



Allstate Sugar Bowl
Baylor
Head Coach Matt Rhule
December 31, 2019



COACH RHULE: Just on behalf of our entire team, I want to make sure I thank everyone associated with the Allstate Sugar Bowl. It's been a fantastic week. The New Orleans Saints have been -- have gone out of the way for us. Had a great experience there for our guys. Had a great experience here in town. And we're very grateful to be here and happy to be here.

At the same time, we're very excited most importantly by the chance to play a great Georgia team. Look forward to representing our team with the way that we play to the best of our abilities. Everyone for us will play, we're excited to play, and it should be a great game.

Q. Get this one out of the way early, have you been contacted by any NFL teams? And do you think it's been a distraction at all this week?

COACH RHULE: I've not been contacted by anybody. But it's certainly a distraction in that our guys are answering that instead of talking about the game, which I hate.

But I was talking to James Lynch yesterday. Like he said, it's part of my job. When our players play well and when they do things like they've done, going from 1-11 to the Sugar Bowl, people are going to take notice of not just me but my staff. The guys on my staff were offered Division I jobs this year, head coaching jobs, and were pretty committed to being at Baylor. It's a wonderful place.

So I hate that it's even a storyline for our players, but they've handled it really well. They're used to it. Every year it's been that way.

Q. Coach, describe James Lynch. What makes him a special football player? I know he's a Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, All-American first team. And just what kind of guy is he on the field?

COACH RHULE: Yes, sir. I think one of the things about James is he's tremendously athletic for a big man. He's 300 pounds but he runs a shuttle like a secondary player. And so it's really his quickness that's allowed him to have the production that he's had. And he's a relentless player, really smart player.

I want to make sure I say this: He's a really, really good athlete, too. Most of his sacks come out of a three-man front where he gets double-teamed. He has a tremendous ability to change his body angles, and he just finds a way to get to the quarterback.

So he makes a ton of plays for us getting the quarterback. Also makes a ton of plays for us in the run game. Certainly, when you play a team like Georgia, it's number one, to find a way to stop the run, especially the outside running game. It's will be really key that he does that.

Q. I know you hate this storyline, but given all you've accomplished here and being one play away from the playoff, how do you sort of weigh what's left to accomplish versus other opportunities that may exist in the NFL?



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COACH RHULE: To me, every day is an accomplishment for me, right? So my goal in life at the end of the day is really to do a good job wherever I'm coaching but more importantly to make sure I take care of my family.

One thing people don't realize is coaches -- we pick up our families. We rip them out of their homes. We rip them out of the places that they are. Sometimes you do that until you get to a point where you find happy. You shouldn't mess with happy.

And so there's a lot to accomplish at Baylor. And most importantly, it's just each and every year, I want to put together a championship-caliber team. And I think we have a chance to be even better next year than we are this year.

And so I'm always looking three, four, five years down the line. I think we have a chance to be a perennial national contender, to be in the top 10 and be in the top five and go to College Football Playoff and play in New Year's Six bowls.

And so it's just finding a way to get those things done. But at the same time, also doing what's right for my family. People hear that and they always think money. It's more like where's the right place for them to be. And Waco and Baylor have been amazing to my family.

Q. You're talking about, I guess, Baylor for the future. Do you think that you'll be back at Baylor next year?

COACH RHULE: Yeah, I plan on that. I certainly think I will be.

Q. What is Jake Fromm's best attribute? And will this be the best defense you have faced this season?

COACH RHULE: I think in terms of Jake, you see a player who's extremely intelligent, gets them in the right play. We face a lot of offenses where they look to the sideline and go back. He's a pro-style quarterback. When I say "pro style," you get him in the right protection, get him in the right play, that makes it difficult on defense because you have to disguise. You have to try to throw them different looks.

And he's got a big, powerful arm. He's pushed the ball down the field and made big plays. He's also athletic within the pocket, gets outside the pocket, keeps his eyes down the field. He's a threat in a lot of ways. He's certainly one of the best quarterbacks we've faced this year.

Defensively, this is by far the best defense we've faced. And that's no disrespect to people in our conference. There's a lot of great defenses in our conference, and there's a lot of difficult defenses in our conference.



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As a fan of college football, I've enjoyed this week seeing the different styles -- not this week, the preparation, watching the different teams in the SEC.

Last year we played Vanderbilt. You hear a lot about SEC versus this conference versus that conference. But it's like night and day the styles of football we see. Really, the only Big 12-type team in the SEC that I watched of the teams I watched was really LSU. And what they're doing is setting everyone. They're doing it better.

It will be interesting to see the different styles. We're two teams that held each other under 20 points a game. And we do it with three-down. They do it four-down. I think Coach [Kirby] Smart is brilliant in what they're doing.

They play so many different guys on defense. They have different packages. They rotate in and out. I told our guys, our coaches, when they are game planning and taking notes, I said, guys, you have no idea what they're going to do until the first snap of the game because they do something different every game. Certainly, one of the best defenses. They have got great, great players. They play hard. They play a lot of guys. It should be a really fun game. I think it's really cool to see the different styles. And we'll see what happens.

Q. Of course, I'm from the Georgia perspective, so much has been made on the players who are not here for the bulldogs this week. But I was wondering when you look at film and some of the youngest kids they're putting on the field, how much difference are you seeing from what they normally have out there?

COACH RHULE: With all due respect, Georgia's issue is not having good players. They've got good players up and down the board. I mean, they're fantastic. And I say that with the greatest of respect.

Like, I haven't seen a team play as many guys. And, again, just as a football fan, you can't really kind of do some of the things that they do. We would be afraid to do some of the things, playing so many different guys on different down distances because of the tempo that we see. Teams go fast against us in our league. They get guys in and out. So they have so many good players.

I think when you come to a bowl game, you understand on both sides, the other team might have guys being ineligible, might have guys fail drug tests, may have guys not play. You can't worry about who the other team has. You have just got to worry about yourselves. We're just going to try and identify them by number.

One of the great things they do, like Mark Webb, he can be the Sam [Tecklenburg] linebacker one play. He's the Mike [Barnett] in their next package. It's just looking at bodies because they move around so much.

Q. Coach, Kirby [Smart] was talking about the innovative nature of your defensive scheme. How much of that is based on personnel? And can you share some of the philosophy behind what you're doing defensively and why and how it's so much different?



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COACH RHULE: Well, I'll start by saying all of our success really we've had as a team this year comes from the growth of our defense over the course from last year to this year. That credit rests solely on Phil Snow, our defensive coordinator and his staff. I GA'd for Phil.

He's had a top-20 defense going all the way back to Arizona State when they played for the national championship. He had it at UCLA. He's been an innovator everywhere he's been.

And we played this three-down package when I was with Coach at Temple probably 30 to 40% of the games. We would play it the last two years. And we got to the end of this past season, we lost some D-linemen to the NFL. We said who were our best players, what's our best package. And we went back and looked and we were in the three-down. We were just way more successful.

I want to make sure I give a lot of credit to Iowa State who started this in the Big 12. If you watch most teams in the Big 12 now, they have all sort of copied it.

And so we took what we already did from three-down and we studied Iowa State and we've kind of built on it. And it fits our players really well. Chris Miller is our middle safety, and unfortunately he's missed some games because he's a big hitter and he has had some illegal hits. But it gives him a chance to kind of run the middle, and he can be in the front, he can be in the middle of the field. It's unique.

Now you have to see if you can man up against the size and the strength of Georgia and the downhill running game. So I think it will be a really cool game from a football perspective, seeing how they attack this defense that maybe they don't see a ton of.

But if you watch them against LSU, they basically played against LSU what we play. So they played a 3-1 with the linebacker behind it. So they certainly have experience seeing it because they did it.

Q. Coach, I was at the Peach Bowl. Were you shocked at what LSU was able to do to Oklahoma? And when you look at Joe Burrow, if you've studied him at all or seen enough of him, can you kind of comment on what kind of season do you think he's having?

COACH RHULE: I mean, I think Joe Borrow is obviously the Heisman Trophy winner landslide for a reason. I think he's tremendously accurate. I think the wideouts, the wideouts probably don't -- they get a lot of credit. Probably don't get enough credit.

They were covered quite a bit in that game the other night. And their ability to go up and get the football and their competitive nature is really, really impressive. I've watched them on the coach's tape a little bit because we played Texas and they played Texas. I think that what they're doing is really historic so far.

And I think one of the things I like about Joe is he puts people in a real conflict with his ability to run and keep his eyes down the field. And you saw that in that game the other day. If he starts to run and people come up,



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then he finds a way to throw it over the top of their heads. If they stay back, he looks, looks, looks. He has got a lot of Aaron Rodgers qualities in that regard.

So what they've done this year is impressive, and I probably should have started by saying this but what a profile in courage and what a -- as a coach, you know, to see what Coach [Steve] Ensminger did, going out there and coaching in that game. That was really, really special and at the same time heartbreaking.

But I think Oklahoma is a great team. I think Oklahoma just kind of -- sometimes you have one of those games, man, where it just hits you before you know it hits you and you're trying to regroup and get back in it.

But LSU looks like a team that's on a mission, and obviously Clemson has been there before. So as a fan, I can't wait to sit back and watch it on TV.

Q. Matt, how good has this three-week break been for Charlie Brewer? And what are you seeing from him in practice?

COACH RHULE: Well, I mean, he's practiced really well. I think, obviously having some time to kind of regroup. I think just besides being hit and having the concussion, I think he was kind of beat up at the end of the year just from general contact.

We ran him a lot against Oklahoma and then Texas. So I think, you know, his ankle, his shoulder, his hip, they all feel better. And I think this was a great game for him to develop as a quarterback because you're not going to run around back there and reverse field and all that stuff against these guys.

I've tried to, you know -- it's one thing to talk about timing and push your quarterbacks to go one, two, three, hitch, throw, check it down. It's another thing when all of a sudden you have these guys rushing you.

So my hope is that Charlie will take a step as a quarterback, get the ball out of his hands because that's what you have to do against these guys.

Q. Coach, obviously you talked about wanting to showcase the team when you played Oklahoma earlier this year on national TV. You have another opportunity to do that in this game. How much did your team maybe learn from that? And how much do you relish these opportunities on this national primetime stage to showcase your program?

COACH RHULE: Yeah, I mean, I think -- Gracious. You go back and look at both Oklahoma games, we're one play away from winning those games. But we didn't make that play. So I don't say that as a loser. I say that like, I think it's always really important to look at, hey, you had to make one more play but we didn't make it. I didn't make it as a coach. I didn't call one better call.



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So part of it being the first time is that, you're learning as you go. And really when -- after the game, you look back and say, You know what? We didn't get it done, but here's where we can improve. So I don't think you heard me say well -- I didn't feel sorry for us that we played our third-string quarterback to get to the -- we played our third-string quarterback, and he's going to go out there and play well. So I think, for me, those games were great steps for our program.

Now, as I told them, our last game we played the number five team in the country again and we just lost, right? Well, here, we have a chance to play the number five team in the country again. And if we're competitors, if we're tough, if we're the team that we want to be, then we have to go out there and fight them and understand this will probably come down to one play. And we have got to make one more play yet again.

So I think our guys have practiced that way. Our guys have trained that way. I want to make sure I say this. I have tried to sound very grateful because I am very grateful to be here. And I read one thing that kind of comes across like I'm saying, hey, we're happy to be here. We're not happy to be here. We're happy to have a chance to go and compete in this game. This is the Sugar Bowl. Like, this is an opportunity to go out and play a great team in Georgia. This is a great, great football team that's been here before.

So for us, let's go out there -- I expect our guys to go out there and fight, scratch, and claw. It's no longer about being here. Now it's about, hey, let's go win one of these. Let's go find a way to make the plays it takes to do it.

And so that's where we are as a team. We have to make that next step. In the Big 12 championship game, we give up a missed tackle to CeeDee Lamb for an 80-yard play. And then we kind of play great defense after that. There's no time for that versus these guys.

So my hope is that our program takes a step in this game. And we fight, scratch, and claw, get the game down to the end, make one more play than they make, and we find a way to win the game.