

# TaxAct Texas Bowl: Kansas State vs LSU

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

## LSU Tigers

## Interim Coach Brad Davis

### Press Conference

Kansas State 42, LSU 20

BRAD DAVIS: I just want to start off, first of all, by thanking the people at the TaxAct Texas Bowl. Thank you, guys, for having us, for hosting us. It was an unbelievable experience for our players. The hospitality that we received we couldn't be more grateful. It was certainly a class act, a well-run venue, and we couldn't be more appreciative, so thank you, guys, for that.

As it pertained to the game, I started off the week by saying there would be no excuse. As you guys can see, we went to battle here with a pretty limited roster. Yet, I'm disappointed in myself that I couldn't have been better for the players today. I fully expected us to win the game. I thought we had a plan that we put together as a coaching staff that would lend to allowing our players to go out and make plays and that plan was obviously not executed well. I'm disappointed for our players, the effort and the resiliency that these guys showed in the midst of adversity. It's a hurtful feeling right now as a coach to go out there and fall short today.

I'm extremely proud of our seniors, the guys who chose to play and continue to represent LSU in the right way. Those guys gave so much to this program, and, again, I'm disappointed that I couldn't allow those guys to go out and celebrate a victory today.

The future at LSU is extremely bright. I can promise you this. Regardless of the scenario, the kids that we have at LSU, they love LSU. It means something for them to put on that jersey every day, and we're going to continue to fight until the end. Coach Kelly is going to take these kids to new heights. I think these guys have a well-deserved break coming to them, and they're going to come back inspired. My message to the team following the game was to remember this feeling, allow it to drive you to do better. When we start winter conditioning and start spring practice, I want this feeling to completely drive our players to give



more, to be more, and to never feel like this ever again. With that, I'll take questions you guys have.

### Q. The job that Jontre did tonight, what do you think of how he stepped into that role?

BRAD DAVIS: I'm so proud of him. Obviously, he hadn't played quarterback since high school. It was an unbelievable opportunity for him to finish his career. He is the epitome of a selfless kid. What I mean by that is he probably didn't have the career that he expected to coming out of high school, and yet, he never complained. You never wavered in his compliment to LSU. He never thought of transferring or quitting. He was the polar opposite. He was positive, selfless, and giving. He was encouraging to his teammates. When he got an opportunity to play, the entire team rallied behind him.

Obviously, quarterback is not his natural position, and so there were mistakes that were made today. As a coach, we should have put him in a better position so those mistakes weren't made, but in terms of the heart and effort that he gave, I couldn't ask for anything more.

### Q. What went into the decision to make him the quarterback, and how did you -- how did that conversation happen?

BRAD DAVIS: Well, there wasn't anybody else. There were a lot of factors. You know, obviously, Max Johnson transferred. Matt O'Dowd had an injury where he wasn't able to play. Garrett Nussmeier, obviously, there was an NCAA ruling that wasn't in his favor, and he was not allowed to play in this game or it would have cost him a Red Shirt year, so we didn't want to put him in that position. We were left with Tavion Faulk and Jontre.

In regards to the conversation, our mantra has been next man up. We've dealt with so many things: Opt-outs, transfers, COVID, injuries. We've had so many guys who have had to step up, so he was one of many. I knew the moment the opportunity presented itself, he would jump at it, and he gave everything he had to help us.

### Q. Was it Nussmeier that -- (Inaudible)

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BRAD DAVIS: I think it was a collective decision. As a coach, I always tell myself, I'll never ask a kid to do anything I wouldn't ask my own son, and so for him, selfishly, I could have put him in a conundrum where he had to make a decision that affected his future. I didn't want to allow that to happen, so we did everything we could to protect him. I also, again, thought that as coaches we could put together a plan that would allow Jontre to lead us to victory. We didn't, in my opinion, lose this game because Garrett didn't play. I don't think it came down to that.

**Q. (Inaudible)**

BRAD DAVIS: So Kay was injured in practice. I won't speak to what it was, but he was, obviously, unavailable for the game. How difficult is it? Incredibly difficult. We had 38 scholarship players is what we had, so I don't know what Kansas State had, but, again, that wasn't an excuse for us. Our players never blinked. I think the people outside of our program made that a bigger deal than we did. We can only put 11 on the field. That's it, so it doesn't matter the number in the locker room.

Our kids have a lot of pride in being LSU Tigers. We fully expect to win every game we play. It doesn't matter against who it is or what the scenario, circumstances are. We expect to win it, and so that wasn't an excuse for us tonight. I let the team down. I didn't put together a well enough executed plan that could have allowed us to win it, and so that's on me.

**Q. Coach, maybe not an excuse, but how much was it**

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BRAD DAVIS: I'm sorry. Pardon me?

**Q. How much is it a war of attrition?**

BRAD DAVIS: I did my best to protect these guys. Obviously, with us being limited, I had to be smart in practice. We couldn't afford to get one kid hurt. We could not. We were that thin. Obviously, being limited with numbers, it did affect the way we practiced. We probably could have done more in regards to the physicality in the nature of practice, but there was also great risk in getting our guys injured, so it showed up, obviously, in the first half in particular. We tackled poorly, and so I have a lot of regret about that, but I had to make a decision in regards to how we practiced. I would rather have had our guys available for today and allowed them to go out and compete than get them beat up in practice and not allow the game to go on. Again, that's on me.

**Q. There's been a lot of teams here in the bowl season that are in the same situation as you guys with a limited roster for one reason or another, and they haven't played. In hindsight, should you have played the game tonight?**

BRAD DAVIS: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. There's ten seniors in our locker room that all wanted to play, and we would not cheat them out of an opportunity to play. We don't back down from a challenge. That isn't who we are or what we stand for at LSU. We were going to play this game. It's important for us. Every opportunity we get to compete, every opportunity we get to go represent our brand, we're going to take advantage of it. There was never a thought in our mind of not competing or playing. We expected to win this game.

**Q. What did this experience mean for you and your future at LSU? What did you learn through this season?**

BRAD DAVIS: I think it's immeasurable the amount of experience that I got over the last month in regards to leadership, managing a roster, working with coaches, game-planning, game-time management. It gave me a completely different perspective from being an assistant coach. That being said, I feel like I was ready for this opportunity, so I embraced it. What I did learn really more so than anything is that a head coach is really only as strong as the support that he has, so we obviously had a limited amount of assistant coaches available, but the analysts, quality control guys, GAs, the effort they put in to coaching our guys, I can't be more thankful for, and so we busted our tail to put together a plan that would give us a chance to win, and I didn't get it executed.

**Q. What do you share about your conversation with Coach Kelly and what you guys want to attack here in the coming weeks and months?**

BRAD DAVIS: You bet. Well, I think he has a great plan. With his experience, he has won at really every level. And so in the conversations that we've had, really it's about managing a roster right now. We have to recruit our roster. What I mean by that is keeping guys in the program and then, obviously, creating a wholesale buy-in, and I think that he has been highly successful at that. I think our guys are excited to turn the page and go compete for him.

Right now recruiting, obviously, is a big piece of it. We're heavily involved with that with trying to acquire new talent that we can get in and develop and allow us to go play. I've been excited about the staff that he has hired. I think he has gone out and has hired winners. He has brought people in that fit the culture that he wants to build. I really

feel optimistic about the direction that LSU football is going to go. Our kids have nothing but great things to say about our strength staff. Those guys jump right in the middle of this thing and began coaching those guys. I think there's a ton of excitement around this change.

**Q. Coach, you guys could have easily pulled in, fighting back like you guys did until the very end. What did it mean to you to see that?**

BRAD DAVIS: There was roughly two minutes left in the game, and obviously, I had to make a decision. Do you just eat it and let the clock run out and concede victory? That isn't who we are. We're from South Louisiana. We fight to the end. We represent toughness. That's who we are. I was taught that from the time I was a little boy. You finish what you start. That was a very slim chance we could come back and win that game, but to see our guys score a touchdown as time ran out, to me it really is metaphoric for who we are. We're going to fight to the end. The circumstances, the adversity, what's going on around us, it doesn't matter. We ain't ever going to quit. I hope our players take that with them not only in football, but in life. When the chips are down, when you take a punch, you don't fold. You keep fighting, and you keep fighting, and you keep fighting. We did that today. We just fell short.

**Q. Bech went through warmups. Was the plan always for him not to play or --**

BRAD DAVIS: Bech is recovering from COVID. Obviously, you guys can understand what COVID does to our young people and really adults for that matter, too. He had a bout with COVID. He was committed to playing. He wasn't physically perhaps in the best condition, so we wanted to limit him to not allow him to go out and get hurt. I think if we would have allowed him to be utilized in a heavier role, he would have jumped at that opportunity. For me I'm never going to ask a kid to do something I wouldn't ask my own children to do, and so we limited him. We tried to protect him. His future at LSU is going to be bright as the sun, and so putting him out there and risking further injury was not wise, and so we limited him today.

**Q. (Inaudible)**

BRAD DAVIS: You bet. That's why guys come to LSU. It really is hard to explain what it means to be able to strap up and go out there on that field and wear that purple and gold. There were so many guys that got their first, quote, unquote, opportunities today. Jacquelin Roy; Greg Penn, seeing him out there running around; obviously, Jontre Kirklín. There were so many guys. Pig Cage, for example, as well. It really is hard to explain the sense of joy that

those guys had to go out there and be able to lay it all on the line for LSU. Those kids have a ton of pride. Their teammates rallied around them. Again, I wish I could have done a better job to allow those guys to have success today.

Thank you, guys. Sorry for letting you guys down. Sorry.

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