

#23/24/25 OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS (8-3 • 6-2 Big 12)

at **HOUSTON COUGARS (4-7 • 2-6 Big 12)**

Saturday, Nov. 18, 2023 • TDECU Stadium • Houston

HEAD COACH DANA HOLGORSEN

Opening Statement

“There were two critical mistakes in the first half that prevented us from potentially going up 21 points. We were ready to play, and I was proud of the guys for being ready.

“We made an excellent play by successfully orchestrating a trick play, for the first time in my coaching career. We had momentum and were moving the ball. We had about 250 yards in the first half.

“They are an outstanding team. My odds-on favorite going to the Big 12 Championship game, but they must beat BYU next week. They own tie-breakers over Kansas, Kansas State and Oklahoma. They're a good team, regardless of what they did last week, they're a great football team.

“We kept fighting and playing, but that was a critical error by Jamal [Morris]. He was just trying to play with passion. He cares, he's turning into one of our better leaders and he made a huge mistake, but owned up to it.

“We had them stopped on third and 16. It was fourth and 16 and they were punting and converted that into a touchdown. We could've been 30 and three at halftime.

“That last drive, interceptions are going to happen. I'm truthful, if it's on Donovan [Smith], then it's on Donovan. That one was on him, they were right to the dude. A two-minute drive or if we were moving the ball, we had all the momentum. It is a critical error.

“You go into halftime up three and they have got all the momentum. They had a ton of people here. Houston is important to Oklahoma State. They had all the momentum going into halftime when we should've. A critical error prevented that.

“In the third quarter, we got worn out. We had people dropping like flies. I'm not using that as an excuse, but they wore us out. That's what a Big 12 big boy, physical team is going to do. We knew that's who they were. They wore us out but we kept fighting.

“We held them to two field goals. We finally got the drive going on offense, then looked up, and it was 36 to 30. We were defending them on the 25-yard line, we had a shot right there in the fourth quarter. We got a stop, then scored and won by one.

“I was proud of how the guys fought. In order for us to win that game, we probably needed to keep that momentum in the second quarter and go into halftime with the momentum and a greater lead.”

On the last drive substitution

"That happened twice, and it's inexcusable on our part. You cannot sub defensive linemen when this is a tempo team. You can not sub when they're not subbing. We did it twice, and it's inexcusable. I'm calling it like it is, we can not sub on tempo teams when they are not subbing. You get to stop right there, and you put that as another critical error."

On the bowl game

"It's everyone's goal. At the beginning of the year, you try to compete for championships and continue to get better, build, and do things right. I know we are to the point where championships are going to be in our future, but if that is not the case, then you try to go to a bowl game. That's what everybody's goal is. It's not going to happen, and it's disappointing, but we have another game that we need to line up and get excited about competing in."

"Are we throwing in the towel? I don't think this is a group that does that. Are we going to see what we got? No. We are going to practice and we're going to challenge them, and playing time is going to be earned. It's going to be earned based on practice and based on what it looks like. We'll go to UCF, compete hard, and try to get a fifth win."

On the first year in the Big 12

"Everybody has their own opinions on it. At the end of the day, my goal is to play competitive football. For the most part, we've played competitive football, today was a competitive game. If you do things right, build it the right way, recruit at a high level, develop players, and build buildings, you do things that get you closer to be competing for championships. Right now in transition, if you look at all four of us who have transitioned, it's about playing competitive football, and that's what I expect us to do."

On Jonah Wilson's performance

"We've seen glimpses of him. He's battling knee tendinitis and he's still growing. He's a baby giraffe out there, he's long and he can run but his parts hurt. We strategically saved two games to let him play in the last two games and he had a really good week of practice. We found something that we can do with him, we put him into the boundary, we figured we could match him up on a safety and he just ran right by the guy. That was obviously encouraging to see and I've been challenging a lot of these other receivers to get in there and make some plays. That was a pretty important play for him to make and he's got a bright future. He'll play next week, he'll get his redshirt and he'll come into next year as a redshirt freshman. His future is very bright."

On Donovan Smith's playmaking

"Going against a defense like this, when you scout them, they run the 3-down, whole defense stuff. Everybody runs the quarterback and you have to protect them and do it in spurts. What he did tonight was more about scrambling."

“We lost Ruben (Unije), Jack (Freeman) and Tyler (Johnson). Offensive linemen are going down left and right and they have an elite pass rusher in Collin Oliver. He’s as good as anybody in the conference and he was putting pressure on us. Donovan (Smith) knew that he was coming so he stepped up and tried to find some guys and keep the play alive and he ended up making some big plays with his legs. It’s just the quarterback game nowadays. The quarterback-run game is important but keeping the play alive and scrambling is important as well. For the most part, he’s done a very good job of taking care of his body and taking care of the ball. The interception was bad but he hasn’t fumbled all year. Ball security has been good and keeping his body out of harm’s way has been good as well.”

On making substitution errors

“I’m going to have to ask my coaches. I don’t substitute defensive linemen so they will be held accountable for it. At the end of the day, it’s on me but I’m not the one subbing those guys in and out. It’s inexcusable.”

On his message to the seniors

“I appreciate them. There’s sixth-year and fifth-year guys. Patrick Paul broke it down there for five years, and I appreciate that. It feels like it’s a family to him.

“There’s four-year guys, three-year guys, two-year guys and there’s four one-year guys. Everybody’s path toward being a senior is different, especially those older guys that have been here as long as I’ve been here.

“I really appreciate that and we’ve been through a lot of different things with COVID, being relocated for an entire semester because of the freeze and busted pipes, American Athletic Conference Championship Game, to the Big 12 transition, transfer portal and NIL. Where we’re at and what they’ve dealt with over the course of the last five years is a lot.

“I appreciate those guys, and I really wanted to celebrate with them. They’re disappointed that we didn’t get that opportunity, but we played a good football team and I was proud of the way our guys competed.”

On getting his guys to respond better

“We have to keep growing. We played a good football team and program. I told Mike (Gundy) after the game that I thought that this was his best coaching job that he’s done. Last time we played was 2009, and I was here in Houston and we beat them. They (Oklahoma State) hired me so he was my boss for a year.

“We’ve competed seven times at West Virginia vs Oklahoma State, so I know him very well. He’s been there 19 years as a head coach. They have a lot of advantages and they’ve won a lot of games. I’m proud of the way our guys competed. This is Week 11 and every week is hard. We’ve never dealt with this, and our program has never dealt with this. I’m proud of the way our guys lined up and just played and competed in practice. The results aren’t what we wanted, but we will continue to grow as a program and those wins will come.”

HOUSTON JUNIOR QUARTERBACK DONOVAN SMITH

On the change during the second half between OSU defense and Houston offense

"They switched it up. They had everybody flying around, getting in different areas. They had safeties rolling down, rolling up corners, dropping down, and stuff like that. I felt like we managed it very well. Play calls were good. People were running around and blocking was great."

On not having a bowl game during his first season of the Big 12

"It sucks if you're not able to make a bowl game, but understanding the transition we're going through and learning from each game that we have. We have to understand where we fit in and that when we come back next year, it's time to take it up a notch."

On what gives the team hope for next season

"It's the excitement and knowing that we can play with these teams and being excited for our futures. Coming back, everyone's going to be stronger. We still have a young team as well. Hanging out more as a team, becoming closer, and that would take us to the next level."

On navigating new players that came in and out of the game

"Just telling them to keep doing their job. They're here for a reason. They're playing at this level for a reason. Just go play ball like you always have. Demetrius did a phenomenal job today. I'm just very proud of him, and of everyone switching and coming in and out, laying where they need to be, and stepping up today. They did a phenomenal job today."

HOUSTON JUNIOR DEFENSIVE LINEMAN NELSON CEASER

On the mindset for the last home game

"We wanted to send the seniors off the right way. I feel like the leadership was there. I think that maybe somewhere at halftime, we might have had a miscommunication. I'm not 100% sure but I feel like the message was simply to send the seniors off the right way."

On bittersweet ending and support from the fans

"Yeah, I say bittersweet. Because losing always sucks, but as a football player, I don't want to call them fans, but the supporters that we have it means a lot to know that I had a positive impact on them and I made coming to games a lot easier for them. That kind of means something."

On not going to a bowl game this season

"It does suck because I've been here for five years. So, there are a lot of people in the locker room that I've known for about four years. To know that next week might be the last time that I get to practice or that I need to put on some pads with those people—it really does suck, but it's the game."

On defending Ollie Gordon II

"I'm not sure what his stats are, but personally, I feel like we kind of contained him pretty well throughout the whole game. I think he probably had some runs pop, but I believe he's a Heisman candidate. That's something we would expect, but for the most part, I feel like we did pretty well."

On lack of substitution opportunities

"Personally, I'm still learning the game, so I'm taking what I've learned from the coaches and how they kind of go about things. I just tried to see how they handle certain situations. At the end of the day, I'm just a player. I'm just part of the team, so if they feel we can't substitute against the tempo team, that's what it is."

On young defensive players to look out for next season:

"I will say Treylin Payne is going to be somebody you guys look at next year. Also, Parker Jenkins is a great player. I tell him all the time. I don't want to leave anybody out; I just play the game. Just off the top of my head is also Zykeius Strong. That's going to be another guy that you guys want to pay attention to next year. Lastly, Justin Benton, I feel like he's going to be a great player for us next year as well."

OKLAHOMA STATE HEAD COACH MIKE GUNDY

Opening statement

"It was good to get back on the winning track. I shared with the team that this was a really good culture win for us. Things didn't go well for us in the first quarter. When playing on the road where that many things go south, if you don't have a strong culture, a lot of times teams can't recover from that. In all three phases, they did. They stood together and their body language was good, their attitudes were good, and that was a culture win for them.

"For us to be on the road and to come back from where we were, particularly at the end of the first half, to where we rallied and put ourselves in a position to play well enough to win in the second half. We had some crucial mistakes, really critical mistakes that we need to learn from, but overall, the guys fought back from it.

"We were able to manage rushing the ball. They played heavy box as I'm sure you guys can tell. We were able to find ways to rush the ball in the second half and balance it out. We held them to 2-of-11 on third down, which is a big jump for us. We've been very average on third downs and we were really good getting off the field defensively this game. We were just under 50% on third down conversions. Our hitting yards were really good in this game. For our returns, we had 75 yards returned to 38, so that's another 40 and then 12 more on punt return. We almost had 100 hitting yards in this game, which would be the length in the field in touchdowns, so our hitting yards were good. We were good on defensive fourth downs 0-for-2. [Brennan] Presley was fantastic with 15 catches and 189 yards. [Alan] Bowman had some throws I wish we could have back, but he also made some throws. We still need to keep working on his set and then not drifting and falling away when throwing, but overall, it was good for us. Five hundred yards of offense and I think they only had two first downs in the second half. I don't remember them getting first downs until the two minute drive.

“We had a critical error on the punter. [Parker Robertson] plays hard all the time. It wasn’t a block and he tried to make it a block. We made a mistake on the roughing the punter, but I also told him, when you play hard like #39 does every play, then I can live with your mistakes. He plays hard every play. When they get the first down, every team usually goes down and scores. The defense rallied and stopped them right there. We were able to get the ball back and move it. Overall, once we got through the first quarter, it was a good day for us. The team’s going to enjoy it tonight, get home, and we go back to work on Monday. We have a long week and have to get a good week’s practice to get ready to play again.

On Trey Rucker getting the interception to ignite the competitor

“I didn’t like the play call we had down there. I’ve called a lot of plays in my career and sometimes you don’t call a good play and they don’t work out. That was a critical mistake for us that we will fix moving forward. They were going for blood, and it was debatable what they really should have done with the lead they had. They went empty and went after it. They got us an empty earlier in the game and they hit it on a post route on [Trey] Rucker. We dropped out into the zone and obviously he must not have known because he didn’t see [Trey] Rucker. At the time, that was huge for us. Yes, the points were good, but more so the momentum and that it was going to be okay.”

On the first quarter feeling like last week and coming back from it

“I told them this is a good culture win. For a quarter and a half, if it would’ve started raining heavily, it felt just like last week. What happened at the end of the first half were the biggest plays in the game, not what happened in the second half.”

On how Brennan Presley was able to have 15 catches

“We’re doing a lot of things with him [Brennan Presley] to try to get him the ball, and you can see that we’re moving him all the time. It doesn’t guarantee it, though. As I’ve shared with you before, it’s difficult to get the ball to the wide receiver, you can get it to the running back easier. It’s not always easy to get it when the defense doesn’t want you to get it to him. So our offense did a good job in moving him around, doing different things to get him freed up a bit, and then he made a number of really tough catches in traffic today. Tough catches make plays. We always want him to get the ball. That’s not a secret. It’s not always easy to get it for him. But when they play heavy run and run safeties down and jump in the box, that will open up more for him on the perimeter.”

On Brennan Presley almost tying the school record for number of catches in one game

“I don’t know where he is career wise, but he’s got to be getting close to a lot of records. He took a lot of hits today, and he kept making plays and getting up, so I’m glad he’s on our team.”

On how the team ran the ball in the third quarter

“We went to a couple of different schemes that we didn’t use as much in the first half. They still had an extra guy in the box, so there’s a couple of schemes you can use to try to handle that if you guess where that extra guy is going to be whether he’s going to be outside or inside. It is a cat and mouse game. I think Kasey [Dunn] guessed right most of the second half, which was difficult to do.

We blocked him, some during the first half but the extra guy would insert in the box when nobody is blocking. You saw there's time that he made that play on us, and, in the second half, he was in the removed area. We were able to pop in a few more times than the first half."

On the health status of the injured player

"I haven't heard anything. I'm guessing he's okay. He came back in and played, and he ran pretty well in the end, so I think he's okay."

On the importance of the win tonight for the team

"Every game is important, no matter the situation. In our culture, the players have to understand that we have an obligation to coach every week. They have an obligation to prepare and play every week. That's what we all signed up for, so no matter what the situation is, the organization is obligated to that. That was what we did. No matter the circumstances. I'm guessing other teams across the country have been trained to get to the end and have a chance to play for something big as you move forward. When we start the season our goal has always been to win a conference championship. We feel like that if we do that, it gives us a good chance. If we don't win the conference, it's going to be pretty rare to get into extra postseason play, so that's a good goal for our team, and the tiebreakers. I don't know all that. Y'all know scores, and I've just told the team my match is not really good. I don't understand all that. I know that if we keep winning, it gives us the best chance in the end."

On the team culture

"We're playing with a good culture. When I use the term culture, it means a team when defense played good at times and then did not play good at times and offense did not play good at times. Special team was pretty good all night, other than running into the kicker. I mean Alex [Hale] had a low bat, but to answer your question, we're not knocking anybody's socks off in any of the three categories, and we just got to kind of play as a group and as coaches, we have to manage the game properly. Try to minimize mistakes and capitalize if the other team makes a field goal."

On special team performance tonight

"Alex [Hale] is a self-motivator, self-starter, and highly intelligent. He has been very successful in his life at multiple things; surfing, skateboarding, soccer, and we trust him. He's reliable and he's very calm. At the end of the game, I was trying to get a set up for him to kick a field goal, and we ended up scoring a touchdown. I wanted him to kick a field goal for sure because it would make it a two-score game. I asked somebody to find the kicker so I could ask him where he wanted the ball. Because we have that discussion, sometimes, he would say it depends on how far it is.

"They couldn't find him, and I said we got two more plays until third down and we have to get the ball located so we need somebody to find the kicker, so I can ask him where he wants the ball. Somebody got him and he came walking up like we're at brunch on Sunday. "You're looking for me, coach?" he asked. I said, "Hell yeah, I'm looking for you. I've been looking for you for 35 seconds. Where do you want the ball?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We're gonna set this thing up to kick a field goal. If we don't score, we can run it right, we can run it left and we can run it up in the

middle, and we can tell Ollie [Gordon II] not to cut one way or the other. What do you want?" He went, "Middle," so we ran up the middle column."

OKLAHOMA STATE SOPHOMORE RUNNINGBACK OLLIE GORDON II

On running against run-heavy defensive formations

"As the weeks go on, we're getting better and better at seeing stacked boxes early and getting right against them. If we keep working with that, we'll be fine."

On regrouping for the second half

"Us firing off good balls to our receivers and them going up and taking it from defenders, that was honestly the best thing about tonight."

On Brennan Presley's game

"You're going to have to study great film on him. That's the only way you can stop him."

On mentality coming into this game

"You just can't dwell on last week. Who would we be if we came out here, dwell on last week, and let that affect how we play this week? We can't change it now. We still have everything that we want in front of us. As long as we keep playing and balling together, we'll be fine."

On Trey Rucker's interception

"It's great when our defense has our back and we have theirs. That's how you balance out a great team."

On the last touchdown drive

"I was telling them to not bounce it outside or go anywhere outside, just stay in the middle. I said stay in the middle, and we scored. Our line just had to handle business and get everybody blocked."

On winning this game

"It felt good being able to bounce back and get back to playing like us. How we know we can play. It was a great feeling being back with the team and balling with them."

On relying on kicker Alex Hale

"We trust Alex. Whenever he goes out there, we throw our hands up because it's always good. He's a great kicker with great power. He can kick from anywhere, left, right, or middle. We wanted to make it simple for him and leave it in the middle and get it through the uprights."

On receiving the ball instead of rushing

"It was fun going out to play receiver and receiving the ball. Can't really complain. Our quarterback put up a really great ball. The corner bailed, the offensive line gave our quarterback enough time to get the ball off. It was a great thing."

On fanbase showing up for an away game

“Our fans travel well. I look up and there's a bunch of orange out there. You can't ask for anything else from your fanbase, but to travel with you and still show love. No matter what happened last week, they were still here showing love for us. Shoutout to them. They're the real MVPs of the game.”

OKLAHOMA STATE SENIOR WIDE RECEIVER BRENNAN PRESLEY

On getting the ball tonight

“We were all just focused. We met extra this week, and extra yesterday before the game. It was a matter of going out there and executing. I think we did a really good job this week.”

On taking big hits during the game

“I get hit hard every single week. To me, it's nothing new. They were a really physical team, so I took some pretty big shots out there. But I'm used to it at this stage in college football. They were really physical though, they put some great shots out there.”

On receptions caught

“The game plan was a lot of motions and putting the ball in my hands. I knew that, so I just wanted to be as prepared as possible.”

On biggest changes in the second half comeback

“The running game. Us being able to pass the ball in the first half opened up the box so Ollie [Gordon II] could get some runs. At the start of the game, you're going to stop the run. You want to try and put nine in the box, so you have to make strides in the passing game. That's what we did this week. Had to be able to pitch, catch, RPO, throw the ball, and run after the catch. So when you're going at it on all cylinders, you get to choose which one you want to do.”

On what it means to play for this team

“It means a lot. With how the season started and how it went in the middle, versus last week and now, I think this team is one of the most resilient teams ever. A game like last week, most teams would have folded. They would have doubted their confidence. Collectively as a team, the leaders came together and said we're not going to let that define us as a team. When one play is over, forget it and play the next play. We've done a really great job of playing with that this year. That's what has made this year so special.”

On knowing how close he was to the single-season reception record

“No, not really. I knew I was getting the ball a lot. I mean, it was hitting my arms, but how much, I didn't really know.”

On punishment your body had today

“I take hits all the time, probably this many hits because I don't get the ball this much. It's something I'm kind of used to. I'll spend some extra time in the cold tub this week and more time relaxing too. I spend too much time though, we still need to focus on BYU next week.”

On feeling like you were in for a big game due to the amount of catches in practice

“If you look at the scheme we had for the game, it was all about getting the ball into my hands. We are on the road so if he [Coach Gundy] trusts me enough to make these catches then that shows a lot of respect to me. I still need to go out and make those plays but Coach always says, ‘The players make the plays.’ It shows they trust me to make these plays.”

OKLAHOMA STATE REDSHIRT-SENIOR QUARTERBACK ALAN BOWMAN

On the pick six

“Obviously we were playing protection. We were hot. The defensive end was free falling out and they had a good plan to cloud that cover-two corner with a defender being hard in his face. I’m responsible for the defensive end. You want to get the ball out quick, as we did multiple times throughout the game, but that is regular for them and they do it very well.”

On coming out after the UCF loss

“The leadership said, ‘You know what? Everything bad that could have happened at UCF happened, and we let it happen.’ Once we started feeling some unfortunate things happening in this game, especially early, we nipped it right in the butt. This cannot keep happening. We need to make a play and we ended up doing that.”

On Brennan Presley’s impact tonight

“We handed him the ball too many times. We had some more stuff off that too, but having him all over the place and being able to spin the ball to him quickly makes it easy to do good things. As many touches as we can get number 80, the better our offense is going to be. One of the runs he had, he was dragging six dudes with him and he’s only 180 pounds. Just the way that he runs and keeps his legs moving, he wants to score everytime he touches the ball and you can see it.”

On staying poised in the game

“Obviously, we have been down before. I don’t think it’s anything new that we’ve been a part of in this team. On the road it makes it a tough environment. It’s hard to get a win on the road at all. When things are not going well, just lean to your basics, lean to your fundamentals, and worry about one play at a time because that’s the only play that matters. Things didn’t happen fortunately for us in the first quarter, but we will be able to take care of each play after that and we’ll be good.

On the catches Brennan Presely had in the game to grab second in program history

“The game plan was to get at the ball as much as we could, and I think we executed that at a high rate. To be able to put him in many different ways, motion him into the backfield, motion him out of the backfield and hand it off to him, it makes it hard to even put two guys on him because he’s just everywhere. 15 receptions is unbelievable. “

On favoring the corner of the endzone

“No doubt. Number 23 [Isaiah Hamilton] is a great player, but I believe in our receivers to go up against any corner they go against. I would make sure to give those guys a chance. We had five deep

balls and came down with three of them and dropped one. If you just give those guys that touch, give them a chance, more than likely they're going to come down with it."

On Houston's safeties playing aggressive

"They did a multitude of things on the defensive throughout the year. Against Texas, they went three safety, three down. Against Cincinnati and Baylor, they were four down, four one and cover four. There were a few hiccups throughout that kinda caught us off guard, but I think they had nothing to lose. They threw everything out there that they could and it kind of got us in the first quarter. But, being able to settle down and make plays helped us out."

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