

Valero Alamo Bowl: USC vs TCU

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

TCU Horned Frogs

Sonny Dykes

Ken Seals

Bud Clark

Kaleb Elams-Orr

Jeremy Payne

Press Conference

TCU 30, USC 27

SONNY DYKES: First of all, I just want to tell these guys thank you. You know, it's been -- I told them this I think today before we left the hotel. I mean, it's really been the honor and privilege of my life to get to coach these guys.

This is my fourth year at TCU, and there's been some guys that have been here from the very beginning. Those guys are just incredibly special.

They hung around when there was a coaching change, and year number one to go so good and year number two doesn't go so great, and there's been some ups and downs. Those guys have never wavered.

The character, who they are, just all of it, I couldn't be more proud. The guys sitting up here Bud and Kaleb and Jeremy and Ken, I mean, they're just such good people, and I'm so blessed to get to go to work every day and be around these guys.

They truly mean the world to me. So proud of what they did tonight. You know, it took a special effort to find a way. That's kind of what we talked about last night after Bram Kohlhausen came and talked to us a little bit. That was his message, you have to find a way. These guys found a way today. Wasn't always pretty. Third quarter was about as ugly offensive football as I've been a part of, but we found a way.



Defense kept hanging in there, and they kept playing hard and got the stops that we need to do give us a chance to win. Then guys made plays down the stretch.

I mean, Jeremy's -- Ken did a great job checking the ball down there on third down, and we were trying to get in field goal range and probably anticipating kicking a 45-, 50-yard field goal, and Jeremy just took it over and made a play.

Just like I said, so proud of these guys. Great win for TCU and I think something that we'll always remember.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Sonny, the offense went four for four in the red zone tonight, and defensively they got a couple of big stops there.

SONNY DYKES: Big stops, yeah.

Q. Just talk about how important red zone...

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, you look back on this game, and I don't know how many competitive PBUs Bud had, but a bunch, you know what I mean? Where the ball was in the air and had a chance to make a play, and Bud Clark just fought harder than he did and made a play.

That was the deal defensively was three times holding them to field goals. That's obviously the difference in the game.

Then when we got down there in the red zone we scored touchdowns. Thought we had the catch with Manjack which would have made it a little bit easier, but wouldn't have been as fun for Jeremy to be able to finish the way he did, so I'm glad it worked out the way it did.

Q. First start in two years, Ken. You lead a double digit comeback. It felt like watching a movie for us. How did it feel for you out there on the field?

KEN SEALS: I mean, it felt like a movie. It was just -- you reach a certain point where, I mean, I was a little rusty to start. Not going to lie. I kind of forgot how to run a football.



I think I got hit standing up straight and just dropped the football the start of the second half, so...

But, I mean, I just can't even -- I'm not processing it. This has just been an unbelievable experience. The week leading up to it, the last ten days, and then to finish it in this fashion is just, you know, more than any guy could dream.

Q. For all the defenders on stage, how special is it for you guys on this defense to get that win not just for each other, but also Coach Avalos who from the IE, from California, probably overlooked by SC? How was it just the temperament going into the week preparing?

KALEB ELAMS-ORR: That was a good win. Defensively I feel like we had our moments, but at the end of the day we got some crucial stops, held them to some field goals, some third down, fourth down stops. Shoot, I'm from California too, so just kind of being overlooked by all the big schools and, you know, playing one of the bigger programs historically and ended up finding a way to get on top is definitely an amazing feeling, for sure.

SONNY DYKES: I'll say this about Andy, too. The great thing about Andy is he didn't make it about him, you know what I mean? I know it meant more to him. He never talked to me about it. I'm guessing he didn't talk to the defensive players about it. That's just who he is. He is a guy that pours his heart and soul into the players and takes a lot of pride in their performance and just really he did a tremendous job getting them ready.

USC is a very talented football team and very well-coached. They day great job with their schemes and what they did. They were down some players, and they still went out and did a great job. Again, that's a credit to Coach Riley and his staff and their players.

BUD CLARK: We prepared for it. We prepared all week. We prepared for the whole month, and? It's been a big thing for us. Just be excited. I feel like we did a great job at doing that, especially on defense and offense, because we believed in Ken and Ken believed in us, and I feel like that's what took us this far.

Q. Jeremy, on that final play, it's third and 20. You get the checkdown. You'll see the screenshot if you haven't already, but you look up, and there's four USC defenders around you. What are you thinking? How desperate were you to keep your legs moving?

JEREMY PAYNE: Just catching the ball, you know, I always taught to beat one player, just beat one player. Once I beat that one player, I'm thinking, let's get the first

down. Then I broke another tackle and I'm, like, oh, I can make it.

Just an amazing feeling. Just all glory to God.

Q. Coach, can you talk about the job Mitch did calling the game tonight?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah. Really good. I mean, you know, we started slow. Ken talked about it. We didn't convert two third and shorts in the first half and that hurt us and kind of slowed us down, but once we got into a rhythm we really started moving the ball and scored the two back-to-back touchdowns on those drives and really had a ton of momentum going into halftime.

Came out in the third quarter. I expected us to kind of pick up where we left off and we just struggled. To Mitch's credit, we're down 10, and if you are a young play caller, and I had to learn this when I began calling plays 20 years ago, you know, you've got to treat the game as if it's a 0-0 game.

You got to call it that way, because you start dropping back and taking shots and things can snowball, especially against a talented defensive front like that.

He did a great job. He kept his composure. He didn't panic. There was tremendous communication among all the coaches, and I thought everybody did a good job of being patient.

You know, we talked to the players and said, hey, look, it's a one play at a time thing, and we'll get back in this game. Again, you can say that, but those guys have to believe it. The only way that they can believe it is they have to believe in themselves and their preparation and all the things that they've done to put themselves in that position.

You know, we had 13 bowl practices, I believe, and never one time did anybody dog it. You know, we had some adversity. Your starting quarterback says he's not going to play in a game. That's adversity. Everybody stepped right up.

Everybody said, okay, we got the guy in the building that can do this in Ken, and you have to believe it. The only way you can go out and do what he did today is you have to prepare yourself every single day for two years, and you have to be incredibly unselfish in order to do that, and he did it.

He got to live a dream tonight. He'll remember it the rest of his life. I'll remember it the rest of mine. Man, it's just fun to be a part of it.

Q. Sonny, you mentioned in your opening statement a little bit of ups and downs the last few years, but the reality is you've won nine games -- at least nine games in three of your first four seasons. How would you evaluate these four years? What's been the key?

SONNY DYKES: Like you said, up and down. I think if you had said, okay, year one you're going to go 5-7, year two you're going to go 9-4, year three you're going to go 9-4, and year four you're going to play for a national championship, I think everybody would go, well, that's pretty good. You know what I'm saying?

I think for us the fact that we did that in year one, you know, makes it hard. Where do you go from there? I think it creates expectations that you want. Look, I want to win every game, and I want us to field the team that believes we can win every game, and I do believe for the last two years we fielded that kind of team.

Now, we've made too many mistakes, coaching errors, and all kinds of other things to do it, but this is a good football program on the verge of being a great program. We all want it to be great. We all want to be in the playoff, but you know, anybody that says bowls don't matter didn't watch this game tonight, because bowls matter.

This is important for this university and most importantly these young men, and it matters. They treated it that way, and that's why they came out on the winning edge.

Look, I want to be in the playoff every year. I know our players want to be in the playoff every year. I know our fans want to be. We're going to work our tails off to get there.

Q. Sonny, you guys trusted a lot of true freshmen tonight. I think about Gil Jackson in that third down stop. How big was he for you guys tonight?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, Gil is awesome. He showed that kind of perseverance. Look at Gil, and you look at Terry, and they got forced into some action tonight. We had some guys that were down, and they've been preparing all year and looking for their opportunity.

We just talked about it. We just talked about it in the locker room. That's what very successful people do. They show up every day, they go to work, and they don't get an opportunity. They do it again the next day, they don't get an opportunity. They know at some point that opportunity is coming and they're ready.

Gil was ready. Terry was ready. Obviously Ken was

ready. Jeremy has proven that over and over again as a young player. Bud was the same way.

I mean, Bud, you go back and look at the national championship here, he's a young player out there playing in these big football games and gained confidence from that, and it helped him be the player that he is now. I'm excited to watch these guys after they leave TCU and what's next for them in their journey in the NFL, because they're going to be very successful people. I can't wait to watch.

Q. Coach, what does your focus look like going into the offseason just being able to build on this momentum from this win tonight?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, you know, biggest thing, number one, is hold on to as many players as we can hold on to. I think that's the whole thing that we've been working really the last month. Ryan Dorchester, our GM, chief of staff, you know, probably honestly the most important guy in the building has been working for a month to secure as many players as we can and get those guys back. That's where it begins.

Then we've got to go address some needs in the transfer portal. You know, we'll have about 72 hours to enjoy this and then we'll start hosting visits on January 3rd, transfer portal visits, and trying to get guys to fill in the roster and get better.

That's what's next, but this does give us a lot of momentum. I think it gives us a lot of confidence. I bet there was a bunch of people watching this game tonight that saw what TCU football is and what we're about, and I think it made a big impression on them. I'm sure it did some of those recruits as well, so it was a big night.

Q. For Bud and Kaleb, I know you practiced against Jeremy a lot. On that last play, were you kind of not surprised that he was able to break that? What was your view from the sidelines?

BUD CLARK: I felt like I knew he was going to do it, because even in practice he does it. It's something that you practice every day. It's not just a pop up and let's do it.

The flip switch, you know -- the switch flipped, and that's what it was. I believed in him and so did our team, and he did what he was called to do.

KALEB ELAMS-ORR: Yeah, I'm not really surprised either. Jeremy is an extremely hard worker. Shoot, he be shaking me at practice sometimes too. I'm not surprised that he just went out there and made a bunch of dudes



miss. He was doing it all night, so once he made that first dude miss, I knew he was gone.

Hell of a player, and I mean, I'm proud of him. I see it every day, so I definitely wasn't surprised.

JEREMY PAYNE: Thank you, y'all.

Q. We had a question come in. The reckless abandon that Bram showed in his game, leaving his feet, you had a same play that was shown on social media a lot. Talk about that mentality going in that you were going to leave it on the field.

KEN SEALS: Yeah, I think my mentality was just sell out, it's your last one, man. If you can put the ball on the goal line and go score, go do it. In some ways I think I needed a refresher on how to run the football. It's been a while since I got hit and it was kind of -- took me a second to, I guess, shake the rust off a little bit.

Once I felt like I settled in and kind of got back to my game and knew how to play and stuff, I felt really confident in what I can do and made the plays when there were plays to be made.

Q. Bud, over 60 games in your career, man. Just talk about your career coming to a close at TCU, what it's meant to you, and playing in this game and it finishing the way it did.

BUD CLARK: When I first came to TCU, I didn't know a thing about it, so it was hard for me. I got in, played under Coach P. He was great to us, you know, whatever. I didn't know what I was going to do because I ended up getting a concussion. Then Dykes came in. I didn't know if they wanted me or not. I was about to transfer, honestly.

I had a good player playing in front of me. So I talked to our DC at the time, and they told me that they wanted me. I knew then that I would do everything that I could for TCU. Anything that I could by any chance, any time, any place, anywhere, I'll do it. I would like to say thanks to Coach Dykes and all the staff that took us in -- well, took me in for sure.

It's crazy it's coming to an end. I started when I was 19, 20. I'm 23 now. Not even 19, 20; 17, 18. I'm 23 now. I've grown. I've matured, and I feel like being here helped me. It helped me grow my grit, grow my tenacity, everything that I needed in order to become the man that I am today.

Q. Coach, you talked about how bowl games matter, and obviously the playoff. You, obviously TCU, Texas Tech, teams from Texas that just aren't in the SEC are

having very great seasons. So when you look upon that going forward with the playoff, how do you feel the Big 12 needs to be placed in terms of the top conferences?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, good question. Look, man, I could sit here and talk for hours about changes that I think need to be made in the playoff and all the stuff, but it's a difficult task. I mean, there's a lot of things that you have to juggle and a lot of things that have to align themselves to make it work.

You know, I believe the Big 12 is the most competitive conference in football. I really do believe that. From top to bottom, anybody can win any given Saturday, and it makes it a very difficult conference to win.

It was hard for us when we went 12-0 our first year. There were only nine teams in the league -- or ten teams in the league at that time. We played everybody, and so you kind of had a real champion. Now with the addition of the teams, the league has gotten stronger.

Texas Tech obviously had a tremendous year. That's a really, really solid football team. I felt the same way about BYU. I felt like BYU probably should have been included in the playoff. You know, they were a 12-win team. Lost two games to Texas Tech, and that's it.

But it's like anything else. I think when you have an opportunity like we did in '22, you have to go win. You know, we beat Michigan. Michigan lost one game in two years, and that was to us.

So we had to go do that for the league. Texas Tech needs to go win some games for the league. As that happens and as teams win games, I think the league gets more respect, because like I said, game in and game out, there's no league tougher from top to bottom.

Now, maybe not as many teams at the top as there is in the SEC or maybe the Big Ten, but the bottom teams in the Big 12 are crazy competitive. So, anyway, it's a hell of a league, and you know, hard to win it.

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