

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Steve Sarkisian

Texas Longhorns

## Kenny Dillingham

Arizona State Sun Devils

Coaches Press Conference



**PLAYOFF  
QUARTERFINAL**



continually improved throughout the season. The last couple of months they've been playing as good as anybody in the country. Tall task. So looking forward to the opportunity. And like I said, humbled and honored to be here.

MODERATOR: Coach Dillingham, same question for you, bowl preparation and what your experience has been like so far.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Once again I'd like to thank the Peach Bowl. Our guys are having the time of their life right now. Like I told them, enjoy the moments in between the work, and I think they're doing that. They're having a moment that they'll remember for the rest of their lives, which was the purpose of these bowl games were to make memories that people carry on forever, and I think our team is doing that leading up to the game.

In terms of the game, our guys are putting in work. That's what they know. We're going to face one of the best teams in the country, if not the best team in the country, coached by arguably the best offensive coach in the country sitting next to me. And it's a really tall task for our guys, but at the same token, if you're a competitor, you want to compete versus the very best in the best environments, and I think that's exactly what we get to do here tomorrow is compete versus the very best in the Peach Bowl, which is one of the best environments. So we're excited as a football team. We're excited as a football program.

MODERATOR: All right. We'll go ahead and open it to questions.

**Q. I know that coaches tend to be part of a small fraternity. Do you guys know each other, have history beyond this game? Do you guys remember meeting each other and have you kind of kept your eyes on each other throughout your various trajectories?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Oddly enough, we were just talking about that. I've known of Kenny for quite some time. I always kind of follow the offensive young hot minds out there, try to stay fresh to what we do and ton of respect for

MODERATOR: At this time we're going to welcome our head coaches as they take the stage. All right. It's my pleasure to welcome first head coach of the No. 5 seed Texas Longhorns, Steve Sarkisian, and the head coach of No. 4 seed and Big 12 champion, Arizona State Sun Devils, Kenny Dillingham.

Coaches, welcome. Thanks for being here. We appreciate your time. We'll start with an opening statement from each coach. When we get to questions and answers, raise your hand. I'll recognize you.

Coach Sarkisian, we'll start with you. If you can give us an opening comment.

STEVE SARKISIAN: First of all, I'd love to first of all acknowledge the Peach Bowl. The job they've done has been first class all the way through. Our staff, our players have enjoyed the experience granted.

Being in the playoff, it's a bit of an abbreviated bowl experience, but I think they've done a fantastic job of making this experience one that our players really have enjoyed. The hospitality, facilities, everything has been tremendous. Thank you.

As far as the ballgame goes, feels like we're just kind of staying the course of what's been going on, the way the season has gone, with starting July 31st with our first ballgame, or excuse me, August 31st. And then two byes along the way, a conference championship, these ten days in between games. So we've just been kind of riding the wave and enjoying the journey. And this is another great opportunity for us.

Humbled and honored to be here representing the Southeastern Conference in the CFP against a great opponent. I've got a ton of respect for Coach Dillingham, the job he's done at Arizona State, the way their team has



him, and a couple of the guys that he's worked with in his time and the connections that we've had.

Oddly enough, we haven't spent a ton of time together, but I think there's some natural connections there. So maybe after this one, we'll hang out a little bit more.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. Same thing. We haven't spent a lot of time together, but I've been watching what he's done from afar. He was one of the first guys to do FIB, formation of the boundary, and really build plans around it and build systems around it.

So he's always been kind of ahead of the curve offensively, and it's somebody -- if you're an offensive guy and want to watch, you definitely want to watch what he's doing because you know he's also studying. He's not a guy who's going to be stagnant. So when you're watching him, if you're a year behind him, you're about three years ahead of everybody else. So definitely a guy you want to watch offensively.

**Q. Steve, how confident are you that you've got the offensive kinks worked out in the Clemson game, and what's your degree of confidence you can get 60 minutes from Isaiah Bond and Cam Williams?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I felt probably for about the last month and a half now, one of the things we needed to address was the running game. And I really felt like we addressed it well, and we've been moving the ball pretty efficiently.

The SEC Championship Game was in my opinion a little bit of an anomaly where we got away from it, and it just didn't come to fruition the way we would have liked, but I feel like the last month and a half of the season, I think our balance is where it needs to be.

Ultimately for us, it's about finishing drives. And when we get into the red area of putting the ball into the end zone, it's one thing to have a bunch of yards and explosive plays, but you need points to win. And so that's going to be the challenge in this game no differently. I think we'll find some balance there.

With IB and Cam, again, I think they both have been practicing. They both have been improving. To some degree, it's how do you feel on game day, right, when the adrenaline really kicks in, what does that feel like for a competitor. And then we gotta make really good decisions with those guys if they play and how much and to what degree.

But I give them both a lot of credit. They've been working.

Our medical staff has done a great job of building them towards this and not only them. We've had a few guys. Jake Majors finally feels good about where he's at. Quinn has steadily been improving.

Again at this juncture of the season, game No. 15, everybody's got bumps and bruises. So we're just trying to get our guys as healthy as we can.

**Q. Steve, as a followup to the run game, you had early adversity in August when you had a couple of guys go down. How would you describe the development that you've seen from Jaydon, Tre and Jerrik to get you to the point where you have been able to put forth a powerful run game?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah. You know, that was -- you never like injuries to occur. And to some degree, it was almost a blessing that they did occur in training camp because it gave us more extended time to work with Tre and Jaydon and Jerrik. And they've all had their, I guess, somewhat ups and downs throughout the season where guys have to grow.

And I think, again, that's a credit to Coach Choice and all of our coaches of continuing to try to work with our players. We had some issues holding onto the ball, and nobody gave up on anybody, and we continued to work, and we got confidence back. I think Tre Wisner, we found out a lot about him, his ability to kind of carry the load. You don't go into Kyle Field and carry it 30 something times in that physical and that environment if you can't handle it.

At the end of the day, I think we've found a good mix with all three of those guys, and we're going to need all three to be effective as an offense.

**Q. Question for both of you coaches. You guys do have something in common, which is you didn't have the results you wanted in year one, but yet you guys still trust the process that you would eventually have the success.**

Can you just talk about getting past year one, trusting the process when you don't see the results and that basically that journey to where you are now?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I'd say you have to have a belief in what you're doing. And I know Coach Sarkisian and myself have been blessed to be around really good people. And you've seen a process that's been successful. You've seen what it looks like, and you've gotta have a belief that if you stay the course, eventually it'll turn.

And I know for me that was always, and for us as a

program, that was always -- the vision and the plan was, you know, it may not look good now, but if you stay the course and you stay the course and you stay true to the principles that you believe in and what a successful program looks like, eventually you'll turn the corner.

And I think that's where we're at is we're still trying to get better every single day, but at the same time, I think us staying the course has definitely helped us get to where we are right now.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I would reiterate a lot of what Coach is saying because I think that's true. I think a lot of times, you know, I've got a great mentor in Pete Carroll. And I remember taking the job, and I remember us struggling through that first year and losing games in the second half.

We'd have leads, and we weren't finishing the way we would have liked. And I was venting to him, I remember, on one Sunday night just about, man, I feel like if I would just go and do some of the things they did before, that we might have a little more success and our record might be a little bit different. He said that's probably true, but he said at the end of the day, if you want to go down that road, you better expect similar results to what they were before, or if you really believe in what you do, you're going to have some rough waters for a while, but in the end, you'll find better results than what was there before.

So staying true to the belief I think is critical. But I also think being adaptable to the times for us. When we started, there was no transfer portal. There was no NIL. And along this journey of four years, college football has changed a ton. And I think being adaptable to the times, I think for ASU, same thing, like adapting to what college football is now and not sitting around complaining about it.

I've heard plenty of Coach Dillingham's comments about a lot of other coaches get up here and complain about what college football is about right now. And I think the two of us have been guys that have been on the forefront of here's the rules, let's maximize the opportunities that we have to enhance our roster, to enhance our level of play, to put the best team out there that we can. But, yeah, it's definitely a journey. Nobody likes to lose, especially in Austin. (Laughs).

**Q. Steve, you have a number of early enrolling freshmen here going through this week. What are the benefits of having the young guys, the guys who have not even been on campus, gone to class yet, what's the benefit?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: The first benefit is we have nine guys entering the portal already, and only two have stayed with

us. And the majority of those guys were off our defensive front. So from a scout team perspective, we needed some bodies to help us with practice. So that was the very first benefit.

I think the second benefit for those kids, they're awesome humans, and I think the exposure they're getting now to our team, rapport, they're staying active, we're getting a little bit of a sense and a feel for what they're about. But, again, the biggest advantage is the fact that we get to practice with a scout team and not have to do crossover work like we had to do before the Clemson game.

**Q. We are currently now in an era of college football where bowl games -- you need to win multiple bowl games in order to win a National Championship, and decades past a bowl game was used just as a celebration, just as a way to celebrate a season, celebrate a single season with a single team.**

For both of you starting with Coach Sark, what does it necessarily mean for you guys now to address your team in today's college football of how to celebrate a season in a bowl game now knowing that you'll have to play in multiple in order to win a National Championship?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, you know, college football has been very unique over the years, and you gotta think it wasn't that long ago, there was no National Championship game. You went to the bowl game that you were assigned to and everybody won or they lost and then you all decided who the national champion was.

And then we went to a two-team kind of they played for a National Championship. And then we went to four teams, and now we're at 12 teams. And ironically, we were really the only sport, us and boxing, that didn't have a tournament. Right? Everybody else always had a tournament, whether it's Major League Baseball, basketball, football, whatever it was, the NCAA basketball tournament.

So I do think we're evolving in a way that is healthy. And I think the responsibility then falls on us as coaches and staffs to make sure that we are enjoying our time with our players and celebrating a successful season, because before I had a lot of good teams that didn't win their bowl game. That doesn't mean we didn't have a successful season, we didn't celebrate that team. But now it's just part of a tournament that we're trying to be the last one standing at the end.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I would agree with a lot of that. I mean, for us we gotta enjoy the moments throughout the process. You gotta take it all in, but you

also gotta be able to get rid of those moments. So we gotta enjoy the moment of being at the Peach Bowl and being welcomed and the guys enjoying the event they put on last night for us and then get back to work. We gotta enjoy the game.

And if you win, you know, enjoy it. Then you gotta get back to work. But I think that's no different than a normal regular season when you're playing really good teams. Now you're just doing it in bigger stakes, you're doing it at a playoff. But you still have to appreciate the fact that you're playing in one of the most iconic games in the history of college football, and you gotta appreciate that and take that for what it's worth. You've gotta enjoy that moment and be able to move on from that moment when that moment ends and restart yourself.

**Q. You guys both had an all conference tight end on your roster this year. How important is that position, those guys, to what you want to do on offense?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. I think if you actually statistically there is a couple GMs that I knew in the league asking them what was one of the greatest correlators to actually success, and it goes quarterback. And ironically there was a period of time where it was tight end. And that was the second greatest, in some systems, right, systems that we're similar to, that was the next biggest piece to having a successful offense in terms of most value.

And I know there's a period of time where the tight ends were devalued, but I actually think if you're a run play action football team very similar to both of us, those guys have to control the middle of the field, not just in the vertical passing game, the intermediate passing game, but also the screen game.

And if you have a guy who's dynamic with the ball who can block the C gap and also control in between the hashes consistently, vertically, immediately and at the line of scrimmage in the screen game, that is a weapon. And for us I think both of our systems really play into that position and play into somebody who's not just good blocking, not just good down the field, but good with the ball in his hands.

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, reiterate a lot of the same. I've answered this before. I would say after the quarterback in our system, probably the most important position is the tight end because of what we ask of him to do from a formational standpoint, a blocking standpoint, a route tree standpoint, the multiplicity of the things that the tight end has to do in our systems make him extremely valuable. When you have a good one, I think that that makes our lives a lot easier from a play caller perspective.

**Q. Coach Dillingham, I wanted to get your thoughts on the progress, the development of Sam Leavitt starting from the time he arrived on campus. What were your expectations for him and how has he obviously progressed to what you've hoped he would become?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. Obviously he's a really good athlete. So when you get really good athletes when they are young, they want to scramble. They want to make every play with their legs. I think one of his, not just the mental side of understanding protections, you don't just have to run away from the guy that makes you hot and make him miss like you do in high school, right, because you're a better athlete than most people. He's started to understand protections. He's started to understand hots and to use his athleticism when it is needed and not when he wants to.

And I think throughout the season, he's really gotten better as when to use his athleticism, when to be ultra aggressive, when to not, when to change pros, which is part of being a freshman is to help protect yourself. And has he exceeded my expectation? Yeah. I would say he has. And if I said he didn't, I'd be lying to you.

He's done such a great job as a freshman to come in. And what people don't see is how hard he works behind the scenes. In any great quarterback is a great worker, and he's an unbelievable worker. He's an unbelievable person. He's super intelligent. He's super competitive.

He was in the game room the other day. We had the event that started at 7:00. He was playing somebody at ping pong. Then he started shooting hoops. I left and came back at 9:50, and I'm walking in with my wife. And I said, watch, I guarantee you Sam is one of the people left in here doing something competitive, and she was like no way. He was over there still shooting hoops. And that's what has got him to this point is he's wired in a way that he just wants to be the best all the time, all the time. And he has confidence in him wanting to be the best all the time.

**Q. Sark, what are some of the areas that maybe you weren't as sure about going into the season that have turned into strengths to help you get to this point?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I think naturally the depth on the defensive line, anytime you lose the quality of players that we lost a year ago with Murphy and Sweat, and I think we felt good about Alfred and Vernon coming in, but what would that depth look like at that position.

And I think the additions of Bill Norton and Jermaine Lole have been huge for us. I think the development of an Alex



January where he's at. And then on the edges, you never know what your transfers might look like. I think the addition of Tre Moore has been tremendous for us. The evolution of Colin Simmons.

It's really supplied us with a lot of depth, and we feel very confident in our two deep on our defensive front with Sorrell and Burke on the other side. So that was probably the biggest question mark coming into the season.

I'd say the second one was probably in the secondary, making the move, putting Jahdae back at corner and putting Gilbeau back in at star, the addition of Mukuba and what that would look like with Taaffe and Derek Williams and Jelani McDonald and having that depth there.

And so those two positions were probably the biggest question marks of what is it all going to play out looking like, and it's turned out pretty good for us. And we've endured some injuries there. Obviously D. Williams, he is out for the year, but the growth of Jelani McDonald in that three headed monster and the rotation those guys have there.

In the end, it's worked out well. I think that's the value of the portal. You're able to kind of stop gap where you have some depth deficiencies, which we had, and those two things have worked out for us.

**Q. For both coaches, if you could just give us maybe your best example of your quarterback's leadership this season and how they've evolved as leaders?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I would say for us it was the Kansas game. We scored. We went down. Kansas came back and scored on a big play. And we still are feeling ourselves in terms of where are we as a program, can we win close games, can we not. And usually that's the biggest hurdle.

When you take over a program is how do you win games late. How do you win close games. And part of that is players that thrive in those moments. And our quarterback went up to our guys with a smile on his face, and he just said you guys ready to go score, just like that. And that was the moment where everybody I think on our offense was looking at each other like, okay, we believe we're going to win, but when that guy comes over that calm as a freshman, they were all saying what is he going to be like in this moment, when he comes over and he kind of cracks like a subtle confident joke of are you guys ready to go score, that was the moment and then we led our team down through a touchdown pass to Jordyn Tyson. He led them down. That was the moment where we're like, okay, he plays his best in these biggest moments. He loves the

attention on him in these moments. And those are what the best quarterbacks do, they thrive in those moments. That's when I really felt like his leadership took a next step and the team bought into him.

STEVE SARKISIAN: Ours was a really subtle one that I don't know how many people even remember the play, but it was a fourth and two at Arkansas. And we're not a big quarterback run zone read team, but sometimes we'll call them in critical moments. And we called it, and Quinn pulled it and probably could have very easily went right, went left, got the first down and the game would have been over and this dude decides to try to run the safety over, and it's a massive collision. And he gets the first down. And probably the emotion that came out of Quinn and the emotion that came off of our sideline for Quinn were to me really indicative of how much the team values him and how much he wants to win for the team.

And I don't know if that's a great sign of leadership, not to answer the question, because I think his true leadership showed up when he was out and Arch was starting and the support he gave Arch and to be with him all week long and on the sidelines to help him play the best that he could play. To me, that was the real leader in Quinn coming out, but I loved that moment against Arkansas because there was some real emotion that came out of that play for him and for our team.

**Q. Steve, you're losing a ton of guys just like last year to the draft, and there are no guarantees you get back to the Elite Eight. They don't just give that away. With the senior-laden locker room, how much do you see that sense of urgency and opportunity to make history if you could keep this going?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah. I mean, I think champagne problems, right? One year we go to the Final Four, and we're a play away from playing for a National Championship. We break the school record for a number of draft picks, and how are we going to do it again. And we come back and this year and of the four teams that were in the Final Four last year, we were the only one invited to be part of the 12, the new expanded playoff.

So it's a really hard thing to do, and we appreciate the work that our guys put in to get to that point. But I think as much as we focus on our older players, we challenge our older players on how they're part of the development for our younger players, just like those older players were part of their development, and what does leadership look like, what does accountability look like, what does work ethic look like here.

And my goal is that we don't go anywhere, you know, but

that takes a lot of hard work. That takes dedication. You just don't rinse and repeat and do it all over again because each team takes on a personality of its own.

But I'll say about this veteran group, I don't think any of them forget being in New Orleans at the end of that game last year, and I don't think any of them forgot all off season long, and the obsession that they've had with getting back to this stage, I think is one that has fueled us through a fair amount of adversity that has gotten us back here.

Do I think we're going to have to play some of our best football down the stretch, there's no question, and it's going to start on the 1st. We're going to have to play arguably our best, if not one of our best games this season.

But that's the challenge that we're all striving for and working towards of how do we all put our best foot forward so that collectively as a team we can play one of our better games.

**Q. Kenny, could you tell me looking at your players this week, listening to them, they seem awfully confident and loose going into this game and I'm wondering if that's exactly how you would want them to act?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think our players are just being themselves. And I think a lot of times there's a lot of how are you supposed to talk to the media, what are you supposed to say, and I just firmly believe in say what you believe. And I'm not going to try to prevent our players from saying what they believe.

And if our players believe they're the best, there's probably a reason why Skatt had zero offers and went to Sac State when nobody believed in him and then came to Arizona State with not much competition for him. And nobody thought he was on NFL draft board going into the year.

If he didn't have that own self-belief in himself that he believes he's the best, then who else would have his entire life. So when he makes comments like that when people ask him a question and he gives you the truth of what he believes because his belief is what got him here and then people twist it on him as if he's being cocky or confident, that's not the nature of what he's trying to say.

What he's trying to say is my entire life I was the only one who believed in me. I'm not changing that. So now if you ask me the question and I give you a real answer, it kind of gets twisted into this cockiness or confidence when the reality is without him believing that his entire life, he wouldn't be in the position he is.

And I would say that with him and Sam, who was not heavily recruited, three-star recruit out of high school, pretty under-recruited for where he was, didn't play last year, same kind of thing for him too is those guys have a lot of self-belief because there was a point with the chip of their shoulder that they were one of the only people that believed in themselves.

And then when they get put in a situation and they're asked a question and they say the truth of what they believe, if you're a competitor and you don't believe you're the best, are you really a competitor. Like that's what you want to do.

So I think just the honesty sometimes in today's media is fun for people because they can take it and run with it. And that's what they should do. Everybody should take those comments and run with it because that's what's fun. That's what sells. But those are just two really, really competitive people. It's nothing about the opponent. It's about their own self-belief.

I mean, Sam probably thinks he could beat Michael Jordan in basketball. I mean, that's Sam, right? Skatt thinks he's probably the great running back of all time because that's Skatt. And I think that's what makes him unique. And sometimes when you verbalize those things, just what you internally believe, it gets twisted in a negative light. But I'm just happy that we have those guys on our team because they're ultra competitors, and I have their back.

MODERATOR: Jordan now or Jordan then?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Jordan then probably. Sam is pretty confident. But like I said, if you're a competitor and you take the court or take the field in anything and you don't want to be the best or compete versus the best, then something's wrong. I mean, that's the definition of competition.

**Q. Building off that, Kenny, is that the thing that's enabled this team to accomplish what it has, and is there a boundary at which point a team can become overly cocky or too confident?**

And for Coach Sark, how have you managed over the years confidence versus overconfidence or observed that within your teams?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, for us, I always talk about, you know, if you're confident versus cocky, goes in your preparation. If your confidence in yourself starts having you prepare less than you have prepared, well, be prepared to be humbled, because now you're letting it affect you.

If you go about your business and everybody should have a self-belief, whether you verbalize it to the media or not, everybody going into this game on both teams should feel like they're the very best. And if you don't, if you don't believe that you can win the football game, I mean, we're 14-point dogs. We're facing a team that was picked to win the National Championship preseason by a lot of people. And if you don't have that belief that you can win the football game, if you don't go that you believe you can match up, then you have no chance.

So like I said, I think sometimes in today's nature when we put a microphone in front of kids, they say what they're believing and that gets pushed in a negative light. When in reality, they're just saying what everybody would be thinking if they were in their shoes. Maybe they just said it out loud, and people aren't supposed to say the actual response to the question.

People want us to respond to the questions in the perfect answer that is supposed to be responded to, not the actual truth nowadays. And I think sometimes the 18 to 23-year-olds just say what they believe, and that sometimes gets twisted.

Both those kids are incredible kids. I do believe that's a reason where we're at is that we have a lot of guys with a chip on their shoulder who were counted out, were underdogs, and we're still underdogs, we're still counted out, but that shouldn't change your own self-belief in yourself.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think from our end, you know, as a coach, our job is to build confidence in our players, right? Whether that's through the physical ability, the mental approach, the emotional approach. That's our job is to build confidence.

And then you have to continue to build that confidence through their preparation week to week to week and then through their execution. It's one thing to be really confident and you don't play well, then you're still confident again. It's, well, why didn't I play well, what do I need to alter to get that back.

Again, there's obviously times when everybody gets humbled. We all do, as coaches, players, it is what it is. And the self-reflection I think is really important. Constructive criticism is really important so that we can continue to build and get better because change is inevitable.

We're either going to get better or we're going to get worse. We're never going to remain the same. And our job as

coaches is to put a team out there that believes in what we're doing, but it's not a false sense of belief. It's true belief because of the preparation and the plan and their brothers and the guys next to him that he's going to do his job and so on and so forth.

But that's the life of a coach, right? That's what we do every day. That's why we get to be around young people and try to instill things in them, not only for this game, not only for this season, but for life, about how they go about their business throughout life even when adversity strikes. That's okay. How am I going to get on the other side of it and keep moving forward.

**Q. Coach Kenny, Jake Plummer named an honorary captain for the game. What has his presence meant for the team throughout the entire course of this season and what does it mean to have him back here this weekend as kind of a full-circle moment for the program?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, it's awesome for the program. Coach Sark and I were talking about it. They were in the same class, I just learned, coming out, and we were talking about how the last time Arizona State played in a game of this magnitude was Jake Plummer was under center, literally under center back then.

And he was under center, and it was -- I mean, he's what Arizona State, him Pat Tillman, that era before, are the last time that we've reached these heights, and having him back involved, having him around, having him want to be around and that era of people want to be around, hopefully it's infectious and hopefully it continues on the next few years, the next few decades, and we can kind of put a string of years and seasons and decades together of really good, competitive ASU football.

**Q. For both coaches, you have been on either side of having a bye week in the playoff, and kind of talk about the pros and cons of whether you'd rather keep the momentum and play a game in the middle or have that extra rest and time to prepare.**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think that's pretty easy one to answer. A year ago, I'd say it was great having the bye because that's a situation we're in. This year we didn't have a bye. So this is great, too. (Laughs). I'm going to tell you exactly what our team needs to hear. So it is what it is.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I have no clue. I haven't been in both settings. So we'll find out tomorrow at about 5:00 if I like the bye or not. But at the end of the day, we're about to go play with eight teams left. If you can't get

excited to play, if there's an excuse for why you didn't play the level you played, something is wrong. At the end of the day, two really good football teams are going to go play each other regardless of the bye or not.

**Q. This question is for both Sarkisian and Coach Dillingham. This week the National Football Foundation and the College Hall of Fame put out a list of those that they're honoring for their role in college football and also for future generations, and you two are the future generation.**

So I'm curious, is there anyone in your past that not only taught you about football, but about carrying this legacy forward and how do you have that conversation with your players?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: For me, obviously Mike Norvell is one of the guys in the profession that's one of my mentors, and he's just a guy that I kind of look up to from that perspective. Obviously he's young as well. So I don't know if that helps with the question, but ironically, I don't know as many coaches or guys that have been super successful.

I haven't been blessed to maybe be around some of the older guys who have done it. I've studied from afar. I don't read books, but I listen to audio books. And I've listened to a lot of those guys' books and trying to take in the Pete Carroll stuff and Bill Belichick stuff and as much stuff as I can acquire and learn.

So I don't know if there's a specific guy in that era that's being inducted, but I do know there's a lot of really successful people, and the one thing I have learned through all those people is they've all done it their own way, and there's no cookie cutter way to do this. You gotta be genuine to yourself, and you gotta take things you learn and make it your own.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I thought you were going to tell us we were getting honored, Terry. (Laughs). Where is Bianco? He didn't tell me this stuff. Anyhow, you know, mine is pretty easy, right? I spent three years with Nick Saban. And I don't think there's been a better ambassador for the transition of college football than Nick Saban.

And so the life lessons that you learn managing a program at a high level, how you treat people, how you develop your players not only on the field, off the field, that's the legacy, right? It's easy to look at the National Championship trophies or the Heisman trophies and think that's the legacy, but I think there's a standard in which he did the work that he did, whether it was at Alabama or at LSU, that that's what you strive for because I think that's

what people remember about him.

He stood his ground on issues that he believed in. He developed young people. He won football games. He adapted with the times. He went from I formation, run the ball to RPO driven quarterback runs. He's forever evolved. And so that was the legacy that I think he left upon us, and it was just how many notes could you take and how can we try to do the same thing here with some of the lessons learned there.

**Q. Kenny, what's a similarity and a difference between Frank Kush's coaching style and your coaching style and how has that shaped your success this season?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I wasn't around really with Frank Kush. I'm a little younger than that. But I do remember just the demand he put on his players. I would say we may get a thing nowadays. He had so much success because the standard that he had, and I think that's every good coach has a high standard.

I would say the difference is how you get to that standard nowadays is probably a little different than how you could get to that standard back then. But Frank Kush has built the foundation for Arizona State football and even to be mentioned in the same sentence with him is an honor.

**Q. Kenny, your first year in the Big 12. I'm curious what you thought of that league from a competitive standpoint and do you think your team's performance in the playoff could or should affect the Big 12's perception of the playoff format moving forward?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, for us obviously the Big 12, really competitive league, really fun environments to be in. It was fun to travel to some of those environments and play some really, really good football teams.

Obviously I couldn't answer the second question. That's way out of my scope. I'm not that smart. I just know how to run power right and counter left, which is what Gus Malzahn taught me years ago.

I'll stick to the football. I'll let all the politicians and all those people stick to who gets in the playoffs and who's not. If we win enough football games, we'll be in. If we don't win enough football games, we won't.

And if you get blessed to play another football game, you pour everything you have into it. And if it's the last one you play, then you should have won more games and repeat, so that's how I look at it, but I'm not going to get into the details on that.



