

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl

Sunday, December 8, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Kenny Dillingham

## Gary Stokan

### Press Conference



**PLAYOFF  
QUARTERFINAL**



THE MODERATOR: We are really excited to be a part of the 2024 Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl taking place on January 1. We've got obviously head coach Kenny Dillingham here and CEO and president of the Chick-Fil-a beach bowl Gary Stokan, also. Without further ado, I'm going to kick it over to Gary for introductions and Kenny will give an opening statement and we'll go from there.

GARY STOKAN: Kenny, congratulations. What a great run. All the great media on this call picking you last in the conference, in a new conference, and you proved them all wrong. Great run, remarkable season, and we really look forward to hosting you here in Atlanta in the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl. Congratulations, and if you need anything, don't hesitate to give us a call.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you want to lead off with an opening statement before we go to Q & A.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I'm excited to be a part of the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl. This is a great opportunity for our guys. They've worked really hard to get to this moment and be able to compete at this level. Some of our guys get to come home to compete in this game, which makes it even more special for those guys from the area.

But at the end of the day, the Peach Bowl is going to get a group of guys who are going to play as hard as they can for 60 minutes and even a little bit longer if it's necessary. I think that's why these guys have gone from worst to first in the conference just because of how hard we play, how passionate we are, and I'm excited to get down there.

**Q. Just wanted to check with you on the schedule going out there and going to the East Coast. How much do you study how NFL teams get ready to play, early body clock, East Coast, and what the preparation looks like for you going out there?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Well, this is a bowl game so we'll actually be out there. We just got the schedule. I haven't

looked at it yet, the exact day that we arrive. I believe it's on a Wednesday practice, so Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so I believe it's four days early, so our body clocks should be adjusted by then, and we get to go do all the events that the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl has for us. We're also preparing for a bowl game.

**Q. Just curious what this next three weeks or month can do for this football program with the national spotlight shined on you guys and what you guys are building here and how big this is to have this stage for your team?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, hopefully help recruiting. Hopefully this stage and our branding out there shows people that we can be one of the newer brands in college football.

Every 10 to 15 years a new brand shows up and a new brand becomes a national brand. I really think Arizona State, the pitchfork, the Sun Devil has a brand that can reach nationally. We just have to create some consistency here and win here, and I think this is the first step in creating both of those things.

**Q. The next couple weeks how do you balance making sure guys get rest, keeping their conditioning up, and also you have two teams that you can prepare for, so what goes into self-scout and how do you divvy up that preparation for those teams, or do you wait until you know exactly who you're playing?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, great question. Early this week we'll be mainly focused on self-scout before we really know our actual opponent. Our guys this week will have off until Sunday, so after tonight's banquet they'll have off until next Sunday, get to go home, get to get refreshed, get their minds right.

Everyone is going to tell them how good they are this week when they go home and all that stuff, and hopefully they can get that flushed out of their mind for when we come back Sunday and realize that we're still probably the worst team in this playoff, according to what everybody believes. So we still have a chip on our shoulder.

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We've got to find the balance in practice of getting the guys fresh/working difficult at a high level, and I'm going to call some people that have done this before, to be honest. I haven't, and to act like I have all the answers is not the truth, so why wouldn't I call somebody who's done this before. I have a few names I'm not going to mention of guys I'm going to call and ask their opinion of, how they balance this out and how they were successful in their past.

**Q. This is your first chance as a head coach to bring in early recruits and get that extra practice in early now the next few weeks. Is that is also something you plan on asking others how they've navigated that in the past, or do you have a game plan for that for anybody that's coming in early?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, that's something I've done in the past in terms of bringing guys in for bowl prep and stuff like that. The guys, we've already been monitoring that and we kind of had that planned since we were going to be in a bowl game. That was after Christmas here for a few weeks. So we were planning on that, and we've got a plan. Not everybody can do that based off of the graduation dates and stuff like that, but the guys who can will be here, and they'll start to get to work.

**Q. Kenny, you've played in a Chick-Fil-a event before at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, played in the Kickoff Classic against Georgia and also some games in the south in the SEC. What are you going to tell your team about playing in Mercedes-Benz Stadium and also just kind of some of the big-game atmospheres down there?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Play the game, not the occasion. I stole that line from Dan Lanning when I was at Oregon with him, and he probably stole it from somewhere else. Coaches are just a byproduct of stealing things from each other. That was something I took from him is play the game, not the occasion, and don't get caught up in the moment. Just one play at a time.

**Q. Can you take us inside the room the moment that it was announced where you guys were going? You're all about your players. What's it like to see them celebrate the way they have the past couple of days, and especially last night? I know you didn't see it in person, but to see them bring that trophy inside of Sun Devil Stadium?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: They're fired up. Wouldn't you be? Everybody counted you out. All these guys came here and they joined a team that was 3-9 back-to-back years.

They joined the team -- all those guys other than four guys are brand new. So they picked to join a team that wasn't good at all, that there was no positive media attention around it, that had sanctions and penalties and everything, and they've completely flipped it upside down.

There's going to be real emotion that they'll carry on for the rest of their life with each other. They'll always have these moments that they'll be able to remember together. I think that was just another one of those moments to be there to see their name picked on national television when they were picked dead last to start. It's pretty special for them.

The best part is they're still hungry to see how far they can take the journey and how far they can take the ride.

**Q. Coach, going into the season, very reminiscent of another team that was an outright champion 28 years ago that I'm an alum of, part of the team and the staff of the '96 team. Going through that season, pulling the valley together, how are you going to continue that momentum, not only for this game but beyond to continue to stay at a high level?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, well, you know, when we were putting together when I first got here our plan, our plan was never to win in year two. Our plan was to win in year three. Our plan was to sign younger transfers that we could build around for years three and hopefully then turn a corner with enough youth on our team that we've recruited. Because of that, 35 of the 44 guys in our two-deep have the ability to return.

Hopefully we can get back 35 of the 44 guys that have got us here. Obviously nowadays with the portal and NIL and us not being one of the top NIL programs in the country, there is a chance that other teams try to come in and poach some of our guys, which is unfortunate, but I think the majority of our team wants to be here, will stay together, and I think you combine that with the freshmen that we've signed in the past that'll be better, I think we have a really good building block for next year to sustain this success and not just be a flash in the pan.

**Q. You mentioned preparing for this week, obviously preparing for kind of a road game environment with the Iowa State fans and the ASU fans going to be clashing. With the fact that you're going to be a Clemson or Texas team that is closer to Atlanta that will possibly have more fans in the building come game day, how are you going to prepare this team? Are you going to try to prepare it as a road game, kind of a traditional road game during the season, or a necessary neutral site game where it maybe does feel different because it's a bowl game?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think we'll play just like we did this last week, a neutral site game. Obviously regionally we're playing out of our region so you're naturally going to have more fans of the opponent.

But we've played road games all year. We've played home games all year. I don't think that part is going to be new. It's just going to be how loud does it get. In my history with bowls and stuff like that, it's not as loud as going to play on the road at one of these teams. It's not as hostile from that perspective. So a little bit of both.

**Q. Transfer portal opens tomorrow; what are you trying to accomplish in the transfer portal, and how well positioned do you feel you are to accomplish it?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I feel like guys will want to be here. I think the success we've had with the guys that have come here speaks for itself. I think the relationships we've had and built with the guys that are coming back here and those guys hopefully not choosing to enter the portal but choosing to stay here and continue to build this is a testament to the culture that we have, and I think that's really what matters is the people that come here love it here, and the people who transfer here want to be here and want to stay here.

I think that says something about the guys and the relationships in today's day and age in college football.

It's going to be big. What we're looking to do is make our team better. Like I tell every person I ever sign, my job is to sign somebody better than you, point blank, and that's going to be from now until forever. If you want something guaranteed, this is not the place for you. If you want somebody to tell you the truth and be honest with you, this is a great spot. But you'd better not have soft feelings because when we get in my office and we have a real conversation, it's going to be real. I think that's what it's about. I think that's what guys need more than ever is real conversations.

**Q. Much has been made online about both Arizona State and Oregon being two former Pac-12 teams that went on to win their conference championship in their new year in the conference. Obviously you were working under Dan Lanning before coming here. What does it say about the two programs the way you've built Arizona State up, the way that Dan Lanning has built up Oregon, that you've both been able to have so much success in your first year in the new conference?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, Dan is one of the best

coaches I've ever been around. Dan was at my wedding, Dan and his wife Sophia. I've known Dan since I was a high school coach in Arizona, so I have so much respect for Dan, not just as a head coach but as a football mind, his ability to go offense, defense, special teams and be involved in all three phases is in my opinion really special.

Then I think he's an elite motivator. For us, I don't know, like I said, we're just trying to be the best versions of us. I don't know why the success we're having other than these guys are special. You walk into the room with these guys and they've just got a special aura about themselves. They truly live every day with a chip on their shoulder, and I think that's what's got us to this point is that chip on their shoulder they all live with to push themselves to be better and they genuinely care about each other.

Our guys, 60 guys hung out together last night when they got back in town. How often does that happen in today's day and age of social media and phones do 60 people go to the same place. I think that's really our secret sauce right now is the genuine relationships our players have with each other.

**Q. Kenny, in terms of media is not always the best prognosticators, but from an Xs and Os standpoint, what do you think they missed picking the Devils last?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: To be honest, I don't think it was possible to not -- like I don't think it's fair to judge the media off where they picked us because we had so many people unproven. I don't know if they missed anything because we had so many people that didn't prove themselves in college yet, the Xavian Alfreds of the world, the Skats of the world, the Sams of world, the Ben Colemans who hadn't played in a year, the Max Iheanachors, the Justin Wodtlys, Shamari Simmons. The list goes on of guys that weren't yet proven in college football, but we knew they were good, and we believed in them. Or maybe they just had a bad experience like the Clayton Smiths and the Princes for some reason or another why they didn't get on the field at their last school as much as they thought.

But it was more -- I don't know if they missed as opposed to I don't know if our guys/our team had proven ourselves yet to be respected, and I think it goes both ways. You have to prove yourself in order to be respected, and I think we just didn't have a lot of that proven respect yet on our team, and I think it's really hard nowadays, and it's easy to judge people with 60 unknown dudes. It's pretty hard to do.

**Q. I know you never make it about yourself, and I completely understand why, but I am curious, reflecting back on your journey through ASU and**

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**being local if this is more meaningful to you to bring this type of excitement and to bring this program to this level?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Oh, of course. I mean, me being from here and me being a fan, growing up a fan, it definitely is super exciting to see just the valley getting excited. When I first got here, I said, activate the valley.

What I meant was just get the valley back excited around Arizona State because we're one of the few college towns and college football programs that the city could actually get behind, a major city can get behind because the college football program was here before this major city was here.

I really think there's a uniqueness here that if we do it right and if there's commitment from the top down and we're united, I think there's an opportunity here for us to be a name in college football very similar to what Dabo did at Clemson in this last 20-year cycle, how he has changed that program into one of the bluebloods.

I think Arizona State has that ability if done right and if the commitment is there.

**Q. I know when you prepare for a bowl that's not a playoff bowl, that's a great opportunity to give younger players time to develop more reps than usual in practice. I've got to believe because this is a playoff quarterfinal that your approach is not going to be any different than it is during the regular season?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Well, we'll have a few weeks' practice where it will be young guy driven, just trying to get the vets some rest, and then we'll transition with about two and a half, two weeks out -- it's actually like 17 days out we'll transition and do more veteran-led practices and more veteran practices to get back into shape, make sure we're in shape, hit a little bit.

So the beginning will be definitely more of that traditional bowl prep, young guys, let's develop, and then it will transition into more of a bye week setting I would say, so we'll kind of take a bye week approach once we get near that two-week mark.

**Q. Curious if you could walk me through the thought process and the emotions as you walked into the meeting room this morning to watch the selection show and kind of that ASU versus Boise State who would get the three chances of playing in the Fiesta Bowl at ASU at home, kind of what that was like for you.**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, obviously for us, I'm fired up. I know our players are fired up to play in the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl. I know obviously the Fiesta Bowl was at home, but we have a lot of guys on our roster from Texas. We have a lot of guys from Louisiana. We have some guys from Georgia, from Florida. So the Peach Bowl has been one of those bowls that they grew up watching, idolizing, wanting to be a part of, and for us to get selected there, those guys couldn't be more excited. The joy in the room when we were picked for that game was through the roof.

**Q. Kenny, going back to the portal, are there any positions that you feel like in particular you and your staff are going to target here to try to shore up for next year?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, wide receiver. We've got to get some more -- we're going to lose a lot of wide outs, so we're going to take a wide out. Offensive line, we're moving some guys around, so we're going to take a couple, one if not two offensive linemen. A running back. Skat is leaving, and Skat is pretty good. We need to find somebody to take on some of these carries. I feel good about the guys behind Skat, but Skat is a bigger back so we've got to get another bigger back in here to replace him.

On the defense we're losing an end and a D-tackle, so one end, one defensive tackle, and then probably one safety depending on what happens here in the next week or so.

If anybody good like that goes in the portal, just hit us up.

**Q. Following up on what you said about some of the local kids, when you guys were picked to the Peach Bowl, did you talk to Jeff Clark or see his reaction since he's a local kid from Powder Springs?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Oh, yeah. He was fired up. I actually made a joke to him. I'm like, you guys know we're going to the Peach Bowl in New Orleans, and see if he caught it, and he's like, it ain't in New Orleans. I grew up watching this thing; this thing is in my hometown. All the other guys were -- some of the guys from the West Coast were joking.

But he's so excited, man. This is a dream come true for some of these kids, and I think sometimes you get lost a little bit in the playoff and where you're ranked and all this other stuff. These bowl games have such great tradition. They've been around for so long, generations, that these kids grew up dreaming that they would one day walk and be in a stadium to play in the Peach Bowl, and it's everything they dreamt of. This is a game that for these guys it's their whole football world coming to just one

moment in time, in Georgia, in the Peach Bowl, at the same moment with everybody. It's just so special for them. I can't wait to see how hard they play.

**Q. Coach, obviously Skat has missed time, Jordan Tyson did not play in the conference championship. What makes you and what has made you throughout the season next man up, made you so confident in this roster and their ability to play through adversity?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: We don't make excuses. The one thing I absolutely hate is excuses. We operate five minutes early. Like that's the standard. I don't care if your car runs into a deer. If you're not early, you're not early. It doesn't matter; nobody in life is going to ask you why you didn't get something accomplished. They don't care. They care if you get it accomplished or you don't. That's the real world.

Are there exceptions to that? Of course. But there's no excuses in this program. I don't believe in that. It's next man up, get the job done, find a way, pour everything you got into it every single day, and repeat and repeat and repeat.

I think that's just the culture that our leadership council has created within the program, and I think the best part about our team right now on that topic is I challenged our best players that they have to work the hardest and set the highest standard, and we're only going to be as good as them, and I think those guys play the hardest and those guys have set an identity for our program that Sun Devil nation can be proud of.

**Q. What's it been like this last week or so seeing Skat sort of become recognized and almost a household name in college football because he has this you mentioned aura about him earlier. He just has that sort of natural entertainer to him. What's it been like seeing that a lot more people are getting to experience that now?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it's awesome for him to be able to reap what you sow. People start to talk about him. He's worked so hard. He's been an underdog his whole life. Everybody has counted him out his whole life. For him to finally at this last stretch of his college career, people realize the special player he is is pretty remarkable, and in my opinion, the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl is getting somebody who should be up for the Heisman. He should be in the top five, and you're going to get a Heisman caliber player playing in that stadium, and I think he's deserved that, and not only are you getting a Heisman-caliber player, you're getting a Heisman-caliber person.

He's an unbelievable person. He signs autographs for 20 to 30, 50 people after every game. He'll stay out there as long as possible.

He's one of the smartest kids on our team. He ran a run the other day, he ran backwards realized he shouldn't have done it and threw the ball away. What kid has the awareness, even though it was not exciting for me, what kid has the awareness to not panic but actually make an intelligent decision, which is crazy, and throw the ball away in that setting. Whether we want him to do it, that's a different topic. That just tells you the awareness level that kid has, the intelligence, and the fact that he walks into the high school state championship last night, it was his idea because he wanted to give back to the community, what else would you want in a person.

I'm just so happy for him to get the national recognition he deserves.

**Q. By the way, your car-hitting-the-deer comment drew a pretty good laugh from my wife in the background. The question I had for you is talking about money, NIL money. It's no secret that other parts of the country, other schools, other conferences have traditionally drawn a lot more financial support. Have you noticed a big difference, a spike, you personally with pushing the Sun Angel collective since the 10th game of the season, the 11th game of the season until now, and what can we do to help? Most of us here are local.**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I've been trying to push it probably as much as if not more than any head coach in the country because I think it's my obligation to my players to work for them. My job is to help them get what they want and succeed in life, and that's literally my job as their coach. For us, those kids want to be here, and it's sad that -- it's unfortunate that those kids want to be Sun Devils and some of them are going to have to face -- they're going to have to face questions of do I want to be a Sun Devil more than I want another \$300,000.

I think these kids want to be here, and I think if this community wants a winner and wants to continue to have a winner, then they're going to have to step up and continue to step up because they already have stepped up. But the only unfortunate thing is we keep winning, and it's funny how when you keep winning, it gets more expensive to win. It's amazing how that happens.

The more we win, the more people are going to offer our players, and the more we have to understand the investment that's needed to keep our roster here, but I can

say this: Everybody can see it and it's clear. Our guys are passionate about ASU. Our guys still sing the fight song. They all know the fight song. They're singing it on the plane. They're walking out on the fields in an Arizona high school game hoisting the trophy. These guys are passionate about being here in more of an old-school college football mantra of they have passion for this university and this school, and I just hope we give the resources to this program that can allow us to keep this roster together and see how far this team can go in the future.

THE MODERATOR: Gary, any final comments on your end?

GARY STOKAN: Thanks to you, Kenny and Jeremy for hosting this, and we look forward to hosting you here in Atlanta and the capital of college football.

I'll tell you a quick story for the moo I can't, as well. Back December 30, 1970, Frank Kush and the Arizona State Sun Devils were No. 8 in the country and none of the big bowls would take them, and the Peach Bowl brought Frank Kush and the Sun Devils here to play North Carolina, and the Sun Devils won 48-26. Vince Dooley was there because his brother, Bill Dooley, was the head coach of North Carolina, and in the first quarter it rained, second quarter it sleeted, third quarter it snowed, and the fourth quarter it iced, and the people from Phoenix said, hey, it's 80 degrees out there in Scottsdale, why don't we start one of these.

Out of that, the people from Phoenix started to meet with the people from Atlanta, and the Fiesta Bowl was created out of that. Kind of a neat story of the relationship between the valley there and Atlanta.

I still remember Vince Dooley, who's passed away, said, Gary, I was so cold I had to leave my own brother. I was on the sidelines, and I had to leave and go home I was so cold.

But Kenny, we promise you 72 degrees. We're in a dome stadium now so you and the media don't need to worry about freezing at the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl.

Again, we look forward to hosting the media. We're a very hospitable city in Atlanta and it's a great time of the year to be here. Great hotels in walking distance to a lot of the great facilities.

Kenny, anything you need, let us know.

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