

CFP National Championship: Georgia vs TCU

Saturday, January 7, 2023

Inglewood, California, USA

SoFi Stadium

TCU Horned Frogs

Coach Sonny Dykes

Press Conference

Q. This is a team that came into the season unranked. You guys have fought your way through. Is there any added motivation just being here, knowing that you all were the underdogs and a lot of people counted you all out and now you got to this far?

COACH DYKES: Yeah, I think, look, we're in the National Championship Game. So there's obviously a ton of motivation to go out and play well. It's hard to get here. It's a difficult road for any college football team just making it through the season.

There's so many things that have to happen for you to have a chance to play for a national championship, just from obviously staying healthy to figuring out ways to win games when you don't play your best. That's going to happen every year.

There's going to be two or three games that you have to go out and figure out how to win because there's going to be some things that, some situations where the ball doesn't bounce your way.

Just you're kind of beat up. You're a little tired. You catch a bad matchup. We had a three-game -- three out of four games during the kind of stretch run for us we're on the road. We had to go to West Virginia, Texas and Baylor in a four week span. And we hadn't won at West Virginia in a really long time.

And so there was a bunch of challenges and a lot of things that have to happen. But our guys have embraced the idea that you have to play well every week. And to me that's what makes college football so unique and so different is you can't go out there and lay an egg. You really can't afford to do that. You've got to play hard every game. You've got to play for 60 minutes every game no matter what the outcome is.

And you go back and you look at our game against Kansas



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State. We lose to Kansas State in the Big 12 Championship game, and we got down -- we were down 11 points in the fourth quarter. And if our guys don't continue to play and get that game into overtime then we may not make the College Football Playoff.

You've got to play hard, keep your head down, keep grinding, do the little things right to give yourself a chance to play well every week.

We come into this game with a lot of motivation, obviously. It's been a long season. We've exceeded expectations, at least externally. And so anytime you do that there's always a little bit of extra motivation.

Q. What has Kendre been able to do this week in terms of preparation and what is his status that?

COACH DYKES: So Kendre Miller's status, the day before yesterday, did a little bit of work. It's one of those deals we want to give him some time to rest and recover, see where he was at. Did a bunch of work, probably a little bit more than we thought he was going to be able to do. Woke up yesterday a little sore. I think he feels better today.

So we'll continue to try to see where he's at. I think to me in the next 24 hours is when obviously we'll have to make a determination, have a pretty good idea on what he's going to be able to do going into the game Monday. We're still optimistic that he's going to be able to play. So we'll see how he feels today.

I think today is going to be important and see, just kind of see where he's at. See how he feels. And the biggest thing obviously is he's confident and feels good about it. And we want him to be very effective. We just don't want to put him out there and give him an opportunity to get more injured.

Q. With him or without him, how important is the running game? How do you feel you guys match up on the front?

COACH DYKES: I think when you play Georgia, you've got to be able to run the football. I think that's the thing that you have to be able to do at least some is run it. If not, you



... when all is said, we're done.®

know, you're playing right into their hands. They can really pressure you, can heat you up. It allows those defensive linemen to really play free.

So I think it's always the case when you play somebody you're going to be much more effective when you can have a run threat. But in particular against a team like Georgia, it's really important to be able to run the ball effectively.

Now, I'm not saying you need to rush for 300 yards, but you need to be able to consistently run the ball. You've got to stay out of third-and-long situations. And when you can do that, then I think it puts more pressure on them and takes some pressure off of yourself.

Q. (Question about Chidera).

COACH DYKES: So it's funny, I didn't know anything about Chidera Uzo-Diribe, who coached with us at SMU and then brought him to TCU and he's now at Georgia. I didn't really know Chidera. Jim Leavitt was our defensive coordinator when I was at SMU. And Chidera worked with Jim.

So Jim obviously really highly recommended him. He had been an analyst, I believe, for Jim and -- a player and an analyst. And he was -- hired him at SMU and he was really good.

He was one of those guys that you knew early. He was destined to be really good. He's got a great disposition when it comes to coaching and communicating with players. Really, really effective communicator. Does a really good job of walking the fine line between having great relationships with players, but at the same time having that authoritative part of that relationship that's important.

So he's really good, really bright. Got a really good future in front of him. He's one of those guys, I expect him to be a coordinator, head coach pretty quickly. I think he's on a really rapid rise. And I think a lot of him and got a great family. And he's going to be a real star in our profession.

Q. I know your focus is on Monday. But I was curious, as you figure out how to move this program forward or take advantage of this, how fortuitous is the timing given that the conference is going to change soon, the playoffs changing soon? And you guys seem to be in a pretty good position coming out of all of that.

COACH DYKES: Like I said, "fortuitous" is a good word. It's important for the Big 12 and our credibility to have teams that perform well and can win. And you lose two of the more high-profile members of the conference,

obviously, with Texas and Oklahoma moving on. But I think that was what was so good about the Big 12 this year, was you got to see, from top to bottom, just how good the league was.

And it's probably as good a league -- it's probably the best that the Big 12 has been in a long time. And the two brand name institutions really weren't as good as they typically are.

So I think it speaks to the strength of the league, the overall strength. I think it speaks to the momentum that the Big 12 has that two remaining teams were in the championship game with us and Kansas State.

I think the future for the Big 12 is very bright. I think the four added institutions coming in all have tremendous potential and have had success obviously through the years.

And so I think the league is going to be better, continue to be better than most people give it credit for being.

The timing was really good. The timing was good. And like you said, you try not to worry about too much right now with the big picture stuff, but I do believe that it was an important year for the league. And I think it was important to get somebody into the College Football Playoff. Because it's been a while since that happened, in particular a member institution that's staying.

Q. TCU had a lot of success this century but a time it was the bottom of the barrel. Wonder if any old TCU fans have told you horror stories.

COACH DYKES: I've heard it some from some folks through the years. The good thing is, as you said, there's been a pretty good 20-year run, really, with a lot of consistency. You look from 2010 to 2020, there was a lot of years there where TCU was in the top 10 and spent a lot of time really in the top five.

I think a lot of people didn't really recognize that. And look, I was pretty knee-deep in college football. And I'm not sure I understood the consistent success that TCU had. I was doing my own thing and I was working.

For whatever reason it didn't seem like TCU might have been the biggest story in college football, but they probably deserved to be just because the team is really strong, really consistent. Won a lot of big games.

Had some opportunities like we did against Michigan to really put their mark on college football and won most of those games. You look at some of the big bowl wins,



obviously the Rose Bowl. You look at some of those wins, and those were really good TCU teams.

And so there has been a good history. But when you do talk to some of the older fans and in particular players that played, there were some lean years, and a lot of lean years.

And I think there was a lot of trying to figure out their way in college football and how important was college football to the TCU community.

And people asked me all the time when you're trying to rebuild a program, what comes first, kind of the chicken or the egg? Does the investment come first and the success later, or success first and then investment?

I think At TCU, fortunately for them, it seemed to happen at the same time. They had a really good coach in Coach Patterson. They had a really good AD in Chris Del Conte, and they were able to make some big moves in a small amount of time because of the real strong commitment from the top down. And we're fortunate enough to reap the benefits of that.

Q. Your career had been on the up and up for a long time until Cal. What did you learn from that experience, how did that reshape how you are as a head coach?

COACH DYKES: It's interesting. It's funny, you don't ever want to be critical of anybody ever. But there are people in our profession, just like there are in every profession, whether it's athletics or business, whatever the case may be, where people have -- they go to some company, some company has a lot of success. Some company loses their CEO. Some company hires this guy to be their CEO. Probably doesn't have the resumé or the success to be the CEO but he falls into a really good situation and continues to have a lot of success with the company.

That happens a lot in our profession. And I think what happens is, when that occurs, you know, everybody gets labeled as this or that.

And there's a lot of different ways to reach the top of the profession in our profession. Some guys have an easier road than others. And some people have to have some jobs at institutions maybe that haven't historically won. And as you work your way up, your job is to fix those.

And sometimes they're not easy to fix. And sometimes they take longer to fix than you want them to. And sometimes there's a reason those places haven't had success in a long time.

And you learn from everything. You really do. My time at Cal was difficult. I'm very, very glad I went through it because it makes me appreciate this so much more. You know what I mean? Had I been at places that were historically successful and kind of fallen into some situations that were, quote, easier, I might have a better record. But I wouldn't have the opportunity to understand how good I've got it, if that makes sense.

That's not taking a shot at anybody. It's really not. It just makes you appreciate when something's really good. And it makes you take a lot of care for that, and it makes you understand it.

And so anyway, I learned a lot from that experience. I learned a lot at Louisiana Tech. I learned a lot at Cal. I learned a lot at SMU. Learned a lot in 2017 when I was working with Coach Patterson.

You just try to make sure that every situation you take something from it and you apply it to your situation. And you try to come out on the other end better than you were before.

And I loved living in the Bay Area. It was a really can cool place for me. I always had an itch to live in California. I grew up in West Texas, and there's a significant difference between Lubbock and Berkeley. And so I appreciated that difference, you know what I mean? Just in terms of everything, culture, the way of thinking, approach, temperature, weather, scenery. To me it was, just I wanted to experience different things in my life. That's just something that's always been really important to me.

And it was a challenging time. I truly believe -- I still believe this, if Sandy Barbour was the AD there, I would still be at Cal and we would have been very successful.

But it's not the way it worked. And it wasn't the way -- it wasn't the plans. And so had to go to plan B, which was kind of start over, reinvent myself, and pray for another opportunity. And SMU gave me that opportunity and I'll be forever grateful for that.

And I think that was the hardest thing for me when we sat down and we said, okay, do we want to make this move from SMU to TCU? We know it's going to be hard. I'm incredibly indebted to SMU for believing in me, giving me this opportunity.

But at the end of the day, you want to have a chance to play for a national championship. And when I sat down and talked to Kate about this opportunity, that's what we kept coming back to. I said, you know what, I truly believe

we can win a national championship at TCU.

It's going to take some time, we thought. It was going to be a little bit more of a journey than it's ended up being, and at least we're having a chance to play for it sooner than I expected. But I certainly believed it could be done.

And that's just from a resource, commitment standpoint. And so here we are. And it's been a heck of a ride and we're looking forward to seeing if we get it done on Monday.

Q. You don't want to do the big-picture stuff, which is understandable. About the historical stuff, given where it all came from to reach this point, if you get through Monday night, have you thought about that perspective?

COACH DYKES: Not really. I mean, that's been -- you and I have talked about this before -- but I think that's probably been part of the reason that we've been able to get to where we are is we have just kind of kept blinders on, you know what I mean?

And I'm a football historian, like most coaches are. I just have a tremendous respect for the game and the people that came before us and the teams and the players and all of it.

But I do think that it's been really freeing for me, personally and I think for our players, that we just kind of keep showing up and talking about trying to get better on a day-to-day basis. And I think it keeps us from getting overwhelmed. It really does.

Again, when you love the game like I do and appreciate the game like I do, and you were brought up in the game like I was, you can get overwhelmed pretty quickly because you start just looking at all the things and all the history.

And I think that's happened to me in the past. We've been in good situations before, really, at LA Tech and Cal and SMU where we got off to really good starts and probably got a little bit overwhelmed by certain things.

So that was -- my whole issue was not to let that happen and it starts with me and filters to the rest of the staff and players from there.

And so we've been really relaxed this year. We've been really confident. I really truly believe in our players. I know that the guys are prepared. I really believe in our assistant coaches and our support staff, our strength and conditioning staff.

And when you have alignment like we do, it gives you great comfort. You lay your head down at night every night saying, you know what, this is in a good place. And we've been able to do it pretty quickly, to get there pretty quickly. And sometimes you never get there, just in terms of all the pieces that have to align for you to have a chance to be successful.

And so that's what's been so good this year is we feel like all the pieces are here and it's our job to put them together. But it has truly been a one-day-at-a-time approach. I think it's been a big part of the reason for our success.

Q. With you breaking through in the four-team playoff, and expanded playoff coming, how difficult is it going to be on the traditional power teams moving forward?

COACH DYKES: It's interesting. I don't know. I think in some ways it's a little bit like the NCAA Tournament, the basketball tournament, where you're going to let more people in, which I believe in inclusion. I think there's more teams that need to be included.

Again, that was one of the things that drove me crazy about being in a non-Power 5 institution was I never thought I had access. Now, Cincinnati got it last year, but really just looking at it, you felt like everything had to fall into place for that to happen.

The one thing I do believe, though, is you get more teams in -- you can have a conversation either way -- that the traditional powers have to win more games but then there's maybe an easier path for them to do that because the other teams aren't going to have as much depth. The other team is going to be a little more beat up. The other teams may have played close games -- and all these factors that go into how healthy is a nontraditional team, how much depth does a nontraditional team have, can they survive the extra two games they have to play to keep advancing?

So I think you can make an argument either way where some of the traditional powers will benefit from the 12-team playoff. And you can also make the argument that it's going to cloud things up a little bit.

So I see it both ways. It will be interesting to see how it plays out. When you look at the NCAA basketball tournament you always end up with one team right on the fringe on getting in, whether it's the final four or the final eight. So I think you'll see that.

But I do wonder the impact it's going to have on, again, the traditional teams, because they're going to be the ones that are more battle tested, have more depth, maybe have had opportunities to rest their starters more, all those things

that add up and matter at the end of the year. So it's going to be interesting to see how it plays out.

Q. With the entire football community being affected by Damar Hamlin injury, is that something that you talk to your players about? And also when Damar kind of came to, his first words were about, "Did we win?" And is that something that's a motivational factor as well?

COACH DYKES: I think, number one, I think that speaks to just the true team concept that does really exist, I think, within a lot of football teams. I do think that football teams are different.

When you line up a football team, there's so many different kinds of people there. You've got big people and small people and slow people and fast people and white people and Black people. And you just have all these people from different backgrounds, different ways of thinking.

It truly is to me the most diverse kind of community that exists really anywhere in the world these days. The great thing about it, nobody cares who anybody's dad is or whether you're rich or poor or whatever the case may be, nobody cares. It's all about how can you help the team and what can you do for the team.

And so when someone like Damar gets injured, you find out how quickly and how much everybody else is invested in him and the team idea. And then when he makes a miraculous recovery and the first thing he does is ask about his teammates and not himself.

Again, it just shows the true humility of obviously his character but also too the real team thinking that exists.

And I think that's what makes coaching football so much fun, is we get to be around these young people that are constantly told over and over again, hey, you've got to get yours, you've got to get yours, you've got to get yours -- they're told that by adults, by the way.

And everybody does, I understand that. And that's part of it. But at the same time, there's nothing like seeing people make sacrifices for each other. And because it's freeing and it does kind of give you hope that people are willing to make big picture sacrifices. And that's one of the great things about coaching.

So we haven't really talked about it as a team. It's one of those things we were going to, and obviously there's been so much going on, we hadn't had a chance to do it.

I've heard a lot of our players talking about how glad they

are that he's recovering at the rate that he is. But it's a scary thing and certainly makes you think about the big picture things in our business and in the game of football.

Q. I'm curious over the last few weeks as you've brought your program on to these big stages, how much have you thought about Mike Leach? And I'm interested in also just he never got one of his teams to this stage. And have you thought about that?

COACH DYKES: I have a little bit. You wish -- it's funny, you go back and you look at this ride that we've been on. I had a chance to speak to Coach Leach prior to his game against Ole Miss. And we had some really great conversations.

And I'm a lot like this as well. Mike is not always going to show his emotions and can be pretty stoic. And we had some really heart-felt conversations preceding that game. And that gave me a lot of peace. I think we both said some things to each other that we wanted to say. Certainly I feel that way.

I wish he was here for the ride. He would be one of those guys that he would have had an invitation to come with us and spend some time with us here in LA and come to the game. I'm sure he would have declined. But he certainly would have had an invitation.

And it's sad, it really is, just because, as you say, he never had an opportunity to play for a championship like this. And what he did for college football, the game of football in general, is really hard to measure.

So it's sad. I think he would be proud to see one of his disciples have the kind of success that we've had. As a matter of fact, I know he was because we talked about it. And obviously that was before advancing to the championship game.

But he's certainly been on my mind a lot. It's been a tough year losing Dave Nichol and then losing Mike. And those two guys have had a big impact on my life and just who I am as a person. He's constantly on my mind.

Q. Was this type of run, and people want to call you a Cinderella, or whatever, but the way you've made this run with this air raid, is this what he had in mind, this is supposed to be a talent equalizing force?

COACH DYKES: Certainly that's what it started out. It's basically option football, the air raid is. It was designed instead of handing it off to play-option football by throwing the ball. And it went from reading first-level players to reading second-level players. And it's kind of built on the



same principles in a lot of ways -- execution, simplicity, fundamentals, drills, all the things that make the option a big equalizer. The air raid's very similar. A little different approach, but same idea.

And so that's the principle of all this. And we're a little different, you know what I mean? This football team is made a little differently maybe because we're a team that runs the ball quite a bit. But, again, we've taken a lot of those same principles from the air raid, applied them to the run game as well, and it's kind of given us this as well.

We're not a traditional air raid in some ways, but it's certainly the heart and soul of what we're doing offensively.

Q. Some of your previous stops, anything specific from your head coach job LA Tech that you take with you or lessons learned, and have you heard from any people back there wishing you well?

COACH DYKES: It's been great. Look, LA Tech was one of those magical places. I really loved my time in Ruston. I loved that community. Some of my best friends are still in Ruston, guys I talked to all the time.

It was just kind of a magical place. It was the perfect place to get started. I could make a ton of mistakes, and it wasn't on a huge stage. I could kind of learn without everybody else knowing that I screwed up to the extent that I screwed up.

It was great, though. It was the first time really for me I had to go, okay, this was my idea on how to build it, and you know what? That's not going to work here. So what do we do now?

And so when I got the LA Tech job I thought I'm going to recruit these DFW kids and kids from Houston, and I've got all these relationships and they're going to come to Ruston. All of a sudden we got there and those kids weren't interested in coming to Ruston.

So we had to recruit a different kind of kid. We had to change our approach when it came to player evaluations, how we were going to do it -- recruiting, recruiting area, recruiting philosophy, team building philosophy, all those different things.

And we had to take about 180-degree turn on those things pretty quickly to give us a chance to be successful.

And then our second year there, we signed 13 junior college players, which in a weird sort of way that was today's version of going to the transfer portal. And so it was kind of our first time to do that. How do you do this?

How do you evaluate these guys?

So obviously that paid dividends for us when we went to SMU. And is paying dividends for us now at TCU in terms of how are we going to take transfers, and how can you mesh them into your program quickly, and how can you still have kind of a hierarchy there when you're adding these new players, and how can you blend it all together.

So we had to start learning quickly then. And, like I said, it's paid dividends for us since.

Q. What one word would you use to describe your team and why?

COACH DYKES: Resilient, I think resilience is probably the best way. Either resilient or confident.

These guys don't quit. It's been weird; they really believe in each other. There's a quiet confidence associated with this group, and there has been. They don't get too high. They don't get too low.

And really, when you find people or a team that does that, confidence is at the root of that. And the reason they don't get too low is because they know they're going to have an opportunity to fight back or they believe that things are going to equalize, or they believe that they're going to figure out a way to get it done.

And so this group just has that mentality and that belief in each other. It's not only a belief in yourself, it's probably, more importantly, a belief in the guy next to you and your teammates and really the system and the approach and everything, and believing that everything makes a difference. Everything matters.

We talk to our guys all the time about when we get done with this, they're going to go eat a meal. What they eat at that meal is going to matter. It's going to have an impact on how well they play on Monday.

So those guys, how much rest do they get? How much do they hydrate? All those things are inches and those inches add up. And all that matters.

Q. Are you going to have to prepare Emari any more than you normally would, regardless what his role would be? Would this be so special for him being so close to home.

COACH DYKES: I don't think so. I think the big thing is, going back to what I said earlier, he's an older kid, has a lot of confidence, has been around a lot. Has played in a lot of big games.



He has a tremendous amount of experience, because he's been the one mainstay, really, at TCU for a long time. Has never really been a starter, but has been probably as important as any player on our team through the years.

And your second-team running back is critical in today's world. He fills that role better than anybody.

Q. You felt this outpouring of support from our entire community. What would it mean if...

COACH DYKES: When you get the kind of send-off we got coming out here, you think it's important to Fort Worth and to DFW and the entire community. But then when you get that many people show up at 9:45 on, whatever day of the week that was, it just shows how important it is and how many people are truly rooting for you, are invested in the program. It's motivating.

Gives you that extra little push when you're a little worn out, a little tired, beat up, to make sure you do the things the right way so you can go out play your best on Monday.

Q. What makes Max Duggan so special and how have you seen him evolve throughout the season?

COACH DYKES: I think the big thing with him he's just so incredibly tough. And "tough" means so many different things. He just never wavers, never gets rattled. He's the same when he throws a touchdown or an interception. It's the same look. It's the same reaction.

He's just so consistent in what he does. And I think in a lot of ways we talked about this earlier, when you haven't been through this, you have to have somebody that everybody can look to. And that person kind of has to be your rock. And I think in a weird sort of way he's our rock because on the sideline he's the same.

And, again, when things are going bad, the guys come to him and they feed off his energy. And I truly believe that that confidence and that belief and that toughness, both physical and mental, has made a huge impact on our team. It just makes everybody around him better.

I think -- there's a lot of really great athletes in different sports, but there's just very few people that raise the temperature of the room. And he does that. When he walks in the room, I think the temperature is raised.

Like I said earlier in the year, I mean, truly when I drive to work in the morning, he makes me want to be better because he's that invested in the program. He cares that much about it that when you drive in you're going, hey,

look, I want to be at my best for him because I know he's going to be at his best for us.

Q. 1938 is a long time ago. How much is that on your mind?

COACH DYKES: Honestly, not much. I think the big thing is we have tried to take it as a one-game approach. It's really kind of a lame cliché that people talk about all the time. But in our case it's really true.

And we're trying to -- there will be plenty of time for reflection at the end of all this to sit down and say this was historical, this was meaningful, this was different, this was maybe unexpected, but in a lot of ways we just haven't done that.

It's really just been about, okay, look, we got through that challenge. We're on to the next one. How can we prepare our very best for this challenge and just kind of keep our head down and not look up?

And that's -- I think it's been a good approach for us. I think it's taken a lot of pressure off of our team to not think in terms of history or not think in terms of anything other than, hey, I'm going to show up today and do my best, see where that takes us.

Q. When you came on here it from a 5-7 team, always big expectations. But are you surprised you're here?

COACH DYKES: It's funny, when we got the job, obviously I had been at SMU. We played TCU. I knew they had good players. Felt like maybe they hadn't played to their potential for whatever reason.

And so it was attractive to me just because I knew there was some talent on the team. And, so, what you want to try to do when you have talent, you want to try to put it in the best position you can to be successful. And then not only from a scheme standpoint but then also, too, from a team-building standpoint try to figure out the very best ways to build a culture.

And I think that's the thing that really gets lost, I think, in so many different ways is the importance of culture. People talk about it all the time, but what does that mean?

And, so, that was our goal from the beginning is, look, let's not worry about football. Let's worry about work ethic. Let's worry about doing things the right way. Let's worry about responsibility to each other. Let's worry about all these kind of intangible things, kind of process-driven things. And then we'll see when we get to spring football where the football goes.



We got through spring. Felt like we had a pretty good team. Had some huge holes in some certain areas. We didn't have enough defensive linemen. So the great thing about today's college football, we were able to go out and address some of those needs through the transfer portal.

Then we got about three weeks into fall camp and we felt like, you know what, this team has a chance to be pretty good. What does that mean? I don't know. We didn't really talk about it. But we thought if we can stay healthy and some guys can improve and we can figure out who we are, then maybe we can get on a run.

And all of a sudden we look up and we're 7-0, 8-0, 9-0, 10-0. And just kind of kept it going. And I think that was the way we approached it. Never talked about any goals as a team other than do your best every day, play hard, and if that happens then good things will happen. And that's exactly how it played out.

Q. Do you remember being introduced to the Just Play app you guys used and -- the Just Play App, what do you remember being introduced to, what do you remember how you got introduced to it and why did you buy in?

COACH DYKES: It's been good for us. It's a great teaching tool, great teaching method for our players. I think it's been something that's been, like everything, a part of our success.

You sit down, you look at all the things that have to come together, there's just so much, obviously, from a player development standpoint, from a staff development standpoint, from an opportunity to communicate to your players.

It's a way to gain an advantage, get a little bit of an edge. And so we're into all of that. Whether it's a little bit of analytics, whether it's an app that allows communication between players and coaches, whether it's playbook stuff, whether it's the way to integrate playbook and video, whatever the case may be, any little advantage you can get makes a huge difference and they all add up.

And so we've tried to sit down and look at everything that we can to gain an inch here and there. And all the inches add up.

Q. When you started the season, did you see yourself at this pinnacle? And how did you communicate to your players to believe? And what will it take to complete the mission?

COACH DYKES: It kind of goes back to what we talked about earlier. It's like anything else. It all begins with -- we talk about this all the time -- there's really three things that we believe are important to building a program.

Number one, it's talent acquisition. And that means good players, good coaches, good strength and conditioning people, good trainers, good everything.

And so trying to gather up as much really talented people as you can.

The second thing, it's about developing those people, player development, and that comes through in so many different ways.

And then the third thing is a culture. Those are the three things, to me, that are really, really important. And that allows you to sustain success, where it's not just a one-time thing when you're able to do those things.

And so that's been our approach from the beginning is let's recruit as many good players as we can, let's go hire the best coaches we can, let's use the best technology we can. Let's do everything we can do to create a little bit of an edge. And then let's continue to do it over and over again. And then let's make that part of what makes us successful in who we are on a day-to-day basis.

That's been our approach. Typically, first year you don't end up in the National Championship Game. So I think that was probably, honestly never crossed my mind. But I felt like we could have a good team.

I've been places where we've been on runs before. Went on a great run at LA Tech, a good run at Cal and great run at SMU. And we weren't able to finish those runs.

I think having been on those at different schools gave me a little bit better confidence that we could learn how to stay on the run and continue to have success instead of getting knocked off late like we had in the past.

So that was kind of the idea and then let's just see where it takes us.

Big thing against Georgia, obviously, is when you play a team like this they're very talented; there's not a lot of weaknesses. Your good players have to make good plays.

That's just part of playing championship football against very good competition. The best players in your program have to play the best.

And that's going to be true on Monday night. And then you've got to play winning football. You've got to limit big



plays, create big plays, don't turn the ball over, all the cliché stuff that everybody talks about, all those things matter when you play against great competition.

And so Georgia will be a big challenge for us. But, again, our guys are very confident in our ability to play well and we believe if we play well we'll certainly have a chance to win.

Q. Obviously you've played in a lot of big championships games. How will you deal with the emotions when it's going up or down?

COACH DYKES: I think the big thing is to try to -- we talk about it all the time, no wasted energy. We don't want to waste a lot of energy on stuff we can't control. Our guys, if we continue to prepare well, which we have up to this point, we've got to have a great walk-through today, great run-through tomorrow.

But they'll gain confidence from those things. They'll know that they're prepared. And that allows them to go out and to play free.

And I think the thing with us is don't get too high or too low. If you score a touchdown, great. Get over to the sideline and do it again. And don't focus on that and don't waste a lot of energy in it.

And same thing if something bad happens; don't spend a lot of energy worrying about something that's already happened.

And the mantra is always for us "play the next play." And the next play is the most important. What happened before doesn't matter. And so you've got to get ready to play the next one.

That's been our mentality all year. Again, you don't feel that way unless you believe in your preparation and you have confidence in your abilities and your teammates' abilities and the good thing is this group does. And that's going to allow them to be pretty emotional stable. And that's going to be really important for us.

Q. When you think about core college football, so much things changing outside of it. I wonder what keeps coaches going. I imagine a group like this is part of that. But what's it like to do that, to go on a run like this, play for the national championship, with all the uncertainty elsewhere?

COACH DYKES: What's funny is I think that there's a belief that by a lot of people, including a lot of coaches and a lot of people in our profession that everything that's

happening in college football right now is bad.

I'm probably in the minority in terms of my belief that anything that's good for the players, I view, is a good thing.

And so NIL makes things complicated. It benefits the players. I think it's a good thing.

Transfer portal, complicated, hard for coaches. Good for players -- can be, assuming guys make good decisions. I'm for it.

So, I think, that's always been our thing is the game is changing daily. And it's my job to adapt and not only keep up but try to be in front of those changes and to try to use every opportunity to make our team better and our program better.

And, so, all those things I really truly see as positives. I think it's all about player empowerment. I'm a big believer in that. It's something, to me, should have happened 30 years ago.

And the tragedy is that we were so slow to adapt that instead of all of us collectively -- the NCAA, the conferences, universities, whatever -- instead of changing and taking care of student-athletes and their welfare, like we should have, we basically neglected that to the point where the courts had to get involved.

So, again, I'm in the minority to view it that way, but that's a tragedy that had to happen that way and all of a sudden when the courts get involved you have chaos because they're deciding on things that obviously they don't know about from a day-to-day perspective.

But we're adapting and trying to figure it out. And it's big-picture stuff. But you've got to continue to evolve. That's what we try to do every day is, okay, look, this is happening; how are we going to use this to our advantage? How will it make us better as a program? So I think that's the approach we try to take.

And I do love the fact that our players are more empowered, and they do have better opportunities and more options. I mean, it's been a bad thing for college football that a kid goes off to college and he doesn't get to see his parents if they can't afford to come to a game. Now there's opportunities for the parents to be able to come.

And the CFP has done an incredible job of allowing our student-athletes to have a stipend and to allow their family to travel. So a lot of our families have been able to come to our game in Phoenix. They probably wouldn't have



been able to come before without that. Same thing here for the championship game.

So all these things are good and I see all the changes as positive. And it creates a little bit of chaos for us as coaches. But, look, that's our job to figure it out and deal with it.

Q. When you took over, pretty quickly you realized Quentin wasn't going anywhere. Could you take us through the coming here and realizing your star wasn't leaving and how unique that was?

COACH DYKES: That was big. When you look at us, and this is probably something that most people don't know, but when we came into the -- when I came into the job, externally I was hearing, okay, these are four players that are really important to the program that you've got to get to stay here. And three of the four left, you know what I mean? We had three of the four that transferred out.

Q. Who were the other three?

COACH DYKES: I don't want to say. But there were four guys that were kind of special talents. And two of them went to Ole Miss -- and I'm trying to remember where the other one went -- but there were some guys that we were trying to hold on to and we weren't able to do it. Two of the three went to Ole Miss, the other one went, I don't want to say.

But anyway, holding on to Quentin was obviously important. And I think it was important not only for his talent, but I think it was also an endorsement from him, you know what I mean -- that everybody was looking for somebody to say, look, I'm jumping on the train.

And Quentin did that for us. And I think it gave our staff some credibility because when you take over in today's era of football, there's chaos. There's a lot of guys looking to leave and there's people reaching out to them. There's people talking to them. And there's all these things that are happening.

And you're trying to get to know these guys. You're trying to sell them on your vision for the program. And so it's a complicated time.

And, again, you're looking for credibility with your players. So when Quentin says, look, okay, I'm going to stay here and stick this out, I think what that does everybody in the program sees that. I think it calms a lot of their anxiety and allows them to say, look, I'm going to jump on board with this guy and see where it's going to talk us.

Q. Star guy, he said he had people reaching out, a lot of money to go elsewhere, how unique of a guy is he?

COACH DYKES: Look, we sat down and talked to Quentin's parents. They're both military people. Unbelievable family. You can see why he's who he is.

And we sat down and we started -- the conversation kind of went to NIL. They were like, we're good. We don't need to have that conversation. That's a conversation that we're not that interested in. And we believe that if Quentin performs like he should he'll be taken care of.

And we want him to be coached and we want you guys to care about him as a person not just as a player. And as long as you guys do that, we're on board.

And I think to me that's the great lesson in all of this. And I think everybody wants to be compensated for their abilities. And everybody wants to have an opportunity to increase their standing financially.

But at the end of the day, I think the guys that make the big-picture decisions really are the ones that get rewarded.

And the ones who say, I really fit in this offense or this defense, I really feel like I could be developed here. Those are the guys to me that have success and then have plenty of opportunities for that financial stuff down the road.

And it's like coaches. I mean, my dad used to tell me this all the time: Don't make decisions on your pay. And if I did, I would still be a high school coach because I went from making what I thought was basically a million dollars a year -- I think it was \$37,000 a year as a high school coach to making \$4,000 a year as a college coach. That's not a very good financial decision.

I thought it was \$4,000 a month; that's a whole other story. Turned out to be \$4,000 a year.

But it was the best thing for me I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't made that decision.

And I think sometimes you've got to look past just the financial thing and you've got to say, okay, what's going to be the best situation for me and allow me to grow and try to reach my potential.

Q. I've covered the NCAA Tournament where a coach who has been doing it for years and years, everybody in the profession knows how good they are, suddenly they go on a run and now everybody knows about them, kind of changes their profile overnight. Have you started to experience that?

COACH DYKES: I think maybe a little bit. Look, we're the flavor of the month. I get that. I'd like for us to be the flavor of the decade, you know what I mean? That to me is a whole lot better than being the flavor of the month. And that remains to be seen if we can do that, you know what I mean?

Like anything else, we're a nice story. And I mean that in all due respect. I mean, our players have done a remarkable job and they've really earned where we are.

But I say this all the time about our profession: To me longevity and consistency is what makes people great in this profession. And so obviously that remains to be seen if we can do it and I could do it.

But there is a lot that goes into having a successful football program. And I think that's why the traditional powers are still good. And they've always been good because it does, it takes alignment really from the top down. And it's the chicken or the egg argument.

But we have to have all the pieces to be able to sustain something for a long time. And the great thing about TCU is I believe we have that. Now it's up to us as coaches and players to do it, but we certainly have the opportunity to do it and not everybody can say that.

Q. What would Mike say to you about all this?

COACH DYKES: He would get a kick out of it. He would say, you know, you're still that same guy that was Navarro Junior College making 288 bucks a month, so don't forget it.

And I think that's the -- to me that's the biggest success of this team. As the season rolled along, nobody got too big, you know what I mean? And players, coaches, all of us, I mean we have really, really good coaches and we have really good coaches that have been recognized -- Garrett Riley won the Frank Broyles Award. Garrett came to work the same day the same as he did the day before. And that's all of our challenge.

That's all of our challenge is to continue to grind and not forget where we came from and understand that this is an opportunity.

And I tell our players this all the time: Okay. We have to approach it this way. If you're a pharmaceutical sales guy, and you have a million dollar quota, you go meet your million dollar quota, guess what? They congratulate you, they pat you on the back and say, you know what, your quota is a million and a half dollars next year,

congratulations.

That's what we talk to our players all the time, okay, congratulations, here's the expectations. And can we handle it? Those are all things that remain to be seen. We've handled them this year up to this point. We need to handle them on Monday. And moving forward we all need to be able to handle them as well.

So, look, I've been on both ends of this. I got a lot of text messages right now from a lot of people and I've also been there where I didn't have one single person return my phone call for months.

So it's part of this profession, and you've got to be the same person every day, whether they return your phone call or you're scrambling to try to return theirs.

Q. Emari had a big game for you. Besides the game he had, just what type of player, person has he been for you guys throughout the year?

COACH DYKES: Pretty remarkable. He's got about five different degrees. So he's really, really smart, brilliant guy, very mature, very methodical. Just as a person, his work ethic and his approach, whether academically or his approach to football and playing football, very disciplined, very mature.

And all those things are obviously really important parts of being successful.

And so the great thing about Emari, I really do believe he'll go on to play in the NFL and have a great career. But when he's done playing football is when he'll really be successful because he's just a brilliant guy. And he's going to be an incredible businessman when he's done with his football career.

Twenty years, there's a pretty good chance I'll be hitting him up for a job, saying don't forget about me. See if he's got a small role for me in some company that he's running.

Q. Safe to say you guys aren't going to be here without change in you and this program, what you've brought, but also the fact that it's not possible without Coach Patterson. Can you just talk about his role.

COACH DYKES: Look, very few coaches have meant more to their football program than Gary Patterson has meant to TCU, just elevating the program, giving credibility to the program, providing the resources we have today that he didn't have when he first got the job.

And so that, to me, is the way that this works. I really



believe this, we're all supposed to leave it better than we found it, you know what I mean? And he certainly did that with TCU. He was there with Coach Franchione. Coach Franchione had success; left it better than he found it. Gary left it better than he found it.

My job is to build on that. That's hard to build on because he had a ton of success and did it consistently for a long time. And we're in the national championship this year, which is great, but we'll see if we can have the kind of success that he had, the longevity that he had. And the jury is still out on that for sure.

That's what we're supposed to do. That's our job. And, again, we would certainly wouldn't be here without him.

Q. When did Garrett Riley first come on your radar? Had a chance to work with both him and Lincoln. What are the similarities and differences maybe?

COACH DYKES: What's interesting, I don't know what's in the water in Muleshoe, but they're both really mature, thoughtful guys. To me, that's the biggest thing. Look, I think Lincoln was probably more mature at 20 than I was at 30 or 40. And he was just kind of -- they're both old souls; they're both very calm.

I mean, they both are process-driven people. It's funny, sometimes I'll be sitting down to eat a meal, I've got all this stuff stacked up on my plate. I look at Garrett's plate, it's like it's divided -- like they teach you to eat your plate when you're in elementary school -- like a third of it is fruits and vegetables, a third is grains and a third is protein. How does this guy do this? That's his approach. That's why he's good at what he does. Just got a methodology a way of doing things, and a discipline.

Most starting 30-year-old guys don't have that kind of discipline, that real kind of confidence in the system, in themselves, that he's got. So they remind me a lot of each other. Different personality-wise, but very similar in their approach the way they conduct business.

Q. There are a lot of guys, people who say you should be happy here. How can you guys actually win the game on Monday?

COACH DYKES: Look, you don't go through all the stuff we've gone through this season and work as hard as these guys have worked and make all the sacrifices these guys have made to say we're just happy to be here. I think if anything, it gives you extra motivation to finish the job because we haven't been here before. And if you haven't been there before, then it's hard to say, well, we'll be back next year, you know what I mean?

So it all just gives you extra motivation to go out and get it done. And it all begins with a belief and an attitude and a desire to make the most of your opportunity. And that's what this team has done all year -- and to focus on doing their job and closing it out, whether it's ball games, whether it's closing out winning the Big 12, the regular season Big 12, playing in a Big Ten Championship, closing out a semifinal game. Whatever it is, this team has been able to close things out this year.

So we want to close out the season. And none of us will feel good about this year if we don't win this game. I think we'll feel like we've squandered an opportunity. And nobody wants to do that.

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