

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl: Utah State vs Washington State

Monday, December 22, 2025

Boise, Idaho, USA

Albertsons Stadium

Utah State Aggies
Bronco Mendenhall
Jacob Conover
John Miller

Postgame Press Conference

Washington State - 34

Utah State - 21

THE MODERATOR: Joining me from Utah State, Bronco Mendenhall, Jacob Conover and John Miller.

We'll begin with an opening statement from coach.

BRONCO MENDENHALL: First, I'd like to just thank the bowl game for an amazing experience. Just we were treated exceptionally well, the activities, but also just the organization. So we felt lucky and privileged to be a part of this game.

Congratulations to Washington State. They deserved to win the game through execution and through production. So congratulations to them.

To my players, two sixth-year players. What a unique challenge that they have been through in the landscape of college football. Lucky they ended up at Utah State, to call Utah State home.

Really fun to see Jacob. Man, that will be cemented in my memory banks forever, to see someone when he gets his opportunity to play as well as he did, to lead and to help our team.

With John, both these guys, it's only been a year, but John has been the catalyst defensively for so many games, making so many plays. Their resilience, effort and leadership, yeah, it's been really fun to be their coach.

So Washington State played really strong defensively for the majority of the game. We didn't capitalize on a couple



turnovers early on, which I think swung the momentum a little bit. But we just ultimately didn't play consistently enough really in any phase to end up having a chance to take over and win the game.

In moments, we started to battle back, our execution didn't hold, or our consistency didn't hold. That's exactly where we were.

So I'm looking forward to the continued growth of this program. Really looking forward to the Pac-12. That's a Pac-12 preview game, so that's great learning and takeaway for us, and a chance to play one more football game with young people that I love.

We came to win the game. Fell short. My responsibility is to have the team prepared to play and execute at a level that will hold through an entire game and be strong enough to help us win. I fell short, as well.

Love my team and love the work they put in this year.

I'll take questions if there are any.

Q. Coach, like you said, it was a Pac-12 preview game. Now you can start looking to the future a bit. What can you say about Washington State heading into the Pac-12?

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Even in the preparation leading up to, I like Washington State's roster, I liked their length, their size, the depth they had. I like their style of play. I thought they were a good opponent.

A few close losses really traveling all over the country having a chance to win more games than what they did. But I was impressed not only with how they're coached but what their roster looked like.

So benchmarking happens all the way along. Again, our program will continue to improve. We'll continue to add players that fit with our program and follow in these guys' footsteps. And we will continue to coach them in a way where there is more precision, execution and consistency.

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But that's what it looked like. Washington State was the better team today.

Q. What can the program and you do to establish yourself as a leader?

BRONCO MENDENHALL: We're just getting started in culture. We're just getting started in execution. We're just getting started with our roster. The clock is ticking. That's how it works in college football.

But I like the foundation a lot with what we're launching from. So just work in all areas. That's what happens with the college football coach and a program right after their bowl game. It's right back to work. On to the selection and assessment of players to replace all the great guys we just had with us, all the schematic adjustments that have to be made. You continue and get right back to work.

Q. Coach, I want to ask about your defense. Played pretty well early in the game, they were holding Washington State fairly well with one exception for most of the first half, then Washington State gained momentum in the second half. What went into that?

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Really surprising, the run game, right? The very first drive in the second half. We weren't fitting cleanly, precisely, nor consistently. So you have to give Washington State credit because they were executing.

Really there was really no intent nor capability to run the ball in the first half. Washington State was mostly in the air. They had success being able to run the football in the second half, which then, man, kept our defense off balance and playing run calls, pass calls, and neither very consistently, which led to some big plays.

The ability to run the football was the difference in the game. I thought the second half, in particular, which attributed to us just not being consistent enough doing what we are supposed to do over and over again.

Q. Talk about what sort of toll this game had on you guys physically, emotionally, mentally, more so mentally, just making some momentum plays and then losing those back to Washington State? Talk about the toll that left on you guys.

BRONCO MENDENHALL: It was a physical game, for sure. That's what a Pac-12 game is going to look like. That's what it looks like in Game 13 of a year, as well.

I mean, you put it in context of Game 13 rather than just that. The targeting call where Ike was removed as well as

Noah Avinger not being able to play through an injury, as well. That tests your roster pretty quickly.

But that's what happens in bowl games. That's what happens in week 13. That's what happens when you play physical and tough opponents. It played out just like that.

I'll let these guys speak. Direct your questions to them, unless you still want to talk to me.

Q. Coach, your opinion on the offense. You knew coming in how good of a defense Washington State is. You were held to 50 yards in the first half. Speak to those issues.

BRONCO MENDENHALL: They were outstanding. There's a reason they've been statistically strong, not only this year at Washington State, but the defensive coordinator the previous two years, FCS stop, leading the country in defense. Really strong scheme. Really good players that execute well within that.

Again, they were consistent. They were consistently better just really in most circumstances until the very end where we were able to kind of make a last-minute push. Yeah, I was impressed. They were as advertised, for sure.

Q. Jacob, can you talk about coming into in this game after Bryson goes down.

JACOB CONOVER: We preach just always being ready. I think that just goes to show the culture that Coach Mendenhall established. Week 13, guys are going down. That shows the relentlessness of our team.

Sometimes you think maybe there's a Heavenly Father above who cares about football. Thankfully it wasn't a pick-six. It goes to show there's a hundred guys on our team that never quit, fight side by side, offense and defense.

Q. John, we talked a lot this week about just how much the defense has improved. Today was another example of that. Great in third down, fourth down situations. Allowed some explosive plays as well. Talk about the level of pride you have for that group and how far they've come throughout the season.

JOHN MILLER: Yeah, I'm extremely prideful of my group on the defensive side. We put in a lot of work, especially after the New Mexico game. I felt that was a punch in the mouth we woke up from. Decided from there we were going to play some good ball, make it look the right way.

We couldn't do that without the coaching staff, Coach



Mendenhall, our DC, other position coaches. We couldn't do it without them because they help put us in the right positions, schemes, make us fly around, play fast. I'm extremely proud of this group. I wouldn't want to do it with any other group. Grateful I got to do my last ride with this group.

Q. Coach, obviously the Mountain West era for Utah State is over. You're looking forward to the Pac-12. Now that you have this bowl game after your first year, what can you say about the future of football with the Pac-12?

BRONCO MENDENHALL: I'm thrilled with the direction of Utah State football, but also Utah State athletics. Our athletic director is here.

Man, I think there's just fantastic leadership and alignment that exists there. Our new president, it's the Trifecta teams to be lined up really well. I certainly have to do my part.

I love the leadership. I love the direction. I love the support. Now I love the opportunity with a new league and this program.

I think we're staged really well. Lots of work to do, as we saw today. Post-season, it's great to qualify, but it's better when you have success and you win.

It really was the transparency of where we are. Love my players. Love these guys. Love their mindset. Everything about 'em.

So they've propelled us forward. They've given us a baseline to now launch from, which I'm really grateful for.

Q. People draw conclusions about the season. What do you draw from this season, it being your last? How do you look back on the 13 games you played this year?

JACOB CONOVER: I guess one word you can put is just 'gratitude'. I don't think oftentimes a record reveals all the truths of a team. We preach, Coach Mendenhall preaches all the time, the greatest gift he can give us is of extreme high expectations. With that comes so many challenges.

One thing our team learned was giving all we could give and still failing. I think that's a battle that every single person faces in their life. I wouldn't trade this for nothing.

JOHN MILLER: Like Jacob said, I agree. I feel like the biggest thing of our team was the grit. The record doesn't really show how we feel about ourselves, what we really went through. Coach preaches about having hard times

together builds stronger bonds.

I feel like this team is so tightly connected. They're going to catapult themselves next year into a new league. I'm excited to see it happen. I'm just happy I could help this team do what they needed to do for the most part, get people to next year to do what they need to do.

Q. Some players aren't going to have a next season. What does the off-season look like for you starting today with the tasks you have ahead of you?

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, it's really a unique. Think I college football is still trying to figure it out, and not very effectively, quite frankly, in terms of timing.

Our athletic director and I were talking the other day. It's really interesting. It seems like college football tries to play the Super Bowl and have the Draft and change coaching all at the same time rather than just sequence it. There is no off. There is no off (smiling). There's change clothes and on is how it works.

The transfer portal opens January 2nd. Our school, Utah State, we begin January 5th. That's the fastest turnaround in all of college football.

Yeah, our coaches will be with their families and on their phones and on their computers, which is how it works, as maybe a lot of professionals. But that's starting with the bus ride home.

Q. Jacob, your college career has been really example of ups and downs of the college sports world. What does it mean to you to be able to come into this game and contribute to this team? More of an in general bigger-picture question. All of the ups and downs that you've gone through personally in your career, what do you take away from that and how do you see those things impacting your future? With this team, the ups and downs you've gone through this season, how can they improve and grow?

JACOB CONOVER: Yeah, I think one of the biggest lessons I've learned has really been instilled here my last year here at Utah State, man, it all starts with self-belief. I'd be lying to you if I said my self-belief wasn't shaken through all those six years.

So diving down to never give up and committing to that, living unconditionally, never setting limits on yourself.

Man, what a better year just to embrace that with this group. You want to talk about a team that just commits to one another. I mean, it's not a team, it's a family.



To experience that throughout six years, to learn, a ton of opportunities to learn, to never give up. To finish a year like this has been something very special for me that I'll carry on with the rest of my life and share with my future family and kids.

No matter what you face in life to never, ever give up. You never know whose life you need to be a part of and team. I'm so grateful for the other guys around me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

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