

Ohio State Offensive Coordinator Chip Kelly Praises “Legit” Texas Defense After Touching Down In Dallas For Cotton Bowl



As Ohio State exited the team bus and walked into the Hilton Anatole in Dallas Wednesday night, the prevailing message from the team seemed to be similar to the one they had when they arrived at the Rose Bowl.

For the Buckeyes, the trip to Dallas is strictly for business, and the one and only order of business they need to take care of is to continue their 2024-25 season going with a Cotton Bowl victory over No. 5 seed Texas Friday night at AT&T Stadium.

Ohio State offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly expressed that exact sentiment just minutes after arriving at the team hotel, saying during his nearly 30-minute media availability that the only thing the team is focused on is defeating the Longhorns.

“The challenge is just the next game,” Kelly said. “We’re not thinking about the end goal. We’re not a result-oriented group, we’re a process oriented group. So our whole sole focus and attention is on preparing for Texas. We have to get in, we have to get settled here tonight, and then we have to have a really good Friday practice, which is tomorrow for us.

“We’re preparing for Texas and (we will) see if we get the opportunity to play one more time. That’s all we really talk about, is just Texas. Because if you don’t take care of business Friday night at the Cotton Bowl, then there’s not going to be anybody left to play in our season.”

For Kelly and the Buckeyes’ offense, their order of business at the Cotton Bowl is a daunting one, one which is centered around trying to stymie and bewilder a vaunted Texas defense that is as dominant as anyone, ranking No. 4 in the nation in scoring defense (14.5 points per game), No. 3 in total defense (277.7 yards per game) and red zone defense (67.6 percent) and No. 2 in interceptions (21).

When asked about the Longhorns’ elite defense, Kelly was quick to deliver praise to the unit’s veteran coaching staff, one which he has great familiarity with. He pointed to Longhorns defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski and co-defensive coordinator Johnny Nansen as the two coaches who have

successfully steered the ship in Austin, Texas, and turned the group into one of the nation's best.

"I know Pete, I faced him back when I was coaching on the West Coast, Pete was at Washington. He was there with Chris Pederson at the time. (Texas' defense is) really sound, well-coached team. Their co-defense coordinator Johnny Nansen was on my staff when I was at UCLA, so I worked with Johnny before.

"So they are really well coached. They don't give up anything cheap. I think they're the No. 1 red zone defense in the country, and that's for a reason. And they played a big-time SEC schedule. So really, really well-coached team in a really good scheme."

Kelly was also complimentary of the great balance on the Longhorns' defense, pointing out that they are equally as effective and dominant on the defensive line as they are in the secondary.

He thinks this is due to the star-power Texas has on all levels of the unit, with guys such as star defensive tackle Alfred Collins and Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year award recipient linebacker Collin Simmons manning the inside and Jim Thorpe Award winner Jahdae Barron and safety Andrew Mukuba leading the secondary, all of whom combine to create what Kelly thinks is a lethal group that has certainly captured their attention leading to kickoff.

"(The speed on Texas' defense) is favorable to Tennessee," Kelly said. "I think it starts with their front. It's not only fast, it's big, I think probably bigger than some of the defenses that we have faced. So how do we handle those guys? Alfred Collins on the inside, Collin Simmons on the outside, he has nine as a freshman rusher. So they have some speed. Anthony Hill Jr. can really run it linebacker."

"Then in the secondary, they have the Jim Thorpe award winner, I think the two safeties are outstanding, maybe as good a pair of safeties as we've seen and faced. So it's legit. "But you don't get to this point in the season where there's four teams left and say, 'Hey, these guys, they're good on one side, but not good on the other. I think they're really, really good on the offensive side of the ball, obviously, and (Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian) has always been known for that. But this defense is legit. They're (third) in the country in red zone defense out of 134 teams, that's pretty good. So it's going to be a battle."