

Gildan New Mexico Bowl: Central Michigan vs San Diego State

Saturday, December 21, 2019



Jordan Byrd Jesse Matthews Kyahva Tezino

San Diego State Aztecs

San Diego State - 48, Central Michigan - 11

Q. Jordan, how good did it feel to come home and have the performance that you did, over 100 yards rushing and the touchdown in front of your friends and family?

JORDAN BYRD: It was good, especially in front of the friends and family. Couldn't do this without the man above. He really kept me healthy through the season. I had some nicks in there, but he gave me the strength today to push and give it all I had.

Q. Jordan, talk about that long run you had. Were you surprised that you got caught from behind, and just talk about that run.

JORDAN BYRD: Well, I talked to my strength coach and he was telling me that I wouldn't have gotten caught if I didn't stop and like get off those guys. But I was shocked. I didn't even see him. I was just looking at the red in the end zone, and all of a sudden I just see my leg in the air. It was a good run, but he had some speed on me.

Q. How about the execution both sides of the football today? Anybody want to take that? You guys looked near perfection.

JESSE MATTHEWS: Yeah, I mean, it was great to see it all kind of come together at the last game. Just we knew what we could do, we knew what we were capable of, and yeah, just we knew what we could do, I'm just glad we got to show it on this stage and I'm glad we got to send the seniors out the right way.

KYAHVA TEZINO: Yeah we just wanted to go ahead and make an impact in our last game. Offense, you know, they came out hitting on all ends of the field, so on defense we just wanted to continue our legacy, and the offense really showed out today, and they held our back, and that's what we was preaching this whole season. I mean, one of these games we're going to make it happen; it's all going to come together. We're

going to look perfect. And I'm so happy it was our last game of the season, my last game here, and I'm just so happy for these guys, for these underclassmen that just sent me out the right way.

JORDAN BYRD: I'm going to keep it short because they said everything that I was going to say, but we all believe in each other; offense believes in defense, and defense believes in offense, so it was a good connection, kept the energy right for us.

Q. Jesse and Kyahva, what was it like to see all that grass, 74 yards, and then that 22-yard touchdown, I believe you had the diving catch? And for Kyahva, what was it like to open up the game with a pass breakup and the pick, and what's that do for the rest of the game?

JESSE MATTHEWS: It was pretty amazing. That long touchdown, I thought no one was with me, so I kind of had a look around for a quick second, found a lane, and I'm just glad I didn't get caught. These guys were joking with me saying they didn't know I had any speed, so I had to show them a little something.

KYAHVA TEZINO: Yeah, that play right there, people are saying that was the game-setting play. So to me I'm just out there trying to make a play to win the game because it's my last time playing with this team, so I'm just trying to go out a winner, and I'm so happy we did, and I'm so happy all the underclassmen came to play today, and I just can't thank them enough. It's going to be hard to replace these guys, and I'm just at a loss for words right now.

Q. Jesse, Kyahva's interception, how much of a spark did you guys view that offensively, and did you guys know you were capable of a performance like this, 48 points? What went into all of that?

JESSE MATTHEWS: Well, yeah, that turnover was pretty big. It gave us a lot of energy. They've been doing it all season, especially Kyahva. So just wanted to capitalize on that.

And as far as, yeah, we knew what we were capable of. We work hard every day in practice, so just to see it come to fruition was a pretty good feeling.

Q. Jesse and Jordan, there was a lot of talk before this game about your defense, how stellar they

were, that it was ranked in this and that. Did this also put a chip on your shoulder for the offense to say, don't overlook it, yes, our defense is good, but we've got a little something for you, too?

JESSE MATTHEWS: I wouldn't say a chip on our shoulder. I mean, we really don't pay attention to anything outside of the locker room. We just try to focus on ourselves, focus on our teammates and what's inside the program. But like I said before, we knew what we could do. Defense has really been kind of carrying us all year, and we just wanted to help them any way we could. I'm glad we could put up 48 points in our last performance. Just like I said, send the seniors out the right way.

JORDAN BYRD: Jesse covered all that. Yeah, we knew we had to do something offensive-wise. We knew we had to put points on the board to keep the defense rested and keep them going, keep that good energy to let the offense even get more yards and passing yards.

Q. Jordan, kind of a two-part question. How good does it feel to help Coach Long get this victory, you being from here and Coach Long being a former coach and player here, and what are you doing for Christmas?

JORDAN BYRD: You know, it was a good one to have in New Mexico, especially with Coach Long. All through practices, he was telling me, you're going back home, you're going back home, and it just kept getting me excited. Just that energy from him, it was really good. I'm really glad he did that for me because it gave me a good push to push harder in this game.

Christmas? I don't know yet. I'll definitely get my mom's cooking. We were talking about that. My mom's and my grandma's cooking. I can't wait for my grandma's cooking, pies and stuff.

Q. Jordan, it seemed like you were playing a lot harder today. I just could sense it. I know your dad was in the stands. What's your next step?

JORDAN BYRD: Thank you. My next step is to try to go to the next level. It's a long-time dream and just want to be able to see if I can go and make an impact there. You know, it's all in God's hands now. Wherever he leads me, he leads me, but I'm going to always just go in and work hard and keep my head down and just work.

Q. Jesse, I know you heard how great -- you're probably sick of hearing about New Mexico and how great it is, right, and we think it's great, and what's you guys' impression? I love the way you got behind Keshawn and Jordan and Coach Long. It seems like you were really bought into this thing. Are you sick of hearing about how great New

Mexico is and what do you think about this place?

JESSE MATTHEWS: You know, it's a pretty great place. All the people were very hospitable. Yeah, I mean, we're not sick of it. It kind of lived up to the hype, I guess. Yeah, it's a great place. I'm glad we got to get this bowl in here in front of these locals.

KYAHVA TEZINO: Yeah, I'm just so excited. The last two bowls didn't go our way, so I don't really like that state or whatever, so I'm just so happy we was able to come to New Mexico and get a win. Wherever we've lost, I don't really like the state. I'm just so happy we came here and won.

Q. Kyahva, what's it like for you personally knowing it's your last game, you're going to probably take off that jersey -- not probably, you are going to take it off one last time. What's kind of going through your head? And then for Jordan, for you, something about New Mexico that you play really well, at New Mexico State another 100-yard game.

Talk about what it's like playing in your home state.

JORDAN BYRD: It was really good. Brought me back to high school days, especially my senior year. But coming back here in December, it reminded me of the final game, of the championship. It really brought me back memories of what I did in that game. Even though I played quarterback during that time, it really brought me a good sense of -- that I knew I could do something. I was telling one of our coaches that cold makes me feel faster. Coming back here and playing in the cold really felt good.

KYAHVA TEZINO: To continue on with your question, it's going to be hard to take off this jersey. I put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into this program, and just these guys here have potentially made who I am today. I mean, I couldn't have done anything this season or anything in my career without these guys pushing me every single day. I just thanked them and I just thanked them and I just thanked them. It's going to be hard. That's all I can really say about that.

Q. Overall when you evaluate your program at San Diego State, why is it so consistently good? What's the formula to winning, and the reason for winning so regularly at San Diego State?

KYAHVA TEZINO: I just feel like the players have to be bought in, and I mean, Coach Long does a great job of putting us in a situation to where it makes it interesting to have us bought in. As a senior, I just felt like since my freshman year all the way to now, we just love the game. We work at football for I don't know how many days, but we're always at it, and we just love it. So once you love it, it never becomes a job, it's just something that you love to do. And that's what I feel like the team is about, and that's what I feel like this current team is

now. We just love to play the game and we love being around each other.

Us as a team and us as a program, that's probably what defines us, and that's why we're so good.

JESSE MATTHEWS: Yeah, Kyahva covered everything. Just really being bought into the system we have in place, it's kind of our job as players to just buy into the program that Coach Long has set for us, and once we do that, we know we can be successful, and we know he's going to have us prepared.

JORDAN BYRD: Yeah, Coach Long gets us really prepared for these kind of games, too. During the season, off-season, just going through all that stuff that we've been through, it really puts us to the standard that we need to be at. We can always be better than what we are, and that's what Coach Long pushes us to be, so that's the good thing about Coach Long, and that's what I like.

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Rocky Long Keshawn Banks

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Q. Keshawn, just talk about how special it is to come back home, get this win, and not only do you get it, you and Jordan being from here and Coach Arnett, Coach Long, all of you guys together, how special is this for you guys?

KESHAWN BANKS: It's very special. Like all those guys talked about, this program is built on so many great things. Having a 10-win season is very important to us, and that's something we strive for every year. Obviously it's not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate is to win the conference championship, and we came up short. But God willing, we were able to accomplish something great and be a great team, so I'm just happy that we sent the team out the right way, and not only the team but the seniors.

Q. And you're at home already; what are you going to do for Christmas?

KESHAWN BANKS: I don't know, probably like Jordan said, just get some home-cooked food and just relax. We've been grinding for so long and working for so long, it'll be nice just to relax for a couple days.

Q. What does it say about this defense? What makes your defense so special?

KESHAWN BANKS: We have a great man in charge of this defense. Coach Long, he prepares so much and he watches so much film and so much preparation goes into the scheme of our defense, and we just have 11 guys on the defensive side who want to go make plays every play, and when you have something like that, it builds something special.

Q. How have you been able to adapt so fast? You played as a freshman, you're doing really well. What do you attribute that to? You seem to be very mature for your age.

KESHAWN BANKS: I think when you come into a great program like this who wins a lot and has a lot of success, it kind of forces you to be mature faster than I would like to be. But just this great program, they helped me build something special, and I was able to

come in, be comfortable, and they just pushed me to work hard every day, and that's what we do, work hard every day.

ROCKY LONG: Obviously we're very, very happy that we played so well because when we -- any game we play, I never know exactly how they're going to play. We've got -- the best part of our program is we've got great kids in our program. Some of them aren't kids. They come in as kids, they leave as men. You saw one of them up here in Kyahva. But they come in as boys and they leave as men. And we have very few issues in our program because they're such great people. They have great families. They know what's right, and they know what's wrong, and they work hard. I get the question all the time about, well, how do you handle this age group since they're so much different. Let me tell you something: They're not any different than the age group was 25 years ago. All you've got to do is prove that you care about them and give them a structured environment, and they thrive. So all that other baloney, you can throw that out the window.

Q. Jordan was saying you were telling him all week, you're going back home. Was there anything you told Jordan coming into the game?

ROCKY LONG: No, we're lucky to have those two New Mexicans on our team. They're great players, and they're just scratching the surface. They're going to be better than they are now, and I was shocked that Jordan got caught, too, because if we had a 100-yard dash -- and we've got some fast guys on our team now. I'm not sure he would win the 40. We've got a couple guys that might beat him in a 40, but there's no one on our football team that can beat him in a 100, I'll promise you that. There's no one else on our team that ran a 10.3 100 meters in high school, so I was pretty shocked that he got caught.

But you know, I tell them they're local heroes, and we were -- I think they were really happy, but our whole team was happy to come here and play in this game, and I think they were especially happy, those two, but I kept telling them that they're going to have to come back here and play well because they're local heroes. Everybody knows them. I actually thought we'd have more people at the pep rally. I sent them to the pep rally, those two. I thought we'd have more people there since they were at the pep rally, but I heard they

weren't as enthusiastic as the other team.

You noticed that both of them are kind of quiet and they don't talk very much, but they talk pretty loud on the football field.

Q. A lot of firsts today, first touchdowns for Jesse Matthews and for TJ out there. How impressed were you with your team's receiver depth today with over 12 players catching a pass for Agnew?

ROCKY LONG: I didn't know that, but that's pretty impressive, but TJ's catch was unbelievable. That's one you're going to see on TV tonight as one of the best plays. And I'm going to talk about Jesse Matthews. This just shows you that people evaluate and other people aren't always right. Do you all know that Jesse Matthews was a walk-on? He walked on and was on the scout team last year, and we didn't think much of it, and then all of a sudden during spring practice and this fall he became our most consistent wide receiver. He can beat you deep, he can out-jump you for the ball, he can make tough catches. He's on scholarship starting second semester, I promise you that, so don't get the idea we're going to let him transfer someplace.

But there's a guy, and he wasn't recruited because he played at a little tiny high school, and he's not very big. So because of his work ethic -- now, he's got athletic ability, too, but that's just him wanting to be good. Now, he had to have some athletic ability, don't get me wrong, but that's him wanting to be good. He's our best receiver. Nobody in this whole country recruited him. Not even us.

So every once in a while you get really, really lucky.

Q. Can you talk about the defense and some of the turnovers, interceptions and what they did for the win, as well as what it means to have another 10-win season?

ROCKY LONG: I'm going to say that this is the best defense obviously that we've had at San Diego State for the last 10 years. There's no doubt in my mind. Now, I can't compare them with all the defenses that San Diego State have had, but I'll bet you it's pretty darned close to maybe the best one they've ever had. We're not exceptionally talented on defense. We have good players, but very few of them are going to be in the NFL.

But they buy into our scheme, which is unusual. A lot of people don't think our scheme works because we do things differently, but guess what, it works. But our kids buy into our scheme and they play extremely hard and they don't make mental errors. So most of the time they're in the right place.

Now, the long pass, our cornerback was in the wrong place, and we got beat on that, and then there's an idiot calling the defenses on the long run because sometimes my want-to gets the best of me, and instead of just playing it safe, I want to stone every play. I don't want them to get one yard. So we called the defense to stop them dead, and that happens, and if they break the line of scrimmage, guess what, it's a long touchdown run. So that's not their fault, that's my fault. The wrong defense was called.

But I'm going to say it again; we've got great people in our program. Last year we kind of lost our way, and this year's senior class with a lot of work got us back to who we want to be, and that's team guys first, and we play and like each other and we play together. Win, lose or draw, they're all in it together. I like to hear them say that, and I don't think they were saying it because I was standing over there, but this team really likes each other.

Q. How does the head coach and your staff feel? What's the fulfillment and joy or satisfaction when your team plays so well both sides of the football?

ROCKY LONG: I mean, obviously we're really, really happy because the last two years we haven't played well in bowl games, so we're happy they came to play today and they played to their abilities. Obviously that's kind of fun to be around. The only part is I wish the last quarter would have gone faster because the more you play, the more chance of a guy -- the game was over, and the more you play, the more chance of somebody getting hurt, especially late in the game when it gets a little sloppy and that sort of thing.

But it's fulfilling. It's fun to win. But if you listen to our players, we always have higher expectations of ourselves. Kind of makes me mad when the fan base has higher expectations than I think they should, but our players in our program, we have higher expectations for ourselves than anybody else.

Keshawn said it. Anybody that can win 10 games in a season, you're a great football team. You can say what you want. There's only going to be a handful of them that won 10 games. So we're a great football team. But you notice what he said? Did y'all listen? He said, well, we're happy we're a pretty good football team because we won 10 games. Well, guess what, that's not our main goal. Our main goal is to win the conference championship. He said that sitting right there. That makes me proud. He could be patting himself on the back right now telling everybody how wonderful he is. Instead of brings up we didn't win the conference championship. That's pretty cool stuff.

Q. You've said before that you like New Mexico kids, that if they can play you want to recruit them.

I think Danny Gonzales was kind of your point guy.

ROCKY LONG: He was. I'm guessing we're not getting any more New Mexico kids because they hired Danny Gonzales.

Q. But will you try? Has anything changed there?

ROCKY LONG: No, nothing has changed. I mean, the young people in this state that can play, we know who they are. I mean, with this day and age and computers, we can watch everybody on computer. We know who they are and we'll try to recruit them, but Coach G is not going to let that happen, I'll promise you.

Q. Just a friendly competition?

ROCKY LONG: Yeah, I told him I want them to win every game except one when we play each other.

Q. Just talk about how special that win is. You come back and you used to look out that window and see the field and all that and you're here at a bowl game, got some players from the state and you win here.

ROCKY LONG: Well, I think it's really special for me because of my ties to New Mexico and how much I love this place. It's really special for Keshawn and it's really special for Jordan. I think our team is really happy about winning, but I don't know how special it is to them except that coming here, the three of us, and Zach Arnett, I told them every single day in practice how much they would like it here, and then we got all those Southern California kids on our team that got here and it was cold and they're complaining about how cold it is, and then we get in the game and the game is beautiful. That's as good a football weather as there could ever be. So if we get out of here before it snows, I mean, I'm not leaving, but if our team gets out of here before it snows, they're going to think this is the most wonderful place in the world.

Q. I asked your players, there was a lot of talk about the defense here. You're ranked second in rushing defense, and we wrote about how good the defense was. What did you tell your offense before the game to step up, to ignore what we write about, about the lack of scoring and get them to step up and score 48 points, well above the season average, to really perform offensively?

ROCKY LONG: I'm going to try to -- it's a really interesting question because -- and I don't want to downplay it at all. We don't tell them any different from week to week. We don't practice any different from week to week. We work hard as coaches and break down film and try to develop game plans and then we try to teach our players the game plan and have them execute the game plan. Nothing changes from week to week. We just played a whole lot better today.

The offensive kids executed better. Our quarterback threw the ball well. Some kids went and caught some passes. Jordan ran it really well. Our offensive line, if we had a good running game, the offensive line must have blocked pretty well. There's no difference. We didn't say anything different to them than we say to them every week. We didn't coach them any different than we do every week, just thank goodness they played really good.

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Jim McElwain

Central Michigan Chippewas

San Diego State - 48, Central Michigan - 11

JIM McELWAIN: Well, first and foremost, just want to start off with this, I want to thank all those fans, our band, the people who made the trek down here and stayed with us all year. That was an incredible year, one of the most enjoyable years I've ever had doing this. Great people, great coaches, and a group of guys in that locker room that no one gave a chance.

To our seniors, who made the choice and decision to make something out of nothing, I'm really proud of them. I'm disappointed with the last two ballgames. We came a long ways. But now the next step as we build this program is to learn what we need to do to take the next step and become a consistent winner.

We've got parts, and we've got parts coming in. I'm excited about them. We start back on January 12th with a team meeting with a group of guys that have had a taste of what it is. Hopefully they come back thirsty for more.

As far as the ballgame goes, you're not going to beat anybody turning it over four times. I knew what kind of team we were playing. Those guys are really good. And yet these are the kind of games that we've got to get used to playing. These are the type of teams we have to get used to playing against. And these are the type of teams that we should want to play against, and that's what this off-season is going to be all about.

Again, I appreciate what everybody has done for us this season, but it's only the beginning. It's the beginning of something really great at Central Michigan University, and I'm proud to be a Chippewa. I can't wait to get started after this break.

Q. You mentioned the turnovers. You knew they were a good defensive team coming in. Did they do anything in particular --

JIM McELWAIN: No, we just gave them the ball. First series they bat a ball to get it and go in and score. You're not going to beat anybody doing that. And then we get down there before half, if you throw it to the boundary, we've got a touchdown.

It is what it is, but they took it away, so therefore they were better.

Q. You touched on this a little bit, but your message to your players in the locker room after this, can you address how you feel about them and that kind of thing?

JIM McELWAIN: Well, I think I did. They mean everything to me, and I said that earlier in the opening statement.

Q. Coach, you kind of touched on it already, but would you consider this season a success --

JIM McELWAIN: Oh, absolutely. I mean, why wouldn't it be a success? I mean, we went to the MAC Championship, right? We were picked dead last with a bunch of guys no one believed in. You're absolutely right, it was a great success. It didn't end the way we wanted it to, and yet here's what I'm going to tell you you do: You learn from your failures. That's what you do, and that's how you become successful. We failed.

Q. Jim, looking at Quinten today, the turnovers were obvious. What was going on with him and what did you say to him to try to get him back on track, and when you decided to go to Lazzaro and Richardson, what was that process like?

JIM McELWAIN: Well, I wanted to give Daniel a chance to go. They beat the heck out of us up front. It was tough to make throws back there when you got the pressure like we did.

Q. As you look back over the season, what is the formula that was used by you and your coaching staff to turn it totally around?

JIM McELWAIN: Yeah, I'm not sure we got there totally, but we made it a long, long ways, believe me.

I think more than anything, it was empowering our players to make choices and really determine who they are and who they want to be and what they are. And not demanding it, yet simply take accountability for who you are. And if you can do that and you give it your all for the guy next to you, you've got a pretty good chance to be successful, and we had a lot of guys do that, and I'm proud of them.

Q. Coach, one guy we saw today, Dishon McNary, it



was his first time playing all season. Could you give us an evaluation of how you thought he played and an evaluation of the defense as a whole?

JIM McELWAIN: Well, I thought the defense played good enough. Yeah, we gave up a couple long plays, but they played good enough. We just didn't get anything done on offense. Dishon, you know, he played bail and ran about 20 yards past the sticks and gave up a critical 3rd down, which is something that we talked about going in that you can't do, but it was good to get him in the game. Now he's got some work to do here in the off-season, both as a player and as a student. We'd sure hope to have him next season.

Q. Looking at Kobe, he's reached the 1,000-yard plateau. He and J-Ward --

JIM McELWAIN: Proud of him.

Q. They're the first duo in Central Michigan history to both reach 1,000 yards. How big has Kobe been and that one-two punch been for you guys?

JIM McELWAIN: Well, you know, I'm proud of both those guys. I love the way they work together and complement each other. To get Kobe over 1,000 and obviously Johnathan over 1,000 and missing a couple games, credit the guys up front, as well, but obviously they're a talented duo. I'm really happy for Kobe. He works his tail off.

Q. And looking forward to the 2020 season, you plan to be the head coach next year?

JIM McELWAIN: Yeah. I mean, didn't I just say that? Thanks, though, I appreciate that.

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Kobe Lewis

Troy Brown

Central Michigan Chippewas

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Q. Your coach spoke, but what do you attribute your turnaround to? Obviously you've had a great season. If there's a few things you could pinpoint, what would you say they were?

TROY BROWN: I would say -- I'll start off by the new introduction to the coaching staff. We brought a lot of guys in who cared. It was more about football to them. You had guys who -- it was about us as human beings, about our personalities, getting to know us, making connections, and we had a lot of guys who bought into that. We really believe in our coaching staff and everything they've done for us. We've been thankful for that.

I would say the number one thing was who was brought in and the connections we made personally with our coaches because you play a lot better playing for somebody else rather than playing for yourself.

KOBE LEWIS: I'll tie of tie in back on what he said. I can say Coach brought me in, and the staff, it was a great staff. Everybody bought into it, the vision, so that was a good thing. It played a role in how we got here. And players just bonded a lot more than we did last year. We was a 1-11 team, and that's a sick feeling. A lot of players on the team, we kept that feeling and just kept our foot on the gas. That's a lot of what pushed us to get where we're at today.

Q. Kobe, can you talk about what it means to you to get to 1,000 yards, and for you and Ward to combine to do something that no backs have ever done in CMU history? That's a pretty good football history here with this program. Can you talk about what that means to you and to him as a pair to do that?

KOBE LEWIS: To start off as a pair, that was a goal we set out for each other as the season began. That was something he wanted to see me do, and it's obviously something I wanted to see him do. Me being a young guy, the vision wasn't as clear to me as it was to him because I haven't been in those shoes. But he believed

in me, so that was a big thing that I appreciate from him because he looked out for me, he gave me tips, he let me know that I could do it, as he did in his sophomore season. It was a big thing for me, too, because that was a goal that I set for myself. That's something that I just wanted real bad, and I got it done. So that's what comes from it on my end, so I'm very proud of that, too.

Q. Were they more of a stout team defensively than you guys anticipated?

KOBE LEWIS: They played well on the defensive side of the ball. We went into the game knowing like they was a pretty high defensive team. A lot of their stuff was run around their defense, so we expected them to be a great defensive team. As we went into the game, they pretty much gave us what we asked for and what we were looking forward to.

Q. Troy, did they do anything offensively that you guys hadn't prepared for?

TROY BROWN: No, they didn't do anything offensively. We just got to be better on the defensive side. No matter what happens on either side of the ball, we're a team. It's all about how we perform and what we do ourselves.

Q. I think we kind of addressed this, but for both of you guys looking back at the entire season, I guess how would you rate it as successful? Obviously it was a successful season for you guys, but what were you guys' biggest thoughts, biggest takeaways from the season as a whole?

TROY BROWN: Well, obviously everybody knows about our turnaround from last year; that's a success. But other than that, like Coach Mac said, we're going to fail, and it's not about what happens, it's how you respond to it. It's all about getting better. No matter how successful we were this season, it should never be enough. It's not enough. And we're going to keep pushing forward next year.

Q. For both of you, Coach said that these are games that you guys want to be playing in, these are the type of opponents that you guys want to be playing against, and with both of you guys still having more time left here, what are you looking forward to next year knowing what you did in year one? What might be able to happen in year two?

TROY BROWN: Well, I'm looking to playing football. I don't care who it is, whatever opponent it is. We're going to play football and do what I came here to do. We've been through a lot as a team, and we believe in who's leading us, so whoever wants to step to the plate, we're there for them. We're ready to play. It doesn't matter who it is.

KOBE LEWIS: It just goes back to improvement. No matter how successful our season is, there's always room for improvement, there's always room to get better. It's, what, 150 something teams in college football Division I, and it could be a goal for us to get ranked or something, so there's always improvement for anything. That's just what we're looking forward to. We didn't finish the season out like we wanted to, so that's something that we can come back and do to make us look better and have a better season than this year.

But as far as last year and this year, we made a whole 360 turnaround, so it's always the rate, to how well this season was, I would give it a 10 because we went from 1-11 to we're playing in the MAC Championship and playing in bowl games and actually being selected by ESPN to play this game, so that's a pretty big accomplishment on our end as a Chippewa.

Q. How about the whole experience, the bowl game? Maybe unexpected at the start of the season. Albuquerque, beautiful day, hard-hitting game. How do you describe your week?

TROY BROWN: I'm not going to lie, I really enjoyed this week. I've been to other bowls, or another bowl, and this one was for sure by far my favorite one. It was a good experience, seeing the city. It's different. I'm from the north, so it's not what I'm used to seeing. Just the overall food, everything was excellent, so I enjoyed being here.

KOBE LEWIS: Yeah, I agree with him. This is my first bowl game, and it's definitely something that I would like to come back to, definitely something I want to experience for the rest of my college years. Since we've been here, we've been treated like family. We've been treated well. A lot of things, it's a good experience to come and get out of something that you ain't ever been, and obviously New Mexico is someplace I've never been, so it was good to get out and see things I had never seen before.

Once again, I just want to thank the committee, the New Mexico Bowl committee for allowing us to come here, and I just want to thank them for treating us like family, treating us well and giving us a good time, so I appreciate that from you all, too.

Q. Kobe, what was your feeling after that 60-odd-

yard run? You felt like the team wasn't giving up, you were hyped. What were you telling folks as you were trying to reenergize the team and say we're still in this?

KOBE LEWIS: As the run, I'm always just thinking play football, play through it. I don't care what the score is, I feel like I can come back from anything as long as there's time on the clock. I feel like if you play hard, anything can happen. Honestly, it's a great game, and that was my mentality. It wasn't necessarily about me trying to get to 1,000 yards. I just wanted to play hard, finish hard. I knew it was the last game. I don't care if it was the last play or the last game, I just wanted to play hard and finish hard, and I just got rewarded with a 60-yard run from my O-linemen, so I just thank them for that.