

TaxAct Texas Bowl: Ole Miss vs Texas Tech

Wednesday, December 28, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Lane Kiffin

Press Conference

Texas Tech - 42, Ole Miss - 25

THE MODERATOR: All right, Coach. Start us off.

LANE KIFFIN: Okay. So you guys that cover me know I don't speak coach speak. When I say this I mean this. I thought that their staff and players did a great job. I thought they had them ready to play.

I thought -- we knew they played hard, you know, kind of overachieving model of team that talk from people in the conference how hard they play. It happens a lot at home. We were hoping maybe they didn't do it as well today, but those guys had some good plans.

I think you're going to -- as a coach you break down the game and say, okay, yards, points, all that stuff. There's a lot of similarities in the running and throwing of the ball by the teams, but, you know, you're going to look really glaring at fourth downs and turnovers.

So, you know, they did a great -- both were very aggressive. You know, we were 2 of 7 on the fourth downs. They were 5 of 6. I thought they had really good plays and speed options and checking on different things. I put that on coach. I thought their fourth down schemes were better than ours, and ours were short of yardage sometimes and weren't able to move them.

So I do, I give them a lot of credit for how well they coached and how hard they played. After the fourth down and turnovers and, you know, do some analytic chart, and you're going to be 99.9%. If you don't make five fourth downs and you turn over, what, five times, that's 10.

One of those fourth downs is a turnover, so it's really nine times, right? If I just did the math right, that's nine times you give them the ball back without kicks going or scores going on. So that's not going to bode well, and it didn't tonight.



I thought we had a little rally there in the second half. Jaxson had a really poor first half, and he would tell you. Some critical plays. Obviously, the turnovers. Fourth down with the guy in the flat, and he thought it was a different play and took a shot deep, which killed some momentum there on a fourth and one.

It's a shame because this would have been a great game to win down here versus a very good team and go out for these guys that were the last game.

So, again, credit to them. I thought they did a great job stopping the run for a team that's run the ball extremely well most of the year. For our backs to be four yards and 4.6 and Jaxson 6.0, that's a really good job for those guys that had really struggled against the run without their pass rush and defensive end.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Lane, did you consider taking Jaxson out late when he took another shot there when he scored the touchdown on the ensuing drive?

LANE KIFFIN: We did. He said it right from as soon as he got up that he was fine. I went and checked him in the tent. He came right back. We were hoping we were going to get the onside kick. I even went in the tent to ask our training room, and they said he was fine to go.

So he kept playing. I thought he kind of played a little bit like we did. You know, tough at times and made some plays, but then some very critical mistakes.

And I really don't like the whole fighting part and, you know, guys after the whistle. I really didn't think we do that very much. I thought we're pretty good at that and work really hard at that are. You know, I don't know. Got to figure out a better way. I don't know if you get into this world of portal and so many guys' last game, and that's kind of hard to manage. Some of those guys know they're on the way out, but that was disappointing.

Q. The fourth downs in the first half, the fake punt as

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well, can you just kind of take us through some of those decisions?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah. I mean, I didn't want to do it. Marty wanted to do it. I'm just kidding. That was a joke.

So we run through those things. They have a look. Got two blockers out there for them. Those things are always hit or miss. I mean, not hit or miss schematically, but sometimes you don't have the right scheme.

We had enough guys for them and went and made the cut, and the guy made a good play, and he slipped before he got behind them. So it's something that we had worked all month on with a really good player in D. Wade.

Also, what goes into those is you cannot predict how games are going. You can just be educated on analytics and games will tell you what or if you talk to coaches in your conference, this is going to be a high-scoring game. They've got a great offense. We've struggled late in the second half of the season on defense. They've given up a lot of yards. Not as many points, but a lot of yards. Kind of like today.

So, you know, going in it was you are going to have to steal some possessions and take some risks. Actually, that really wasn't -- I'm not backing them. Those actually a lot of times didn't go right into points. Sometimes we would stop them at field goals, and sometimes it's easier to play on a short field, as crazy as that sounds, against an offense like us that builds on pushing the ball in tempo.

So, obviously, that's not the plan to not make it, but those were critical decisions. They didn't work out, and I think it stopped and started early. Getting beat on fourth and one. You know, where we don't make the Brock, and the guy hits us in the back field. It was discouraging because they had a lot of similar fourth downs and did a really good job with some really good scheme runs to scheme us up.

Q. Coach, can you talk about when Texas Tech came out on offense the first play of the game, they came out in an air raid. It was an honor to Mike Leach.

LANE KIFFIN: That was a cool idea that their coach had. He mentioned it to me yesterday at the luncheon. I thought that was really cool. I joked with him and said we need all the help we can get, so we're not going to decline it.

No, I just think that goes with Coach Leach. Being in different conferences with hem, being around the coaches and players, there's not many people that leave places in coaching because sometimes you're fired, sometimes you leave, which he has done both of those, and then the

places still -- the places still honor them. That just shows how he impacted people.

I always said with him, I don't know how he did it, but he always had time for a long conversation with everybody, and I think that shows why people cared so much.

Q. (Inaudible) there was a lot of players it that were down there in the game with injuries. Do you have a status update on any of the players, and also was there any complaints about turf or anything with them all going down?

LANE KIFFIN: No. We don't really report on injuries, but we didn't -- I know people do that. So, again, you don't cover us, but I just tell you how it is. When our guys were injured, that really wasn't benefitting us, because they had short fields the whole day because we kept giving them the ball.

When teams do that, I can tell you it's usually because there's long drives going on. That's why they do that. Those were legitimate, and it there were injuries happening. Probably part of having a long layoff.

You know, we talked about in the last press conference, you know, so the using of the time-out was just very frustrating, the situation. It did not win or lose the game.

But just so you guys know, because I like our players to be composed, okay, you know, I'm told on our sideline after that long thing, after the fumble, which we got a lot of good momentum going, so we fumbled the ball back, they get the ball, and there's this big fight. And we're yelling at our players, and their coaches are taking their No. 11 off the field, screaming at him, because he spit on our player.

And so the side judge on my side says to me, listen, they're 11, and he actually points that way, they're 11, going to be ejected, your 71, fought back, so he is going to get a penalty too.

So I'm, like, okay. Then all of a sudden they announce our 11. Well, our 11 was Jordan Watkins who wasn't in the fight. It was their 11 fighting 71 that everybody knew because their own coaches were yelling at the guy. There was a racial slur involved. That's not the point of what we're talking about, about the spitting part and the penalty that was said.

So look, I brought our own 71 up to the officials and said, right or wrong, do you see him crying? He is not crying because he spit on him. He is crying because he got spit on and something was said. It just didn't make any sense. It was really poor to have that many officials that

communicate. They all have these wires in and all talk, and they did a great job on some other ones of getting them right, but that's not good.

You talk about spitting on people and calling the wrong No. 11 who if you meet Jordan Watkins, Jordan Watkins isn't doing that if you know him. He is the receiver. He isn't in a fight with the defensive lineman or the left tackle.

So that's why I was so discouraged because they had still told me he was ejected so now I'm trying to game plan on the sidelines, yelling at Jordan, getting our subs all right. And Jordan is, like, Coach, I swear to God I did not spit on this guy, nor did I come close to spitting on him.

Here's our other tackle crying talking about how derogatory it was, what was said, and he was spit on. So that's why I called time-out to try to get them to get it right. You got all these officials, guys. Communicate. That's a big deal. You know, if you are going to eject.

Then they say, well, he is not ejected. So did he spit or not? So now he is not ejected because you're not really sure which 11. That's why, just so you know because I tell our players to keep their composure, and I'm going to defend our players when, you know, a kid is spit on and then accused to the audience, national audience that it's him, and Jordan has to deal with this.

That's why that was.

Q. This game is still fresh.

LANE KIFFIN: Again, that had nothing to do with why we lost the game. That was a personal thing about one of our kids, an amazing kid that they just totally blew it. And wouldn't change it. Like, just going to sit on it, like, my bad. That's a pretty big my bad. The kid has family.

Q. This game is still fresh, but when will you kind of look back at it in the offseason and just this whole season and kind of evaluate things and where things might stand?

LANE KIFFIN: I'm not a jump to conclusions because you lose a game, but, you know, you guys have been around here. We've won ten games and made changes, so we will look at everything in our program. I'm sure there will be some changes made in some areas because I think the good thing about our fans they know about me, this is not acceptable. That makes us 8-a5 and finish the season like that and come down here and do that. There will be some changes made.

Obviously in the recruiting you have to go right into this

thing because now we've got to figure out all these portal guys that are in the portal. I have to make sure our guys aren't getting bought, and we keep our own guys. There's a lot going on.

But staff and administration around the building and stuff, we will always look at all that stuff.

Q. Back to this -- that you are talking about. The Texas Tech player had a racial slur towards a player in the scrum? Just clarify --

LANE KIFFIN: I'm not going to because I did not hear it say that happened for sure that he gave a racial slur to our player. I'm told that was said in that, but I did not hear that. So that would obviously be a giant issue.

But the issue that I do know is the spitting part from other players seeing it and their own coaches. Like, I mean, if you actually watch over there, one of them is kind of laughing because he got off. He is screaming at the player. They're losing their mind on him, and then all of a sudden -- I talked to the head coach afterwards. He is, like, man, crazy officiating out there. I go, yeah, that's really bad on that one that your guy spit and our guy got the penalty. He is, like, yeah, I know.

That's just frustrating to me because it's not a holding. That's calling a guy's name out to tell national what he did that was wrong, and you have all these officials to get it right. It's a big deal.

Q. Coach, what are kind of -- you talk about on the field changes and stuff, but what are your biggest take-aways with this group of guys off the field for this entire season now?

LANE KIFFIN: I think they did a really good job off the field. I think, you know, we don't have a lot of problems off the field. They do well in school and stuff.

I don't like the style of penalties today and all the after the whistle stuff. You know, we've worked hard for years to not be that way. I think we've always done a good job.

We do things -- you know, there are things we can always do better and don't do well, but I think in this area we've done pretty good. You know, Malik has his little moments today. Last year we mentioned about Malik and what he has meant and how we've changed him and stuff, so I just really didn't like that.

And the targeting thing is so frustrating. The guy is sliding. I mean, come on, guys. First time, bad. Second time, worse. We've done it throughout the year, so it really -- I'm

the head coach. It's lack of discipline and decision-making.

Q. Kind of that run that you all made right out of the second half, you all got a stop and you go and score a touchdown. How proud were you of that response from the team?

LANE KIFFIN: I said at half, this is going to be a great comeback. We're going to come back and win this game, and I really believed it.

I believed we had some good matchups of things. I felt our defense was playing better than maybe people would have anticipated with that matchup and making some plays even without Cedric, which was hard catching that quarterback without him.

So I had a feeling we could really do it. It wasn't -- I'm honest with you guys. Oh, we got problems. We got matchup issues. It wasn't that.

So as you saw, we did the three and out. We went down and scored. Screwed up the extra point, but I really did feel leak we could easily do that because I knew the turnovers in the fourth down were the issues that -- I'm not saying because we would have punt and we would have won. I'm saying maybe punt or make the fourth downs and call better plays, you know? That's why I really thought it was going to be a really cool comeback, and I thought we were built that way to come back because they would have the same problem in four-minute that we do slowing the game down, so...

Q. Does decision-making come on fourth downs in those kind of plays, fourth and shorts -- does that change in bowl games? Would you have handled it different in a regular season game at all?

LANE KIFFIN: Not really. I mean, it's not like it's preseason. I mean, the game matters. I'm trying to win the game.

That was really a pregame decision of, okay, when we have the analytics support, and we read the books. I know when it doesn't work, everybody says they're stupid books. Jimbo will be happy today. The book didn't work.

When you play these matchups versus, let's say, we're a defense built team versus another defensive team, you're going to punt in almost all of those. That's why that was made before the game that we have to be aggressive, and then we started to play a little better defense, and there was something in the second half where there was a fake in the second half that we didn't do that we had lined up to do because I felt like, okay, now we were playing a little

better.

Q. You just mentioned, they had come out (inaudible) with three turnovers and it really seemed like it gave you a chance to come back in the second half. Can you just speak a little bit more into what you saw from that and throughout the game?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, they did some good things playing on a short field. You know, not exactly, but some Baylor-type feel. You know, the Sugar Bowl where we were screwing around on offense and them keeping us in it.

I did. I was proud -- like I say, this generation of recruiting guys to stay to play a game. You know, Miles Battle has already taken visits. I've talked to the coaches, you know, the schools he is going to go to. And here he is making plays for us in a game, making some critical plays. I was proud of him. Proud of some guys that were in those situations.

Even Luke. The play didn't work, but those are some guys that were going to go out. They went in the portal, and they weren't going to play and decided play. Even though it didn't work out with the wins, I think those are things those guys won't regret.

Q. I know the season just ended, but what is the next step for this program?

LANE KIFFIN: I mean, we just go to work. There's a million things to do. You know, you've got -- remember, your signing day, they're every day because of the portal. You know, every day you're going to see people go in the portal, sign places. I just had a player in our portal just on the way out tell me he is going to take himself out of the portal and stay.

So it's a different -- it's just different than it used to be where I could tell you, hey, we have this many days until the next signing day because no one really signs on that day anymore. So it's just a new era. I can't really tell you exactly what it is except go try to build the roster the best we can, look at the coaching, the recruiting, the administrative parts of our building, whatever we're doing. Just look at all of it like we have before. Like I said, we went 10-2 and made some changes.

We have to always do -- look at everything to make the program the best. We don't ever say, well, that guy is okay. We don't do that in coaching. We don't do that in playing. So we're always looking in the portal to find better players.

