

Valero Alamo Bowl: USC vs TCU

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

USC Trojans

Coach Lincoln Riley

Jide Abasiri

Press Conference



and also, again, there's just so many guys, especially tonight with all the guys that got to play, there's a real sense of purpose in that locker room right now. We'll be excited to get back to work.

Thanks to the Alamo Bowl. It really was a tremendous week. They treated us awesome. Heck of a game, and we'll go questions from there.

Q. Lincoln, can you tell us what you saw on that final play? What went wrong? Maybe just in the fourth quarter and overtime, what changed with the defense? Seemed like the third quarter they were much better than they ended up in the fourth.

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, we got off to a good start in the overtime. We had them backed up to a third and extra long, and there was going to be a pretty tough field goal even at that point.

You know, I thought Henny made a really nice call, and we missed a couple of tackles in just a very inopportune time.

Give the guy credit from TCU. Made a hell of a run, but, you know, wasn't a lot of times this year that we missed multiple tackles on a play. And again, it just happened in kind of the worst time possible when we really had a great call and forced them to check down.

We did everything right defensively to put them in that position and we just didn't finish the play. The same thing happened offensively. Got down there to the 2 yard line, and wasn't able to do run the football in and had a loss-yardage play.

We probably would have gone for it had we not had the loss-yardage play. It got just a little too far out.

But that was the tale of the game. We fought. We had a lot of big plays. We had a couple of unique calls that just didn't quite bounce our way, but we just did not execute good enough in the red zone either side of the ball.

If we had done that, then it's probably a different feeling right now.

TCU 30, USC 27

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, want to congratulate TCU it was a hell of a ball game. Obviously our guys are really disappointed. You know, kind of started this journey with this team I guess a little less than a month ago, and we could tell pretty quickly this team was going to be unique in that not completely the team we played with this year and not completely the team that we played with next year.

And our mantra the entire time was this team really gets one game together.

I had new leadership. Obviously a lot of players playing and the most reps that they've been able to play, guys playing different positions, and we just really tried to embrace that.

I give our team a lot of credit. I think anybody that watched us play tonight, our guys battled like crazy. They really wanted to win this game. They wanted to win it for each other. Fought. Obviously did a lot of good things to put ourselves in position to win it, but we -- at the end of the day we had to kick too many field goals, and they scored touchdowns in the red zone when we didn't, and that was really the tale of the game.

Yeah, disappointed for our one-game season here to not win this one, but obviously we're excited about what's ahead and appreciative to all the guys that have been a part of this whole season and then the guys that were part of the game here tonight that played their last game as Trojans.

It's been a great group. Been a lot of fun to coach. Been a lot of great memories throughout the year, and I think the locker room right now, it's sad to see a lot of these guys go



Q. You mentioned Henny making the call. D'Anton was here. When did you decide to run with Henny as the defensive play caller, and just what changed? Why wasn't D'Anton calling the defense tonight?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, Henny did a great job. The staff rallied around him. There was a lot of energy with the guys. The other part of it I'm not going to share details on.

Q. Jide, what's your relationship like with Coach Henny, and what was it like having him call the defense tonight?

JIDE ABASIRI: Yeah, I love Coach Henny. He's a great defensive coach, great defensive line coach, and he always talks about when your time is right, to step up and fall back on your training. The time was called for him and he stepped up and was the play caller on defense, and he did an amazing job.

Q. Lincoln, with D'Anton leaving, how do you just generally feel about the state of this defense going forward? What are you looking for in terms of the next defensive coordinator to take that job?

LINCOLN RILEY: I feel fantastic. You know, we've made obviously documented strides the last couple of years statistically, but those that really study the game and watch the way that we've played and the way that we've been able to improve, the arrow is just pointing straight up.

I think for us right now the opportunity to make a hire, to continue to make us better and to go from being a very good defense to being a great defense is the goal. We have the personnel to do it. We're on an upward trend. There's going to be a lot of interest in this job. This will be an extremely, extremely coveted job. I can already tell by the nature of what my phone has been like the last couple of days.

You know, it's kind of like -- I know I described it to you guys a little bit when I first got here. When I first got here there was a few of us that believed in it, but putting together the staff had some challenges too because I think a lot of people were skeptical about is SC really that all in, are they really going to invest, are they really serious about being great in football again?

Everybody knows the history, but it's like what it had done for a few years and had been a little stagnant. I think each year as this has gone on when we've had an opportunity to go make a hire, it's gotten easier each year and the pools have gotten bigger.

Our ability to go get great people to bring into our program to help make us better has just gotten higher and higher. I can already tell that with this.

So, yeah, it will be a fun process to go through, and I definitely don't want to press reset, because I think we've made a lot of improvement and we've got a hell of a defensive staff in there, and their ability to rally on short notice tonight I think was evident.

I'm excited about the process, and I think it's going to make us better. I know it will. So we'll wake up tomorrow morning, and we'll get on it.

Q. Coach, despite the tough loss, Jaden Richardson had an incredible play catching probably one of the best catches I've ever seen. What was it like seeing a guy who didn't necessarily get a ton of targets during the regular season come out and make a play as big as that one?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, that was awesome. Definitely one of the highlights tonight. Not just his. It was a tremendous play, but I think so many guys that have been kind of behind the scenes. Maybe they only played a few snaps through the year. We had guys that were full-time scout teamers that had never even played tonight that came in and got a lot of burn against a quality team in a fun environment.

Yeah, it was awesome to see him make that play and a lot of other guys step up and make plays. It energized our team and our sideline. You know, J-Rich is one of those guys you can't have enough of. He's all about the team, all about the Trojans, all about what he can do, and I think for him to make that big of play in a critical moment was an awesome moment for him and a good message to everybody on our roster. You keep plugging away, you never know when your opportunity is going to show up.

Q. Lincoln, obviously Jayden had a career year. What do you say to your starting quarterback at the end of that game just based on how things went and then the locker room to get his mind right for the offseason?

LINCOLN RILEY: I mean, yeah, he's obviously grown a lot, but there's still going to be so much more growth left. Yeah, I'm proud of the progress that he's made, but we know in that room what the standards are both for us as a staff and at this school. So we're going to continue to strive to get there with all the guys in the room.

Yeah, I love the room. Really enjoy coaching Jayden. He's gotten a lot better, and we'll be looking forward to make a jump with him and the entire room going into next

year.

Q. Without Makai and Ja'Kobi out there, how did you see Tanook take ownership of this game?

LINCOLN RILEY: He stepped up and made some good plays. He was awesome and made some really tough, competitive plays down the field. I think he gained a lot of confidence after the Oregon game and kind of the show we put on in that game.

Yeah, it was fun to see him kind of rise up in that moment and kind of assume that role. He was pretty unguardable tonight, to be honest. The only times they really guarded him is when they tackled him. So, yeah, he did a great job. He's going to be a hell of a player here.

Q. I sense the optimism in the future. If you could talk about obviously tough loss tonight, but the recruiting class you have coming in, the facility you guys are about to build? What gives you hope that this team will be in the college football playoffs soon?

LINCOLN RILEY: I think all those things you just said, but honestly, kind of how our locker room was ten minutes ago. You can just tell, you know. When you've been in those programs and been a part of those teams that have done those things, you feel what it's like. This place is doing all the things that you need to do to put yourself in position to go bust that door down and do it.

I really believe a window here has opened up that's taken a lot of effort by a lot of people, a lot of commitment by a lot of people. Four fun, but really challenging years to get it open, and it's open now.

We all feel that, all of us that are fortunate enough to be able to come back here next year, because it's not our right, coaching or playing. Working at USC is not anybody's right. It's a privilege. Those of us that have the privilege to be able to come back, we know what our job is. It's to make all the efforts of all those people the last four years worth it. That's what we're going to do.

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