

# TaxAct Texas Bowl: Oklahoma State vs Texas A&M

Thursday, December 28, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

**Oklahoma State Cowboys**

**Coach Mike Gundy**

**Rashod Owens**

**Nickolas Martin**

Press Conference

Oklahoma State - 31, Texas A&M - 23

COACH GUNDY: That was a good end for our team, our players, this season, and for them to be able to win 10 games and fight through all the adversity and persevere and just keep playing and practicing and such.

They did a really good job the last three weeks preparing for this game. They were great on site over the last week in preparing for essentially what we might see. They stayed focused. Did a really good job.

And I give credit to A&M. They did a nice job. We knew that they had enough talent to be competitive in the game. We were aware of that. It's a little bit of the curveball for us when the quarterback went out and then going to the running quarterback. We hadn't worked on a running quarterback in the last three and half weeks.

But our guys rallied, got a couple of stops in the fourth quarter. They made some good plays on some throwbacks and such.

I was proud of our guys. And every game is a challenge. But they found a way to be competitive and win in the end.

**Q. Huge games for Presley and Owens. Did you know you had an advantage with those guys against the A&M secondary?**

COACH GUNDY: We felt we could get the ball out in the flat with -- they had some different players in and we felt like we'd be able to attack that. They made some adjustments in the end of the third and fourth quarter for



that, which allowed us to get Ollie to run the ball a little more.

It was hard for Ollie to run the ball with the way they were playing, inserting an extra guy in the box pretty much the first half and vacating the flats.

But honestly, Brennan had a great game and so did Rashod. Leon had -- Leon has four catches for 86 and nobody's talking about him. All those guys really had a good game.

**Q. Talk about how Ollie was able to get 118 yards. It was a lot between-the-tackles stuff. It wasn't easy yards, but how he was able to amass those numbers even with what they were doing.**

COACH GUNDY: It wasn't easy based on what they were doing. Their defensive coordinator is, in my opinion, really good. I think he's really smart. They're the number one defense in the SEC this year. Now, they're down some players, but their concepts were the same. Three down, four down, they chose to insert a safety to stop the running game, and it was tough. It was tough to run it through there. That's why we had to get the ball out on the perimeters and let these guys go up and make plays.

We won the battle in the 50/50 throws today. And when that happens at wideout you're generally going to have a good offensive day.

**Q. What does a 10-win season in the grand scheme of things mean?**

COACH GUNDY: Same thing we talked about a couple of weeks ago. There's a lot of talk about the bowls and such, and so we stayed with what our philosophy is going to be. We wanted to have spring practice with about 25 percent of our practice preparing for what we thought we would see from A&M.

And it was difficult, I'll be honest, because you were just kind of reaching for what you were going to see. But I also said it's important that you play to win the game. That will be always important to us.



If we're going to compete, whether it's in a bowl game, no matter who is coaching or what's going on, whether we're out here in the parking lot, we're going to compete and try to find a way to win. I think it's very important for Oklahoma State and I think it's important for college football.

Somebody told me we went eight times now with double-digit wins since I've been the head coach. I'm not sure if that's correct or not. Somebody just said it. But that's a big mark. It's not easy to win double-digit games at any level in particular with college football.

And these guys have stayed the course from day one and they're unselfish. And they practice hard. And it's fun, it's fun to coach them.

**Q. What does it mean to get Gunnar the touchdown tonight and the run that he got?**

COACH GUNDY: Well, they had a lot of success in the score zone. From about the 8-yard line in is our score zone. And I watched a couple days of tape, and we don't know who's playing for them. But they have a number of good players.

So either way, they had done a good job with their girth inside, and we had a concept for him. We had four or five plays where, if they wanted to lighten the box, he would run it; and if they wanted to go heavy and press up on him, we're going to throw it.

We felt we might need that in this game just based on their mass. So we worked that from day one for three weeks. It just worked out in this game that we only got inside the 8 one time -- he ran it in from the 9, whatever it was.

The other scores we had were way out or from the 1 yard line, when we wanted to go turbo and plunge it in with Ollie.

But we had a package for him because we thought we might need the extra body with using Ollie as a blocker or whoever is at running back to give us that number to run the ball in.

**Q. What would it mean to have Alan Bowman back next year with the way he changed this season and the way he played tonight?**

COACH GUNDY: We've got a number of guys that are coming back, a large percentage of guys. Now, we still have some that have waivers to go through. So we're not sure where those are at. But the large majority of the

players that are on this team that had the chance to come back have said they want to come back.

I think they like the chemistry of the team. They like competing with each other against whoever we're playing. And they feel like that we can make a really good run next year.

And so the core leadership that we have can lead us through the winter. So my message to them -- and I don't get to talk to them now because everybody's scattered -- but when we get back in the middle of January it will be if they stay humble and stay unselfish and continue to work then they have a chance to be a really good team. And I think we have enough returning leaders to get that accomplished.

**Q. There's a lot of teams this time of year like A&M that's undergoing a lot of roster changes, coaching changes, instability. Where do you feel like you guys are now even compared to this time last year with the stability that you've had, and like you said, a lot of guys wanting to come back next year?**

COACH GUNDY: First off, we all know this, that there's instability and volatility in college football. It's day to day. And we as a coaching staff, and selfishly, myself, just like I said, we like our core leadership and the values that these guys are bringing to the younger guys.

So we have good young guys that are going to be developed. And then we have -- we might have 18 or 19 returning starters -- I don't know, I'm just throwing that number out. So we're a stable organization. And these guys have to decide what they want to do.

Now, selfishly, as a coach, you want everybody to stay the course and be back. But sometimes players have something that could be better for them and their future. And coaches have to respect that.

We had some guys leave last year, and then we tried to replace guys that left with the same maturity and positions that guys that went out. And a number of those guys made a lot of plays for us this year. And so that's the way we're handle it.

But we have made adjustments as coaches. I have made adjustments as a head coach in trying to stay ahead of the volatility of college football. And the one thing that we can do as coaches is take care of our players, be up front and honest with them and continue with discipline structure and accountability and loyalty. And then they make the decision on what they want to do. They play the games. We don't play the games.

**Q. You get the ball back. They cut it to one-score game with five minutes left. And Alan had thrown a couple of picks in the second half, and yet they moved the ball, run the clock. You went back to the air. What was behind that decision?**

COACH GUNDY: They're crashing the gaps. They're coming inside. And they had one and a half extra people in the box. And so it's a math -- football is math. It's a numbers game -- we have to trust we can throw and catch.

And there were times last year and early this year that we just tried to force it in there and beat our heads against the wall, and it didn't work out for us.

So we looked at it as an offensive staff and said if they're going to do that -- there's a difference between one extra guy and trying to run away from him, but when there's a man and a half and even two extra guys, you have to throw the ball, because we knew we needed three first downs, because they had all their timeouts. We needed three first downs.

So my conversation with them is we have to play football and try to use the clock and force them to use their timeouts. And then when there was four minutes left, I told the defense, I said, if for some reason we have to punt and they get the ball back, we're ahead by eight points. So we need to be in an all-blitz mode and we need to roll the dice.

And if they score, they score, they gotta go for two just to tie; we're still going to go to overtime anyway. So we need to force their hand defensively and attack them to see if they can make a play in an all-out blitz mode and set them behind the chains, because at that time they were going to have maybe one timeout after we got that first down.

So that was our plan from about that 3:40 mark moving forward. Your original question, why did we do it? We felt like we have to trust our guys. We have to throw and catch.

**Q. You talked about 50/50 balls earlier. Big piece of that was Rashod. Talk about what he meant, not just tonight, but since you moved him into the starting lineup and you had to --**

COACH GUNDY: I've said this over the last nine or 10 games is we've had a few guys on our team that started out down in the depth chart and they worked their way up. And then they took over when we needed them and they played at a really, really high level.

And he's one of them. And continued to make plays. You

guys have seen him make plays over the last two months of the season. And we trust him.

And he and Leon did a great job of going up and getting 50/50 balls in this game. And if you're going to overload the box, you're going to insert safeties, then we have to get the ball and use the width of the field.

And if they're going to press us you can't use the width of the field; you have to get the ball over their head. It's real simple, or you'll be running into an extra man and a half and usually can mean a long night. They can still play good up front and play good defense with the players that they have.

So they made plays, and that's what has to happen in games like this. You have to make plays, find a way to move the ball when they're pressuring the box.

**Q. Just to clarify, with Alan, is his waiver situation still up in the air? You guys don't know?**

COACH GUNDY: I haven't heard anything. We talked about this. There's -- the timeline with him is we don't know much. So it could be three days. It could be three weeks. I mean, I couldn't imagine it would be more than three weeks because you have all the other things going on with college football that are now the timelines, but we don't know a lot about what's going on.

**Q. You like Presley throwing the pass or (inaudible) Ollie?**

COACH GUNDY: He at least threw to our guy. But you know what's interesting with that, which nothing surprises me with Brennan anymore, and we talked about this, he did a really nice job of run, run, run, and then go late, which worked.

And Brennan started getting pushed sideways and had a little pressure in his face, and he had to throw the ball, I think I counted 42 yards in the air. That's hard to do when you're 5-foot whatever he is. He can run full speed under this table and not bump his head. For him to throw the ball like that was impressive. And then he went up and made a catch.

How many tackles, seven more plus 130 what?

**Q. I think he had 140.**

COACH GUNDY: Now he has how many?

**Q. 140 on the year.**

COACH GUNDY: Unbelievable, 140 tackles, how about that? We didn't think anybody would ever touch Rodriguez's 120, whatever it was. Pretty amazing.

**Q. Rashod, could you ever imagine, going back to when you didn't get to play much, that you walk in, the season you had 10 catches, 100-whatever yards and that trophy?**

RASHOD OWENS: No, not really, but every day my parents and my teammates and coaches always telling me to be patient. That's what I did. I stayed patient, trusted the process. And I'm blessed and glad to be in that position.

**Q. What does Brennan's ball look like compared to a quarterback throwing it?**

RASHOD OWENS: It was a bad ball, but he put it out there for me -- we talked about it on the sideline, too, before that drive happened. I told him I was like if it's one-on-one just give me a shot, just give me a chance and I'll go make a play for you. If it's double coverage, obviously dirty or run it, whatever, one-on-one, just throw it up there and I'll make it happen.

**Q. You guys came in with the same recruiting class. For him to have that kind of night, for you to have that kind of night, what was it like?**

RASHOD OWENS: It was just a blessing. We worked for this since our freshman year. We dreamed of these moments, and we're going to celebrate on it. And the offseason is going to be time to work again, and it's another year. We're returning and everything. We've got to go back and get that ring for sure. That's the big thing on our mind.

**Q. Nick, Mike said this before you got in here, but said you guys didn't really practice much against a running quarterback, (indiscernible). What was the challenge when suddenly there's a quarterback out there you've probably not watched a moment of tape on him?**

NICKOLAS MARTIN: The challenge was just game planning them being that so much has changed with their offense. But we did play a lot of running quarterbacks, a lot of scrambling quarterbacks this season. So I think that ultimately put us in the position to make plays against him.

**Q. How did you just feel overall? Obviously you guys didn't know what to expect out of them with so many changes. I'm sure watching film was tough to make heads or tails who you might see. How do you just assess what you guys were able to do against a team**

**that you were just probably having to guess tendencies on?**

NICKOLAS MARTIN: You look at the games that they were running that offense and you go from there. Ultimately you've got to take into consideration their whole season, what they did. And you make a game plan and you go from there.

It's all about repetition at that point, figuring it out, getting it down, getting it off film and going from there. The coaches made great game plans put us in great positions to make plays.

**Q. Nick, could you put your season in perspective. Mike talked about total tackles at 140. Could you explain what you accomplished?**

NICKOLAS MARTIN: I think it's a good testament of how good God is in how he rewards hard work. And I think that was a testament of this whole season for all of us. And getting the 10 wins and being in a great bowl like this and a great location like this.

It seems surreal, but it definitely wasn't expected. Definitely was not -- wasn't expected. My bad. It's been a long day.

**Q. Both you guys talk about what Mike was talking about there, the fact that you guys do look like you're going to have so many starters back, so many veterans back. What's the (indiscernible) for, in your all's minds, as you look ahead in 2024?**

RASHOD OWENS: You know, it's a great thing that a lot of guys want to come back, and it just shows that a lot of guys have trust in each other and love and emotional support for each other and everything. And having that, it shows that a lot of guys are determined to go back to that Big 12 Championship and actually get the ring. It kind of stunned us a little bit, and we took that game out here on this field today.

It's just a real good thing that a lot of guys have that same mindset of they want to finish strong, they want to get to that college playoff experience sometime and hopefully next year is that year.

**Q. Rashod, what can you say about the kind of impact, influence that Alan's had on this offense, on you just throughout this season?**

RASHOD OWENS: He had a huge impact. He played a big role, especially with a lot of changes happening throughout the season and everything. But he always

stayed positive no matter the course. He always kept our team together and everything and made sure that we always had our head straight and knew how to keep moving forward even though we might be moving backwards or a certain way that we're trying to move.

He always stayed positive and tried to help us stay positive in our own minds and stay confident in every way and keep our egos high.

**Q. No one has had 140 tackles at OSU since the '80s. Is it more physical or more mental just continuing to answer the bell like that?**

NICKOLAS MARTIN: I think it's both. The physical part can be tough because playing this many games in the season can take a toll on your body but that's when the mental part comes in, how bad do you want it. That's all of us. We all want it.

**Q. I think this is the first time we've heard from you guys since Ollie made his announcement on Christmas Eve. What did you all think when -- I don't know how you all found out he was coming back. What did you all think when you heard that news? Nick, you're smiling.**

NICKOLAS MARTIN: Because I was laughing at the video because it was funny. I mean, we all talk. It's just part of it. But in seeing him do that, it was a testament of his personality and how fun he is. It was a super cool video.

**Q. You guys knew well before the video came out?**

RASHOD OWENS: Yes.

**Q. Rashod, what was it like when you heard that news?**

RASHOD OWENS: Speak of the devil. Like Nick said, it was funny to see that. It shows his personality who he is. And great player to be around. He always bring the energy and bring the juice all around and sometimes he may get a little mad but he still play the game hard every play. But like he said, we've been -- we knew it was going to happen, he was going to come back and everything. He just have to put it out there. And we talk about you.

Commitment.

OLLIE GORDON: Excuse me. I can't leave my guys. Rashod Owens, that guy, Nick Martin, that guy, can't leave them.

RASHOD OWENS: Ollie Gordon, that guy. That guy --

"we."

NICKOLAS MARTIN: (Laughter) yes.

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