

# Boca Raton Bowl: James Madison vs Western Kentucky

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Boca Raton, Florida, USA

FAU Stadium

**James Madison Dukes**  
**Coach Bob Chesney**  
**Billy Atkins**  
**JC Evans**  
**DJ Cotton, Jr.**  
**Brian Snow**  
Press Conference

James Madison 27, Western Kentucky 17

**BOB CHESNEY:** Just a great moment in the history of our program, to be the best ever to do anything for the first is a big deal, and to do it down here in Boca at a bowl game matters not only to this program, but to the community and all these young men that believed, and to set up a group like we did in a very short period of time; and then to have the next-man-up mentality throughout the entire day, throughout the entire week, really throughout the entire year, and we talk about all the time at some point that light shines on you.

And I don't know if 11 and 12 thought over here it would shine on them, but it did. When it does, it's going to reveal you for all the work you've done or it's going to expose you for the work you didn't do, the backup to the backup and all those things they were throughout the year.

They battled. They stayed the course. They never gave up. I'm glad that that light shined on them and had a chance to reveal all the work they've done up to this point in time.

**Q. Billy, can you walk us through the touchdown pass to Taylor. Looked like the safety moved over that way. Was that the right read? Looked like it was a pretty perfect throw.**

**BILLY ATKINS:** Yeah, so on that fade, they came out in a one-five look, so basically it's man-to-man. They matched up their linebacker on one of the best receivers we had, so



I saw that match-up one-on-one, I threw it out and trusted Taylor and he came down with it. Big time play.

**Q. JC, a couple of firsts today. You had your first rushing touchdown and your first touchdown pass right here in South Florida, coming back home. Talk about how that felt to achieve those firsts right here?**

**JC EVANS:** It's honestly an unbelievable feeling. Like I've said, we put in this work since January. I didn't know how much I would play but I would make the most of it. I just have so much trust in these guys around me and I know these guys trust me, and they'll go to bat for me just like I'd do the same for them.

I won't put this all on the offensive linemen. Those guys have been working just as hard as I have since January, so this trophy really goes to them.

**Q. Coach Chesney, could you please tell me about the play of CJ today, facing Evans today?**

**BOB CHESNEY:** Yeah, I sure can. He came in and did a great job. Ran behind his pads. He put us in some plus one quarterback run scheme, which we needed. Just thought he did a really good job.

And then when we had a chance to let him throw, he again executed that play excellently. He prepared all week. He prepared for the past two weeks. He prepared really all year. I think he takes every rep whether he's on scout team or whatever he was real seriously opportunity personal game and that's exactly what he did.

**Q. Billy, I saw after the game ended you got emotional a little bit and you were surrounded by your teammates almost instantly. What was that moment like for you and what were the emotions so much for you?**

**BILLY ATKINS:** Yeah, I mean it was definitely surreal for sure. I think guys around me know I went through some tough times; things did not go necessarily how I would definitely drew it up a little bit.



So the fact that I got to go out here and play with these guys and we tried to win a game for the guys I started with, it was big for me. I honestly never thought I would step foot again on this field for JMU after my sophomore year.

Things were said. Things were done. So the fact that I got to come back out here and give myself a little bit to find out I can play, it meant the world to me.

**Q. DJ, you had back-to-back plays early in that game that kind of set the tone on defense. What were you seeing early from them that led to the good tackle and the forced fumble?**

DJ COTTON JR.: Just trusting the guys around me, just watching film. All the film work that the guys put in in the past, looking to just trust myself and trusting myself and trusting the guys around me. They allowed me to play freely.

**Q. Billy, for you, it's not every day a quarterback plays half the snaps. How were you able to develop a rhythm in the second half despite not playing the 1st and 2nd down and coming in on 3rd and long?**

BILLY ATKINS: Yeah I kind of said that earlier in the week, things like that. I think the fact that I played with the guys who were starting this game last year definitely helped me out a lot.

I think guys like Omarion Dollison, Yamir Knight, it's crazy because those guys were all essential guys last year.

So I think that chemistry kind of carried over to it's a point where in the second half I think it came natural to a point where I wasn't thinking about what would go wrong. I think I just knew that I could trust those guys to win and they did exactly that.

**Q. Going back to those days after practice when you're on the second team, did you ever think a moment like this would be possible?**

BILLY ATKINS: No, definitely not. I think that you really can't draw it up any crazier than how it played out. It truly is a blessing from God. It's unbelievable how I got to this point in my career, but the fact that I am here and I'm able to receive his glory in a way, it's amazing.

**Q. Brian, what does it mean to you to be part of the first team to win a bowl at JMU? What kind of legacy is that?**

BRIAN SNOW: It's very special. We've worked very, very hard for this, so I'm very proud to be a part of it. I'm proud

to be able to go out this way with my teammates. Like I said, we've worked very hard, so I'm proud of all of us, and hopefully there's more in the future.

**Q. How would you describe Kalin Jean's contribution to the team?**

BOB CHESNEY: Kalin has done a great job. He gives us exactly what we need all week in the work part of it and he just helps prepare our guys extremely, extremely well. He's a tough competitor and has done a really good job.

**Q. What's next for the whole entire team?**

BOB CHESNEY: Everything. There's a lot of possibility that remains. At this moment I think that we stick together and we get through this the way that we should and come out the other side and continue to build competitive rooms and continue to compete all throughout the winter.

But first enjoy this for a minute and just be proud of what these guys were able to do to this point.

**Q. Coach, you guys came in first in the country in turnover margin. Just talk about the three ball recoveries, the three turnovers.**

BOB CHESNEY: I mean, we don't call them turnovers, we call them takeaways. Coach Hemp would make sure you knew that, right, that they're called takeaways and that's what we did. DJ, it was a big play over the middle and he caught back up to the kid and was able to rip the ball out. That was as big a play as any early in that game, and I think the other ones obviously are crucially important, as well. Anytime you can turn the ball o, it matters a lot. We had probably another shot at one that looked like a fumble, and then there was that pass that was just on the little inside on a little option route that Gannon almost had an opportunity at, as well. I thought we put good pressure on the quarterback. I thought our defensive ends did just that, and it all starts up front.

**Q. Every first-year head coach wants to have success right away. You guys were able to do that. I'm sure it's hard to pinpoint the exact reason why, but if you had to try, what would you think led you to be successful in year one?**

BOB CHESNEY: I think the chemistry and I think the ability for these guys to come together. We spent a lot of time not just talking about football. We actually spent a lot more time not talking about football really. We talk about each other's why and their purpose and why do they play this game.

Billy got up and talked to the team last night but every single person on this team has talked about their purpose and their why and when you have that insight into who they are as humans I think you have a really good shot at accomplishing almost everything. This is obviously a fast paced-transactional world and it's a week-to-week-business, and they love us and they hate us depending on how we do the week before.

And I just think that when we know in that locker room what we are and who we are as people, that matters the most. That's what ultimately leads you to these moments where you can fight for and with each other no matter what you're up against.

**Q. First ever bowl win for this program. What is that going to do going forward in terms of NIL, the transfer portal? This is all new in college football. What's is that going to do and how is it going to help build this program going forward?**

BOB CHESNEY: It's momentum. I think any time positive momentum that's it. We talk about recycling energy all game, every game, every play and not letting it die down, and we have unbelievable fans, we have an unbelievable community.

This just continues to add to that momentum of this program, and I just think that, again, I said before, but we put this team together very, very quickly. A lot of people have believed, learned a lot about each other on a personal level and they fought every single day for each other.

We came up short in moments but we never wavered and I think to carry this game with this trophy and talk about bowl champions here at the Boca Bowl is a really big deal and that will help us.

**Q. Why did you go with the two-quarterback system? What was the thinking there?**

BOB CHESNEY: Well, I think we wanted to make sure that we could protect some guys, too, right Billy? But we liked the plus 1 quarterback, Billy just out there running a lot is going to be a little bit of a challenge, but I think when you throw JC in there both and provides just the different -- that balance, but an off balanceness, and I think I played against it before, and it's a problem when you have to defend these two offenses as you go through, especially we haven't seen them on film yet, and I think that was a huge advantage for us.

**Q. Talk about their play, obviously. Talk about their selfless manner that Billy and JC were able to go out**

**there and share that responsibility.**

BOB CHESNEY: Yeah, I sure can. They never sat there and said, I need to be the guy. They said, what can we do for this team to win the game.

And I think that to me speaks volumes of who they are. They believe in each other. They just believed in themselves and they believed in each other. I think Billy, man, what a great job. To watch him come to the sideline, it was exciting after he throws a touchdown.

I watch him physically keep it down and keep it even keeled and be ready for the next play, and I think his speed to the next was really important and his way to lead these guys with confidence and the speed in the huddle and come up with plays on his own in there, and then have communication with singles coming with it. There was a lot he was doing unnoticed but not by us as coaches.

**Q. Coach, talk about your experience here in Boca Raton from the time you guys got off the plane until now?**

BOB CHESNEY: It was awesome, and I think we talked about it before. It's like when you go on vacation with your whole family and you go through a bunch of days like that and you have a great environment to be in. We're at the beach, hanging out by the pool. Our guys and our families were involved as coaches, and I think that was really neat to see our guys interacting, and we talk a lot about family. It was truly family.

We're going to get on this plane and go home today. I wish we had another night or two together, but we're going to go home and get on this plane and the end of this vacation week come to an end, so to speak. It wasn't a vacation; it was a lot of work; there was a lot of commitment; there was a lot of sacrifice that happened. But ultimately it's going to be sad when we have to get off that plane later this morning or tomorrow morning and won't see each other for a little bit, but we'll be right back.

BRIAN SNOW: Yeah, this is the end of my college football career, and I couldn't be more proud of my teammates, my coaches and everybody around me. This is a great win for the program, and hopefully it continues to be a launch pad for us to come.

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