



Arizona State Head Coach Kenny Dillingham Weekly Press Conference

Monday, September 8, 2025

Previewing Texas State and Week Three:

On the long touchdowns given up by the defense

“Obviously the first one they play with tempo, miscommunication early drive, good job to them. They create chaos; it’s loud in that environment; nice job by them. One side was playing man, the other side was playing zone and some combo stuff, so got us there for an explosive (play). We just have to clean that up as we continue to play, have better hand signals on the field when you can’t hear and make sure we’re on the same page. The second one that came in was a nice play. Whether it’s a flag or not, I think everybody has their opinion on that. I’m never going to make an excuse. At the end of the day, if they had blocked him, they would have scored. They didn’t need to high-low him to block him successfully. Was it a high-low? Yes, they admitted it was a high-low in the report, which is fine, but for us, they didn’t need a high-low to affect the play. They would have been able to successfully block it. Their guys made a good play, so it was still a great play by them. They got us there one-on-one. I was a fast guy. He was really fast. He ran fast, they threw it far, and he cut it over his shoulder — you’ve got to give him credit they make plays. Then the last one was just unfortunate to be honest, late in the game, another explosive (play) and we tripped over the number 3 receiver, which sucks, that never happens in the football game. It is what it is. There’s always calls you’d like to have back in a game and all those scenarios we’d like to have back as a coaching staff. Because all three of those calls create communication and we didn’t do a good enough job communicating in two of them. All three of those calls I’d like to have back, and I’d like to play Cover 2 every single time they took a shot in hindsight. That would be my perfect scenario in those three.”

On the emotion and attitude of the team following the loss

“I think our team is in a good spot. Like I told our guys, the outside noise and the clout will disappear. But the goal of the season and the vision of the season really has no change. The funny thing about football — more than even other sports — is not all the plays are even. That’s what makes football so great. In other sports (baseball) an out is an out. They’re worth one out every time. Every run that touches home plate is one run. For football, one play, three plays in the game, equate to half of the yardage. We played really, really, really good defense. They were a positive. On offense, we clicked in the second half and flipped the switch. We got our run game going. So like I told our guys, if we let one or two of these plays affect how we played in the second half, that’s not a sign of a good football team. Good football teams take the actual substance of that football game, and the substance was we played really, really good football in the second half. Really good football, on the road, in a great environment. We’ve got to go into that, not that there was one or two plays in the game that didn’t go our way. Let’s just clean those one or two plays up and go play a football game. That was kind of the message and I think the guys responded really well.”

On struggling to convert on third down and how that impacted the offense in first two games

“Spot on. That's not good if you're wondering. That's really bad, and I think we have to simplify things. We have to give our players easier things to see and get our guys more comfortable. But, 100%, when you're not converting third downs, when do you throw it if you don't feel good about third and medium? Like if you have a 1st down run, great. It's 2nd and four or five. Well, if you don't feel good about 3rd and medium, you can't throw it on 2nd and medium then because you're like, crap, we don't want to get into 3rd and medium. If you throw it on 1st down and it's incomplete, now you run the ball and have a good run, now it's 3rd and five. Well, we're not converting 3rd and medium. I think once we clean up 3rd downs, and we're taking a big emphasis on that, it will allow us to stay in more of a rhythm on offense. And you can't go 3 and out and get a rhythm. One, we're getting into 3rd and longs, we're not getting into as many 3rd and manageable as we would like. So, we have to get into 3rd and better manageable, and have to do that with 1st and 2nd down, obviously. And then, once we get the 3rd down, get one conversion and I think we'll get rolling. I think some things just kind of feed off each other in football games, so you don't convert 3rd downs, it's not a shock — you don't get in a rhythm. It's not a shocker. You can't run the ball as much, you don't have as many plays, and if you don't have as many plays you can't do anything as much. You want to run it more, you want to throw it more and you want to call more screens. You can't do anything if you're not converting 3rd down or you're not converting your play action game smoothly.”

On the wide receivers not being very involved in the pass game in the first two games

“We have to get more guys involved. We just have to, have to get more guys involved. So that's the plan. In fall camp we had more guys involved, all the time. We have to do a better job, myself, at getting more guys involved. That is simple. We have guys out there that should be involved, can be involved, so we need to get more guys involved.”

On what the thought process behind not going Cover 2 defensively on the final deciding score of the game

“We weren't in cover 2 almost all night. We were in quarters, pretty much the majority of the night. We were in quarters the last play they scored a touchdown on, and that was one of our base calls throughout the night. In that scenario, it was a soft quarter shell and we were playing that most of the night.”

On what (S) Kyndrich Breedlove's responsibility was on that play

“I'm not going to get into guys specifically like that. In hindsight, they called switch verts double move, it's 30-8, you would love it if you hit home and the game's over because they have no timeouts. You would love to play that side. In hindsight, I would wish we were in Cover 2 and we just played a bracket shelled coverage, give up the completion and let them play catch. But, that's the best part about coaching. Sometimes it doesn't work and it sucks, and then you get to say that you wish you were in something different. So 100%, I will always, if something doesn't work, I lay up in bed all night saying, ‘Man, should we have gone for it. Man, why didn't I go for it? Man, should I kick the onside kick that I thought was there at the end of the game’ You always live in this hindsight world. So everything that doesn't work, I literally constantly second-guess after the game and think what we could have done that would have been the best call. 100%. I wish we were in soft coverage on that last play that broke for a touchdown.”

On why the offensive switch didn't happen in the first half:

"I thought early in the game we couldn't get in a rhythm. We ran the ball an absurd amount of times in the second half. You don't usually go into a game saying we're going to run the ball 14 consecutive plays, it's usually not a recipe for success. I think it was just an adjustment to what we were seeing and at the same token, releases. (RB) Raleek (Brown) is starting to get a lot more carries and (RB) (Kanye) Udoh got a lot of carries and we started to get a rhythm for where things were hitting in the first half. We were bouncing a lot of runs and letting the ball get to the edge. In the second half, we were being patient and taking dirtier runs. We got to give a shout out to (TE) Chamon (Metayer), he's been unbelievable. It's not going to reflect in the stats, but he and the offensive line had an unbelievable game and sometimes tight ends who block get under the radar. You got to respect how he's playing the game right now. We calmed down on some of the looks, so we were on the right people and then we moved people and it was really successful. Running the ball and having that identity definitely opened things up in the second half."

On it was hard to reconcile in with players and coaches after the game:

"I'll say I have the exact same conversations after. If we make one more play and win, and if we make one less play and lose, I think overreacting is one of the reasons why teams that are good can go on downward spirals. That's the nature of sport, it's results are driven externally. Sometimes, you can get lost in the external result of is it in the win column or the loss column, and if you're too drastic because one play was wrong, you do so many things differently. That is a recipe for failure down the road. What we're trying to do is say, OK, like every week, what do we do good? What do we do bad? How do we be better? The emotion after a game is based off winning or losing. I never show up on Sunday and the win or the loss has zero effect on how we approach the next week. The key is to not get distracted by those things of the external wins and losses and stay focused on the little things that could have flipped it. I'd say the exact same things that I normally say. The guys, obviously get a bad taste in their mouths, so we got to flush that. You can't let one game affect the next so we got to flush this one."

On preparing the run game for Texas State:

"Coach Kinne does a great job, I think he's one of the best coaches in college football, especially as a younger coach. They've added a lot of good players to their roster. You watch them play football, and they are a very talented football team on tape. They're twitchy on the defensive line and on the corners. Offensively, they've got a three-headed monster and other guys that have speed. This is a good football team in terms of running the ball. Obviously they're going to watch last week's game and try to figure out how to stop the run. But you also know that we've got good players around it and you're not defined by one football game. We've got to be able to establish the run, most teams want to be able to establish it and that we have to be better in the intermediate and play action pass game. We got to be able to scheme guys open more. I got to do a lot more to help our guys in some of those scenarios."

On if they went away from Sam Leavitt in their second half gameplan:

"No, I don't think we went away from (QB) Sam (Leavitt). I think we leaned on our strength which was running the ball really well. Before the last drive, I literally told the team that we're going to run duo 14 straight times, there's going to be no time on the clock and we're going to win the football game. Unfortunately (RB) Raleek (Brown) had a 25 yard run which didn't allow us to get another first down, which allowed them to get the ball back. If we would have had a 12 yard run, then we could have milked the clock out and kick the field goal to win. It was too good of a run by Raleek that allowed them to get the ball back. Our guys answered the bell. I told them that this is an identity drive and let's establish an identity of who we want to be the rest of

the year, and they did that, so it wasn't about a player. We converted a third down on a play action play where (WR) Jordyn Tyson catches the ball over the middle of the field and we have a guy in the quarterback's face and he delivers a great throw on a third down after the penalty around midfield. Everybody was a part of that, but I just think we leaned and we challenged our guys to form a culture drive and they responded."

On injury updates:

"(DL) (Justin) Wodtly will be back this week and (WR) (Jalen) Moss is still up in the air from last week. (RB) Kyson (Brown) will probably be out barring something incredible. He's a tough kid, I never like to say for sure because of the way he works so you never know. The other guys we're still waiting on, as of Monday morning, that's all I know."

On whether hindsight will change late-game defensive ideology moving forward:

"Hindsight means if something doesn't work, you always second-guess yourself. It's the game of second guessing. At the end of the day, we struggled scoring and we had penalties in their end zone. So, you don't want to play that game for overtime because if we play that game for overtime with the cowbells in that environment, we're going to have to play perfect football down there to win. Their kicker, last week, kicked a 55-yard field goal and nailed it with space and they were about 18 yards out of field goal range with 35, 40 seconds left to go at that point. We had an opportunity where we felt like we could sack the quarterback and end the game. They call it a double move, we didn't hit home, so you're like, 'Dang, if we hit home, we win the football game.' But, yeah, hindsight, it didn't work, so that sucks. We didn't hit home and didn't get the result we wanted. So, I'll always look back at that and say, 'Could we have hit home playing a Cover 3 pressure? Could we have hit home with just a 4-man rush?' Maybe. But we felt like we had a chance for a guy to come free and it didn't work."

On how Sam Leavitt has looked in the 48 hours following the loss:

"I think he's been great. He's come in, he's gotten to work. He showed up yesterday, went back to work. Everybody doesn't have great games, every game. The dude's unbelievable. I wouldn't trade him for any other quarterback in the country. That's the quarterback I want to coach. That's the quarterback that I have complete faith in. So I think for me and him, there's really no difference. It's 'let's get back to work' and I've called some horrible games, absolutely atrocious. We played Georgia year one in Oregon and golly, did I not set up Bo Nix to succeed that game. I absolutely set him up to fail. So that's part of being elite and being a high level player is the expectations are so high and for him that's the fun part. We're going to bounce back. We're going to do a better job giving him plays to get in a rhythm because we haven't done that yet. So, it's really not him, it's us. It's us as a staff. I've got to do a better job getting him to play up to his potential, and that's my job."

On his philosophy with how hands-on he is with DC Brian Ward in late-game situations:

"We're communicating, so like, third-and-8, 40 seconds, no time outs, one sack wins the game. So if we have a call that can sack him, you win. They'd already driven the ball about 25 yards. They just had a drop in the drive which should have put them on about the plus-48 (yard line), which is 8-10 yards away from field goal range for their kicker, who's good. You don't want to go into overtime versus that team because you're going to get the ball on their side and it's going to be cowbells and loud. You're probably going to eventually get a false start at that point. It's harder to play a game on the road in overtime in that environment, so you're not playing to try to hold them to a field goal. You're playing to win. So if you have a call that wins the game, you call it. We called it. It didn't work, you lose. Were expecting that call to give up a touchdown? We

were not expecting to give up a touchdown. Were we expecting to give up a quick game (completion) that could gain 15 yards? Yeah, that would have sucked. Were we expecting it to give up a touchdown? Definitely not. We were actually calling it for them to take a shot. That call was for a deeper progressional route which they ran, but when it doesn't work, it sucks. It's not nearly as fun as when it works and usually we win close games. Unfortunately, we've been part of two really fun losses. Two of the last three games have been some of the most emotional losses I've been a part of and, crazy enough, we've been a part of it, which sucks. But it shows that we've got to play these end-of-game situations better. We've got to be better."

On the secondary's performance:

"For the most part of the game, I thought they did really well. The slots didn't get beat on anything vertically down the field versus a team that's a vertical option team.

We're going to face that again this week, (DB) Myles Rowser at boundary safety is the reciprocal of the nickel in our defense. He had one that was close, but he had good coverage there in the slot I thought they were going to be able to try to isolate more of our nickel than our corner, and we had a plan to protect him. Our guys held up and they've done a good job for the most part in the first two weeks, they've covered pretty well."

On seeing the opposing team rush the field against them:

"It's a great sign. I don't think people would have rushed the field two years ago when we got here for beating Arizona State. Now we're in week two, we're on the road in the SEC. We battle back, we take the lead. It's going to be the biggest comeback in Arizona State with this team. 'We're back, baby.' One play. 'Oh, they're not back.' You can't fall into the (media) game. You can't listen to that. You have to be focused on what happened in the game. You want the result, that's the emotion. But you can't be lost in that. So, what I mean by that is, yeah, it's pretty cool. You don't ever want that. It means you lost. But it shows the respect that people have for our football team. We're going to get everybody's best game, every week. We're going to be in a ton of close games. Last year in those seven points or less games in the regular season, we were 5-0. Right now we're 0-1. Ok, we've got to flip the narrative. We've got to win the close games again and we're one play away from it. And people were saying, 'oh, you guys are elite in close games.' Well now we suck in close games. That's the nature of the beast. You've got to weather the storm, not listen to outside noise, and go get better at what you can get better at."

On playing a Texas School and what that does for the Texas-Tempe Pipeline:

"I want to play our best football. That's my goal. Obviously, I want to win as many games as possible, but that's a result of accomplishing our goal of playing our best football. My goal is to just play our very best. That's why I wasn't happy after week one. That's why the second half of last week I was very, very happy because I thought we played really, really good football. That's all I want and I know if we play our best football. The wins are going to come naturally. If you chase winds constantly, you're going to lose focus and you're going to spiral out of control. We've got to stay focused on playing our best football all the time. In terms of the Texas-Tempe pipeline, 100%. You definitely want to play well in these games where a lot of people are watching. They've got a lot of players that our guys are familiar with. They've got guys from our team that are there with Buddha and JP Dier, who are two awesome kids, and I'm wishing them nothing but success. So, this is a tough challenge and they're going to be ready to give everything they've got this week. I think we're really, really close to selling out again, which would be awesome. So hopefully it's another sold out crowd, a great environment, hopefully we

can continue to protect home field, which our guys have done in the last year and a half and get seen by a whole bunch of people in a region where we play a lot.”

On if (RB) Kanye Udoh has earned a more solidified role:

“He was fired up. They didn’t bounce the football in the second half, they were staying tight as possible. Other than one of (RB) Raleek’s (Brown) runs that bounced on the fib formation versus the corner but (RB) Udoh (Kanye) did a really nice job, ran really hard, ran through tackles. Our o-line was pushing the pile, so it was great to get him going. That’s another huge positive. Every game I look at what are the positives, what are the negatives, how can we do better. We cleaned up hands inside, we didn’t have any holding calls, so we cleaned that up. We had a few procedural issues but that’s because that place is loud and it’s an awesome environment. Only one procedural penalty or time out had to be used that wasn’t in their region of the student section, which is where it got the loudest. Most of that communication stuff, other than one around the 45 yard line happened in their area of the field. For us to be able to clean those issues up and play fairly clean football was a huge positive.”

On (TE) Chamon Metayer’s blocking performance:

“That dude was unbelievable, he has bought into playing a brand of football that’s old school. We do have to get him the ball more because he is playing really good football right now. I couldn’t be happier with how he’s playing, he’s buying in. He is one of the unsung heroes for sure.”

On balancing (QB) Sam Leavitt in a tough, fast-paced environment:

“There is a balance. We need to find that balance this year and figure out what that is. To say we have it would obviously not be a correct answer, we’ve got to find it. We’re trending to figure us out, every team is a little bit different. We prove that we can run the football. That was probably the biggest question going into the year from people was, can we run the football and I think we can. Now it’s what is our identity and how do you build it from there. We have to find that balance with him (QB Sam Leavitt). I don’t think I have done a good enough job putting him in positions to have easy success. One of the best things that I have done in my past is giving quarterbacks the ability to really just operate and then when they need to make special plays, make it. Sometimes we’re asking them to make too many special plays and not enough easy plays. I’ve got to find ways to not let that happen in the future so we can help him. At the end of the day, myself and him we go hand in hand at this. If he is not in a rhythm, that’s my fault. I’ve got to force him into a rhythm, we haven’t really got him in one of those.”

On how the game against Mississippi State will prepare them for tough away games:

“It’s huge. That environment is as good as it gets in college football, when that place is rocking. I told our guys at halftime, this is the best thing that could happen to our football team. We need to face adversity before conference play. We need to have our backs against the wall before conference play, before they all count. Conference play is when everything starts to count. We need to have our backs against the wall and we’re going to find out what we’re made of. Our team responded to that on the road and how we played in the second half. Our team showed the grit, our team showed we’re not going to quit, our team showed the fight. Everybody can watch that game and can still see the passion of how you play football. That was the one thing that I will always take pride in when you turn on our tape. Do we play hard, do we play with passion, can you feel it. In that second half, everybody could feel us play the game through the

screen, if you weren't there. On the field if you were there, you could feel that passion. That's my number one judge of a football team is that, and you could feel that in the second half. Obviously I would've loved to win the football game, but it's not how I view the games, it's how I view the moment. I view the games in terms of whether we were successful or not, on each play and each moment. It's not judged by winning a game or losing a game."

On how (DL) Clayton Smith and (LB) Keyshaun Elliot bring a force to the defense:

"(DL) Clayton (Smith) has gained 15 pounds, you can see it. He got to bull rush some, which wasn't really in his arsenal last year and squeeze the pocket. He brought a good twist game there at the end of the first half, which sacked the quarterback. (LB) Keyshaun (Elliot) is pound for pound, the strongest. He always wins our Ironman Award every year and you can see that payout. To see both of those guys have success is huge. It was one of our better games impacting the quarterback with four. We impacted the quarterback a good amount throughout the night, which was a positive. Whether it was with four, whether it was with some of our pressures. We impacted the quarterback enough, too many explosive plays. Three explosive plays away from talking under 150 yards of offense, 180 yards of offense. That is the nature of football, it is those three plays. That system is built to create those three plays. We've got to be able to mitigate those three plays moving forward, whether that's schematically simplifying things. We cannot let that continue to happen."