

# DIRECTV Holiday Bowl: Syracuse vs Washington State

Thursday, December 26, 2024

San Diego, California, USA

Petco Park

## Fran Brown

## Pete Kaligis

### Coaches Press Conference



RICK SCHLOSS: Morning, everybody. I'd like to bring up Jackie Reed, president of Sports San Diego, director of the DIRECTV Holiday Bowl. She'll make some remarks, then we'll go to Q&A.

JACKIE REED: I want to thank you all for being here today. We are so excited. It's bowl week, and we have two amazing teams here to play a great game for you tomorrow.

I have the privilege of introducing the coaches. After I introduce them, they'll say a few remarks, then open to taking questions.

From the visiting team, it is my pleasure to introduce from the Syracuse Orange head coach Fran Brown.

FRAN BROWN: Thank you. Thank you a lot Miss Jackie.

First and foremost I want to thank God for waking us up this morning, our staff, our players. On behalf of Syracuse, our chancellor Kent Syverud, or athletic director, John Wildhack, we are extremely thankful and happy to be here.

This means a lot for us to have an opportunity to play in such a prestigious bowl game, a prestigious school, a head coach interim right now that I think has done an amazing job.

He has some good players that he was able to keep back. Right now the way the portal going, things of that nature, seeing all the guys, seeing how they were with each other, how we were together the other day when we were at the Navy, we shared a little event together.

I was very, very pleased and impressed with the job that he's done, that the staff has done, all those players. Even seeing them yesterday, what was it called, SeaWorld, getting to see those guys there yesterday, I'm impressed. Thankful we get a chance to go against those guys.

I think the quarterback coming back in, to pronounce his name, last name is pretty hard, Zevi Eckhaus. I thought he did a good job. Watched a lot of film of him. I was watching film on him the last few days. Thought he did a really good job.

The running back, I wrote my own notes down, I think Leo did a really good job throughout the year of just running the ball, getting an opportunity to be in there, run the football.

I think you all know they have some of the better receivers in of the country. Get a chance to go against Kyle, Josh, Carlos, Cooper the tight end. On the defensive side of the ball, Tyreek, all those guys they have, I think they do a really good job.

We know they'll be a tough football team to play, especially when you have a defensive line guy at heart being a defensive coach right now. We know we have our hands full. We're thankful for the opportunity to play against these guys.

I want to say happy holidays to Syracuse fans, alum, everybody in the country. Happy holidays.

JACKIE REED: Thank you.

Now our home team from Washington State, I am proud to introduce head coach Pete Kaligis.

PETE KALIGIS: Thank you. There's so many thanks and so much to be grateful for. I'd like to thank the Holiday Bowl committee for giving our young men one of the best experiences. The staff at the Grand Hyatt, the catering service setting up breakfast at 4 a.m. so our young men can eat at 7 a.m., sacrificing their time on Christmas morning to provide for us.

I want to thank SeaWorld for their time. I want to thank Captain Gary Harrington and the crew on the USS Tripoli for giving us time on Christmas Eve. I want to thank Coach Brown for the welcoming that he gave us and our team and his staff. So much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for in this process as we go.

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As we've gone through this, I do thank my Heavenly Father for giving me an opportunity to lead. I'm on my knees before him to lead these men in His way, not my way. That's number one to me.

I know we're up against a very, very, very, very good opponent. Defensively three down to four down with Bates all over the place, rushing the edge, getting after people.

The structure they do in the back end disguising their coverages. They go. I know how fast that ball gets out on the perimeter in the RPO game. That's why they average 397 a game in the air.

They play hard. They're very well-coached. They don't make mistakes. They don't make mistakes. So when you watch 'em, it's been fun. Coach, it's been an honor to watch your team all season long in every situation. Trust me, you do a great job.

I'd also just like to wish my family back home a merry Christmas to them, the Coug Nation, Merry Christmas. I'd also like to thank Anne McCoy and Ike for giving me this opportunity to I always say lead these men from behind. What you see tomorrow, it's the men, it's not me. They deserve all the credit. So thank you very much.

RICK SCHLOSS: We'll take some questions.

**Q. Wonder what you think of the current state of college football with the transfer portal and how you have dealt with the ins-and-outs heading into the game time on Friday.**

PETE KALIGIS: Going into the ins-and-outs of the game tomorrow doesn't matter. We are who we are, we have what we have. I know that's for both of us.

The state of the college football right now the way it's changed, with the portal, NIL, it's a whole different game that we have to adapt to as coaches. That's where you start to see that relationships are important.

When a staff leaves and guys get in the portal, it's because the relationships they have garnered with their position coaches. When that position coach isn't guaranteed he's going to be there, that's who that young man trusts.

I've been doing this for a long time. What's been hard for me, I spent 13 years at Wyoming, I saw three graduating classes. I remember I was the longest tenured coach there. To see them all the way through. When I came to WAZZU, I was their fourth D-line coach.

I always ask the men the question, How can you become your best when the coaching staffs are always changing, the process changes, the technique changes. How can a young man become his best when the coach isn't there all the time?

When it changes for us, it's about loving the young man and finding the depth of their soul so you can coach them the way they need to be coached. They all have talent, but they need too believe in it.

Now it's becoming shorter for us as coaches to grab that young man and know the their souls because trust takes time. It's sacrifice. You're sacrificing time. The more you can pour into that young man, the faster you can pour into him in the recruiting process, gaining that relationship and trust which takes time, knowing who they are as young men so you can coach them the right way, get them to believe who they are, allow them to know that football is not their identity. When they know who they are as a man, then we as coaches, we just try to keep up with them because they're running so fast.

FRAN BROWN: That's a good answer that he gave. All of that, that's what I'll say (smiling).

Honestly, it's twofold. I think this gives everyone an opportunity to just adapt, such as he said. I think you need to adapt. It's not just the coaches that need to adapt now. I think it comes from an administration level, I think the Board of Trustees, things of that nature. It's everyone now, right?

Before it used to be how can we put together and have some of the better looking buildings in the country because that's where all the kids were going to. Now it becomes a different ballgame where kids are going to school now, they're getting NIL, right?

I think NIL is really the forefront of everything. So as long as you have a good NIL plan, you're consistent, you continuously, like he stated, love the players, they understand and know that you love them, I don't think you'll have too many worries.

There are going to be a lot of places that offer a whole bunch of money. I think there's a lot of kids that are looking for relationships. The relationships mean more because long-term they'll make more, right? You may have a kid that has an opportunity to make \$200,000. Once you're able to explain to them that 200 won't mean as much as your signing bonus may be, the relationship you'll have, and you already knowing and understanding that you'll have a job. The 200 won't mean as much as getting a degree from Syracuse, which is what you're going

to college to really do.

Then with the game, I mean, we just want to play football. Wish we played today. I want to play the game. I'm excited about the game. Practice is everything to me. I mean, if you've been watching and seeing, we love practice.

But I think right now the NIL state and the transfer portal, I'm comfortable with it. Whatever comes, we going to adapt to it. It just gives our administration, the coaching staff, the alum, the Board of Trustees, gives everyone an opportunity to be on one team and to do what's best for the university so we can move on and not just have to play in this game, which is an amazing bowl game.

I want to play next Wednesday, you know? My goal is to be playing Wednesday. We fell a little bit short of that. We're truly thankful that we got to be in such a prestigious Tier I bowl.

To be able to play next Wednesday we have to be able do adapt and compete in the NIL area to keep guys out of the portal so they're going to want to be there with us.

**Q. Fran, Washington State, a lot of guys went into the portal. You have at least one in Anwar, maybe a couple more.**

FRAN BROWN: I don't think Anwar is in the portal. Guys go into the portal for situations, right? All situations are different. Can you play here? Cool. Maybe you can't play here, you know you can't play here. There's a lot of honesty that comes from me. You listen to me all year long. I'm going to tell you if you can or can't play here. Are you adapting to our culture? If you're not, I'm telling you you can't play here.

So it's a big difference. I think Anwar has taken over the last month a role of, Okay, I need to do what I need to do to be the man I'm supposed to be. If I do what I'm supposed to do off the field to be the man I'm supposed to be, then becoming a great football player will be easy.

He obviously has the talent to do that. It was all the other areas. It was the faith, it was the academics, it was just all those little pieces of making sure that I get it all together the right way and keep going.

Sometimes when kids graduate early, they feel they can just kind of ease their way through. Masters degree, still have to get that. Still things you have to do.

A lot of kids go in the portal because it's not the right fit. I'm not an easy coach. I might be cool with the way they

dress, things of that nature. There's structure. That's what DART is. Dart is about being detailed, accountable, relentless and tough.

Sometimes guys go into the portal because this is too tough for them. Sometimes they go into the portal because they can't play. Sometimes I may say, You should go. There's guys that went in the portal, a kid I didn't want to go, he didn't feel this was the situation for him.

A little bit of competitiveness, bringing a lot of tall, fast guys in. I think big people beat little people up. The more big people we bring in that can run as fast will have an opportunity to play next week, next season.

**Q. I'm going to allow you to finish what you want to finish with your team. You said you don't want to be here, and that's that, you're not welcome anymore.**

FRAN BROWN: I'm the number one person, unless you go to John Wildhack, our athletic directors, you say I'm not comfortable, this is not what I want to do. You go right to who's above myself or you come to me, you come talk to me like a man. I don't know if this is the right fit for me, I might want to go, then we can sit there and I can probably let you finish out the year.

If you go spreading that through the team, you're becoming a cancer, then I got to get you out right there. That's the way to get rid of cancer, is to cut it out, right? Make sure we do that right away. We don't want any cancers on our football team, things of that nature. We want a tight ship where we need all positivity. Too much going on in the world in life for us to have a bunch of negative guys on our football team.

**Q. To jump into your domain, the defensive line, how are you feeling about the depth going into this game there, your rotations with your starting defensive tackles not here?**

PETE KALIGIS: As everyone know, we lost three. David Gusta is not playing because of his ankle. So with the depth, you make changes and you put young men in there that got heart. They're going to be trained and they're going to fight and do what they do. You train 'em year-round.

Also they always got to be ready. The time has come. I'm excited to watch these young men play tomorrow. Like I said, that's what it's going to be the whole message tonight and tomorrow, is that it's your time to shine. It really is.

I have 100% faith in the men when they go on the field they'll execute to the best of their ability. They will do what

they have to do.

**Q. Buddah Al-Uqdah about 45 minutes ago announced a transfer to U-Dub, arch rival of Washington State.**

PETE KALIGIS: I'll say no comment to that. Thank you very much.

**Q. Anything you can say at this time about whether or not you and the university are exploring Kyle McCord coming back for another year and where they're at in that process?**

FRAN BROWN: You listen to this man talk over there? He's extremely tough. I'm focused on trying to go out and get a W against them the same way he's doing that.

I think the NCAA right now is closed. They're on a long holiday break also. We don't really know about that, say about that. We're just focused on trying to play against a tough football team.

When this comes out, you'll be the first to know.

**Q. Lighten it up a little bit here. If you guys win, you get an eggnog shower. Have you thought about the eggnog shower? What would it mean to each of you?**

FRAN BROWN: I'm allergic to eggs, so Dave Villari is taking the NIL deal (laughter). I think Meier's Creek already said they would love for him to be the guy to do it. I'm allergic to eggs.

I definitely would love to pour the eggnog on Dan, if I could.

PETE KALIGIS: I'm sorry. Nothing I've thought about. I haven't thought about that. If it happens, God's will. All glory to Him. All glory to Him.

**Q. Pete, how many of your portal guys are going to suit up?**

PETE KALIGIS: I'm sorry. I can't give you the exact number. There's been so much in the press. When Coach Dickert resigned, (indiscernible) and I sat down and said anybody after December 18th that entered the portal was able to play. I can't give you the exact number of who's all in.

Obviously the players that left before December 18th, they won't be here. They won't be playing. The guys, I can't give you that exact number. I know we came here with 98 guys, that's who we're going to show up on the field with.

**Q. How different will the Cougars be tomorrow night**

**compared to the team we saw down here beating San Diego State in late October?**

PETE KALIGIS: How different? That's a really good question to ask.

I think you're going to see a different team than you saw at San Diego State the first time. I think you're going to see a team that's going to be playing with a lot of energy, a lot of excitement, and playing with a lot of love together as one. That's what I believe you're going to see.

**Q. Coach Brown, obviously you've established a disciplined culture on your team, but also engaged your guys doing a lot of community service, having fun. What does coming to the Holiday Bowl and getting to go to SeaWorld and things like that, doing that bonding, help contribute to success on the field?**

FRAN BROWN: I think it helps a lot. We've been doing that the entire year. I think in life you have to be comfortable and understanding in knowing that you need to seek, save and serve. First and foremost, we want always to be able to help, be that hand. I don't know if I could be that voice that could change somebody's mindset for the rest of their lives. That's important to us.

It's been fun here being together. I mean, honestly I like practice. Everything else been straight. My wife is here, my kids, all the other coaches' wives and kids. We don't usually get to see them. You try to structure everything so we can have an opportunity of getting some time with them.

We get to do a lot of things together, not just as a football team, but we get to do it with our families and with our players' families. We had a nice little dinner last night with everyone together for Christmas night. It was cool to be able to do that.

There's a lot of players who were here whose families aren't here. We wanted to make sure everybody got to be around each other. We're that extended family for all of us being together. That's from our A.D. all the way down, everyone is there, together. We are all in on the same page. We kind of do it that way.

If you understand and know our chancellor, know what Syracuse is about, you would understand we're a tight-knit family up there. Everyone sticks together. We wear our heart on our sleeves so you know how we feel.

It's important that we spend time together. It's important that we help others. We want to bring the bottom of the hill and the top of the hill, make sure everyone understands

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each other so we kind of force bringing that thing together.

**Q. Fran, you mentioned the NCAA might be on a little bit of a break. How difficult is the uncertainty for you in terms of roster building? Is that impacting your off-season?**

FRAN BROWN: No, I'm good. I'm focused, man. I'm focused on this game. They're not wearing these red jackets for this game not to be legit.

We're focused on the game. We want to go out and have a good game. We have an opportunity of winning 10 games, which means you're starting to become a successful program, right? Our players haven't had a chance of winning a bowl game. So there's a lot of things that are on the line for us to really be able to build our program and being able to move forward.

We're also going against a prestigious program who has a lot to come together. A lot of people think the portal, they had all this stuff going, things of that nature. You listen to him talk, I hear everything. I've been saying, those guys are going to come together closer. Everyone that's not with us, circle the wagon, it's about us. This is for us, we're going to do it together.

Same thing we do. We're on the same page, make sure we do it for us, for our university. I think you'll see probably one of the better bowl games of the year with us playing against each other because you got two coaches that's not soft. We ready to go out there and compete. It's important that we focus on trying to get a 10th win against a good opponent.

**Q. Coach Brown, a few guys on the team last year had to go through the Boca Raton Bowl loss, 45 to nothing.**

FRAN BROWN: I'm not going to talk about that bowl game. That was one of the worst days of my life. I said, What the hell did I do?

**Q. How important is it for you and the guys on the team to end on a good note?**

FRAN BROWN: This is the start of our 2025 season. We're trying to focus on this game. I'm not thinking about last year's game. I'm thinking about today and being able to go focus. You've been listening to me all year, right? We do the same thing over and over and over daily.

Would I be thinking about the last year Boca Raton Bowl when I wasn't even a coach? I just took the job. That wasn't even my game. It became my team as soon as that clock hit zero.

We're focused on today right now. They're back there doing some things. I can't be there because I'm here answering these questions. I just love practice, man. I love practice.

**Q. Coach Brown, I keep hearing 'prestigious university' in terms of Washington State. They were obviously left out of the P4 conversation. Do you agree with that? What were your thoughts?**

FRAN BROWN: What I watched on film, that team that I saw, was really, really good. Like, I watch, I know different guys went. I also go and look at all the pieces who are replacing. Guys played all year. Outside of seeing the quarterback had to go do other things, everyone else was getting time. Everyone else was playing. They did a really good job of rotating.

It's not like we're going to play this team that they're not together. You can listen to the coach. I got a chance to just meet some of the other coaches.

Then I just go back to history, right? Washington has been known to be a great program for a long time, not just over this year or the past years. This was before the previous coach even became the coach. They've been doing a good job.

I just respect history. I respect football. You come to the west coast, I believe there's good football, right? Great football teams. UNLV did a heck of a job. San Diego State may not be having the best year right now, but they're a good team. USC is doing extremely good job. UCLA.

When you come out to the west coast, you have to understand and know there is good football out here, have the opportunity. When we get a chance to go across the country to play against another team, we want to make sure we come and have our best foot forward because we know everyone will be watching out here. It's like an east coast and west coast thing, right?

RICK SCHLOSS: Thank you.

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