

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl: Utah State vs Georgia State

Saturday, December 23, 2023

Boise, Idaho, USA

Albertsons Stadium

Utah State Aggies
Blake Anderson
Jalen Royals
Paul Fitzgerald
Press Conference

Georgia State 45, Utah State 22

THE MODERATOR: Joining me from Utah State are head coach Blake Anderson and student-athletes Jalen Royals and Paul Fitzgerald. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach Anderson.

Coach Anderson.

BLAKE ANDERSON: First off, it was honestly a great week. Appreciate everybody that put the bowl together. The events that we had this week were phenomenal. Just the hospitality from start to finish was top-notch.

I acknowledge a bunch of people putting this thing together. It's been going on for a long time. It doesn't happen by accident. Thank you to everybody that put effort and energy into making it a great week.

Our fans, those that traveled, we had a lot of folks that made the trip, just appreciate them coming to support us. Very disappointed in how we played. We're a better football team than what you saw today. That's the hard part, is we did a lot of work to get here, overcame a lot of adversity to get here, but then just did not play in any phase the way we're capable of.

I love our dudes. I love what they did to get us to a bowl game. But as I told them in the locker room, we're a better football team than we showed today. Frustrated in how we played in all three phases.

Got to give them credit, they manhandled us from beginning to end. They had a better plan. We got out-coached and outplayed. That's not how you want to finish the season.



We'll cut these guys lose a little bit to enjoy Christmas with their families, come back and go back to work. That's all we can do. There's a lot of things that need to be fixed, things that we can fix. Hopefully we're all in there arm in arm to get it done.

Again, thanks to everybody that made this possible. But disappointed in how we finished.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Jalen, you set a record today in the game getting your 15th touchdown. What does it feel like being the record holder there?

JALEN ROYALS: It means a lot. Just coming to Utah State, coach trusted in me, just playing how he wants me to play. Breaking the record is pretty good for me. So yeah...

Q. Coach Anderson, the microcosm of the season defensively was the inability to get off the field on third-and-long. What do you think was the biggest bugaboo with that this season?

BLAKE ANDERSON: Yeah, I don't know if it's just third-and-long. I think in general just defensively we struggled all season. It's not something that we talk about a lot, but clearly it's obvious we struggled. We struggled to create pass-rush without adding extra guys. When you add extra guys, you're exposed in coverage.

At this point it's kind of what do you do, do you bring extra bodies, do you not, play back and not get the pass-rush.

We've got to continue to develop and recruit to get better in those areas. This season was about managing what we had, not really worrying about what we didn't have but managing what we had.

I would just tell you that I think Joe is as frustrated as anybody is and knows we have to attack this in recruiting. There's eight starters that should be out there helping us on defense that are playing on other people's rosters

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across the country and could have added a lot of help that we just didn't have. We've got to attack it.

Not pleased with how we played. He's not either. Nobody in that locker room is. I would tell you, you ask about third down, you've got to be able to create pass-rush, speed the clock up. If you can't, you better be great in coverage. At this point we're still struggling in both those areas.

Q. Paul and coach, Darren Grainger, quarterback for Georgia State, had a pretty incredible game. Hurt you on the ground, in the air. Talk about what he did today, how hard it was to play against him.

PAUL FITZGERALD: He's a good athlete. He was able to throw the balls he needed to make. He was moving around good. He's a good athlete. Just played better than us. Better scheme.

BLAKE ANDERSON: I've had a chance to watch him a good bit. What I saw today didn't surprise me a lot. He is truly a dual-threat quarterback with a tremendous amount of poise. I think schematically they do a tremendous job utilizing his skill set.

But it starts up front. They owned us up front on both sides of the ball. We've had that conversation all year. We know it's something we have to address. Today was critical. Just could not get to him, create pressure.

I thought they did a really good job schematically of adding plus-one type situations that really spread us out thin defensively. He just didn't make a lot of mistakes. He had a couple, but nothing critical. Seemed to make the play when he had to.

He's a phenomenal player. Really didn't expect anything different from him.

Q. In the first quarter you were keeping up with their offense, then stalled in the second quarter. What happened there?

BLAKE ANDERSON: Mismanaged a couple opportunities I think. Lost some one-on-one battles up front. I felt like as the game kind of went on, they were able to stretch it out, they were able to play us a little differently.

We're not really built right now with Levi at quarterback to play catch-up a whole lot. We're much better when we can stay balanced. They started dropping eight, playing a little bit differently.

Obviously they handled us. When we needed to make big plays, we struggled to protect. They did a good job of

keeping us off balance at times, were able to drop eight into coverage, taking away the big, big play, making us earn it. We just didn't do a great job of that.

It was one of our worst offensive outings of the season. Very, very little rhythm or tempo, which is things we need to be successful.

Q. Paul, what was it like playing in a bowl game in your home state, tying a program record with three sacks in a bowl game?

PAUL FITZGERALD: It felt good, but at the end of the day we still lost, so... Kind of takes away the enjoyment of it. Still feels good to be able to produce, make some plays, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

BLAKE ANDERSON: Thanks, folks.

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