

Capital One Orange Bowl: Alabama vs Oklahoma

Sunday, December 30, 2018

Lincoln Riley

Ben Powers

Curtis Bolton

Amani Bledsoe

Dru Samia

Oklahoma Sooners

Alabama 45, Oklahoma 34

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, it's not the result that we wanted or expected. Kind of a tale of two different games for us. The start of the game, give Alabama credit, they're a really good football team. They made a run on us there early. We just had a hard time breaking their string of momentum.

But I felt like our team, until really the last run down there at the very end felt like we were going to win the football game, even despite going down 28-0. We just kind of kept talking, hey, we've been here, so we've been here with way less time and still found a way to come back before. We've trailed in seven, now eight ballgames this year and found a way to win almost all of them. After that we outscored them by 17 the rest of the way. So we played much more -- just much closer to what we felt like we were capable of there the last three quarters, and unfortunately we just dug ourselves too big of a hole and we were just one play away there in the fourth quarter from making it a game that could go either way. Disappointed in the way we played early, but I am proud as hell of our guys' fight and our belief.

We're going to -- we've still got a bunch of Big 12 trophies. We're going to hold that tall skinny one here in a couple years and we're going to hold it in a large part because of the fight from these seniors in this program, all the players, the staff. We've had some really good teams here the last four years, but I don't know that we've ever had a team, and I just told them that in the locker room, that has had the fight in them that this team has, and that's going to do wonders for our program. That's going to make us a better program, what this team this did year. And so I'm thankful for them, thankful for a historic senior class that did something that no Big 12 team or no



Oklahoma team has ever done in winning four straight Big 12s, and countless other honors, awards, great wins.

So it's been a hell of a ride. Hate that it ends right now, because you're sick, you feel like you're right there, being ready to play next week. It was certainly a game we fully expected to win.

But give Alabama a ton of credit. They're a really, really good football team, coached very well, outstanding players all around. It was fun. I mean, it was a heavy hitter just like we all expected.

Q. Lincoln, you guys are usually such great starters; what do you think happened at the start of the game because you guys usually are the ones to get on top of teams at the beginning of the game.

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, we just kind of picked a bad time. We kind of just played our worst ball at the beginning. We very simply didn't get stops, gave up some big plays to them. They made some really nice, competitive plays down the field, and then we just had trouble kind of gaining our traction offensively early. Every time we'd have a good play, we'd seem to kind of shoot ourselves in the foot. We were just a little off early. We obviously didn't do a good enough job coaching them early. And I thought it took us a little bit longer to settle into this one than it normally does, and it's like we were just kind of waiting for that spark, and it just took longer.

I mean, they outplayed us early. I think it's as simple as that. It was just a complete tale of two games. I mean, they completely outplayed us early and then we completely outplayed them pretty much the rest of the way.

Q. Lincoln, you got the team together at the end of the first quarter I think it was, and like you said, you guys went on to outscore them after the score in the second quarter 34-17. What did you share with your team in that moment?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, I just wanted us to know that we were still in it, just reminded them of all the adversity that we've faced this year, all the tough games, all the times that we were down and people counted us out, and I just wanted to make sure that the entire team heard that message. And listen, you can

go yell and holler and say whatever you want as a coach. There's not any magic words that I said. The credit goes to these guys up here and the guys in that locker room because they're the ones that went and did something about it and played pretty good football from then on out. No magic words, that's just the guts of this team, and I was just making sure they didn't forget that, and they damned sure didn't.

Q. Lincoln, a couple things with your receivers. CD Lamb didn't get involved much in that first quarter, but your thoughts on him coming on and doing what he did? And secondly, when was it you realized that you weren't going to get out of Hollywood what you normally do, and how did you adjust to that?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, CD was phenomenal the whole night. If we could have done anything morning, he caught eight, we probably should have thrown him about 20. I mean, they had a hard time covering him. They tried some different things and Kyler and him made some great plays together. We started to protect better and gave him some time, so he was phenomenal.

Yeah, Hollywood, honestly he was probably not as good as we thought he was going to be. He had some good days of practice. I thought there was honestly just some rust. He had about a whole month here where there was just very, very little that he could do. So we were a little worried about that today, even if he's feeling pretty decent early. It's just been a long time since this guy has done a lot, and then you add in a hot, muggy night. I thought conditioning was a little bit of a factor for him which is understandable. We tried every way to condition him without aggravating the injury as possible.

Yeah, I honestly probably thought we'd get a little bit more out of him, but as we got into the game you could tell he wasn't quite himself. I'm proud of Charleston Rambo. He stepped in and made some big plays for us there, and it bodes well for the future for him.

Q. Lincoln, last year I asked you how close you were to winning a National Championship, and you guys were inches away from beating Georgia, and they're inches away from beating Alabama. This year when you step back and look at it, how close are you to winning a National Championship?

LINCOLN RILEY: Well, I think we'll see what happens here in eight or nine days, but I mean, I think it's pretty clear that Alabama is a National Championship caliber team, just like Georgia was. I think we're right on the doorstep. There's no doubt. And I think the talent level is growing, the recruiting is going great, the program I think is headed in such a great direction in large part

because of these guys up here, and the fight in this program has never been better.

It's agonizingly close. It is. But we've got to continue to take steps in the right direction, and we're going to do everything we can to get that done.

Q. Curtis, how did you feel the defense held up tonight, and when you couldn't get stops there particularly down the stretch, what was the issue?

CURTIS BOLTON: We just flat out didn't play good enough. You know, I thought we came out on the first drive a little bit too aggressive. I thought they were going to try to out-physical us from the beginning of the game, and they kind of mixed it up on us, and we didn't adjust to it well enough. I didn't get off blocks well enough, didn't tackle well enough, didn't cover well enough. Just all around, I think it was a night we let the team down. Any time you give up that many points, we're not going to let anybody else take the blame but us, and as the leader of the defense, that falls on me. Just wasn't good enough.

LINCOLN RILEY: That falls on all of us. Curtis is a great leader for us. Proud of that kid, where he was two, three years ago to where he is now. He's been a great leader, been a spark plug for us all year. Going down the way we did early was -- everybody had a hand in that, coaches, offense, defense, special teams, everybody. Everybody also had a hand in outscoring them by 17 the rest of the way, including our defense, including Curtis.

Q. Ben and Dru, both you guys, Dru, especially you've been through this now three times, I'm curious how you feel about the legacy that you leave here, rebuilding this offensive line into a Joe Moore Award winner this year, and both you guys' thoughts on CD tonight and how he did against 92?

DRU SAMIA: Well, first of all, I'm really proud of the way this offensive line has developed. We came in 2015, Ben came in the year after, and we weren't sure what we were going to do after Orlando left. But we all leaned on each other. We knew that we had to take this offensive line. It was our year. It was time to go. We just looked each other in the eyes and knew that we wanted to go accomplish something, and luckily we did.

The legacy that we left I think completely has to do with perseverance. All of us have been through our struggles. The last time I was here in 2015, I felt like I had lost the team the game. Ben, no offers coming out of high school and then coming and doing what he did in college, I feel like this group has the most perseverance of any group in the nation. I feel like that showed tonight.

BEN POWERS: Yeah, CD had a hell of a game. I'd say of all the players on the team, he has one of the brightest futures. He played great. If it wasn't for him stepping up this year the way he did, I don't think we'd be sitting here today.

Q. Coach, talk about the level of respect you have for Tua?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, a ton of respect. I thought he moved around well. I thought he really threw the ball well. There wasn't many of the passes that weren't on target. Made a lot of great throws. Didn't give us too many opportunities. I thought he gave us one there on one of the deep balls that the guy ended up catching. I thought we had a chance to pick that one. But yeah, he did a great job. He played well. He's a heck of a player. Obviously has a bright future, and he's a great kid. We got to know him and his family a little bit on the little award circuit, and that's an awesome family. He's got a magnetic personality, and obviously he's a fantastic player.