

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

Saturday, December 28, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Leif Fautanu

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are back with senior offensive lineman Leif Fautanu.

Q. What you guys have done this year is just so darn impressive. Is it hard to believe you guys are a two touchdown underdog in this game with all y'all have done and how good y'all are?

LEIF FAUTANU: Yeah, it's definitely motivating for us. I feel like that's kind of what we've used all year. We've kind of been the underdog all year, and that's kind of what's been fueling us this past season.

Being two touchdown underdogs is definitely motivating for us, and we're definitely looking forward to the challenge.

Q. On Cam Skattebo, your talented running back, is there any one thing that sets him apart, do you think, from other running backs?

LEIF FAUTANU: I think the thing that separates him is his passion. He's very passionate as a running back. When your running back is very passionate, the offensive line feeds off of that. So I feel like that's kind of what's been helping us as an offensive line where we feed off of his energy and it gives us that edge, and it kind of gives us that mentality that, if our running back can do it, then our offensive line can do it.

It spreads throughout the entire offense, and it helps us with running the ball, and then it opens up everything else in the pass.

Q. Obviously offensive linemen across college football are not necessarily ones to maybe compliment their own play or showcase their individual accolades, but this is the first time you've spoken to us since obviously the accolades you received -- first team all Big 12, being a finalist for Polynesian College Football



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Player of the Year, and being named a Walter Camp All-American on the second team. You haven't necessarily been that promotive of your individual play throughout the season, but for those who maybe aren't as familiar to your game and for Texas fans who are maybe just acclimating to your style of play and what you bring to the table, what does it mean to you to be recognized in the way that you have over these last couple of weeks as you prepare for maybe arguably the biggest game of your life?

LEIF FAUTANU: I'm blessed to have those type of accolades, but I think it all goes back to the people I play around, like Skat, Sam, the other offensive linemen that make me look good. All I do is snap the ball, and I just get in the way most of the time.

At the same time, I feel like Ben, Kyle, Josh, and Max and all those guys have made my job that much easier. All I do is just snap the ball and think, but at the same time, it's also to play around guys that care, and I feel like that's kind of what are the mantra of our offensive line is, and I think that's kind of what I'm trying to do as well, trying to instill the mantra that we care and that we're going to be physical.

Q. As a quick follow-up to that, what have you just seen in the preparation watching the film? Texas' defensive front is considered one of the best in the country. What have you just seen on film from guys like Anthony and other players who have received All-American honors themselves and what they bring to the table and what you guys as a line and you being the vocal veteran leader, what you have to bring to the table on the 1st?

LEIF FAUTANU: Their front seven is awesome. They show no weaknesses a lot of the time. They're a really good defensive front. They're one of the best rushing defenses in the country, and we're one of the better rushing offenses in the country.

So it's definitely going to be a big challenge for us, big challenge for the offensive line, Sam and Skat and all the



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other tight ends. I feel like we're very well prepared, and I feel like that's going to be a big challenge for us, but at the same time, they're a physical front just like we are. The D-line is also preparing for our physicality as well. So it's really going to be a good challenge for both sides of the ball.

Q. Obviously everybody's come on here, coaches and players, and kind of talked about not focused on the outside noise, we're just kind of focused on the game. Once you guys get into the game, use the center as the leader, how are you going to rally the guys and make sure you get started off to a good start way you guys want to?

LEIF FAUTANU: That goes back to how we practice. We've done a really good job in practice of starting fast. I think that's kind of the identity of our offense. We start fast, and we don't really make a lot of mistakes on offense.

Hopefully that carries over to the game on Wednesday, where we can take our practice reps into the game reps, and I feel like that's kind of what we were able to do in this week's practice to start fast and have really crisp and really good practices. I feel like that's what's going to carry over into the game.

Q. Quick question. At what point this season did you sense that this was going to be different?

LEIF FAUTANU: I think I sensed it when we were at Camp T I think, when we went to Camp T, we were able to come a lot closer as a team. A lot of football teams kind of hang out within their own position group, but we were able to step out of our comfort zone and kind of bond with other position groups.

I feel like that's kind of where I noticed we're a team, and a lot of the dudes want to get together outside of football. A lot of teams don't really do that, and I feel like that's kind of the separating factor between us and other teams is our chemistry throughout the entire team.

We're able to connect with one another, and I feel like that's kind of where, when the game time comes around, we're able to hold each other accountable, to continue to do our jobs and uphold the energy on the team. I feel that's kind of the separating factor between us and other teams.

Q. For you guys, having all this time in between your last game and then this one, what do you make of how that time has kind of been for you and what you guys have been able to do and accomplish in practice? I know you mentioned starting fast, but also just being

in the mental capacity to handle all the extravagant things that come with playing in college football playoff game, all the media beforehand and everything that leads up to the game as well.

LEIF FAUTANU: I think Coach Dillingham kind of harps on that where we play in the moment, not the game. We treat it just as we have the other 13 weeks. We were able to kind of take it one game at a time and treat it the same way as any other game. The Big 12 Championship was treated the same way as we did Wyoming.

I feel like that's what's kind of going to help us to stick to the process and stay with the same routine that we have been that's got us to this point. So that kind of helps us to stay locked in and finish up the rest of the week and look forward to a really good game.

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