

Baylor University Football Media Conference

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Waco, Texas

Lincoln Riley Press Conference

Oklahoma 34, Baylor 31

LINCOLN RILEY: Well, that was fun. Where do you start? I just told the radio guys, we had probably, in my opinion, the best, most spirited set of practices we've had all year coming into this one. I felt really good about how we would play tonight.

Obviously the first half didn't go anywhere like you dream. We made a lot of mistakes. I give Baylor credit. They're as good as we thought they were coming in.

We brought the team up right there, after I think it went 28-3, brought the team up and said, Let's try to close the gap a little bit here. We were playing really hard at the beginning, didn't do our job great. Guys were trying to make a little too much happen. They were so good, they were so amped to play this game, it was maybe a little bit too much honestly in the beginning.

They settled in, man. They did. They settled in and fought. The locker room at halftime was probably not what you imagine it would be like in the movies when something like this happens. Didn't have to say a whole lot to our guys. They knew what they had to do.

You never know 100% that you're going to be able to come back from something like that, but I think they all felt like we had a chance. I got to be honest, even at K State when we got down in that third quarter, I think maybe about half of us really believed we had a chance to come back and win that thing. In this one, there was not one person on that sideline that didn't believe it.

You still have to go make it happen, but the belief for a comeback like that is where it starts. Team ball. Can't say enough about how well we played. Other than fumbling the ball on the goal line, we played a really, really good half a game, completely dominant there.

As a coach, there's a lot of great wins. We've been lucky to have a ton of them here. Coming back like we



did, how it all played out, this one is up there for sure. I am beyond proud, also beyond excited about us continuing to grow. I think people still see we got a lot of things to continue to grow and get better. I think this can be a catalyst for that. I think it will be.

Our best ball is coming soon.

Q. You had two tales of halves. First drive of the second half, how big was that?

LINCOLN RILEY: Big. We talked about it coming out. We also felt like we had some momentum there at the end of the half, as crazy as that may sound. Make them kick a field goal. We felt like we had momentum coming in. The guys were awesome at half. Didn't have to say a whole lot to them.

We talked about kind of energy, the passion, the supporting of each other, all that the whole week. They were awesome on that all night. But we were finally kind of settled in there a little bit within the game. We were able to balance that by doing our job at a high level.

I give our kids credit. They made so many phenomenal plays. It would have been easy to pack up the tent tonight. We didn't do it.

Q. The first half it looked like you couldn't stop them on defense. Second half, dominant. What changed at halftime on the defensive side?

LINCOLN RILEY: I tell you what, get that turnover. We stripped that ball, get it back. It was just kind of on from there. It was almost like a monkey off your back a little bit. We got that turnover.

I think getting the turnover, then just settling in, doing our job better than we did in the first half. They understood we had to play with the same amount of energy and effort, but we had to do our job better.

Q. How much do you feel having CeeDee out impacted what went wrong offensively?

LINCOLN RILEY: CeeDee was a medical decision. Did it impact us in the first half? Hard to say. I mean, you got a guy that's probably the best receiver in America. It's hard to say that it doesn't.

Our guys, as you saw, were more than capable of

playing and playing well. Maybe a little. I don't know how to measure it. He's a tremendous player. Man, we had some young guys really step up and make some big-time plays tonight that CeeDee made when he was a young guy. That helped spur him on to a tremendous career. I think tonight will be a big night for a lot of those guys that made big plays on both sides of the ball.

Q. When you see Jalen go out the second half, how much does that help this team moving forward in terms of chemistry?

LINCOLN RILEY: It does. He had to trust those other guys certainly. I'd be interested to go back and watch the film, but it will be interesting if he did as much early as he did at the end. Playing with a guy that's such a difference maker like CeeDee can get the attention of your quarterback, and it should.

Sometimes playing without him can almost make you see the whole thing a little bit better. He did, he hung in there. One bad decision in the throw game. Obviously the two fumbles. Other than that, the guy played pretty clean ball, he did.

He settled in. I thought he handled some of our adjustments, which we had to make a lot of in this game. I thought he handled those in game as good as he had all year.

Yeah, I mean, it's just pretty awesome to see a kid that wants to win so bad, then has those turnovers, is a part of the reason that we're in the hole, then to come back and play like he did at the end of the half, the second half, what more can you say.

Q. (No microphone.)

LINCOLN RILEY: We thought there were a couple opportunities in the last game to stay in a little bit more, trust our linemen and receivers. It's a fine line with a guy like that because he's such a dynamic athlete, you don't want to slow him down either, because hell, 75% of the time he takes off, it's pretty good.

He's worked on it. I thought he really trusted it, made some big, big throws from the pocket.

Q. Describe how the game plan changes, simplifies, when you fall behind big?

LINCOLN RILEY: No, we really didn't. We had to make some adjustments within plays. I don't know that we made a huge difference or called a bunch of things.

We made a few adjustments. They changed a few things like they do. We had to adjust it and we did. The big difference was we held onto the ball.

We had a couple opportunities there in the first half certainly to get things moving. That's the one thing we said even when we got down big early was, We got to stick with what we have. There's times you're playing, we need to make some adjustments. Then there's times like, No, our plan is pretty good, a tweak here or there, keep firing. That was where we landed.

Q. Baylor has won so many games by coming back. What is running through your mind with 1:45 to go?

LINCOLN RILEY: I don't get too emotionally caught up in it. I can't. We have two timeouts left. I would want to use those, communicate with our defensive staff, watch our kids make plays. I mean, I'm thinking, What do we got to do to get a stop?

Q. What can you say about Brkic? He drills the one that you have to call a timeout, then comes out and drills it again.

LINCOLN RILEY: I told you guys before, even as a young guy when he came in, Austin was clearly the starter, putting him in some pressure kick situations, he always seemed to make those.

He went out there, you may not believe me, but I really was not that worried about it. He'll probably make it like all the other ones he does.

Big-time kick. The confidence he has in Connor and Casey is a big part of this, especially for a young kid.

Q. How about Benito?

LINCOLN RILEY: The one he caught was a much harder play. I mean, much harder play. A great call by Coach Grinch, an awesome play.

Q. You're as close as anybody to Jalen after any series or turnover. What did you say to him after the fumble?

LINCOLN RILEY: A lot like the Texas game. He kind of stayed calm as he made some mistakes early. He was particularly disappointed about the one there because we had all the momentum in the world. I think that was right after we had recovered a fumble, if I remember right.

So, yeah, he was disappointed, then he was on quickly. That's one thing I know about him. I don't got to go do a Dr. Phil session on the side. There's adjustments we got to talk about, things he's doing, things we're seeing, all that.

Q. When that happens, it being his third turnover, is it you basically slap him on the back, Keep going?

LINCOLN RILEY: I told him that I think we're moving it

well at this point, hold onto the damn ball, score every drive.

Q. Obviously you were down, came back with K State. You said you were calm in the locker room. How much do you think that experience helped out tonight?

LINCOLN RILEY: It did. I think our team has clearly grown from it. I would say combination of some of the getting a little tougher as a team. Again, the preparation. Everybody always thinks the preparation is schematically something you're doing or a technique or a fundamental or what you think you're going to see from the other team. It is part of that.

It also is mentally each individual getting themselves to a place where they're ready to compete at the highest level and ready to do it for their teammates. I don't care who you are, you cannot just flip that on on game day. This team was so invested through the week.

Even if we didn't play well in a period here or there, I knew we were going to just fight our tails off. You just knew that. Our team knew that. They felt that.

Q. (Question about Jalen smiling.)

LINCOLN RILEY: Which time?

Q. In the end zone, when you hugged him.

LINCOLN RILEY: He smiles a lot more than you guys see him.

Q. CeeDee went out for warmups. How did you make the final determination?

LINCOLN RILEY: We knew by today that he wasn't going to play. The decision in warmups was twofold: he wanted to be out there with his teammates and participate, then I thought strategically for us it made sense.

Q. Did you make any adjustments protection-wise after the first half?

LINCOLN RILEY: A little bit. A little bit. There's a couple things here and there. There were some very, very small adjustments, but I think it was just more of us recognizing how they were attacking us.

Q. Did you know early in the week there was a chance you were not going to have CeeDee or...

LINCOLN RILEY: We knew early in the week there was a chance. It kind of clarified as it went on.

Q. How big of a boost to your playoff chances is this?

LINCOLN RILEY: You have to win. I know all the people on TV talk about style points, how much you win by, how much you lose by. I think you have to find a

way to win. That's all I know. I know that's been a decent formula for us the last few years. You got to win these tough ones like this.

We got a good football team. We do. I don't care who all watches on the outside. I just think we saw in that second half what we can be. Go fight for the entire rest of the season.

Q. What did you learn about your team tonight? Did you know you had this in you?

LINCOLN RILEY: I learned a lot about our team this week. I probably learned more this week about our team than maybe tonight. When we got down, I really believed we had the comeback in us. Now, it's still hard to do. No doubt about that, especially against a good team. But I really felt like we had it in us.

Just the way our guys were this week, the way they responded, we kind of found our (indiscernible). Best way I can describe it.

Q. What was your message to Alex? What has it been like?

LINCOLN RILEY: It was kind of a mob scene in our locker room. No, it's exciting for him. We're just getting started defensively with what we're going to be here. He's done a great job with our guys.

A game like this, a second half like this, when I came in first year as offensive coordinator, you are going to get in those moments where you're going to have to make it happen. We were fortunate enough that first year, not all of them, but we were able to have some of those moments offensively year one where you could feel the belief.

I think tonight can be that for us defensively. He and our staff have done a great job. Our kids' buy-in this week, even after all the stuff out there, all the noise, this week was as good as it's been. The result was there. I'm proud of what he's doing, what our staff is doing. Can't wait to see how much better we get.

Q. (No microphone.)

LINCOLN RILEY: He was awesome. He was one of the guys we really challenged and said, You came here to be a primetime player. We got to have it from you. He responded in a big way.

Q. Talk about recruiting and how important this is.

LINCOLN RILEY: It's why you work so hard, you work so hard to bring in the right guys. Recruits, you talk to them about getting a chance to play in games like this, get a chance to make the big winning plays. Tonight was exciting certainly for this team first and foremost, but for the future.

Q. Any idea if you'll have CeeDee back next week?

LINCOLN RILEY: We'll have to see. I don't know. I don't know.

Q. You've pulled together twice a team together during a game.

LINCOLN RILEY: Maybe I ought to do it a little sooner (laughter).

Q. What is the speech like?

LINCOLN RILEY: It's different. I mean, it's just what you think the team needs in that moment. This team is in a different place than that one was.

I think it's a chance just to refocus a little bit. Sometimes, especially on the road, an atmosphere like this, it can get away from you quick. Your mistakes start getting compounded. I felt like that's what happened for us. We would have one or two mistakes, turn into three, four, five. We had to stop that.

I wanted to make sure they knew what we did all week really happened, we are really good enough to come back and do this.

I told them, If we don't believe, we have no shot. But they believed. Those speeches aren't magical. It's what the players do with it. Our players did it.

Q. Is it really you're drilling in things mentally?

LINCOLN RILEY: I think some mentality, then also getting to the heart of what the problem is, addressing it head on, knowing we have an answer for it. Sometimes just getting everybody in there together has just a little bit different feel to it.

Q. You're down 21 at halftime. Without CeeDee, how tough was it to stay patient?

LINCOLN RILEY: CeeDee is a great player. I didn't feel like we wouldn't hit home runs. We have other good players, too.

I think it goes back to the other question of do we have confidence in the plan that we had. We did. We had confidence in our ability to execute it. One thing we said was we can't scrap everything, just go rogue. There was a lot of time.

I think when I pulled them up, even at 28-3, I think I said at that time we had 41 minutes left in the game. There was still forever left. I didn't want us to panic.

Our coaches did a good job of sticking to the plans on both of them.