



Allstate Sugar Bowl
Georgia
Defense Press Conference
December 30, 2019



DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: First off, just want to say obviously how honored we are as a program to be associated with a bowl as prestigious as the Sugar Bowl. This is truly one of the best ones. You can circle it on your calendar every year. You know you're going to get everybody's attention in the nation when you get to play in a game like this.

Luckily for me, was able to have a little bit of crawfish étouffée last night, which is always exciting and have a couple oysters. So probably the first time I stepped out of the hotel this week.

But this is one of those special ones. I know our guys are really excited. I know we have a tremendous amount of respect for Baylor and the program that Coach [Matt] Rhule runs and how prepared they'll be. So we're excited for a really fun game. Watch our guys go out there and go to work.

Q. Can you talk about the realities of not having J.R. Reed here and just what that safety position is going to look like without him here.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: The reality is that's an opportunity. I love J.R. He's done a lot for our program. Extremely excited for him and his future. But we're excited for the guys that are here and what they're going to do.

The reality is somebody is going to step up. It's pretty common in this day and age that you're going to get guys that get opportunities in games like this. We had a lot of young guys that got opportunities in this game last year. I think that was critical to their development and also provide you some insight to you as a coach with what you've got. We've got some really good players on our team. Excited to see those guys go perform.

Q. You were up here last year. We didn't know if you were going to be the coordinator. A lot has happened. Can you talk about what this first season as coordinator has been like working with Kirby [Smart] and some of the things that this Georgia defense was able to do this season.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: Sometimes you sit back and it's hard to realize the blessings that you've had all your life. There's probably nobody associated with this program that feels as fortunate as I do to get to do what I do every day. We have outstanding coaches on the defensive side of the ball, Glenn Schumann, Tray Scott, Charlton Warren. Those guys are a pleasure to work with.

I get an opportunity to work with Coach [Kirby] Smart every day, and for me that's really exciting. He's a phenomenal coach. Since the first day I've got here, I've approached it like a guy that has a lot to learn. I'll tell you this, he's not afraid to teach me. So that's exciting.

More exciting than that, we build our mantra on kind of being the noname defense. It's not really about the players. It's about us. It's been about us this entire year. Our guys have gone out constantly and performed, tried



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to play to a standard regardless of who the opponent is. It's been exciting to see our guys embrace that this year. They've just done a really good job I think of attacking it each week. This game no different. The standard doesn't change for this one either.

Q. Where did the noname defense idea come up from? Also, in this day and age of so many prolific offenses, how much pride do you take in the numbers that your defense has been able to put up this year?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: Yeah, I'll be honest, I don't really know where it came up. It just kind of came in the conversation one day in one of those defensive meetings that we have that, look, it really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks outside of this room. What really matters are the people in this room.

We take a lot of pride in our performance, in everything we do. Not just the way we play, the way we meet, the way we present, the way we practice, the way we work. And it's great that the numbers can reflect that. This year that's awesome.

But our number one goal regardless of the numbers is the win. And I think our guys take a lot of pride in that. And a lot of times those numbers, they equate to wins. So when you're doing things the right way, you get to win like we have been able to win here at Georgia.

So we take yeah, we want to hold our defense to a standard. We've been fortunate to hit that several times this year. But the number one priority for us always is that W. And I think what's great about our players is they don't care who gets the recognition. They truly don't. They want to have success, but they all realize that individual success comes within team success.

Q. You were asked about J.R. Reed. You are missing a couple of other guys in the secondary. Who are some of the guys that maybe didn't get as much playing time that you will have to count on more this time?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: Fortunate us we've played a ton of guys this entire season. I think if you go back and look, we probably had over 40 guys that really had significant roles for us in this defense. You're going to see more. You're not necessarily going to see new, but you will see more. You will see more Lewis Cine. You will see more Chris Smith, more Otis Reese. You will see some more guys but you're not necessarily going to see new guys because all those guys at this point in the season have contributed to our success.

Q. Baylor is obviously a Big 12 offense, but they do it a little differently running the ball over 54% of the time. What kind of challenges do they present?



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DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: First off, they are extremely wellcoached. They do a really good job on offense of mixing it up. They can carry tempo, but they can also slow it down. They have big tight ends that can block at the point of attack. But they are really big at wide receiver outside, and that's a challenge. They make you play them honest.

If you want to take away the wideouts, they're going to be able to run the ball. If you want to take away the run, they are going to be able to run the 50/50 ball outside to guys like [Denzel] Mims. They have shifty backs. And their quarterback is just a winner. [Charlie] Brewer is a winner. You think, okay, well, if he's not in, somebody else is playing. Next guy comes in and has the success he had in the championship game.

They are really balanced, and you can't pick one thing or another thing to take away from them because you're probably pulling away from something else that you need to be able to do well.

You just watch them on film. You can see they're extremely wellcoached, play really, really hard. They compete for the ball, and they don't beat themselves. They're a team that doesn't beat themselves. So that sticks out.

Q. Is Tyrique McGhee here? If not, why not?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: All I'm speaking about are the players that are here. Got great respect for every guy that's helped us throughout this season, done great things for us this season. But the guys that are here, those are the guys that we're going to compete with.

Q. You have a lot of guys contributing who were not that highly recruited, especially at the level that Georgia has been recruiting the last couple of years. What does it take to develop a player like that? How much pride do you take? You have taken some guys who maybe either what you saw in them when you were recruiting them, regardless how many starts they had. How much pride do you take in being able to develop players?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: Probably not common to popular belief, we don't really care how many starts guys have. That just seems to happen. But we focus on the overall player, what kind of person they are, and where's their room for growth.

If we can take guys that are talented players but are eager to get better, those are the guys you really see develop. I think the guys that you are talking about in our program that have done that have really attacked it and wanted to get better. They come out of this program a whole lot better player because obviously Coach [Kirby] Smart is one of the best people doing it when it comes to development of players.



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We have a lot of support. We've got player personnel staff. We've got a strength staff. We've got coaches. We got a lot of people that touch our players in our program. So at the end of the day, that provides a lot of opportunities for growth and we have some guys really taking advantage of that.

Q. Who's the one player showing the most progress from the beginning of the year to now that's impressed you a lot?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: Gosh, that's a really hard one to pick. We've had a lot of guys that have done really well. One guy sticks out to me at least from my position group is Azeez Ojulari. His coming out game last year was this game. And he has just continued to work and push himself throughout this year to get better and help us.

But it would be really hard to single out one guy. You look at our guys on defense, there's a lot of guys that have played really well and gotten better throughout the season.

Q. I know you don't like to talk about yourself and deflect, but this going to be part of it. If you could expand more on Azeez [Ojulari]. He is one of the seven semifinalists for Freshman of the Year. What made him the team captain? He's the first Kirby [Smart] has ever had. I guess it was, last year Kirby was talking about you and said you did some things outside the box. He has been a coordinator a long time. Can you elaborate a little bit on something maybe you brought that impressed Kirby or some principles that you bring to the game?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: First off, on Azeez, what makes him different, he's the kind of guy that will get up in the room and he does it by showing you, not by what he says. I think that's something we have challenged Azeez, Hey, man, you could be more vocal. You have earned that opportunity. What he does, he just rolls up his sleeves and goes to work every day. That's what Azeez has brought to our program and what he does. I think when you set by example, when you lead by example, that's a really good way to lead.

That being said, I know Azeez knows there's a lot of opportunities for him to get better. And I think he's excited to attack those areas for growth.

I don't think you could single me out from a standpoint of doing something outside the box. I think every one of our coaches on the defensive side of the ball really look for and this is more credit probably to Coach [Kirby] Smart, from a standpoint of he doesn't want to be cookie cutter from a standpoint of defense.

We're going to find things that are going to make us better. If we need to change the way we do a defensive meeting, if we need to bring excitement to a different piece of practice, if we need to get guys running around with the ball in between periods so we can strip at it, to work on takeaways, whatever it is that we can do different, Coach Smart is willing to do. He's really afforded our defensive staff the opportunity to go look for



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different things that can make us better. He's probably at the forefront of that as much as any other person on our staff when it comes to making changes.

Q. There have been reports that Robert Beal put his name in the transfer portal, but he's here practicing for the Sugar Bowl. Can you say if he still plans on transferring or he plans to stay with the team?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: I can't speak to Rob. I know he's here working with us this week. Excited to see what he's doing. But, no, I can't speak to that.

Q. Did you all you talked about the noname defense thing. Did you all kind of by design I think you played I counted about 24 players in a regular rotation. I think J.R. [Reed] may have been the only guy that stayed on the field all the time. Did you all by design say, We're going to make up for not having that one star, whatever, by embracing our depth and attacking it that way?

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR LANNING: I think what we really set out to do at the beginning of the year is identify the guys that were ready to play and contribute to our team. And what we didn't want to do is have guys that we felt like could play on the sideline for us.

So if you had the ability to have a role for us in this defense and you were ready, what we've said from the getgo is if you're good enough, you're old enough. It really doesn't matter how old you are. We've had a lot of guys we felt like were good enough and we could find roles for them. When we were able to find those roles, those guys excelled and did a good job depending on what we felt was best for us to take away the team we were playing. A lot of guys embraced those roles, and that equated to a lot of guys playing. So we want to reward guys that work hard and are ready to play.