



2019 MAKERS WANTED BAHAMAS BOWL

Charlotte Press Conference Quotes

Dec. 19, 2019



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Head Coach Will Healy

Opening Statement...

"First off, I don't know how you ever top this trip. To think about it from our perspective, your first ever bowl game, having the opportunity to go to the Bahamas and spend five days at Atlantis, it's been everything I could hope it would be and more. Just to be able to walk around our hotel and see the smiles on these guys' faces, to watch them enjoy what this bowl game has to offer, it's a first-class event. We've had a blast. We understand there's still a football game to be played, but the whole experience has been amazing. I want to thank everybody here, especially Richard and Lea for the hospitality we've seen in the Bahamas. Atlantis has been incredible, and now we're excited about shifting our tone and getting ready for an outstanding Buffalo team. I saw the other day, they had a top 150 coaches of all-time list and Lance was 78. I don't even know if I was on the top two million. Obviously they're a tremendously well-coached football team that's won five out of their last six. They've played really good football at the end of the year like we have. We're excited about the opportunity, excited to give these two seniors to play in our first- ever bowl game and now set the standard and expectation for our football team."

On Cam and Alex...

"You've got two guys here who are both fifth-year seniors. They had a lot of success well before I got there. Obviously I didn't recruit them. I thought it was important to build a culture and a program, so I really needed the seniors to buy into what we were doing and how we were doing it. These two were really the first two to jump on board and push the message and buy into our program and our culture. Alex Highsmith was a school-start walk-on, they didn't even invite him to camp. Next thing you know, he's the first AP All-American in the history of Charlotte football. He had 14 sacks this year, second in the country in sacks. What he's done has been tremendous. He's a great football player, but he's twice as good a person, and that's talking about an AP All-American. I'm going to get him to loosen up with the mic a little bit, relax a little bit and let his personality show. He's been so much fun to coach. I think it's because of what I've been able to teach him from a pass-rush perspective, but I think he disagrees. Cam Clark, was a guy we knew coming back had a lot of hype about him. Both of these guys will have an opportunity to play at the next level. We've had almost 200 NFL scouts come through our building because of these two and some of our other guys. Cam's been an all-conference, all-American caliber player the entire year. How about this, he's going to play in his 49th collegiate football game tomorrow, fitting for us being the 49ers. Cam is a guy who has shattered every record and has created a new path. He will have an excellent career in the National Football League. He's been kind of a vocal leader, he's been able to push the message and guys listen when he speaks. I couldn't imagine two better ones to be up here with me. I've loved being around them. I wish I had them seven more years because you could build an entire program around these two. Excellent football players, but again, even better football players."

On shifting focus from the fun to the game...

"We've talked about it a bunch over the last two weeks. When it's time to lock in, I expect you to be professional enough and mature enough to lock in. We say act like a man, I'll treat you like a man; act like a child, I'll treat you like a child. These guys have been very mature about how they've handled this entire week. We had a great practice this morning. I don't know that I've ever practiced in wind like that before. I'm glad I'm not a kicker. I thought the way they locked in this morning was awesome. Really good execution, great energy, we had a really good morning. Last night in meetings they were locked in, they were ready to roll. I think they're used to me, where when you're working hard, let's work really hard. When you're playing hard, let's play really hard, and that's in all aspects. These guys have enjoyed this trip, I can assure you. I've never seen smiles on faces like I have with our guys walking around. I get this question a lot, tangent: 'what does a bowl game like this mean to your players?' So many people in the national media say there's only the College Football Playoff. If you got one chance to walk through the lobby and look at our guys and talk to our guys, you will realize why they play bowl games besides the College Football Playoff. This is a once-in-a-lifetime trip for a lot of our guys. I hope it's not, but the overwhelming odds say for some of them it will be the best trip they ever take in their life. They've locked in. They've been great. They're mature. They've handled the situation extremely well. I said nobody's going to have more fun than we have, and nobody's going to lock in like we will, and they've done that"

On his ability to relax this week...

"I would say [my son] Eli has helped me relax a little bit considering it's been all about the rapid river and nothing about Buffalo. Now I've got to lock back in. My number one concern was that the experience paid off. You worked really hard to get to this situation. If you don't enjoy it, then why do you fight so hard for it? That was my number one thing, the experience. I felt confident enough in these guys that when it was time to bring them back in, they'd be ready to do it. They're excited about another opportunity to play football, and I think that's very important."

On balancing fun and football...

"For me, the biggest thing about it was, with these seniors, I can feel a little bit more at peace. This is not where we want to be, it's not where we're going to be, but to be able to give them this experience before they leave makes me sleep a little bit easier. These guys, so much is going to change and they're leaving it so much better for the people who are coming after them. They're going to come back to our place in two or three years and say 'I wish I had some of those things that they're doing right now.' But having this experience for them makes me feel a lot better, making sure they can leave on this type of experience. I know it's been their goal since they got here. These guys have seen the good, the bad and the really ugly. They've had multiple one-win seasons. First winning season in school history, first-ever bowl game. They now leave a legacy where they're the first to do it. We can only build from it, nobody can ever match that."



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Cam Clark, Redshirt Senior, Offensive Lineman

On the most memorable moment in the Bahamas so far...

"I would say being able to spend this time with my teammates at Atlantis. Being able to be outside of our normal element, we're not in our locker room, we're not in the field house. This is a brand new element for us. For all of us to be able to interact, especially the seniors, we couldn't have a better bowl destination and we're just blessed to be here."

On creating history at Charlotte...

"We always knew that we could do it. We attacked this offseason like we never have before. It wasn't a surprise when then success happened, it was more of a breakthrough. When we lost to FIU, me and Smitty were in the locker room crying. We were like, 'this is about to change. We're not about to go out like this.' We came out against Western Kentucky and got back to the basics. We didn't win that game but during the game we saw a different side of our team. Our defense, they showed a side that we hadn't seen all year. They came out tenacious in the second half when we weren't even in the game. Once we started playing for each other and got back to the basics, there was nothing that could stop us."

On Club Lit...

"Club Lit is crazy. It's lit. It's gotten better and better each win. The first win, we're in there, the lights were on and everything. Comparing that to our last home win versus Marshall, Marshall was crazy. It was standing room only."

On finishing his college career in the Bahamas...

"It couldn't have been a better destination. We've been talking about this since we were freshmen so this is really a dream come true. Our strength coach gave us our summer packet before the first summer. On it, it said 'will you outwork them?' and it had the logo of every team. At the bottom of it, it had the Conference USA championship and the Makers Wanted Bahamas Bowl. That's been on my wall since we got it. I just crossed out the Makers Wanted Bahamas Bowl right before we left because we accomplished it. We did it. It's not a miracle. We've put in the work. Our coaching staff came in and they worked extremely hard with us. It's nice to just reap the benefit of all our hard work because we haven't gotten to do that in the past."

On the importance of winning the game...

"It would mean the world to us. That's what we're preparing for. We didn't come down here just to have fun. We came out here to win a game. That's our focus. We're focused in on tomorrow. We're going to put our best foot forward and play our brand of football."

On changing the culture at Charlotte...

"I feel like the main focus of this senior class was to leave it better than we found it. That was definitely our main goal and I feel like we did that. Not just in the way we played but in the way we led the locker room, the relationships we built, the way we brought young guys along. It's really been a beautiful thing to see just how close the seniors are with the younger guys. The older guys on the team, how we mentored everyone. It's really a family, so to see it pay off like this and for us to all be close like this, Charlotte is definitely on the right track."

Alex Highsmith, Redshirt Senior, Defensive End

On the most memorable moment in the Bahamas so far...

"Being able to spend this week at Atlantis with my brothers, that's just been unforgettable. It's been so amazing so far. For me, finally seeing some clear water has been awesome. I went to Clearwater Beach earlier in the year and I thought I was going to see clear water, but it wasn't really clear. I finally got to see some clear water. The first thing when we got here was eat lunch, then didn't even go back to the room, just went to the beach."

On Club Lit...

"I still remember the first Club Lit. I came into the locker room and we were all jumping and cheering. Coach Healy comes in and takes his shirt off, and I was like 'woah, this is crazy.' I've never seen a team celebrate like this. It's awesome that he wants us to celebrate success, I really love that. No matter how we win, we won, and he wants to celebrate that. He wants it to be the best when we do celebrate so we take that from practice all the way into the game and into Club Lit. That's why we enjoy it after the game so much with Club Lit."

On finishing his college career in the Bahamas...

"What a week and what a place to just enjoy our hard work that we've put in. It's been awesome, the week's been awesome. Me and Cam, when we got here, we just wanted to leave this place better than we found it. It feels good now that we've done that. We set a standard for what this program is going to be. This program is going to do even bigger and better things in the future. It feels cool to be part of the first bowl game in school history."

On changing the culture at Charlotte...

"About midway through the season when things started changing, coach had us in this leadership council we were doing every week. You had all the senior captains in there, all the seniors, and a lot of young guys as well. We were reading some chapters of a book about leadership, doing an hour discussion about it. We talked about things like how to run a culture, how to make a culture. I think it's definitely going to be passed on when this senior class leaves."