

CFP First Round: James Madison vs Oregon

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Eugene, Oregon, USA

Autzen Stadium

James Madison Dukes Coach Bob Chesney Postgame Press Conference

Oregon 51, James Madison 34

BOB CHESNEY: ...it really amounted to anything. The complementary football we've been playing all year really didn't show up. There were spurts on offense, there were moments on defense, there were moments on special teams, and then there was obviously really bad moments on all three sides of the ball.

I think we needed to play elite football. We needed to play our best football of the entire year. We needed to match up really well with them and play an aggressive style, and there were moments where we did and moments where we did not, but I think the lack of complementary football was really what ailed us today.

I thought, again, for our seniors to be in this stage, to put themselves in this situation, I'm really proud of them. Again, to build this program and their acceptance of us from the very beginning is pretty awesome, and I told them make sure they take those pads off slowly because for some of them it'll be the last time they're taking those pads off.

In order to accomplish what we did to get here, I think there are things we should be really proud of, and obviously ending it on this night the way it ended is not ideal, but at the same time, it doesn't take away from what we did during the course of the year and their leadership and their ability to, again, believe in one another and play the style of football they played throughout the year.

Q. You've said repeatedly that the focus is on the 2025 team. Now that that season is over, what was the emotion level for you in that locker room and coming off the field?

BOB CHESNEY: Well, I didn't get in the locker room. It's a pretty tight locker room over there, so you can't all fit. I stood on the end zone there and made sure I gave every



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kid on this team a hug as they walked off this field, and then we'll have a moment tonight and again tomorrow before we fly out to just have a conversation about all of this.

I just told them to be proud of what they did all year. As disappointing as today is and tonight is, still just be really, really proud of what they've accomplished throughout the course of this year.

I think that should be the case.

The emotion, it runs deep just because these guys are guys that we shared this journey with for this year, sometimes them too and many even more than that. Just sad to be ending it the way we just did.

Q. The conversation about the inclusion of the group of six teams, the way the first half played out obviously validated some of that criticism. What do you make of that dynamic and for folks that think that non-major programs don't deserve a seat at this table?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I don't really -- I'm so not involved in that conversation. I'm just trying to prepare our team to come here and play the best football that we possibly can. I think that's a conversation that's a little bit above me and maybe have time to talk about it and we can circle back on it, but tonight we came here to accomplish a task.

We did not play complementary football. We did not play our best football. There were moments where we did have, I think, some really productive plays on offense, defense, special teams, all the way through. It just wasn't enough. It had to be elite to hang with this team, and it just wasn't.

Yeah, I'd rather not get too deep into that question because I don't -- yeah.

Q. I know we've talked a lot about the firsts that this team has accomplished throughout whether it's the Sun Belt Championship win or being here now. Kind of going off Mike's question, when you look back at this team, how do you want this group specifically to be remembered in the years to come?



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BOB CHESNEY: I think as a team that accomplished a lot of firsts and maybe the ones that first got us to this stage, so the second time and third time that we show up here, it'll just be a little bit different.

I think that, again, we just had to lean on the leadership of those guys, and I thought J.T., I thought Trent, I thought so many guys out on that field, I thought Zo did a good job today, I thought Pat did, as long as he was healthy to get through that game, and I thought Wayne -- there are just guys that have produced all year that we really needed their leadership, and I think that's ultimately what this entire program is about, is just believing in one another.

They're always willing to give to one another, and they're always at a part where they're celebrating each other's successes. I just wish there were a little more of them here tonight.

Q. Asking you to keep this specific to your team rather than expanded to the whole G6 schools, but do you think the body of work you guys put forth this year as well as this game in particular, you guys showed that you did belong on this stage to have this opportunity?

BOB CHESNEY: Obviously today you go through the yards, 509 to 514; you could go through some other things in there where we did hang with them. But I think the scoreboard itself, every time we got down there we kind of shot ourselves in the foot.

If we did not do that, if we did not end with 13 penalties, is this a little bit of a different game? Maybe. But at the same point in time, that's a tough offense to stop, and I think it's tough for a lot of teams in the entire country to stop.

But I thought we hung in there at moments on our offense if we did not go backwards and didn't find ourselves jumping offsides. Obviously it's a great environment to play in here and it does affect the game.

I think there's moments in there where I feel like we could play with them. I think that today the complementary football and us playing elite and the way we needed to just did not exist.

So I think for us, there's moments when I look at yards and all the other things that come with it that there's a lot of bright spots that I do think that on a different -- I don't want to say a different day, but I do think if we just could have put a couple more of those plays together, ball in the back of the end zone, we have a shot.

But there was just a little bit -- we were just a little bit overpowered for sure on defense.

Q. Aside from the outcome of the game, how would you rate the overall experience for you, the team, coming all the way out to Oregon? There's fans that went to the coast, fans hanging out around the state. How did people treat you guys here?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I thought everybody did great. We have a lot of people wearing green in our hotel and they were very nice and complimentary and accepting, and I thought this environment was pretty cool.

I thought that we walked through in the indoor yesterday and got a chance to see a little bit more of the facility, and I just thought that overall the excitement around this team, the support for this team, it reminds me a lot of us, just with 30,000 more people in the stands.

Really close to what I think the opponents have to deal with when they come into our place at Bridgeforth.

Q. Obviously the first half didn't necessarily go your way, but you climbed back in the second half. What kind of adjustments did you make offensively, especially to get that passing attack going, because there were some concepts where you guys were getting open receivers?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I think that ultimately we just -- it's not anything we were doing so different from the first half. I think that we were just, again, playing a little bit differently, playing with a little bit more confidence, understanding that we could be on this field with these guys, that we can do things -- make some yards after the catch.

Our protection I thought was really good. I didn't think that Zo was under a ton of duress today which I thought coming into this might be the case, and I thought we held up pretty well in there.

Pat went out, Deacon stepped in and did a really nice job for us, as well, and the whole entire -- I think halfway through the third quarter and all of the fourth.

There was a lot of things in there that I thought just started to click a little bit more, I think, when it slowed down a little bit for us, when we were able to deal with the noise.

But then you just got stuck with some of those situations where you were going backwards, especially when you got into the red zone; just not ideal. You've got to be gaining three to four yards on every single play down there, and instead we were going backwards.



To answer the question on the pass game in itself, I thought our protection held up. I thought we believed that we could run with them and play, and I thought Nick DeGennaro was the one that popped it open, and the rest started to flow after that.

Q. Coach, what does it say about your group when you're down 34-6 at the half and you guys don't quit and just play the complete 60 minutes and outscore them in the second half?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I think that's, again, who we are as a team. I think that, again, you wish there was a couple other things you could have done a little differently at the end there. Obviously dropping the ball at the 1-yard line, not ideal, and then being at our own 1-yard line and going backwards.

But there's moments in there that I thought our guys just never stopped believing. They felt like they wanted to go out, and if they were going to go out, they wanted to go out with a fight, and I think that's something we can all be really proud of.

Q. You're obviously going to be moving on after this, but this James Madison program, do you think the ceiling is still high for what this program can achieve moving forward?

BOB CHESNEY: Absolutely. I think that when we came in here two years ago, we knew that this was a program that was steeped in tradition and believed in itself and had a community to support it, and I think that it's only gotten better.

From what the program looks like now and the support around it and with Matt Roan as athletic director and President Jim being in there, as well, the support that shows up is just very different from when I got here. So I think honestly the sky's the limit for this program for sure.

Q. What stuck out to you from what they were able to do in the explosive game? Was there something they were doing or something you weren't seeing from your defense?

BOB CHESNEY: No, I think they were big, they were physical, and on the edge -- a lot of their runs didn't show up up the middle, they all showed up on the edge, and they understood that. They were able to be really physical on our corners and some of our DBs, and we just had to put a stop in that play, not let it stretch out, and it showed up a whole bunch at times; then your fits got to be perfect.

I thought the way their interior offensive linemen climbed to the second level was pretty special. They just cut some things off that even if you got hats out there, you're missing guys from inside just because of how quickly they got up on the second level.

Then you just never really got a hard stop on the edge. We never really created edges, and it just stretched us a little bit, and then this kid wasn't afraid to put his pads down and just kind of try to run through people.

They're fast. They're big. They're strong every which way on offense. It was a very good football team.

Q. Coach, when we've asked you about Elijah Culp this season, you've always talked about how much he has grown off the field and as a young man. To see him today get that interception before the half and that allowed you guys to get that field goal, too, what was it like to see that moment for him after he's had some called back this year?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I think Trent had a lot to do with that, as well. Trent knew what was coming and was able to get a little piece of that receiver, which put Elijah in a position to have that interception.

J.T. was waiting for him on our right sideline to lead him up, and he cut it back across the field, but he probably had a pretty nice run down that right side if he stuck with it.

But it was really great for him to see him be able to do that. Again, after playing through a game that was just tough and physical and hard on all the DBs out there. It was like a third level is where this ball really showed up a bunch.

Again, stick with it and put yourself in position, ask your teammate for help. Trent being able to help him and him end up with that interception I thought was really good.

Q. We talked about this after the Sun Belt title game, but your relationship with Alonza, everything he's been through, and to get this team where he did this year, what has that experience of coaching him been like?

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, it's been phenomenal. Again, I keep saying that he's one of the fiercest competitors. He prepares every single game. He understands what he's doing schematically, and then there was moments where he delivered the ball and did just a phenomenal job to keep us on track and put up numbers like we just did on offense.

It takes a full team. The O-line has got to protect. We've got to be able to run the ball. He's got to pull it down. That's what stood out also to me is there's bigger runs that

happened for us throughout the year where you get through the offensive line to get in that second level and you're gone, and here you'd get to that second level and just the strength of those guys, it puts you back into the ground and not let you break those big runs is what stood out.

A lot of those you thought, okay, here we go, and it just ended up going for eight or nine as opposed to the bigger run.

Q. What did getting to this stage mean to the university?

BOB CHESNEY: I think it means a lot. I think when you just look and see every single day, you see this JMU across the TV for the past however long, I can't imagine what that's going to do to have us in the national conversation, period.

It's a free advertisement for the school all over the place, and I just think that our guys, to be able to know that they were the ones to put us in this spot, I think it's a proud community if you've never been. It's a proud community that loves their football team and supports the heck out of it, and every single home game is sold out, probably similar to this. Just like I said earlier, with 30,000 less people in the stands, but it's a pretty special place.

I think to be in this conversation, to see it on the national screen, on national TV every single day for the past two weeks is pretty special.

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