

# Kinder's Texas Bowl: LSU vs Baylor

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

**LSU Tigers**

**Brian Kelly**

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 44, Baylor - 31

**BRIAN KELLY:** That's why I wanted the ball in Josh Williams' hand on that goal line play. Nobody's been more trustworthy and accountable, there every day for us. That kind of epitomized what he has been about for us, and that kind of put the game away for us late.

It was a little bit of everything today. There were some really good things on special teams and then some not so good things. It's been really fun to coach this team.

I know cynics would say it was disappointing. It wasn't disappointing. It was a team that was less than perfect because of inexperience, a team that gained experience. We still played with six true freshmen and a redshirt freshmen most of the time on defense, and they kept battling.

So to win nine games and to win three in a row at the end, I'm just happy for our football team. Again, the nine guys that came back and finished what they started.

Look, I'm 100 percent behind the guys that didn't play for whatever the reasons are. They're valid. But the nine that were here, I want to be able to trumpet them as well because finishing what you start is important as well. Happy with the victory.

**Q. Was it just me or was that a strange, weird game?**

**BRIAN KELLY:** I just said that there were -- you're talking about a bowl game where a lot of different things can happen because of the preparation and the layoff. You had special teams gaffes, and then you had some spectacular plays on special teams. You had some great one-on-one matchups -- I mean, there were some spectacular catches by Baylor and by LSU.

You saw a true freshman in Trey'Dez Green, who in many ways, how do you put it in perspective that he made you forget about Mason Taylor, who is an incredible player, because of the plays he made on fourth down and third down.

We didn't give up a sack today without a first round draft pick, a first day draft pick, a starting three-year starter. That's pretty incredible.

So, yeah, there were some bizarre things, but the big picture is pretty bright in terms of what happened today.

**Q. When you're on the sideline for a game like that, do you sometimes just like, okay, that's the way it's going to be today, go with it?**

**BRIAN KELLY:** Yeah, we kind of went with the flow, but that's what this group has been about all year. When they're in a valley, they know they're going to come out of it. So if a bad play happens, they look to come back. I think there were several of those occasions today, and they just kept fighting.

**Q. Sort of offense as a whole, like you said, the offensive line stepping up, Trey'Dez and several others, Chris Hilton. Why do you think they were able to be so successful today despite having to fill in pieces in a short period of time?**

**BRIAN KELLY:** I think Tyree Adams was really solid at left tackle, Miles Frazier at the right tackle, our edges were really good. D.J. at center has been there all year. So we really had some good pieces there. I think we were able to do a great job of getting the ball down the field. Once we were able to hit some big plays down the field, it opened up a lot of things.

I'll say it again, I think the presence of Trey'Dez Green at the tight end positions gave Garrett Nussmeier the opportunity to convert third and fourth down situations, which he's had all year with Mason Taylor. That was really the biggest thing for us is, when he had that guy available for him, and we saw that he did again. Just the deflection that he got that came up short on fourth down shows you

the kind of athletic ability he has.

So you really had some young players step up in those situations, which is what we really thought was going to happen, but you never know until they go out and play.

**Q. Two parts here. You talked about a little bit Trey'Dez stepping in for Mason Taylor. Those are huge shoes to fill, but he kind of did it seamlessly. How was he able to be as good as he was today? Also, Chris Hilton, what did you see from him?**

BRIAN KELLY: Trey'Dez is an incredible competitor. The work he put in in the bowl prep was second to none. His mindset, his want to go in there and mix it up and run block.

As you saw, we didn't treat him like a wide receiver. We treated him like an attached tight end. He lined up in the core. He lined up in the slot. I said this to you folks, we weren't going to treat him differently. We were going to treat him like it was Mason running that position.

He had to get sandpapered a little bit in practice. He went home a couple of times, and I'm not sure he made it past 6:30, 7:00 at night. He was sore. But that was just what his commitment was and pretty proud of him.

Chris has been waiting for these opportunities. He got his chance and was able to do the things that he's capable of doing. I think the other thing was the run after the catch. When he ran the inside stop route and we saw a burst from him, that was electric. So big things for him to come.

**Q. Kind of a two-parter. One, is there any update on Whit Weeks and the initial update. Second part of that, can you speak of the response from your team to come off the sideline? What that shows and how much they care about him and what it means?**

BRIAN KELLY: The early indication is a dislocation of the ankle, probably will have surgery here quickly. I don't want to give an exact timeline, but we should have him ready to go sometime around spring ball.

Obviously we feel for him, and certainly he's a tough kid that will handle this the right way. We'll act quickly on it. His family was with him. Again, I think that our team responded appropriately because he's such an important part of what we do.

**Q. Have you seen that before, just the whole team come off the sideline to greet a player like that before they carted him off?**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think there's been times where the heartbeat of your team, and in particular the defense -- I don't know that they knew the nature of the injury. So I think that they were very guarded about what it might have been.

I actually told the team before we went back out what the nature of the injury was just so we didn't have any lingering effects going into the second half so that they could play and get back to what was most important, and that was finishing off the game.

**Q. I know obviously the roster is going to go through a number of changes before you guys play another football game, but what did tonight's --**

BRIAN KELLY: I hope not.

**Q. What did tonight's game and the performance from some of the guys, like what did it show the staff, what do you feel like you have that maybe you didn't feel like you had before tonight?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think we've already talked about some of them. We talked about Trey'Dez Green, how good you feel about that with a veteran player also coming in from the portal at that position. You feel really good there, right?

Some of the guys that got pressed into starting roles, Tyree Adams at the left tackle position, that really bolsters what you're thinking about from the offensive perspective.

Defensively playing all those freshmen, whether it was Tylen Singleton or Dashawn Spears or Javien Toviano. P.J. played a lot at the core position when Zy didn't play in the third or fourth quarter. So there's just so many guys now that have experience playing, and now add some additions that have veteran experience. That's really why we wanted to wait and give these guys some experience and now add them to the mix.

Now you have a healthy roster. You have depth on your football team going into the SEC.

**Q. Coach, your defense has kind of been the don't break. You gave up a lot of yards, over 500, but when it mattered the most, they stepped up. They were 1 of 6, I think, on fourth down conversions, and two of those came in the red zone. Just talk a little bit about their ability to be able to step up and get those turnovers on downs when you needed them the most.**

BRIAN KELLY: I just think from a defensive perspective, when we needed a play to be made, we forced Baylor into making a play other than a one-on-one inside slot fade or a

one-on-one 50-50 ball.

Look, they played very well. Their offense is very difficult to defend because they have a very accurate quarterback and they do a great job of pushing the ball outside.

I thought when we did a really good job late in the game in the fourth quarter of eliminating the run game, they were up against it because the passing game then became one where we could play a lot more quarter coverage and get off playing man coverage. That made it hard. When the field began to shrink, our safeties could be flat foot and really squeeze those routes down.

That kind of was the difference with that bend but don't break. It was hard for them to put the ball into the end zone because of that.

**Q. Just kind of zooming out a little bit, you've done some great things in the transfer portal, a lot of young guys played today because of the opt-outs and opportunities and whatnot. What does a win like this in a bowl game do for you as you continue to build for next year and what you guys hope, I suppose, winning a championship?**

BRIAN KELLY: We talked about that today. Our captains reflected that. It was Greg Penn and Josh Williams. They were two of the captains that reflect the leadership in 2024. Then Garrett Nussmeier and Whit Weeks were two of the captains.

So it was about finishing '24 and starting '25. So today really was about the first game of '25, and what we were talking about was but we want to lean on our veterans to help us get there. What did it mean? It means that we got off to a good start in '25.

As you know, we haven't gotten off to a very good start the past three years, so I wanted our guys to feel like this is the start we wanted. Let's build on this start in '25.

**Q. There were a few special teams issues today. Was that more just new guys filling different roles, or was it things that are easily fixable in the future as well?**

BRIAN KELLY: Are you talking about the kickoff return for a touchdown?

**Q. Sure.**

BRIAN KELLY: No, we had a poor snap on a field goal that rolled back, which we have a veteran guy and he feels terrible about it. It was just a bad snap in that situation.

But we had a breakdown on the right side where they were able to penetrate the C-gap between our right guard and right tackle. We had two new guys in there, and they didn't execute at the highest level. The snap needs to be better, and he knows that. That was an issue.

Clearly they had the punt return for a touchdown, but there was a hold on it. There was a personal foul on the punter. So that's a wash from my perspective.

I thought the thing that clearly we have to be better at punting the football. That has been an issue. We addressed it in the portal. There will be competition there. But overall, we were electric in the kickoff return game and the punt return game. We have to be better.

Damian Ramos has been outstanding all year, and I certainly don't put that one on him in terms of the block.

**Q. It might be a while before we talk to you. You said obviously there's a little bit of work --**

BRIAN KELLY: I know. I'll send you guys cards.

**Q. Thank you. With that in mind, obviously there's still, like you said, a little bit more that you want to do in the transfer portal, but if you were to go through your checklist here coming up, is there any staff evaluations that you feel you need to make? Hiring a tight ends coach, where are you with that as you enter the offseason?**

BRIAN KELLY: At the end of the season, we're doing what did we do well as a staff? What do we need to do better? And certainly what did we learn?

We have to do some things better, there's no question. That's part of this process every year. Whether you're a football program or whether you're a Fortune 500 company, you're going to evaluate everything within your program: How we travel, how we recruit, how we coach, how we develop our players. All of those things over the next four to six weeks will be evaluated.

Look, this is a championship program. This is about winning championships, and we fell short of that. So we have to evaluate all of those things. It starts with me and how I led, and it goes through and permeates the entire program.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports