

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

Wednesday, January 1, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Arizona State Sun Devils

Ken Dillingham

Sam Leavitt

Cam Skattebo

Postgame Press Conference

Texas 39 - Arizona State 31

MODERATOR: Coach, just start with an opening statement, and we'll go into questions.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. That was one of the best teams in the country, if not the best team in the country we faced today. We started off not so great, and the way the guys battled back is remarkable.

Like I told them, if they could rewind in the locker room, I hate to lose more than anybody, but now that it's over, when you can reflect and where these guys have come is an incredible testament to the team. But, golly, that one sucks.

MODERATOR: We'll open it for questions.

Q. Obviously with Cam, everything he's done this year, but with him not doing great on the sidelines, what was going on with that and what was your reaction just him getting back in the game and helping spark that come back to even be in the position to potentially win it?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. If him being competitive and passionate on the sideline is a negative, then I'm in the wrong sport. The kid is competitive. The kid is passionate. And if that's a negative, then I don't know what a positive is because kids that care and have compassion and believe is the exact reason why we had a chance to win this football game. I love Cam, and we're going to have a relationship forever.

Q. When did you notice that things had changed, the



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momentum had changed, things had shifted in that game?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I don't really know when. Probably the safety or when we drove down the field. I mean, the punt return killed us early. That got us behind two scores early, but then from then out, it was -- we never really didn't have control of the game.

They were playing really good red zone defense. Looking back at it, I didn't put our guys in the best position to succeed too many times, and our guys deserved to win the football game. I didn't do a good enough job for them as their head coach putting them in a position to win and I'm going to reflect on that and look at how I can do better to put them in a better position to be successful.

Q. Can you take me through that fourth and 13 play, what you saw from your perspective that gave Texas a chance to score?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. To be honest, it's all on me. We're in a cover zero look. Late in the play clock, Zyrus did a phenomenal job checking out recognizing the cover zero look, checking into a max pro, and I didn't have the ability to get out of it, and that's on me. So we left our guys isoed and covered zero into a max pro there.

I gotta go into that game with an ability to get out of that call. And like I said, there's a lot of things that I gotta do better to help our guys to win the football game. That's one of the many things that as I reflect I gotta be better because our guys played good enough to win. Our guys battled good enough to win, and this game is 100 percent on me.

Q. Kenny, have you ever seen a more heroic game than somebody like Cam and is it hard not to think you had the best team today?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. At the end of the day, the best team is the team that wins the football game. Bottom line. And that's a really good football team we faced. That's one of the best teams in the country.



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And they've built that thing over four years to get to where they're at. And I have the utmost respect for Sark and that football team. I know our team does as well because that was a battle. When you look at it, did we belong on the field? I think a lot of people were questioning that, and I don't think any person questions if we belonged on the field.

Now, there are no moral victories when the season ends. There's no such thing. This should hurt and be painful. The locker room is dreadful right now, and it should be. If it wasn't, something would be wrong.

But at the same token, now that this is over, I really am going to challenge our guys to reflect on where it all started, because it really is remarkable. And, you know, like I said, I won't be able to sleep for a while. But I will reflect immediately, because it's an incredible season, and what these two guys did this year is absolutely, I mean, unbelievable.

And everybody should have the utmost respect for what both of those guys did, not just being the players they are, but the leaders of the football team.

Q. Kenny, I was wondering after the game you went and there were some guys walking off the field and you went and kind of circled them back toward the field. What were you doing there?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. You lost the game. Doesn't mean you just get to leave. Like you shake hands. That's what you do. That's sportsmanship. Nothing more than if we would have won, you shake the team's hand. You lose, you go out there, and it's not fun, but that's part of life.

Q. Sam, this question is for you. The emotions on your face right now are obviously evident and you're obviously holding Cam's hand. This being your first college football season, what are you going to reflect the most out of today and what can you say just about the effort that went into today on the field?

SAM LEAVITT: Yeah, I mean, I just want to cherish everything that comes with the season. So special in this group of guys. It's so special, especially the two sitting next to me, the amount of time that -- sorry.

Just the amount of time that I spent with them and the work that we put in. It's just going to hurt me not to be with him next year. I still got another year, but I'm just going to go into this next season and not take anything for granted, off season workouts, the late nights in the facility and everything like that. So, yeah.

Q. When people think of the 2024 Arizona State Sun Devils, what do you want them to think of first?

CAM SKATTEBO: Undeniable. We fought through everything all season. I mean, we let them hang the whole year. We gave everything we had, and you saw it in that game. We never stopped.

I bet you nobody in this room thought we were going to even be close when we went down 17-3 in that first quarter. So we believed in ourselves. We believed in what we had going and undeniable is what this team is about because like you said, heroic, too, heroic. Everybody on this team believes in each other and that's what kept us close.

SAM LEAVITT: Crazy season. I feel like one of the best things is just passion. I feel like, you know, it's pretty special. And that stems from Coach Dillingham and the staff. We just have a different level of passion and something that I've never been a part of.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Family.

Q. Coach, the performance from Cam, the go around, the touchdown pass he threw on fourth down, just some of the plays he made were just insane. Where does that one rank for you just individual performances you've seen?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I mean, this is just a Tuesday for Cam. (Laughs). It is. This is Tuesday.

CAM SKATTEBO: Wednesday.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. Good point. He's a special player. I mean, he's somebody -- I mean, yeah, it's just Cam. It's exactly what I expected, bottom line. You give him the ball, crazy things happen. They saw a man earlier in the game, he runs to the side, I gotta win a go bomb. I was like I agree, and we found a way to get him the go ball, and he makes the play. And that's just Cam.

Q. Cam and Sam, can you kind of talk about the first half offensive yards were kind of hard to come by and the fact that you guys didn't flinch and you're not a team that's kind of been here before. What was it like in the locker room trying to get some positive momentum going and come out in the second half?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I'll start before. I had a bad plan going into it. I didn't put them in the best positions to succeed on offense. I gotta do a much better job with formations, motions to create some better leverages to get

these guys going.

CAM SKATTEBO: And then in the locker room at halftime, you know, we took a step back and calmed down, and we understood what we had in the locker room, and we went out there and played ball, you know, our ball. We didn't play the best ball in the first half, but we came back out and gave ourselves a chance. So that's what matters.

SAM LEAVITT: I just feel like it was red zone stuff. We moved the ball pretty effectively actually, and we just needed to convert in the red zone. I take accountability for a lot of stuff that happened. Just going back, I just want to understand that red zone things happen so fast and you have to be so precise. So that's one thing I'm going to carry over into next year.

Q. Coach, Texas came into this game running balls everybody at Georgia and you guys held them to under 50 yards today. What can you say about your defense performance?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Our defensive line, our defense in general did a phenomenal job. Our offensive line in my opinion I started to give them better chances to be successful. They did an awesome job upfront too in the running game.

Both sides of the line of scrimmage I was extremely proud of. I mean, you watch the game, and we played really, really good football for most plays. The problem with football is some plays were worth a lot more than others, and the plays that were worth a lot, they made more of them.

And but like I said, both our lines of scrimmage, I couldn't have been more proud of and the ability to get four other guys back upfront on offense and everybody but one guy back on the defensive lines and two guys in the entire front seven on defense. You know, I'm really excited of the foundation that Cam and this team and Leif has laid and to see where it can take us. Now if the Arizona Cardinals can just draft Cam so we can keep him home, that would be awesome.

Q. Kenny, a couple of situations I wanted to ask about. The decision to punt versus go on fourth and I think five at the end of regulation, was that an easy one given the momentum that you had, and then also the targeting review that was not called targeting and you talked to the officials and what you thought about that?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. The punt was -- we were playing good defense and the score of the game. We kind

of had to in my opinion, just fourth and five low percentage, doesn't even give you -- if that go for it would have guaranteed us a win, we would have gone for it.

So plus 35 if you completed, plus 30, you complete it, you win the football game with a field goal 100 percent would have gone for it, but that go for it would not have clinched a win. So the risk/reward level just wasn't there.

In terms of the targeting, I mean, I'm going to be honest, I don't know what targeting is. We lost one of our best players in the first half for targeting, and I just don't -- I just don't know what it is.

So I don't want to comment on something that I have to get a better grasp of what it is just because it's so -- you know, I just don't quite understand it. I do want to protect the players though. So whatever rules that are put in place to protect the players, I'm all about.

Q. Sam, I know it's kind of hard right now, but thinking next year, what are the main things you're ready to work on in the off season and come back stronger?

SAM LEAVITT: I don't know. I just got done with the game, so I guess I'll go dive into some film study and stuff, but I'm just going to take the next few weeks and just relax and then I'll get to all that.

Q. Kenny, 97 plays on offense. That's a lot of plays. Would you have imagined that many plays for you and Sam both just running 97 plays in a game?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, that's a lot of football plays, but like I said, we extended drives. We moved the ball down the field. We out gained them. We just in the low red zone, like I said, I gotta do a better job putting our guys in position to succeed in the low red zone and finish some of those drives. And, yeah.

Q. What does it mean leave better than how you found it? I saw you grabbed Kenny in the tunnel as you were walking back in the locker room. What did it mean to play for Kenny?

CAM SKATTEBO: ASU has changed my life forever in a good way. Simple. They've supported me through everything, put me in a position to be successful.

So I think everybody in the ASU community and Coach Dillingham and his staff and this kid next to me right here, they changed my life forever.

Q. Ten minutes ago, Coach Prime tweeted out how proud he is of you and how you represent the Big 12.



How does that make you feel?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah. I have a lot of respect for Coach Prime. Disappointed we couldn't win the football game, but I couldn't be more proud of our guys. They battled, battled from the beginning of the year.

Like I said, I gotta put our guys in better positions to win this football game, and there's many things I could have done that could have helped us do that.

Q. Cam, there were reports that you were ill on the sidelines during the game. Could you give us an idea of what you were going through and how much of it had to do at all in the game?

CAM SKATTEBO: Yeah, I mean, I threw up. I mean, I threw up. I drank too much water too fast, and I was kind of feeling sloshy, and then felt better after.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Puke and rally. (Laughs).

CAM SKATTEBO: I felt a lot better after throwing up, you know, and that's when it all started. I had a rough first half, and I wasn't feeling too good. That second half, it was a different ballgame.

Q. Kenny, did the emotions of this visit begin with the announcement or the release of the news of an extension for you? What does that mean for you and the players you have coming back?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, to be honest, I wanted that to be released at a time people weren't going to talk about it. I wanted this to be about the guys, the game and the players, so we released it basically at midnight on New Years so it's not in the media because it's not about me. It's about these guys.

But I'm fired up that we can continue to build this thing, and like I said, I'm a Sun Devil, and that's awesome for me, but I didn't want that to be a distraction or people to really talk about it.

CAM SKATTEBO: Congratulations. I didn't even know.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Exactly. It worked.

Q. Cam, I know it's just right after the game, but kind of going through the emotions in your mind like this is my last game, this is the last time I'll be with Kenny, I'll be with Sam and just the emotions on just the performance you had and just going out there with them one final time?

CAM SKATTEBO: Yeah. I mean, Coach Dillingham has got the longest future in coach history, I promise. And then this kid next to me, he's going to play on Sundays. I'm going to play on Sundays.

So us three right here, we got a long life ahead of us. This is just the beginning for us. No matter what, these guys will be in my life forever. So it's awesome that I was able to play football for and with them.

And I'm just happy to be in the position I am, and for him to put me in a role to be successful, and then Sam executing to help me be successful. Just hats off to those guys, and I love those guys forever.

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