

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl: Kent State vs Wyoming

Monday, December 20, 2021

Boise, Idaho, USA

Albertsons Stadium

Wyoming Cowboys

Coach Craig Bohl

Chad Muma

Xazavian Valladay

Press Conference

CRAIG BOHL: On behalf of Cowboy football, University of Wyoming, we are really excited about being here. We appreciate the Idaho Famous Potato Bowl and Kevin McDonald, all the things that he's done for college football and is doing. Our players have had a great experience while they've been here. We appreciate the hospitality of the community of Boise.

We're also really excited about playing Kent State. They've got an excellent football team, explosive players. They're well-coached. I think it's going to be a classic match-up, and so our players have had spirited practices. We're set and ready to go. I'm sure Kent State is, as well.

Appreciate the members of the media being here and covering this. All these bowl games are so important.

It was interesting, several years ago I was on the NCAA competition committee, and we were staging different events, and I had heard some clamoring out there, somebody said, there's all these meaningless games, and to these fellows that are sitting to my left and all the members of our team and I'm sure the members of the Kent State team, there are no meaningless bowl games. It's a great experience for our players.

Many times I think we forget why we're doing this, and for the betterment of the student-athlete to be in these type of games, to experience this, and to go to different parts of the country.

I just want to get off my soapbox, but do say that all these games are so important. We appreciate the leadership of Kevin and his crew, and we're excited about being here.

That being said, I'll open it up to any questions anybody



may have for myself, X and Chad.

Q. Chad, your career started on blue turf in high school in Colorado. Now it's ending here. Have you had a chance to reminisce at all, and what has this week been like for you?

CHAD MUMA: Yeah, I don't think I've really reminisced too much. I don't think that's really part of my personality, but I've just been focused about this week and this game. I've enjoyed the little things here and there and being able to have those conversations when I can, but primarily I've just really been focused on the game and going out there and ending my career on a good note.

Q. Chad, how do you get ready for an offense that tries to basically snap the ball every six seconds, especially in your position trying to read --

CHAD MUMA: Yeah, it's just about the communication. I think that's the biggest part. Also just during practice getting those different looks because there's not a lot of different looks that they give, but when they do, it's coming quick, so it's just being able to align quickly, communicate everything that I need to, and just making sure everyone on the defense is on the same page.

Q. Chad, Josh Allen had the chance to close out his career with a special performance a few years ago. How much are you looking forward to the opportunity to do the same here?

CHAD MUMA: I think that's the biggest thing that I'm looking forward to right now is just going out tomorrow and just as a team all performing to the best of our ability and playing the way we know how to play.

Q. Craig, I saw you walk in with a branding iron. Can we hear what that's all about, please?

CRAIG BOHL: Yeah, it's been interesting through the years, that's a branding iron that my great, great, great grandfather had, and I have some cattle now, and that's our brand. What I've done through the years whenever we make a bowl game, I load it up on the equipment truck and

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bring it, and my family gathers around.

That's what it's there for, so it's back there. I put Tracy in charge of guarding it right now.

Q. Speaking of guarding it, when you look at this season and what your expectations were coming into the season and then the way the season wound up playing out, does that put a little more fire into this game for you guys, a little more wanting to at least finish it off?

CRAIG BOHL: Well, I know expectations are high. They're high for these guys. I have high expectations.

In the midst of this, what I will not do and we should not do is celebrate the fact that we're bowl eligible again. Getting in a bowl game is not easy, and if you look at our history, we've had somewhat of a checkered history as far as qualifying.

Kudos to these guys and the plays that they've made for us to be here today.

I do think that any time you're in a game, you're in it to win it. The bowl game experience is great, but make no mistake, I'm sure Kent feels the same way, Kent State feels the same way, we're in this thing to win it, and our guys have had spirited practices. We have a mantra going 1-0, so that's our mantra right now, get to 1-0.

Q. X, part of Kent State's strategy obviously is to score, score quickly and kind of wear down the other defense. How important do you think it will be for you guys to also run the ball well and maybe help your defense stay off the field as much as possible?

XAZAVIAN VALLADAY: Great question. I think it's a very important deal for us on the offensive side of the ball to create big plays and keep our defense off the field. We're very aware that they have an explosive offense, so doing our part and moving the ball down the field would be great for us as far as throwing the ball and running the ball, as well.

Q. Craig, I'm curious what your assessment is on Kent State's secondary. They've given up a lot of yards but also have picked off a lot of passes. They're very opportunistic it seems.

CRAIG BOHL: Well, you're very accurate on that. They've got good players back there. Their style of offense, when you go against that during the course of spring and fall camp, you're used to playing against explosive players. I think they're very athletic.

It's going to be imperative -- I say over and over again, a key for us is the turnover margin, for our defense and Chad's crew to get a couple.

And then on the other side to make sure we take care of the football. You throw the ball up and you put it into harm's way, they're very opportunistic in going after it. We've got to be on point. Levi has got to throw the ball well, and we need to catch it well.

Q. X, you were named team captain earlier this season. For you what does that mean and what would you say is the greatest mark you left on this program and how excited are you for a chance to get to 1,000 yards again?

XAZAVIAN VALLADAY: It's very exciting. It's been a great season and a great time just being able to lead my teammates and be the voice that I can be for them. I can say just reminiscing about everything we've been through this year and the off-season, I feel like we've been very prepared and well-coached in all aspects where Coach Bohl can put us in positions to lead our team and do the right things for us to come out and just be great student-athletes. I thought we did that pretty well this year, and I thought I've been in a great position to do the right things for our team.

Q. X, when you look at Levi, obviously the Arizona Bowl he was a freshman getting ready for that situation, kind of a big stage for the first time. How have you seen him preparing for this bowl and just his evolution over the last couple years?

XAZAVIAN VALLADAY: Levi, he's definitely grown into a great quarterback from just all the coaching aspects and points that he's been able to do for our team, and just his athleticism, being able to grow from a great quarterback a couple years ago from the plays that he's been making up until now, I definitely feel like he's grown to be a very dynamic player as far as throwing and running the ball.

You guys will definitely have a chance to see and watch that tomorrow.

Q. X, Josh kind of mentioned it, you're really close to eclipsing 1,000 yards on the season. Is that something you think about going into this game?

XAZAVIAN VALLADAY: No, not really. I just have my mind set on winning the football game and just enjoying this experience with my team and my coaches and all the Wyoming fans. I definitely feel like this is a great experience for our fans, as well, and the whole entire



community, so just being able to be locked in and being able to have a fun experience.

Q. Chad, Kent State has a good running attack and two running backs and a quarterback who can take off any time, too. As a defender when they can hit you from all angles like that, how do you stop that and give your defense the ability to make some plays?

CHAD MUMA: Yeah, I think it's just early on being able to fit up those run plays and not really showing a weakness in your run game, so if they were to kind of break one out on you, they'll come back to that play later on. So I think the biggest thing is just getting it stopped early and kind of forcing them to go to more pass game situations.

Q. Chad, as far as dual-threat quarterbacks, why do you think you've had problems with those guys?

CHAD MUMA: Yeah, I think most of the time it's just keeping the contain on the quarterbacks and everyone staying in their lanes and then after that it's going out and just making a tackle and not having the opportunity for those quarterbacks to really cut back and continue to gain yards.

Q. Chad, it's your last game at the University of Wyoming tomorrow. How do you think your time in the brown and gold has prepared you to take that next step?

CHAD MUMA: Oh, I think it's done everything that I could have asked for. Going into college, I only weighed about 195 pounds, and I think that everything that I've received from Wyoming has gotten me to this point and allowed me to be ready and put on weight and learn about the game the way I needed to, and so I think that everything that Coach Bohl has done for this program and for me especially has just been tremendous to get me ready for the next level.

Q. Craig, just looking back, two seniors right here next to you, what do you remember most about when you were recruiting these two guys?

CRAIG BOHL: Well, on both of them, it seems like just yesterday they arrived on campus, and physically, as Chad said, they're just trying to figure some things out. It's been great to see the maturation process. We are a developmental program, and these two guys that are sitting to my left are great examples of being developmental players. They've established themselves at a very high level, and I appreciate what they've said, that we have provided the resources, but along with that, they've got the DNA inside to take advantage of the resources.

Both of them have done very well academically. They've gotten bigger, stronger, faster, and they've developed into great football players.

It's always a challenge when you have these guys that come and go, but it's great to have them.

As we said, Chad said it and X said it, too, we're very focused on winning this game.

Q. I know he's not here, but Crall has talked about how he was 190 pounds when he came to Wyoming. You make him a defensive lineman. A lot of these guys you've taken that were quarterbacks, running backs, turned them into linebackers, defensive linemen, offensive linemen. What do you see in a guy that makes you think you can take this star quarterback and put him in that type of a role?

CRAIG BOHL: Well, that's easier said than done. But I think the biggest thing for us is to recognize what's inside him, how important is football, how important is it to them to get a meaningful degree, how important is it to them to be a team player. We're very intentional when we recruit guys.

We still do things the old-fashioned way. We do a lot of in-person evaluation, and what we try to do is take a guy who's an athlete and then protect where they're going to be, not right now but where they're going to be in four or five years. So that's our MO. I think that's why you've seen more consistent play, and quite frankly, I think that's why you've seen the number of players that have launched themselves in the NFL.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that you come to a bowl game to win the game, but what's your favorite thing about bringing your team to a bowl game like this?

CRAIG BOHL: Well, you know what, without question, the activities that surround a bowl game, and to see our players experience a different part of the country, wherever that is, but really quite frankly, it's some little things that you see. You see them hanging out together in the hotel for an extended period of time and then break out into some card game where they're laughing.

We had a little bit -- a couple hiccups as we were trying to get here, and somehow I was able to maintain my poise and composure, but what really made it easy was just seeing how our players were.

So I think the biggest thing is just the camaraderie that they have. I would equate it, sometimes it's the little things in



life, and just to see them enjoy being around in a different environment.

Q. Craig, how big of a role will Keonte play in this game at nickel, and what can you tell us about Blake Harrington?

CRAIG BOHL: Yeah, Keonte Glinton is an excellent nickel. We're certainly excited. He's going to get tested. What they do, as Chad will tell you, they're a dual threat team. You've got to be able to defend the pass but you've also got to defend the run, and he's going to get tested. I think he's in great shape.

Blake Harrington is a guy who is unbelievably smart. He's wickedly smart, and he always seems to be in the right place at the right time. While he has not played a ton of game reps, he's always been ready. He's going to launch himself into a career -- these guys are going to do great. He's not going to play -- Blake Harrington is not going to play in the NFL, but he's going to go pro in something else, and I think he'll probably be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Good for him.

Guys, I want to say thanks for your exposure. We need accurate media. Our local guys, I've told them this, and I know we have other members here. Accurate journalism is so important. College football is something to be celebrated, and your part as journalists has a critical, critical prism that our fans look through, so I want to say thanks for your interest and support.

To the local guys that are here, it's great to see you again. It'll probably be a little while maybe afterwards and then we won't see each other for a while.

Kevin, once again, thanks for putting on a great bowl game. We appreciate all your efforts. We're excited about being back here in Boise, and we're excited about playing in this bowl game. Thank you, everybody.

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