

Pop-Tarts Bowl: BYU Cougars vs Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

Wednesday, December 24, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

Blake Gideon

Rodney Shelley

Press Conference

BLAKE GIDEON: Merry Christmas, everyone. Thank you, first of all, for taking time away from your families, like we all are, to come do this.

What an honor to be here a great bowl. FCS has put on a wonderful event for our guys. I won't compare our experience to any other experience, but I'll say the reviews have come back pretty good from Rodney here and the rest of the players.

Our guys are really pumped about this opportunity. I think that comes from quality of opponent we're playing against. We believe we're playing against a Playoff team from a championship-caliber program. We have a ton of respect for Coach Sitake and the rest of his staff and obviously his players and what they have built there over time through consistency. And I think it's pretty apparent we believe in a lot of the same things their program believes in with toughness and effort and physicality. Hearing him speak last night with Coach Key at a staff gathering, it was apparent that those guys share a lot of those same traits and believe in a lot of the same program-building philosophies.

We're excited. Our guys will be ready. We've been practicing their tails off the past few weeks and we're ready to go finish off this story the right way.

Q. What's the next step in year two for your defense, and how has your defense done?

BLAKE GIDEON: You don't look at how a season is going to go in the beginning and ways you stub your toe, but I think after you stub your toe, you're kind of grateful for those moments and what you learn about one another.



What I learned about myself and obviously as a staff and then what we learned about the players -- I don't think enough credit is given to the immediate change that these guys made.

You know, I can come up with whatever call, we can scheme whatever scheme we want to scheme as a staff but the players are the ones that make it come to life, right? For those guys to put their foot down, really, at halftime at the Pitt game and decide how things were going to go moving forward was about as impressive a thing as I've ever been around in any locker room.

It's been a wild ride. It's been fun. I'm so blessed and honored to coach these guys that have gotten over themselves and allowed themselves to be coached, and want to be coached. And they fight and they keep swinging for each other.

So it's been a great year, great experience for me this year, and we're looking forward to building on this in the future.

Q. On a daily basis, you guys go up against a tough mobile quarterback in Haynes. Is there any similarity in how he plays and what you've seen from BYU's quarterback?

BLAKE GIDEON: Yeah, toughness, No. 1. I think both of those guys carry that mentality for their team, right, and whenever your quarterback is one of the toughest guys on your team, I think everybody else kind of comes along, coaches included. If this guy is willing to do this and stick his nose in there, go get those extra few yards, and then we can all do a little bit more, too, right?

So absolutely, this guy carries what Coach Sitake wants in their program and that's important when you have a guy that's guaranteed to touch the ball every snap.

Our preparation and obviously dealing with Haynes in our offense every day, there is some carryover. But these guys are professional coaches and players, too, on the other side, and so they will have their changeups. They do a

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great job of finding the weakness, the soft spot in the defense, and we're going to have been prepared to adjust. I think that's the main thing in bowl games.

THE MODERATOR: Question for you, Rodney. I know you didn't have a chance to play in last year's Birmingham Bowl due to injury. What do you take away from bowl opportunity when you go to play in these games?

RODNEY SHELLEY: Honestly, cherish the moment with their teammates. Obviously for me, this is my last bowl game. I'm a senior. So I just want to cherish all these moments with my teammates.

Q. For you seniors, how far you all have come? The program has a chance to get a tenth win, how much have you talked about that going into this one?

RODNEY SHELLEY: Obviously it's a big day in the room right now that we want this game as a win. I think there's a little history behind it or whatever.

But I think it [would be] the tenth season [with 10 wins] and it's amazing. I think it's going to be a good thing for us to get this win.

Q. I've been covering this dual-threat quarterback at BYU all year and just wondering from you, I'll try not to get too much into scouting reports and that kind of thing so that Coach doesn't stare daggers into me. But what's the biggest challenge of facing a guy like Haynes or Bear, a quarterback who is not afraid to tuck and run?

RODNEY SHELLEY: Obviously BYU is a great offense, I feel like they can establish will the run and pass and adding a quarterback with a run game as well, I think that's just something you have to pay attention to. You know they will try to open you open, throw the ball, throw the ball, maybe come back -- you never know.

THE MODERATOR: Curious your perspective, as well, Coach, on Bear and what he's brought to BYU in his first season from what you've seen on tape.

BLAKE GIDEON: Whenever you watch him on tape you have to remind yourself that the kid is a true freshman and he's mature beyond his years. I think you see growth that's probably accelerated faster than most freshman quarterbacks.

Again, I think his toughness and competitiveness and the willingness to go compete in those environments that they played in in the Big 12 all year, it's apparent that he's not afraid, right?

Again, that's one of the things that you look for, not just at the quarterback position, but in any position. Same with us on defense -- is a guy afraid of the moment, and is he going to do it right all week and then panic on Saturday night?

So this offense, obviously, they run it well. They throw it well. But with the element of quarterback run, it forces you to play 11-on-11, right? That's always a possibility, and Coach Roderick on offense does a great job of mixing that in. There's no real tell or down-and-distance area of the field when it's coming.

And so it just forces that to be a constant reminder in all of our guys' heads of it could happen here, it could happen here and we can't take anything for granted just because the situation normally means this or this. They do a really nice job of changing things up and obviously they have got the players to be able to handle all that mentally and execute it physically.

Q. What does this say about a team, you guys don't have a ton of players opting out of game. Haynes coming back to play in it as well. What does that say about the mentality of the team, want to go come back and finish what you guys started?

RODNEY SHELLEY: I don't know, I can't explain. Just to see all these guys willing to put it all in -- they just want to play ball, be together, create this bond for life. You know, I think that's what it's about.

Q. You mentioned halftime at Pitt, the Georgia game was obviously a very good game for you all. Was it just a mentality thing? Schematic changes?

BLAKE GIDEON: Yeah, we made some changes schematically, probably not as earth-shattering as it may have seemed. But I think our guys, just something we had always talked about throughout this whole process was not worrying about the result and just enjoying the process and immersing ourselves in the process and being the best in the world at my job on this play.

You know, the last play already happened. You can't do anything about it. And the next play has enough worries of its own, right? So let's just own our job and this play. And I think everybody just kind of relaxed and untucked their shirts a little bit, and just went and played ball.

We like to over-complicate it a lot as college coaches. We like to get in there and play mad scientist on the chalkboard and draw up all these fun schemes. But at the end of the day it's getting off blocks and tackling,



leveraging off routes in coverage. Again, I think it wasn't really -- Rodney will tell you, it wasn't anything earth-shattering that we did go into going into the Georgia game. We just said, 'Hey, guys, we are going to run these calls and we're going to get really good at them, and I believe in you guys, y'all trust in me. So let's go own our role. Own our job.'

Again, you see what we can be as a unit. And that's, you know, a starting safety goes down in the Georgia game in the first 10 plays, and a true freshman that's never really played meaningful snaps goes out there, and this, that -- I mean, all things that could have happened, happened. And our guys just stopped, in my opinion, stopped worrying about the result and just played. I don't care how many points they have already scored, how many first downs they have already made. They just made the next play, and that's the game. That's the measure of a good team, a mature team, especially on defense, is their ability to move forward.

THE MODERATOR: Rodney, we will close with this. Coach talking about the bond he's created with the locker room in his first season, I assume that's been reciprocal. Can you speak to the impact Coach Gideon has had in his first year at Georgia Tech.

BLAKE GIDEON: Careful.

RODNEY SHELLEY: Great guy. I've learned a lot from Coach Gideon on and off the field. I think he came in, asked for some blind trust, and we believed in him.

I actually had -- there was a moment in the season where he kind of talked to me about my shoulder injury because he had some similar injuries or whatever, and it kind of pulled me a little closer to him as well. You know, just learning his schemes, the way he taught it, the way he's passionate about it, just gave me this feeling like, yeah, he's a great guy, going to be a great coach and a good season.

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