



## Team Selection Teleconference

No. 5 Georgia vs. No. 7 Baylor

December 8, 2019



**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you very much, and welcome everybody. We are looking forward to another Allstate Sugar Bowl. This year's 86th annual Allstate Sugar Bowl will feature No. 5 Georgia and No. 7 Baylor. As this is the media teleconference with the head coaches, we're not going to waste any time. We'll jump right into it.

We're going to start with Coach Kirby Smart. Coach Smart, if you could please start off with a brief opening statement, and then we'll open it to questions.

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, first, I want to thank the Sugar Bowl for inviting us and realize it is one of the best bowls out there in country. And I've been very blessed to be a part of a lot of good bowl games. And, fortunately, I've been a part of a lot of Sugars Bowls, it seems like, throughout my career in the SEC. Our team is headed back to the Sugar Bowl. And I know that we've got a lot of players I have to meet with today that want to get the bad taste out of their mouth from last year for the loss, so excited for the opportunity. And we got a lot of respect for the Baylor football team that we'll be playing. We got to watch them play several times this year, and got tremendous respect for the way they compete and the season they've had.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you very much, Coach. We will now open it up to questions.

**Q. Can you tell this early how many injured players? You had five or six, I know, go down on the field last night. And how many might possibly be back for the Sugar Bowl. I know, of course, [Dominick] Blaylock will definitely be out. But how do you see the others as of this moment?**

**COACH SMART:** Well, I think we'll be able to get most of those guys back. A couple of them were cramping issues, which obviously aren't severe. Kearis Jackson had an ankle, but should be fine, couldn't finish last night. And then, obviously, Dominick [Blaylock]. But we'll get most of them back. I think most of those guys will be back.

**Q. You kind alluded to it in your opening statement, but what do you think of the job Coach Rhule has done in his three years to get to where they are?**

**COACH SMART:** Phenomenal, just incredible. You can tell the passion and energy he coaches with, got a lot of respect for the way their team plays. Man, they played really two hard-fought battles with Oklahoma, who's one of the best teams in the country year in and year out, and really had them. Both games were in the lead there, and just got a lot of respect for the job he's done. It's really been incredible to watch them play. And it was actually interesting because it was a place that we had written down to go visit in the off season. We were hoping to get to go visit and kind of see how they're doing things to get fresh new ideas. And now, of course, we get to play them.

**Q. And I don't know how much you've seen of Baylor. Do you see y'all as maybe kind of similar teams, both have really good defenses?**



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**COACH SMART:** Definitely in that regard. Again, just finishing up last night, we've been crazy busy today. I have not got to see actual footage and tape. I just know what I have seen of them on TV.

**Q. Just checking on Lawrence Cager's potential availability for the game. And, also, I was wondering, have you noticed any difference in the reaction your team has to this Sugar Bowl berth this year compared to maybe the way y'all reacted this time last year when you knew you were going to the Sugar Bowl?**

**COACH SMART:** No, I didn't notice a difference in the finding out of the bowl game. It was similar. We had a loss last year, you know, the SEC championship game, and kind of felt like we knew where we were going had we lost either game. But as far as Cager's availability, it's very doubtful that he will be able to play.

**Q. Could you address the reports that Sam Pittman is headed to Arkansas to be the head coach? And what about guys like Sam and Dan and coaching rumors at this time of year and the potential to have to replace them? How do you deal with that?**

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, it's always the nature of the beast. You always hear rumors flying around and different things coming around. You'll never know what's to be true and what's not. And, right now, we're focusing on the Sugar Bowl and getting ready for it.

**Q. And then just to follow up on that, based on last year's experience, I mean, this is such a fluid time with transfer portals and players leaving early. Did you take anything out of last year's Sugar Bowl? And do you have an idea which players will be playing in that game and which ones might not be as they protect draft status?**

**COACH SMART:** Not at all right now. That's, obviously, you said a fluid situation. I think we will find out more as it comes about, if guys -- they really haven't had time to really sit back and observe where they are and get information and things like that. And we really only had one last year, and that was Deandre Baker. You know, I don't know where that will fall, and really not concerned with that right now as much as I am finishing up final exams, getting on recruiting, and then getting started on Baylor.

**Q. Motivation seems to be a little bit of an issue for your team last year. Do you address that in the week before this game?**

**COACH SMART:** Certainly. I mean, you address it in the practice leading up to it. I thought that there was lot of young players that got to play in that game last year. I thought it really propelled our defense, it all started. And, at that time, because Coach Tucker had taken that head job, but the defensive staff kind of started to impart its kind of personality on things and thought that a lot of that started to show up in those games. A lot of young players got to play on defense, which really helped us this year.



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**Q.** Yeah, I want a follow-up question on the defense. Last night, it seemed like you were just inches away from close to getting psyched on [Joe] Burrow, but his elusiveness just is really just part of hamming him up. How did you evaluate the overall defense? I thought holding them to 17, when they could have had more attempts in the first half was a pretty good accomplishment. But what would you say the overall defense? And do you think they tired some in the second half with the way the LSU offense was playing?

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, I thought that we had a good plan for what they wanted to do, trying to mix things up with them. I think that any time you're trying to stop a unit as powerful and as explosive as they are, you got to get stops. And there was a couple of times we had opportunities to get off the field on third down and didn't.

He is an amazing football player, as I said last night. And he has an unbelievable supporting cast around him. So they did a great job. We could have made some more plays and got some more players out in some more ways. But I thought they fought hard, and probably held them to some field goals in the red area where it could have been worse if they had scored touchdowns.

**Q.** You referred earlier about getting the bad taste out of your mouth. And I know you're going to be asked this a lot, but just what did you learn from last year about the attitude and everything that you need to have when you're in this kind of situation? Is there anything that maybe you will think about doing a little bit differently this year in your approach?

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, I think we learned a lot of things. First thing we did when we got last year, we had a bunch of notes written up by every coach and every sports staff member of things we could do better or different to put ourselves if we were in that situation again if you're playing in a nonplayoff situation.

And we've got some ideas. We will look at those. Like I said, we've been barely 24 hours out of the other one. And bottom line is, it's your job to go play in a football game. You get a great opportunity. And there's a lot of teams all across the country that would be dying to play in a game like this. And we're going to sell it that way. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be Sugar Bowl champs.

None of the kids on our team have ever been Sugar Bowl champs, and they're going to get an opportunity to do that. And we're going to take the ones that want to do that and want to play well.

What I found out last year, for a lot of kids, it was the most important game of their season and meant so much to them. And then maybe for some others, it didn't. And you got to take the guys that are engaged and excited about playing because that matters a whole lot more than how good they are.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you very much, Coach. Thanks for taking the time. Good luck with all the preparations leading into the game. We look forward to seeing you in a few weeks.



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**COACH SMART:** Thank you. Appreciate it.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** All right. If you can bring Coach Rhule into the line now, please, and let us know when he is with us.

**COACH RHULE:** Well, on behalf of our entire team and everyone at Baylor, I want to make sure that we express our gratitude and how excited we are to to come the Allstate Sugar Bowl. On a personal note, it's a lifelong sort of bucket list item for me to take part in the game. And I know that our players and our program is excited to come and represent Baylor University and do everything the right way and have a great time.

So it's an honor to play against the University of Georgia. I've had a chance to watch them. Coach Smart is a great coach. They have great players, a great program. And we can only hope that we'll come and give everyone a great game and a great experience. And, again, we're just very grateful to be there. So thank you so much for having me on today.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you, Coach. And at this time, we will open it up to questions.

**Q. Just wondering, you were that close to getting into the playoffs yesterday. How do you get past that disappointment and look forward to capitalizing on what your team has accomplished over this season?**

**COACH RHULE:** Yeah, we're a program that believes in competition. We're a program that believes in being grateful for every opportunity that you have. And we were a team that was picked sixth or seventh in our league. So, really, while we did come close to making the playoff, we're really an overtime away from maybe having a chance to play in that game, that's not really how we think.

I mean, we're unbelievably excited to have a chance to go out and play together as a team one more time. And then you factor in the fact that we have a chance to come to New Orleans, a chance to play in the Sugar Bowl.

You know, I said that our guys today, because we weren't sure where we would end up. There were a lot of guys nodding their head, just so grateful for the experience. And then to play a team like Georgia with so much on the line. We would like to finish the year as a Top 10 team. We would like to finish the year -- if we can win one more game and get to 12 games, we will be the winningest team in Baylor football history. And where we came from in the past three years ago to where we are now, I know our guys are going to play their best game and give our best effort.

**Q. Just wondering, you called this a bucket list-type item for you to play in this game. Was it something about the Sugar Bowl in particular that always appealed to you, or was it just the idea of playing one of these major bowl games? I didn't know if you were a Sugar Bowl follower specifically.**



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**COACH RHULE:** No, it would be the Sugar Bowl. And I had chance as a player to play in the Rose Bowl and the Fiesta Bow, all tremendous experiences. I was a Penn State fan from the time I was born. I was born into it. We lived in New York City, but going back to Pennsylvania and watching the 1982 Sugar Bowl, Penn State versus Georgia, watching Greg Garrity catch the diving touchdown down the left sideline from Don Blackledge and just having that be one of my earliest memories of football, of what the bowl games mean when family and friends come together to root teams on whether in person or far, far away.

So, to me, it will be an amazing opportunity. It's on a very personal note, to play in one of the greatest bowl games, really, in history and take a Baylor team that has done something really special over the last three years. That's a very personal thing for me. I'm sure our team has their own memories. But just for me personally as a college football fan, the Sugar Bowl holds so much meaning.

**Q. I don't know how much you've seen Georgia this year. I was wondering if you saw very many similarities between your team and theirs, and also if you have an update on Charlie [Brewer].**

**COACH RHULE:** I haven't had a chance to really study the film yet. I'm actually in Albuquerque, New Mexico, recruiting right now. I came in and met with the team this morning and then headed out on the road. I don't have a great feel other than just what I've seen on TV, what I've seen over the past few years. And, obviously, you have a great defense always with Kirby Smart and Georgia and their ability to run the football. [Jake] Fromm is a great quarterback. But I haven't had a chance yet to study those things.

And there's really no update right now on Charlie to be made official. I haven't really had a chance to get back there to see them. He is obviously, as with anybody who's suffered the injury, under the care of the medical staff.

**Q. What would you say the big difference is where you would go from 7-6 last season to the 11-2 this season? What did you do so much better and what came together for you as a football team?**

**COACH RHULE:** I think our team has really matured. They've grown. They understand the process. They attack everything that comes in front of them. So I think just another year of maturation. Last year was our second year together. This year, knowing what to expect. And I think, really, our growth on defense, you know, going from maybe second to last or last in every defensive category to this year where we're first or second in every category. And it's the same players. It was just really their growth, their development, the job that Phil Snow, our defensive coordinator, has done has been amazing. And I think those are probably the biggest reasons why we've been able to make this job.



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**Q. What is your familiarity with Georgia's program? Have you crossed paths anywhere in your career with Kirby or many of the people associated with that program?**

**COACH RHULE:** Not really. One of our assistant string coaches and one of the best young members of our staff, a young man name Corey Campbell, was player there, I think right before Coach Smart. I think under Coach [Mark] Richt. So that's probably my most familiar part of the University of Georgia.

Other than that, it's really just from afar, watching them on TV, watching them on crossover tape, the way that they do things. I obviously have the utmost respect for them, but no real personal connection with anyone that's there.

**Q. You've given a lot of credit to those first couple of senior classes for what they did. How important was it or what does it mean to take this group of seniors to a bowl like this?**

**COACH RHULE:** Well, this group of seniors, I'm their third head coach. They had to endure at a young age a lot of change and turmoil. Thought they did that really in a positive way. And there was a time after their freshman year and after their sophomore year where they had lost 16 of 18 games. And that can have a real effect on many people. But these guys were tough. They were hard-working. They competed in everything they did. And as juniors, got us to a bowl game, and won the bowl game. And this year as seniors to have us finish the season as the No. 7 team in the country with an opportunity to play the University of Georgia in the Sugar Bowl, not many stories are written like that. It's been their character and their resolve and their toughness that's allowed us to do it. I'll get some credit, some other people will get some credit. But it's really been the players and most importantly the seniors that have made that happen.

**Q. I see you have a master's degree, I believe it's in education psychology. And I was just wondering have you been able to use that degree in your coaching career? And even with Baylor and kind of developing this team?**

**COACH RHULE:** Yeah, that's one of the reasons why I studied that. I was a political science undergraduate, and then I got my Master's in Educational Psychology. I like studying and learning theory and the different ways in which people learn. Some people believe, and sometimes I've worked for coaches who believe, hey, this guy can't learn. Well, everyone can learn, but there's just different ways that people learn. People have many different types of intelligences. So I think those were the main things that I learned and I try to apply every day. And then a lot of about motivation. And I think that's really important.



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I wrote my master's thesis on expert/novice differences. Gladwell wrote a book about 10,000 hours or 10 years to become an expert. And that's really what I wrote my master's degree on before some of the studies that led to his book. And that's really what we want. We want to have guys that go out there and play that know how to learn, that are motivated, and that they can play like experts, that are

automatic in the things that they do. So I thought my education at State University of New York at Buffalo and also at UCLA really helped me as a coach.

**Q. Yes, Coach, last year, there was a similar situation. And for Texas, they brought a ton of fans. They were happy to be in the game. And outplayed Georgia and won the game when they were an underdog. What's your message to your fans about support, how much support you expect to get and how much do you need at the Sugar Bowl?**

**COACH RHULE:** I tried to train our team that we don't rely on outside things. We had to play Rice in front of not many people. We had to go to Kansas last game of the year and play not in front of many people. My message is, it's football, you should be able to play in front of a hundred thousand people or in front a thousand people.

That being said, we love it when our fans come. I thought what we experienced last year was elite. The fans traveled. I thought our bowl game, excuse me, our championship game experience yesterday, we had a great crowd there. We are not the University of Texas. We are not Oklahoma. We are not a public school. We have not the same size but the people that love Baylor are passionate about it. They love it. And I hope they all come to New Orleans. I hope they have a tremendous time. I hope they travel well as they did last year. I'm sure that they will. I think people are really proud. Baylor people are really proud of this team. And not just what they have done but the way they have done it. And the way they have competed, and they was that when bad things happen, we don't make excuses. When good things happen, we share, and we share in the credit with everyone else. So I know our team will be excited, but I hope our fans, I know our fans will be as well. But I want to guys to really focus on football, because it's a great opportunity football-wise to move the program forward.

**Q. Just take me back as far as opening this opportunity, what did you see in Baylor, and what was the philosophy that you brought there that has enabled the program to have this sort of growth under you?**

**COACH RHULE:** Well, I had a great job at Temple. And felt like it was time to leave and take on another challenge. There were a couple opportunities. And Dion Dawkins who's the starting left tackle for the Buffalo Bills, he was a senior. I remember him saying to me, Coach, I get it. Other people won't get it, but I get it. You know there's a challenge there, and there's something wrong there, and you're going to go fix it.

And my staff and I, I think we looked at it. And it was against, you know, come coach college football in the state of Texas, with all the great high school football that we have and just a tremendous



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opportunity to go there. It was a chance to come up into the Big 12 and be in opportunities like this to go to the Sugar Bowl, to play in the New Year's six elite college football games. It was that opportunity.

And it's a Baptist university. And my dad is a minister and a football coach. And I was raised in a family where we love football, but we also understood that there was more important things in life than just what you do, but also who you are and the purpose that God gives us.

So it just felt like maybe I was uniquely suited to take that job from a football perspective and also from my upbringing and what the mission of the university was. And while my head might have said is this going to be a challenge, it just felt like it was where I was supposed to be. And my wife, Julie, felt that way. And both of us said this is where we're going to raise our kids and try to build a program. And, thankfully, here we are in year three with an opportunity to go play in this game and just a tremendous opportunity that it is.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you very much for taking the time with us this afternoon. And good luck as you continue your preparations for about three weeks out from the Sugar Bowl, so we look forward to seeing you then.