

Kinder's Texas Bowl: Houston vs LSU

Sunday, December 28, 2025

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

Houston Cougars

Coach Willie Fritz

Postgame Press Conference



Houston - 38, LSU - 35

WILLIE FRITZ: We'll take the W. Didn't start very good. Had the big kick return at the beginning of the game. The kid did a super job. We did a bad job of leverage on the play.

There was a lot of important plays during the game. I thought that drive during the first half was really, really important for us, and I thought Slade Nagel did an outstanding job play calling tonight. He's one step than ahead of them most of the game and really, really did a good job calling.

Defensively, we played well at times and at times we gave up a couple of big plays. But overall, I thought for a game where we hadn't practiced for a while, we tackled well.

You look at the score, 35, shoot, we gave up two of those touchdowns basically in the kicking game.

So I'm just proud of the kids and the win. I just got done telling them in the locker room, we put together a good group of young men. I've had very, very, very few issues or problems at all. I'm very demanding on these guys, and they appreciate that, and they do things the way you're supposed to do them.

I'm going to miss those seniors. They really did a lot for this program.

Q. Coming into the game, you mentioned coming into the game you mentioned about the goal of the 10 wins and what that could do for -- what can that do now for moving forward to what you accomplished this year with the tournament?

WILLIE FRITZ: It's big. I know that Houston has had some 10-win seasons in the past. But I look at it, 1990

was the last time Houston had 10 wins in a Power 4 conference. I played in some of those other leagues that Houston was playing at that time. And those were great teams that U of H had.

To do it every single week in the Big 12 is difficult. And then to play an SEC opponent is in this bowl game, every week you've got to be ready to play. There's no gimmies in the Big 12. It's really good from top to bottom.

I wish Texas Tech luck for their game here in a few days for our conference. But, yeah, 10 wins is big. Not a whole lot of teams in the country who have got 10 wins.

Q. You have 10 wins, first 10-win coach for you here in Houston. You beat an SEC team to reach that mark. Houston hadn't beat an SEC team since 1999. What does that say about the program that you're building and the Cougar background? And on top of that, in the NIL era, how are you able to use what you're building to influence players staying and also the transfer portal?

WILLIE FRITZ: I'm sure we'll have a lot of discussions here in the next few days, weeks, whatever the case may be. But the thing that I'm proud of, with our culture, is we didn't have anybody opt out. Everybody played in the ball game. I'm sure there were people in their ear telling them maybe they shouldn't play.

Tanner, I think Tanner is going to be a draft pick, second-day draft pick, should be. Great tight end. Great player. He's only going to get better. His career progresses.

He played, a bunch of those guys, Latrell McCutchin. And I'm proud they did it for this school and they did it for each other. That's something that we'll brag about that all of our guys played. We like playing football here.

Q. What's it mean getting this win right here in the heart of Houston in front of your fans?

WILLIE FRITZ: I don't know how many fans we had out there. But I thought they were loud throughout the ball



game. And happy about them turning out. And hopefully this will help us with some season tickets for next year. Get them going, Eddie? Got our AD in the back.

But I'm glad, I love the city of Houston. It's a big reason why I came here. I just enjoy the city of Houston. Always have. We were going to retire here. Lucky enough to get the job and going to be here for a while.

Q. Great way to end the season, obviously. But as you turn the page on this season, what does it mean to you to be able to send your seniors out on a big win? And on top of that, if you can name this chapter of your coaching career as this season ends, what would you call it?

WILLIE FRITZ: I don't know. One of the things -- when I take over a program, I don't know why, my wife always gives me the business on this, but I want to take over a program but maybe didn't have a whole lot of success. And then when I retire here in 20 years, I want it to be a heck of a lot better when I pass it off to the next person. That's always been my goal every place I've been.

We've got so many things that we're fortunate to have here at the University of Houston. We've got the best location in the world for football players. No ifs, ands, buts or maybes about that.

And then we're close to a lot of great areas to also recruit -- drivable distances. I'm a big fact guy. We've got a great school academically. We really do. One of the top academic schools, public schools in the country. I believe we're third in the state of Texas. 281 great majors.

I'm proud that we were able to sell that as well. And we play in a great league. It's a very good conference. Really is. I think we should have had two teams make it. Our goal is for one of us to be one of those teams.

Q. Conner rises to the occasion. That he can play his best in a game like that, what did you see from him and how he's locked in?

WILLIE FRITZ: We're going to have to go back and look at it, but I don't know if he made a mistake tonight. I mean, he was spot on in everything that he's doing, throwing the ball, running the ball. Now we're going to nitpick and we'll find some stuff, but I thought he played really, really well.

When he ran it, there's a lot of decisions he's making back there as to whether or not we're handing the ball or throwing the ball in the perimeter. And then we've got progression reads we're doing based on are they in man or zone, whatever the case may be.

But he's a really smart football player. He's very competitive. I just thought that was a -- we had zero turnovers. I don't know if we were close to one. So he was very deserving of the MVP, without question.

Q. You mentioned the drive at the end of the first half. Taking over there at 1:27, was the plan to be aggressive?

WILLIE FRITZ: Yeah, we had three timeouts left. We wanted to see if we could get some stuff going, and we did. It worked out. I thought it was a great drive, and made smart decisions all the way down the field. Got out of bounds when we needed to get out of bounds.

Then you'll have to ask Conner about the route, with him and Tanner on the touchdown. But really, really good drive. It's big.

Q. How did you guys adjust in the special teams, kickoff return coverage after the first --

WILLIE FRITZ: We got chicken, so we started doing all sorts of squibs and pooches and all sorts of stuff like that. You know so we changed it up. That guy's dangerous.

And the first kickoff we didn't do a good job of leverage where you have two guys in a gap and he hit it vertical. And then our contained player stuck his nose inside along with our safety to that side and.

Hey, that guy's fast. He outran us. We started doing some other things. We gave up some field position. We're fortunate it didn't hurt us any more than it could have.

Q. After the first two touchdowns, LSU, what were the shifts that you had to make in defense physically and within the (indiscernible)?

WILLIE FRITZ: We had the two touchdowns. You know, one was a kickoff return, so it had nothing to do with the defense. And the second one, you know, we had that poor punt and then they started off with great field position. I think we had a third-and-about-17. And we had a, you know, a brain fart and didn't cover 14 on an over route, and that got him down there to score the touchdown, or else we would have been off the field then.

And I thought Coach Armstrong made some great adjustments. Tackled okay, but sometimes we really put the defense in some bad field position because of the kicking game.

Q. Going back to just kind of an overview, when you



win a game like this and you win 10 games and you're competitive in the Big 12, in this era with NIL and rev share, do these seasons carry a little bit more weight just because people out there may be wanting to come here or guys may be deciding, hey, we may leave, it gives them something to think about what this program is?

WILLIE FRITZ: I think it's going to be a lot easier to recruit with 10 wins than four. You know, with four, we did a pretty good job of getting the right dudes in here. We just gotta be -- we spend a lot of time evaluating talent, gathering information on prospects, making sure we have the right guys come in here. We did that last year. We'll need to do it this year again. We've just got to be right.

We talk all the time that being a perfectionist is our goal but excellence will be tolerated. We gotta get the right guys. We make some mistakes on evaluating, and those kind of things, it's hard to recover where we're at right now. But we'll do another great job in that area.

Our personnel department, I thought, did a super job of evaluating the talent and also gathering information and having guys that fit in with our program.

I'm very demanding. I have expectations for how these guys should act on the field, off the field and in the classroom. They've really done a great job all year.

Q. Looked like Tanner really left it out on the field tonight after that fourth-down grab especially. What's it been like coaching someone with that kind of mindset this year?

WILLIE FRITZ: I think he's a high draft pick, I really do. They don't ask my opinion on anything, which is fine, but I've had some great tight ends and Delaney Walker was a great tight end for me. And Tanner, boy, he's something else. I say this all the time. He's really unique. He's got a great catch radius, reach, length, he sticks his hands away from his body and he utilizes it. He does it time after time, after time, after time. And he's getting better and better and better at blocking. So, I don't know, a high draft pick. I'll never have one, I guess. I don't know.

Q. What are your thoughts on Traville rising to the occasion there in that third quarter and getting that go ahead catch?

WILLIE FRITZ: Traville Frederick, he works so hard, and I've known the kid forever. He was committed to us at my previous school. His aunt worked for me for a long period of time. It's good to see him have that success. He deserves it. Works hard every single day.

Q. What impact does the incoming class taking part in the festivities on the field have on setting the standard?

WILLIE FRITZ: That's a good question. I thought it was huge. I told those guys after the game, they're 1-0. They think it's all easy, I guess.

But it was neat to work those guys out all week. We did a lot of competitive drills with them, and I think this is only going to get them more entrenched in our culture.

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