

DIRECTV Holiday Bowl: Syracuse vs Washington State

Friday, December 27, 2024

San Diego, California, USA

Petco Park

Washington State Cougars

Pete Kaligis

Kyle Williams

Zevi Eckhaus

Kyle Thornton

Postgame Press Conference

Syracuse 52, Washington State 28

PETE KALIGIS: Well, thank you for all being here, in honor of Kyle Thornton, Kyle Williams and Zevi. There was a lot of questions asked about what team would show up, and I know it's disappointing. That's on me. That's not even on these young men, and I'll take it all, because they fought. They fought, and I'm so proud of them. I am so proud of them.

The one thing I do know, that love never fails, and it won't fail.

I'll open it up for questions now.

Q. Kyle, after the events of the last month or so, what was it like to get out and play a football game?

KYLE THORNTON: It's everything. The game of football for a lot of us, or for really everyone that plays it, it's the release from everything. When you're out there in between the white lines, you're not thinking about anything else, you're just thinking about playing football.

When all that chaos kind of started going around, and honestly it's been going around the Cougs for a while, but out there, that's our sanctuary. That's where you get to play free, play with your brothers, and you don't get to worry about it. So getting to play football, it's everything.

Q. For both Kyles, last game at WSU. Where is your head at when it comes to going through that?

KYLE WILLIAMS: It means everything. It's been a long



college journey for me, and it's been a roller coaster, a lot of ups and downs, but to finish it off where a lot of things went left and you just see the commitment of everybody, just the brotherhood and camaraderie of the team, it was something special, and if I could do it again, I would do it over and over and over with these boys.

KYLE THORNTON: Yeah, I'm not sure I have the words for it. I think that's why I'm kind of expressing it with the tears I'm showing up here, but just so many emotions. Honestly can't even believe that it's real.

I've been telling the guys, like, I don't even know what it's like to not show back up in January and report to winter camp. So we'll see how that goes.

But just so many emotions. So thankful for the journey. The biggest thing that comes to my mind is grateful. Grateful for all the individuals, all the coaches, all the players, all the staff, just all the people who have touched me life and helped shape me into who I am today, especially this man right here to my left. There's not many like him, and I wouldn't be here without him. Appreciate you, Coach.

PETE KALIGIS: Thank you, Kyle.

Q. Kyle Thornton, you showed up in 2019 under Coach Leach. You've been through it all. What kept you in Pullman?

KYLE THORNTON: Kind of what I just talked about, the special people. It's a special place. This team, I don't know if you can quantify it, but there's something special in this team. There's a love that this team has that they choose not to quit regardless of the circumstances. This whole year has been a fight, again, kind of just circling back to the first question, it's been a fight for the Cougs for a long time, and honestly, we wouldn't want it any other way. It's all we know. It's how we are. We love to fight. It's what brings us closer, and it's what makes us who we are.

Honestly, that's why I chose to stay, because I didn't want to be anywhere else. I wanted to be a part of that group,



be a part of that group of fighters, and again, just hopefully have the chance to pour into other people like they poured into me.

Q. For everybody, what has the Holiday experience meant for the team and for you guys?

ZEVI ECKHAUS: I mean, yeah, it was a blessed experience I would say. Not everybody gets the opportunity to play in a bowl game, let alone DirecTV Holiday Bowl, obviously a prestigious bowl game.

I think it goes to say even more everything that this team has went through in the past three weeks, the amount of changes, the amount of departures. There was a similar situation that happened to Marshall, and they backed out of their game. I think that just goes to show who WSU is. Who we are, we're not going to back down. We had a similar situation happen, but everybody is here. Everybody showed up. Everybody that we needed to go out there and perform performed. I mean, speaking from my own behalf, I'm just grateful. I'm grateful to be able to be in this position, to be able to be up here standing and talking to you guys and playing with these guys. I credit it all to God. I credit it all to these fellas around me for keeping me confident in my ability throughout the year, and I'm just grateful to be here, and I know the guys are, as well.

Q. Coach, the mood in the locker room, it was a big mountain to climb, and yet just listening to all these guys, it just seems the heart is really there.

PETE KALIGIS: Yeah, there's a lot of hugs, there's a lot of tears. A lot of tears. As Kyle said, these young men have made me who I am in the last three years. They poured into me more than I think I poured into them.

When you have to say goodbye, that's hard. It's hard. They're good young men, and there's just a lot of tears. A lot of tears.

Q. For all of you sitting up here, at different chapters in your careers. How do you plan on closing this one out, and what do you see personally for yourselves looking into the next chapter, and Coach, kind of would love for you to answer that, as well, what you see for this Washington State program.

KYLE THORNTON: I can start first. I guess future plans for me, this is probably the last time I'm going to lace up the cleats. Time to hang them up, trade it in for a whistle. Just, again, attributing to all the coaches who have poured into me. It gives me hope that I can hopefully pour into people like that, and model myself after this man to my left.

KYLE WILLIAMS: For me personally, I don't know what's next. Hopefully the next level, but at the end of the day, I'm just going to leave it to God. It's out of my control. Just take it one day at a time, one moment at a time. This is the last time I'm going to be with these boys, so right now I'm just worried about enjoying this moment with my brothers.

ZEVI ECKHAUS: I'd say the same. I just want to enjoy the moment that I have with this team. You're giving hugs and everything to people in there you know you're not going to be with anymore, like these two guys to my right. I just want to enjoy the moment with the people that I'm here with. I don't want to think too far ahead. Yeah, that's all I've got.

KYLE THORNTON: And for the Cougs as a whole, I just want to say, I know it's pretty easy to keep track of the ones that don't want to be a part of the team, but the Cougs who want to be Cougs, they're a little harder to track, but they're in there. Being inside the locker room, there's a lot of guys in there that bleed crimson and gray, and they want to be Cougs for life.

There's something special here in Pullman and the Cougs, and that's not going anywhere. There's some fighters in here that aren't going to change. They're going to carry on this legacy of fighting. I believe that. I know that. I know it's a little doom and gloom for the Cougs around now, but there's sunny days coming. There are sunny times coming. I do believe that. The future Cougs are going to go find it. I believe that.

Q. For Kyle Williams, you broke Dez Bryant's record for most career receiving yards in the DirecTV Holiday Bowl. What does that mean to you to finish out your college career like that, and Zevi, after Kyle, talk about what it meant to have him out there with you today?

KYLE WILLIAMS: Honestly, it's amazing. Every game I come and try to put on a show and do the most that I can, but to be the receiver that's all time and great like that is just an honor, and it shows all the work that I put in, it wasn't for nothing. I'm grateful I could do that, but I wouldn't have got it without this gunslinger.

ZEVI ECKHAUS: He's giving me so much credit. Yeah, I touched upon it earlier this week. For anybody that's watching, scouts, whoever, GMs, this kid's character is insane and his work ethic. He shows up every single day. He doesn't care about the accolades, the awards. I'm sure he appreciates them, but that doesn't define him. Whether he was hurting, whether he was sick, whatever the case may be, he showed up.

To have him here out there with us, to be a leader for the

wide receiver corps, it meant everything, and that's why the performance -- that doesn't just happen. You don't go out and break a record like that. He works every single day towards that goal, and he pushes himself and he pushes the guys around him. I'm so grateful to have a guy like that by my side to take the field this past game. I'm just grateful to have a man like that.

Q. Kyle Thornton, I saw you kind of hugging your parents there at the end and just kind of taking it all in. I'm wondering what does Cougar Nation mean to you as a man, not just a player?

KYLE THORNTON: The word "everything" I know is kind of cliché and I've used it a couple times, but it really is everything. You don't realize it when you're young because you're so young and so self-absorbed you don't really realize it, but just the amount of love that truly pours into this place, that's a real thing, man. It's so, so special. It's honestly why we do what we do.

As much as we love playing football, last time I checked, we don't play in empty stadiums. We play with people all around us. It takes a lot of people to get this football thing working, just all the love they have for us, Cougar Nation. What I kind of talked about earlier is just hold your head high, the people in this building that are staying, they're fighting, and whoever is next, they're going to be a fighter because that's what Pullman breeds. They breed fighters, fighters in a good way. So we're going to fight. It's going to keep fighting. Things will get better.

I can't thank them enough for just accepting me, letting me wear this jersey. I couldn't thank them enough.

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