

Valero Alamo Bowl: Colorado vs BYU

Friday, December 27, 2024

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Deion Sanders

Colorado Buffs

Kalani Sitake

BYU Cougars

Head Coaches Press Conference



Really excited to be here. Looking forward to the game. This means we're one day away from it. Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to questions.

Q. What is has highlight of your experience here in San Antonio been so far?

DEION SANDERS: The parade last night was phenomenal. Seeing Miss Peggy embraced was awesome. But seeing the kids floating down the river, that was awesome. The things that (indiscernible) shared as well was phenomenal.

But the city has been so gracious. I take a walk every morning with some of my staff members. The hospitality and the love and support, even from the homeless people, has been phenomenal. That's when you know you got it going on in a good city. The homeless people, Coach Prime, way to go (smiling).

Amen, God bless you.

It's been phenomenal here. I'm enjoying myself immensely.

Q. A unique bowl game in that you are both in the same conference. Does that add a little bit extra? Does it feel like the Peoples Champion Big 12 game?

DEION SANDERS: I defer to my coach (smiling).

KALANI SITAKE: Just excited to play the game. I mean, when we were playing conference play, there were a lot of crossover games. We saw a lot of Colorado film because we were playing their opponents.

When you start looking at that, you start to realize, man, this is a really gifted team. That caught our attention. When we knew this could be a possibility, I was excited about the game more than anything.

The motivation from our players when it was finalized, there was a lot of excitement. Next-level players on

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us today. It's my pleasure to welcome head coach Kalani Sitake from BYU and head coach for Colorado Deion 'Coach Prime' Sanders.

KALANI SITAKE: Just excited. A day away from the game. We just enjoyed our time here in San Antonio. Thank you to the bowl officials and Valero Alamo Bowl and the people of San Antonio. City has been amazing. I'm sure Deion would agree with me that we've had a very enjoyable stay. Gave us some great memories this week.

With that being said, we're excited the game is tomorrow. Looking forward to it. Just want to say thank you to everybody.

Also want to recognize Colorado and their team, their fans, also their coach, coaching staff. Have a great relationship with Coach Prime. Just have a lot of respect for what he's done with his team.

Here we are sitting in this position that no one predicted us to be in. We're in this game, we're looking forward to it. Everybody is playing. It's going to be an exciting, exciting time. Just really looking forward to the matchup.

We're excited about our opportunity to play with these seniors that we have, the guys that are leaving the program, this is their last game. Want to make it memorable.

When you look at what Colorado does, you look at the talent, how well-coached they are. One of the things that is most impressive is they have talent, you can see it, but they have a high football IQ, which means they're learning from the coaching staff and experience of the game.



Colorado's team. We have a lot of players that want to prove they belong there, too.

You can't deny the fact they have a lot of talent, a Heisman Trophy winner, draft picks on that side. What we saw with our eyes is definitely coming to fruition in the way Coach Prime has his team ready. We have to be at our best. We're looking forward to that.

If you've been around me quite a bit, you know this is what I want for our team. This is great motivation going into the game tomorrow.

Q. Coach Sitake, you mentioned neither team was expected to be here. Obviously predicted 13th and 11th. Can both of you talk about what this bowl game could mean to your programs going forward, maybe a springboard into 2025 and '26 and beyond.

DEION SANDERS: We don't look at it as a springboard. It's a game we want to win. We're not just making a cameo here just to show up. We don't do that.

We have a valued opponent, a guy that his team is well-coached, disciplined, structured. Good athletes on both sides of the ball. They got some tremendous players.

They're not going to make mistakes. We have to beat them. They're not going to allow us. They're going to play the game of football like they've been taught to play.

I'm excited, man. I'm truly excited. I love this man in many facets, not just as a coach but as a man. We know people who knows people who knows people who has validated who he is, what he is when the camera's aren't on.

Love every bit of it. His shoe game is on point as well. Clean, a jacket. Had no idea. Not like I would have changed anyway, but he's looking really good. Dress-up matchup today, he got me. I'm not happy about that (smiling).

KALANI SITAKE: I got one outfit, man. This is about it. We switch wardrobes right now, I'm pretty sure I would get a lot more from it than you would. I could never make that work (smiling).

But just really appreciate Deion just being open and so kind to me. When we first met, you guys weren't around, when we first met, it was a great interaction for me. I grew up watching him and cheering for him.

DEION SANDERS: I ain't that old, man (smiling).

KALANI SITAKE: He's a little bit older than me. He was

making plays when he was young is what I'm trying to say (laughter).

I grew up a 9ers fan. Liked him more when he was wearing a 9ers uniform than the other one. He played at Atlanta with people that I knew and a coach that I had when I was at BYU, Brian Mitchell. There's a lot of connections.

When I got to meet him, so genuine and kind to me with his time, with his knowledge, man. I think it was a lot of fun for me just being able to meet somebody that has had so much influence in the game. Just being kind and gracious with his time.

It was such a great feeling for me when we met. I mean, I feel like he's my guy. We're able to talk about a bunch of stuff, especially with college football, how much it's changing. I'm able to lean on his intelligence and advice. We have a really good relationship, a good friendship. I love him back.

Can't love each other for about three and a half, four hours tomorrow. Away we go. The respect, we have a lot of respect.

You can tell from the teams, we've been here all week, we're trying to enjoy the festivities, all that, but we're getting close to game time. I think a lot of guys are getting ready for game mode. There's tons of respect for we have for Colorado, what they've been able to accomplish. Looking forward to this matchup more than anything.

Q. Coach Prime, I know that you're going to be focused on the game tomorrow. I wonder, will there be a moment...

DEION SANDERS: Yes.

Q. ...where you're going to embrace the fact that you're walking on the field for the final time with your two sons?

DEION SANDERS: Yes. But don't forget Travis, the multitude of seniors that we have, because I love 'em all.

But yes. I've been trying to shy away from that moment because I knew the last home game, it was the last home game, but wasn't the last game. But this is it, so...

I got upset with Shedeur yesterday. I told him we have 48 hours, son, then all this is over (smiling).

It's going to be something to behold. I don't know how I'm going to handle it. I know Travis is going to trigger me

because he always does. He's going to bring tears up my eyes.

I don't look forward to it but I do because that means they're going to another level, another chapter of life, and they're going to soar. I'm thankful that I feel we've equipped them with all the tools necessary to be successful.

Q. Coach Sitake, in the first year of the 16-team league, what are your thoughts on how things transpired this year, how the Big 12 stacked up against the rest of the country?

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, I can only speak for the games we played in. Highly competitive. A lot of parity. The reason being, you look at the predictions, and none of it came true. The fact that anybody has a shot in this conference.

Then I think for a lot of the coaches, when you listen to them, we played nine conference games. That's something that not all the conferences do. When you're trying to compare conferences, I don't know how else to do it.

I recommend we should play just like basketball does, the pre-season games, match up our conference against another conference, just match 'em all up, then when we get to our conference games, everybody can feel good about whatever the results will be. Kind of like how basketball does it.

I do know that we've been independent for a while. Being in this conference is something that's super special. We enjoy it, with all sports, not just with football. We're enjoying it, having fun with it.

We definitely have tons of respect for this conference and the teams in it, the coaches. I think Deion would say it's well-coached teams everywhere. It just keeps getting better and better. It's an honor for me to be part of that.

Q. Coach Prime, you have really leaned into the pageantry and tradition of playing in a bowl game at a time where other places in college sports haven't leaned in as much. Why is it important to you to take this game so seriously?

DEION SANDERS: Maybe because neither of us were supposed to be here. We were supposed to be in the crib right now, focused on recruiting, improving our rosters. Nevertheless, we're here. Nevertheless, not only that, we're a few plays away from playing in another week or so. We know what we have. We're happy about it.

We're not going to take this for granted. It's a blessing. When you're on the outside of this stuff, you're looking in, you want to get there, you're like dang. You get to a bowl, you don't want to play in something you thrive to do? Do you know how many people wish they could be in our situations?

We're going to take full advantage of it. All our kids are playing. We're going to play our toughest, our hardest. This is a game, not just routine. This is a game that both of us want to win.

We're taking it serious because we were predicted not to be here by some of you wonderful folks (smiling).

KALANI SITAKE: I'll add on that the pageantry of it all, it's a lot of fun. I think we sit here and think it's only the players and the team benefit from it, the coaches, but the fans do, too. I got to meet Miss Peggy yesterday. That's awesome. I've seen and heard about her. Got to give her a quick hug and talk to her for a quick minute. That was super special.

We're forgetting the fans are part of this, too. We plan on seeing all our fans in the stadium tomorrow. They're enjoying all of it. I speak for Deion, we love seeing our fans happy.

DEION SANDERS: That's correct.

KALANI SITAKE: That's a big part of why we're where we're at.

I can tell you this, watching Colorado, they love to play football. So do we. When it's all said and done, it's a game of football. If nobody showed up and if there were no cameras there, we would still play because these guys love to play the game on both sides. We're looking forward to it.

DEION SANDERS: We would have at least one camera, though. That's how we get down. I am sorry, coach, but we want some cameras there. At least one. My son, he has to be there.

Q. Speaking about your son, we spoke with him yesterday.

DEION SANDERS: Which one?

Q. With Shedeur yesterday. He was saying that when it comes to facing BYU, it's like a math problem, we have to calculate, figure out an equation. That's what he's looking forward to. With BYU's players, they were

talking about how talented the roster is, Heisman Trophy winner. From your perspectives, what are you most looking forward to when it comes to facing each other?

DEION SANDERS: Just the competitiveness, the competition, because they're not going nowhere. We have to deal with these guys next year, the year after that. They're not going anywhere. This man is not going anywhere.

They have this attitude, this intellect, this intelligence. His team embodies who he is as a man. That is a daunting task.

Our kids are going to have to play smart, they're going to have to be disciplined. I'm glad Shedeur did divulge that stuff to you. Dad, can we stop going to all this stuff so I can focus and lock in? I got to perform.

That's where he's focused right now, but it's a task.

KALANI SITAKE: I think sometimes when people talk about great talent, they forget the fact they have intelligence, too. When great talent matched with great football IQ and intelligence, and leadership qualities and love of the game, it's dangerous.

You look at the leadership that they have, I keep talking about it, Deion has been manifesting this for a long time, the success he had, Heisman Trophy winner, what he started at Colorado. I think a lot of people have to give him his credit, intelligence, his ability to kind of put it together and lead it.

He talks about me. This team takes their personality from him, too. It's going to be a great game. I think you're going to get the best out of both of us. I don't know what the score's going to look like, but I hope it's entertaining, but not too entertaining at some levels.

We're old school BYU, man. We're the ones that started throwing the ball out there with LaVell Edwards back in the day. We'll see what happens.

I think you can't just look past the fact that these young men, especially on Colorado's side, they're very talented, but they have intelligence, too. They understand the game. You can see it from the way Shedeur was breaking it down yesterday. We're just talking about a couple players, but the entire team, they learn, get better.

We watched all the film. We had nothing but time getting ready for this team. We saw it from the beginning of the season till the end. This team improved quite a bit week to

week. I think we've done the same. So it's going to be a great matchup.

Q. Coach Prime, obviously you were saying how you're trying to maybe delay some of the emotion that comes with tomorrow's game. A decades' long chapter coming to a close with you coaching your sons. Is that something you'll reflect on after this game as you look back on a decades's long period?

DEION SANDERS: Yeah, I've already thought about it. You got to understand, Jan is here, Cat, (indiscernible), some of my homies are here with me that traveled to this game. They've been coaching, they've been with me since youth. I mean, we started this thing ironically in Texas, in the hood, a multitude of years ago. It has gone and gone and gone.

This is a tremendous calling that God placed in my life to be around these kids, raise these kids to such a level as this. When you think about your steps being ordered, I'm thankful.

I'm thankful that Rick gave me the opportunity. We wouldn't have had a Heisman Trophy winner, a guy that daunted to be in the first or second pick of the whole draft. Several other guys are definitely going to get drafted. It wouldn't have happened if I wouldn't have accepted that calling. So I'm thankful with the opportunities afforded to me. I'm thankful to be here, period.

This has been a journey that you can't help but reflect on. Shoot, I was just in high school a few years back. Coach has been doing his thing for a minute. His resilience and dedication, what he's built.

Man, this is a blessing. I don't take any moment for granted.

Q. If you could change one thing about college football, I'm curious what you would change, conference schedule, recruiting...

DEION SANDERS: That's a good one, coach. You take that first. I'm going to ponder this thought.

KALANI SITAKE: As long as we play the game of football, I don't care. They tell us what the rules are, we adapt. I think the key is to be proactive, think ahead, stay with the times.

I like old-school principles myself, but I also don't want to be outdated. I want to be on the cusp of forward thinking. Whatever they say, whatever they pass, we just try to stay ahead of it. As long as we play the game of football, I'm

good with it.

DEION SANDERS: I've had a minute to think while coach gracefully answered the question.

I think financial literacy classes should be mandatory so these kids understand how to manage their money. It should be a pay scale, structured. It can't be Tom, Dick and Harry get this because he had a great year somewhere else, then that throws off the chemistry and structure of your whole team. One of you guys come out here, some guy comes in here from outside and they make more money not doing the work you've done, that's not fair.

I think the NFL has handled it right. I think we need to mimic the NFL when it comes to that. Right now we're not pros but we're semi pro. That's the way it's going. If we don't get ahold of it, it's going to keep going left.

The teams that don't have the budgets, like us, it's going to be hard to sit up here in front of you and make it to a Playoff game because now it turns into Pay-Per-View, and we don't want that at this age and stage. It's supposed to be amateur and it's not.

You want them to get compensated correctly for their talent, but it has to be structured.

Q. You mentioned Coach Edwards a moment ago. Sitting in your position, being at BYU, what is his legacy?

KALANI SITAKE: Oh, everything. I mean, I'm here 'cause of LaVell Edwards, because of his coaching staff. They're great examples to me when I was a player for them. I like the way they did things, that I chose to become a coach myself.

I'm a fullback that was in an air raid type of system. Fullbacks are a rare breed anyway, let alone one that's in a system that throws the ball quite a bit.

The influence that I had from him, myself and other people, I mean, I'm not the only one. There's a lot of guys that come from LaVell Edwards' coaching tree. Andy Reid, who is doing a great job in the NFL, being able to adjust and adapt. Steve Sarkisian is another one. Quite a few out there. Kyle Whittingham. Mike Leach, when I was playing, he was at BYU practices quite a bit, spring ball.

LaVell Edwards is an amazing man. I'm still close to his family. I'm trying to do it like he did, try to make him proud. If there's something original about me, a lot of what I'm doing is what he did for me, trying to establish it in this time.

Q. Coach Sitake, Coach Prime mentioned how emotional tomorrow is going to be. Seeing this incredible group of seniors, what is tomorrow going to be like for you emotionally?

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, just grateful for the seniors. Last five years, this is the third time they've won double-digit wins. They've done a lot for our program. Ushered us into the Big 12 from independence. We've seen them do some historical things. I love 'em. I love this team.

It's interesting because we are fathers as coaches. We are fathers. We are also fathers of this team. The relationships, all that, it's sad that it's coming to an end. That's why we want to perform our best, then see what happens.

Regardless of the result, I know that it's going to be a sad day anyways. We're going to say good-bye to some of these guys. I know there's a lot of talent, draft picks on Colorado's side. We got some, too.

It's interesting. I talked to some of these guys yesterday. You're going to be teammates with a lot of these guys we're playing against at the next level.

It's going to be one of those games, there's already a lot of attention involved with it for obvious reasons, the talent that we've seen. I mean, just the personalities. It's really, really good for college football. What Deion has been able to do is very impressive. I'm just happy to be part of it.

But overall just going to be hard to say good-bye to these guys no matter what the result is. Then we've got to move on. For me, for Coach Prime, we just want to live in the moment, enjoy it as much as we can.

Q. Big 12 matchup. You both have ties to Kyle Whittingham, have been complimentary of him. Whether there's a passing of the torch that's about to happen or not, can you speak to the Big 12 aspect, the relationship that you have with the stalwart in this conference?

DEION SANDERS: First of all, I don't want that torch. That torch is unbelievable. It's heavy. The consistency that he's brought for years and years and years is unbelievable. That thing is too heavy for me to carry. He is phenomenal. I look up to him. I look out for him. I pray for him. He is awesome, exemplified.

When you deal with his team, you know you got to bring it. I mean, you talk about personality. Tough, rugged, physical, aggressive. That's who you playing against. You

playing against a coach.

Hats off. Utmost respect. Nothing but kind to me every time I've been in his presence. I respect the heck out of that. I respect the heck out of him. He's exceeded expectations in meeting him than before I met him.

KALANI SITAKE: You know my connection to him. I worked for him for a decade. We have a great friendship. He's a mentor of mine.

You say 'passing the torch'. Who has held the torch in this conference? It's changed quite a bit. The parity is unbelievable. I don't know if you can really feel comfortable holding the torch.

That's a compliment to the rest of the teams in the conference, it's not like there's a sustainable No. 1 the entire time. It's rotated quite a bit. We want to make sure we're in the mix.

We're going to be in the mix if we can keep getting better every week, keep improving our program, we just get back to the basics. That's what we're going to focus on.

I wouldn't be sitting here, Coach Prime wouldn't be sitting here, it took a lot of other people that work hard for us to get here. We're both good at allowing the outside influences and those that helped us get to where we are, highlight them, show them gratitude and becoming the best mentors and coaches we can ourselves.

Q. Coach Prime, you mentioned last week that the high schoolers coming in gave your team kind of a jolt last week. For those players, especially the quarterbacks, what value have they gotten from being around your team?

DEION SANDERS: Tremendous. First of all, seeing how (indiscernible) operates in practice, how he focuses as the game approaches, as well as how we move at practice, the expectation, intensity, the passion for the purpose in practice, how defined we are. The speed, how the competition level is. It was vital on them.

Let me digress a bit. It's not just about my kids in this last moment. When I'm thinking about Shane Cokes, Chidozie, Travis, Gant, some of these guys on defense. We've all had moments in my office or on the field that could bring you to tears if you really knew those moments. Cam Silmon, who has been playing for me since he was a sophomore during high school.

Then the offensive side, all the darn receivers, including LaJohntay, that earned his No. 1 because he brought his

grades up. Jimmy Horn, who I was just with he and his father a couple weeks ago. Will Sheppard. So many of these guys that you shared different moments with. It's unbelievable.

I mean, so many things that you reflect on. Coach has these moments as well with his team and his seniors. It's unfortunate that they're moving on, but you pray that you poured into them enough that when they move on they move up. They're not just passing by. They move on and they move up. You've blessed them with knowledge and support and love and compassion in those moments.

The most vital moments aren't even about the field. It's about what transpires in life that you're able to be there for them. Those are the things that I passionately adore with many of our seniors, that I can't wait to see them soar. But it's going to be tough on both sides.

These guys, we're about to get on a roller coaster the other day, and I was scared to death. I don't do roller coaster stuff. I am trying to be a good father. But Travis talked me into getting on this darn roller coaster.

His guys were in line as well. I told a couple of your big boys, I said, C'mon, man, we family. Do you know why I did that? Because of the love I have for this man and the support and the compassion that he's exuded to me. His kids are family.

Anytime I saw them at the park, I embraced them, showed them love. I think they enjoyed skipping the line, going up to the front as well.

KALANI SITAKE: They tried to follow you around a little more (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you coaches.

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