

CFP First Round: James Madison vs Oregon

Sunday, December 21, 2025

Eugene, Oregon, USA

Autzen Stadium

Oregon Ducks

Will Stein

Postgame Press Conference

Oregon 51, James Madison 34

Q. Coach, I asked Dante the same question, but 13 games in the season now, it's been a long way now you're into these playoff elimination games. Dante's 13 straight starts, first 13 starts at Oregon. Where have you seen him grow the most?

WILL STEIN: I think I said in here the other day, he's just got full command of the offense. When he first got here, he was still figuring it out, just like any new player in our program does. The terminology, the reads, the checks. Now he's at the point to where he's making plays on the field similar to what Bo did and what Dillon did towards the end, but he's completely composed and just has a full grasp on what we're doing and he can anticipate the play calls. I feel like we're really in sync, play caller to quarterback and that relationship's huge.

Q. Oregon's always been known for the speed. How fun is it for you to call plays and get those guys in space and watch them erase those angles?

WILL STEIN: Yeah, it's huge. Our team speed is legit. Not just our wideouts, but our backs, our tight ends, everybody can run. Our O-line can run. So they felt, as a play caller, it frees me up a lot knowing that I can get those guys in space and they're going to make plays.

Q. I got a lot on my plate right now. Coach Stein, one of the things Tosh just said is he's pissed off. Does that resonate with you? Do you feel that same way? What are you feeling right now?

WILL STEIN: Yeah, we play to a standard. We always have, we always will. When you don't maybe match that standard, even in a playoff game, an elimination game, you still feel some type of way. Every coach regrets calls every time, whether you win or lose. Just speak from experience, there's plays that I want back from two years



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ago here, even in wins. So there's plenty of stuff that we can all improve on and that's the great thing, we get to improve next week and play a really good team in Miami.

But you definitely celebrate the wins, especially now, but you also look at the reality of the situation. We threw two picks. Critical situations, one in two-minute drill end of half and one in the low red where we feel like we could have taken advantage of those looks, and really end of the game. So there's plenty of things to clean up but definitely glad we got the win.

Q. Even if they didn't get a ton of run, you haven't had a fully loaded receiving core in about two months so to have Dak and Gary back out there, what did it offer you even if it was somewhat limited in terms of rep count and what may get offered you 12 days from now.

WILL STEIN: Yeah, I think just offering J-Mac and Malik and Cooper, those guys some rest, too, so they don't have to go the entire game. That was big for us just having, like you mentioned, Gary and Dakorien out there. It was great to see them out there again. I think they pose a lot of threats to the defense, their speed, their willingness to block on the perimeter, their ball-in-hand attributes that they have. They're just exceptional players. Can free you up in a little bit more 11 personnel if you want to do that.

We've kind of found a groove in who we are this year and true to keep that identity going but definitely strength in numbers is huge for us. It helps us in practice, too. Guys aren't just gassed out there. We can actually get quality reps, so that was really cool to see them back out there. I thought they did a really good job. Kori, one of his first plays in there, he gets big-time blocks on the perimeter to spring Dierre when they're in like a mug seven-up look that we get the ball on the edge. So I'm proud of him and Gary. They're selfless players and they did a really nice job tonight.

Q. First off, I love the hat.

WILL STEIN: Support your local O-line coach.

Q. Yeah. Since the 12-team playoff, it's become more common for assistant coaches to be named head



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coaches at other programs but remain with their current team during the playoffs. How challenging has that been for so you for and is it what you expected having to basically do two jobs now?

WILL STEIN: Yeah, I definitely wear two hats but when I'm here in the building, I'm all Oregon. Try to compartmentalize my day. Use the morning time with the three-hour time change in Lexington to try to maximize phone calls or things that I need to do before we're here at work in Oregon and late night making calls when I need to.

But in between, it's about winning and getting this team to where we want to get to and spending all my efforts into these players who really are the reason why I'm in this position, them and Dan Lanning, so I owe it to them. I owe it to this university, this state, all of our fans, all the people that help our program to finish this thing the right way.

Q. Will, obviously the wide receiver depth was tested this past month and it feels like they really stepped up to that call. Can you describe what it was like attacking that challenge and maybe how you grew from it as a play caller?

WILL STEIN: Totally, yeah. It forced me to get into different -- I wouldn't say different personnels but to utilize more personnel groupings than maybe I have in the past. We've been pretty much 11, 12, 13 operation. We've experienced and dabbled with some 21-personnel two-back sets in 22 but now we've done a lot more but I think it just creates a lot of conflict in the defense. If you have split backs, you can run the ball both directions. That's just one. There's a lot of different protection schemes that you can get into. I think it messes with backer fits because they have to figure out which way the ball is going on the snap, so that's been really cool. Those backs have been elite since they got here and they all have different abilities and different ways. Jordon's your bruiser. Noah's your slasher. Dierre is a home run hitter, so it's a lot of play with. We even got into 30-personnel tonight which is fun. Direct snap to Jordon. I like doing that too.

Those guys, it's like fun toys for sure. We keep experimenting and sometimes the plays that you work all week don't show up in the next game. You try to carry them over and keep working them and keep creasing them up and some of them showed up tonight.

Q. What allowed the vertical passing game to have so much success in that first half in particular?

WILL STEIN: James Madison is a heavy one high man or no deep man outfit so we knew going into this game we had to get the ball in the perimeter early with our

transportation, pin pull schemes. If they're all mugged up, common sense, if they're all inside, you run outside. If they're outside, you run inside. So that was a lot of the plan going into this to attack them and then there was some personnel mismatches that we felt we could take advantage of and we did, especially with Malik on his first touchdown catch. Thought we had a great match-up there with their field corner and a heavy set. We were able to hit home tonight on multiple vertical passes.

Q. I wanted to give you an opportunity to support your local offensive line coach. Why should this team win the Joe Moore Award?

WILL STEIN: A'lique Terry is the best offensive line coach in the country. Cutter Leftwich is in that room, who is actually going with me to my next spot. We've had guys like Mike Cavanaugh, too, that have poured in this room. Ryan Walk, our graduate assistant. Holden Whipple. Dallas Warmack. That group of men that coach those players are the best in the country, the best that I've ever been around. They pour into them. They're extremely well-connected. They really play for each other. It's unbelievable. And when you look at guys like Pancho and World and Pregnon, Dave, Harkey. Gernorris Wilson who's played this year, Fox Crader, shoot, Charlie Pickard. The list goes on and on how much those guys practice their ass off and they literally hit all the time. It's not like a wide out or a running back or quarterback. These guys are like training every single day and they've just battled and they don't complain. They don't do anything. They just show up every single day. Credit to them. Credit to A'lique, credit to all those guys in that room that just really pour into each other and it's a fun group to coach.