



## Team Selection Teleconference

No. 15 Texas vs. No. 5 Georgia

December 2, 2018



**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Welcome, everybody, to the Allstate Sugar Bowl head coaches teleconference. We're getting ready for the 85th annual Allstate Sugar Bowl. I'm very proud of the long history that the bowl has, and that makes us very excited about this year's matchup between Texas and Georgia. I was given a great stat earlier, that the two schools have 251 combined years of football, 1,726 wins, and 110 bowl appearances. So we've got a lot of history coming together here in the Sugar Bowl.

To start off, we'd like to introduce the head coach of the University of Texas.

Tom Herman, if you could please give us a brief opening statement.

**COACH HERMAN:** Sure. Thanks, John. Just extremely excited to be one of the very few select teams to participate in a New Year's Six bowl game and to have it be the prestigious Sugar Bowl is icing on the cake. Really proud of our team for what they've accomplished, although certainly disappointed with the outcome in our championship game yesterday. This is a definite reward for them and the season that they've had. Having been to the Sugar Bowl as a coach myself, I know what a fantastic operation it is. I told our team that they're going to have a wonderful time. They'll be treated as first class as possible of any bowl game out there. And it's, again, a tremendous honor to be part of that.

And I know Coach Smart and his program. I've had a chance to speak with him many times over the years, and we've shared ideas. I watched their championship game, and I know what a formidable opponent Georgia will be. And I know how he coaches and the level of play that we're going to be competing against. And I look forward to seeing him in New Orleans. Just excited to be a part of it.

**Q. Hey, Coach, you know, the last time University of Texas played a bowl game outside of the state of Texas was in 2011. Obviously, this predates you. But from a guy who's had that Peach Bowl experience at Houston, what does it mean for your guys to just kind of get on a plane, get outside of their familiar surroundings, and experience something different, especially for some of these seniors?**

**COACH HERMAN:** Yeah. I think, you know, all bowl games are good bowl games because it means you've had a successful season. But I do think there is an added benefit to getting outside the state of Texas and seeing things that aren't as readily available for you to see as a student-athlete. We do have quite a few players on our roster from the state of Louisiana, so I think it will be a nice homecoming for them. But, you're right, the bowl experience for the student-athlete is supposed to be one where they can go and enjoy something -- enjoy the fruits of their labor, so to speak, and enjoy something that may not be available to them had they not reached that bowl game. So do it at one of, if not the, most prestigious bowls games and certainly one of the most historic bowl games in college football history is a real treat and, like you said, especially for our seniors.



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**Q. Yeah, Tom, just kind of building on that, did you sense any more excitement out of guys like Charles or Beck or, you know, any of these seniors who really were here when this team wasn't going to bowl games at all and now they're playing on New Year's Day? Have you sensed anything more out of those seniors?**

**COACH HERMAN:** Well, considering I'm in Waterloo, Iowa, at the UNI-Dome watching a junior college football game, the only communication I've had with our team right now has been through texts. I'll be in the office tomorrow and probably be able to answer that. I certainly don't want to put words in their mouth. But how can -- you know, considering what this senior class has gone through as a group and to know that they're the class that led Texas back to a New Year's Six bowl game, I'm sure there's a lot of pride and excitement with that senior class.

**Q. Real quick, was there any injury updates on Kade?**

**COACH HERMAN:** I haven't received one yet. What I understand is he's getting an MRI today and we should know more this afternoon.

**Q. Tom, I'm curious, obviously, this experience of -- I know the bowl experience is, obviously, a big deal, but I'm curious with this being in New Orleans, obviously Louisiana, as you mentioned, guys on your roster, there's a recruiting presence for you guys there, is there any tangible recruiting benefit to playing this game in New Orleans and Louisiana and that target recruiting for you?**

**COACH HERMAN:** I think sometimes that gets a bit overblown because, although recruits -- if your practices are open to the public, recruits can come to practice, you can't talk to them if it's in a dead period.

So, you know, is it nice that the kids from New Orleans and Baton Rouge get to see the burnt orange maybe driving down I-10 and banners and posters up throughout the City of New Orleans? Yeah, I do think that that has a subliminal effect a little bit. But, you know, being able to personally communicate with these recruits is just -- it makes it difficult because your practices are during a dead period and they've got the same access as the general public would.

**Q. Coach, tell me -- I think my history is right here. So 2014, you were the coordinator at Ohio State that beat Alabama in the College Football Playoffs in the Sugar Bowl and Kirby was the D coordinator. I don't know how much you dived into this Georgia team yet. But I guess I'll just jump right out and ask you for some similarities and ask you maybe to reflect on what that might mean to your crew.**

**COACH HERMAN:** Yeah. Until you brought it up, I didn't even think twice about it. That is an interesting factoid that both of us competed against each other as coordinators in the Sugar Bowl just four years ago, I guess it would be.

So I don't know a whole lot about Georgia. Obviously, like I said, I'm in Iowa right now recruiting. And we'll spend some time certainly diving into the Xs and Os and all of that. I do know I've seen a lot of statistics, and they're 20 in the country in damn near every offensive and defensive statistic. So from statistics alone, it looks



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like a very balanced team. And, obviously, I watched the game or a little bit of it. I was in a recruit's living room last night, watched a little bit of it.

We know what they've been able to do. They played in the international championship game last year; they were on the verge of being in the Playoffs this year. Kirby's got that thing rolling. We're going to need our A game to have a chance to compete.

**Q. Hey, Coach. In the Big 12 y'all's game play has been mostly around defending the passing game, but going up against Georgia, how big of a change and how difficult is it to adjust having to go against a predominantly strong run game?**

**COACH HERMAN:** I think that's a bit of a misnomer. We played a team in Oklahoma yesterday that had gone six straight games of rushing for over 290 yards, at least 290 yards. The week prior was against Kansas team that had a freshman running back named Pooka Williams who rushed for 200-and-something yards against Oklahoma the week prior to that.

So, yeah, there are some teams that do like to throw it in our conference. But the last three games that we played, being Iowa State, Kansas, and then Oklahoma, are all in the conversation for very difficult teams to defend running the football. So I don't think transitionally it will be anything too formidable for us. We pride ourselves in our run defense, and we certainly understand the way that Georgia's built, that we're going to need our best on January 1st, certainly against the run.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you, Coach.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** I'd like to introduce Kirby Smart, the head coach for University of Georgia.

**COACH SMART:** Thanks, John. First of all, University of Georgia is excited to be in what is one of the most historic and traditional bowls, especially the relationship with the Southeastern Conference. So many years, our fan base has seen Sugar Bowl as such a special game, and so many special memories have come for Georgia there. To continue our long streak of 22 consecutive bowl games now, we are excited to get to go to the Allstate Sugar Bowl to play and honored to get to go down to New Orleans and play.

**Q. Coach, how do you put your team back together emotionally after such a devastating loss and the disappointment of not making the College Football Playoffs?**

**COACH SMART:** Well, I think the first thing to do is turn the tape on of the Texas football team. You find out right away, first of all, they're well coached. I know their staff as well. Got a lot of respect for Tom and the job they've done. As far as our players and our team, these kids recover faster than you think they do. Obviously, there's disappointment in last night's result, but there's also the opportunity to move forward with really a young team and a chance to go on a national stage where our fans, I know, follow us to play in a New Year's Six bowl game.



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**Q. Hi, Kirby. Two things. You were at Alabama when you lost a game that kept you out of a national championship when you came to the Sugar Bowl and you lost to Utah and the first time against Oklahoma. Do you draw any lessons from that about getting teams back up?**

**And, secondly, how much do you need your fans to support you in this game even though maybe a lot of them already made the trip over here for the LSU game earlier this year?**

**COACH SMART:** Our fans have really never let us down. They're very passionate about it. Have not been to the Sugar Bowl for a long time. I'm not sure exactly how long. 2008, I think, or so, 2008 bowl game. But I know they'll follow us. They follow us all over the country, and they're passionate about football. That's one of the special things about Georgia.

As far as the initial part, what was the first part the question?

**Q. Just that you were talking about getting your team back up. You lost in the Sugar Bowl but didn't play their best in Sugar Bowl after losing the previous game.**

**COACH SMART:** I think each one of those teams individually is different than the others. This is a much younger team than any of those Bama teams. A lot of those kids, this will be their first or second time in a bigtime bowl environment, which we're still getting accustomed to that. After last year, it was a special venue and, obviously, a classic game against Oklahoma in the Rose Bowl, and then to play in the national championship against Alabama was the same thing. So these guys aren't quite as experienced at that kind of bowl environment as maybe those Alabama teams that didn't play as well as we probably should have. It's definitely a challenge, but that's a challenge you're presented. I mean, that's what you're given. We're looking at this as an opportunity to spring forward into the next year.

**Q. Kirby, do you have any clarity as far as not being picked as for whether this is the best four teams or the most deserving, the four deserving, and the criteria that goes into it?**

**COACH SMART:** Right. Good question. I mean, do I have any clarity? I don't think I have clarity. Obviously, I feel comfortable and understand the decision they made.

I mean, that's a hard decision. You think about it. The committee's charged with a really, really, really tough decision-making process.

I think every year it's going to be different. I do think eventually think there's going to be a two-loss team get in. There was a lot of thought last year that, had Auburn beat us, they would have been the first to do it. Now, obviously, they wouldn't have been conference champions, but I felt 100% that they would have gotten in had they beaten as that two-loss conversation probably would have been out of the way. But two-loss nonchampion is something they've never gone to, and respect their decision. I'm not crying over spilt milk. We had our opportunity in the Alabama game and did not finish and did not take advantage of them. I certainly think we're one of the best four teams in the country, but I also know that we're not in the Playoffs, and we'll have an



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opportunity to do that next year.

### **Q. What jumps out at you when you look at Texas offense and specifically Sam Ehlinger?**

**COACH SMART:** I'm going to be honest with you. I haven't had a chance to watch a lot of Texas just yet. I got to catch a couple games during the year. I've been good friends with Tom since our game with them against Ohio State. I've kept in touch. We've shared ideas and thoughts. And I also used him as a trusted friend and resource to use information. But I can't tell you. I know this. They're really well coached. They've got a really good football team. To do what they've done in their conference -- and Todd Orlando. I've got a tremendous amount of respect for their defensive coordinator. But I have not had a chance to watch them on tape.

### **Q. Kirby, you talk about the fact that the team was so young. Does that in any way make this year even more satisfying because they were so young, able to accomplish so much?**

**COACH SMART:** Well, I don't know. I mean, satisfied up till last night might be the right way to say it. But that game, the way it played out and the way it came apart, I don't think you'd say it's satisfying. But I don't think you ever know and you're never too young. I've never made an excuse for being young. I don't think you do that. You take the hand you're dealt, and you try it get the most out of them.

What I'm really proud of is the improvement the team made. From game 1 to the end of the year I really think we got -- we improved more than the previous team. So we showed a lot of improvement. We got better throughout the year. We played a lot better since the LSU game even into last night.

But youth should never be an excuse. You got to deal with the players you got, and you got to take the ones who are young and grow them up. I thought they were able to do that really well this year. A lot of guys had plug-and-play. We dealt with a lot more injuries this year than we dealt with the year before. But that's part of it. Some years you have them; some years you don't.

### **Q. Kirby, you were pretty passionate after the game and on TV late night about deserving to get in the playoffs. Was that hoping to change minds? Because you said earlier today you weren't surprised how it went down.**

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, I think after you sat there, took it in through the night, and then you get up in the morning and you see a lot of the talk and things out there, I felt that's the way it was headed. Doesn't necessarily mean I have to agree with it, but I certainly respect the decision of the committee. I mean, they're charged with a really tough job. And I was passionate about it last night because I really felt that way. And, you know, if you don't fight for your kids, who will?

And we have some really good seniors on this team that have helped keep the glue under two different staffs. They were the ones that were the first to kind of inherit us as a staff. And seeing a lot of them last night and the



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way they played with so much effort and toughness, I wanted them to have that opportunity.

**JOHN SUDSBURY:** Thank you very much, Coach. We really appreciate you taking the time. We look forward to seeing you down here in New Orleans in a few weeks, and hope all of it goes well with your preparations.

**COACH SMART:** Thank you. We look forward to coming down.