

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

Wednesday, January 1, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Texas Longhorns

Steve Sarkisian

Quinn Ewers

Jahdae Barron

Postgame Press Conference

Texas 39 - Arizona State 31

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

STEVE SARKISIAN: First of all, hats off to Arizona State, Coach Dillingham. They showed a ton of fight, ton of resiliency. It is a really good football team. And we went up 16 in the fourth quarter and their ability to come back and take this thing to overtime was very impressive. So congratulations to them on a heck of a season and a game played today.

As far as our guys go today, not our cleanest game of the year. And that's okay to say that. But the one thing that I know about our group is when our backs are against the wall and when our best is needed, our best shows up time and time again, and the resiliency that these guys showed today was something as a coach makes you really proud, you know, that we weren't at our best and felt like an NCAA March Madness basketball game with the swings of emotions and things, but fourth and 15 in overtime to score to come right back and score again, two-point conversion and then a great play by Andrew Mukuba, just proud of these guys, because not every game is going to be pretty and not every game is just going to go exactly how you want it to go.

And there's going to be plenty of stuff that we're going to look at this tape and say we gotta do better and be better, but the one thing I won't have to say is our toughness and fight doesn't need to be better. And if there's one thing that you want as a calling card for your team is just that.

So I think it's a tribute to these guys up here and their



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leadership and the culture that we have and their ability to stay calm through the storm and execute when like I said when our best was needed.

Q. Steve, the fourth down stops, red zone stops. Can you talk about the level the defense is playing at, on the flip side, the third quarter, you only had eight yards in the third quarter play?

STEVE SARKISIAN: The third quarter in my opinion was somewhat of a by-product of the first half. We only ran 21 plays in the first half of the game. Then the third quarter comes out. We go three and out. The very next play, we get the ball back after the goal line stand. We give up the safety. They did a great job.

And we knew coming into the game that they were a tremendous ball possession team, and they do a great job of taking care of the ball. Tonight was no different. They held the ball for 398 minutes. They limit your opportunities as an offensive football team to take advantage of that and over time, what that does it their style of play is they can wear on your defense. And clearly we got fatigued some there defensively, and their play makers made some plays.

The quarterback was scrambling around, and Skattebo was as advertised. He got stronger, it felt like. You could see he was fatigued too. It was like a heavyweight fight. He made some really critical plays and obviously on the go ball, but to me, the third quarter was a little bit of a microcosm of really the first half. It almost bled all the way into the second half.

Just we didn't have a lot of opportunities, and we weren't taking advantage of things on first and second down to stay ahead of the chains. We were getting in third and longs. We were punting the ball, and it got difficult.

Q. What about the level the defense played?

STEVE SARKISIAN: It's pretty incredible. These guys do such a good job of just saying, hey, protect the end zone. And if it's six inches, one yard, four yards, whatever that looks like, they're going to stand in there.

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And I think there were three of six in the red area tonight scoring, and I think that's a by-product of them trusting one another and trusting the scheme, but I think it's also a by-product of guys understanding when it's their time to make the play, they make the play.

They tackle ferociously. There's a lot of white hats getting to the ball, and they make catches tough. They contest balls when they're thrown in the air, and I think all those things showed up tonight.

Q. Coach, just looking at the resolve of this team, bend but don't break, not just in this game, college football playoff, but in general this season what you can say about your offense, your defense and your special teams and how you got to this point by bending, but never really breaking?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah. I think one thing that happens is as a team, you grow through adversity as long as you handle adversity the right way. And I said to these guys a year ago today, there was a lot of tears and a lot of frustration because we weren't able to close out the semifinal to get to the National Championship game. And that started it.

And I think the way they responded to that to all the things that we went through this off season, the summer, into fall camp, losing a critical piece to this team in Cedric Baxter, one of our team leaders, to Quinn getting injured earlier in the season to losing Kelvin Banks, to losing a lot of different players along the way, Isaiah Bond, so on and so forth.

But the next guy steps up, you know, and the moment doesn't ever feel too big for our guys. As critical as a moment might be, as maybe we're not playing our best football, the one thing I know, the resolve is that they know how to really lock in and get focused and be at their best when their best is needed.

Q. Coach, fourth and 15, talk about that play call and just that throw that Quinn was able to make and maybe those throws that you made to make those dives to Gunnar and Matthew in overtime as well?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I thought there was a couple of things that were impressive. One, I thought it was a great job of preparation by our coaches in relaying that to our players. We actually practiced that play versus that exact defense during the week.

And there was some moving parts to that to where Quinn had to change the protection on the play and he did. He

got us to a max protection. But even at that, there was some intricacies to handle the pressure the way it was coming inside. And so the protection, him changing it to them getting the protection and then Matt understanding why that route was going to be there predicated on the coverage, and I thought Quinn's ability to stand in the pocket and deliver the ball the way that he did was a real strike. So there was layers to the whole thing.

We guessed a little with the call thinking they might come after us, and we guessed right, and he did a great job of getting the protection right and making the play.

Q. Quinn, can you kind of speak to coming through the clutch with the two big overtime passes that you had and does your heart rate ever change?

QUINN EWERS: Well, I think just first off, that's just a testament to how mature this team is and just taking advantage of every single opportunity that we have, whether it be fourth and 15 or first and 10, whatever the situation is, just taking full advantage of the opportunity that's thrown our way.

And just so proud of the way that the entire team stayed poised and composed through the entire game, especially through overtime. And it definitely feels a lot better to be on this end of the win in overtime at the same spot for sure.

Q. (Inaudible)?

QUINN EWERS: I think that we all stay calm, and for all of us to stay calm, it kind of starts with me. And I just try to be that calm within the storm for all the guys, and I think that my relationship with Jesus has helped me in that specific way of knowing that no matter what happens, that He's going to be there for me. He's still going to love me. And the reality of it is, that's the reality of it.

Q. Quinn, after you guys tied up, what were the conversations like on the sideline knowing you had to go right back out there to try and take the lead?

And for Jahdae, your faith never wavered. What do you have to say about his clutch performance, three straight throws for scores?

JAHDAE BARRON: I mean, this starts all like during the summer. Our culture Wednesdays and again just opening up to one another, but I wish Sark could have had a card. We do these culture things on I would say Friday, but today is not Friday. So we do it Tuesday. Tuesday night, we do a team activity, and we write in the card.

And in the card, I wrote just thanking Sark and the last



bullet point was Quinn is going to play fast and the reason he's going to play fast is because of God the creator. He's going to give all his worries and everything he has and give it to him and allow him to play free. And I think that's what Quinn did. When our back is against the wall, he just kept fighting and made some big-time plays in those three throws.

Q. What were your conversation like after you guys tied it up on the sideline?

QUINN EWERS: Pretty short and simple. Let's go do it again. And Coach Sark called a great play that we run pretty often against our own defense, and it hit kind of similar. So it's funny how things work.

Q. How has Matthew stepped up over the past few weeks with Isaiah being kind of in and out and just being able to be that wide receiver one that Quinn can throw to?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think that's probably a credit to Matthew and to Quinn. As a quarterback, you're always trying to find rapport and trust in a receiver. And as a play caller you are, too. And you earn trust, right, with consistency and time. And I think there's a level of consistency in Matthew's game that he's earned a lot of trust in myself and earned a lot of trust in Quinn that in a lot of the critical moments, it's easy to try to find him, because you know he's going to be in the right spot and you know he's going to be competitively tough and make those plays.

And I think over time, I've learned at least that the moment doesn't ever get too big for him either. He remains very poised and composed in some of the bigger moments that we've had.

Q. You've been through a lot with Quinn over the last three years. I know outside of the building takes a lot of criticism undeserved. But how would you describe the belief in him in those moments and how he's able to continuously pull you guys through?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Quinn's a G, man. He is. Like I know he doesn't always exude that, like in his body language and his demeanor because I say it about him about this all the time, like he's a steady C. He never gets really high. There's flashes of that emotion. He never gets too low.

Sure, there's moments of frustration that we all have, but the guy recalibrates so quickly, and he's so calm that it allows me to lean on him, you know, in the most critical moments, especially tonight, man.

The run game was tough, and we didn't want to get behind the sticks, and we went into overtime thinking we gotta throw it to win. And as much as I wanted to run to win, these guys will tell you, I was telling them last night I felt like in that moment, we had to throw it to win and we had to get the ball in the end zone. I just didn't want to settle for another field goal. We had to go score.

JAHDAE BARRON: Quinn's a leader. He's been leading us this whole time. We used to be roommates. He used to bully me telling me go take out the trash, screaming at me go to sleep. Just Quinn, he strives to be perfect, but he wants everybody else to be perfect.

But, again, he knows the Lord is his creator and he can give everything to him. He can just go play fast, literally go out there and play fast. We're all blessed to be here and blessed to play a game we love, but at the end of the day, you can't make a mistake in God's eyes.

Q. Only Georgia has stopped your all's running game all year and Arizona State did today. Why do you think you all have struggled so much to get your running game going?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think, one, kind of limited ops. We played four quarters and two overtimes and only ran 60 plays tonight, and that's -- part of the run game is finding a rhythm, and we just couldn't quite get the rhythm and the flow of the game the way we wanted it to go.

I thought they did a good job with some of their movement. I thought they did a nice job kind of on the back side of things when we were ready to make some cuts. And then you feel like it's maybe a gain of six, seven, eight yards. We were getting three. And it was kind of a little frustrating.

But I think ultimately, we gotta find a way to be a little bit more efficient on first down. Four-yard runs are good for us. That's okay. I just felt like we just didn't have enough ops and that was probably the most frustrating thing to where we could really get going, you know.

I'm looking at Jaydon Blue only had four carries and Tre had 18. But we need to be better, and we gotta analyze that. They were a quick athletic front that did a nice job, as I said.

The safeties were aggressive, and they got us on the ground. I give them a lot of credit. They didn't play for over 20 days, and I thought they tackled pretty good tonight, they got us on the ground.

Q. You guys played against a lot of elite competition

in the SEC and then I'm sure the focal point of your game plan defensively this week was to stop the run for ASU, and obviously to have a guy like Cam Skattebo. So watching film of him and then actually playing against him, what was it like when facing Skattebo?

JAHDAE BARRON: As a competitor, you know, it's fun. It's fun when guys say what they say before the game and that's just his confidence level and things like that. But just to go out there with my guys and keep fighting. I think we kept fighting.

Sometimes if we had a penalty and they got another drive, another play, we just continued to fight. And I think ultimately that's what it means and that's what brotherhood means here and the culture and level of bond that we have and the level of bond that we share.

Q. Coach, something about this building, two overtime games, and this time you came out on top. Was there anything, a certain way you approach overtime, and anything you learned whether it's with the play calls or your approach from that Georgia game coming into this one because you seemed to hit those plays?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah. I felt like the way the game was going tonight, I definitely wanted to stay aggressive. And even though in the first overtime, we kind of took a shot on the first play, and it wasn't quite there. And then we came back and then we get a false start after the run, and then we get the second false start and that's how we end up in the 4th and 15.

I felt like we wanted to be aggressive, and that's why when we got the first play to come back out in the second overtime, staying aggressive, trust in your best players to make plays. Between Quinn, Gunnar, Matthew, those guys have been so clutch for us all year. We find a way to get the ball in their hands and see what they could get done.

That was the mentality. I guess I'll take a third overtime if we can get back here on the 20th, right? If that's what it takes, we'll keep everybody on their toes a little bit.

Q. You mentioned the March Madness feel and you talked to basketball coaches and they say experience and being there before helps. I'm wondering how much the experience against Washington helped you all get through these moments this year?

QUINN EWERS: You can't really coach or teach experience. So just the amount of maturity and poise that we have in these games I think has definitely helped us

over time.

JAHDAE BARRON: Sark told us at halftime, this was the point where we were at last year, and we didn't handle business and just to be able to have another opportunity to go out there and go out there and handle business, that was a blessing to do that. So him just continuing to just fight us and push us through that adversity and things like that.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I'd say from a coach's perspective, the more times we get in these moments, whether it's now back-to-back years of being in the playoff, back-to-back years being in the Final Four, playing in a Big 12 Championship and winning it last year, competing in the SEC championship this year, going on the road a year ago to Alabama, going on the road this year to Michigan.

We've been in some pretty big environments, some pretty cool arenas, some pretty big games. Not to say these aren't great experiences. They are. These are amazing experiences for these guys. But the moment at this point doesn't seem too big.

We're not in awe that, hey, this is where we are. This is where we're supposed to be. And I think that they understand that and then they get back to their preparation so that we can try to play our best football.

But that's what experience gives you. It gives you being on this stage, being in the arena and understanding what it's like to be in the arena so that you can focus on your play rather than all of the other stuff that's going on.

Q. You both mentioned your faith in God and that faith in each other. Just to expound on that a little bit and why that's so important to you, and Coach, what it's like to coach guys that put God first?

JAHDAE BARRON: I mean, yesterday in Bible study with Kevin Washington, there was a few guys that went up there. Kevin asked us to tell the reason why you deeply and strongly got closer with God and why you trust God, and Cedric went up there and he told us his story, and Jake Majors went up there, and I also went up there.

I told all the guys like last year and the years before previously, I wanted things done on my time. But it doesn't work like that. God has everything planned. It's already written. And all you have to do is just keep going with the process and just trusting the process and then allowing everybody to be a plus in your life and trusting everybody. So just literally relying on God.

And Psalms 105:1, just "give thanks to the Lord and

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proclaim His greatness and show the whole world what He has done." I mean, I'm showing you all my talent, but I'll be surprised, too, when God just pushes me to go out there and allows me to make plays like that.

QUINN EWERS: It's just been super cool to see the amount of guys that have really let God come into their heart, and me being part of that and Jahdae being part of that, it's kind of like a domino effect in the locker room.

I think more guys are starting to come to Bible study, come to chapel, whatever it is. And just to see that, and I think that's what grows us closer as well is just the amount of guys that are putting their faith in the Lord has been really cool to see.

We pray after every practice as a team. And prayer is very powerful, and I really believe in prayer. And it's just been cool to see how Jesus and God have just worked in our lives throughout this year, and I think that is also a testament to how we stay level-headed and poised throughout the entirety of the game.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think at the end of the day, it's understanding there's definitely a power greater than ourselves. And we live in a world right now in society when it's look at me, look at me, look at me, look what I did. And we try to get these guys out of that mode, and we try to get them to focus on an attitude of gratitude and an idea that serving others and what does that look like and what does that feel like.

And I see it with these guys every single day. And that's why when these moments kind of come up, I'm really not surprised because I know where their mind is at in their approach to going to do this stuff. So it's a testament to the leadership that these two have, because it goes beyond Xs and Os, right? It goes beyond.

It's the fact that there are more guys in Bible study. There are more guys going to chapel. That's leadership. That's what real leadership looks like, but then that's what comes out on game day on 4th and 15.

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