

# ReliaQuest Bowl: Michigan vs Alabama

Monday, December 30, 2024

Tampa, Florida, USA

Raymond James Stadium

## Sherrone Moore

## Kalen DeBoer

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Coach Moore, if you'd like to start us off with a brief opening statement and go from there.

SHERRONE MOORE: Just want to thank everybody for being here. We've had a great time this week. Looked as if it as a business trip, and our guys have really taken hold of that and had a great week of prep. Really excited about the game with a great opponent. I've known Kalen for a very long time. We talked about our days when we were in the MAC, going around Chicago, and I was at Central and he was at Eastern, and I've always had a lot of respect for him and how he runs his program and what he's done.

Obviously we faced last year in the National Championship, and just tremendous respect for him and how he's built programs and has winning traditions.

But really excited for this game. Our players are excited. It's going to be a great challenge with a great team, great opponent. Ready to kick this thing off.

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, it's been a good few days down here. Just appreciate everyone in the Tampa area. Got over to Clearwater yesterday and just all these events that our players have been able to be a part of, fans, as well, just nothing but great hospitality.

Appreciate ReliaQuest with the sponsorship and just everyone down here for greeting us from the time we got here until I know the time we leave.

As Coach said, we've known each other for a while, and a lot of respect for him, know some of the staff, and also just the program there at Michigan in general.

Looking forward to a great game. Our guys, really proud of the way they've gone about their work, going back not just this week but all the way through the month. Just always looking for opportunities to continue to get better



individually, collectively as a team, and ready to go out and play tomorrow.

Again, great weather down here in Tampa. Looking forward to an exciting game, and be our best.

**Q. For both coaches and Coach DeBoer first, there's a plethora of sports movies being made today. If they decide to make a movie that you're in, what actor do you want to play you? Coach DeBoer, I'm thinking Jeff Daniels. Not the "Dumb and Dumber" Jeff Daniels but the one who's in "Newsroom." And Coach Moore, Cuba Gooding, Jr. What do you guys think?**

KALEN DeBOER: Well, I think you said it. Yeah, I appreciate the added piece on there with not the "Dumb and Dumber" part. So thanks for that.

Yeah, I don't know. I haven't thought that far down the road. I think probably just like Coach, we're just trying to take one day at a time and lead our programs right now and take care of our guys.

Love a good sports movie, though, that's for sure.

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, I haven't really thought about that. If I had to put some deep thought -- the first person that comes to my mind in any movie would be Denzel Washington because he's an absolute animal in any movie that he's in. But just really excited for this game.

**Q. Kalen, curious, we've seen a lot of Jaylen Mbakwe at wide receiver over the past few days. I'm curious what you've seen from him in practice, but is it a permanent move to wide receiver? Is he going to play both ways for you guys?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, for this game, I think right now where it's transitioning to just with the opportunities there at that position, I think it's something that based on what we've seen here through the first couple, I guess almost two weeks now, of him taking reps, he's certainly got the skill set, and really excited about what he can do for us there at that position.

He's got the speed. He's had the ball in his hands all through high school, running the offense there at that level, and then we've used him in the punt return game and the return games.

We're just really comfortable with what he can bring to the table. Now it's just learning the position, learning the offense. I think you'll see us continue to move in this direction with him. He's really been focused on the offensive side really all of bowl prep.

It was natural, number one, because of numbers, but number two, I think because of what he can do as a football player. Not all guys just naturally move into that role, but he's provided a really good amount of confidence in us and I think his teammates in this transition here already.

**Q. Coach DeBoer, in the landscape we're in in college football with players opting out for bowl games, what does it say about your leaders that they came out right away and most of the captains on the team are playing with the exception of the injury to Malachi? Did you meet with them or was that just kind of assumed?**

KALEN DeBOER: We didn't have a big meeting, but I think the leaders, as you mentioned, I think that's always the key is what's your leadership, and the leaders just understanding the precedent that's been set here in this program when it comes to bowl games, opting out, and just kind of setting the tone on how important every opportunity when you get to put the crimson on is, and these guys get that one last chance here this year. Guys like Tyler Booker really stepping up and Milroe, as well, and others, just really saying, hey, we get one more chance as a brotherhood to go out on that football field together, we get a chance to be better as football players, and we want to set the program off continuing in the right direction going into next year and leave it at the best possible place that we can.

They've poured everything into it, all these guys. Just couldn't be more proud of the mindset and how that's trickled throughout the team and really led us to have some really good practices here all the way through the bowl practice here, even today.

**Q. Kalen, do you have an update on Kadyn Proctor's status for tomorrow?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, we're expecting him to play.

**Q. Coach DeBoer, with all the portal activity in December, obviously your roster right now looks a lot more like it will look in spring practice than it did for**

**any regular season game. Does that make the tape from this bowl game more valuable as a self-evaluation tool ahead of spring practice than what you would get in the fall?**

KALEN DeBOER: From this past fall? Yeah, I think every guy, it's an opportunity. There's some opportunities that some new faces are going to get. Maybe they've had roles, but their roles are upticked a little bit just as far as the reps they may get. Might be special teams, might be offense, defense.

I think this game, the whole purpose, though, is still to go out here and go find a way to win. So that's the priority, and along with it, just because there is movement, as you mentioned, with the portal, new guys are getting upgraded roles, more opportunities, and they're looking forward to taking advantage of it.

Again, I think as you were kind of alluding to, it does help you kind of move forward into spring practice, which will just be right around the corner here before you know it.

**Q. Kalen, a chance to get 10 wins with this game. What have you communicated and what have people told you about what that would mean for that streak with this program?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, it's something that's really important to the guys. There's no question. They want to keep the streak alive there with 10-win seasons.

We always talk in terms of really trying to even simplify it down beyond that and just the most important game is the next one, just like the next play is the most important one. That's where we're focused.

But there is a piece, too, with the tradition and just everything. You don't do it to put added pressure on yourself, you just make the game what it is, and this is an important game because it's the one that's in front of us.

Our players finding those motivational pieces, that is certainly one of them.

**Q. Coach Moore, can you talk about the offensive line and who you expect to play tackle in this game? And there are reports that Juan Castillo might be joining your program again. Can you talk a little bit about that?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, we're really excited about the guys that are going to play in the game. Evan Link, obviously been there, moving over to left, Andrew Sprague getting a start, feel really confident about him. He's a guy



that's super talented that we've moved into the game a little bit and played, and then the guys that have played inside are the same guys.

Super excited for them. Super excited for the opportunities that they have.

Coach Castillo has been a guy I've known for a long time, obviously been here and been back, so he'll be back helping. Just a veteran guy that's been in the NFL, that's been in college, groomed really high quality offensive linemen. Obviously that's an important position for me. I want guys that I feel like can help that position as much as possible, and feel like he can bring a lot to the table.

**Q. Coach DeBoer, you mentioned the leadership and the brotherhood going into this game. Is that what you might be most proud of when you look at this group, the 2024 season in the larger context?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think that's something I know I feel going back to January has certainly been just a stabilizing force for our team. There's so much that was happening. I can sit here and talk all day just about this particular area and how important it's been and how proud I am because there are some guys that pretty much put their foot down and said, this is the place that we believe in. They believe in themselves. They chose to stay. The ups and downs that came with our season, they just were steady through it and understood that the task wasn't going to be easy.

Anytime you're a program that's on top, it's hard enough just to stay on top when the continuity is all there, but they took on that challenge, and I couldn't be, again, more proud of just the way that they've stuck together, whether it's the upperclassmen or whether it's sides of the ball. That includes our staff, as well, just the way they've continued to stay the course and look at every day as an opportunity for us to grow our program, continue to build our foundation.

But yeah, that brotherhood, that family environment that we really feel strong about, it's carried us through a lot, including this last month, just, again, with the highs and lows of what's come our way.

**Q. Kalen, this isn't any player specific, but just in general, what have your conversations been like with guys who are considering the NFL? How has your advice changed over the years when they can now come back to school and make money with NIL?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, a lot of this has been going on, especially the last month. Just position coaches,

coordinators, just as much information as we can always give these guys, we want to help them make the best decision that they can. That's the priority.

Yeah, those conversations continue to happen now. I think a lot of the guys have a good feel of where they're leaning, but there's still some decisions that need to be made, and we're here for them. I think they understand that.

Of course our program moving forward is probably better with them if they stay, but that's for each guy to make his choice, and we're going to help them through it the best we can. I think most of them here sooner than later will have that final decision made.

But the conversations do, as you mentioned, they certainly are different now than they maybe were three, four, five years ago as far as what the opportunities and why you might stay compared to what it was before NIL and so forth.

**Q. Coach Moore, now that Mikey Keene has signed and you can comment on him, what made him someone you guys targeted in the portal, and how do you expect he'll factor into the quarterback competition in the spring?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, experienced guy that's played a lot of football. Really excited about him. We played him in the first game, so we know how tough he is. We know the type of throws he can make.

Just heard great things and tactical things about him as a leader, and really excited for him to push that room and give us an experienced guy that we feel that he can win us games, and that was the most important piece of it.

**Q. Coach Moore, now that you've had basically a month of bowl preparation for this game, who do you feel has made the most of their experience in terms of practice, and who do you feel like has really taken their game to the next step?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, you just look at everybody on the team, and I don't think there's a position group that's overachieved or overexceeded. All those guys have really taken the opportunity to get better. You look at from the O-line to the D-line to the DBs, the quarterback, running backs, all those different positions, everybody has taken the chance to get better, and they've really invested the time that they've had to get better.

Really excited about the young players that are going to get to play in the game, the older guys that are playing in the game. They just want to strap it up for Michigan.

**Q. Sherrone, your impressions of Jordan Marshall during practice? Second question on Evan, he took some heat this season. How do you think he progressed later on in the season, and how confident are you at left tackle with him?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, first Jordan Marshall, he's a young kid. He's dynamic. We really felt really good about him throughout the year. Had a couple of bumps and bruises and was limited a little bit, and is at full strength now. He's got a chance to be a really special player. So really excited about him.

Then Evan has been great. He switched in fall camp from the position where he naturally was at, and he's done a really good job. Really excited about him. Really the last two games he played exceptional. Played really good in the last game of the year, and he's had a really good month of prep, and excited for him and what he's going to do.

**Q. Sherrone, when you bring in a transfer quarterback, what's the message to him about the potential starting and getting into games?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, it's open competition. Nobody is promised a certain spot. Everybody has got to earn it, and he really understands that, even with the guys we've brought in. So he's really excited to push the whole room.

He's a guy that's played a lot of football, that has a lot of experience and made plays at all different levels. He's familiar with Chip Lindsey was really huge. They had a connection previously. That helped.

But just all the reviews that we got from him as a person, as a player, and then it was huge that we played him this year. We saw him live in action. We saw him make some really good throws and do some things dynamic. So really ready for him to get going in this program.

**Q. Coach DeBoer, final game in your first year as Alabama's head football coach. What does a win mean to you?**

KALEN DeBOER: Well, yeah, you want to win them all, right? That's a given. But I think just finishing this year off with a positive would be big for just the direction, for this team to kind of put an end to it, but also to help us just moving forward and the trajectory. I think that's what bowl games are in general. But yeah, certainly after finishing up the first year, it's been a whirlwind of 11 months.

But I like where we're at with the mindset, like where we're at with how things are coming together, and looking forward to taking those next steps, and I think this bowl game can certainly help in that and moving forward.

**Q. Kalen, for double clarity, Jalen and all your draft eligible guys, this is their game. They're expected to play the whole game and go the distance if they can, correct?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, there's been no conversations or anything. I guess I'd be pretty surprised. I think they're here to win, to compete to put the best product that we can put out there on the football field for four quarters and go out there. I would not expect something like that.

That's the way these guys are. Jalen Milroe, as you alluded to, and the other guys, they're going to go out there just like they always have been and give everything they have, and they've shown that in practice, so I wouldn't expect anything different.

**Q. Last year you guys were playing in the Rose Bowl in the National Championship, so late. I know that that sort of hindered things within the portal and the way there was going to be development. I guess this year how much do you have to do in the portal and what's your balance been like preparing for obviously another important game here but still obviously been successfully attacking that, as well?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, I think there's always going to be that balance. With the calendar how it is, regardless of if you're in the playoff or a big-time bowl game like this one, you're going to have to have some balance with the recruiting piece.

The recruiting piece never stops. It's 365, even when it's a dead period. People are still calling you, texting you. It never stops, so for us it's been a continuous emphasis on what we have to do and the guys we have to get. There's still a few positions we need to get and we want to get.

But ultimately they've got to be the best fit for the program. But the main thing right now is to go try and win this game.

**Q. In the trenches, is that the positions where you're --**

SHERRONE MOORE: It's a mix of different positions for sure. Always want the best guys up front.

**Q. For both coaches, when you're looking at film of the opposition, offense, defense, is there anything similar to teams you played when you look at Alabama or when you look at Michigan?**



SHERRONE MOORE: I mean, for us, you start off offense, and Jalen is special. He's not like any quarterback we've played or the ability that he has to impact the game with his legs. They've got great playmakers on the outside, a big offensive line. It's just a different animal. It's a different group.

Defensively, again, NFL players everywhere. We've played some really good teams all year. We've played Oregon, played Texas, played Ohio State. So similar to those guys and the guys that we've played, the top competition that we played all year.

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think the last part, too, would certainly apply. Take the most physical teams that we've played all season, and that's what you're going to look at when you're getting ready for the game tomorrow is both sides of the ball, when it comes to Michigan, just being physical up front. That's across the board, not even just up front. Just the style of play, the mindset that they have spreads not just in the front but all the way through the back half and the skill positions, as well, in just how hard they play, how physical they are.

So take the teams that you've played, each side of the ball maybe has faced different challenges from our end throughout the year, but these guys certainly present that at the highest level when it comes to the physicality.

They've shown style of play that I think going back to at least the last game here with their nice win against a playoff team, you understand that there's a style of play that you've got to be ready for, I think, in knowing what they can do to win their football game. So we've got to counter that.

**Q. Kalen, do you have an update on Justin Jefferson's eligibility, like a definitive if he's coming back next year?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I'll let him make the decision -- not the decision, the announcements. But I know he was pretty excited to hear about the opportunity. So if that can give you an indication of where his head is at, and we've had the talks, and pretty confident that he's excited to continue to play college football.

Nothing official has been said, but that was certainly a big announcement there right around Christmas. A good Christmas present for him and a good Christmas present for us for sure.

**Q. For both coaches, you guys had a connection in the portal this off-season with Damon Payne and**

**Justice Haynes. Can you talk about what you saw from them on film, and Coach DeBoer, talk about what you saw from them on the field coaching them this season.**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, both those guys, I can't really comment on those guys right now. I'll just go from there. Both great players at Alabama, and I can't really comment on those guys right now.

KALEN DeBOER: Tough question. Yeah, I'm just going to say this: I'm always going to wish the guys that are in our program the best, and those are two really good solid young men. Always going to wish them the best. I hear the word "fit" coming from Coach Moore's talk here, and that's what you always hope, is that the college experience for anyone that you get to coach, you want it to be in your program, you want it to be a lead in your program, but ultimately this time comes and goes really fast, so I'm always going to wish the guys the best that were part of the year that we had here or anytime I've coached throughout my career.

**Q. Sherrone, Max Bredeson, a cornerstone of the offense, a captain, he's here and said he hasn't made a decision about his future, but can you speak on the impact his leadership and his play on the field have had in practices so far?**

SHERRONE MOORE: Yeah, he's the ultimate competitor, ultimate leader, everything you want in a captain and a guy you want on your team, as physical of a player in college football I would say, and he's everything you want from a leader on your team. He impacts our team not just on the field but off the field in huge ways and making sure the locker room is aligned in every single way.

I just can't speak highly enough about that young man, and just excited for his future and making his determination, whatever he does.

**Q. What has your experience been like here in Tampa? What kind of bonding things have you been doing? And what do you want your guys to get out of this experience?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think it's a setting where there's some time for the guys where they don't have to worry about classes, they don't have to worry about other things. It's just enjoying each other, enjoying the moments that we have. There's been different activities, events hosted by the bowl that I know they've enjoyed, and the practices and all that, this is what these guys love to do, and being able to just focus on football, and then when they have the free time, focus on the relationships and the friendships that we



have.

We're a smaller group now, just with some guys maybe that aren't with us, that are not with the team, so I think these guys are really taking advantage of continuing to build, and the ones that are maybe spending their last days in the program, we've always tried to highlight them and celebrate what they've brought to this program and what this last game means to them and every practice being the last one potentially in this last moment here and that last moment there, tonight will be the last team meeting that we'll ever have as this football team.

It's just cherishing those moments that come along with these type of situations.

**SHERRONE MOORE:** Yeah, it's been an awesome experience. The bowl game has provided a great opportunity for our players to just sit back sometimes and get some time off their feet and relax but also get some time to do different things as a team. Going to Busch Gardens, guys riding roller coasters, doing different things, feeding giraffes and animals, they really honed into that and loved that, and spending time with each other when there isn't football around.

But when it's time to do football, they're really excited about that, and just like Kalen said, not having class at the same time, they can really study the game even deeper, and those guys love to do that. They love to embrace the opportunity to get better, especially with film study.

Just anytime we eat a team meal, guys are sitting down and just talking and just talking about nothing, talking about random things and talking about life, I think it's cool to get that opportunity as a coach but also our assistant coaches to be able to sit down with their players and just have that time and not have those time restrictions of different things that they can do.

It's been a great opportunity for our players and our staff to get out here and enjoy this, and obviously coming from Michigan, the day before we left it was like 19 degrees, so 66 and 70 feels really good to us, so we love -- this weather has been great for us, and just continuing to embrace these moments with our players.

**Q. Sherrone, Steve Casula alluded to this earlier, that Michigan's offense is always going to be Michigan's offense, but what you do specifically is always going to be dictated by specific personnel. With so many new faces in the mix, whether it's Steve or Chip Lindsey popping in here and there, different players, does that allow you to do anything a little bit different this week, maybe a more individualized approach that**

**sets you up for maybe something a little different or more success this week or maybe later on down the line that can be beneficial?**

**SHERRONE MOORE:** Yeah, I think the best thing about offense is just if you're going to have a really good offense you've got to tell a story in what you do and how you do it, and you've got to get the best players the ball and the best players involved and do things that our players are really good at. At the end of the day, that's what we're going to think to do this week and this game, and not try to be too crazy and be out of the box, but we'll have some specific things that we have for the game, and when you're attacking this defense, this defense is difficult to deal with and you've got to have a plan for different things that they do.

For us, it's going to be about getting the best players the football and making sure they can impact the game and control the clock.

**Q. For both coaches, and Coach DeBoer, you first, you were both in the College Football Playoff last year. If you cannot be in it, is there a better place to tee it up than Tampa, Florida, on New Year's Eve at the ReliaQuest Bowl?**

**KALEN DeBOER:** Talking about the newbies who are going to be in it someday, too. Yeah, we're excited to be here, when we found out we got the opportunity.

It's lived up to everything that I'd hoped.

**SHERRONE MOORE:** Yeah, it's been a great experience for us, the staff, the players. Wouldn't want to be anywhere besides the playoff, but this has been a great opportunity for us as players, as staff to continue to bond and build our camaraderie and to get better and feel good about it, and just excited for the game.

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