

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

Monday, December 30, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Brian Ward

Press Conference

BRIAN WARD: It's been one thing after another since our championship game. As you look at that, you're playing a team like Texas with good storied history and its tradition, and it's one of college football's powerhouses. And seeing that we're being -- that we're right there with those guys and being able to go play in this type of setting is just really kind of surreal.

So especially with the expectations that we had starting the season, like we were like, hey, we're trying to take steps in the process of getting to where we want to be, and in this season we stayed healthy and we were able to stick to the process and good things were able to happen, and usually that's kind of the formula for success for anybody.

Man, it's been amazing and here we are. So we have a team that believes, and obviously they're a team that has high expectations, and they always do because it's Texas. And being in this role that we are, the underdog role, it's really fun to be.

Q. Unique situation (inaudible) they've been bringing Arch Manning in.

BRIAN WARD: I mean, it is. I mean especially with the style of play that Manning brings. Ewers is a guy that's getting 80, 85 percent of the snaps and then they'll bring in Manning to run specific plays and do specific things. So we'll be real specific when he comes in and what our answer to it is, and obviously it's going to be a chess match, and they're going to react to what we're doing. So we gotta be on top of that.

But the quarterback situation is one of the reasons -- four of the longest years of my life is my son being a high school quarterback on the varsity level. So it was long because it's a drama-filled position, you know what I mean? And I know a lot of people see that position, especially from an external point of view, as what it should



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be and what should be happening, and I know that there's a lot of pressure that goes along with that that puts it on the players and the coaches alike.

So for me as a coordinator, I just gotta figure out a way to call it, but I know that's not an easy deal -- I went through it as a dad. It's not an easy deal to manage. So hats off to their coaching staff and those two kids.

BRIAN WARD: No one really knows what this could be, and obviously we were probably the lowest point in the program history, but just within the last 25, 30 years, because of the bowl ban and the sanctions and all those things and the black mark that was left -- or the black eye that was put on the program because of the violations. So we had to really build it, and this season has just been a by-product of doing things right and working really hard, but also a by-product of the relationships that you build with the players.

We look forward to coming to work with these guys every single day, and I don't know that every organization can say that, you know what I mean, and I think that's a great reflection. And as I reflect back on this season, I mean, every day I came to work I looked forward to seeing these players and the guys that I work with, these coaches. So it's been fun.

Q. One of the players said they see us as more than just a number. How much do you think that's allowed you guys to grow and embrace that you are a family?

BRIAN WARD: I know it's a cliché for a lot of people, a lot of coaches, a lot of wherever in any area of society, but people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care about them. And it always starts with the coaches, and it always starts with our head coach. It always starts at the top of an organization.

So anytime you have a coach that understands the players like he does and really does put the players first, the players can sense that and they can feel that, and when the coaches embody that philosophy, that culture kind of permeates throughout the organization. So it really has.



And we've seen the result of that, and it's paid big dividends for us.

Q. Now that you guys are here, you've watched Texas on film. What do you see from their offense?

BRIAN WARD: Just incredibly talented team. There's talent everywhere. There's potential NFL players at almost every position, and they're incredibly well coached. And a lot of people talk about the players and the talent and the speed they have and how big they are up front and the quarterbacks and their futures and what the future holds for them. But what they lose sight of is just how good they are.

I mean, speaking offensively to what they do, and it's just a system-oriented approach. I know he's part of a family of coaches who I believe are the toughest coaches to coach against and call games against in this profession. There's nobody tougher than these guys because they have a systematic way of being the same while being different, not only from week to week, from in-game adjustments. So we got our hands full.

Q. Coach, I mean a lot of people in your profession now are cynical, maybe overly cynical about the state of affairs. Seems like it would be hard to be cynical with that guy coming in every day.

BRIAN WARD: It's really the approach, hey, business as usual. And the more you plan, the more you try to work a plan, the more you know that the plans aren't going to go according to whatever you planned prior. So he just makes it about the players, and he makes it about football, and that's the biggest thing.

Like everybody asks me like what's different about this NIL era and now we're going to revenue sharing and the players and the negotiation. You know, I guess you'd have to ask NFL coaches about it, you know what I mean? Like NFL coaches probably have to deal with this all the time. But if you know NFL guys, like NFL, it's more about relationships than it is about anything else. Everybody thinks it's just big money. Well, yeah, for the four or five players that they're paying the most money to. The rest of those rosters are all about relationships, how well people work together, how much the owners like the players and how much the players like the owners and the coaches. And they really have to work together. It's not the top-down model, the hierarchy that's always been college football.

And I think a lot of people have a hard time adjusting and adapting. But to me the players are the same as they've always been. It's about relationships and about

developing, and if players come to the building every day and they feel like they're getting better and they're learning, they're always going to want to be there and be content and they're going to be happy.

And coaches are no different. And that's really the model that he's made within this organization.

Q. As long as I've been doing this, though, 20 years, young coaches always get knocked for, you know, whether it's not doesn't have the gravitas or the discipline or whatever. I mean there's always good things and bad things about younger coaches, but there's always sort of this stigma about somebody of that age. How has he sort of abridged that gap of not having the experience but also being able to relate to players?

BRIAN WARD: Where Kenny is different than a lot of the guys that get these head coaching deals when they're younger is Kenny has been the guy that's had to climb his way up. And a lot of these guys, they were the star athlete when they were playing peewee soccer. They were the star athlete in high school, they were all the eyes on them, all the attention, and then they get the scholarships and all eyes on them and then they go play in the NFL or get -- Kenny has been the blue collar guy that's had to work his way into the profession to get the respect and the -- to get people, like you said, he's had to earn his stripes, and I think that's what makes him different.

Yeah, you know, they say that wisdom comes from failure, you know what I mean, and wisdom comes from having to navigate success and failure. And Kenny has had to do that in his own way, and that's -- the one thing he does have is he's able -- like he empowers his coaches. He doesn't meddle, and he knows that -- like we all do. We don't have all the answers, so we're willing to listen, and we're going to try to find different ways to get things done because ultimately it boils down to getting the most out of your players. That's the only thing that matters. It's not about who gets the attention; it's not about who gets the credit, and he really embodies that as a leader.

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