

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Texas vs Arizona State

Friday, December 27, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

C.J. Fite

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Sophomore defensive lineman C.J. Fite is joining us now. Thank you for the time, C.J.

Q. In preparing for Texas for the Peach Bowl next week, how difficult has it been? Do they remind you of anybody you've played? What's been the hardest thing to start preparing for?

C.J. FITE: I wouldn't compare them to anybody. They're a special team. They do -- they're unique. They do a lot of different things. I guess the hardest thing is just going this long a period of time without playing football.

The way Coach Dillingham has structured practice to make sure we're still ready, he's done a great job. Really these few weeks of practice, it's been just all about us, making sure that we play what we play, stick to the process, do the way we've been doing all year.

Q. How would you evaluate their offensive line?

C.J. FITE: They're a great unit. Obviously they're a finalist for the Joe Moore award. You have to respect the O-line. We're going to do what we do like we do every other week.

Just playing football, at the end of the day it's football, no matter who you play. We're going to play our brand of football and see what happens against Texas.

Q. Did y'all -- be honest, could you even envision being in this position at the beginning of the year coming off the season you did last year and the fact that obviously expectations were pretty low? Did you see this at all in the future for this team this season? Also, was there a moment where you maybe realized it was going to be a special season?

C.J. FITE: I got this question asked a while back, and it was like just no matter how hard you work or how much



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work you put in, it still feels unreal when you get in the position. It's like you put in all the work, we deserve to be here, the work we put in in the off-season and the way we've been playing football all these weeks, we deserve to be here.

It doesn't matter if anybody thinks we deserve to be here or not. We're here. We earned it. So that's it.

Q. Just want to kind of ask you, Brian kind of talked about the running game for Texas. Just wanted to ask maybe what you've seen out of some of the running backs? I know they're a pretty patient bunch back there.

C.J. FITE: They have a good group of backs. They have the one-two punch back there. It's just playing assignment football is the biggest thing. Making sure we're all where we're supposed to be, doing our 111, doing our job on the field and not messing up the man beside you or behind you.

If we do our job, it's all going to play out, work out how it's supposed to. They have great players, but as long as we play our brand of football, we'll get the job done.

Q. When you look at just the leadership overall, and I was asking Shamari about this, guys stepping in and doing the 111th, next man up, but in a game like this, the competition that you've driven each other on all season, how big is it for guys to have leaders like you guys that are pushing them in practice every day?

C.J. FITE: The leaders have to make sure that everybody is getting better each and every day. Obviously some programs have coaches do it, but Coach Dillingham has always said he wants this to be player led, not coach fed. So just making sure that the leaders make sure that everybody is getting better, working every day, sticking to what we do every day, the practice, the work, the work ethic we do, just how we play football, just making sure that we're just setting a good example for all the players on the team.



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Q. Obviously there's been a lot of discussion going back to selection day of the players who were formerly in Austin who are now going to get a chance to play Texas potentially in this Peach Bowl if they were able to get past Clemson. Now that that's officially true, what have been the discussions with guys in your room, guys like Prince, guys like Clayton, guys that you know on this defensive side particularly who are probably more excited than maybe even you are to get a chance to play this kind of a game against that team? What has this been like in practices and just locker room discussions with those guys?

C.J. FITE: We just play every game like any other game obviously. The more weeks you go into it, the bigger the game gets. It's not like just because we're in the playoffs right now, that it's the biggest game. Even three weeks ago we were saying it's the biggest game of our lives because it was the game like this week.

So just make sure we stick to the process and stay in the head space. Obviously we want to do everything we can to make sure all those guys that play on the team put good things on tape just to make sure you play for them, play hard for them.

Obviously it's like a little -- this is something behind them obviously coming from there and having whatever happened there. So being able to play for them and making sure we do our jobs, I feel like it makes us more tuned in, makes us more focused, just having that in the back of our heads to make sure we stick to the process and just more process oriented than ever to make sure we're sticking to it and fine tuning the details.

Q. When you guys have extra time to prepare for a game, does that lead to an ability to build more into a game plan or more complex game plan or get the game plan that you do have more sort of dialed in? How might that impact this game?

C.J. FITE: Whatever game plan the coaches give us, we're going to execute to our best abilities. Whether it's real complex, whether it's simple, we're going to do what we need to get the job done. It's like whatever they throw at us, we're going to make sure we get it done.

I don't know how much time they spent game planning, but what we got on our plates right now, we're just trying to fine tune it and make sure we stick to it and get better each day.

Q. Would you say this is on the more complex side or on the more straightforward side?

C.J. FITE: I don't know if I can say all that. I'm going to leave that one alone.

Q. I wanted to ask you too because I know we were talking about leadership with the defense, but with how these linebackers have performed, and I know going into the season I've talked to you before, and it was kind of a question. But just the linebackers as a unit, what have they meant to the growth of this defense this year too and as you get ready for the game against Texas?

C.J. FITE: Our linebacker core, we have some ballers back there. We have some dogs playing linebacker. It makes it easier on the D-line, it makes it easier for the guys behind them. The linebackers will go sideline to sideline and go right in between the tackles to go fit something up. The way they trigger, they trigger fast.

The D tackles, we love it. We get out of the double-team faster. I love playing and having them just play behind us and just making sure we do what we need to do so they can do what they need to do so we can all play together and get the job done.

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