

# Jimmy Kimmel LA Bowl Presented By Stifel: Washington State vs Fresno State

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Los Angeles, California, USA

SoFi Stadium

## Coach Jeff Tedford Coach Jake Dickert

### Press Conference

**Q. From the championship belt to being on Jimmy Kimmel, how would you both summarize the LA experience?**

COACH DICKERT: I think it's been really positive. I always look at bowl games as a reward for a team that you can go out there and create connections and have fun. And just to be in SoFi again, we had a coach's social on Tuesday, it's not just a stadium, it's an entertainment district and area.

I would echo coach the same way, a lot of our players are from California, a lot of players from Southern California.

Just hosted a Super Bowl, and going to host a national championship here in a couple of weeks, I think it's pretty special for the players, and that's kind of the way we've approached this week and had a little fun with the preparation and excited for kickoff.

COACH TEDFORD: And ditto. It's always a reward for the kids. A long, hard season. Get an opportunity to come and play a great football team like Washington State.

They've done an awesome job with how they've put everything together for the kids and the staff and to be able to go to Jimmy Kimmel and go to Universal Studios, and then, really, you hear a lot about this stadium, but they just got a chance to walk in here a couple of minutes ago. And very, very impressive.

And a lot of Southern California kids, they've never been here. And so what an opportunity to be able to play on the field. It doesn't happen every day.



**Q. Coach Tedford, in the age of the transfer portal, opting out to get ready for the NFL draft, you have players, Jake, Jalen and Jordan who opted into the bowl game. Did you sense their leadership this week in getting ready?**

COACH TEDFORD: That really never even came up about if anybody was going to play in the game or not play in the game. I think our guys are so committed to the process and each other, that it could have come up at some point, but it never did.

And so they've had a great week. And they have provided that leadership. And I don't even think they haven't batted an eye at it. They've just gone about their business like they normally do. And really excited to finish this season off together. It's the last time the 2022 team gets to play together. And so they're really excited for that opportunity.

**Q. How comfortable does it feel like the team has handled kind of the transition without the coordinators during this week of practice?**

COACH DICKERT: Well, I think it's always one of those things it's how you approach it. It's still a players' game. It's still guys going out there executing in the moment. It will be a couple new guys calling the plays.

But I think as we've gone throughout practice, it's more about operationally. You want to make sure as coaches, new roles, new assignments, making sure operationally we're clean so we can go out there, put our players in the best position to go out there and make plays. And that's always been the goal.

So I think our veteran group -- we have really good leadership. And I think they went out there, just took it to task every day. And it's good opportunities for coaches, too.

That's why in the spring game I let all different kinds of coaches call the plays, so they get ready for these moments and you get a feel for what that's like as you go through the process.



**Q. You've talked about it before, but how much fun has it been for you to transition back to defensive coordinator calling plays back in the room there?**

COACH DICKERT: I probably speak for coach, too. We love coaching ball. Love being back in the room, got a chance going into the linebacker room, working through some drills, calling the plays, going back to a lot of film study and the process.

It brings you back to why you're sitting here, because you love players, you love the game. You love going out there and competing. And that's what we're going to do on Saturday.

It's been fun. And just excited about what that can mean for our guys and putting them in the best position possible so they can go have some success.

**Q. Coach Dickert, I know last week you were sort of reiterating sort of the stress of everything that's going on between a lot of guys maybe opting out. You had the coordinators out. And you had the Signing Day next week. Now that the game is less than 24 hours away, have you been able to decompress, relax a little at all?**

COACH DICKERT: We're getting there. Once the ball is kicked off, none of that other stuff matters. It's about two great teams. I echo what coach said, they're champions for a reason. I have so much respect for the Mountain West. I was there for three years.

And with coach there, they're tough, hard, physical. And going to go out there, be prepared. So it's one of those things that you've got to go throughout our process and do those things.

But at the end of the day sometimes these early bowl games create different challenges. But once that ball is kicked off, both teams are in the same situation and both teams will be ready to play.

**Q. Coach Dickert, you'll have a chance for some young guys to step up in the bowl game. How have those guys tackled this week, some of those younger guys, and who are some of the guys you're expecting to step up tomorrow?**

COACH DICKERT: I think Kyle Thornton and Ben Wilson, two guys at linebacker that really waited their turn, have always been in the background, have been excellent special teams players will now step into starting linebacker roles and have the utmost confidence in them.

I went out there today and said, mistakes will happen, it's okay, go out there and play and cut it loose and don't think and make sure you're being the best you that you can possibly be.

So we're excited about some of those guys. I think Cam Lampkin has had some of the best practice during his bowl prep that he's had. We're excited about him getting into the rotation a little bit more.

Jordan Lee feeling more comfortable and healthy to go out there and play the role that I think he's always known is in there. He's had a bunch of injury situations with him throughout the season.

Excited to see some of those guys. And have Armani Marsh back will be really important for our defense, our communication, just the confidence of our guys out there.

**Q. I know this morning, players had the opportunity to go out and play with some kids and kind of do that thing. I guess how important is it to be able to do kind of do something like that in the process of the whole bowl thing?**

COACH TEDFORD: I think that's always really important. Community engagement is really important to this experience. I think it's great for the kids that we're going to see. But I think there's a lot of reward and gratification that comes out of things like that for our young men, too.

We try to do that around our town. And so to have an opportunity to represent our university and our team and go do that, I think it's great for everyone involved. So I'm glad that they do that. I'm glad they arrange that for us, because it means a lot to us.

**Q. Coach Dickert, do you believe that Fresno State should join the Pac-12 given there's now some vacancies?**

COACH DICKERT: No opinion on that. I appreciate you asking me. That's way over my pay grade. I think there's a bunch of teams out there. I know our leadership, not just at Washington State University, but our leadership in the Pac-12, I have the utmost confidence in navigating what the future of the Pac-12 looks like. I think there's a bunch of schools that would fit our profile and what we're looking for, not just on a regional level, but a national level.

So I think those questions will be answered here in short term. So hopefully we'll have those answers pretty soon.

**Q. Coach Tedford, is that something that the program is looking towards especially playing a Pac-12 team**



**tomorrow?**

COACH TEDFORD: I'm with coach, we have really nothing to do with that. We do our best to put a successful team on the field, graduate our kids, do things the right way. That's really all we can do.

And so those decisions are made from people a lot higher up than we are as coaches. I know with conference realignment, there's so many conversations that are going on, but those are being had at a whole different level than us, at least me. I'm not privy to those conversations.

I think competitively we've done a good job of competing with the best teams in the West Coast and some in the nation and things like that. So I don't think we've had a problem doing that. But I don't know what all -- I know it's about TV sets and it's about all that kind of stuff.

And so what the conversations are, that are being had, I really don't know. I hope that happens one day because I think our program deserves to be at that level.

**Q. Jake, obviously an exciting week here in LA. But I know the loss of Coach Leach is weighing heavily on the community and Pullman and on this program. I'm curious what your reflections are on his legacy both at Washington State and on the college football landscape as a whole?**

COACH DICKERT: I don't know Coach Leach personally, but I had an opportunity, not just from people in Pullman, but people in Coug Nation, to some of our coaches personally coached from Coach Leach.

To start with this, I think he allowed Coug fans again to be confident that we could win. He came to Pullman and Washington State to really not just revive himself, but to revive a program.

And I always talk about impact versus influence. Because you're the head coach, you have a lot of influence, but he's impacted many people's lives. And not just Cougs, but there's so many former players to hear his stories -- from Eric Morris and Clay McGuire and Joel Filani who were personally coached by him, all the way through our administrative people, and just fans in general, they love Coach Leach.

I think he's made a lasting impact locally in Pullman but nationally in college football. And his footprint will be on football for a long time. And as coaches, you can only dream of having that sort of impact, not just on the game, but on people and players.

We're excited to honor coach Saturday. We'll have a helmet sticker for him and hopefully everyone will understand there's a gravity to the moment. And we lost a great ambassador for the game.

**Q. No shortage of stories that we've all heard over the years of Coach Leach, is there a story you've heard that stands out?**

COACH DICKERT: I can only say those are speculation. No. The ones that stick out to me are the ones that people don't hear of just a man that was so giving of his time, that would give to the kids and the people in the community. And any coach that came up, he was more than willing to sit with them for hours on end to teach them the game of football and to give him his time. So I think that says the type of character and type of man Coach Leach was. Without me personally knowing him, those are the ones that stick with me the most.

COACH TEDFORD: I'd like to have the opportunity to talk about that, too, because we are so saddened by the loss of Coach Leach. I do know Coach Leach well through some of these bowl game experiences, back when I was at Cal, we played them at Texas Tech.

We had to come for a press conference a couple weeks early. Him and I and our DFOs went across the street and told stories until way into the night.

And obviously he did most of the talking because he was the best storyteller there ever was. And then to be on head coach trips with him, the Nike trips, things like that, we always hung out, had such a great time.

And he was the first guy up every single morning. He was so intelligent. He was the first guy up. Always going out, doing something historical, finding something new to learn.

And he was such a deep guy. My prayers out to Sharon and his kids. Just a tremendous guy. We're going to miss him. Innovator in football, without a doubt. But just an unbelievable human being. One-of-a-kind to be around, I can tell you that. We had so many great times talking, telling stories; I'm going to miss him.

**Q. Is there anything you learned from him either from a coaching perspective or just a life perspective that you think you'll carry with you in the way that you run your program?**

COACH TEDFORD: Well, I wish I could do it like him, because I would go into -- when I used to call all the plays and I had a sheet that was about this big (gesturing), people used to call it my pizza box. And he's got this little

sheet like this (gesturing), and they're running up and down the field with this little bitty sheet. I'm definitely doing something wrong here. I've got way too many plays or whatever, because he had it down.

I think the disciples he has in football are so well-respected. And like coach said, when you can leave your mark on something, not just the game, but the people that he has coached, he definitely has done that. And Mike Leach will never be forgotten.

**Q. Coach Dickert, at Pac-12 Media Day, you talked about how this year's team is going to be different. You would win together, you would just become more ignited. How do you feel like the team kind of answered the call this season?**

COACH DICKERT: I think the biggest thing, it was all about winning and losing as a team. I think there's sometimes a point, when I got there in 2020, you look up Washington State in the dictionary, you see just offense.

And it was about doing something together. And the new Wazzu and new accountability and new relationships and new discipline in the program, I thought our guys did a really great job of getting to this point.

I said, we're here for a reason. Excited about the growth that we've had and the adversity that we faced and how we came through it on the other side.

We lost to five quality opponents. In those games we had opportunities. There's things to build on. There's a lot of positives that come out of year one of trying to establish a program and lay a foundation.

**Q. Coach Tedford, with all the NFL talent that's come through Fresno State, do you feel like there's really much left to prove on a national stage as far as how you guys win compared to just, let's say, a team that goes and wins like 10 games in the season versus just winning bowl games every year, do you feel like Fresno State deserves and has that respect?**

COACH TEDFORD: I believe so. Yeah. I think we've had our share of success. And we won 10 and we won 12 and 10 last year. And if we were fortunate enough to be successful this week, it would be 10.

I think we have a tradition of being highly competitive no matter who we play. We have great kids on our team. We have great coaches on our staff. We have a lot of support in our community.

And we've been fortunate to have a lot of guys go out to

the next level and play. But I think the key is to try to stay consistent. The day and age of college football right now, who knows, with this portal stuff and everything going on.

I think it's just kind of an open book right now to see how this is all going to play out. I think it's so new, unpredictable that time will tell over the next few years about when stats start coming up about is the portal good or not so good, I think college football changing and I think it's going to be very interesting to see where it goes in the next few years.

**Q. With the way COVID kind of just gave everybody such an extra year of eligibility and high school kids, JUCO kids have to kind of stay behind, has it been easier to kind of recruit that level, in comparison to the portal?**

COACH DICKERT: Well, I would say this: I mean, COVID has been interesting, more for the fact that like an Armani Marsh on our team, got an opportunity to coach him for an extra year. I think there's been a developmental process that those kids have gone through. But it also has affected some guys at some lower levels.

But at Washington State, we'll always be a developmental program. We'll always be looking for that high school kid with a chip on his shoulder that doesn't have the stars, loves football, what can he be in three years. We'll never be a portal destination. Just not who we're going to be and how we're going to be constructed.

So we know that. We've got to plan for that. But also people want instant success. So when you put them through what I call a slow cooker, it's not a microwave and instantly they're great players, it takes some time.

We've had success doing it before, and we've got to get back to doing it again.

**Q. Coach Tedford, Cougar fans might not too much about your program, but they'll recognize the name Jake Haener. What has he provided for your team this year, and what can you say about his play?**

COACH TEDFORD: A lot of leadership. Jake is an unbelievable competitor. He's a grinder. The way he approaches the game, with his preparation, everyone just feeds off of him. They really do.

We talk a lot about special things can happen when purpose plus preparation, plus commitment meet opportunity. And when you talk about purpose and preparation and commitment, I don't think there's anyone stronger in those areas than Jake is.





He's the most disciplined guy I've ever been around when it comes to anything. His diet. The way he prepares. He's just been a blessing. I'm going to miss him. I'm going to miss him as a friend because we have a great relationship.

We can talk about anything. He's tough. And when he came back, I think when both him and Evan came back, our safety, at the same time, it gave us a little boost in the arm because those are our two captains that we lost in the same game at USC.

So when they both came back -- not to mention his talent on the football field. His arm talent, his ability to throw the ball, and all that kind of stuff.

He just brings so much more to a team. He takes no days off as far as if he's not in on a rep, he's coaching everybody else. He's not in the back goofing around. He is totally committed to what's going on. And everyone else around him, they better be as well or he's going to hold them accountable. So I love Jake to death. Very sad this is going to be our last game together.

But he's a special guy. And I really hope that he gets the opportunity he deserves after this game to go to the next level.

**Q. Coach Dickert, with kind of the craziness of the last couple of weeks and missing a few players, what have you seen from the guys you would designate as leaders in your team and how have they stepped up in these last couple of weeks?**

COACH DICKERT: We've talked about it before. But leadership isn't in the easy moments, it's through adversity. It's through change. It's through a whole bunch of different things.

So I think our leaders have risen to the occasion and put a stake in the ground and know where we want to go and what we want to do.

And it isn't just about this one game, it's how it springboards into next season and how you continue to build a roster and a team and a program.

So I've been proud of those guys. Lincoln Victor and Brennan Jackson, RJ Stone, Konner Gomness, just really proud of their leadership and what that means to our program and what it means to me.

We do a lot of culture, a lot of team building, try to create connections that are real, and I think those guys have that piece of what it is to be a Cougar and I think that means

something to everybody.

**Q. Coach Dickert, bouncing off that last question, what has Daiyan and Renard Bell, what have they provided this week as player coaches and just a little bit about what they've meant to the program as well.**

COACH DICKERT: I think Daiyan, that's a unique situation in college football. Sometimes you get a player for 11 months. And Daiyan came to Washington State with a trust of a process that we're going to help put him through. He came with one of his coaches.

It was one of those things where he trusted that we would get him to this point. He's made more impact on me and our community and our fan base as a person. Everyone sees the player. Everyone sees the talent. You get to see the personality. Like coach alluded to, you guys get to see 12 Saturdays. We get to see the work, the dedication, the film study, the fun.

Anyone that knows Daiyan, he's fun and he loves the game. So the impact he has has been tremendous. I told him the other day I'm going to stop short of putting a headset on. He doesn't need that. He'll be making calls as we go.

But Renard, you might see a little bit out there tomorrow. I'm excited where he's at. I think he's feeling more confident in his process. So he'll be more of a game-time decision.

**Q. Coach Dickert, you obviously were at Wyoming for a couple of years when your paths crossed with Coach Tedford and Fresno State. What were your initial impressions of this program before obviously game planning this week?**

COACH DICKERT: One time we tried to freeze them out, get a snowstorm to go Fresno and Cheyenne, you guys got caught, right?

COACH TEDFORD: Yeah, we barely made it.

COACH DICKERT: So I think they changed the rule where you have to stay in town from now on down in Laramie.

But physical comes to mind, well-coached, disciplined. Tough teams. Offensive ingenuity. There's been a bunch of those good battles. I remember that one being a really close game.

The next year, Fresno was ultra competitive. Went down there, I think the coach has gotten the better of us the last few matchups. But have a lot of respect for him, his

programs, and just the style and the way they play and how they're prepared.

And you know it's going to be a battle. And it's going to be a battle for 60 minutes. And the kids are tough. And that's a reflection of the coaching staff and the program and the type of men that they have in their program.

**Q. Coach Tedford, in 2018, that Mountain West championship game, you said several months back that everybody remembers the Ronnie touchdown; you remember the Matt Boateng coming off the edge and blocking the extra point. Obviously this season is not finished yet, but what do you think you'll remember the most from the turnaround starting out 1-4 to potentially 10 and 4, 9 and 5 at worse?**

COACH TEDFORD: I just think the perseverance and the belief of your program, because it's a true test. When you're 1-4 and you lost some fourth-quarter games and the guys are so committed, they put a lot of hard work and effort into it. And when you have those games and you don't come away with a reward, it's really going to test what the locker room's about, what the leadership's about, what the belief is about.

And so I thought our kids did a nice job of that. And I'll never forget this year's team. No matter what happens tomorrow, I'm so proud of this group.

We have one more game to play together. And I know they're going to let it all hang out and do their best. But this group has been a special group because of that. In this day and age, when you go 1-4 and social media is beating you down, all that stuff, there's certain things we don't have control of in the locker room. And to have the team believe that, hey, just pay attention to what's going on in here because it's a lot coming at them. And a lot of people get down on them and things like that.

It would have been very easy to kind of shift gears. And I know I've said this many times, Andrew, but I know they were disappointed but they were never discouraged. They worked very hard and they came out to work each and every day with the same attitude and didn't start seeing it turn the corner and things like that.

And then they never changed their attitude from there. It's not like they got giddy. It's not like they got overconfident, because each and every week we had to bring our best. There's no question. We're not a team that's just going to go out and blow people away. We have to play hard each and every game.

This game is not going to be no different. It's going to be

Wazzu always is physical. That's never changed over the years, from when I was in the Pac-10, Pac-12, that's never changed. They're always very well-coached. They're explosive on offense. Very solid on special teams.

So for us to have the opportunity to be successful in this game, we're going to have to play our best in all three phases of the game. And our players understand that, right?

And I think they're looking forward to the challenge one more time and play together because I think our guys love each other. I really do.

I think when you try to build a culture, it's about love, it's about friendship, it's about belief. And I think we had a test this year to really test that. And I think our kids passed that test early.

We have one more opportunity to play together, and looking forward to it.

Like I said, no matter what happens tomorrow, I'll be so proud of these kids for everything they went through earlier in this year and how they bounced back.

**Q. Is there a sense of pressure or excitement regarding the team's possibility of making history with a 10-win season after a 1-4 start?**

COACH TEDFORD: No, there's no pressure with that. I mean, I guess it's there. But our kids really aren't thinking about that. This is about what goes on between the lines, about them having the opportunity to play together one more time against a great opponent, and they've worked really hard to be in this position.

And whatever those things are are kind of secondary. That's not something that we're talking a lot about. This is more about just an opportunity to win a great bowl game against a great football team. I know we're going to have a lot of fan support here. The community involvement and things like that is really big.

We're playing for more than just ourselves. Right? We're the representative of the Mountain West Conference. That's big. We're playing for our community, the City of Fresno, that's big, and all of our alumni, who take a lot of pride in -- pride and tradition of Bulldog football. So we're playing for all that.

And it's going to be the guys between the lines tomorrow and the memories they're going to create for themselves.

**Q. With how great your quarterbacks have been this**



**year, what's the biggest thing that the rest of your offense has kind of learned from them in how to approach the game?**

COACH DICKERT: I think when your quarterback's one of your hardest workers, I think there's some real magic to that because leadership is not just granted at that position. I think it's necessary.

So Cam came to us January last season and really built the trust over time with the offense. And when guys saw him come in and want to work and want to be part of something, not a "me" thing, I think it was empowering for our offense.

And things haven't always gone the way we want them to. We've had to kind of slug through some lulls and some highs and lows and everything in between.

I think Cam has stayed the course. And I think consistency matters. Consistency in approach gains credibility with your team. So Cam just went out there and made a lot of plays. And a lot of the stuff has been off script. It hasn't always been perfect. He always looks in the mirror first. Excited for Cam to go out there once again and compete. He's an ultimate competitor.

So he's craving at the moment to get back out on that field and continue to play a 60-minute football game. I think that's what we're looking for tomorrow.

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