

# CFP First Round: James Madison vs Oregon

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Eugene, Oregon, USA

Autzen Stadium

**James Madison Dukes**

**Dean Kennedy**

**Wayne Knight**

**Nick DeGenarro**

Postgame Press Conference

Oregon 51, James Madison 34

DEAN KENNEDY: Obviously a very good team, but it's not the result that we wanted by any means. But I think this season and where we got to and doing these things that we have done just speaks volumes about the players to the left and right of me and everyone else on the offensive side of the ball and the whole team.

Obviously we wanted to win, but very proud of the whole group. They battled the whole game, all 60 minutes as you guys could see. There was belief in themselves and their teammates throughout every aspect of every play, this game, this season, which when you reflect back on it, that's what I'm most proud about this group.

**Q. For both the players, the challenges that this Oregon defense presented in terms of you guys being able to establish the run but then turned to going through the air. How do you think you did offensively, especially late, to keep this one close?**

WAYNE KNIGHT: Yeah, offensively we did good, knowing that those front guys, they were going to play a hard game.

They were going to play well. They were going to shoot gaps. They were going to give us different looks.

I think from an offensive perspective, the offensive line handled that very well. Some of the tight ends and some of the run scheme blocking. We just played to our fullest potential and obviously didn't get the result that we wanted, but proud of them boys up front.

NICK DeGENNARO: It's a little bit different as a wide out being on the edge. You don't really get to see the whole game. But from my perspective I thought that we matched



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up really well against those guys. I thought we had a really good plan. I thought the athletes that we had in our receiving corps did a really good job, not just myself, but a bunch of guys made a bunch of really big plays.

Super proud of those guys, and I thought that we were able to run by them. Credit to them, they had some good athletes, as well. They were big, they were strong, they were smart, but I thought competitively speaking on the edge, we matched up really well, and I think it showed. Like Wayne said and T Hen and J.T., wish it ended a little bit different, but proud to have been a part of this group and helped this team win and get to where we are.

**Q. You kind of just hit on it, but how do you guys not let tonight's result color the way you look back on this season? And for both of you, what kind of shape do you think the JMU program is in going forward?**

WAYNE KNIGHT: Yeah, just kind of reflecting, from the beginning of the season, it's always outside noise. It's a lot of things that people set expectations for you and what they want you to do going into the season.

I just think as a group, as a whole, together, we set our own goals and we understood the task at hand each and every game. We attacked it with a reckless abandon. That just kind of talks a lot about this team, all the things that we've been through up to this point.

Just moving forward, just understanding all the things that we've accomplished up to this point, wouldn't want to do it with no other group, and it kind of just showed tonight.

NICK DeGENNARO: Yeah, I think people involved in the sports world, if you're not actually on the team, especially in this day and age of the game, it's crazy to think about January to December, to think about not just personally but however many number of guys are new, they come in and you're just working out. You don't even really know each other.

You're making friends with people, and you get into the summer and now it's football, and Coach Kennedy is saying we're going to go make this playoff, and you've got to believe it, and you've got to believe it with guys you've



... when all is said, we're done.®

never played with.

It's crazy. To think about that and what we've done, and people can say some people lost or whatever, it doesn't matter. We won the Sun Belt, something that JMU hasn't done. We got to the playoffs, something JMU hasn't done. It's crazy that we haven't had a group of guys that have all been here for four years. We had guys -- again, somebody pulled up that stat about how many guys were new, but it's ridiculous to think about how we were so cohesive and so close and I'm super grateful, and it felt like because we were so close that we've all been here for five years.

Super grateful. There's no stain on this season. I'll remember this for the rest of my life, and I'm sure guys agree with me.

**Q. Nick, I guess you guys brought in like 114 players in the last couple years, so everything you just said is 100 percent. Coach, it seemed like you guys really were clicking execution-wise, you had the double pass, you had that beautiful play of the tailback running through the line and running a wheel. Did you feel as a coach that your team executed well but maybe Oregon had a little too much talent to overcome?**

DEAN KENNEDY: Yeah, I thought we did a good job at times. I think the penalties, they hurt us in some critical moments, especially when you get down to the red zone. You face a team like this, this is a good team. It's a good football team.

When you face a team like this, you can't make those mistakes. We characterize those as pre-snap penalties and stuff like that. Those are hard to overcome when you're in 1st and 15.

But overall I thought the execution they did really well, and I thought kind of like Nick just said, you could tell and you could feel from our group, that's a connected group. They enjoy playing for one another. They enjoy playing the game of football.

I think that's one of the things when you look back at it, obviously the execution was there and we could have been better just like any game, but that's where I look back and say it's fun to watch. It's fun to -- when I'm sitting up in the booth and seeing how much they care for one another.

The score wasn't where we wanted it to be, but you get into the fourth quarter and they're still fighting.

If there was another 60 minutes they would have kept fighting, and that's what I love to see, and that's what you

love to see as a coach.

**Q. Wayne, you had a couple long runs today but that first one on the opening drive where Zo had that block for you to open it up, when you look at a play like that and what a quarterback is willing to do for this offense, how much do you think that defines what this offense is and playing for each other?**

WAYNE KNIGHT: Yeah, Zo himself is just a selfless guy. He's been through a lot. Just kind of just characterized himself and just shows what kind of person he is to be able to get out there and lay his body on the line just to bring us an explosive play. Just having that explosive play just brought us some momentum early on to get us going, and we was going to need that early on.

**Q. Dean, Nick was just talking about some of the challenges of the new era of college football. You had a coach who had already accepted another position; kind of had thoughts late-night he said he would be working on UCLA stuff, during the day, focused on you. From your vantage point, what was it like him balancing those two responsibilities?**

DEAN KENNEDY: First off, I think he did an unbelievable job of putting the focus when it was time to put the focus into JMU. I think the players -- that's not easy on the players, either, with all of the stuff, the noise that's going on. You go on social media, you're hearing it left and right.

But I think a lot of the credit should go to the players, of them blocking all of that out. This chatter and this noise and the coaching carousel when it happens, we're still playing. You've got to go back probably into week 10, week 9 when you start hearing coaches' names pop up for different jobs, and the focus from the players' standpoint was about JMU. They didn't care about everything else that was being talked about behind the scenes. It was about how do we reach our full potential and how do we reach our goals.

I thought Coach did a great job of really relaying that message, but more importantly the players and everybody on this team did a great job of buying into the fact that this year's team is this year's team. We'll worry about 2026 at another date. They did a great job of pouring everything they had into this football season.

**Q. For the two players, I know you guys have played a lot of different places, but I'm curious what your experience was like coming out here to Oregon the past couple days, how people treated you, and your experience at Autzen playing in this kind of environment?**



NICK DeGENNARO: It's been a really good experience. I've been at three different places. I've been in this game for a long time. People call me a grandpa at this point in the sport.

But my experience at JMU, that was the question, what my experience was comparatively?

It's funny, I came to a game with family probably 13 years ago. I was really young, was on the field, and it's a crazy stadium. Marcus Mariota is playing. I loved him. I used to play quarterback, believe it or not. Well, I guess now it makes sense.

But coming here, it's great. This is the stage you want to play. JMU is an unbelievable place to play football. It's unreal. The stadium is packed. It's loud. It's amazing. But when you get a chance to go to a place like Louisville and there's how many thousand people and you're in there and you're in the game and you get a chance to come here and not only play in front of however many thousands of people here but know that on this stage there's millions of people watching at home, it's a privilege and it's an honor; it's a blessing to be a part of.

WAYNE KNIGHT: Just piggybacking off of that, definitely a privilege to come here and play in front of a sold-out crowd or whatever it was. Just adds to the game, makes it more fun. You're out there with your brothers, then to go just to have fun and win games.

I think that just adds to the entire environment, the whole experience of just being able to come out here and play in front of this crowd.

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