

Valero Alamo Bowl: USC vs TCU

Monday, December 29, 2025

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Lincoln Riley USC Trojans Sonny Dykes TCU Horned Frogs

Head Coaches Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us today for the head coaches' press conference. It's my pleasure to welcome the head coach of USC, Lincoln Riley, and for TCU, Sonny Dykes.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach Riley.

LINCOLN RILEY: It's great to be here. The Alamo Bowl, Valero as a sponsor, the entire city of San Antonio, has been incredibly welcoming for our team, our staff, our families. We've had a great several days here in San Antonio. It's been great to get back to Texas, a lot of great memories here.

Certainly excited for the game tomorrow. Coach Dykes and his staff have obviously done a tremendous job at TCU. It's going to be a great challenge.

Great to be able to compete against a great friend and somebody that has been great to me throughout my entire career, especially as a younger coach when we were both at Texas Tech. A lot of great memories.

It's been a tremendous week. Thankful to everybody that's been a part of this to make this happen for us. Certainly looking forward to the game tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Dykes.

SONNY DYKES: To echo a lot of things that Lincoln said, I can't imagine a better city to host a bowl game than San Antonio. It's been great for our players, tremendous for our fans. I know our coaches' families have had a great time.

Valero is obviously a tremendous host, tremendous sponsor. They've done a great job of taking care of everybody. Our players have had a lot of fun this week.



The guys have commented that this has been first class in every way, shape and form. It's one of the best bowl games.

Lincoln brought this up the other day. Bowl games matter still in college football. They're important. The memories that our players will have from this week together, time with their families, our families, our coaches' wives and kids, being able to spend time with our players, it's invaluable. Means so much to the development of these young people. Again, some memories that they'll remember forever.

We're excited to play against USC, a very talented football team. Had a tremendous year. They'll be a big challenge.

As Lincoln said, we've known each other for a long time. It's fun when you get to play against people you admire in the profession.

Lincoln obviously has had an incredible career. Knew he was going to be really successful when I was around him when he was a young coach. Really sharp guy. Hard-working. Very mature. Just knew he was going to be incredibly successful.

I know his team will be very well-prepared tomorrow night. We're looking forward to the challenge.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Coach Riley, you had some pretty good success when you were in the Big 12 playing TCU. What was your first reaction when you found out you were going to be playing against TCU?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, there were some great battles certainly throughout the years there. Obviously a lot has changed since then.

Yeah, brings back a lot of great memories, obviously not just for me but with my family. My brother Garrett coached for Coach Dykes, had a great run there together.

It's always been a program and a place that I've admired for a long time. There's been a great run of success that



Coach Dykes has continued and taken to a whole 'nother level.

Fort Worth is a tremendous city, a great place. Obviously Texas as a whole is very near and dear to me. To be back here in Texas playing, to play against that program, is tremendous. It's one I have a lot of respect for. I'm sure it will be another great battle tomorrow night.

Q. Coach Dykes, you referred to bowl games recently as the first game of the next season. You made a decision to start a quarterback who is in his last game, a good soldier for you. How do you balance wanting to win the football game versus using it to take that next step?

SONNY DYKES: It's interesting. This bowl game, it's pretty late. The fact that it's December 30th, we didn't play in the Big 12 championship, it gave us a lot of time to prepare.

The way we tried to approach it was really to accomplish two goals:

Number one, to have 12, 13 practices to bring our young players along. It's almost like an extra spring practice. We tried to approach it that way, just get those guys more reps, spend some time looking at some of the young players that have been scout team players for us that we think will probably play for us next season.

Those reps are invaluable. The growth those guys had in those practices, you could see it on a day-to-day basis. That was very encouraging.

The second part of it is to do everything you can to prepare your team to play well and win the game. Kind of a two-prong approach.

But I think in a lot of ways, especially now in today's world, some guys aren't playing in the game. It gives you a chance really to focus on some guys that you're really going to count on next season. I think from that perspective it is the first peek at next year's team in a lot of ways. Our guys are looking forward to it and excited about it.

We've been lucky. We have a lot of guys that decided they want to play, want to compete. Proud of those guys for wanting to do that. It has been some really valuable reps for those young players.

Q. Sonny, how have you seen the team rally around Ken the last couple days?

SONNY DYKES: Look, it's hard not to like Ken Seals. Ken has been the backup quarterback for a couple years for us. He's probably my son's favorite player (smiling). That tells you just what kind of personality Ken's got.

He's a guy that everybody really respects, admires. He's one of those players that there were times we got into fall camp and we thought he performed just every bit as well as our starting quarterback performed.

It's hard for him. When you're the backup quarterback sometimes, especially when you're older than the starter, it can be tough. It can be tough to practice at a high level, be mentally focused and go out there and give it your all every day when you know there's not a great chance that you're going to play.

Ken never did that. He showed up every day. Had the best attitude. He loves being at TCU. He's a local guy. I think it's meant the world for him to have a chance to come home and just be a part of TCU and go to school and be around these teammates.

The guys love him. The guys respect him. He's a cool guy. I expect our team to rally around him. He's had a great week of practice. When he started getting a lot of reps, you could tell there was a little bit of rust. Some of the decision making things were probably a little slower than you wanted it be. As he got more reps, he started to look like the starting quarterback.

I'm thankful for him and his commitment to his teammates, what kind of person he is. Again, the guys have really rallied around him and they're excited to play for him.

Q. Eric is playing in this game. He was one of those guys that during the team meeting, he got up, told everyone to rally behind Ken. What does that mean to you to have a leader step up like that, a guy that doesn't have to play this game?

SONNY DYKES: I think it all started with those older guys. I think it started with the Bud Clarks of the world. Bud has kind of seen it all. Four years ago Bud was playing for a national championship. So he's been through it. He's seen it all.

I think when you have that kind of leadership, a guy like Bud, that helped Eric get in line with Kaleb Orr, then all of a sudden the guys all made a commitment to each other and said, Look, man, we started this, let's finish this together.

Could not be more proud of them for having that mentality, especially Eric. I think Eric has been one of those players that has grown up so much. It's been fun to see. He was a

guy that, again, he's from Azle, he appreciates being home. He went than to Boise, came back to DFW area, Fort Worth. He appreciates it. He appreciates being around his family. He appreciates playing for TCU, a school he grew up rooting for and watching. I think all that stuff matters.

In the world of college football now, everybody talks about money, everybody talks about this and that, all these things. Really being a good teammate matters. Making a commitment to each other matters. Those guys, they love each other, they care about each other, they don't want to let each other down.

Eric has been a guy that has really grown in that role. I think when he stood up in that team meeting said, Look, Ken Seals is my guy, let's go, I think everybody in the room got excited and decided to rally behind Ken.

Again, the guys believe in him and they're confident in him.

Q. Coach Riley, this is the first time the media has gotten to speak to you since the announcement that the Notre Dame-USC game would be postponed...

LINCOLN RILEY: I'd be happy to discuss it. Everybody knows how I feel about the game. I've said it multiple times.

One of my first thoughts when I took the job at USC was getting to be a part of that rivalry. I have a deep respect for college football, been a part of some really great rivalries. Obviously this is right there up at the top.

It's pretty simple. We both worked for months to try to find a solution. Notre Dame was very vocal about the fact that they would play us anytime, anywhere. Obviously them not having a conference affiliation gives them an ability to be pretty flexible with their scheduling.

We went back, Jen Cohen, our A.D., went back to Notre Dame roughly a couple of weeks ago with a scenario and a proposal that would extend the series for the next two years. We took Notre Dame at their word that they would play us anytime, anywhere.

That proposal was rejected. Not only was it rejected, but five minutes after we got the call, it was announced they scheduled another opponent, which I'll give them credit, that might be the fastest scheduling act in college football history.

I know there's been a lot of back and forth on it. I know college football has changed a lot. But the fact is very, very clear, this can all be settled very quickly. Had Notre

Dame lived up to their word and played us anytime, anywhere, we would be playing in the next two years, and looking ahead after that, hopefully continuing the series.

They did not follow through on it, thus we are not playing them the next couple years. We're hopeful something can be worked out in the future. That would be fantastic. We at SC would love for the game to continue. We have no problem following through on our promises in the future.

SONNY DYKES: You know what, that was a hell of an answer. Let me just say this:

Scheduling is tough in college football. It really is. We had the same thing with the SMU series. It's tough. SMU was in a situation where they had eight conference games and we had nine. That made it very difficult.

As Lincoln said, it's hard to schedule teams when you're in a conference and you have nine games, especially when you're in the Big Ten and you have those kind of quality opponents.

All of have to look out for our program and do what's best for our program. Man, scheduling is tough. Some of these old rivalries go away because of that. Like I said, I mean, I think everybody assumes it's really, really easy. Those things are very difficult.

Anyway, that's my two cents' worth. I don't know anything about it. It's harder than people think.

Q. Coach Riley, you hired Anthony Jones from TCU a couple years ago. What type of impact has he made on the program?

LINCOLN RILEY: Anthony has done a great job. He developed a lot in Coach Dykes' program. That was definitely an appealing factor to me right away, as I knew he obviously worked in a great program, worked for a tremendous head coach and had a lot of success.

Anthony has been great. Probably a lot of the same things that Sonny would say he brought to TCU. He's an energetic coach, high energy. He brings great background from being a former high school head coach. A lot of great perspective there. He's really tough on our guys, holding them accountable at the highest level. Great person. A lot of integrity. We've love having him.

Q. Coach Dykes, can you recall a specific memory in which working with Coach Riley, you were like, This guy is going to be different?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, I think you kind of saw it early on.



I think one of Lincoln's strengths is he's a really good communicator. Coaching is teaching. That's what we do, is we teach young people. We teach them how to play football and a lot of other stuff.

He was always good at communicating. He had a really clear sense of how to talk to players and how to be able to make a point with somebody. He was a really bright, hard-working guy.

The cool thing about Mike Leach is Mike empowered young coaches. I had kind of gone through the same thing. I was Mike's GA in 1997 at Kentucky, then went with Mike to Texas Tech in 2000 and got hooked up with Lincoln shortly thereafter.

Mike did that for me when I was a GA. He gave me a ton of responsibility. I think that's why so many guys that worked on that staff have gone on to be successful. He probably gave us more responsibility than we deserved. He believed in us. He empowered us. He gave us confidence. He did the same thing for Lincoln.

I always expected him to be really successful. Then I saw the Alamo Bowl when he called the game, I believe 2009. I remember watching the game going, Okay, this guy is getting ready to take off. Went to East Carolina, was successful there.

I'll never forget, I was coaching at Cal, Bob Stoops called me and asked me about Lincoln, What do you think about this guy?

I said, It's a home run, you need to hire him if you get a chance to do it.

Obviously did a tremendous job as a coordinator there, as a head coach. Launched just a fantastic career.

Q. Coach Riley, a follow-up to that, since he talked about Mike Leach. There's so much representation with both of you. What goes through your mind when you see the impact he had on your career but of those of so many?

LINCOLN RILEY: This for a lot of us is a full-circle moment. Being at this game brings back a lot of memories, not just that week in 2009, but again being here with Sonny. There's still several members of both of our staffs, families, all that, that were part of those years.

It's kind of wild, you think back to those teams, late nights in the office there at Tech, because Mike wasn't there till about 1:00 in the afternoon anyway.

SONNY DYKES: A lot of late nights (laughter).

LINCOLN RILEY: A lot of late nights.

To think back to those meetings, holed back in the staff room at Lubbock, Texas. Now to see where all these people have gone, where these careers have taken us, our families, the different experiences we've had and been able to be a part of. It's kind of wild that it all started there really in so many ways.

Like Sonny said, Mike deserves a ton of credit because he really started something fantastic, was great for a lot of us to work for, to come up under.

Yeah, then I think for all of us, there's a sense of pride of when any of us does well, right? It is almost like its own little fraternity in a way. You're always rooting for all the other guys that are across the country in all these different positions to do well.

Then I think, yeah, I mean, there's definitely been a couple moments this year, I was here, Mike was here with us, we played at Nebraska this year, we walked into the visitors' locker room, last time we were here we were beating Nebraska at Texas Tech, in here celebrating. Mike is getting up there giving a postgame speech. Nobody has any idea what he was talking about, but it was great, right?

Certainly being here with Sonny and his family, all of us here together, it is a little bit surreal, to be honest. It's been cool to see everybody's success. Obviously that all started with Mike.

Q. Sonny, with the impact and the influence of Coach Leach on you and on the sport, it's immeasurable. Do you take some of those lessons? I'm thinking about Mitch right now.

SONNY DYKES: Sure.

Q. How you've worked with him.

SONNY DYKES: It's funny, I had that conversation with Mitch. I said, Mitch, I expect you to go out and call a hell of a game and be the head coach at (indiscernible) in four years. Lincoln set the bar pretty high when it comes to doing that.

But yeah, same thing. I mean, you want to emulate the people that you care about and that are really successful. And empowering Mitch was a Mike Leach move, you know what I mean? It was one of those things that he deserved it, he's ready to do it.

Yeah, I mean, I think you look at what Mike did for all of us and how he did it. Again, the responsibility that he gave us that we probably quite frankly hadn't earned. He just saw something in people.

Yeah, hopefully Mitch will take this opportunity and run with it. I fully expect him to. He's worked really hard. He's well-prepared, excited. He's a bright young guy, somebody that I expect will have a tremendous success in his career.

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