinn, your head coach was a former pretty good quarterback back in the day, Coach Sark. Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Coach Sark, and as a quarterback specifically, and what you've garnered from him the most? Last time Washington was in the Alamo Bowl, Coach Sark was the head coach and it was 67-56. Can we anticipate that kind of an offensive output this game?

QUINN EWERS: Obviously Coach Sark was a really good quarterback in college. It's cool to see because sometimes we'll see the same things and we'll see different things and kind of talk about it. It's awesome because he has great input on everything I do. Obviously he's been there, he's done it. But yeah, like you said, it'll be a cool game for him and a couple other coaches that came from Washington. It

should be a fun experience overall, and I'm not going to predict anything, but it should be a fun game.

Q. Xavier, I'm going to stay on this offensive theme. They've got some pretty big-time receivers, as well, and you do, as well. Have you thought about just the excitement because this could be a track meet for the receivers.

XAVIER WORTHY: Yeah, coming into this game we knew their offense was a very close offense, so we just want to match what they've got going on on the offensive side of the ball.

Q. Jake and Ja'Tavion, what have you seen in the bowl practices? How would you assess how they've gone, what the team's mindset is? A lot of times it's about which team is motivated to play in these bowl games. What have you seen from your team in the practices?

JA'TAVION SANDERS: I think I've seen a lot of maturity from the younger guys, like Coach Flood was saying, just them getting an opportunity in the offense in practice showing what they really can do, giving them confidence, and it's really starting to show, and I can't wait to see what they've got to show on the field.

Q. Anyone in particular?

JA'TAVION SANDERS: All of them, in my opinion.

JAKE MAJORS: To add on to that, just seeing the maturity of this group with Bijan and Ro stepping aside, Blue and Jonathon Brooks stepping in and just seeing the way that they've prepared and knowing that we can trust them whenever they're out there. Just being able to see that and see the maturity that they have and everybody invested in them is just what's made it so fun as a group to just keep evolving with star guys stepping aside, but it's going to be a good game.

Q. Jake and Coach Flood, considering how well you guys ran the ball against Kansas and Baylor the last two games of the year, how much confidence as a group does this O-line have coming into this game, and what's it been like to have the same starting five for all 12 games, being able to grow together throughout the regular season going into the bowl game?

KYLE FLOOD: Yeah, the confidence part, you can't give a player confidence. Confidence is earned by that player by doing things right over and over and over again. That's where I think this group having a chance to be together and create some continuity has really helped.

But I've said all along, you need more than five. Usually you get to about eight in a season on a normal year, and that's where guys like DJ Campbell, as they come along, guys like Neto and Cam Williams and they come along, that's really important because we lost Junior Angilau in the preseason, so we didn't have him for any part of this game.

The guy has started a lot of football games here at Texas; we didn't have him.

The fact that we were able to stay healthy for the most through the season created some continuity and really helped, and I think some of these younger guys starting to come along, DJ is the most obvious one that you see, but we see the other stuff in practice with Neto, with Cam. I think that has allowed us to get better as the year has gone on.

JAKE MAJORS: Yeah, I think Coach Flood hit it spot on when it comes to confidence, playing together. He said that we've had a starting five group for a long time now, and with that comes real chemistry I would say, and I can feel that with the guys next to me. With consistency, with when it comes to calling plays, we're always on the same page. It kind of shows you how we were able to go out there and run the ball during conference play. But credit to those guys keying in on whatever I ID and making the plays and stuff like that. It just shows that they're bought into me and they're bought into the program.

Q. Quinn and Ja'Tavion. Michael Penix is putting up video game type numbers in this game, and this game itself has a history of shootouts. Are you guys excited about the potential of lighting it up like they've done in years past with these two good offenses?

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, they have a really good quarterback over there playing for them. Like you said, he's put up crazy numbers this year.

But no, we're just going to go into it like we do every other game, and at the end of the day just try to get a W. We know defense is going to put up a good stand over there like they always do, and we're just trying to stay comfortable and stay on track and try to go 1-0.

JATAVION SANDERS: Yeah, and off that, we just really need to come play our brand our football, honestly, because when we do that, I feel like we can be unbeatable. We come out and do that, it's definitely going to be a shootout for sure.

Q. What's been the mental preparation before the game? What will you think about pregame and how will you look at it going into it?

QUINN EWERS: Yeah, kind of like what I said, just kind of treat it like it's every other game. At the end of the day, try to go 1-0. We're just trying to keep it as simple as that and not try to let all this other stuff going around us kind of get in our way and be distractions.

JATAVION SANDERS: Also, it's a business trip, as well.

Q. Kyle, I know Andre has moved on to another program but he brought something unique with that jumbo tight end. Is that something you want to replicate maybe going forward in years, and is that something you see Gunnar taking over for this game or do you see something like that being used in this game?

KYLE FLOOD: Well, Gunnar has his role already. He's got a big role in this offense as a tight end.

The stuff we do where we add a sixth offensive lineman is something that Coach Sark and I have been doing now even prior to coming to Texas, so we've done that in the past, as well. We've always trained more than one guy to be in that role, and Andre was in that role, but Andre is not with us now, so we've got a couple other guys that are ready to kind of step into that role because it's always been a big part of our offense, and game to game, it could be different percentages and definitely how a game goes could affect that, as well. We always had that as something that we do. I don't think we ever go into a game saying we're not going to do something. We may do a little more of something or a little less of it, but we have pretty much everything available every time we play.

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