

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl: Eastern Michigan vs San Jose State

Monday, December 19, 2022

Boise, Idaho, USA

Albertsons Stadium

San Jose State Spartans Head Coach Brent Brennan Junior Fehoko Chevan Cordeiro

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2022 Famous Idaho Potato Bowl press conference. Joining us from San Jose State are Coach Brent Brennan, Junior Fehoko, and Chevan Cordeiro. We'll open with a statement from Coach.

BRENT BRENNAN: Thanks for having us. We have had an incredible time here in Boise. Thank you to everybody that's worked so hard to put on just a great experience for our football team. We've had a blast. We've had great practice. The facilities have been great.

It's just been a very special experience for our team. We haven't been to a bowl game like this in a long time. At least not since I've been the head coach here. Our last bowl experience was we were in a hotel for a week and couldn't leave and it was COVID, and it didn't feel anything like this has felt.

To be able to enjoy the city, for our players to be able to enjoy being out and about and seeing a new place, and experiencing something new has been incredible. Thank you to everybody from the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl for having us. We're having a great, great time here.

Big game for us. We know we're playing a really good Eastern Michigan team. It's a great challenge for our football team. We've played teams from the MAC before. We have tremendous respect for the conference. So we're excited to play the game.

I've got two really good guys up here with me, but for us this game is really about the senior class that all of them committed to us when we were 2-10 or 1-11. To think



about that journey and what that has meant to our program, what it's meant to our school is really, really special. So we're excited to play one last time together as a football family, and we're excited for tomorrow.

Q. This question is for Brent and Junior, by the way. Given that you mentioned how the last time you were at the bowl game, it was the Arizona Bowl, and those were under conditions of COVID. Do you feel that this bowl game is a bit like a redemption since the last bowl game you had, like, 30 players that didn't play. So do you think this is another chance to really show what you are really made of on the big stage?

BRENT BRENNAN: I think we're excited about the big stage, but I think more than anything we're just excited to play one more game. This has been a special group. It's been a tough year.

We've battled through a lot of hard stuff. Losing our brother Camdan McWright midseason. It's just been an incredibly challenging and hard thing for all of us. So it's more to me about our brotherhood and getting to play the game that we love one last time with the people that we love.

JUNIOR FEHOKO: I would agree with Coach Brennan on that one. With all the hard things that we've been through as a program this year, as a team, the biggest thing for us is just being together for this past month that we have an extra month to be with each other and just work. That's it.

Q. I wanted to ask you guys, I guess Chevan, talk to you a little about their defense. I don't know if you have had nightmares about Ramirez or not, but a big guy on the defensive end coming in. Can you talk about what you guys see in order for you guys to have success offensively, what you guys are going to be able to do or what you are going to need to do tomorrow?

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: I mean, they've got a solid defense. Their defensive end won defensive player of the year, and he is a good guy. We just have to play our game. We just have to focus on our game plan and just be



ourselves and just buy into the game plan, and the rest will take care of itself.

Q. Junior, for you, can you talk a little bit about as far as going up against their offense? They have a really good running back and some good receivers. What do you guys have to do in order to have success tomorrow?

JUNIOR FEHOKO: We know that as a defense we just have to come in and be focused and be ready to play four quarters of disciplined football. We know that their offense was one of the best in their conference this past year. So just discipline every play. We're going to wait to see who messes up first. Yes, sir.

Q. Coach, the thing that kind of jumps out at me when I look at this matchup and we think of all these things where guys are leaving the bowl game behind to get ready for pro football. You have a pro football prospect right next to you that's going to play in the game. Unless I missed something, both teams are all in on this bowl game. I mean, talk a little bit about that in terms of what this means about college football and all the fun stuff that comes with it. To me it's a real statement about both teams and kind of how they're built.

BRENT BRENNAN: Yeah, I talked about it with Coach Creighton. I think there's some real similarities between our two programs, when we met for the first time the other day.

I think it does speak to the fact that the players that are playing in either program are having a good experience playing there. They're connected to the guys that they go to work with every day, and they want to play for them. I think that's a really neat thing.

You are seeing that from both schools, which is really, really special. So, you know, I think what's happening in college football right now is what it is, and it's not something that we try to focus on what we can control, and right now that's just our preparation and being together and enjoying the process, getting ready for this big game.

Q. Chevan, if I could ask you a question. It's always interesting to me. I always envisioned you as a warm weather quarterback, right? You're from Honolulu, Hawaii. I think about when you played for Hawaii, you would always play big at Wyoming for the Paniolo Trophy in bad weather. Did it this year against Wyoming. Are you able to do that because your approach seems to be the same every week when we talk to you. It's like the game plan, we just go execute

it. You don't seem intimidated by the weather at all.

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: I just have that mindset where I can play in any weather, whether it's raining, super hot, or snowing. I'm going to play my game. I'm going to listen to the game plan, and I don't really worry about that.

Q. Last question for Junior. You're rocking those gold cleats, ala L.C. Greenwood with the Pittsburgh Steelers. I know I'm a lot older than you, but what are the origins of those cleats? I love the drip. Where did they come from, and why did you wear them?

JUNIOR FEHOKO: There's no crazy story behind it. They were just able to find 14 -- or three pairs of gold cleats that were my size, so they gave it to the three big guys on our team. That was just about it (laughing).

Q. This is for the players. Can both of you guys talk about Coach Brennan mentioned earlier about when you were recruiting a lot of the seniors on the team, you were 2-10, 1-11. What has it meant to you guys to be able to be a part of a program that kind of building something back up from the ground up to where you guys are now doing some things that haven't been done in this program in a long time?

JUNIOR FEHOKO: For me it's being here from 2018 until now just being able to see Coach Brennan emphasize brotherhood, culture, and family. Those are like the pillars of our football team, and just seeing that philosophy grow and the belief in our team grow as a whole. It has been a cool experience to witness everything that Coach Brennan has given us.

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: It's just good for us and what Coach Brennan does for the program. Just keeping us together. It's just one family. When I got here, they treated me like family from the very jump. It just shows how good of a coach Coach Brennan is. That's why we all came here.

I mean, it's fun. We had a great season, and we just want to finish strong. I mean, I love this team.

Q. Coach, talking to the players they all mention brotherhood. It's kind of a theme for you guys. Where does that kind of come from, and what have you done to are kind of cultivate that culture here?

BRENT BRENNAN: I think our coaching staff does a good job of that. I think guys would have trouble working with me if they weren't about the players, if they didn't care about the young men that we lead and coach.



The brotherhood is -- I just think this game is hard, and if you are not connected, if you're not really, really connected, it's hard to overcome.

There was some history at San Jose that was not great football history for a stretch, and so how are we going to make a move in the conference? How are we going to make a move as a program? We did that by connecting the team and really believing in each other.

And we've done a bunch of -- these guys will tell you a bunch of funny team-building things on Friday nights or offseason where we break up into small groups and we talk about real stuff. It's really common in the room for there to be laughing and crying or hugging.

We've been able to build, find common ground, whatever it might be. Maybe someone's parents just got divorced or someone had a death in the family or, you know, or someone went through a bad breakup. Some of these things come out in these conversations.

They're normally directed or guided a little bit by something that I either ask the leaders of the team, Hey, what do you think about this? Or sometimes it comes from them. Hey, Coach, we got it this week.

But it's definitely more special when you care about the people you are doing it with, and I think that's one of the reasons we've been able to make some progress as a program is because we love each other, and we work hard for each other every day.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what are some of those activities that you do? Are there any ones that are unique? You said some are funny. What are some ones that maybe are some of your favorites with the players?

BRENT BRENNAN: There's a lot of them, but we've done -- I count up the room so that numbers are random so you don't have all the D-line together or all the -- you know, all positions are mixed up. Best day of your life/worst day of your life. Hardest things you've ever been through.

We did gratitude tree where everyone had to write down everything on an actual picture of a tree and then they broke out in groups, and you had to talk about what you were grateful for.

Then you find out, well, I'm grateful for my step dad. Oh, I didn't know. I have a step dad too. He is really important to me. So then all these connections get built through those team activities.

It's been really positive for us I think. Sometimes they're, like, Oh, come on, Coach. Then after they're, like, That was good, thank you.

It's funny. This year when we went to play Auburn the day before we went to the -- I'm going to forget the name, which is not good, but the civil rights museum there, and it was this incredible experience for everybody, and then that night we talked about that, right?

You are in this group of people that's mixed more so than most society is, and you have to talk about real stuff. People have different experiences growing up or living where they do or going through what they do. How much of that stuff can we talk about? How much awareness can we bring to each other? And how much empathy can we have for each other for someone that's going through something hard?

Maybe because you have had a similar experience, maybe you can take some of that load off of them and help them go about their day better. So it's been something that I think has really bound us.

I know for Chev it was a little bit new, some of it this year. But I think it's an important part of who we are and what we do.

Q. This question is for Chevan and Junior. If you would be so kind to humor me, I know when a play happens, you don't linger on it for too long, but my third favorite play in football is the batted pass. What's it like from your individual perspectives when, one, you have a pass batted or you are knocking down the ball?

JUNIOR FEHOKO: Well, as a defender, especially a D-lineman or for the whole defense, you know, it's a positive for us. We get the quarterback off his routine. Maybe it's on first down. So we win on first down, and now we can pin our ears back on second down and go get after Chevan, you know? Yeah, for us it just messes up the offense's routine, and it gives us a jump on them.

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: For me my perspective, I mean, it's the worst feeling when you know something is wide open and it gets batted down. But, I mean, it's something I can't control. It's on to the next, yeah.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit about tomorrow as far as what are some of your keys to the game and things that if your guys are going to be successful, you know, what do you see your team needing to be able to do?

BRENT BRENNAN: We have to win the turnover battle. It always starts with that for us. We've got to play with great effort. I mean, all these things sound cliché, but every time I'm asked this question, I say about the same thing. We have to stop the run, and we have to run the ball. Then do a great job in the kicking game.

Those are five really simple things that we talk about a lot and focus on a lot, but win the turnover battle, run the ball, stop the run, play with great effort, and play great in the kicking game.

Q. And as far as the outcome of this game goes, how important or how much do you feel like this is something for the program to build on and that sort of thing? How big is this for you guys?

BRENT BRENNAN: Well, I think it's huge because it always feels better when have an experience like this and it ends with the result you want, right? I've been a part of winning and losing games as a coach and as a player.

And I know we've talked about it a lot as a team. Like, you'll remember this game the rest of your life. I still remember the '94 Rose Bowl. Turned it over seven times and lost to Wisconsin. I'll never -- I was a player. I wasn't a very good one, but I was on the team. Stuff like that.

Then we also think about how we felt at the Arizona Bowl where we were really missing a lot of key players. I mean, we've been laughing about it all week because when we left San Jose, we left 14 players in San Jose. So it was already like a funeral when we got on the plane. It was rough.

Our staff the whole week was trying to jump-start the emotion of the team, but then we were afraid of COVID, so everyone was locked in their hotel room. We would not meet as a team because we were afraid of any other -- we were getting tested every day, but we lost both coordinators. It was a heck of a deal.

Then really how that game felt where we didn't play our best football. We were playing a really good Ball State team, and they got after us, and it was misery. These guys remember that.

So I just think for our program to play good football against a good opponent, that always matters. But to finish the season, it matters even more.

Q. You guys are familiar with coming here. You play Boise State on the blue every other year. Is it a different approach? Is it a different feeling coming in this time around playing a different opponent?

BRENT BRENNAN: It's funny. These guys have never played -- I mean, Chevan maybe has, but my team has not played here. This is my sixth year.

We came out here during COVID. I don't know if you remember. The day was canceled the day of the game at, like, 8:00 in the morning. It was a nightmare. It was not fun.

Then we had to play them. Then we won the rest of our games, and we ended up playing them in the championship, but that was in Vegas. The current Spartan crew hasn't been on the blue yet.

Q. Clearly I didn't do my homework.

BRENT BRENNAN: That's all right.

Q. Another question for you guys. Since a lot of the fan base out here isn't familiar with Spartan football, what would you say to kind of get them excited and get them to come out for the game tomorrow?

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: We're going to put on a show. We're going to score on offense and play some solid defense, and it's going to be a good game, and they're a good team. Yeah, it's going to be an exciting game.

Q. I'm not sure if this is going to be the last question or not, but given that we are at the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl, what is your favorite way to enjoy or to prepare a potato?

BRENT BRENNAN: That's a good question.

JUNIOR FEHOKO: I have no answer for you.

BRENT BRENNAN: French fries. That would be my slam dunk answer for potatoes.

CHEVAN CORDEIRO: Yeah, McDonald's fries.

JUNIOR FEHOKO: There we go. McDonald's fries.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions? Thank you so the San Jose State Spartans, and good luck tomorrow.

BRENT BRENNAN: Thank you all.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

