

TaxAct Texas Bowl: Kansas State vs LSU

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

Kansas State Wildcats

Deuce Vaughn

Skylar Thompson

Press Conference

Kansas State - 42, LSU - 20

Q. Sky, how fun was that?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: It honestly hasn't registered like what just happened. It was that much fun. I felt like that was our best offensive performance of the season on all cylinders. O line was blocking their tail off. Deuce running the ball well. Receivers catching the ball. We were just firing on all cylinders.

And you could feel the aggressiveness of Coach Klein's play calling. And you guys know, him and I are always -- we've been on this journey for a long time together. And I was just so excited to get out there, go play for him, just because we know each other so well, and the flow of the game, I knew what he was going to call before he called it.

He just kept us attacking by his play calls. Didn't allow us to take our foot off the gas at all. And it was just so much fun. It flew by. But it was a special way to end it for sure.

Q. What was it like holding up that trophy with Coach and what were thoughts going through your head?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: Perseverance. There's a lot that went into that. And a lot of stuff behind the scenes that nobody saw or was a part of. There's a lot of work I put in outside of things in the treatment room every day. That gets very old and tiring and draining. There's so much that went into that.

And throughout my six years here, it hasn't always been perfect. I could have left. I could have walked away from the game after tearing my pec. But that's not how I roll. I was raised you start something, you finish it. And give it everything you've got and let God take care of the rest.



And, holy smokes, I couldn't have drawn up a better way to finish than tonight.

Q. Talked about being aggressive. You guys took the ball to start the game, which has not been what you typically do. Did you feel extra pressure there or did you want the ball?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: I want the ball. That's the way we're built on offense. When Coach Klieman came up to me and Noah during walk-through today and said, if we win the toss we're going to take the ball, let's go. That's our mindset.

Coach Klieman, this whole prep, we're going to be aggressive and smart and take care of the football and we're going to keep our foot on the gas. When we got the ball we knew it was time to go.

Q. Deuce, what has this guy meant to you?

DEUCE VAUGHN: So much. Just from the two years I've been here, on and off the field, the type of man that he is, the influence that he's put on myself, it's going to be something that I carry for a very long time. He's going to be somebody that I call a friend for a very, very long time and somebody I'll never hesitate to call or text anything beyond football.

And, man, just the impact he's had in my life over these past two years, on and off the field, is something I'll carry for a long time.

Q. Did you check out of anything tonight?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: That was part of our game plan going into this. What we want to do more of is controlling the tempo and keeping the defense on their heels.

You saw us get in the huddle, you saw us get up and turbo and go fast. You saw us double look. I mean, we did a whole bunch of different things. It keeps the defense on their heels, allows them to not get set up in pressures, allows them to not realize what the down and distance is to where they can sit on the sticks. There's a lot of stuff that



goes into that.

Coach Klein was helping me with some of the checks and some of it was on my own. But, like I said, a lot of the times when we checked something I knew by the look we were getting what Coach Klein was going to check, and I think that's very helpful for me just to re-ensure that I'm seeing it correctly. So it was great for us.

Q. What was your best throw tonight?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: I would say that dover route to Phil there in the second quarter. I knew it pre-snap it looked like it was going to cover 4. They rolled down to cover 3 and I'm (indiscernible) up free safety between the post and the deep over. They panic dropped out of there, the backer did. So, I knew I had green grass to throw to, and just put some air on it and let Phil go make a play and he made a great catch.

Q. You kind of passed the torch onto Deuce, after this game. What was your advice to him and what's he meant to you, those types of things?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: I'll tell you what, taking it back to COVID times, we were getting together for seven on seven in Anneberg Park in Manhattan. And it was when Deuce first got on campus. And after our first workout I texted Coach Anderson, and it was, like, hey, we've got a special one here. I could tell by the way he attacks the work on a daily basis. His football IQ is through the roof.

And from day one I just felt like him and I have been on the same page. There's a lot of stuff we do with Deuce that it's completely an option route that is just get open. And based off what the defense is doing I know most likely what he's going to do before he does it. It allows us to play fast and make plays.

What I love about Deuce, I would say it if he wasn't sitting by me, but what I love about him he's had so much success but he's the same person every day. He's all about K-State and being a Wildcat. He puts his teammates before himself and that's what K-State is all about.

And, like what he said about me, I'm going to have his back. I'm going to support him every step of his journey. I know his future is bright. He's just getting started, just scratching the ceiling, and there's no ceiling for Deuce.

Q. How much does it mean to have a game like this in your home state?

DEUCE VAUGHN: It's pretty big because LSU is a team you watch growing up. They're a blue blood school. They

won a national championship a few years ago. To get the opportunity to play them in a big-time bowl game back in Texas and to have the opportunity to play with these guys, like this guy sitting next to me, again, for the last time and to come out on top is big time in the regard of, man, you're playing against a top-tier team and you get to do it with your brothers. That's why it was so big tonight.

Q. How tough was it to see Landry go down right after that big catch? And the resiliency of you guys to go score a touchdown?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: I'll tell you what, Landry Weber is the definition of Kansas State football. Talk about a guy that will put his back on the line for anything no matter what. If it's filling up water bottles, taping ankles, you ask Landry Weber to do it, he'll do it.

That's what I've always appreciated about Landry. He's been a great teammate. He's always supported me. Once again, he's the same person every single day. He works his tail off so much.

He's faced his fair share of injuries too. And I mean the way that he responded back this year after the surgeries he had was phenomenal. And that's total credit to his work ethic and what he puts in every single day.

And to see him go down like that it broke my heart because I knew, for me, how much this game meant to me this last game here. And for something like that to happen to a senior, I knew how much it meant to him, it broke my heart.

But what I love, too, you see him on the sideline, rooting on his teammates. He's uplifting. At halftime talking to him, he said, go win it, go win it. Don't worry about me and you've got my support. So he's a special one.

Q. Deuce, did you feel the offense playing a little bit more aggressive today with Collin calling the plays?

DEUCE VAUGHN: Absolutely. From the tempo as well, getting up to the line quick, checking some things, depending on what the defense was giving us. That was like the mentality. And Coach Klieman told us before the game that if you see something on the field, speak up. Tell your position coach and he'll get back to me and then that's how we'll dictate how we play this game.

That's when the aggressiveness came. It came from us relaying back to our coaches, them giving us the driver's wheel in a sense and coming back to the sideline. And Coach Klein, doing what he does, he called a great game tonight.

Q. What was K-State Nation like today?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: Special. I mean, just the timing of our game being on a Tuesday, I knew it made it hard for people to travel down here and support us; but, man, it was loud. It wasn't full in there, but it was rocking. And it is so special just being part of this football program and the support that we have from our fans. They're the most loyal in the country. And I love it. I love them. I give my heart to them all.

And it's a great way to finish. Great way to go out. And their consistent support for me, after I faced -- after I tore my pec, I had 50 letters, roughly. I don't know exactly, but just around people that wrote me told me to keep my head up and that better things are ahead of you and not to give up. It just means a lot to me. I cherish those things so much.

Q. So much of your story is about (indiscernible), and he talked about how the team didn't waiver when things got rocky. What does it mean for this team to go out like this on such a high note after what you faced this season?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: Coming into the season, we came up with four core values: Discipline, commitment, toughness and be selfless. And that's what our program is built off of. Our senior class has done a great job, leaders on the team have done a great job implementing those values, holding people accountable to them. And that's ultimately what changed everything.

Doesn't matter, win, lose, highs, lows, the fact of the matter, it's football; you're going to face adversity. There will be times when things don't go your way, don't go how you draw them up. But you stick to those four core values and we'll be successful. That's what we've done.

Q. When you went down against Baylor, did you think a night like tonight was possible?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: Yes, 100 percent. I knew my time wasn't done. I knew I had a pretty severe injury but it was manageable to get healthy. And my ultimate goal was to be healthy for this game and to go out on my terms. That was my biggest goal is I want to walk away from this on two feet standing and give everything I've got and get a bowl win.

This is my first win. We won the Cactus Bowl but I don't really count that for my starting credibility. But this was a big game for me to go out, and I wanted to get Coach Klieman his first bowl win. And it's huge for our program. It's huge.

Q. Did you have a favorite moment out there, where, yeah, this is what I wanted?

SKYLAR THOMPSON: Probably looking up and seeing my dad. You know, my mom wasn't able to make the trip because she has to work tomorrow. But I can only imagine what she was like watching the TV. But my dad and my little brother, he's missing basketball practice. Probably have to do a couple extra suicides, but he doesn't care. Like, that to me, I'll tell you what, it means the most to me.

And my dad, my father, has been everything to me. Him and I have been through thick and thin together.

And I was, high school, we were driving all over the country to go to camps, to go to visits, and my dad was dragging me everywhere and exhausted. But he was willing to do anything, sacrifice anything for me to do something like this today.

And to see the gratitude on his face and share that moment with him, I can't put it into words. I love him so much. I love my family so much. It's been a special ride.

Q. What opened up things for the running game?

DEUCE VAUGHN: Just the aggressiveness in our play calling. The passing game opened up the running game a whole bunch as the game went on.

This guy right here making plays and our receivers making plays, our tight ends making plays down the field really allowed them to say we've got to watch out for the pass. And then our O line, the way they stay committed to the fight. That's a really good defense over there, even though some will say they're depleted, that's a really good defense over there.

And for them to stay in the fight like that, to keep winning the line of scrimmage, and things started to open up as the game went on.

Q. Patience, did you have to be confident --

DEUCE VAUGHN: You have to be super patient. That's always as a running back because you're never going to pop off 80-yard gains every single play. You'll have to take your two, your one, your zero and your five, your six. And then whenever it hits you have to have that calm and coolness to be able to hit it and not be frustrated with how the game has been going and that's when you start missing stuff.

Q. I know it's very fresh, Deuce, but as you look back



on your body of work this season, what are you most proud of?

DEUCE VAUGHN: Just the fact that, I mean, of course, doing that was -- it was a big-time dream of mine to play like this this past season. But when I look back, it's all about the guys in the locker room, really.

To be able to do it with that special type of group of guys is why I came here. Coach Klieman said we'll build a culture and bringing guys that will say what K-State is, and to be able to do that and them help me get to the point I am right now, man, that's over -- I can't even put into words how thankful I am for everybody in this program and for them bringing me in.

SKYLAR THOMPSON: I want to say one more thing. I appreciate every single one of you and covering me and my journey. I haven't always agreed with the things you guys say, but we're open to talk to you and be honest. But really, I really appreciate you guys. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for everything that you guys have done for covering me, all the positive things you've said about myself, about my teammates and, truly, I'm grateful for you guys. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for all your covering me and our program. I appreciate it.

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