

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

Monday, December 30, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Kenny Dillingham

Press Conference

Q. So we're in a very cynical time, and you seem to take the opposite approach in terms of profession. Is that a function of your age? What's your philosophy?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I don't know opposite. I don't think about it like that. I just think about, like what's right for the guys. Like if I were their parent, like how you treat people, and I choose to believe that if you treat people right, then yeah, good things will happen. Really what do I think is best for the people that I coach and the people that we're around.

Q. For so long, Arizona State has been a program that a lot of people thought had potential to do the things you're doing now, but it was never realized until this year.

Having grown up there and having gone to school there, did you have a philosophy on what it was going to take to realize that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: The city is so like transit that you have this big town that's filled with transit people, and you have a small town, Tempe, where it was ASU football and the Phoenix Suns 20 years ago, when the Outlaws were there, not the Arizona Cardinals, before the Coyotes were there and left. You have this weird mix of small-town, big city.

So my challenge in college sports is it's really hard to win in big cities, so how do you convert this old, small town, the feel, with this big city vibe.

So you had to re-root, essentially, the small-town feel of all those people that are still in the city and get them to convince all the other people in the city that this is the thing to do.

You know, that's what makes I think Arizona State a unique



**PLAYOFF
QUARTERFINAL**



job is that there is still that small city of 20 years ago fans to the university and football while also having a fifth largest city in the country. I thought that was the big picture was how do you merge that into a small town big city feel, which is unique in college football, and if you can do that, support equals winning in college football.

It's not just -- it's the support. You need everybody involved in college football. You need all the talent behind it, the donors behind it, the president behind it, the AD behind it, and then the players, and then the coach.

So I think that was the first step for me was how do I merge that gap from just big city, one of the shows in town, to like what it was 20 years ago.

Q. Was part of when you took the job, obviously incredible opportunity, something you wanted for your whole life, but was part of you worried that this is your one shot here and if circumstances were not perfect, it might be your only one you get?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, 100 percent. You usually only get one opportunity to be a head coach. Sometimes you get multiple, but usually you only get one opportunity. I knew when we took it over, it was in a different place. It was just different, a different scenario than most of the times when you take over a job. I knew it was going to be challenging, and I knew it was going to be difficult.

But at the same token, I really felt like I understood the city enough and understood the place enough that every job put me in a different city. I may be a horrible coach, like that's the reality. That's the nature of college athletics is the fit is so important.

And me understanding the place here, I think it helped the fit and helped the transition because I just understand what the school and the city is about, and you're recruiting to the school. So you want people who understand that like you understand it.

I think my knowledge of the place definitely helped.

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

Q. Sark was here earlier and he said right now in college athletics, the energy of the head coach is extremely important. And you've always had that energy. How much of a factor do you think that is, and the fact that you were able to turn it so fast?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I don't know. I truly know people think it's like a cliché, I don't want to take credit. I truly don't think we are winning because of me. I truly think we are winning because we hired an unbelievable staff, and then we have unbelievable kids, like very unique kids that are so internally motivated.

Does my energy, obviously, definitely, if somebody walks in with a frown on their face every day, the energy is going to be bad. So of course that's -- but I think we recruited kids who have that energy and they are the ones that create that energy around the program, and I'm just a byproduct of it. That is my personality.

So we do recruit guys with that personality more than probably the next school. If somebody walks in and I don't get a good vibe, I am like he's not the guy for us. He is an unbelievable player. He is probably going to beat our butt somewhere. It doesn't mean he's good for us and what we're looking for.

We are looking for a very unique person and a good person that just loves, like, life. Like they enjoy showing up and like, oh, I get to go work harder than anybody today. I want that. That's the personality we want and I think that's really why the culture is the way it is.

Q. Yesterday with the rally, talked about the first year, just seeing that send-off you guys had and the reception you received last night, what does it mean to you?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it's exactly what I thought it could be. You know, like you said, this is one of the -- Arizona, Tempe, Phoenix, the Valley is one of the largest cities in the country and one of the largest growing cities in the country, but the roots of it are small town ASU, and that's the secret sauce to ASU football is you can get small town feel in a big town city and not many places in college football have that combination.

So to Activate the Valley thing, it's fun. It's exciting. It's good. But it's also way more rooted to how you win in college sports, and that is a rabid fan base who is all in and passionate. And to see those people and those fans line up, that's what it looks like in this part of the country. That's what it looks like. That's another day.

How do we create that being another Friday when we

travel to Lubbock? That's the goal. That's the vision, not just when we are playing in the Peach Bowl. And if we can create that, and also live in 65-degree weather, right, in one of the nicest cities in the country, now you've got something that kids show up on campus are and are like, you win? I like the staff. I can be developed. The fans care. It sells out, and I'm in a nice city? Like what else is there that you want?

I think that's what Activate the Valley is is connecting those last three dots that I just talked about. And if we can connect them, then I really think this place can be really as good as anywhere in the country.

Q. We're hearing a lot about guys should just be happy to be here. I doubt you're thinking of it that way. How are you thinking of it?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: There is no doubt we are playing with house money. To say we are not is just a lie. Like nobody expected us to be here. But if you're a competitor and you wake up a day not wanting to compete versus the very best, then something is wrong with you.

Our guys got to this point because they are ultra competitors, not because they are ever satisfied. So just because you are playing with house money doesn't mean you should be satisfied. We should be driven every single day to be the best version of ourselves, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat.

I get asked about it all the time, like have you reflected? No, I haven't reflected. We are playing games. Like I haven't reflected yet. When the season ends, I'll be able to reflect.

Right now, it's about doing whatever we can to be the best version of us today, tomorrow, the next day, the next day, the next day. Eventually we'll sit back and reflect and I'll probably be like, holy cow, look what we just did, but not right now.

Q. It was notable a couple weeks ago when you had a couple guys go into the portal and you were publically giving them, hey, I can't wait to coach you for a couple more weeks, whatever. What was your philosophy behind being so supportive?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It takes an entire team to get here. We are not here without some of the guys that help us on scout team. We are not here without some of the guys that run down on special teams. We are just not here.

You get four or five years, who knows how many nowadays, to play college football, and you don't always

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

get to go, you know, to the Chick-fil-A bowl. You don't always get to the Peach Bowl. That doesn't always happen.

For those guys to be able to work that hard, but then their personal goals are I want to play and start somewhere, and let's have a real conversation. That may not happen here. That's going to be challenging.

But you're a big piece of why we're here. Why should they have to choose? It's not their fault that the timing of this is the timing of this. So I don't want them to have to choose, so I said you don't have to choose. You get to have both.

Q. What do you say to the fans at home supporting you?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Hey, have some friends over, watch the game, enjoy this, buy your season tickets for next year. We've got to build on this year.

Just like I tell our staff and our players, we don't want this to be a flash in the pan. We don't want people showing up outside of when we depart to be once a year. We want that to be a norm. We want Arizona State football to be the front of sports in the Valley.

So get involved however you can, wave your flags. So go Devils to people, wear your shirts for the next few days and go Devils.

Q. O'Neal said he's coming back and taking advantage of that junior college year. How important is that and what is your take on having him back?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it's great for him to come back. That rule only really gives you a fifth year. It doesn't extend your amount of years. It's just if you didn't redshirt, you get a year back.

So there's some nuance to that rule. Elijah gets to take advantage of it. Elijah is a guy that needs to take advantage of it. For him to be able to come back and be improved again, it could literally change the trajectory of his football career at the next level, him having an opportunity to come back again. Unbelievable for him and us.

Q. Does it take a year coming from junior college to get used to that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it takes time to get adjusted. You're getting coached. You are eating and you have all of the resources to get your body right. And year two, you're really good. And it's like, I can't build on that.

So I think it's really good for him to get into this next year, year three, and really build on it.

Q. I know you try to keep things as normal as possible with the day-by-day approach. Obviously it's a little different on a big stage like this. How do you put a balance trying to keep things how they usually are?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: You can't hide from what's happening. Like just we're playing a game, and there's a lot of fun stuff that's going to happen before it. What does that have to do with the game? It has nothing to do with the game.

All life is about is being able to separate different segments, being able to keep work at home and keep family at family, right. You have to be able to separate parts of your life.

So okay, this is fun, go get interviewed. I let the guys wear whatever they want to wear. Just look sharp today. It's express yourself. Talk to people. Then we're going to load the bus and we're going to go back and we're going to eat and we're going to go practice.

You'd better be able to compartmentalize. Nobody is going to be watching you practice again, so let's go back to practice. And then you have your fun stuff, have fun, and then go back to work again. Like you have to be able to compartmentalize your life in order to be successful. And I think it's just a great challenge for those guys to do that.

Q. How do you create momentum from that win to playing into the quarterfinal?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think our guys were playing their best football at the end of the year. Testament to them, they continued to work. And the last four games of the year, we played our best football. The last two games of the year, we played our best two games of the year.

I think the three and a half week break is a great challenge for us because we are on that momentum and driving, driving, driving and now you have three and a half weeks where you can't play another team.

I think that's going to be a great test for our guys to see how hard we pushed ourselves in Bowl prep to get to this point. The Big 12 title, first year in the league and being able to take home the championship is huge, just for the direction of the program, what Arizona State as a program can be, not just the season.

This isn't about just trying to build this, have one good year. We are trying to have a good program. We are trying to

build Arizona State into a household name where people wear the shirt and they say Forks Up or they say or Go Devils and that becomes the norm. That's the greatest challenge we have now.

Q. You mentioned three and a half weeks. Obviously that's a unique challenge for you all. What creative ways were you able to keep your team involved, still staying physical, but at the same time being mindful of being healthy and utilizing that time to your advantage?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, well, the first week we sent them home. We sent everybody away. No football practice, nothing. We wanted everybody to get away. So then we had two and a half weeks of prep, and we used a little bit of a week, basically, as Monday, Wednesday, Friday, we were going to hit and have one high, high intensity workload week and the other days are going to be more fundamental, get the young guys reps, and we used the last ten days of that cycle to prep for our opponent. One week about us, one day was conditioning, and then ten days for opponent prep when we got back.

And I think the guys handled it well. I think the guys are excited to play. But when you have not played in three and a half weeks, there is concern that we've got to start fast. You can't start trailing a team as good as Texas, one of the best football teams in college football. We have to be able to start fast after that three and a half week break.

Q. How have the players handled the time and the situation?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think they are handling it great. Up to this point, they have gone into work. They have stayed humble, but they have also enjoyed the moment.

You can't shy away from what you've accomplished. This group of guys, I mean, was the No. 1, I believe, in the history of college sport champion, like the biggest underdog to ever win a championship in the history of college sports, according to articles I've read, right? Who knows if those are real, like the odds and all that stuff.

So they better enjoy the moment, but you can enjoy the moment and still go back to work. You don't have to enjoy the moment and then being lax when we get back to work. You can enjoy the moment and then realize, okay, you can enjoy the moment and be embarrassed on Wednesday or enjoy the moment and go compete on Wednesday.

And I think hopefully our guys are really continuing to take that stance of, we are going to enjoy the moment, we are

going to have more fun working harder than anybody in the country and then go back to work when it's time to go to work.

Q. Have you been able to enjoy the moment, what this team has done and accomplished? I know it's not done yet.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I enjoy the moments. I haven't been able to sit back and reflect. But I've definitely enjoyed like the moments. Like I'm an emotional guy, everybody knows that. Highs, lows, I wear my heart on my sleeve. So I've definitely been able to enjoy the moments and then get over the moments and get back to work, right.

At the end of the day, we talk about moments in our program, moments, win or lose games, right. But in life, right, everybody talks about the vacation they took and they think that's a reflection because Instagram vacation shows they had so much fun that they are happy. That doesn't replicate happiness. You have to find a way to fall in love with the process of growth, not just in football, but in life.

If you hate going to work every day, if you hate what you do every day, cool, your week vacation can help you escape the moment, but you're still trapped in something you don't want to be in.

We want to fall in love with working harder on a day-to-day basis than anyone in the country. When we have our moments, that is great. We are still not miserable when we go back to work. We still enjoy the process that got us here, and I hope our guys have enjoyed the process that got them here and that allowed us to get us back to work even through all these unbelievable moments.

Q. How about Activate the Valley, are you happy that saying came true?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It is, it is. Now right now, obviously we're winning. So people are excited. Well, what happens, you know, in six months from now? What happens in a year from now? What happens in three months from now? What happens in the spring game? What happens with season ticket sales?

That's really the growth of what we have to create at ASU. We have to bring a recruit on campus and be able to see it's sold out. It doesn't matter that it's a hundred degrees right now to kick off in September. This place is sold out. The fans are rocking. There's tailgating before it. People are wearing their shirts at the local restaurants when we go take them to eat because that is who we compete against. We compete up against teams and fan bases that are

obsessive.

We have to become an obsessive fan base. And if we can do that in the fifth largest city in the country where people go to retire, we have got something special, and that's the mix. I've seen it. I've seen it. And we've got to bring it back to life.

Q. Is it just about winning or more than that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think it's everything. I think people have to know the players. They have to know that we have good kids. They have to see the joy. They have to see the excitement. They have to see what it does for the city, for the local businesses of winning.

I got hit up by three or four local restaurants that said our Big 12 title game was the busiest their restaurant has ever been, right? You look on the Internet, and we have a store on Mill Avenue selling shirts that they said the line is out the door to buy these shirts.

Winning creates winning. There's no difference in winning for the city and how it creates winning for the local businesses as winning does for a player when they start to reap benefits and be top five in the Heisman vote.

Winning, people reap the results of it. And it's not just the team. It's the city, and it's the individual player, and it's the administration, and it's you guys as the media get to follow us more and your stories get clicked on more. Everybody wins when you win. So why not get the entire state and the entire city behind a winner because everybody is going to win behind it.

Q. How do you beat Texas?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: You don't turn the football over. Obviously win the turnover battle. Fourth down, you've got to win fourth downs. He's going to go for it. He has not punted on one fourth-and-one all year, which I'm the same way. We both haven't on any fourth-and-one.

When it becomes fourth-and-one, are we converting or are we stopping them? That's the game. That's the turnover. You're going to talk about turnovers and fourth-and-ones and explosive plays. We have to win those three categories of the football game.

Q. Both teams like to run the football, too. Do you expect a physical game?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yes.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It is. It is going to be a physical game. Coach Sarkisian, in my opinion, is one of the best coaches in college football. He's does a phenomenal job for a long time at a lot of different places and had success at those places, and then got to go learn from Nick Saban and got to bring some of that into his tree.

What he's done at Texas is really phenomenal. He's built one of the best teams, one of the best rosters in college football, and it's going to be a great challenge for us. But like I tell the guys, the moments in the game, like one moment in a game, they get to the one-yard line and your effort could be the difference in seven points for them or a sack fumble or a 99-yard touchdown return that's a 14 point swing in a football game that you should have lost. You never know in the game of football. You have to win the moments and that's what we've got to win.

Q. Some of the guys spilled the tea and said that you cry from time to time; would you agree with that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I told you, I was emotional, high and low.

Q. Talking about Coach Sark's reputation, you being the youngest coach in college football, what does it mean to have him sing your praises?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: That's cool for him to say and awesome for him to think that way. I don't really get distracted or what people -- and I have an opinion of myself and that is I can be better. I'm very critical of myself. I think there's a lot of things I could have done this year better. There's a lot of notes that I have of myself from this year from a scheduling standpoint, end-game decision standpoint that I'm going to reflect on when the season ends to be better. So I'm always looking to find a way to grow.

Q. Much has been made about the chemistry of this team. How did you get this many players to buy in?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think it goes back to recruiting, who you recruit, the type of person you recruit. I think we recruited really good kids that have personalities.

When you have personalities and like most of our kids, you look over there, they are smiling, talking to each other. When you have personalities, you connect better with more people. The more people that connect because they are smiling, cracking jokes, they are making fun of each other, they can take a joke, the tighter you get.

I think recruiting people with personalities, recruiting people



that smile when they walk in the building or create conversation, I think it's infectious to the entire building and it helps you create more relationships, and those relationships are why our guys are close and why the guys want to hang out together.

Saturday night after a championship, you have 65 guys all at the same place hanging out. That's the stuff that behind the scenes wins that I think you guys can see that style of play on Saturdays or in this case, Wednesday.

Q. The best part about being in a college football game?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Another opportunity to play against arguably the best team in the country. When you're a competitor, you want to play versus the best, and this team was picked to win the National Championship. This team has lost a game and a half.

When you play a game like the last game they played against Texas, you can call it a loss, but it's not. They lost a game and a half, versus another one of the best teams in college football. They have not lost another football game.

They have only played in less than three games that were one-score games. They haven't just won games. They have dominated games. So the ability to go and play a team that is the arguably the best team in college football is the exciting part.

Q. Seems like a lot of teams around the country struggled to deal with the pressure of you have to win this game to make the playoff, but you guys seemed to play better.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Never talked about it. We never, ever talked about winning the Big 12. We never talked about winning six games or making a Bowl game. We never talked about making the College Football Playoff. Always just talked about, right now, being the very best version of us. Repeat.

There's not something on our wall that says win this championship or win that. It is very coach-speak, but it's absolutely the message. If I hear people talking about championships, that's cool. You should know that. If your goal internally is not to be the very best, then what are you doing here? Why do we have to talk about it? Let's talk about the stuff that matters and that's the process of today, and the other stuff is just in your head. I think the fact that we didn't talk about it and we just hammered the process I think kept guys focused on the process of growth.

Q. A lot's been made of former Texas players on the

roster, but also the amount of Texas players on the roster. Can you speak about recruiting in Texas, the doors that have been opened as a result of the Big 12 move and all that goes into recruiting a new territory?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, when we got the job here, I had a feeling we were going to join the Big 12. I saw the direction of college football. And I'm like, hey, there's a strong chance we join the Big 12 here. And I wanted to be prepared, so we hired some guys like Bryan Carrington, Isaiah Williams, and at the time Ra'Shaad Samples who is now at Oregon to really get into Texas and say, we want to create a Texas to Tempe movement because when we move to the Big 12, we are a two-hour flight from Dallas, Houston, right, Austin, all those areas. So we want to be able to have a footprint here because we play games here.

That was part of a strategy knowing where we were going, and that strategy, I feel like it's catching on. You now look at our team, and you have over 20-something guys are from Texas, our signing class, I think it was six, seven, eight guys from Texas, our portal class we signed Boogie from Texas. I think it's going to continue to grow, and I think the footprint being in the Big 12, when you think of Big 12, I think of Texas, Oklahoma, that region of the country.

Now, when you think of Big 12, and we are involved and you get to think Arizona where it is 65 degrees in the summer and there's beautiful mountains and people go to retire, and you can win championships? Well, maybe I should take that two-hour flight. I think that's kind of been the vision.

Q. When you recruited Sam, what was it that attracted you as a quarterback?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Mindset. He was wired right. The guys I've coached at quarterback, I've been blessed to coach some good ones, they are wired right. He sat in like a six-hour meeting about football. Couldn't leave. Just wanted to keep talking football. Every question he had was football, relationships, football, relationships.

I loved it. Like you could see the look in his eyes that we saw on tape, the talent necessary to get to where, you know, he wanted to go, which is become a high-level NFL guy. We saw the talent, but there's so many guys with talent that don't just have that. There's something just not, the it.

When you met him, you felt it. Like you were on your toes as a coach. Like I've got to be ready. When I meet with this guy, he's going to ask some questions that I can't just say the generic answer to. He's going to want a good



answer.

And then he's going to ask a follow-up and I'd better be ready, and those are the guys I love to be around because it really challenges you as a coach.

Q. Was it you and him?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It was him, Coach Arroyo, me and my meeting and a combination of us three. When he left, we were debating on bringing in -- we told him we were going to bring in another quarterback who is a veteran behind you to challenge you, and at the time, another guy on our roster.

When he left, we made a decision that, hey, we are not taking the older guy. We cancelled that kid's visit, and we are all in on you. He sold us enough that we stopped recruiting the other guys in the portal and we said, you're the guy we're going to go all in on.

Q. What did you learn in that meeting compared to the reality?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: He's way more intense than I even thought in that meeting. That's what makes him -- he's a perfectionist, and he's a passionate perfectionist. When you're a passionate perfectionist like that, I've got to be able to balance that because when you're passionate, you want everything to be perfect. Not everybody is like that.

I'm the opposite of a perfectionist. You can ask my wife. I deal well with people who want things perfect all the time because I can help them with, that person doesn't think like you. I think we are a really good match in terms of how he processes and how I process, how Coach Arroyo works and glad he's our quarterback.

Q. When you guys brought in Jeff after the spring window, what was that conversation like?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: We have a really good quarterback that we believe in, could be an NFL guy. We are going to give you the opportunity to go compete for the job.

But just know, there's a chance that you don't win the job because this dude is really good. I think Jeff has been unbelievable. I mean, he really has. For him to come in, compete the way he competed, he feels like he's getting better. He feels like he's the best version of himself right now even though he's not playing, and Jeff has got all the ability to play on Sundays as well.

To be able to have both those guys on the roster, they are both really good friends, close to each other is awesome.

Q. How did that conversation with Sam go when you brought him?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It was, hey, this guy is going to come to compete. Beat him out. Like beat him out. Just don't let him beat you out. You've been in the system six months. He hasn't. Beat him out.

Our program is always going to be about competition. Now if you earn right to be the guy, and then you come back, like Sam is going to be our starting quarterback next year. He's earned the right that when he comes back, he's going to be our starter. But you have to earn that right.

Xavion Alford, there's a bunch of guys who have earned that right, but you have to earn that right for us to think of you like that. You have to play football games for us to think of you like that. There's going to be no guarantees in this program until you have earned it on the football field on Saturdays.

Q. Troy and Jake obviously both played at Texas and have pretty incredible stories, what they have overcome. What is it about those two guys that makes them so special?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Jake has just been through so much. Physically, mentally, emotionally, all of it. And for him to keep battling, and then comeback and play in a game like this, just his adversity, just continued to battle adversity.

Troy with all of the injuries, coming out of high school as one of the top players in the country, big, physical, runs fast and injuries, and he's just battled back, battled back, battled back. Both those guys have battled so much adversity and for them to be here in this moment and compete is pretty cool.

Q. Do you think they are really getting a lot out of the six guys? To get this opportunity, is it more special to them?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I don't know. I hope not. I mean, you're playing, like you said, in the semifinals in the Peach Bowl versus Texas. If you're not excited or if you need more motivation than what that provides, then, I mean, maybe. But golly, like what else do you want?

Q. I have a question for you, I was talking to Tyson, and he said a couple days ago Cam was chewing his own face.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I did not see this. I don't know if he

saw that either. I don't even know how that's possible.

Q. Does it sound like something --

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I joke with Cam. Cam is a normal dude. Like he really is. He's a really normal dude, but he has some weird habits. He has some quirks to him like everybody does. He's a normal person with some quirks, which is what makes him different and what makes him special. That's what I love about Cam is he's normal in his own way, which is what makes you normal. If you're perfect, you're not normal. He's normal because he's imperfect because he's different, and that's what normal is.

So yeah, I don't think he chewed his face, but -- I didn't see that. It's probably a mouthpiece or something. I don't know.

Q. When you say quirks, I'm sure there's something that comes to mind for you. Is there a classic Cam?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: He's just a practical joker. He's over there on the plane and guys that are falling asleep with their mouth open, putting a Cheeto in it. That's just Cam. He just wants people to know he cares about them. He truly does care about people.

I think one thing that gets lost in his aura of rough, tough, buff, like that mentality is he genuinely cares about people at a really high level. He genuinely cares about his teammates and wants his teammates to know he cares about them and he expresses it through some quirky things, like putting Cheetos in somebody's mouth. You're not going to do that with somebody you do not have a real relationship with.

And the fact that he can do and the guys can laugh about it and he can make a joke and they can make a joke about him, that's Cam. He's his own unique quirky way with that physicality and toughness, but he really is -- he just wants the guys to know he cares about them, and I think he just shows it in a different way.

Q. To experience this with the families and kids and everything, how special is this?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It's cool to see all the families out here and getting involved and being a part of something like this. You work really hard to be a part of these moments. It's kind of what I alluded to earlier is you have to be able in settings like this to separate, just like we talk about on the football field, you can't let this moment affect the next one. You have to be able to embrace this and really enjoy the moment, and then be like, okay, that

moment's over. Let's go back to work and separate the moments.

But there's no difference between that and life when you show up at the office and you're pissed off about something and you go home. You have to be able to compartmentalize that and separate it when you get home.

It's just a great -- I think moments like these are really good for the guys to learn that all these distractions, right, are just part of the real world. And you'd better get used to separating them. And if you can't get used to separating them, you're going to struggle at some times in the real world when you have to separate things. Enjoy it. Embrace it. Go to the karaoke or go get your caricature or whatever that this and wake up in the morning and go to the meeting and be like, okay, it's time to get back to work. It's over. It is time to have fun again. Oh, what do I do on Thursday nights? I watch an extra 45 minutes of tape. He better still do that. He better be able to process that. It's that fine balance of this isn't jail. We are in the Peach Bowl. Enjoy yourself. Enjoy it.

Q. Did your wife say you can do that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: No. But I also don't have a normal job. My job is 24/7 because my phone is my job and my phone can always ring. I will say on holidays, I put my phone away. Merry Christmas to everybody I didn't text. I'm horrible at the mass text guy. I'm not the mass text guy on Christmas or holidays. I put my phones away for the most part, and I respond to people at night. Those are the days that I really try -- a few times a year I try to put my phone away and get away from it.

But this is a 24/7 job. There is no separation unlike most jobs in the real world where you can put it away.

Q. With recruiting going on 24/7 and the portal everything and, have you noticed any dishes in the last couple of weeks with the level the program is at now?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, people are interested. A lot of people are interested, and I think the greatest challenge is, the guys who are really talented that are interested, making sure that they fit the values of what got us here.

I think one of the hardest things is once you get more players are interested in you, and more really good players want to come there, and they are calling you instead of you calling them. Or they are, I'm so glad you always called. Whereas last year, it was like, Oh, hi.

Now it's like, I'm so glad you called. It's like, okay, well, I'm glad you're glad we called.

But what got us here is really good kids who love football, who are competitive and have a chip on their shoulder and bring an energy about themselves. I don't care how talented you. Doesn't matter how badly you want to be here.

If you didn't fit those categories, this just isn't the fit. And we have got to be able as a staff to stay true to that even if that's some guys that social media and the fan base want, if it doesn't fit that, we've got to be able to make sure we get through the core of why we're here. And that's the players we brought in, the type of player we brought in.

So hopefully we continue to get a lot of interest that are really good players that fit our culture and what we want to do. But we can't sacrifice because somebody is really talented, what I believe got us here, and that's the guys on the football team that are just good people.

Q. Speaking of that energy, that energy is what you strive for. There's a lot of conversation the last couple weeks about Cam being super confident and best running back around the country. What do you say to people who are out there that look at Cam and are just like, well, he's too confident, if he's too cocky about himself. But you've seen that competitive nature about him.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think if you're not confident, right, so everybody is different. I think sometimes people want to put personalities in a bubble about, what you're supposed to say, what you're not supposed to say. Make sure you says this and everybody wants to just almost to take personalities and force them into what it should look like. I couldn't disagree more with that.

I want our guys to be themselves. That's it. If what makes you play better and what you feel is you've got to express it, express it. If you're a guy that want to be humble and I'm just about the work and that's your personality, then that's you. There's so many ways to be successful. You're not going to please everybody. So why don't you just be yourself and you'll please the people who naturally like you, and you won't please the people who naturally don't.

Instead of living in this middle ground of you're just kind of there, I just want our guys to be themselves. That's it. And if that's through a lot of confidence and that's what our guys believe in, then I'm all about it.

If that's through humbleness, then great. But I don't think either are bad. I think it's how you're raised, who you are, what your personality is. Some guys wear really bright clothes, and some guys wear black and white wherever

they go. Your personality is your personality.

I'm just glad that Cam believes in himself. Because for a long time in his life, nobody believed in him. If he didn't have that personality believing in himself, who knows where he would be.

Q. Someone like yourself, great at examining quarterbacks, the two quarterbacks, can you identify the differences?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I don't know Quinn on a personal level so I don't want to get into his personality because like I said, what you see is not in front of a camera.

I do know this: Out of high school, he doesn't know, I really was around him. But I called and obviously studied him and all that, and he was one of the best high school quarterbacks I've ever seen. You could see that transition out of college.

He locates the ball at a super high level. Super intelligent. He is super calm on the football field, and then you see some moments where he's really emotional and he's fiery. You can see how he's a calm dude that has that emotion and power that people can follow. He's going to play on Sundays and he's going to play on Sundays in my opinion for a long time.

Great challenge for us to go versus one of the best quarterbacks in college football.

Q. The roster budget, getting caught up to the Big 12, how do you feel like you ended up this year and next year with the revenue share?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Our university is all in, I'll say that. Our president is all in. Our athletic department, the president, President Crow. You know, Graham Rossini, our AD, is all in. So we are going to be as competitive as anybody in the Big 12 in the country or close to as competitive depending on some things, as anybody in the country. That's what excites me about where this place can go.

Q. Bryan Carrington, he's a guy that had a good reputation as a recruiter, really young as a coach. How did he get on your radar and what made you take a chance on him?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: So when I was at -- obviously I studied him for a while. I always study younger guys that are kind of making a splash, right, because I always have that list. I always have a list of guys, or I would hire younger guys that are growing.

When I was at Florida State, he took the running back analyst job at USC. So I was like, whoa, he obviously wants to transition to coaching.

He's obviously super intelligent. He climbed the ladder of the recruiting side quickly, so he's obviously personable and intelligent. So he can learn the football side. That's the easy part.

Then he went back to TCU in a recruiting side, again, and I'm like, well, he obviously still has that itch to coach and he's smart enough to do it. Got around him a little bit. And when I got the job, it was like, this is a guy we should hire. He's smart and intelligent and he's good with people. And he's relationship-driven, and that's what I want in our staff.

I have got to surround him with somebody else who is a veteran. So we surrounded him with D-Walk, who has been a head coach in college, been a defensive coordinator at UCLA, been in the NFL. You get this guy who is an ultra smart, ultra competitive relationship guy, with this guy, who has done all this, and now you get in my opinion one of the best coach corner rooms in the country.

Q. It's a risk for you in some ways, right, but how were you able to minimize it? It was a risk at the time. You could have taken a seasoned guy that checked all the boxes.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: If you do things how everybody else do them, well, then you're just average, right. If I'm doing everything in our program the way every other coach is doing them, then what's it going to take Arizona State to achieve something it's never done before? Nothing. It's going to be what it's always been.

I always live in the model of: I don't really care what anybody else is doing. If I think this is best for ASU based off where we are and what we need, I'm going to do it. And I think he was one of those examples of just doing something different that a lot of people maybe didn't like or challenged that I think has helped us have this Texas to Tempe movement. He's a big part of it.

Q. Has he met your expectations as a coach so far?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, he's met, exceeded my expectations as a coach. His humbleness and his willingness to continue to learn and grow. A lot of coaches have about around this game a long time. But the game has evolved. And they may know what they know, but they have not evolved with the game.

And his willingness to grow and grow and grow on the

football side, he's caught up to the game. He's surpassed some people that may have been coaching a lot longer that still have a teaching style that may be conducive to a kid 15 years ago.

So his ability to not just learn the scheme but adapt with the kids' learning style, learn how these kids process and what makes them tick has made him a good motivator, and then on top of that, he's intelligent. So learning the football side is easy.

Q. When you first got the job, what was the philosophy that you had in kind of what you were looking for, the kind of guy you were looking for, and who did you lean on as you guys were -- I know it's a frenzied process to do this in the off-season. Who did you lean on to help you?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Year one, it was like, anybody who we thought was good enough to be honest. Because we had so many spots we had to fill that it was very difficult. It was really hard in that short window of time while hiring a staff to really go through it as detailed as year two.

So year one, it was bringing guys that we felt were talented enough that we thought were good people.

Year two it was bringing that same thing, talented enough, good people, but now, the right energy. Okay. Now we get to know them a little bit more.

So then it was the energy, your passion for the game; do you love football at a super high level; do you make others -- we talk about multipliers and dividers. A multiplier makes somebody 15 percent better, and a divider makes somebody 30 percent worse.

So if you have 15 percent of your team are dividers, right, that's really 30 percent of your team, right. That was the challenge we did in year two. So that was the transition we made.

Q. What did you see from Sam that made you recruit him off the transfer portal?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Great off-platform thrower. Athletic, could make the throws down the field. Super, super competitive and intelligent in the meeting room.

Q. Was that based off his high school film?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: We watched enough of Michigan State -- I remember the clip, he rolled left versus Michigan State on a boot threw the ball across. It was actually an interception on the play. The guy dropped the ball. But he

threw across his body right to the guy's helmet, great throw.

I was like this, dude, can throw off-platform. This guy is a player. Now let's get to know his personality, and if his personality and he's wired right, this guy has a chance to be special.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

