

PAC-12 Conference Championship Game: Oregon vs Utah

Friday, December 6, 2019

Kyle Whittingham
Zack Moss
Terrell Burgess

Utah Utes

Oregon 37, Utah 15

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Utah. Coach, opening remarks.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, proud of this football team for the season they've had overall. Obviously tonight was a huge disappointment. But doesn't detract from the fact that we won 11 football games, champions consecutive two years in a row. A lot of good things.

Unfortunately we came up short tonight. Disappointing thing is we lost in the one area we've been undefeated this year: Line of scrimmage. We didn't win the line of scrimmage for the first time all season, which is, like I say, disappointing. Surprising really.

Credit Oregon. They were good up front. That offensive line is physical. Played well in the front seven on defense. They deserve a lot of credit. As poor as we were in the first half, going in 20-0, we fought back. Got to 23-15, we were in it. On the 10 yard line, 9 yards to go, I thought we were in pretty good shape. They proceeded to go 67 yards on us. We never really recovered from that.

Like I said, proud of these guys. They hung in there. They didn't quit. No quit in these guys. Congratulations to Oregon. Just have to come back here next year till we get it right, keep coming back till we get it right.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for coach and the student-athletes.

Q. For lack of a better term, did they out-Utah you tonight, line of scrimmage and the rushing stats?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: We're usually the more physical team, like I said. Even in the loss earlier in the season, we won the line of scrimmage.



I guess you could say that. I guess you could say they beat us with our strength, where our strength lied. But they've been physical all year long, too. They're a good football team. They've won 10 games for a reason, 11 now. Two good teams going at it.

Q. Zack, how does this game leave you feeling?

ZACK MOSS: Really at a loss of words. Like Coach said, we just lost of the battle in trenches where we have been good at all year. We felt confident coming in that we were going to do that again. Their offensive line breaks our D-line at the line, versus their offensive line.

Things didn't shape out that way. But this one definitely hurts. But we got another game, so shift our focus there.

Q. Zack and Coach, you both talk about you did come back maybe in the game, but how costly was the first half? Five possessions where you got inside the 40 and came away with nothing.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, I'll make the first comments. We didn't have an ideal start by any means in that first quarter. Punt blocked, everything that could go wrong in that first quarter went wrong. Didn't get a lot of production on offense in that first quarter, first half for that matter.

You judge the game in its entirety, like I always say. When you look at it in its entirety, all the comments I already made tell the story.

ZACK MOSS: You don't win the game in the first half. Defense did a really good job of just controlling the damage as much as they could. We came out 15-23, battled all the way in, but didn't win the fourth quarter. That's what we've been really good at all year, so...

Q. The decision to punt down 23-15, did you consider going for it at that point?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, not getting the fourth downs earlier played into it. But when we were going earlier, it was a multiple-score game, a one-score game at 23-15. Wouldn't have done anything different there. Like I say, we pinned them on the 10. I would have bet the house that our defense would have been able to get a stop. Number one run defense in the country. Had a lot of confidence in them at that point.

They just creased us on one. Like I said, that was something we couldn't recover from it seemed like.

Q. Zack, could you describe the first series when you got stopped on third-and-one and fourth-and-one, what that sort of did, maybe put you back on your heels?

ZACK MOSS: The first drive, fourth and short, I don't think that was detrimental to our offense. We just never really got rolling and we played behind the sticks a few times. They have some good pass-rushers, so they made it tough on Tyler to do some things in the pocket.

That first drive I don't think really did anything.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: You see a replay on that, that Vickers run, second down when he ran the ball. I thought he got the first on that drive at the exact spot you're talking about. Did they show it on the booth up in the box? Did he get it?

Q. I don't think so.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Okay. Thought about challenging that, but they were looking at it, told me they were looking at it. Interesting to watch that play, could have shifted the momentum early in the game. Sidebar, pay no attention to that (smiling).

Q. Terrell, talk about why they were able to run the ball so effectively. Was it all about the trenches?

TERRELL BURGESS: That's something we've been doing well all year. I guess tonight we just didn't do it well. I mean, there were some gaps that were there. We didn't make tackles, we didn't hold them to what we thought we should have.

Q. Do you feel like the chatter about the expectations going into this game for this program bled into the start potentially tonight? You always talk about not reading into things externally, staying in-house as much as possible.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: I didn't sense that. We moved the ball well that first drive. We were down the field until we stalled, like we just talked about.

I don't think so. I think our guys handled it the right way. We just didn't play very well tonight.

Q. Did you get any explanations on especially the second non-targeting call they didn't review?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: No. They told me they were looking at it. They came over, said, Incomplete pass. I said, Yeah, no kidding, incomplete pass. What about the targeting? They said, Nothing there, nothing there. Yeah, that was my explanation.

Q. Do you know, did Julian have a serious injury?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Appears to be. Also R.J. Hubert. That's a shame. Both first and second free safety. Looks like it may be significant. We'll find out. Let you know. We will let you know that next week.

Q. Because of the result tonight, this will probably be the third straight year Pac-12 doesn't send a team to the Playoff. You and Oregon have had good teams. Why has it been so hard for one of the league's teams to make it up into the top four?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: I've been asked that a lot of times the last couple years, three, four years. I pretty much always have the same answer: You got a very balanced league, nine conference games. You got to pretty much run the table in conference, non-conference as well. 12-0, 11-1, that's pretty much what you got to be. Nobody has been able to do that because we beat each other up every year. We play that ninth game, which gives you another opportunity to take a loss.

There's been a lot of balance. I hate the word 'parity' but competitive, it's a very competitive conference. I can't remember the last time anybody ran the table in league play. I can't remember. Been a while.

Q. Their D-line put a lot of pressure on Tyler tonight. They stopped the run. Did you see anything different from them, from their defensive front?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Not a lot. They did a nice job with their pressures. They brought some good pressures. We didn't handle them as well as we probably should have.

They had good players. Those linebackers are tough and active. They won 10 games for a reason. They're a good team. We're not trying to say we played some average outfit. They're a really good football team.

Q. Terrell, how hard is it to see guys like Blackmon and Hubert go out, having that inconsistency knowing the guys you've been playing with so long?

TERRELL BURGESS: I mean, it's tough. You never want to see somebody go down. In this program, we teach 'next man up'. Faysal came in. We tried to do what we could with what we had, just tried to play football.

Q. Terrell, with so much at stake for you seniors tonight, how do you put this into perspective?

TERRELL BURGESS: It sucks. I mean, no one wants to lose. Nobody wants to lose any game. Nobody wants to lose a championship game.

We have another chance to play with each other. We

just got to go out the best way we can at this point.

Q. With the senior group, talk about what have they done in terms of elevating the status of this program.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: It would take me an hour to talk about those guys, what they've done, how important they've been to our program.

The only reason this game is important is because of what we did all season long from start to finish, to make this an important game, to get to this point. They've won back-to-back south conference championships. They're all graduating, which is the most important thing. Every one of them is going to have their degree.

The leadership that they brought to this football team has been incredible. Been around a long time, and this is as good of leadership as we've ever had. Their maturity, work ethic, just who they are as people. They're all going to be wildly successful whether it's in the NFL or in life. It's a great group of guys.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.