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Tropical Smoothie Cafe Frisco Bowl Press Conference Quotes

Monday, Dec. 20, 2021

Toyota Stadium | Frisco, Texas

SDSU Only

Head Coach Brady Hoke

Opening Statement:

"Number one, thanks for coming out. We're thankful to be here, really excited to be here. We were here three years ago and it's really great to be back. We want to thank all the people associated with Frisco Bowl and their hospitality. Sean (Johnson), Wren (Ovard), Nick (Shafer), Kris (Katseanes) and Ray (Mallouk) and all the volunteers have been great. We really appreciate it all. We had the opportunity to practice at Prosper High School and it couldn't have worked out better. We want to thank their (athletic director) Valerie Little for kind of putting that together. And also, you know, Coach (Jeff) Horton has a little influence, so it was great to be able to (practice) there. We'd also like to thank Tropical Smoothie Cafe, Rudy's Bar-B-Q, Galaxy Theatres and Tumbleweed. All those people have been very supportive.

"We're really excited to have the opportunity to play such a good football program in UTSA, which beat Western Kentucky for the C-USA title to get their 12th win this season. We're excited to be their opponent and try to play our best football against. The guys in (our) program haven't played a home game in two years. They've gone up to Carson, California, and have done an excellent job. I really give them a lot of credit because of the leadership of the guys on this football team and how they've handled (the past) two seasons. To this point, we have not missed any games; we've been able to play all the way through. We did have an incident that happened during (Mountain West) championship week, but at the same time, (I'm) just really (proud) how our guys reacted, how they followed the protocols. I give San Diego State (University) a lot of credit and the people within our medical staff, on campus and within the athletic (department). We're proud of the guys."

On how UTSA's Frank Harris compares to other quarterbacks the Aztecs have faced this year:

"As you know, we've played against a lot of guys this year who are going to play at the next level, so I don't think Frank's much different. What he does is extend plays. (Myself) as a defensive coach by trade, he drives you crazy. I think it was kind of neat just to meet him as he was leaving the building here. But he's a tremendous quarterback, a great leader. I think their team, their offense responds to him, so we'll have our hands full. He's a dual-threat guy. It puts a lot of pressure on your defense...They're 12-1 for a reason. That reason is they've got good football players. They play well together and they're well-coached."

On building early momentum and confidence this season with wins over Pac-12 schools:

"If you've got a group of guys who are highly competitive, which I think we do, I think that has some do with it. I do think it translates to a little bit more confidence. But as we all know, winning is hard. I mean, it's hard. What they (UTSA) did winning their conference, you know, I give them a lot of respect, because it's hard. And our guys for 10 weeks played some pretty doggone good football. But we talked about (how) winning's hard all the time, and I think our leadership really got us through."

On being able to return to a program he helped build back in 2009 and 2010:

"It's not the coach, it's the players and the guys you recruit and their character. I'm really proud of the guys on our coaching staff who have helped mentor, helped build, helped guys learn life lessons and how to play the great game of football."

On which UTSA game stood out to him after watching video:

"I think it was the Memphis game because of the respect I have for them. The (C-USA) title game against Western Kentucky. Western Kentucky's quarterback (Bailey Zappe) obviously had a great game against Appalachian State the other night in the (Boca Raton Bowl). That's got to be a great win (for UTSA), winning a conference championship and how they played."

Senior linebacker Caden McDonald

On recording wins vs. Power Five opponents over the last several years:

"Yeah, having those kinds of wins really motivate the team because a lot of us were underrecruited or not offered (scholarships) by those big schools, so we come into those games with a chip on our shoulder, and to go out there and win those games, it definitely gives the team a different edge and different (level) of confidence knowing that, hey, even though these guys are rated higher than us, when you step between the lines on the field, it's all football. The only thing that matters is who's going to score the most points and be the toughest team on the field. So after those big games versus big teams, (they're) genuinely a great confidence booster for our team."

On his return to Texas where he played high school football:

"I've never had to play a game in this stadium (Toyota Stadium). But I did play my last (high school) football game at The Star (Ford Center in Frisco, Texas). And I'm fortunate enough to play three out of (our last) four bowl games within 45 minutes of home, so it's truly a blessing to be able to come home for my last game this season. I get to have all my friends, family, old coaches, a ton of people in the stands to play in front of (who) don't necessarily get the opportunities to (travel) because San Diego so far away, halfway across the country. So I get to come home and play in front of them. It really means the world to me to be able to do it. I love to play in front of them because all those people in the stands all played a role in getting me to where I'm at today. For me to be able to play in front of them and for them to support me as well, it really means a lot. I also just want to thank the Frisco Bowl and the bowl committee for having us out again. It's truly a blessing for all the things you do and all the hospitality that you have done for us."

On not being able to really play at home the past couple of years and leaving a legacy behind for the new stadium:

"It was (extremely) difficult the first year with no fans in the stadium at all, so there was definitely some adjusting to do. But after a while, we claimed that place (Dignity Health Sports Park) as our home. We got into the routine, and we had the same routine every single week we'd go up there. So that was what we called home and we got comfortable with that, and it wasn't that bad. I'm returning next season and we're going to be in a stadium 15 minutes from campus that we can genuinely call Aztec Stadium and that's our home. That's going to be awesome for our fans, a culture of our team. It's really going to be a game-changer for our program. It's going to be an awesome atmosphere and I definitely cannot wait to play there."

On whether this season featured one of the best defenses the Aztecs have had in a while:

"I think so. It's definitely been one of the funnest defenses I've ever put been a part of. Being able to be a leader on this defense is truly a blessing because I know all the other 10 guys around me and everyone on the sideline has that same mentality. We know what to do know how to do it. All 11 guys to the ball in a bad humor and keep the other team out of the end zone. These guys play with fanatical effort. This defense works harder than any other team I've ever been a part of. They just want it. They have grit and toughness. They just want to win and just want to be great and it's truly a blessing to be a part of a team like this."

Senior running back Kaegun Williams

On not being able to really play at home the past couple of years:

"Having road games, like you said, was really hard. But I think ultimately, as a team, we grew much, much stronger. We had to rely on ourselves and not focus on the (lack of) outside noise or fans or anything like that. More so just playing the game as best we can."