



Texas
Head Coach Tom Herman
December 31, 2018



COACH HERMAN: Not a whole lot to say that hasn't been said. Really honored, though, to be able to represent the University of Texas at the Sugar Bowl, one of the most storied, tradition-laden bowls in the history of college football.

Our guys have had a great week of practice. They are excited. We've had no issues off the field which is certainly something you worry about in New Orleans.

And, again, our guys, they understand that we can't just be satisfied to get here. We've got to do what it takes and take the necessary steps to prepare to go win a game. And we're excited to do that.

Q. Is Georgia the best team you've seen on tape this year, and why or why not?

COACH HERMAN: I don't know. Our rival to our north is pretty dang good, too. We had two great games against them. And we respect the heck out of them.

But different. It's hard to say best when you're talking about anything. And I would say certainly different. I think they pose some unique challenges with how big they are up front on both sides of the ball, which is something that is different for us. But "best" is difficult. They're certainly as good as any team that we played in our two years here.

Q. Tom, how pleased have you been with special teams this year? And what do you have to do against a team like Georgia to play well and be a big factor in this game?

COACH HERMAN: I think we've been just okay. I think we've certainly improved our field goal checking and kickoffs, which was good. Our return game is just okay right now. And our punt team is kind of up and down.

But I think to answer your question on what we need to do in that phase, we've got to flip the field. When we don't score points on drives, we've got to make sure that we're making that field as long as possible for their offense.

Q. The Texas Bowl last year was big for your program to break the cycle of losing and all that. I wonder in terms of the progression at Texas, is this game every bit as big now as that was then?

COACH HERMAN: Yeah, I think so. If you're measuring the trajectory of our program, the answer is yes. This is another very important step. Winning it would certainly be even bigger.

But Corby Meekins, he has coached college football for four years. He's been to two New Year's Six games and the Texas Bowl. We were talking about it the other day. He said, "Are all the bowls like this?" I said, "No, they're not all like this." These are some pretty special ones. And so this is another very important step for us, yes.



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Q. With your two years head coaching at Houston and now your two years at Texas, what do you feel like you've learned in these past two years that maybe you didn't know when you started at Houston?

COACH HERMAN: How much time do you have? I think you're prepared when you get that first head coaching job but you're never quite ready. I don't know if that makes any sense.

I had studied under some phenomenal head coaches and really respect the heck out of the mentorship that they had given me as an assistant. But there's things that are impossible to prepare for.

We went to the hospital a couple days ago. And I think the most important thing is -- when we walked by, we saw a picture of a physician and a quote. And he said, "Don't ever forget that you're treating people. You're not treating diseases but people."

And I sent it to our assistant coaches and wanted to remind them don't ever forget, no matter what game we're playing in, no matter who the opponent is, no matter what the circumstances are, we're coaching people and young men. And we're not coaching defenses. We're not coaching plays. We're not coaching blitzes. We're coaching people. And I think as long as you keep that in the forefront of your mind, then you kind of learn as you go.

Q. The expectations obviously will go up with your team reaching the Big 12 title game and playing in a New Year's Six bowl. I guess your comfort level with that going into 2019. And then any thoughts on Major Applewhite getting fired at Houston after just two seasons?

COACH HERMAN: Thoughts of expectations, we don't worry about outside expectations. We worry about the expectations in our building. And nobody is going to have higher expectations for us and our program than our staff and our players. So not too concerned about that.

As far as Major is concerned, talked to Maj. Disappointed for him, but he's a great coach. And I know he'll land on his feet very quickly.

Q. Kind of piggybacking off what Brian Davis was talking about, Coach, you have a group of seniors that signed at Texas but they didn't sign with you. When you see that they didn't go to a bowl game for a couple years and now your being able to see them on this stage, is that kind of rewarding for you? And can you just talk about your senior class?

COACH HERMAN: It's indescribable how rewarding it is. And what a great group. We've got five captains in that senior class. A group that could have very easily gone a different direction. They certainly could have been defiant or disinterested when we got here, but they bought in. They're really important.



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And I told them this yesterday. Although they may not have the championships or the hardware to prove it, they will go down as maybe the most influential senior class at least hopefully in my tenure for having gotten us through some rocky times and never wavering, staying committed to the things that they believe in and the things that we believe in. And I can't thank them enough or be more proud of them.

Q. When you walk off FedEx Field, the confidence for Sam [Ehlinger] had to be wavering a little bit. What did you see in the growth mentally, physically, and his toughness from then to becoming an elite quarterback this year?

COACH HERMAN: You said his confidence must have been wavering. I don't think it was. I think it's pretty hard to get that guy's confidence wavering.

I think he understood that we needed to play better, I don't know -- he needed to play better. I needed to coach better. We all needed to relax and trust ourselves and trust the development. And so we were -- our confidence in him I know never wavered. So I certainly don't want to speak for him, but I hope his didn't.

And just his maturation has been phenomenal. You've watched the guy. If there's a more improved quarterback from freshman to sophomore year this season, I'd like to meet him. Sam has completely elevated his game. He's a different guy, and I think that speaks a lot to continuity, too, with this being the first time in five years I believe where Texas has had the same offensive system for back-to-back years. So he feels very, very comfortable in the system. He makes checks that sometimes we haven't even talked about through the week of preparation. He just understands the offense. And he sees defenses as good as I've coached. And then his physical toughness is something that the players really, really rally around.

Q. Do you have any injury updates? And how has Caden [Sterns] looked this week in practice?

COACH HERMAN: Moro Ojomo is cleared. So if we need him, he can play. Caden has looked great. And I don't think we'll have any issues with him. Other than the ones you already know about, everybody's stayed healthy, and the ones that were a little dinged up have improved throughout the week.

Q. What's it say about the two programs that you and Kirby [Smart] have where Kirby can go into Georgia as far as recruiting goes and pull one or two guys -- or Kirby goes into Texas and pulls one or two guys and you can go into Georgia as well?

COACH HERMAN: I think that you're talking about two major national brands. You're talking about both schools with the ability because of the tradition, because of the history, I think because of the academics, because of the location of both schools and the attractiveness of both cities I think allow us to go anywhere to recruit.

Certainly, I would imagine having talked to Kirby a few times -- certainly don't want to put words in his mouth. But he's going to try to keep the best players in the state of Georgia in the state. And we're going to do our best in the state of Texas as well.



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But if we need to go out of state to recruit, I think both programs from an historical standpoint have allowed us to do that because the attractiveness.

Q. You talked about not being just satisfied to be here. Why do you think your guys will be able to compete with a team like Georgia when not a lot of people are giving y'all much of a chance in this one?

COACH HERMAN: Because for the first time in a long time I think we understand that our best is good enough, that if we play our best, we can play with and/or beat any team in the country. And now we're going to have to play our best though. We're certainly not good enough to show up with our B game and expect to beat a team like Georgia. We're going to need our A game.

But I think our guys have proven to themselves that if we prepare the right way, we prepare the way that we know how to and then we put that preparation into action when the ball is kicked off, that we're going have a chance to be in just about any game.

Q. Go back to the first question about Georgia's one of the best. This running game, is it the best that you've seen this year?

COACH HERMAN: Again, different. I mean, when we played Oklahoma in the conference title game, they had gone six straight games of rushing for over 290 yards. So we've got a lot of respect for what they do in the run game.

But it's different. So as good certainly. The schemes are different. The tempo is different. The one thing those two teams have in common are massive offensive linemen and really, really talented tailbacks, which usually equates to a pretty good run game. And we're going to need to play our best to even hope to slow it down. different but as good as any that we've played in our two years here.