

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

Friday, December 26, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

**Brent Key**  
**Kalani Sitake**

Press Conference



little bit.

And Riley, hamstring.

And Canion, receiver, he has a little issue that he has to worked on and hope to get him back for spring ball as well.

That's the injuries. I want to clear the air with that. At this point, other than guys who made the decision to leave the football team, we have a 100% participation with the guys on the team playing in this game. So, really excited for that. Excited to be able to compete tomorrow.

KALANI SITAKE: Just echo what Coach Key said, that we are really excited to be here.

We made a bunch of announcements already and just in terms of how much fun we have had here. Just like Georgia Tech, we actually enjoy being in service projects and the amusement parks with Georgia Tech and their players.

They are a great first-class organization. Coach Key does a great job as their leader, and they are an extension of him. You know that they are tough young men that love to compete, and they are very courteous and kind as we go through this.

But I don't expect them to be kind tomorrow during the game, but it is okay.

I think this game of football, you can have tons of respect for each other and enjoy the festivities of what FCS has provided for us here with the Pop-Tarts Bowl, and then get to competition.

I think everybody, as they get closer to the game, the sense of urgency is starting to pick up, and, honestly, we enjoy being around our players and around our team. And these guys enjoy each other, the brotherhood that we have and we have established. I can see the exact same thing with Georgia Tech.

Everyone wants to win, because they want to send their

BRENT KEY: We have done a lot of these openings statements, since we have down here the last week and previous. I want to thank FCS with having us here and the wonderful time we have had here this week, and it has been a great event.

I know our players, our staff and our families have all enjoyed so much being in Orlando. My family is still enjoying it today. They left to go over to one of the parks and the kids had a great experience last night what they did. We are really excited to play and really excited to play BYU. A team that I have said now numerous times is a team that really should have been in the playoffs this year. When you look at their body of work and what they have done.

It is a great opportunity for us at Georgia Tech to be able to compete, and that is what we want. Competitors want to compete, and that's what we have. We have two teams of competitors.

I will go ahead and address some of the injuries for our team right now just to clear the water on things. Clayton Powell, safety, who rolled his ankle in the last game of the season He will be out.

Brayden Manly, defensive end, had surgery right after the last game to go and repair a shoulder that was the same thing last year. Do it now. Now, you have a chance to get it back by spring practice. Went ahead and did the surgery.

Chad Alexander, who came back from an ACL this year, he is just going through kind of the scar tissue, whatever. So, it is nothing serious with Chad. Just something that he is doubtful, I would say, right now. I wouldn't rule him totally as out, but he is doubtful, and again, it is nothing serious with him. Something that is a week-type deal, tweaked it a

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seniors out the right way. So sometimes that gets the kids a little bit nervous, but the truth is winning just makes saying good-bye easier. It is going to be hard at the end of the day to say good-bye to these seniors who have put so much work into the program.

I know Coach Key and I have had tons of conversations about our players and our families and about this area, specifically.

So, winning the game would make it easier to say good-bye but it is going to be hard to say good-bye, anyways. Regardless, we are going to be thankful to the seniors and what they have done for the program. It is more than one game we're going to experience tomorrow.

This has been a lot of fun, and just want to that have been everybody involved. Our families have had a great time. It is a great reward. The bowl games are amazing, because it is a great reward to the players, their families, also our coaches and our staffs and their families.

And selfishly for me and my children, they love being here.

I think FCS is smart, bringing us all in, show these young men a good time that it can be fun for single young men, but also fun for families, so you get them hooked. I guarantee there are going to be a bunch of guys on our team when they get older. As parents and husbands, they will be coming back to Orlando. It is a smart move, great investment, and I can see why the travel and tourism has had so much success here in Orlando.

In terms of our team, you guys know I have already talked about LJ Martin, that there's a small window where he could get the surgery. I think Coach Key and they have the same situation where after the holidays, they will be able to extend his recovery. Whether he goes to the NFL or comes back and plays a senior year with us, it was more important for him to get the surgery done now, and then he could make that addition.

But we are anticipating him being a leader for us, and he will be here today rooting on his team.

For the rest of the team, a bunch of guys that are still banged up, are game-day decisions. The question will be how they feel tomorrow as we get ready. The majority of the team has been practicing.

So, we haven't had anybody in terms of opt-out choose not to play in the game. We anticipate everyone that will be able physically to participate, that they will, other than a few guys that have already announced that they are transferring and those guys are all transferring for more

opportunities to be on the field.

What questions do you guys have for us?

**Q. I wanted to ask you guys have an opportunity to win ten games. What would that mean for you and this program moving forward?**

BRENT KEY: That 10-game threshold is big, just from an external perception from going down the road in January.

We have taken great steps the last three years in the program, what we have been able to do and accomplish and this is one of those kind of glass ceilings, I guess you would say, that you're always looking to get towards.

The one thing we know is we cannot control the outcome of a game, right. All we can control is what goes into it. How we prepare. How we compete, and we can't control the outcome. We are not an outcome-based organization. We are about the heat of the moment, where your feet are, playing the play that you have. When that play is over, it is done and same thing with the game.

It is important. It is big for the program, but nine wins is big, too, right now, and then 10. You are always wanting to improve and get better and better and better.

Look, I don't care if you have zero wins or 12 wins. You play that next game, competitors want to compete, right. Again, we are not outcome based. We are about competing.

**Q. I want to ask you, you have had an excellent season as a team, but I wanted to kind of give you an opportunity to say what it is you think, whether it's the Big 12 Conference that's underappreciated or what is it that people are missing about BYU as a program that they should hear more about that would help people understand how impressive a group you are?**

KALANI SITAKE: Well, I don't think my job is to get out there and campaign for anything other than show what we can do.

I was nodding my head when Brent was talking, because our beat writers are used to me saying the exact same thing; that we are not going to be focused on. I know my job to win games but that's not my focus. That is a by-product of doing things the right way.

I see a lot of similarities in our programs, in our style of play, but also culturally, I see a lot of similarities. Smart kids on both sides, and tough kids.

So, a lot of what he says is what I believe in, too. They are a great team, and you can see it on film. I don't know if enough people watch and see the intricate details that go into all of it. You see well-coached, you see great leadership, senior leadership on our team, and I like to think that we are very similar.

There are things that we have sat there and shared and taken notes from them and watched them specifically on how they play the game.

It is a fun matchup. When it comes down to it, I am not here to campaign for anything other than we love being in the Big 12 Conference. We love the partnership that we have in the Big 12. It has been amazing for us coming off independent when I first got the job.

So to be in this position, I think more than anything, it is just appreciation and gratitude is what I have as a leader as the head coach here, and seeing how far we have come as a program and just really proud that we get to be in the mix.

A playoff committee made the decision. We are okay. We will move on. This is not a consolation prize. This is something we were looking forward to, this matchup. We get to play football again.

At the beginning of the year, we didn't start campaigning, so we are definitely not going to do it at the end of the year.

I would just say that we love representing and we really just have this appreciation and gratitude for where we are at and looking forward to the game and finishing the season the right way, and that's competing.

If we can be at our best and if Georgia Tech can be at their best, all that matters is that we will be able to live with the results regardless whether it is win or lose.

**Q. Curious what your assessment's been of the offensive staff, making adjustments here, and Chris calling the game and just how you guys have proceeded with that about the Bowl prep?**

BRENT KEY: Look, the days of having five coaches on offense and five coaches on defense are so far gone.

When coaches come and go -- and that's going to happen. They are going to look for different opportunities. They are going to look for elevation, what might be in their mind elevation and not. They are going to look for different -- whether sometimes it is family reasons. You can't control those things. I learned a lot time ago you can't control people's thoughts, wants, desires. My focus is on our team.

We have plenty of people on that offensive staff, believe me, that are doing a heck of a job. Chris's leadership, he has been unbelievable these last three weeks from the time that I brought the offensive staff in and told them what my plans were.

He has taken the bull by the horns, and it is a great experience for Chris to be able to call it. The calling it part of it, that is such a small part of being a coordinator. It is the organization, the leadership, the management of people, holding people accountable. That is what being a coordinator is about, right.

That is what you look for in a coordinator is leadership. He has gotten to know Chris externally. He is a strong personality. He is very determined in what he wants and what he believes in.

But when he sits down with the staff, it is a complete collaboration of everyone, and that is what it has been for the last three years. This offense was put together three years ago, and going through this time of year where you are talking to different guys about possibly joining your staff and whatnot, and you say, hey what do you call this organization -- it is X, Y, Z, whatever, that is double, double formation. We have put this thing together, and 165 people know what that formation is. And we are not changing it for one person. That is an overall team philosophy. That is building a program, not just a team for a season.

Chris has been able to step into that role, do an unbelievable job. I continue to want to put Chris in those positions.

The judgment on how someone does in that role has very little to do with the outcome of the game. It has to do with the preparation and the collaboration that goes into it. I have been more than pleased with Chris.

As a lot of people know, Chris has been by my side, since the very beginning of this. I trust Chris Wienke with everything, I do. Within the program, he is going to tell me the truth. He is not a "yes" man. He is going to tell me what I need to hear, and I respect him for that.

Our relationship goes all the way back to 2000, when we were both seniors and we went to ACC media days and we were both there. I was 22, and he was about 35 then, senior, last year. But, he was over there hanging out with all the Sports Illustrated and ESPN people, and me and the other guys were sitting there hanging out in the bowling alley.

Wienke is a great man, great husband, great father. I love



Chris Wienke, and I am excited for him and his future and what he is able to continue doing and what he is going to continue to be able to bring to our program.

**Q. This opportunity to play in this game, you get a chance to possibly win 12 games for the first time since 2001. What does that say about the direction of the program and the guys who have been around this team to be able to get to this point the last couple years?**

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, I would say very similar to what Brent was saying. When you are doing things the right way, people are going to want your guys, especially your coaching staff.

We have had a lot of people that are interested in our coaches and myself, and that is a good sign. It's difficult when you're the head coach and trying to keep things going.

But if you have a great foundation, like I know Georgia Tech has and we have, there are signs of that. LaVell, when he was coaching, he had Mike Holmgren and Norm Chow and Scoville and all those guys were in there. This is like Andy Reid and all those guys were on the staff.

I think if you have a lot of coaches and players doing great things, just like Brent's done, then guys are going to want them, and they are going to go to other places. It is a compliment. It is just hard, because you establish everything, and you are like, man, I have to keep doing that? That's college football. In some ways, it is even with the players.

Eventually, we are going to get the guys that want to be there and the guys, whether they are players, coaches or staff, and we will go to work.

So the thing that will be consistent – that is why I am really happy about the long-term deal at BYU -- is being able to establish a foundation and make sure that it is sustainable and that we can have other coaches coming in, whether it is losing coaches to opportunities, giving them options – it is awesome. It is great for those guys and their families.

You look at Brent talking to him and Sark last week, and you see the connections they have with all the coaches, that is what Nick Saban has done. We would be foolish to not try to do the same thing, and that is a good sign for us. A good sign for all of us that people want our coaches to be leaders and coordinators and be part of their programs, too.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the contract extension.**

**Do you think over the last few weeks that the added resources for your staff has allowed you to keep some of the staff members you feel like you might have lost in years past because you won 22 games over the last two years, and do you expect everybody back?**

KALANI SITAKE: I can't foresee the future and say -- I mean, I do know that I have coaches on my staff that want to be head coaches, and most of those opportunities, they will come along.

We can be transparent as much as we can about it, but it is going to be really difficult as we go through this. I just need to know how to sustain it, and a lot of it, now that the NCAA has given us an opportunity to have more than one coach, have a position. I think Brent said it earlier. We don't need -- you can have 20 to 30 coaches, if you want. It is just a balance of how many, and then who to replace them with.

There is a bunch of guys that know what we are doing, and just like they are going through, you have the -- the play calls are already done. You have them established and these are the calls that you are going to make in a certain situation.

And then when you get there, you allow the play-caller to have a little bit of instincts to make that call, but as head coaches, we are the ones that override all of it. I can be a jerk about it and say, I'm calling all three phases, leave me alone, I have it.

BRENT KEY: Let's do that in the second quarter (Laughter).

KALANI SITAKE: I haven't done that yet, but I don't know if I'm going to do it, but I do trust the guys that are there.

It is a great learning experience. I mean, we have all done it. We have been graduate assistants. We have gone through the position coaching and we have gone through the play calling and recruiting and coordinating all that. It is that we are able to mentor a lot more young men and women on the staff to help us get the job done.

In that way, it makes it an easier transition, but it is tough, because you don't want to lose any of our guys. Like we are losing our seniors tomorrow, we don't want to lose our family members. I mean, they are there to help us. But that is attrition, and that is life and that is life in football.

**Q. Just because you have a unique perspective, having had your name in the mix with other coaching jobs around college football, but this is more of a broad overview-type of question. Just what your thoughts are on the state of college football and the**

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**calendar and the way kind of everything is kind of coming together.**

BRENT KEY: Right. Told you we would need more time. This is a broad question, but I will try to make it very pointed what I want to get across.

I think the state of college football, college football is in the greatest place it has ever been, all right. The fan experience, the viewership, the engagement of college football is at an all-time high. The amount of people that are watching games, watching playoffs, the amount of people that wake up on Saturday morning and watch game day, maybe it is for all of Nick's cussing.

But it is just overall, you look from when it is Thursday night, whether it is Friday night, Saturdays. College football is a way of life in so much of the United States, all right.

So I think college football, the interest in it is at an all-time high, okay.

When you look at the other things, and I say this all the time, there was a time there were no face masks on helmets, and that changed. There was a time when they started out and there was -- voted on who the National Champion was and sometimes it was a split National Championship, i.e., last time Georgia Tech played a bowl game in this stadium.

So, times change. If you look in college football, about every 15 to 20 years, there is a major overhaul in college football. And sometimes you don't even recognize that it is happening until it is just part of the game.

We are going through one of those right now. We have been for the last probably 18 months to two years. It is a change in college football. Well, massive changes like this don't just happen overnight.

The final way to do it, best way to do it, doesn't just happen. And when you sit in these meetings like we have and you hear people talk, well, yeah it might sound like a great idea to change the date on the calendar.

But when you start digging in and all the things that go along with that and all the things that affects, at the end of the day, our job is to graduate players from college. To give them opportunity, that a lot of them would not have had to go to college to get a degree and change their lives and create generational change in families.

We do that through the avenue of football. I'm speaking about myself. I had no business going to Georgia Tech. Zero. Zero. The game of football provided that opportunity

for me to go to Georgia Tech. It changed my life. It changed my family's life. It changed the trajectory of a lot of things.

I look at this every day, like Kalani just said. Yes, we are judged by the scoreboard, by the wins and the losses. But I put my head down at night knowing I have done my part of putting better young men in this world, and that has not changed. That will not change. That will not change at Georgia Tech.

We just had the highest GPA in the history of our program, 133 years. I think it is a 3.17. I have 62 players on the team that I have signed an appeal for; that means they had under a 2.55 in high school. They have a collective 2.86 GPA at Georgia Tech. 20 out of 24 freshmen made Dean's List at Georgia Tech.

Those values have not changed and what we are really out here to do is to create better young men, lives of young men that come in at 17, 18 years old. And some of them come in and are transferring for six months.

But when you get that stamp, that "GT" stamp on your life, it changes it.

Are there things in the calendar? Yes. There are a lot of things that we could go through, but every second I spend complaining or every second, 'Oh, this should be' -- I'm wasting time trying to figure out how to be better. Let everyone else complain about it. Let everyone else waste their time saying that it could be better or should be like this or should be like that, all right. I'm going to pass their ass, all right, and we are going to find a better way to do it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, anything you want to add?

KALANI SITAKE: I agree with everything that he just said (Laughter).

Our job, I mean, all our guys, you nodded your head, because that's what I say, too. We have had record GPAs every semester, and we will follow it again with this semester.

So the correlation of them doing well in the classroom and off the field in terms of service, I mean, our guys do a lot -- with the platform that they have been given, they have done a lot of service, a lot of helping the community and promoting, just good things in life.

The reason why we want to be in college coaching is because we get to be involved with their education and be involved with their transition from a young man to an adult. That is what drives us.



When we first started coaching, remember we were talking about our salaries when we first started doing it? I don't know if a lot of people would be doing it if they started with those starting salaries we did when we started this gig.

We did it, because we had amazing coaches and mentors along the way, and we wanted to be like them. I wanted to be like LaVell Edwards. I idolized what he did and all the coaches on that staff, wanted to be like them.

I didn't realize they were mentoring me not just in life -- I mean, football is a small part of it, but football was the key to getting my attention. Next thing, I am enjoying life as an adult, because I was able to take in the education that I received, not just in the classroom, but in life all together.

The benefit was that I wanted to be just like them. I got into the business, because of the same thing. If we keep our focus on that, I am with Brent: Let everybody else figure it out. What I do know is they are going to adapt to whatever they say we can do and we cannot do.

Remember when we played, you said we had -- face masks weren't there. We had face masks when we played. We are not that old, but you could target every play if you wanted to. In fact, that was celebrated.

BRENT KEY: I did.

KALANI SITAKE: You blind-sided -- you would knock someone out and that would make the highlight reel. Now, we are telling them to pick them like basketball instead.

People say it is not as tough. It is safer. It is better. We can all agree on it.

We are going to adapt to what we are allowed to do. We understand the reason why things happen, but I am not in there to make those decisions.

I do know one thing, though: If you want things to go smoother, involve more coaches in the decision-making process.

BRENT KEY: Yes.

KALANI SITAKE: And things would be better in all of it, whatever area you want to go into, but we control what we control and that is in our programs, and that is what makes it fun.

We have sat there and talked about a lot of different things. I can hang out with Brent all the time, because we believe in the same way. We are aligned in how we do things

culturally, and it is a lot of fun when you get to meet someone that is very similar and runs a program the same way.

You are an O-lineman and a fullback. I played fullback for a passing team, guys. Basically, I was just a fullback, because I wasn't tall enough to be an O-lineman. I just tell everybody, 'My hands were too good, I could catch the ball.'

BRENT KEY: You were a short guard.

KALANI SITAKE: I was a short guard. I weighed just as much as the O-linemen did, so everybody should know.

I loved playing football and I loved playing for LaVell.

BRENT KEY: It is pretty crazy. My experience with George O'Leary as a young player and a coach, we were talking about just a minute ago and how Coach O'Leary is still -- Coach O'Leary nowadays will call me sometimes and be like, 'Hey, make sure you go down and tell the staff to get out of here early tonight and go spend time with their families.'

'Huh? And what? What did you say? Is this George O'Leary?'

You look at the coaches I was around as a player. You know, my position coaches, Mac McWhorter, Doug Marrone, Billy O'Brien -- Bill O'Brien was the GA at Georgia Tech that drove me and my mom around in a van on my official visit. Then, he was our running backs coach.

Then my first year as a GA was his first year as a coordinator, Lance Thompson, Ted Roof, we come down here to UCF. The GAs to start out here at UCF were me, George Godsey, Ryan Silverfield, Ed Manowitz, who is an agent now. We were all GAs together at UCF for Coach O'Leary. You look at the people and the progression of how I go to Georgia Tech and Doug and Billy were GAs. Then kind of as you go up, and you become a GA and see where those guys are gone. A lot of that is because of those men that we have played for and worked for.

#### **Q. A more game-specific question.**

KALANI SITAKE: Great.

#### **Q. Doesn't fit. With LJ Martin, what is your confidence in the other guys, can they step in and keep your offense moving forward along?**

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, of course, when you go through recruiting and development, you don't just have one and



you stop. You don't say, well, this is it.

Let me just remind everybody, you guys have no idea who LJ Martin was a few years ago. What happens is that they are given an opportunity, and then they literally, in this case, run with it.

LJ is going to have his opportunities to do things, and I hope he comes back. I think his decision is the NFL or come back with us for his senior year. The decision to have the surgery was actually smart. We needed him. It is for his future. It made sense for him to do that.

It is going to open an opportunity for somebody else to come through. I think A-Rod is really excited about Jovesa having an opportunity, and Preston and Enoch has been there. Enoch helped us beat SMU last year.

Look at all the guys that we have there, they are all very capable running backs. LJ is the starter but these guys, sometimes the difference between the starter and the backup is just when they can get their opportunity and when they can make it fly.

For us, we feel like we have done a great job with our depth on our team and not just in one position, and now we will find out. I am excited for these guys. The tough part is going against a really talented team with Georgia Tech and with more time to prepare for them.

I don't know if it is going to be easy, but I know that I really care. I just want them to go out and have fun and enjoy the game and play tough and take advantage of their opportunities that they have.

**Q. I'll get the tough one out of the way. How many different flavors of Pop-Tarts have you tried this week?**

KALANI SITAKE: Those are the questions I really like. (Laughter) I have tried them all. I said before, Brent and I agree on a lot of things, not just football, but eating, as well. There is not a Pop-Tart – I am kind of disappointed that [trophy toaster] didn't work, because I could use one right now.

But anyways, they are good, toasted, untoasted, doesn't matter. I am really getting into the combo bites, but I think people look at me differently when I bite two Pop-Tarts at the same time with different flavors. But don't knock it until you try it, guys.

**Q. And you mentioned so much about LJ Martin, Bear this season, rightfully so. Just speak to the offensive line as a whole. You guys retooled that a little bit at the start of the season, and specifically the leadership of**

**Bruce Mitchell, and what he has added to the season being the starting center?**

KALANI SITAKE: Bruce has been great to. Take a young man that was a D-Lineman and move him over to O-line and play center and snap the ball, it's not an easy thing to do.

I think Coach Unga has done a great job with him and his development from last year to now and to have him be a First Team All-Conference, that's awesome.

But if you look at the entire O-line, they are a close group, and I think if you can get to the line of scrimmage with your best guys, and then they are all believing the same way -- I think Brent is going to be the same way. You want to establish that you have very capable guys up front.

Bruce is a capable guy. You combine that with the guys that we have, the five of them can do it, and we've had to use a rotation of seven to eight guys.

So that is good for us and our future and the development. We have been putting Trev at tight end a little bit and played him a little bit. These guys can play. I am really proud of all of them and what they have been able to do. This is going to be a tough matchup.

I want our guys -- and they know it. It is going to require us to be at our best. Georgia Tech, they are ranked in the Top-10. They are No. 7 in the country at one time, and you could see the talent and the skill there and the toughness. The way they played Georgia, I thought they had Georgia. That was last year, too. Sorry, Coach.

There are a lot of teams that weren't in that place, and so when you see that -- I think people look at the score and they just bypass what actually happened in the game. I think a lot of credit needs to go to what Coach Key has been able to do with that program and how tough they play and how they show up in those moments.

There has been a lot of talk about the playoffs expanding and everything. That would be pretty cool, too. I just love the bowl game. I love the fact that we get to be out here and experience this for these young men, and for the families, they are for everybody, me included. Kind of mingling with the community, it just makes it even more enjoyable. Now, we are all here playing a really tough Georgia Tech team, it is going to be good.

I think no matter what, this year is going to help us, like last year's game did. But the focus on the game and having it be such a difficult opponent will really help us. It has made our team better already in the preparation, and I hope and I



believe it will springboard us into 2026

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