

**NOVA HOME LOANS ARIZONA BOWL
WYOMING VS. GEORGIA STATE
PRE-GAME PRESS CONFERENCE
DECEMBER 30TH, 2019 - GEORGIA STATE**



COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: First of all, on behalf of Georgia State University and our football program, we're thrilled. I think, just talking to our players, it's been a great few days here.

We're excited about this contest. We're playing a quality opponent in Wyoming. Just thrilled, to tell you the truth. It's a rewarding experience when you work so hard in your off-season, and then to have it finalized in a great Bowl game. You've got great teams.

We're just really appreciative of being here and looking forward to a great contest.

Q. Considering Georgia State is such a young program, when you were offered the head coaching job, why did you take it?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: I love doing things for the first time. I love setting standards. Probably when I was a player to when I began coaching, it was always about, hey, what do you want to be remembered for?

What a great opportunity, to take over a program at that time that was seven years old, had never won a Bowl game, had been to one Bowl game. There were so many firsts that you could go out, and we don't sell things at Georgia State University. We present them to individuals.

So I thought in recruiting that you could go out and really lay a plan in place for individuals and get them excited about having something to really kind of be a founding father, so to speak.

Q. Dontae and Dan, was that kind of the same thing when you were recruited?

DAN ELLINGTON: Yes, sir.

DONTAE WILSON: Yes. I just knew Georgia State was right up the street from my hometown. Georgia State was one of my last offers. I talked to Coach Elliott, and I knew it was about being something at Georgia State, and I wanted to be a part of it.

Q. Dan, we spoke on the phone a couple of weeks ago. How does the knee feel, and what are you kind of expecting in terms of what you can and can't do tomorrow?



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DAN ELLINGTON: I think I'm doing the best I have felt since the injury. I've think I've been practicing really well, and tomorrow I'm going to see how it goes, but I feel really good.

Q. What went into your decision to keep playing rather than shut down and have the surgery?

DAN ELLINGTON: Just Coach Elliott, the team, the school. I didn't want to let the team down. So I got here on Monday. Asked me if I want to play, and I said yeah. We just went day to day about practice. So I felt good about playing.

Q. What did the doctors tell you about it? Did they tell you you could possibly make it worse if you kept playing? What did they say?

DAN ELLINGTON: They did tell me that it could make it worse. They did say I have some risks there, but for these guys and for him, it was worth it.

Q. Shawn, what does it mean to hear that from your quarterback?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: You know, it's really remarkable because there's so much stuff that goes around. For someone to set it all aside and say I want to do it for our team, I want to do it for the university, for the coach, whatever it might be, shoot. I'm telling you, to know that you have that type of impact on somebody that he wants to give everything and more, it's remarkable.

Q. What's your impression of Wyoming and what you're going to get from those guys?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: Wyoming, tough, physical. That's exactly it. I didn't even have to look at the film to know exactly who we're going to play. I know the style of football they play. I've seen them. We had a crossover game with Texas State. Hard working, I can imagine.

If I were to close my eyes and picture them in the off-season, I would see tough, rugged, in the weight room, just sweat everywhere, just blue collar.

Q. Craig just announced that Levi Williams, the true freshman, is going to start at quarterback. Has it been kind of tough game planning for two different guys? What kind of challenge will he present?



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COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: It's not tough at all. They have a system that they believe in, and they're going to go with that system. You don't just wholesale change something because of one individual. You certainly play with two different talents, but the game plan will be the same.

Q. Dontae, what do you think of their offensive ability, downhill rushing?

DONTAE WILSON: We know they're big and strong up front and have some good running backs and use mobile quarterbacks. We know they're run first, offense. We're just really keen on stopping the run first and getting ourselves in passing situations where we can get after the quarterback.

Q. As a nose tackle, do you like that idea, that kind of game, run-oriented game, physical game?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: He'd better! (Laughter).

Q. Dontae, what did you think when you found out your quarterback was going to play through a torn ACL?

DONTAE WILSON: Well, I just knew Dan's been having an incredible season this year. He's really been putting the team on the map. When we found out he had the injury, we just knew that as a defense, we had to step up and really fill in the gap where normally he'd be able to run the scramble and make plays. We just knew he'd be able to do it a little more often. So we've got to really step up and do what we can to be as successful as we can for the team.

Q. Shawn, with Tra Barnett this year, I think he had 500-something yards last year. This year, almost 1,400, put on 10, 15 pounds. What did you guys see in the off-season, and how is he taking things to the next level?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: It's very interesting. I think there's two things that go into the performance of the running back. It starts with the guys up front. I think the five individuals that we have up front, four of the five have been starting for a number of games.



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Coming into this season, we had started to really develop our run game and felt very comfortable in what we were doing. We have a run game that's only four of them, but we stick with. So those guys became the glue.

Then Tra, in the off-season, made a commitment to himself and our football team to really just -- the hard work, the extra effort.

There were times -- we were actually going to report August 1st, whatever day it was, and he reported the next day. So we had a team meeting about 6:00 that evening. Tra had come out to the field, and Tra was out there, and he had cones set up. And this is what he'd been doing all off-season.

He had cones set up, I mean, the night before he reported. We've been busting tail all off-season. Take a couple days off. And he was out there running cone drills and just working.

A lot of people say, oh, we've got our team meeting coming up. I'm not going to do anything today. He just made the commitment to be successful. And I think that any individual, if you put your mind to it and you have a plan in place and you have some support, like those offensive linemen, that you can be successful, and he certainly had a plan.

Q. You guys obviously like to run the ball. Wyoming is top ten nationally in rush defense. You've seen their defense, what they do against the run. What makes them so effective, and what do you guys have to do?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: When I think of a tough run defense, I think of guys that love to get dirty. And when I watch them play, those guys love to get dirty. They like the physical nature in the trenches where the linebacker loves contact. That's what I think of, and that's what makes them so difficult.

They exude confidence in stopping the run. You can see it from their mentality, their body language, how they run to the football. So that's why they're so good in the run stop.

Q. Coach, what makes Dontae an effective interior defender?



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COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: Because he is relentless. He has a passion to play the game. He loves the physical nature of what football stands for.

I can tell you one thing. When I first got hired and we were looking to build a foundation for us defensively, I think at that time, you were committed to Army. And I said, this guy's not going to Army. I've got to have Dontae with us.

He had an assistant coach named Rusty Wright, and he played with great effort. When you turn on the film and you look for someone to swarm the team, you look for great effort, great intensity, especially on the defensive side of the ball.

He had a strong, strong -- I just saw him as the perfect one. Ever since we signed him, he has not disappointed. Strong, physical. Maybe not 6 foot, right? But he's everything we thought he would be and more.

Q. Shawn, what did that win over Tennessee do for your program, your young program, and the confidence of your fellas?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: Everyone in the college football world knew who Georgia State University was. Every single one. We were on the 6:00 report, 7:00 report, 11:00 report, next day, Monday Night Football, everybody was talking about what our football program had done. Can't put a price on that.

And the way we did it, it was no fluke. They had a strong-minded football team that went in there and played very, very well. It's done so much for our sport. It really has.

Q. They have a kicker who's going to the Shrine Game. They have maybe one of the top punt returners in the nation. How big of a role do you think special teams might play in the game?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: Special teams will play an important role, just like it always does. As far as the punt returner, I think we have a plan in place to minimize that. We can kick that thing out of bounds and save us a lot of headache. (Laughter).



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That's the way I always say it. I'm not a hard-headed individual who's going to say let's kick it to that guy. We're going to tackle him.

There are always very, very important moments in special teams. All three phases are certainly important, but as long as you're prepared and have a plan in place, you should be okay.

Q. What sort of challenges do you feel like you have faced as a new program as far as recruiting, which is obviously the life blood. I think you were saying yesterday that the players are the biggest thing. So what's been the biggest challenge for you as far as that goes?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: Probably from the time I was hired, the biggest thing was probably the facilities, to tell you the truth. We're in a talent-rich area in the city of Atlanta, in the southeast. Atlanta is the capital of college football. It just is.

But our facilities, at the moment we took over, it wasn't what it needed to be. Our administration, our athletics director has put a plan in place to give us some of the top facilities. It started out with Georgia State Stadium, and then we built our operations, football operations there. Then we got great off-campus housing ten feet away from our stadium. Everything we do is very, very convenient.

So those were the challenges early on that we faced, and we made a lot of headway.

Q. Dan, why did you decide to play for Georgia State?

DAN ELLINGTON: Just the history. I was actually on another visit when I got a call and they offered me. The thing is, like, two or three days later, I came to visit Georgia State. I got here, and I've been to Atlanta, like, twice in my life. When I got here, I just knew. It felt comfortable. It felt right.

I went on another visit after I left Georgia State, and all I was thinking about was Georgia State. I got back, and I think I called them, like, the day before they played The Cure Bowl, and told them I'm in. It's awesome to be here. It's awesome to play for Coach Elliott. I wouldn't want it any other way.



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Q. Where were you visiting when you first got that call or that offer?

DAN ELLINGTON: Murray State.

Q. Shawn or any of the players, is there any team that Wyoming reminds you of that you played this year?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: They probably run it as much as Army does maybe, but certainly not the same style. No, I don't think there's a team that they mimic that we faced. What do you think, Dontae?

DONTAE WILSON: I can't think of another team.

Q. What's been your experience of Tucson?

DAN ELLINGTON: It's a very nice place. It's quiet here. I like that. I like the mountains. I like how there's snow in the mountains.

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: He's from Mississippi. (Laughter).

DAN ELLINGTON: Yeah. It's really quiet. The people here are nice. It's a really good Bowl game country. I really like it. This is my first time here, so I love it here.

DONTAE WILSON: I like the views. Where I'm from, there's a lot of trees. Then in Atlanta there's a lot of buildings. We don't have a lot of mountains where I'm from. So just seeing all these mountains around, it's nice.

Q. So for the players, you guys have an opportunity, I guess, if you win this game, to have the most wins that you've ever had as a program. What would that mean to you if you're able to pull that off?

DONTAE WILSON: It means everything. I mean, that's what we're here for is to make history. That's why I came to Georgia State. As soon as I came here, they had been to a Bowl game, and they never won one. So my freshman year, we went The Cure Bowl and won The Cure Bowl.



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Then we had the most regular season wins this season, and we're trying to get the eighth win of the season to get the most wins in our school history. It would be a major thing for us.

Q. Coach, going off of that last comment by Dontae, how valuable is that experience of the core of upperclassmen that have played in a Bowl game and have that winning experience?

COACH SHAWN ELLIOTT: I think any time you have experience in doing something, it always helps. It doesn't matter what profession you're in. In the game you're playing, if you have the experience to win it, you're going to be more inclined to be better at it. I think, just from our experience two years ago and how we took care of business -- when I say took care of business, both off the field, in the hotel, whatever we were doing in a first-class manner -- it set the stage for our younger guys.

And here we are two years later, and we're mimicking the same thing we did in that game. Hopefully, it pays off just like it did two years ago.

Q. Dontae, were you committed to Army, or was that just among the offers?

DONTAE WILSON: Yes, I was committed.

Q. Why did you change your mind?

DONTAE WILSON: Army is a great school and football program, but I love my family. So Georgia State just being an hour away from my hometown, it was just a no-brainer for me.

[End of transcript].

