

Pac-12 Football Championship Game: Oregon vs Washington

Friday, December 1, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Allegiant Stadium

Washington Huskies

Coach Kalen DeBoer

Michael Penix

Postgame Press Conference



Washington 34, Oregon 31

KALEN DeBOER: Wow, what a game. Didn't expect anything less. Just got to give a nod and tip of the cap to Coach Lanning, Bo Nix, the entire Oregon football team. They've had an amazing year. We've had two battles with them that just, as you know, went down to the wire. We knew it would be that.

Just proud of our guys and the way they continue to just be resilient and find a way. Just always playing in the present, in the moment. Never having regrets. Finding different ways to do it.

Proud of the way we stepped up again, physicality both sides of the ball. Ran the football. Offense and Michael, probably back in sync. A lot of that has to do with just getting the guys and the crew all back together again. Had a couple weeks now where J Macs joined the mix. You can see that timing continue to develop, the rhythm in practice growing. They just found ways to make those big plays.

It took a team effort. Defense did a nice job getting off the field early in the game. Started fast. Got us off to a great start. That lead, we lost it at one point, but that lead was important because it still put us in a small deficit a great drive there in the first quarter by these guys. Just again, proud all the way around.

THE MODERATOR: Michael Penix has joined, as well.

Q. You've had some critical third and fourth down moments late in games where other teams may have ran it, worked clock, but in each of those games you put the ball in Michael's hands... In those moments, what is it about your temperament as a coach and this team where there seems to be this no-hesitation

mentality?

KALEN DeBOER: It isn't even playing the percentages. You want your best players to win football games for you. It's exactly that. I think you said it all. When you got 9 right here, give him the chance to touch the football, make plays. He's been through it all. He's got all these experiences to draw upon. He knows when to take the risk, when not to, how to put the team on his back and just keep moving.

He's the guy we're going to let pull the trigger when we feel like we got a call, put all our trust and belief in him. Other great players around him, of course, that are going to come through him, of course. Rome, even J.P., J Mac had big games tonight.

Just want to give these guys a chance to go win a football game, not play scared, not play just to try to be close, but play to win.

Q. The slants. They kept going to it. Was that just something that you practiced, were able to improve on? Looked like they thought they could beat you in those one-on-one situations. This has never been done before, Pac-12 is over, it ended with an undefeated team. Never happened. You're new-ish to it. But this is huge. What does it mean to you to finish by doing something that's never been done before?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think, first of all, with our coverage on some of their routes, they're going to what they've -- they're looking at film. It's also what they do. Some RPOs and things like that where they're trying to move defenders, get a guy isolated.

Our guys do a great job of film prep on a short week. Really proud of the way they just got bodies on bodies, played physical, but didn't get pass interferences and things like that over the middle.

Proud of the way we continued to respond. They made a play. They got a fourth down. Hit the slant. We lined up and kept playing.



It means so much, your second question, with the 13-0. It's hard to do. It's hard to go 12-0. To have to beat a really good football team a second time in one year, that's just the tip of the cap to our guys, just how they didn't worry about the last game, didn't worry about who was supposed to win or anything like that.

Just focused on us. It's always been about us. We believe that we have what it takes. If we just play in the present and control what we can control, that's what happens is what you see out there today.

Q. I know you weren't thinking about this during the week, but this game did have a symbolic aspect to it, being the last Pac-12 game. Your thoughts on being involved in the last game in this conference, your thoughts about the conference in general, maybe some nostalgic moments for you?

KALEN DeBOER: I think probably two things. Just the historic tradition of what this conference has done, the great teams throughout all the years. We've had many of 'em at U-Dub, historic moments there. Conference championships, national championships.

It is sad to see it happen, that be the last football game. But I think the other part is, just understanding how strong the conference was this year. There were eight teams at one point I believe that were ranked in the top 25. We played the best ones. We played one of 'em twice.

I don't think there's anyone else in the country that's gone through what we went through. We did it not just at the beginning of the year, it was spread out, we did it at the end of the year. We won four games against four top teams here in November, and now in December.

That's tough to do. We did it at home. We did it on the road. We did it in wind, we did it in rain. This team, okay, can do it because we have all those different pieces. We got a defense that will take advantage of opportunity, and we have an offense, you get in a fast track like we had tonight, you see how explosive they can be. We can do it in the air and on the ground.

Being back to the Pac-12. We did it against one of the best years ever the Pac-12 has had when it comes to the depth of the league.

Q. Michael, could you comment as well.

MICHAEL PENIX: Yeah, I'm just super excited to be here and to be in this moment. Obviously, like Coach said, it's sad to see. For us to be able to do the things that we did this season, it's still going on, but to do the things we've

done so far, it took a lot of hard work and dedication.

Like he said, we played a lot of great teams in this conference. We're just super blessed to be a part of it. Just look forward to what the future holds.

Q. You've had pretty special moments in this conference. What do you think makes it unique? What are you going to take away from it as you make this move to the Big Ten?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think getting all the rivalries. For us, it starts with the northwest Pacific area. The rivalries that are built in. Each team kind of has those within the conference.

There's been so many big games, so many great players that have stepped on the football field. I know I vowed to make sure the guys that won championships for us and had those great individual and team efforts, we'll always remember and make sure we celebrate those teams that did great things, that got us to having the program that we have today.

Q. You've played a lot of close games recently. How much did those experiences matter in a game like this?

KALEN DeBOER: I think we always draw on our experiences. There is a deep, deep, deep belief right now in our football team that when the moments get tough, we can really hone in and guys will just do their job. Not get overwhelmed, go execute.

I think, again, can you go back to one game and learn from it. You can go back to all of a sudden two or three. Everything has happened in a different way. We've won it in different ways.

Man, we got a brotherhood in that locker room that is super proud, wants to continue to showcase who they are collectively and how hard they play, how much they love each other. It shows. It shows.

They're just going to leave it all on the football field.

MICHAEL PENIX: For me, I would say the love and trust that we have on our team, it's unmatched. It's unmatched. Man, we've been do it each and every week. We are not going to say we want those games to be close, but to be able to find a way to win each and every week, day in, day out, keeping that 1-0 mindset, it's us versus us. Not worrying about the things on the outside that could possibly be a distraction for our team. I feel like that's what makes this team so special.



We're all about each other. We want to see each other succeed. We know we've done it before. Coach Mac, our strength coach, he put us through a lot of hard times during the off-season so we could be prepared for those moments so whenever we face these great football teams, we're able to come out on top at the end of the day by our perseverance, the love and trust that we have for each other.

Q. Michael, at the end of the game your teammates were chanting Heisman, Heisman, Heisman. What would it be like to take part in that ceremony, potentially win the award?

MICHAEL PENIX: It's just a blessing to be able to be in that talk. For me, it was always the main thing was to win. To be able to do that today on a stage like this, it's incredible. I'm going to always savor this moment.

I'm just super excited. Right now I'm just really living in this moment. Whatever happens come next weekend is going to happen. It's already written. Obviously I couldn't do it without the guys around me.

I got to thank my offensive line for all the work that they put in each and every day to allow me to stay clean on Saturdays, or today on Friday. I'm just super blessed for the guys I have around me. Coach DeBoer and the staff, as well, for sure.

Q. Mike, you had the whole team around you between the third and fourth quarter. What was your message to them?

MICHAEL PENIX: Yeah, just keep believing, keep fighting. The game obviously wasn't over. We just got to continue to stay 1-0. We've been in this position before where it gets tight at the end.

For us it was about trusting in each other. I was telling them just look at the guy next to you, trust that he's going to do his job to help us win this game. That's what it's all about. Loving each other, trusting each other when those moments get big, those moments seem to get tough, having that belief to know we'll be able to make it happen.

Q. Why was it so important for you to be able to establish you can run the ball?

KALEN DeBOER: That's been a work in progress the second half of the season. D.J., along with the offensive line, it's important for us if we want to win a championship, Pac-12 Championship, national championship, for us to have that balance, the ability to be balanced.

If a team has taken Michael and the receiving core away, to be able to move the chains, get those hard yards, we're going to be critical.

We've continued to work on it, plug away. That was a big deal a big part of the game. Especially the way we finished it off there at the very end, the last drive.

Q. Michael, your last touchdown, your pass to Quentin Moore, was that the play call? Was that a check-down? Was that something you saw? Also, I know you've had Jalen McMillan back for a couple weeks, but he was back tonight. How much did that change the offense?

MICHAEL PENIX: That play call to Quentin Moore, that's the play call we've been holding for the past couple weeks. We knew once the moment came, we were going to be able to execute it at a high level.

A special moment for Q. I know how excited he was. You should have saw him in practice when we were installing it, he couldn't stop smiling because he knew he was going to get a touchdown on that play.

It just comes from that belief, belief in Coach Grubb, his play calling. Towards the end of the game, it was a key third down when I threw it to Jalen McMillan on the out route, we were coming off a timeout or -- I think it was off a timeout, and I was talking to one of the other quarterbacks, and I'm like -- it was like third and four, and I was like, We need to go this certain play. On the headsets Coach Grubb called in that same exact play that I said without us even talking about it.

It was crazy to be able to have a quarterback and offensive coordinator be on the same page like that, our connection and bond, our trust we have with one another. I knew it was going to be special and we were going to make it happen.

J Mac, Jalen, he has been tremendous. He's been battling with stuff, but always kept positive energy. He's the ultimate team guy. He wants this team to be successful. He always said he's going to do whatever he can to help this team win football games. Today he definitely showed who he really is.

Thank you. Go Dawgs.

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