

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

Saturday, December 28, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Sam Leavitt

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Quarterback Sam Leavitt is joining us now.

Q. I was just on a zoom yesterday with Texas safety Michael Taaffe, who's an AP second team All-American, and I asked him specifically if he -- comparing your skill set to skill sets of quarterbacks that him and his defense have seen across the SEC, and he specifically brought up Texas A&M quarterback Marcel Reed as an example, as someone who's a mobile quarterback who can make plays both with his legs but also extend plays and get the ball down the field with good confidence. What is your response to a comparison like that, and what would you necessarily say has been the most challenging thing preparing for a secondary like this with guys like him and Jahdae Barron, who are considered some of the best secondary players in the country?

SAM LEAVITT: First off with the comparison, I see what he's saying with making plays with my legs and extending down the field. I've seen Marcel play a fair amount. I would say I'm a different player for sure, and I feel like I'm more mature and growing with decision-making, taking care of the ball and stuff like that.

In terms of preparing for the secondary, you go into the week, and you have your game plan, and it's all based upon coverages and looks that they give you. You know exactly where you're going to go. Along with that, you've got to go matchup depending. So they've got No. 7 and 4 and 16 are all good players.

I'm just excited for the matchups and see what we can really do and how we match up come game time.

Q. Obviously a lot of recruiting websites out of high school had you as a 4 star, One of the top 15 quarterbacks in the country. A lot of SEC schools



didn't recruit you out of high school. Going into this game, how much is about trying to prove yourself and saying to Texas and some of the other schools like, hey, I can compete with some of the top players in the country?

SAM LEAVITT: Yeah, there's some that comes with that. I've kind of always been under looked my entire career. Dating back to high school, early on I wasn't even a high recruit, three star, had about two offers going into my senior year. Then played really well, became a four star. SEC teams didn't really reach out and stuff like that.

Then when I entered the transfer portal and came here, didn't have a name on my back and had to work everything. Even going into this game, I feel like I'm still disrespected and we are as a team in general. That's a common goal for our entire team and everything like that.

But at the end of the day, we're still trying to play our game and play for each other. Who cares what everybody else thinks?

Q. You just talked about playing for each other, and the chemistry you guys have had all season long, you guys have all talked about it. Yesterday when we were on that zoom with the defensive players, even they noticed that you guys play for each other, that you would run through a brick wall for each other. From youth football all the way up, you've played on a lot of teams, and to get everyone to buy in is not easy, you know that. What is it about this team? How did you, especially as one of the top leaders on the team, get everyone to buy in, number one? Then my second question, my follow-up question would be how do you keep everybody at an equilibrium so that the hype around the Peach Bowl doesn't sway you guys from the game plan?

SAM LEAVITT: I feel like, to answer the first question, dating back to summer workouts and everything like that, it's hard to get everybody to buy in and understand the ultimate goal. But you workout really hard and understand who really wants it, and people are pushing each other.



Then you start to have some success within the season, and people really start to buy in. You don't really have to push that along because they're seeing the success that's happening and everything like that. So you kind of just take it one day at a time and one game at a time.

That's a testament to our coaching staff putting us in those positions and instilling that all in our minds that that's what it's going to take.

Can you repeat the second question?

Q. How do you not let the hype of the Peach Bowl as one of the leaders, how do you keep your team at even an keel so they're not affected by all the hype?

SAM LEAVITT: It's kind of tough. You can't really change someone's perspective and opinion on certain things in such a short amount of time. I would just say don't let the occasion and the game change anything that we do in terms of preparation and how we play because why should it?

At the end of the day, we're still on a football field playing with the same people we've played with since spring ball. We saw what we did at the Big 12 Championship, so I'm not too worried about it.

Q. It seems like Cam is kind of a throwback to by gone days in a way. You've got this big bruising runner that runs over people and around people and stuff like that. Do you kind of consider him like an old school kind of player playing in college football in this era?

SAM LEAVITT: I don't know because he's so special and unique. I would say his mentality in terms of brutality, yes. He'll get right back and smile in your face.

But he's so crafty that I feel like he fits the modern game so well. Catches the ball so well out of the backfield, he's super smart, understands protections and everything like that.

He's a mix of both, the best of both worlds.

Q. As far as y'all being a two touchdown underdog, I get the sense that you guys just revel in loving that, just kind of feeds what you all have been buying all year long. Is that correct?

SAM LEAVITT: Oh, yeah, been counting on that since day one. Just more fuel to the fire.

Q. Why do you think people discounted you so much,

picked last in the Big 12, that's outrageous considering what you all have done?

SAM LEAVITT: I guess, I would say, last year's record, people not buying into Coach Dillingham and our process, which is hard when you haven't proven it yet.

I kind of understand it preseason and stuff like that, but as we progressed throughout the year and kept proving people wrong and now people see the product that we have, I'm a little confused by the score predictions.

But I'm super hyped about it. Opportunity is all you can ask for. Now I get an opportunity to go play on the biggest stage and do what we do.

Q. Can you talk about at what point you thought, hey, this team has something special? I don't know if it was at one point during the season or before this season, but when did you think this team was special?

SAM LEAVITT: I'd kind of say it progressed week to week. This week we came back from winning close game in some crunch moments, and I feel like that was a point for me saying, hey, I can go win a close game. You know Utah, same thing. Just kind of progressed. Then UCF and Oklahoma State.

Kansas State, going to that stage and we really performed early on and showed everybody what we can really do. Then came back and beat BYU.

So I would just say week to week it just showed even more potential that we had. Especially this last week in the Big 12 Championship, just how dominant of a performance we had on all cylinders of offense, defense, special teams. So we're just rolling right now. I feel like everybody's really bought in.

Q. I just wanted to get your quick thoughts on what Coach Arroyo just mentioned to us a couple moments ago. He discussed how after the Arizona game, following Jordyn's injury, that the wide receiver room needed to pick up the flag, to kind of just pick up the mantel of the next man up mentality and all that stuff. Obviously in the Big 12 Championship you showcased why this wide receiver room is much deeper than maybe what a lot of people expected. Really over these last three weeks, everyone who's covered this team since the beginning is well aware of the relationship you and Jordyn have both on and off the field, but just how confident and how impressed have you been with how this wide receiver room outside of him has stepped up in his absence, and how confident are you they're going to come through for you and

perform in a game like this?

SAM LEAVITT: I would say I'm more confident than impressed. I've seen it since day one. I've seen the work that they put in every single day in practice what they can do -- one-on-ones, routes on air, 7-on-7, team periods. Jordyn might have overshadowed some things that people have done throughout the year, but to have them now take the center of the stage and have people really understand what they can do, that's special. People made plays when they had to make plays, that's the type of people that we have on our team.

I have the utmost faith in everyone on our team, and wide receiver room has some dudes.

Q. I know Jordyn hasn't spoken publicly since this, but he was awarded as an AP second team All-American within the last week, week and a half. Can you just kind of comment on just how proud you are of him and obviously with the fact he's going to be returning more likely than not next season, how excited you are to continue building that relationship with him going forward?

SAM LEAVITT: That's my guy. I didn't know him when he got hurt last year, but I've had plenty of conversations with him about what that was like. To see him, where he's at now mentally, physically, just how much he's grown since week 1, his maturity within the game.

There's certain plays that he's made later in the season that I feel like he wouldn't have made earlier in the season just because of his mental. That's constant growth in him. The offense entrusts within me that we've constantly grown. He's a worker. That's one thing that I feel like people don't really understand about him is how much time he puts into the game and how he lives at the facility and he's always here.

He just loves everything about the process, and that's going to produce results. You put that along with some talent, and it creates a special player.

Q. I'm just curious, you talked a little bit about Texas' secondary a little while ago, but in watching film and whatnot, what have you seen that they do so well that makes them so successful?

SAM LEAVITT: Certain players are just better than others. They're big, fast, athletic guys who have good conditioning.

I talked to our safety Xavion Alford, and he was boys with No. 7, the corner. He always says just how smart of a

player he is. You can see that on the tape with how aggressive he is and driving stuff in the thirds look. No. 4 is making plays left and right. He's all over the field. Then 16, you talk about someone who was a walk-on at one point and is now a starter on their team and is second team whatever, that shows you that he's a ballplayer and he knows the game really well.

So they got some dudes, and I'm just really excited for the opportunity to go head to head with them.

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