

Valero Alamo Bowl: Texas vs Washington

Thursday, December 8, 2022

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Derrick Fox
Randy Cain
Gary Simmons
Steve Sarkisian
Kalen DeBoer

Press Conference

RICK HILL: I'd like to introduce our head table today. We have our president and CEO, Derrick Fox. The visiting team this year is Texas. We have Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian. Our volunteer chair for the Valero Alamo Bowl is Randy Cain. Our home team is the University of Washington, head coach Kalen DeBoer. Our title sponsor Valero, Gary Simmons.

Randy, could you start us please.

RANDY CAIN: Thank you for joining us today here at the Security Service Insurance Golf Classic as we kick off a month-long series of events culminating with the 30th annual Valero Alamo Bowl between No. 20 Texas and No. 12 Washington on December the 29th.

We knew it was going to be very special when we announced on Selection Sunday. That feeling has been validated over the last four days with a tremendous amount of media attention and fan interest it has received.

Our ability to bring such outstanding universities to San Antonio is a testament to the community support that we've received over the past 30 years. Valero is one of our original partners in 1993. Then in 2007, Valero stepped up to become our title sponsor, allowing us to move up to our current position as the No. 1 bowl game outside the CFP in the Big 12 and Pac-12 conferences. That has allowed us to feature top-20 matchups in seven of the last nine years of the CFP and annually ranked No. 1 among all bowls in local scholarship giving. I'll say that one more time: No. 1 among all bowls in local scholarship giving.



With us this morning is Gary Simmons, Valero executive vice president and chief commercial officer. Please help me in applauding Gary and Valero for their partnership that allows us to bring such quality programs to San Antonio and positively impact our community each year.

Gary.

GARY SIMMONS: Thank you, Randy.

Valero is proud to help commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Valero Alamo Bowl. It's certainly been a game changer for the city of San Antonio.

At Valero we are changing the game too, from recycling used cooking oil to make renewable diesel to providing scholarships for local students, just a couple of examples of things we're doing right now because at Valero we know the future is based on the actions we do today.

Valero is thrilled to be a part of this must-see matchup between Texas and Washington. We applaud the efforts of the teams, the coaches and their families on the successful seasons that they've had.

We know that millions of viewers will be tuned to ESPN to see all the excitement inside the Alamodome on game day. It's equally rewarding to see the city of San Antonio become even more alive during bowl week with the teams and their fans here.

I'd like to thank everyone with the Valero Alamo Bowl team for what they do every year to make this event such a success.

I'll turn it over to Derrick to introduce the coaches.

DERRICK FOX: Gary, thank you again for your support. We cannot overstate how much we are so blessed to have you our title sponsor. On behalf of our organization, the entire community, thank you, Gary.

Our selection rights give us the opportunity to host teams that excite local supporters, drive visitation and turn on TV sets. No pressure, guys (smiling).



The Valero Alamo Bowl is San Antonio's holiday tradition. We have two outstanding programs and coaches like we do every year, but this year in our 30th anniversary is truly special. We're very blessed to have you guys here. Thank you very much.

On behalf of the Valero Alamo Bowl I'd like to welcome Coach Sarkisian and Coach DeBoer to San Antonio. Congratulations on your successful seasons. We appreciate you bringing your teams and excited fan bases to San Antonio, and scheduling to be here today. We know it's a very crazy time. Thank you for making time for us.

First let me introduce to you the Texas head coach, Steve Sarkisian. In his second year leading the Longhorns, they finished with an 8-4 record, No. 20 ranking, a balanced attack, ranking in the top 20 in points per game and top 30 in points allowed per game.

This is his first bowl game with Texas, his second time playing in the Valero Alamo Bowl. His 2011 Washington Husky team scored 56 points, the second highest total in points history.

On behalf of the Valero Alamo Bowl, we're thrilled to welcome you and the Longhorns to San Antonio for the first time. Turn it over to you for an opening statement.

STEVE SARKISIAN: You had to remind me of that 2011 game (smiling). That was a heck of a game. I'm sure everybody here loved watching that one. Anyway, thank you for having us. This is a phenomenal experience. We're super pumped to be here.

At the end of the day there's high expectations with what we do, and our players are appreciative of the opportunity that we have. To play the University of Washington, all that they've accomplished this season, a team that I'm watching the tape, man, a couple plays here or there, they're in the College Football Playoff.

The reality of it is this is a great challenge for us, great bowl game, great opportunity. Appreciative of the opportunity. Thank you.

GARY SIMMONS: Thank you, Coach Sarkisian.

Now let's talk to the University of Washington head coach Kalen DeBoer.

KALEN DeBOER: First of all, it's great to be here. I know our team is excited. Can't wait to take part in the Alamo Bowl.

Again, I know Coach Sark, he's got some history with U-Dub as you heard. Just appreciative of what his part is in our history. Looking forward to the great challenge to play UT.

We know that they've had, as you look at their schedule, their season, some great wins, and continue to be projecting onward and upward. Looking forward to the great challenge.

RICK HILL: We'll take questions.

Q. Michael Penix, how would you say he compares with the four quarterback finalists for the Heisman Trophy?

KALEN DeBOER: I haven't had a chance to see all of them a lot. I so know what Michael does. He does it at a high lever. Being around college football for a lot of years, he does as good as anyone I've ever seen.

His ability to be accurate. He has a cannon for an arm. A great leader, great person, high-character guy who came in and instantly brought life to our team. Our stadium became electric because of the big plays he's made.

Taking an offense that was near the bottom of FBS a year ago and pretty much with everyone else around him for the most part being the same people, to be one of the top two offenses in the country in most categories, a lot of that credit is due to what Michael has done for us.

Q. His decision to return this year?

KALEN DeBOER: We're pretty fired up about that (smiling).

He threw us for a little surprise on Sunday after our team banquet. Had a video prepared, made the announcement to our team and many parents that were there as well.

We're excited about the future. It's certainly got our momentum going for next year. But we still got work to do this year. We want to close out this season and try to get that 11th win.

Q. Sark, how is it prioritizing right now looking ahead to a bowl, transfer portal, in-home visit?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think at the end of the day it's, like you said, about prioritizing. It's what are you doing today. Today we happen to be here for this press conference, then you go on to doing your home visits, then you get ready for practice tomorrow. You just go through it.



I think at the end of the day, like, our players understand that. We dive into what we need to dive into. We go according to the process of what's expected of us. That's what we do.

I wish I could say it more eloquently, but that's exactly what happens. You just handle what's in front of you, then you go tackle it.

Q. Coach Sarkisian, Bijan is a guy that has a lot of options. Is he going to be participating in bowl practices? Do you anticipate him playing in the game? The same goes for Roschon. Will he be healthy enough?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think all those things, when you talk about the players, who's playing, who's not, I think those are all things we have to work ourselves through.

Bijan has a lot of things to work himself through, like do I leave to go to the NFL, do I not. Do I practice, do I not. Roschon, same thing.

We work with our players kind of day to day, what do they need, what do they need from us to be the most productive players that they can be.

Awesome human beings. These guys are unbelievable human beings. So we just try to support 'em the best we can.

Bijan, he loves the University of Texas. It's not something like, Well, it's kind of... No, he loves it. He loves this place.

For him to decide do I leave early to go to the NFL or not, I mean, that is a tough decision. That's heavy on anybody. So we try to help him, support him the best we can.

Q. Coach Sark, how do you think you've evolved as a coach since you left U-Dub and reflect on your time at Washington?

STEVE SARKISIAN: My time at Washington is one that I'll never forget. Special times, special place. That place was incredible. The fan base was incredible. I don't take it lightly.

You evolve as a coach obviously as you go through all of it. In the end, man, you hope you leave a place better than what you found it. I think that we did that.

Coach DeBoer has done a fantastic job with that program. But in the end it's, like, man, do I think it was better than what it was when I got there? Yeah, I think so. And I'm

appreciative of all the people there. They're great people at the University of Washington. Much respect for everybody there.

Q. Talk about the ups and downs as you get a 4-0 start, and 0-2, now six wins in a row. After the second loss, was the locker room worried?

KALEN DeBOER: I think after the second loss, fortunately, and I guess unfortunately, we were in a time where our health was certainly a big issue. A couple positions in particular. We've gotten through it. We've lost some guys for the year that were playing then.

We've been able to at least sustain a positive vibe through all of it. The resiliency of our guys I think really showed up in the last half of the season.

One game at a time, I think we really understood how to play team football, how to trust and believe in each other. As the year has gone on, we've really gained a lot of confidence that when times are tough, we'll pull through.

Those critical moments that we've had, especially in the month of November, that's exactly what we did. Just I think a lot of it had to do with some injuries that we were going through in the first half of the season. It kind of came to a head. But I credit our guys, they stuck together.

Q. Coach Sarkisian, how much will the young guys get an opportunity to participate in bowl practice? Maybe speak to Maalik Murphy, is he moving to the No. 2 spot?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think it's a great point.

Early on in bowl prep, yeah, a lot of young guys getting a lot of reps, as many opportunities as we can give them to prepare and to show the growth that they have.

Maalik is a great example of that. The idea that now you're the No. 2, what do you need to do, how do you need to do it, how do you go about your business. It's a great opportunity for him.

At the end of the day, yeah, a lot of work goes into it. We'll see how far they get. You never know until their number gets called, but we try to do all we can to get them prepared.

Q. Sark, I know you mentioned watching the tape on Washington. Some of your initial impressions from the early study you've done?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Score a lot of points (laughter).



These guys, they score a lot of points. They throw it around, man. Wish I could clinic with Coach DeBoer. Michael Penix, those receivers, they do a heck of a job. Their ability to rush the passer defensively and create havoc on the quarterback are issues.

But they can score. They score on everybody. It doesn't matter the helmet. Doesn't matter who they're playing. They go score. You got to be prepared to make sure you're playing four quarters and score collectively against them because they can do it at a high, high level.

Q. This is a crazy time of year, gotten crazier. Are either of you in favor of an August signing day? Anything you would do to tweak the whole transfer portal window or dates?

KALEN DeBOER: I was going to turn and look at him (laughter).

I guess I haven't really thought too much about the August signing day piece. I think you just try to adjust with whatever comes your way.

It is a crazy time right now. There's no doubt. We're flying around mostly on the West Coast but around the country, trying to get back for bowl practices. You mix in finals, a lot of other things that are happening. There's a lot.

I do think that the early signing date we have has a lot of benefits that have helped us understand where our team roster is at. This transfer portal window we're in now, I think it can always be adjusted and tweaked. There will be lessons learned through it all.

I think as just a coach in the coaching profession, we need to continue to work together to help make it better, better for our student-athletes, to help them navigate through all of it. I think that's what we'll continue to do, is live and learn, make it better.

STEVE SARKISIAN: So anyhow, I think this. I think we're in a unique time of college football. We as head coaches fight our tail off to put our teams in the best position to be successful.

The reality of it is, it's unique, it's different, it's new. How do you navigate all this? You take it day by day. As coach just said, literally day by day. How are we going to navigate today?

I think you try to surround yourself with good people that want to do it the right way, then you try to recruit the best players that you can to fit your program. It is unique, man. It is different, for sure.

Q. Would you change another August signing date or change the portal window?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know. I'm just trying to deal with what we got now.

Q. Are the conversations, Coach Sarkisian, that you said you'd have with players about their future, are those complete now that you're starting bowl practices?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think those conversations are ongoing. We have players with real decisions to make, understandable. I was waiting for the highlight video of one of our players to say he was coming back, but we didn't get that. Not as fortunate as Washington.

The reality of it is you just work with the players. It's ongoing. I wish I could tell you guys, Man, everything is perfect, everything is good. It's not. Like, we are in this process of working with our players every day to help them be the best that they can be, going on to their future, getting their degree from the University of Texas.

It just is what it is. It's tough. I feel for our players because they love this place, but yet they have a future to think about, too. That's how we go about it.

Q. Coach Sark, in your installation of your offense with Quinn, what are some signs of growth that you want to see from him from year one into year two? With these extra practices, are you going to be able to help him expediate [sic] that?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think at the end of the day our ability to be functional passing the ball, we have not been good enough growth-wise from a program perspective of our ability to throw the ball down the field. That takes time, that takes effort, that takes work.

Whether it's Quinn, wideouts, tight ends, we've got to put in the work to make sure we're growing in a positive direction to be the best program that we can be.

Throwing the ball nowadays is, like, I feel like that's the norm. It used to be running the ball back in the day, now it's throwing the ball. How do we get better at it, continue and improve.

That's what we're doing.

Q. Coach Sark, about a year ago you signed a lot of talented offensive linemen. About a year later, talk about the growth of some of those young guys, the job

that Kyle Flood has done, Kelvin Banks, Hudson, Cam Williams.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I love the development of our young offensive linemen. Any time you start two true freshmen at offensive linemen, not many people do that. Kelvin and Cole, what they were able to do...

But the development of DJ Campbell, incredible. Cam Williams, incredible. Like, Coach Flood has done an awesome job. He identified these guys, and he's worked with them. We're reaping the benefits of it.

Q. Coach Sarkisian, can you talk about the impact being in a bowl game has on younger players.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think in the end, being in a bowl game is a great opportunity. We're playing a heck of a team, man. University of Washington is a top-10 opponent. We have a great opportunity ahead of us. It's going to take everybody dialing into what we need to do. But it's a great challenge for sure. We have to make sure we're prepared, we're focused and we're doing the things necessary to perform.

Q. Coach DeBoer, have you talked with Ja'Lynn Polk from Texas? He may get matched up on a high school teammate. Have you been able to talk to him about that?

KALEN DeBOER: We haven't had a chance to talk specifically about that. I do know when I came into the facility, the team was stretching. I made the announcement of where we were playing, who we were playing. Ja'Lynn Polk, his eyes perked up, the grin was from ear to ear. He was excited, just as a few of our other guys are as well coming back to their home here in Texas, getting a chance to play a game.

My eyes went immediately to Ja'Lynn Polk in particular because I knew he'd be pretty fired up.

Q. Kalen, how will USC and UCLA's departure affect the Pac-12's strength going forward? How is Deion going to shake up your league?

KALEN DeBOER: That's loaded right there (smiling).

I think in a time where everything's just so fluid from you're talking about teams leaving, coaches coming in, I think we're just always trying to make our league stronger.

It's two great programs that have a lot of history in the Pac-12. Certainly doesn't go unnoticed, and it's something that we'll have to navigate and work through as a

conference.

I feel like the strength of who we are, not just a conference, but University of Washington, we'll continue to thrive and continue to keep the head in the right direction.

Certainly Coach Prime, I guess I haven't met him in person, but Coach Prime is coming in the league, going to continue to make that program there at Colorado stronger, add value to our league, continue to be a challenge each and every week now. Every team, you know you got to bring your best. That will be the case with Colorado.

Q. Kalen, I'm not sure how much you and your staff have had a chance to watch Texas yet. Impressions you have of Texas?

KALEN DeBOER: I know the staff has started to pore into the film, on the road recruiting a lot. Glanced a little bit.

I think the biggest thing is a balanced team, offensively, defensively, finding ways to win. Looking at just the teams they've played, the wins, even a couple close losses, you know that strength of the team, it's in there.

We know we're going to have to bring our best to find a way to meet the challenge that's presented by UT here in the Alamo Bowl.

Q. 123 points scored in Sark's last Alamo Bowl appearance. Any chance we see the same offensive output?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Is this for me (laughter)? I'll never forget watching RGIII and that whole crew.

A great game. I think that's what the beauty of the Alamo Bowl is. I know we're not a New Year's Six game. But to get two top-20 teams battling at a high level on a national stage, this is what it's about.

Great opportunity for us at the University of Texas. I'm sure for Coach DeBoer and his program at the University of Washington. What a deal for the Alamo Bowl, like, to get these two teams. Are you kidding me?

Fired up. It's going to be great.

DERRICK FOX: Speaking of fired up, our community is. Looking forward to having both of you guys back. Thank you for two tradition-rich programs we're able to have here in San Antonio at the Valero Alamo Bowl.

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