

Starco Brands LA Bowl Hosted By Gronk: Boise State vs UCLA

Friday, December 15, 2023

Los Angeles, California, USA

SoFi Stadium

Coach Chip Kelly Coach Spencer Danielson

Press Conference

CHIP KELLY: It's an absolute honor to play in the Gronk Bowl. Big fan of Rob, and I think it is special that he's the first player to have a college bowl game named after him.

It's really exciting for our team to be in Los Angeles and the people at SoFi have been fantastic in the time, and I know our guys have had a great week and the bowl people have been fantastic.

Our kids have been juggling finals so we were going back through a couple things logistically, but the people that run the bowl are fantastic and we're excited to play against a really good team in Boise State who just won the Mountain West Championship.

So I think it's going to be a heck of a game tomorrow.

SPENCER DANIELSON: Appreciate you guys a ton for being here. I know our team is extremely excited. Been through a lot this year, and being able to finish it against a great opponent, Coach Kelly, the UCLA Bruins is going to be an awesome experience for our players, especially with our roster.

A lot of our kids are from Southern California, so it's been awesome to be down here practicing, a lot of the parents able to come through and see our kids. But just being able to finish this the right way for our university, for these seniors. This has been something we've been working our tail off, so we're excited for it.

Great environment. It was awesome to meet Gronk earlier today. He was a lot bigger than I even thought. Our players, when he walked up, they started taking a bunch of pictures, so just that experience alone is just worth all of it.



Really excited for our players.

Q. Spence, you guys ended a tough year last year with a win in the Frisco Bowl. You have another chance to win with a win in a bowl game. What impact did you see that Frisco Bowl have on this season, and how important is it to end the year on a high note?

SPENCER DANIELSON: Every year at Boise State, I'm sure Coach Kelly has the same for his team, is to win the Mountain West Conference Championship and a bowl game, and being able to win the last one is a huge deal. Not even just for recruiting and going forward. There are multiple players on our team that are not going to play football after Saturday, and so being able to finish out the right way for those guys, wearing the blue and orange for the last time, that's the legacy we want to finish.

I know Coach Kelly and their team is going to feel the exact same way, so that's the importance of this goal game. One, it's another game we can play together. It's another game we can represent such a great university. But for our seniors, finishing the right way for them is a huge deal to us.

Q. How does it feel knowing the Mountain West has never lost this bowl game? And Coach Kelly, Latu is not playing, but Boise State has one of the best edge rushers in the country in Ahmed. How has it been for you game planning against him this week?

SPENCER DANIELSON: Well, that's a first. At the end of the day it's a new year, and what's happened prior to this is really irrelevant for our team and this match-up.

The respect we have for Coach Kelly and his team, you talk about a team that's going to be disciplined, play together, extremely talented, and they're going to be very well-coached throughout the game.

So we know it's going to be a huge challenge. We're excited for that. I know our players are excited for it. But we know the task at hand on Saturday.

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, he's an outstanding football player,



and I think they do such a good job on the defensive side. Spence obviously leads, and Eric Chinander, that whole group over there, and they put their players in position to make plays.

We have to know where he is on every play, and we need to be aware of what we're doing in our protections because if you have 12 and a half sacks in college football you're a really good player, and we know he's a really good player.

Q. Spencer, you are breaking in a new quarterback for the final game of the season. What have you seen out of CJ Tiller this week, and have you made a final decision on who's going to be under center snap one tomorrow?

SPENCER DANIELSON: CJ Tiller will be our starter on Saturday. He's earned it. He's had a great job the past couple weeks in practice. He's is not going to be perfect, but he doesn't need to be. That's the biggest thing with him and our offensive staff is putting a great game plan together, but we've got to keep him in good situations, too.

We know the defense we're going to be playing. They're going to be well-coached. They're very talented. But we got to put CJ in the right spots. He's done a great job and he's got a lot of good pieces around him. We've got to play together.

When you play a great opponent like we're playing on Saturday, we have to play complementary football, special teams, offense, defense.

But excited for CJ. He's had a really good week of practice. He's done a great job controlling what he can control. He's been prepping. We talk all the time about earning the confidence to play well, and he's earning that every day, every practice, every snap.

And so he's had a good week.

Q. Coach Kelly, your numbers against the run have been outstanding. What do you see as the challenge of slowing down Jeanty and Holani?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, that is the challenge. They have two outstanding running backs, and it's really schemed up really well, too. We have some talented players on our side of the ball, and our defensive coaches have done a good job all year long of putting those guys in positions to make plays, but I think it's going to be a strength against a strength, so that's going to be a big test for us tomorrow.

Q. Chip, what's the latest that you have on Carson Steele and his availability for this game?

CHIP KELLY: All of our availability, as you know, will be done on Saturday morning. So do you want me to finish it, because you know it's going to be done on Saturday morning when we meet with our trainers and do our final depth, and we'll get all that stuff tomorrow morning.

Q. You hear them talking about CJ Tiller. What's it like for you on the other side, a guy that's never thrown a college pass starting in this game and the unknown there?

CHIP KELLY: We know who he is. He's a local kid from Southern California and obviously really talented, so we understand his skill set. We watched him play in high school. Very talented player.

Bush does such a great job with their scheme, and they also have talented running backs around him and other people around him.

We've had to play multiple quarterbacks this year, also, during the season, so I know what Spence is going through. But I know they're going to do a really good job, and he'll be prepared to play in the game tomorrow.

Q. With a handful of coaches and players not available for the game, did you have to restructure your offense and defense, or do you have --

CHIP KELLY: We did. We're going to run the wishbone -- I just letting Spence -- I'm going to give him 24 hours just to make sure he's ready to handle that.

SPENCER DANIELSON: Love it.

CHIP KELLY: And then we'll change the entire defensive scheme, because when our defensive coaches left the new guys wanted to do a lot of different things.

No, we obviously have Latu especially on the defensive side of the ball, but everything is the same. Offensively Ken Niumatalolo stepped in and coached the quarterbacks, and then we were fortunate to have Clancy Pendergrass who is an analyst, for us Greg Burns who is an analyst for us, so we just kind of plug and played with those guys in terms of putting them in.

Our defensive staff has always game planned together, so I think they did a really good job this week of putting together a plan, and offensively it was really the same. We just added Ken when we lost Jeff to the head coaching job at Austin Peay.

The biggest thing for us all week was really just finals and



working around that a little bit. We had a couple days where we were missing certain kids at certain positions, but we worked around it, and we're excited to play this game tomorrow.

Q. Obviously this isn't just a regular game. It's now the Gronk Bowl. How is the energy with the players?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, they were excited, really, really excited to actually play here in LA for the first time for some of these guys, to see this stadium, because we haven't played in it before.

So to play in an NFL stadium is a real big deal for our guys, so they're coming in here I think as we speak right now, so we have a walk-through here this afternoon at 3:00 and then a team photo.

I know they're fired up to play in this game.

Q. Chip, when we initially jumped on a Zoom call with you a couple weeks ago, Spencer Danielson still had the interim tag. You spoke very highly of him. Curious, what do you base that off of? What is your connection with Spencer over his years, and do you still feel that way?

CHIP KELLY: Obviously. He did an unbelievable job. I know he was the first interim head coach to ever win a conference championship, so I think to take over a program and then to lead them to where he's led them is a big deal.

Spence has been down to our place. We have a bunch of Mountain West coaches that work our camp in the off-season. It's a big recruiting camp, so we invite all the Mountain West coaches, whether it's Brent Brennan or Jeff Tedford or whomever, and they come down. We have seen Spence coach, seen Spence in person. I know he had a great career over at Azusa Pacific. He is a local guy.

The coaching community is pretty small, and if you don't actually know the person, you're connected to a lot of people that do know the person. So I was really excited. I want to take credit -- you guys asked me about the interim tag, I said he should be hired, and he got hired a half hour later.

SPENCER DANIELSON: I give you full credit, Coach Kelly.

CHIP KELLY: But full credit means like an agent has a fee, so we can discuss that later on.

SPENCER DANIELSON: Good question.

CHIP KELLY: I think he's a heck of a football coach, and you can just watch the tape what they look like since he took over, and it's impressive to watch. I think he's a rising star in this profession.

Q. We know you're an emotional guy. With these seniors tomorrow, not trying to make you cry again --

SPENCER DANIELSON: I probably will, thanks.

Q. Just talk about the emotions that are going to be with those seniors and playing the last game with them tomorrow.

SPENCER DANIELSON: I'll probably be crying. For people that have heard me speak about our players and this senior class, there's going to be a lot of emotions, especially the ones that I know will be moving on and potentially never playing football again, definitely not wearing the blue and orange again.

More than anything, it's just how much they've done for this place, how much they've impacted me. DJ Schramm George Holani, Garrett Curran. I could go on and on. They all have made a mayor imprint on this university, made their imprint on me and impacted me in so many ways.

So for them being able to take things that were not going to go our way and be able to finish it for each other and finish it for our team and be able to win the Mountain West Conference Championship and a chance to finish with a win in a bowl game against a great opponent, just to be able to play one more game together, that's going to be going to the emotional just even going into the game, because this is the last opportunity to do it together.

I believe as a coach, and I told them this earlier today in the team meeting, it is my goal that their best life is still in in front of them. I told them, if your best life is at Boise State, I failed you, because the goal is to create a platform that they can grow and develop.

Now, there's going to be memories that when you play football, Boise State hopefully you have forever, no different than when you play at UCLA. But it is going to be different because I'm not going to see them all the time, so it's going to be emotional for me knowing that God's best in front of them, but I am not going to be around them as much, and they just had just a big impact on me and everyone they've been around.

Q. Obviously both run the ball really well; play great defense. What has it been like putting a game plan

together just from a competitive standpoint?

SPENCER DANIELSON: Well, I'll speak first. Coach Kelly does a phenomenal job. We were talking as a defensive staff and a whole staff, just being able to see how he's been able to work through guys being injured and create a plan offensively, and the whole team, but focused on what they do offensively, and it's been fun. It's been challenging.

He does a great job creating match-up issues across the board, and so finding our best plan of attack as well.

But it's been a fun week, but very challenging just because of obviously who he is and how well he's done it for a long time.

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, that's the beauty of the game, what's going to happen. The fact that it's the last game of the year and you have so much tape on them and they have so much tape on you, I don't think there's going to be any surprises on either side just because we've played so much football this year and they've played so much football this year.

Our job has always been to put our players in out of the way and let them go play connect check. You don't want to complicate it too much for them. You want to give them a plan they can be successful with, and then they got to go out and execute.

So that'll be a fun part to watch tomorrow.

Q. Coach Spence, I recall a time that you were at Azusa Pacific and rising through the ranks, and I remember the team chemistry you had at APU. How much of that family atmosphere did you bring to Boise State?

SPENCER DANIELSON: It's definitely nothing that I did personally. My time at Azusa Pacific, Victor Santa Cruz was the head coach and there was a lot of coaches there. Bo Beatty, guys that changed my life when I was coaching as a junior or when I was playing as a junior at Azusa Pacific. We went and coached like a team camp at Hume Lake that was run by FCA.

When I left that camp is when I knew I wanted to coach. This is a guy playing in Citrus College in front of 3,000 fans feeling like I am playing in the Rose Bowl because you just don't know any different.

I fell in love with not even the game, but just how much I was impacted by those coaches, and so really took it from them and just that love for the young men and how to

change their life through the vehicle of football.

And then obviously going to Boise was impacted by so many coaches throughout the years.

I'm a product of a lot of really good people putting up with me and building into me and helping me and being around great players that have impacted my life.

I'm blessed and humbled to be in this situation.

Q. Coach Kelly, you, like Boise State, have used a number of quarterbacks this year. With Garbers, if he is the guy, what makes it different when he's in there versus with some of the other quarterbacks?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, Ethan, he has it, the "it" factor. He's been through a lot. He's been with us for a while. He's played games when Dorian was our starting quarterback and Dorian had missed a few games and Ethan always stepped up when that opportunity came.

He's got a great command of what we do. I think everybody feels kind of calm when Garbs is in there. There's a rhythm to our offense, and you look at when we've been playing really well on the offensive side of the ball, Garbs has been a guy leading us to do that.

It's been fun to watch his growth as a person and as a quarterback, and we're excited to see where he takes us.

Q. Chip, on Monday when we talked to you last, you said that you were going to wait until after the bowl game to search for the defensive coordinator, quarterbacks coach. Do you have a plan for the tight ends coach going forward?

CHIP KELLY: Same thing. We took our guys that were on staff and basically promoted them for the week and a couple guys -- it started actually the week before because we had to put guys on the road because we were down coaches on the road. The plan for everything was get through the bowl game, and then after the bowl game we'll sit down and hatch out a plan.

There's not a race. We weren't going to have anybody in place for the game, so we'll take our time.

Q. You just heard Spencer talk about his senior class. What has this senior class meant to you, especially a guy like Kenny Churchill --

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, church has been here a long time, Alex Johnson. Kenny has been here as long as I've been here. I think all people throughout college football, that

COVID time, I think there was a bonding and a grouping and all these guys that weathered that storm were not playing, it's canceled, what are we going to do, now it's back on, we are going to play games but we're not going to have any fans.

I think that time, although it was a very difficult time, I think this team grew through that. I look at where we were then and where we are now. A lot of it had to do with those guys, the Kenny Churchills, the Duke Clemons, Alex Johnson, some of those guys that around for a real long time.

Then when you add guys like Darius, who's in year two but it's his final game, some of that group on defense have all been two-year guys that transferred in a year ago, but now they're in year two, and I think they've really flourished in that.

It's an extremely connected team, extremely close team, and it always gets emotional.

We have senior day and they always ask you, are you sad on senior day, and I was like, I'm going to see them tomorrow. It's our last regular season game, but we knew we were going to a bowl game. But now there's a finality to it, so I think that's a part that you always want to send your seniors out the right way, and what they've given to our program something that's been truly special.

Q. Chip, you mentioned the way Spence took over the last four weeks. What have you noticed since he took over in terms of why they've got a four-game winning streak going and what does concern you most about them?

CHIP KELLY: I think they do the little things you have to do to win football games. They don't turn the ball over. They don't have a lot of self-inflicted wounds. They play downhill football. They're usually not behind in the chains. They're not in a lot of 3rd and longs, a lot of 2nd and longs. They create a lot of 2nd and longs and they create a lot of 3rd and longs, so I think it's really complementary football in all three phases, and that's a mark of a really good football team.

Q. How does it feel knowing this is your last bowl game as a member of the Pac-12, and what's going to be some of your lasting memories regarding this conference going into the Big Ten?

CHIP KELLY: Am I honest? Is it sad? A bunch of people couldn't figure out how to keep this conference together, and that's sad. This conference has been together since 1915. We're supposed to be the smart ones.

Kirk Ferentz talked in front of Congress when they were talking about realignment and NIL, and he said we have to be the dumbest people in the world. This is an amazing game and we keep trying to screw it up. And I'm talking about the administrators and the coaches. It's on us.

But the fact that there is not going to be a Pac-12 next year, the fact that Washington State is not going to be in a conference next year, the fact that Oregon State is not going to be in a conference, we've failed. Our job is to create opportunities for student-athletes to be successful, and we didn't do it.

We are on a path where we're going into the Big Ten and we're excited about that there, but I think we all own part of what happened, and it shouldn't happen.

The fact that Oregon State and Washington State aren't going to play in a conference, that's not right. And the fact that there's not going to be a Pac-12, that's not right. But I didn't have much say in it, either. I've got a lot of thoughts and a lot of ideas.

Nobody really talks to me very much about that because it's usually in the car when I am driving to work at 4:30 in the morning, and I've got a lot of them. But I think we should get all the people that can affect this game, because it is such a great game, and they need to sit in a room and they need to figure this all out.

They need to figure out transfers. They need to figure out NIL. They need to figure out conference re-alignment, because it's all about the student-athletes, and we have to make sure that that's the North Star that guides us, is that the student-athletes are the ones that they should be focused on, not TV and money.

Q. Is there any hope that you might play some in the future with Oregon State or Washington State maybe non-conference?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, it is weird to say, and I would love to play those guys. Again, we're in charge of getting 1st downs and stopping 1st downs, so there's not a lot of that stuff. I know we have a schedule for a couple years, so we'll see what happens, but I would love to play -- I think Corvallis and Pullman are two amazing places, and if you have an opportunity to play games there, that is what college football is all about. You go to play in Corvallis with that fan base, you go to play in Pullman with that fan base, that's an awesome experience for anybody to experience.

Q. You said you might have some ideas. I know picking one to attack in college football is almost

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

impossible because there's so many, but what is the biggest issue that you might have right now, whether it be realignment, NIL, transfer portal, and what would your plan be to try to solve it?

CHIP KELLY: I think they're all a problem, and I think we need to have a conference commissioner, and I think football should be separate from the other sports. Just the fact that our school is leaving to go to the Big Ten in football, our softball team should be playing Arizona in softball. Our basketball team should be playing Arizona in basketball.

But because football left, and they say, well, how do you do that? Well, Notre Dame is independent in football and they're in a conference and everything else. I think we should all be independent in football, and you can have a 64-team conference that's in the Power Five and you can have a 64-team conference in the Group of Five, and we separate it and we play each other.

You can have the West Coast teams and then every year we play seven games against the West Coast teams, and then we play the east. So we play Syracuse, Boston College, Pitt, West Virginia, Virginia.

Then the next year you play against the south while you still play your seven teams. You can play a seven-game schedule. You can play four against another division opponent. You can always play against one Mountain West team every year so that we can still keep those rivalries going. Not that I've really thought about this and not that I've spent a lot of time on this.

But I think if you went together collectively as a group and said there's 132 teams and we all share the same TV contract so that the Mountain West doesn't have one and the Sun Belt doesn't have another and SEC has one and they have another, that we all go together. That's a lot of games, and there's a lot of people in the TV world that would go through it.

You can sponsor each one. Instead of calling it Group of Five and Power Five, you can call it Amazon, Nike, bid that out to things. A lot of different things.

But I think if we still do the same thing and take all that money and I would do this and I think this needs to be done, that money now needs to be shared with the student-athletes, and there needs to be revenue sharing and the players should get paid and you can get rid of NIL and the schools should be paying the players because the players are what the product is, and the fact that they don't get paid is really the biggest travesty, not that I've thought about it.

Q. Spencer, kind of to follow that up, the moment you remove the interim tag from head coach, I know you don't change, but how does your life change? I assume there's got to be more hand shakes and things that might take you away from football at least for a little bit.

SPENCER DANIELSON: I know first off, I now officially have two suits when I used to have one that I bought because my brother got married this past summer.

Probably a couple more pictures than normal. Kind of stay out of the limelight guy, but obviously being -- having the interim tag removed and then like Coach has been involved, a lot of recruiting, a lot of different things going on, so haven't really had a moment so sit back much and figure out some of the different parts of it.

Our coaches, our staff, our players are doing a great job because you go from winning the Mountain West Championship, being named the official head coach the next day and then we're really into recruiting and going through a lot of stuff.

It's been awesome, and the support at Boise State has been phenomenal. Bronco Nation has been phenomenal, but there's been a lot of things going on quickly, working with our staff, keeping our players, finding the right ones to bring in, and then preparing for a great opponent.

A lot of different things. I know it'll probably sink in a little bit more as we move through signing day into Christmas break and then into the new year, and in my mind I'm an intense, energetic go-getter, so my mind is going through -- kind of like Coach Kelly driving in at 4:30 going through some stuff, my mind goes a lot of different things that I'm excited to do and change and impact.

But right now we're focused on playing UCLA, and we'll get to a lot of those things.

Q. Chip, just because of where your defense ranked not only in the Pac-12 but nationally, were you surprised that the Pac-12 didn't honor more on either the first or second team outside of Darius and Latu?

CHIP KELLY: Yes. I mean, it is what it is, but I don't -- we have some really, really good players over there. It's tough, but we try to worry about things that we can control, and sometimes those things you can't control.

But I do think we have some good players that haven't got the notoriety that they need.

Q. Coach Danielson, how does it feel that knowing that after this season, the Mountain West is really the only major West Coast conference left, and rather than try to fill the void of the Pac-12, how is the Mountain West going into the future as really the last bastion of West Coast football?

SPENCER DANIELSON: As a San Diego kid, coaches talk about I grew up watching the Pac-10, then turned into the Pac-12 and the different Mountain West schools, and even that's changed throughout the years.

Obviously college football is at an interesting place with the conference realignment and some of the different things we're talking about where now you've got West Coast schools that are in more of a Midwest to East Coast conference, so it's going to be interesting where college football goes from here.

I know for me stepping in this role it's control what we can control, like Coach Kelly has been talking about, because a lot of these things we as coaches are not controlling. We control how we impact our players. We control the players we bring into our football program and how we impact them and grow them to be not only good football players but more importantly husbands and fathers later in life.

So focused on that. The other stuff I can't control. I'm going to pray to the good Lord that we can continue to have an impact and make sure that this is an amazing game, that it will continue to be an amazing game, to impact these people and impact these men for the future because that's everything.

These 18- to 22-year-old kids are the future, and if we don't impact them the right way and train them up, then nothing matters.

But I do want to see a lot of different changes, and we believe in God for those things to happen in the future.

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