

# Valero Alamo Bowl: Oklahoma vs Arizona

Tuesday, December 26, 2023

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

**Oklahoma Sooners**

**Seth Littrell**

**Joe Jon Finley**

**Ted Roof**

**Drake Stoops**

**Ethan Downs**

**Billy Bowman**

**McKade Mettauer**

Press Conference

**Q. Seth, I wanted to ask you, how have you evolved as a coach over the last year with the experience you've had since you left North Texas?**

SETH LITTRELL: Well, I think just being with a great staff. Coach Venables and this group, understanding the culture and all the hard work they've put in here, just being able to sit back and really observe for this past year has been really refreshing. It's helped me grow not only as a coach but as a person, and I feel like that getting a really good sense of what we did offensively here, the way we played, I thought Coach Lebby did a phenomenal job along with a ton of great coaches in that room. Just being around them every day, you're going to learn and you're going to grow. It's been a blessing for me just to have that opportunity this year.

**Q. How important have the last few weeks been to sort of getting the ball rolling on what this offense is going to look like in 2024?**

SETH LITTRELL: Well, I'll tell you, it's been very fast over the past few weeks, having gone from not knowing exactly what I was doing after the season to going out on the road recruiting to the transfer portal to bowl practices to bowl prep, trying to get on the same page with all the coaches during this time has been very challenging.



We've got a very hardworking crew. The great thing about our situation that we have, we have great players, very experienced players that know how to go out and make plays, and so as of right now, it's just keeping it the way we've been doing things. Terminology is not changing, the offense that we're running will stay consistent to what we've done throughout the year, and then we can look up after the season and figure out what we need to do moving forward as adjustments and kind of evolving in how we grow.

But this isn't time for that. This is time for these guys to go out there and play fast and have that camaraderie together.

**Q. Seth, I wanted to ask you about Jackson Arnold. He mentioned a few days ago that you guys kind of learned the offense together back in the spring. How has your relationship with him grown and what have the last weeks been like in terms of working with him?**

SETH LITTRELL: It's been awesome. Jackson is a phenomenal young man, extremely hard worker. He's going to put in all the time it takes to prepare the right way each and every week, even though he wasn't the starter most of those games this year.

Like I told him, we're both getting our first start together. It'll be an amazing time. No one better to do it with.

Like I told him. We've got great playmakers around us, great coaches around us that are going to make plays for us, too.

Our job is to work as hard as we can, collaborate effort with everybody else, and do our job, make the plays and manage the game that we're supposed to, and let the guys around us make huge plays for us, as well.

**Q. Seth and Joe Jon, you guys both come from different coaching trees. Air-raid for you, Seth; spread for you, Joe Jon. How do you go about marrying those two concepts and working together?**

JOE JON FINLEY: Yeah, just working with Seth all year long, he had a big influence on what we did anyways, so we'll continue to do what we've done and sprinkle in some of the things that he knows very well and can coach very easily and let these guys make plays.

SETH LITTRELL: Yeah, for me, I've come from a lot of different backgrounds over the years, just from the places I've been. I had the great opportunity to be around a lot of great coaches, a lot of great offensive minds and not just the head coaches I've worked for but a lot of assistants, as well. I've kind of evolved over the years to anywhere I've gone to hopefully evolving the system that fits the strengths of our players, not so much around -- some of it's going to fit your personality, but a lot of it year to year is going to change depending on what you have, who's the quarterback, who are your receivers, running backs, O-line. Every year is a little bit different.

I think it's our job as coaches to put our players in the best situations to have success at whatever that is. That's what we need to do.

We're always evolving, always looking to get better. But we have very similar backgrounds. It's a lot closer than you would think. That's one of the reasons I came to the University of Oklahoma, just believed in what they were doing offensively was very similar to what I was doing before the past few years at North Texas.

It was just a great fit for me, and just being able to learn and grow under this system, a lot of things that we were doing has really helped me evolve more into this system, as well, so it's been great.

**Q. Seth, after Jeff left, how long did the process take for you to be asked about accept this job, and did Brent talk about the co-coordinator system that he did with Mike Stoops when they were here so many years?**

SETH LITTRELL: It's like dog years I think from the beginning of our last game through the recruiting cycle. It wasn't long. I know there was a process. Coach Venables is always going to do his due diligence and make sure that he hires the right fit for his program and for our players.

But we had conversations, and not only with us, with Joe and I and our entire staff, and I think it's a collaborative effort, in order to get the right person, the right fit in there.

But after that, it wasn't too much longer. Obviously the way we do things as a coaching staff and offensively, especially, with Jeff Leiby before and now moving forward, it's not going to change. We're all going to help each other. We're all going to game plan together. At the end of the

day, on game day someone calls it, but there's a lot of help in between. What may be in between series may be on a 3rd down, a crucial 3rd down someone is going to speak up say we need to run this. That's why we do it together all week long.

I think people sometimes if you haven't been involved in it, they make it a little bit too hard, who calls what and this. Listen, we had great coaches, we've got great players, and at the end of the day, we're going to do it together. We're always going to do it together as a collaborative effort, and our biggest thing is to have fun and make sure and go out there and execute what we're calling.

**Q. Brent talked a few weeks ago about the pride that you guys have being former players coming back coaching at your alma mater, if you could expound on that, please, that would be great, just the amount of respect you have for the program, the love that brought you here in the first place.**

JOE JON FINLEY: Yeah, so for me, I've picked Oklahoma three times. I picked it as a player in '03 and then came back as a GA in 2012 and '13 and then as soon as I got a call to come back here three years ago, I couldn't get in the car fast enough. My family is from here.

Man, I absolutely love the University of Oklahoma because of the players that you see sitting beside us. These guys have so many expectations on their backs. There's so many fans that want us to win every single game and play perfect every single game. These guys do a great job of handling that. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I love the expectations. I love playing in front of 85,000 every Saturday. I know what the expectations are, and man, it's been so much fun this past month working with Seth and the staff just trying to get a plan together to let these guys go execute.

SETH LITTRELL: For me obviously being born and raised here, my father played here and so that's all I ever knew growing up. That was my dream growing up, and I remember laying in bed growing up, and I told our players this story kind of when I got hired.

My mom always sitting over there and telling us, telling me I was going to follow in my father's footsteps, have the opportunity to play for a National Championship at Oklahoma, and she said that a long time ago, and I would get so excited, and then we would say our prayers at night, and that's the the honest to God truth. We'd pray on that and she's been praying over that for my entire life.

God has been good to us, and I've got the opportunity to come here and play for a National Championship and be a

part of an unbelievable team.

This place obviously means everything to me. I've been trying to get back here for 23 years, and so this is obviously the place I want to be.

I'm just as much of a fan as I am a coach. I'm a huge fan of Oklahoma. So I have high expectations of this program along with everybody sitting up here and everybody within our program, and so we know the expectations, and hey, we're going to do everything we can to go out and compete and win championships.

But it's all about the coaches and players and the fans. That's what makes this place so special. I'm just glad to be home.

**Q. Seth and Joe Jon, by the end of this, Jackson will have had 15 bowl practices and a game. What are the markers of growth over that time that you'll be looking for Thursday or maybe you're already seeing in practice?**

SETH LITRELL: I think there's been a ton of growth. I think Jackson is one of those guys that he's going to compete every single day with himself and get a day better, and the players will be able to tell you a little bit more. They're with him every single day in the locker room, the amount of work he puts in. Obviously you're going to get more and more comfortable with more days of practice and more reps with the first group.

Listen, Jackson is a phenomenal young man. He loves competing. He always goes out and plays with that chip on his shoulder. I definitely believe he's going to be a special player.

But again, there's a ton of special players on this team, guys that are struggling to get better each and every single day, one day better. That's what we're here to do, and these guys go to work at it every single day, and it's not just Jackson, it's our entire group.

**Q. For the players and also the offensive coordinators, when you look at Arizona's defense, what stands out to you?**

DRAKE STOOPS: They're very disciplined. They definitely know where they're supposed to be and where their help is and how they can complement each other in their schemes. I mean, yeah, they play sound. They play hard. They're real strong inside. On the back end they're disciplined, and they're all really kind of playing together.

You've got to pick and choose when and where to attack.

**Q. You were sitting in that seat two years ago. Is this kind of a full circle moment for you? Talk about your growth in the offense.**

DRAKE STOOPS: Yeah, I remember sitting here two years ago, and it's good to be back. Hopefully we'll be back at the end of the game, as well. Yeah, just been working year in and year out trying to be a better player really every day. You're never too old to continue to learn and continue to grow and I feel like that's what I've done over the last two years and hopefully I'll be a very different player stepping into the Alamo Bowl this year than I was two years ago.

**Q. Billy and Ethan, you guys are two of the only four guys left in that 2021 class. Heading into next year, what does that mean to you guys and kind of taking on that leadership role as this program goes into the SEC?**

BILLY BOWMAN: What they say is right. When you come into college, the same people are not going to be there when you leave. But being here, it shows the loyalty we have for this school, for this program, for these teammates and coaches. But just going into my senior year, obviously don't want to finish out on the right note on my junior year with this last game we have. But going into my senior year, it just went by in the blink of an eye. Just yesterday I feel like I just came in early to spring ball, went through spring ball, then fall camp, then started my freshman season.

Now that I'm starting to head into my senior season, I just feel like it's big time to be able to be recognized and be chosen to be up here as a leader of this team. I'm just going to continue to keep doing my best in whatever I can.

ETHAN DOWNS: It's an honor to be up here, like Billy was saying. We've seen a lot of different coaches, and we've been a lot of different places, and the expectation has always been the same, because that's what it's all about. We know the standard. We know how to uphold it. We know what OU means because like Billy said, we picked it from the beginning, and we've been here, we've stayed through here through all the chaos and all the craziness of the last three years, and now we're able to build it up as chosen leaders by our peers.

That was an honor. It wasn't a coaches' choice. We picked a toll, it was a locker room who we wanted the leaders to be, and when they said it was us, I was chosen as part of that group, I teared up and started crying, like man, this is an honor because this is stuff I dreamed about as a kid. So getting to live that up, make the most of it,



why not. Why not be a leader, why not try to chase every dream and every goal and give it our very best. That's what we're doing. That's why we're here. This is what's in front of us, attacking this week head on, and this is a championship. We've got to win.

**Q. Going off of that, Ethan, being one of those leaders, being one of those guys that's coming back, you kind of started it. You said you're coming back, and then Billy did and then Danny did and DJ and Jake on. What does that say to you about what Brent Venables has been able to do and what he is accomplishing in terms of getting that culture to be exactly where he wants it to go moving forward?**

ETHAN DOWNS: I think he has evolved our mindset and perspective on what it means to be college football players and to understand that another year of development, another year of growth with our teammates and aspirations to become a better person and what that means to becoming a future husband or father or leader or employee anywhere, it's becoming our very best. That's the challenge that's given us.

In football it's things like becoming more disciplined, becoming more dependable, knowing your job, being able to defend it and being able to teach others and having a coach's mind out there. Those are all things that each player should want to attain because it's going to make you play faster and more aggressive.

Another year of us with Schmitt getting bigger and stronger and the brotherhood that we're building. We had three years together; a lot of those guys in my class had decided to come back, and even the guys in the next class coming back for fifth year, a lot of us are really bought in this year and decided that we have huge goals to strive for, and we were inches away from getting it this year.

Comparing it to the year before, we understand it's a game of inches, and to practice our disciplines every day, to chase those inches so that we will be in the playoffs next year, so we have these dreams to chase because they're so close. Buying into that dream as a whole class, as a group, as leaders is really amazing. It's special. It's not common.

**Q. Coach Roof, can you talk about what you've seen on film from the Arizona offense after their 529 yards the last game?**

TED ROOF: Yeah, tremendous balance, both explosive plays in the run game and the pass game. There's no weakness. Their offensive line is well-coached. They know how they're protecting and also who to target in the

run game. But their quarterback, he's pretty special. Again, makes a lot of plays with his arm but also has the ability to make plays with his legs, as well, and extend plays.

You can just feel as you watch the tape, you sense a sense of confidence and belief that they have in him, and again, what the talent they have at the receiver position and the running back position, they've all tight end and throwing a lot of balance but a lot of explosive plays.

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