

BOWL NEWS

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December 30 Press Conference Quotes - Houston

Coach Kevin Sumlin – “It’s an honor to be back here. We’ve been treated very, very well again. The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl people have done a really, really good job with our players and our families. The people in the city of Fort Worth opened their restaurants and have taken care of us. I think it’s going to be a great game. I’ve said many times that Troy (Calhoun) does a fantastic job, he and his staff. They’re an extremely disciplined football team. You look at statistics – I don’t really pay attention to them until the end of the year – but this is a team that has only turned the ball over 11 times. They’re number one in the country in pass defense and top 10 in the country in total defense. They’re just a tremendously disciplined, physical football team. It will be a great challenge for us. Basically, we’re trying to do what we want to do and they’re really good at not letting people do what they want to do. It’s going to be a great challenge.”

(On the practice facilities at Southlake Carroll Senior High School.) “It was a pretty good week (of preparation). They did a great job the whole week of preparation. Their outdoor practice field and the indoor field that we used (Tuesday), we were able to bounce around in there. We had everything that we needed. They provided us with the locker rooms and everything – the whole setup – was first class.”

(On both teams wearing dark jerseys in the game.) “I don’t think it’s going to effect the kids at all. I think both teams know who they are so I don’t think we’ll have any problem figuring out who the other guys are.”

(On whether the cold weather will effect his players.) “I hope not. We practiced in it and when we played East Carolina, it was in the 40s. We’ve been in it before and we only played one game indoors. The elements are all part of football and we know what it’s going to be, we watched the weather report for the last week. It’s not going to change, either. Unless it’s raining, (the weather) doesn’t matter.”

(On team captains Marcus McGraw and Case Keenum.) “Both of them, although they’re in two different classes, were voted captains by their peers, their teammates. Marcus McGraw, a sophomore, is our leading tackler and just really a dynamic player. I think he’s played every down since he’s gotten to the University of Houston. Unless we take him out, he never comes out. He’s had a tremendous career so far, even though he’s only played two years of football. Case Keenum, a junior quarterback, these two guys are really the cornerstones of our football team. I can’t say enough for both of their leadership on and off the field, how they conduct things day to day and what leaders by example they are for our university and our team.”

(On how a bowl week changes your preparations.) “We try to mimic our normal week. It just so happens that we take the game day and count back. For us, today (Wednesday) is Friday, so our coaches talk about Friday’s schedule. The other day, I didn’t even know what day it was. But that’s what we’ve done. We practiced up until the 22nd and then came back the 26th the guys came back in and we treated it like a Monday. We usually go to a movie on Friday night with the team, unless it’s an early game, so we won’t do that tonight.”

(On the dynamics of the rematch with Air Force.) “You know I don’t pay attention to that. Everybody makes a big deal out of us playing Air Force again, but we also have six or seven games on our schedule where we play the same team again every year. That’s not that big a deal.”

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Quarterback Case Keenum – (On playing close to home.) “I hope it’s going to be fun; I expect it to be. Based on what it was last year, a lot of people are going to show up and it should be a fun game so it’s going to be a lot of fun for us and hopefully for the people watching as well.”

(On the weather.) “When you’re playing in December, that means you’re doing well. When it starts to get cold, that’s football weather, that’s playoff weather and that’s bowl weather. When you play in December and January, you’ve got to expect it because it’s that time of year and it means you’re playing in the games you want to be playing in. It’s the same for both teams.”

(On the team’s mind-set after the loss in the Conference USA championship game.) “Obviously, that was not the way that we had intended things to go. That’s the last time we played since now and it’s what’s on everybody’s mind. It’s the taste we have in our mouths and it’s not a good one. We’re hoping to get that bad taste out of our mouths and a win in a bowl game will help. A win in a bowl game, you can draw on it through the off-season and kind of feed off it going into next year. This is a good bowl game, it’s going to be a championship atmosphere and Air Force is a good football team so it’s going to be a test and we’re excited about playing in it.”

(On the challenge Air Force presents.) “Obviously, they’re the number-one pass defense in the nation so they’ve done a really good of that. They’re going to play extremely hard the entire game, they’re going to be in the right spots at the right time and they’re not going to have very many busted assignments. We just have to match that intensity and come out ready to go. A lot of times, bowl games are who can get back to game speed the quickest and we’ve got make sure we can do that. There’s no telling (if Air Force is going to do anything different this time) so we just have to go out there and play our game and be ready for anything. If we play hard, everything else will come with it.”

Linebacker Marcus McGraw – (On how the weather will effect play.) “I don’t think it plays in that much. At first, you may be a little chilly but I feel once we get warmed up, I think you shouldn’t even think about it.”

(On the week’s preparations.) “It’s been an exciting week. You’ve got your business when you go to practice in the morning and then you get to have a little fun at night. It’s been a pretty good thing this week. You’ve just got to be on your A game. You just can’t go out there empty-headed; you still have to be able to think and function and remember what you are here for. I think if we keep that in mind, I think we’ll be able to keep the penalties and the turnovers down.”

(On the team’s mind-set this week.) “We take it as a business trip. We’re coming out here to see what we’ll be going into next season with and we’re probably going to have a lot of young guys playing who probably never played earlier this year. It’ll be exciting for us to see how we fold out.”

(On the team’s attitude after the loss in the Conference USA championship game.) “It’s an attitude where we didn’t like our last performance out on the field so we’re going to try to change everybody’s opinion of us. Going out with a win will be able to give us some confidence going into the off-season and make us feel good. We’re trying to get to an 11-win season and I think it’s only been done twice in a couple of decades at the University of Houston. I think it’ll be great for our seniors to leave a legacy out there with an 11-win season and for the young guys, it’ll just make us want to do better as the years go on.”

(On playing Air Force.) “We’ve just got to be on our A game. We’ve got to be able to trust each other and do our assignments because everybody has got a specific job to do on each play and if we forget something, it could result in a touchdown for Air Force. We look at it like any other game. Some people that really haven’t played in the game look at it as a new game against a lot of new faces. It’s like a new team. For us, it’s like another bowl game, another opportunity to show how good we are. I’m sure they’ve got something to prove but we’re just going to go out and try to do what we’re able to do and get a win.”