

# Valero Alamo Bowl: Oklahoma vs Arizona

Friday, December 29, 2023

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

**Oklahoma Sooners**

**Coach Brent Venables**

**Jackson Arnold**

**Gavin Sawchuk**

**Drake Stoops**

**Billy Bowman**

**Danny Stutsman**

Press Conference

Arizona 38, Oklahoma 24

**BRENT VENABLES:** Just want to say, first of all, just congratulate Arizona and Coach Fisch and their team. They've had a fantastic season. They played their guts out today. Certainly deserved to win. Really proud of our football team, and I'm so thankful for all of you guys up here.

Just, again, the guts, the fight, the belief, the commitment, your body of work, the young men that you are. Just amazing people, fantastic football players but amazing people.

Got everything that we could out of this group of guys, and you guys have led the way. We squeezed all the juice out of it we could squeeze.

I just want to say how thankful I am for all of our players and these guys as leaders of the team. I'm disappointed for them that we couldn't do a few things a little better to have a chance to win, and we certainly had a heck of a game and came out on the wrong end of it, but doesn't take away, again, how amazing these guys are, the type of team that I believe -- the season that we had.

Sure, there's some disappointment, but there's a lot more to be thankful for than not.



Drake is the one senior that's up here, man. This is a guy that he's made every person in the Oklahoma program better. Man, you've enriched all of our lives, man. We're thankful with the amazing example that you've been. You've been an amazing player, but how you do what you do, man, you're that dude.

I just want to say thank you, man. I love you, and all you guys, man. You guys are playing banged up and Jackson had many things tonight that was just fantastic. He's going to have an amazing future. We've got to be a little better around him to help him.

I don't want to speak the obvious, but obviously you're not going to win when you lose the turnover margin 6-1. That's the name of the game.

But again, doesn't take away, again, the type of season and the type of men that we have and what our future looks like.

**Q. Danny, after the game you talked to Jackson a little bit and basically said something to the fact of you're all in with him going into the SEC as the quarterback. Take us through your thought process on why you decided to tell him that after the game?**

**DANNY STUTSMAN:** It's obvious Jackson is a baller and we have full faith in him. First career start, he played his heart out. Every time he takes that field, I have so much confidence in that offense and everything that they do. I love him to death. He's a tremendous player.

I know now there's going to be some adversity, but he needs to hang his head up higher than ever because Oklahoma has his back, that entire locker room with Jackson, and this changes nothing.

**Q. A similar question for you, Brent. I noticed late in the game you were talking to Jackson when Arizona went up there. What were your words to him in that moment and throughout the game and especially early when he had that shaky start?**

**BRENT VENABLES:** We've got your back, don't throw late



across the middle, and can't go broke taking a profit, and you don't have to try to win the game all in one play. Not that he did. Just normal coach-speak stuff.

But he had some phenomenal moments tonight and gave us a chance going into the fourth quarter having a chance to win, and to me, if we played a little better on defense when the game is tied up, the second and 17, we can't give up a conversion there and expect to win in a game that's -- through all the adversity that's happened and the game is tied and it's 2nd and 17, I've got to put them in a better position. I think two plays later they scored a touchdown to go up.

Everybody around him got to be better to help him be successful. But I think it shows you, you don't have to play perfect -- as a matter of fact, you can play far from perfect and still have a chance to beat a top-15 team.

At the same time, the game will punish you for turning the ball over.

**Q. Jackson, I know it's really soon after the game, but what do you feel like you learned tonight, especially from the way that the game started and the way you were able to settle in after that until the end?**

JACKSON ARNOLD: I'd say just to battle through adversity. Our team chaplain this morning, that was the main focus was battling through adversity because it's going to strike at some point, and it did tonight.

Obviously there's things that went bad tonight, but just learn to keep my head up and keep playing through it no matter what is something I take away from the night.

**Q. Jackson, if you could talk a little bit about how the night went with Seth because obviously you're new but so is he, just how that communication went with you. And Brent, I'm wondering, Jackson dropped back 50 times, threw 45 passes. Was this a night to see what you've got in this guy and that offense moving forward?**

JACKSON ARNOLD: I loved the way Coach Littrell and Coach Finley did tonight. I've got the utmost confidence in them that they're going to call a great game, and I believe they did.

Those mistakes were on me. I'm going to take the full blame for that. I've just got to be better. I thought they put me in great positions to win tonight, and lack of execution was the problems that we had tonight.

BRENT VENABLES: I thought we had good balance

running and throwing and had a lot of opportunity throwing the ball, threw it well a lot, and so I think some of that was there. And then some of it's RPO world, and that's just his decision by the quarterback, whether he pulls it out of the belly or not. But I thought we had really good balance.

Hard to stay in rhythm, again, when you have some of the things that were happening maybe, whether it's penalties or, again, turning the ball over, but we continued to fight together.

Defense responded several times, and offense would come right back, and that's what I love is just even in moments of adversity or when things were going dreadfully wrong, we can continue to respond, and on both sides of the ball.

But especially on offense and with Jackson as the leader, just what he said, the chapel service today was about handling -- when you've got the right stuff, it's just second nature, and he does. Shouldn't be a surprise to anybody, but it's certainly not for us.

**Q. Brent, you ran a little bit of a different look today on defense. Could you talk about that and how it went. And Drake, if you could talk about the fight that you guys had. It's one of your biggest attributes is you always fight until the last whistle. You have a new quarterback, but you always looked like you were fighting.**

BRENT VENABLES: Again, we just thought that the style of their offense, really good at skill. They're either going to seven-man, eight-man protect and not let your four-man rush get there if you're rushing four, or their big screen game and then shot game down the field.

Just thought that having a little more speed on the field would be important. That's a really athletic offense and again, good skill, and give you a little more variety in coverage and things of that nature. Some of it was really good, some of it not so good.

Played -- I think there was some disruptiveness that took place. I think we had five sacks and 11 tackles for loss, and again, we've got to get off the field a couple of other drives, but I thought there was some good stuff that came out of it.

DRAKE STOOPS: Yeah, just to speak on the fight of -- you said the offense or the whole team in general? I'd say we're a reflection of our head coach, and that starts in the off-season and off-season training, who you've got.

We've just got guys that have the right stuff, and those are



intangibles that can't be taught. It's in you or it's not, and we've got guys with that.

If there's time left on the clock, we're fighting, we're clawing, we're trying to win. If there's time left on the clock you've got a chance to win. I think when you've got a group of guys like that you're going to win a lot of games, and the ones you don't, they're going to be close.

We came up short tonight, didn't make enough plays to win, but we're never going to stop fighting.

**Q. To the defensive players, it seemed like it was either feast or famine. They got off to such a good start, but then for much of the game you just throttled them. It was like 520 yards to 2-something for so long. What was the reason for such good play and then them having so much success at other times?**

DANNY STUTSMAN: I think that's just how the game of football goes. At times we had momentum, we were able to execute and they're going to make plays. They have great players for the University of Arizona, so they were able to get us on some play calls.

It's a game of chess. We had them there; we had them sometimes. I love the fight the defense showed. Every single time they made a play we were hustling, kept fighting clawing like Drake was implying, and I just love the fight this whole entire team has.

BILLY BOWMAN: I feel like we did a great job preparing for Arizona. Coaches put the right stuff. I just feel like tonight Oklahoma beat Oklahoma, and if you do that, you can't expect to win.

I feel like we did a good job putting them behind the chains. We've just got to find a way to get off the field.

**Q. Brent, you've been around the program long enough to know that the buildup, especially for the quarterback position and the tendency to parse everything that he does every game, and when you've got a guy as anticipated as Jackson there's going to be a tendency to go one way or the other. Your reaction to the possibility of that occurring based off this one-game sample size, the fact that there's just so much anticipation for a quarterback at Oklahoma?**

BRENT VENABLES: It's always going to be extreme one way or the other. For me, I always preach to these guys all the time, man, being inside out, whether they're really supporting you or they're throwing stones at you. You get into this arena, that's what you sign up for.

But at the same time, man, that's not how we're going to get our joy. That's not what's going to define us, good or bad. For us to be just committed to what it takes to be successful, do your part, 1 of 11, like every single -- Jackson and the quarterback at Oklahoma is no different than any other player.

You're going to have some great moments. You're offered a scholarship at Oklahoma, you must be pretty dang good. When you're the quarterback at the University of Oklahoma, something you do sign up for, you're the face in many ways of the program.

But I know we've got the right guy, and we've got the right group there. Broad shoulders, level headed, incredibly humble, tough on himself, demanding of himself. I don't ever worry about him having success and going to his head, and I certainly don't worry about if he's fragile or a head case.

This is a strong dude that's very process driven. He's very committed. He's relentless with his work ethic, and he'll bring out the best in everybody. He's a great leader and incredibly skilled.

We had a chance going into the fourth quarter to win the game in his debut against a top-15 team, and if we're -- yeah, you've got to hold on to the ball or get off the field on 2nd and 17. It's a team game. Everything matters.

We had a chance going into the last half of the fourth quarter, a chance to win the game. That's a lot of credit to all the great things that Jackson and the team did, as well.

**Q. Gavin, how physical was the game, and did that have anything to do with the three fumbles you guys -- interceptions happen in modern football, but fumbles are generally the result of physicality.**

GAVIN SAWCHUK: Yeah, Arizona was a great team and they played hard, they played physical, and it's something we knew watching them they'd be physical, but we've got to take care of the ball, and that starts with drills at practice, making it an emphasis to take care of the ball.

Like Coach Venables says you can't win the game with 6 to 1 turnover battle, so just got to be able to take care of that ball. That's the key to the game, so we've just got to be better in that aspect.

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