

Kinder's Texas Bowl: LSU vs Baylor

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

Baylor Bears

Coach Dave Aranda

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 44, Baylor - 31

DAVE ARANDA: A lot of emotion with this one. So appreciative and thankful for all of our seniors. I can't put it into words, just the growth we've seen in them, all of the adversity that they felt.

I wish we could send them off with a win. But there are boys that are going to leave us that are leaving a legacy of fighting and of not accepting stuff and not being defined by people and outside things. And just so proud.

As parents, you want your kids to stand up for themselves and be self-reliant. That's what we're able to do with this senior group throughout just all the winning and the losing and some of us --

I think of this game as just way too many mistakes. It's so unfortunate. There hasn't been a game like this in a while. We played complementary football. It's just not that -- I think you take away just one of those mistakes that we had and then we're going to go win a game at the end of the game.

I think that puts it in perspective, just the fight that the guys have and the care factor they have is just -- I told them at the end, we've been able to -- this senior group has scrapped and fought and clawed to get us from really no level to a certain type of level. This was an opportunity to get to another level. And so I think the guys that are returning, I think, are in an opportunity where they can do that for us.

I think the lesson to that is that whatever is on the outside, whether it's a positive, it's a negative or it's the hype or it's just whatever, it is has nothing to do with the actual outcome of the game. And I think that's probably a lesson learned for our team.

Q. LSU scored 34 in the first half. You've mentioned some of the mistakes. I know you'll want to go back and look at the film, but could you pinpoint what some of the breakdowns were? They were running and had receivers running free?

DAVE ARANDA: I don't know if there was -- I thought there was kind of one-on-one where we're getting deep, I think it's more than that. The stats is what it was.

I think there was one where there was a guy running free and we were in, it was a nub, it's tight trips, and we were in a two-roll coverage and we had a call, we were going to pass off to the tight end and the number two receiver because they're in that formation where they only run one route. And the sidelines calling it and I think even the guy on the field was calling it, but they didn't get it to the other guy that would pass it off. There was a guy running free on that.

That was really frustrating but outside of that, I thought they were exploiting our corners on -- especially to the field. So I think in the early first half we were playing kind of base stuff, kind of stuff that fits the schematics, not stuff that protects people.

And the second half, we played stuff that protects people and so then you've got more runs because of the lighter boxes and you've got more screens and we have to tackle better on those screens. I think this was a lot of the people we were protecting in the first place.

So I think there's a whole area there that for us to kind of break -- to set the level we have to get to, we have to (inaudible) and really what we did the whole season long. So this was reflective of our season.

Q. Did the special teams breakdowns surprise you?

DAVE ARANDA: It did. I think going into it we knew that the most dangerous returners, most dangerous returners that we played all year long, really since (inaudible), the most dangerous returners, no secret, we struggled throughout the year even in conditions and all the other things we've been able to kick it in the end zone, and we

were not able to do that in this game, for whatever reason.

And so we had to resort to kind of pump up kicks and everything else to try to be able to negate that. And then I thought at the very end Micah Gifford is a hell of a player and he's immensely talented and his care factor was so incredible. He's been really one of the MVPs for us on special teams this year. And I think just his care factor and just how much he loves Baylor and how much he gives to football and it's just so, moving from offense to defense because of his caliber (indiscernible).

And I think it's still going to take him a while to get over it. (Inaudible) so it's stuff we hadn't done getting close to making those types of mistakes. Way frustrating today on this stage.

Q. Was there any thought in the third quarter there was two fourth down plays that didn't succeed, the Ashtyn touchdown that was called back and the bad snap, was there any thought between you and Spav to kick field goals in those moments?

DAVE ARANDA: No, we were down so much and we were moving the ball so well that coming like at the end, where it's like, hey, we've got to score and then we've got to get an onside kick and then a Hail Mary.

All that stuff has kind of worked out in terms of time and in terms of, hey, there could be some crazy stuff happening but crazy stuff doesn't happen. We need touchdowns, not field goals.

So we were never able, if you take away -- if you have the pick-6 and you have the return. That margin of error we were never able to get on the other side of it. We were always kind of fighting that number. That's why we need touchdowns.

Q. Every senior class leaves some sort of legacy. What do you believe the legacy of this senior class will be?

DAVE ARANDA: Fighting. I think that there's guys that had chances to leave and didn't leave. I think there's guys that had chances to be defined and fought to not be defined.

I think there's guys that they grew up a lot, matured a lot, and let us in and let us affect their lives in a positive way. So I just think that -- yeah, it's crazy. All of the emotions and all of the -- I wish all of it was like this for me, for us probably (inaudible) those guys were a part of all of that. So to come out better than when we found them is the goal.

Q. You accomplished a lot this season. Now looking into next season, what are you most looking forward to about next year with the Baylor Bears team?

DAVE ARANDA: I think this was an opportunity. Like I mentioned, we're on -- the success we had, that winning streak, it was an opportunity to get some positivity around us and some feel-good around us.

And this game was an opportunity to kind of take all that and get to a whole other level. And I don't think the moment was too big for us.

And so I think the opportunity in this group coming back is to focus their efforts and kind of harden their skin. And so praise, criticism, it doesn't mean anything, so that we can be more efficient in what we do so we get to these moments and burst through that ceiling.

Q. You guys did not convert a third down on the ground. Are some of those, when you're running Dawson on third-and-10 or third-and-six or whatever, is that predicated on the fact that you're planning on going for it on fourth?

DAVE ARANDA: Yeah, so I think when they knew we were throwing it, which the score, the way it was, the majority of the game that way, but pass rushers are in, they're playing two-man, the deck is stacked that way and you can try to loosen them up by, hey, it looks like it's a pass and it's a run. And now maybe that rusher is a little bit slow getting off.

Now maybe the coverage isn't as tight because they can't turn their backs and run with the guy. And so there's that. So I think that was kind of -- then we were getting five, six yards, we'd like to get more. We were never able to do that today.

Q. How about losing Bryson? Did that compromise your run game?

DAVE ARANDA: Yeah, he's a huge part. Head injury early and just a huge part of our offense, and I think there was accounting that comes with him and I think guys feed off of him when he's playing his style, it becomes our style. I think Dawson, I thought, did a good job, and his style is different. There's such a patience and then kind of a burst or a slip and slide here and there. And so I think there's a change of pace initially. Guys were hitting hard and coming downhill like they would with Bryson. But with Dawson, he's cutting back, and slipping out the back door, the whole thing. There's some of that. It's nice to have the depth we have in that room.

Q. What was the Baylor crowd like and how much did you all feed off of that?

DAVE ARANDA: All throughout the lead up to this, we had heard there was going to be a great turnout. And when the buses parked and we were walking through, the people at the bowl game, you've got so many more people than LSU. Just on the field to hear it, see it, so appreciative, and I wish we could have got the win. It was so cool to see that.

And I talked to the seniors about it. Like, they're a big part of that, and the fight that they had to have to come and show out.

Q. Plenty of linebackers that became leaders over the Baylor history. Matt Jones being one of them. What did he mean to this program as he wraps up that chapter of his life and who do you think could potentially take the mantle from him the next season?

DAVE ARANDA: I'm going to miss Matt. Matt, the growing up that he did and the man he's become, as a parent, as a teammate, as a mentor, right, all of that, it's just so cool. As a player, I thought Matt went off instinct and off of what feels like for him to do and his football IQ is off the chart and that's a credit to him.

And I think his football IQ is out the roof, and that's a credit to him to say, man, this is important and it's not where I need to be with this. And I think that's putting him in a position where it will enable him to play football somewhere. I'm excited for him. And I think Keegan right now is pissed off somewhere.

And we're going to try to use that to motivate some other people to take the step forward, keep going this year.

Q. Sawyer's performance at quarterback.

DAVE ARANDA: I thought he battled. I thought that early on in the game, whether it's zero blips or drop eight, I think he could see it. I wasn't surprised by a lot. I thought he was able to put balls where they need to be. A lot of things were contested and I thought the ball placement was good. I thought he was patient. Under pressure he stepped up in the pocket and wasn't deterred by the pressures. But he took some hits and he got back up and he rallied the troops. I think the best for him is yet to come. I talked to him at the end here, hey, dude you've had an offseason last year that ain't going to be like this one.

You're a different guy and this is a different offseason you're the face of the team and he knows that. You wouldn't want anything different for the group. I'm excited

what can come of this outcome. So for sure I'm happy for him.

Q. What does the secondary group as a whole need to do to improve going into next year I know you've got people coming in but what can they do to get better?

DAVE ARANDA: I think it's gotta start with attention to detail. I think it has to start with a stronger care factor. I think it's got to start with finding examples in practice that can lead to games. I think for me I have to do a better job of leading. I have to do a better job of demanding more. I think that's an area that's first and foremost in my mind of there's a bunch of things, we're losing guys in this position group and that position group and this other position group, and we're trying to address them as we speak.

But in my mind that's the group right there that's got to take the biggest step forward. You look at the O line. You look at our receivers. You look at our quarterback play, all of it has been under adversity at some point in this year and we're able to turn the corner. We just weren't able to do it with this particular group. So need more attention to this game.

Q. When does the offseason begin for you all and what are the first steps in that process?

DAVE ARANDA: So we're having -- after today we're having meetings with our team. We did not have a bunch of NIL meetings prior to -- we had a few, select few prior to this game, really want to focus on the game, wanted to win this game. So now that the game's over with, start meeting with our players, there's contracts and all of these things that have to get worked out. That's starting I think tomorrow morning, the next couple of days that's all it's going to be. And so we'll be working on that. We've got a few more transfer portal visits to work through and fully define once everything opens up and we can come on back and visit there in Waco and then once that team is solidified in terms of our roster, then it's about getting back in the winning thought. This year it's football, football, football there's good and bad that came with that. I think we can get better in certain areas. The focus is so heavy on football, and I plan on doing that. But we've got to start with football from the beginning.

Like I said, I think we're at a level right now, we want to break through, I think everybody wants to break through get to another level. So we'll focus more on that.

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