



## Western Michigan Arrival Quotes



Tuesday, December 27, 2016  
Gaylord Texan Resort, Grapevine, Texas

### QUESTIONS FOR HEAD COACH P.J. FLECK

**COACH FLECK:** Thank you so much for coming, y'all. I think that's the proper term down here, right? I have heard that a lot. We are so thrilled to be down here representing the Mid-American Conference, Western Michigan University, and all the Group of Five at the Goodyear Cotton Bowl. I just want to thank the playoff committee, thank the Cotton Bowl committee for the selection of us here in this historic game. This has been a very magical and historical year for our football program and our university and our city of Kalamazoo. And we are just very proud to be representing everybody.

It was a very smooth trip, very smooth. There wasn't any hiccups or flaws. Nick Uhlenhopp, our director of football operations, does a tremendous job. Any time you get a chance to go to the Cotton Bowl, it brings everybody's excitement up even a little bit more than even just a normal bowl game.

The hospitality here at the Gaylord has been tremendous and very memorable already. I stopped Fin [Ewing] yesterday and I said, "We have only been here three or four hours, but I have never had an experience like this in my entire life. And I have been at a national championship at Ohio State, multiple different bowl games and coached in the National Football League. And the hospitality from everybody here in the hotel; the state of Texas; and, obviously, the people in Arlington and Dallas. We are just so thrilled to be here.

The guys went to the Dallas Cowboys-Lions game yesterday. If you look at some of their Facebook "Lives" and a lot of their tweets and videos, the faces are a lot of this (indicating) everywhere they walked. I think it was brilliant to actually have those guys go and see the stadium. You can read about it. You can look at it. But, when you see it from the outside -- first of all, Jerry World is a big spaceship just landed. But then you actually walk in the place. It takes your breath away. It really does. It did that when I was a coach at the Buccaneers, when we came here to play, and when I was here for the national championship two years ago watching the game. It just takes your breath away. I think it was wonderful for our players to be around that, to break the ice, and see how actually big that Jumbotron is. I did tell our players last year we just got new video boards. We got new video boards at Waldo Stadium, beautiful. Donated by Alec Gores. The problem now is all of them ask me, "When are we getting those? When are we getting bigger scoreboards?" It's amazing how big they really are.

Again, very honored to be here representing everybody in Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University, and the entire state of Michigan, and the entire Group of Five and our conference. With that, I guess we'll open it up for questions.

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*Q. I don't know an offensive coach that doesn't want to protect the football. Can you explain how you guys have been so good at not turning it over?*

**COACH FLECK:** First and foremost, people always ask us about this type of run and this type of magical season. There isn't really anything magical. It's just being able to buy into the actual program values. We have a saying in our program, the ball is the program. The ball was the program same three years ago. It was the same slogan, okay? We turned the ball over -- we were minus 16 in the turnover margin, 1-11. But we constantly showed our players the value of the football, whether it was the National Football League statistics tied in winning or college football directly correlated to winning. The number one statistic in this game is the ball, right?

And so I think what has happened, we have failed enough so much that we're now succeeding. And our players defined failing as growth. Failure is quit. Failing is growth. We embrace failing. And they embrace their past to create their future.

And so this year we didn't turn the ball over for the first six games. And, when you start to look at that, there's a direct correlation why we're 6-0. We're number one in the country in turnover margin. When you start piecing that and showing 1-11 year, to this year back and forth and keep that the forefront of the program, they are mature now enough to understand that. We define maturity in our program as when doing what you have to do becomes doing what you want to do. You have to take care of the football to win in this game. Have to. If you don't, you're going to lose a lot of games. And you have to get turnovers on the other side.

And we didn't understand that year one. But now we're a lot more mature with what you have to do is take care of the ball and get turnovers. Now they actually want to do it. They feed off that. They thrive off that. They are like great white sharks with blood in the water when we talk about the football. That is the number one statistic.

So, if you want to turn the program around and you want to get to this level, just take care of the football. It's that simple.

That simple is very difficult to do because it goes back to Zach Terrell's completion percentage of 70-something percent. Kirk Ciarrocca, our offensive coordinator, training Zach to be such a decisive decision-maker. Corey Davis staying 30, 40 minutes after every practice working on his game, working on his ball drills, coming back for his senior season because he wants to get his degree and be in a position like this. This was not only my vision, but his vision. That's why he came back for his senior season. It all comes back to the football. The ball is the program. It is all over our facility, and they are finding out now the value of that. Great question.

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*Q. It's not as famous an award as the Heisman, but it's the academic Heisman. What kind of impact do you think Zach winning the Campbell Award is going to have on the program?*

**COACH FLECK:** I think it's one of the biggest awards in college football, because it's the best student-athlete award. When you sit there and talk about college football, what is it? It's full of student-athletes. Everybody wants to get political and talk about -- we're student-athletes first. I agree. But then we just want to talk about football on ESPN. We want to talk about football on CBS and NBC. And that's all we talk about. I think Zach won the most prestigious award, I think, in college football. Prestigious. Because it's so difficult to win. Because you will not only have to be incredibly productive on the field, not only productive in the community, not only productive and do all the right things; but now you have got to be able to be almost perfect in school.

And I have always told people that, if you're a business owner, you better hire Zach Terrell real fast. Because in four years you might be working for him. When your company goes down, you might be asking him for a job. He's the type of guy you want leading your football team. And he's one of those guys that have a crack on their shoulder, not a chip. He's a program guy. He really is the head football coach on the football field. And the number one relationship in sports, I think, is the quarterback and the head football coach. That's my opinion.

The reason why is you get all the credit when you do something right and you get all the credit when you don't do something right, you get all the blame. You have to be incredibly in sync with each other. That's why I think [Bill] Belichick and [Tom] Brady have had a long run together. You look at that relationship and look at the success they have had through the good times and the bad times and you sit there and look at them, wow, they continue to have that relationship and it only gets stronger.

That's what you see with Zach. It's a reflection of his parents. He has incredible parents. Colleen and Mark are just incredible people. They raised him to serve and give. If you ask Zach when he's up here, "What is your life about," his answer will be serving and giving, which is exactly what our program is about. Everybody is going to define us on wins. Everybody is going to define us on losses. We're going to get hired. We're going to get fired. Nobody in our mind will define what our players and what we have done just based on wins. This team is about serving and giving, and Zach Terrell is the forefront of that. He's the leader.

*Q. Originally your relationship with him, could you describe that? Has it kind of evolved and grown?*

**COACH FLECK:** Sure. I think everybody has got that a little bit off a little bit just in terms of

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-- I think everybody thought we hated each other to begin with. It's kind of like one of those wives tales. The fish stories. The fish just got bigger and bigger. Started out like this, and now the fish is like this.

I'll be honest with you. I think it was such a change of culture and so different and so fast and so -- you had to adapt so quickly that a lot of people said, "Well, this isn't for me." And it wasn't for them. Some people are like, I don't know if I want to and I don't know if I want to risk staying and wasting time. I think he got kind of fit into that category. He knew he was really talented, but also is this going to be a system for me? Do they look at me as a past regime guy? Are they going to bring in their own guy? We had a high-prolific quarterback we were recruiting at the time. These guys aren't dumb. They see all those things. They hear all those things.

But Zach Terrell -- I'll say this about him. He invested in himself. And that was the best advice I ever got as a young coach from Greg Schiano, "P.J., invest in yourself." Nobody what anybody ever talks to you about, tells you, labels you as, tells you what you should do, invest in you first.

And I think that's what Zach did. He finally said, you know what? There's competition everywhere I go. I can stay here, and I can prove that I'm the quarterback for the future here at Western Michigan. And thank God he did, to be honest with you.

But I think he had to fail a lot to grow. But, even when we sat down in my office -- even that gets told, that story. Who knows where the story is at now. But, literally, I just told him, look, you're quiet. You don't talk. You don't communicate. You are kind of a mute. I don't see a lot of pizzazz from you. Your body language spells this, this, and this. Maybe he didn't have that in the past. Because I value a lot of those things. Perception being how you perceive yourself and how you give people yourself means a lot to me.

He said, "No, no, Coach. You got it all wrong. You got it all wrong. I'm not like that. Just give me a day or two to prove it." Then it went overboard. The next day he was -- it was like almost not him on the other side. And then we kind of worked on it and met almost every single day. He was in my office, and we got to know each other. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. That's a true statement. Jim Tressel taught me that. We had to have that on both sides. He had to know I cared about him as a person first and vice versa. I'm just proud that he stuck around, and the rest is history. Because I think he is one of the best if not the most prolific quarterback in the country in 2016.

*Q. You were just so happy with the reception you have gotten from the Cotton Bowl folks, pulling in on the bus to the incredible hospitality room to the players' names out there on the walkway, the whole nine yards. Talk a little bit about that.*

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**COACH FLECK:** I think my wife said it best. When I first got here, you are doing a bunch of things. She got all the bags. The hotel got all the bags. I wouldn't leave her with all the bags. That will show up in the paper. (Smiling.) The hotel got all the bags.

She went up to the room. The first text I get from her -- and this is a credit to the Cotton Bowl. "You will not believe the detail." And to say that to me, who I think I'm pretty much a detail-oriented guy. To say that from my wife to me who knows that is an incredible compliment to the Cotton Bowl, from the band playing as you came in, from the cheerleaders, to our buses wrapped. I mean, if we would have went home after just seeing the buses, our players probably would have been okay, to be honest with you, because everyone is taking pictures. We had to tell the bus drivers to put the doors down on the side, they had to put them down because all the players wanted to see their faces, take pictures of the buses. That is classy.

Everything you have done is first class. You walk through the walkway on the way to the convention center. And every third or fourth diamond on the ground, big granite, three-by-three diamond, has one of our player's names and numbers on it with the Cotton Bowl. You talk about every little detail. And everybody willing to help.

And one thing I know our players have never taken advantage of anything. But they feel comfortable to be able to ask if they do need something. I think that's the balance the Cotton Bowl has had. It's so high class and it's so first class, but it's not stuffy. You still feel very comfortable in your surroundings. I think that's a credit to everybody here because of the hospitality they show.

*Q. Corey Davis coming out of high school was a two-star recruit. Now he's probably going to hear his name called on the first day of the draft, all-time receiving leader, FBS. What did people miss back then?*

**COACH FLECK:** I think the first thing they missed was stars. I was a minus two star in high school. So stars really don't matter a lot to me. But, when you look at him, I wasn't really looking for stars. I was looking for anybody that was interested in our program whatsoever. And the first phone call I made when I got the head coaching job -- remember I was working for Greg Schiano. I got the job in early December, but I had to wait a whole month for the NFL season to end. So you are doing two jobs. And you're really just working the phones when Greg Schiano gave me -- I was very blessed. He gave me from 4:00 in the morning to 6:00 in the morning and then 10:00 to midnight, which Coach Schiano, that's the way he is. He's going to make sure you can do both. If you want to do both, you have to do both at an elite level. And I will give you time to do it. But you are not going to be not giving 100% to us and not giving

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100% to Western Michigan. You got to be able to do both.

I called Ron Muhitch, the head high school coach at Wheaton Warrenville South High School, famous Hall of Fame coach, numerous state titles. I remember talking to him on the phone. I said, "Hey, look. I'm still in Tampa. I got the head coaching job in Western Michigan. Do you have anybody?"

I called five or six of the guys in Illinois where I'm from that I knew very well. First guy I called was Ron. Typical Ron Muhitch fashion. "Well, Coach, there's a reason why you called me. And do I have the guy for you!" You know, all right. It was a little bit more of an infomercial. Yeah, perfect. He started talking about Corey. But he didn't talk about Corey as the football player. What I love about Ron is he talked about does he fit me. Because, look, I'm not for everybody. If you don't like energy and you don't like passion, you don't like positivity, don't come play for me. You have to have a fit to be able to play for a lot of people.

Ron knows me better than anybody. Ron said, "This guy is perfect for you. Actually, P.J., I think he needs you." Then I got to meet Corey. At the time Corey had a lot to do in the classroom to get eligible. You meet a lot of kids like that. You meet a lot of kids that have a lot to do in the classroom. You are willing to take a chance on some of them. But some of them, there's no way you can take a chance. You meet them and there's no way this kid will do the work and get eligible. And, when he does get eligible, there's no way he will continue to grow higher throughout his life.

The minute I met Corey, heard his story, and then Corey looked me in my eye and said, "Coach, I will make it." I looked at his last four weeks of progress, eight weeks, 12 weeks and it continued to ascend. I sat there and said, "All right. This is a guy I need." Then I looked at him physically, "I definitely need you." And the rest is history.

His guidance counselor at Wheaton Warrenville South deserves a lot of credit for what she did for him. The Grahams, Dan Graham and Robin Graham, deserve a lot of credit for what they did his junior year in high school in bringing him into their family. And even his brother, Ryan Graham at Northern Illinois, and the relationship they built. Corey is an outstanding human being. When you listen to his story, there's nothing by coincidence. You sit there and look at his work ethic, 30, 40 minutes after practice. He reminds me of Vincent Jackson and the work ethic that Vincent had. He wants to be the best. He continued to grow in the academic department. All he has done is grown in the community and in the football department. And a better person. I mean, you talk about a kid that's been there four years and been "the" guy, freshman player of the year his freshman year, and has been flawless in his record, flawless. You don't see Corey Davis on the news. You don't see Corey Davis getting in trouble. You don't see Corey Davis on

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academic probation. You don't see Corey Davis talking about it. You see Corey Davis being Corey Davis. The most humble, hard-working, inspirational guy, teammate that you can possibly have. Very, very proud of him.

*Q. You have already played and beaten two Big Ten teams. You, obviously, would be excited to be playing Slippery Rock in the Cotton Bowl. But just the fact that you guys, a lot of them grew up watching Big Ten teams, maybe weren't recruited by Big Ten teams as they might have hoped, you are playing a traditional Big Ten power, does that add a little bit of juice to this game for your guys?*

**COACH FLECK:** When you play in the Cotton Bowl, you will never play a bad opponent ever. You will play one of the top ten teams in the country. You always will. That's the history dating back for the past 80 years, whatever it has been. I remember watching the Cotton Bowl with my dad, just the Cotton Bowl, and hearing "The Cotton Bowl" and seeing the old stadium and listening to all those games. R.C. Slocum, I can go on and on about those guys. I get a chance to spend time with them every year in Pebble Beach and talk a little bit about it.

Our players take a one-game approach. The entire time we have been there, we have been wanting to become 1-0 in a particular season the particular week we have been at. And we have a saying called "change your best." So we never let our players get comfortable enough to know that, okay, we can slough off this week. They have done a tremendous job of being humble and confident all year. Humble enough to know that anybody can beat them any moment if they are not at their absolute best. And to be at your best for 13 straight weeks is almost impossible. That's why there's only two teams that have done it. And one of them really should be a NFL football team right now. They're that good.

But, when you look at it, they did that really the hard way. That was the humble part. Then you got to be confident enough at the same time, not cocky but confident enough to know that you can beat anybody that's on your schedule if you play your best. And you have got -- it's a balancing act all year to be able to watch that happen. And I thought our team handled it beautifully the entire year.

They're not a team that got too high or too low. They are a team that celebrated, and we celebrate wins. We're not shy of that. We are going to celebrate every win that we have because that's the time to celebrate. We're going to celebrate it on Sundays. And then we're done with it. And then we're going to move on. Playing a team like Wisconsin, who Paul Chryst is one of the best football coaches in the country. His coordinator and I were GAs together on the offensive side of the ball at Ohio State, Joe Rudolph. Coach Wilcox is one of the best defensive coordinators in the country. They have got some of the best players in the country. Their front

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seven on defense are better than any front seven we have played since I have been at Western Michigan. That's with all due respect. They remind me of last year's defense at Ohio State and last year's offense at Michigan State. I don't like to make comparisons because everybody says this guy is not this, he said this. But that's the best thing I can do to get you wrapped around how good they really are.

And no disrespect to any Big Ten teams we played this year. However, this is a different animal. This is a different animal. They deserve a lot of credit. They deserve to be here. And it should be a fun game, an exciting game, and a very entertaining game for everybody that's watching.

*Q. Following up on that, people are going to look at what the MAC has done so far, obviously, lost all five of their games and maybe look at it and say, well, maybe Western wasn't in that strong a conference. If that is going to be talked here before the game, is that a little bit more incentive for you guys? Are you guys playing for the MAC?*

**COACH FLECK:** We are always playing for the MAC, for the Group of Five. We are playing for our university, more importantly, to be honest with you, and representing us. We can't handle -- we can't control what everybody else does. We never have thought about it. Never thought about it that way. Because every game is a different entity. We have a matchup, and that's all that matters to us. There has been a lot of close MAC games.

One thing I'll say about our football team. We beat everybody on our schedule. I don't care who you are. I don't care what conference you're in. I think at one point we were averaging close to beating our opponents in conference by 15 points. That's unheard of. Arguably, maybe one of the best, if not the best Mid-American Conference team of all time is what they have talked about. I'm not sitting there saying we are that. What I am saying is what we have done is really special. And all I can control is us. I can't control what the other five teams in the bowl games in the Mid-American Conference have done. We played against them. They are very good. There have been a lot of very close games that have been lost.

Yesterday Mississippi State and Miami (Ohio), there was a last second field goal blocked. If that goes through, we are talking about the MAC beating the SEC. You have Ohio and Troy, very close game all the way down to the end. I can go on and on about some of the other bowl games. That's what bowl games are. Sometimes we could be 4-1 right now or you could be 0-5. That's our conference. And that's how close in the parity that it really is. I think it reflects a little bit of that.

*Q. There's a team motto called "Row the Boat." How did it originate and elevate the team?*

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**COACH FLECK:** Everybody always asks what does it have to do with the Bronco? My easiest answer is nothing. Doesn't have anything to do with football. February 9th, 2011, I lost my second son to a heart condition shortly after birth. When you have a tragedy like that happen, you think you are always prepared for that possibly. You never think it could happen. When it happens, it changes your life forever. The minute that happened, my life changed forever. It became not about myself anymore. It became about serving and giving, which is what our program is about. When you are a head football coach, your program is going to be to represent you. It will have a lot to do with you. It will have your characteristics.

I always said, when I come up and I have a program, I want to have something that's bigger than football. Something that's a motto and mantra that everybody in the community, whether they like football, whether they hate football, can rally behind, whether we win or lose. And we can have a direct connection with our community. And they can see me as a human being. They can see me with issues, problems, like everybody else. But they can look at me as a light to guide them through.

That's where it came about. It didn't come up that day. Months after that, coming up with something that I would like to be able to do to represent his life. Because I live two lives now. He's on my back. I live Colt's life for the rest of my life. He didn't experience all the things we were able to experience, so I have to do it twofold, I have to do it again and better. And I have to use what we're doing to influence as many people as we possibly can. That's why I'm in this world.

Here's what it really means: There's three parts. The oar is the energy you bring to your life, your family, your career. It's the energy. Energy is love. Love is everything.

The second part is the boat. The boat is the sacrifice. What you are willing to give up for something you never had. The more you give, the more you serve, the more you give up of yourself, the bigger your boat gets and the more people you can put in it and the stronger it gets. So the more storms you can go through.

And the third part is the compass. The compass is the direction of your life. Very important for 18- to 22-year-olds. It's very simple. If you surround yourself with really bad people, you are probably going to do really bad things. If you surround yourself with really elite people, you are probably going to do really elite things. It's not that hard.

When you row a boat -- I am going to teach everybody how to do this. You row the boat. We don't paddle. If you look at me and do this (indicating), I am not going to not look back at you. It's completely -- you are like telling us like we don't -- we are opposite of row the boat.

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But this is row the boat. Your back is to the future; can't control it. Tell our players all the time you have no idea what happens to you when you walk out that door. The only thing you can control is rowing in the present, your oar staying in the water no matter how bad the seas out, how bad the storm is. No matter how much sunshine there is or calm it is, your oar stays in the water. You choose whether you take the oar out quick or you continue to fail at times and just keep rowing. You determine that. But you are looking at the past. The past is something you cannot take back. You can't control it anymore. It's done. But it's the only thing when you row the boat that you can learn from.

Embracing it is key. Not building a wall up. After we lost our son, I didn't build up a wall and say I'm never going back there again. I'm not talking about it. I'm not doing it. But I said, you know what? I'm going to break that wall down. I'm going to embrace that. I know it happened for a reason to be able to have something like this to affect so many more people that has nothing do with football. It has more to do with life.

We affected more people with "Row the Boat" in our lifetime at Western Michigan in four years than we'll ever affect with 13 wins. And our players have done the same thing. We have pink ones for breast cancer, red ones for American Heart Association oars. We have puzzle piece ones for autism, purple ones for pancreatic cancer. We have big ones; we have little ones. We have all types of things. Yellow ones for troops that come home in our town. Again, it is our way to connect to our community, done through a way of tragedy becoming a positive light for people. You asked. So there you go. There's "Row the Boat."

*Q. Talk a little bit about bowl preps. I know early on six, seven practices in, you were pretty happy. Guys didn't need to get pumped up. They came to practice ready to work.*

**COACH FLECK:** This is a very mature group. Very mature group. These guys understand what they have to do. They understand why they're here. Our team is not shocked to be here, guys. They're not shocked. It's not too big for them. January 7th we showed them that logo [Cotton Bowl] in a team meeting. Now, I'm a process-driven guy. I never talk about results. Result is just data and information that you get. You gather. And then what you do with that is a difference maker, their response.

And we showed them that on the wall. Then they had to have a players-only meeting to say is that what you really want? You want to talk a big game. That's what you really think the next step of this program is, the next right step? If you really want that, then you guys decide to make that a goal. I'm not making that goal for you. You have to decide.

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And they came back as a team. Zach Terrell, Corey Davis came back and said that's what we want to accomplish. We can get there. We can get there.

I said, "Okay. If you want it, you're going to get it." I promise you, if you ask them, it was the hardest off-season they ever had on the field and off the field. However, hard doesn't mean bad. Hard means challenging. And, if you look at our GPA, 3.14 GPA for a football team that's not named Harvard or Yale or Stanford, a top 15 program in terms of academics plus on-field success through "Time" magazine. And last year we set a record in our GPA 2.93. This year it's 3.14. Plus going to the Cotton Bowl, plus the community service, plus the numerous amount of awards that have nothing to do with a football. You talk about a team ready for this. They're ready for it. They've been dreaming of this. This is something they wanted. This is something they, the players, have decided to do. This wasn't P.J. Fleck, Coach Fleck saying, "Yep. This is what we are going to do, got it? Get on the line." That's not what this was. That was what they wanted to accomplish, because they understood the process of what it takes to get here. When they come to practice, there's too much on the line to do anything else but come ready to work and come ready to make our program better. And that's what they have done every single day since January, not even just now. But it's only grown higher and gotten better.

They deserve the lights to come off and the strobe lights going, "And now ... " I'm sorry.

First of all, I'll introduce Corey Davis. Corey, like I said before -- I talked about him earlier. An incredible story of perseverance, character. We call heart work, dedication. He is one of the finest human beings I have ever been around, one of the hardest workers I have been around. I have compared him to Vincent Jackson, Mohamed Sanu, guys I have coached in the past.

With all due respect to those guys -- and Vincent probably wouldn't mind me saying this because they have talked a lot -- is that I even think he has got an edge on them this early in his career in the terms of the way he works.

Everything is important to Corey Davis. When you get around him and you listen, he's a very soft-spoken guy. He's not going to be like his head football coach. He's very soft spoken. He lets his play work for itself and the way he lives speak for itself.

When you look at his numbers, guys, he is the most prolific wide receiver in the history of college football. We are not even talking about the history of the Cotton Bowl. We are talking about the history of college football. And the reasons he came back last year had nothing to do with himself as an individual. Had to do with everything else and things like this, the Cotton Bowl, the MAC championship.

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We had 74 firsts this year, 74. Last year we had 22. This year 74. And most of them have to do with that guy. He's the most humble human being you will ever meet. I'm very, very happy he's on our football team. I wish we could somehow grant him a fifth year. We got to find a year. I know you won't, but we have got to find a way. We love having him. He's one the most prolific receivers ever in Western Michigan's history and college football history, our wide receiver Corey Davis.

Next, I think our relationship speaks for itself, I think through the media. I think everybody understands that. Both of these guys, I look at as my own sons. There's two jerseys that are in our in the Fleck house. One of them is Corey Davis, and one of them is Zach Terrell. And both boys have both. So they just alternate. They can't wear the same jersey on the same day, my sons. They alternate, and they pretty much wear them every day. That's what they actually wear. They actually wore it too much over Christmas. They got it too hot and sweaty and wore it outside. So we had to take a break from it for a little while.

When you look at Zach Terrell, his life's dedicated to serving and giving. His faith is incredibly important to him. One of the most prolific passers in Western Michigan history, Mid-American Conference history. When you talk to him, this is somebody you would love to have as your own son. This is somebody you want to have marry your daughter. This is somebody you want representing you every single minute of every day as a college football program or an NFL organization.

Both of these guys have NFL written all over them. We are incredibly humbled and very honored to have them represent Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo every single day. And, again, I think you are in for quite a show to watch these two perform on January 2nd, our quarterback Zach Terrell.

Row the boat.

### QUESTIONS FOR WR COREY DAVIS

*Q. Was there a particular time in your career at Western Michigan when you said, yeah, you know what? I belong here and I can play at this level?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** I kind of felt I belonged as soon as I got there. I always knew about my abilities and my skill, ever since I was a little kid. It just took for someone else to see it. And Coach Fleck did. He saw it right away. He believed in me, and he pushed me every single day as well as Coach [Luke] Getsy, our first coach, and Coach [Matt] Simon, when he came my sophomore year. I'm really happy to have those guys that coached me every day not only in

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football but in life.

*Q. Not only at Western Michigan but high school, so many things changed. What was the biggest change that helped you get here?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** I just matured a lot. That was a credit to this coaching staff. They helped me tremendously not only as a player but as a person. The things we teach and the values that we incorporate in our program has to do with life, not only football. That's a big thing for me, not only football but taking my skills and applying it to life. So it's great to be a part of.

*Q. Did you ever dream of playing in the Big Ten?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** I did. I definitely did. But they overlooked me, and they didn't really give me a shot. I'm happy to be a part of the MAC and part of Western Michigan. And everything happens for a reason. Happy to be here.

*Q. Still, because of the geography, everything else, when you do play against a Big Ten team, is that extra incentive?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Definitely. Pretty much playing every team it's a little bit on me. But Big Ten, in particular, it's a little bit more. It means a little bit more to me because I have so much more to prove. I have always had that chip on my shoulder ever since I was a little kid. It's definitely grown ever since I got here and ever since I have been playing bigger schools, bigger opponents. I have more to prove.

*Q. What does this game mean to you guys, the Cotton Bowl game?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** It means a lot. Very honored, very blessed to be here. It's not every day that a MAC school gets to play in the Cotton Bowl in Jerry World (AT&T Stadium). It's a blessing. We know why we're here. It's a business trip. We're here to win this game.

*Q. Talk about your quarterback. What's your best story about him?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Zach, he's a great guy, great person, great player. He definitely makes my job really easy. Everybody wants to talk about me and my accolades and all my awards. It's only because of him that I'm in the position I am today. Like I said, he makes my job easy. We're always watching film, always staying after practice. He's a great guy, very selfless leader. Like Coach said, he's the head coach on the field.

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*Q. Is he the kind of quarterback that always puts the ball where you need it? Like, if you are going across the middle, he didn't throw it behind you, where you have to break stride? Is he very accurate?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** He's very accurate. He puts it where it needs to be. He checks plays that he sees. Like I said, he makes my job really easy.

*Q. When did you guys develop this relationship? Obviously, it goes over time. But was there a particular time frame, one summer, one spring practice, whatever, where things started clicking for you two?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** My first year, my freshman year, we played Michigan State. And our starting quarterback went down. Zach stepped up. And he did what he needed to do. He took care of business. But that entire season for us was kind of a struggle. We went 1-11. We learned a lot. We grew a lot. That off-season following my freshman year is kind of where we clicked, and we needed to change. We talked a lot. And we grew, our chemistry grew. That's when it happened, was that summer.

*Q. Did you or any other guys on the team give him grief about being the smartest guy?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** He knows it, too. He's a very smart guy. At the same time, he's extremely humble. We always joke with each other and give each other crap a little bit.

Like I said, I'm happy to have that guy on our team. I speak for the entire team when I say that. He's a great leader, a great person.

*Q. Is that one of his best qualities in the huddle, just the confidence he brings to everybody?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Yeah, definitely. He definitely makes it comfortable. When everyone is all uptight and very serious, he will kind of crack a joke and just let everyone know that everything is okay. That's just the type of person he is.

*Q. Is last night the first time you were at AT&T stadium?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Yes.

*Q. What did you think?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Phenomenal. That Jumbotron is huge. Never seen anything like it. We

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have to get one of those at Western.

*Q. Did you watch the game on the Jumbotron or on the field?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** I was kind of watching a little bit of both. It was kind of crazy -- it was almost better on the Jumbotron. It was awesome, though.

*Q. The catch phrase "Row the Boat," what does that mean to you?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** It means a lot. I wish I knew about that when I was in high school, just facing everything I have been through and all the adversity. To me it just means whatever you are going through, you can't control the past and you can't control the future. You can only row in the present and do what you do in the present. That's where you make your difference.

*Q. When you were a senior in high school and you finally did become eligible, did you envision wherever you landed up you would be at the position you are today with so much in front of you?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** No, not at all. I have always had dreams and goals to be the best at my position. But never would I have thought I would be in this position that I am today. That's a credit to Zach [Terrell] and Coach [P.J.] Fleck and Coach [Matt] Simon and Coach [Kirk] Ciarrocca and this entire coaching staff and team. They help me out every single day. Like I said, Zach makes my job really easy. Just going out there and letting loose and just playing. It's great to be out there.

*Q. Talk a little bit about this incredible Cotton Bowl hospitality from that reception you got pulling in -- look at that big smile -- the hospitality room, your names out there on the concourse. Talk about that.*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** I've never seen anything like that. As soon as we stepped off the bus or off the plane, we felt like we were royalty. Just seeing the wraps on the bus and seeing the teams' faces, I have never seen anything like that. It's just a blessing to be here. They've treated us phenomenal since day one. And just seeing our names on the tiles makes us feel really special. It's a blessing to be here. We're really happy.

*Q. Talk about the practice leading up to this. Coach just said you guys came to work every day, really happy with that.*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Like he said, we work hard every single day. And our practices, they

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aren't easy. They're extremely challenging. Probably the hardest part of our game is the practices. We get after it. And it's very physical, very fast-paced. And I love it. I love being part of this team.

*Q. Coach talked about the Wisconsin defense. Talk about what you are seeing on tape?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** They are very fast. They're very physical. Like he said, he mentioned their front seven. And you can't take those guys lightly. It will take our best game to beat these guys. We understand that. We understand that we're a pretty elite team, too, as well. We know we're here for business, and we plan on winning this game.

*Q. He mentioned the front seven. The Big Ten championship game, their back end really struggled against a good quarterback and good receivers. Do you look at that and see a team that struggled to defend the pass that well, does that help you in preparation to be a little bit more confident?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** We will be saying they have a great secondary. We understand we have to be humble and confident at the same time. Like I said, those guys are great back there. Can't take any of them lightly. It will take our best game.

*Q. Have teams tried to double and triple you?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** Multiple times. It's very rare I see single coverage. When I do, I'm in my chops a little bit.

*Q. Your defensive coordinator, how often do they move you around a lot, put you in different spots so it's different for teams to look at you?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** They move me around a lot. Coach (Kirk) Ciarrocca does a really great job like that. I like being in the slot on the outside. Wherever he puts me, I'm okay with it. Whatever I can do to help out this team, I'm okay with it.

*Q. Coach talked about in January having the vision of being here. But I'm just curious, when you were 1-11 that first year, what was the vision in your mind for the future?*

**WR COREY DAVIS:** It's kind of hard to see the vision at that time, because a lot of guys were kind of down in the dumps. Coach Fleck just stayed with us. We bought into that mantra, the "row the boat" mantra. And it has everything to do with this program and everything to do with the adversity that we faced just to keep going whatever you are going through. We believe in it.

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And we saw a vision for this program to be a top program and be a nationwide program, and we're on our way.

### QUESTIONS FOR QB ZACH TERRELL

*Q. (Question about the importance of winning the turnover battle.)*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** I can remember back to my red shirt freshman year. I turned the ball over myself. We were minus 16. And then this year, you know, we have a lot of older guys at key positions. That kind of has really resonated with us and has really been a real key part to turning it around and why we take the ball so seriously. We do it every day in practice. We have -- Coach screams out "Program." We all know exactly where to go. We know exactly what we're going to do. It's a key focus, and we never overlook the ball and the importance of it.

*Q. Talk a little bit about the reception. You show up on the bus. You got that big reception outside, that awesome hospitality room. You got your names out there on the concourse. How great has that been?*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** Like Coach said, the details have just been amazing. Just those little things mean so much to us as players. I have never seen my face on the side of a bus before. I can probably say not a lot of people have. Just to get picked up in a bus like that and just to kind of have that experience and then to have our names on the floor, just every little detail and the things have just been first class.

Coach said that we were going to be blown away. I guess I didn't know exactly what to expect, but it has exceeded my expectations already. We just finished day one. So I'm just really excited to continue to just soak up this experience. And I know we've really enjoyed it. Everything has been amazing. We will continue to enjoy it because these opportunities only come around once in a lifetime.

*Q. You get 15 bowl week practices. Coach said there wasn't an off day. He didn't have to push you. You came ready to work every day.*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** Yeah, I don't know why anybody would not be motivated to play, especially for a game like the Cotton Bowl. And, if you need to be motivated and you need to be pushed to prepare for a game like this against an opponent like Wisconsin, then you probably shouldn't be playing college football. And you definitely should not be playing on our football team, because for us this is an opportunity that no one has ever had at Western Michigan University. And, if you take that lightly, then shame on you. Because this does not come around

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every day, and this has been earned.

We've done a lot of failing, and we've had a lot of growth through that period. And it's just a tremendous honor to represent the MAC and Western Michigan and the non-power five. Because, like I said, this does not come around every day.

***Q. Your coach mentioned that today you're not shocked to be here. Talked about that meeting last year. 1-11, what was the vision back then?***

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** 1-11 was just the foundation. The vision then is the same that it is now. It's just like I said that maturity and that learning. And all that failing that we went through -- I mean, we should have been 0-12 honestly. We should have lost that game we won. Just to go through everything we did that season really is what set the foundation for our team and our older players.

We have been a part of all that. Corey Davis and I, we have been part of the 1-11. We have been to the bottom. And now, so to speak, we're almost to the top. And I think a lot of that has to do with everything we have been through. And that humility that it's built inside of us is something we'll never forget.

***Q. What if you finish unbeaten and Alabama doesn't?***

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** I don't live in hypotheticals, thank goodness. I can say that we are just very, very honored to be here at the Cotton Bowl. And it's been an absolute amazing season and a dream come true.

When I came to Western Michigan, I wanted to leave it better than what I found it. And what we have been able to do not only for the school and the community and this football program is something I will never forget. And I'm very, very proud to be a part of that. I know I speak for all the other seniors that have kind of seen this maturation over these past four years. It has been a real pleasure to serve under Coach Fleck and his vision. And it's become a reality.

***Q. Coach was pretty effusive about that Wisconsin defense. Talk about what you are seeing on tape and the task at hand.***

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** We will have our hands full. That's what I can assure you. They get after it, and they enjoy playing together. That is apparent when you watch the film. They're obviously one of the best defenses in the country. That's no secret. You look at the statistics. You watch the film. And it just jumps out at you. We will have our hands full.

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These are the kind of games that you look forward to because you know you will be challenged each and every play. As a competitor, that's what I look for and that's what excites me when we get to play them. It's just an opportunity for us to continue to change our best and to grow higher. What more can you ask in the Cotton Bowl other than to play one of the best teams in the country and to get an opportunity to prove yourself.

*Q. (Question about hospital visits.)*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** They have the perspective that they do. They are more joyful than anybody we have ever met most of the time. For that perspective and to see that, really puts your life back into perspective, like I said, it just gives you that clear vision of why we do what we do. We're doing it for something bigger than us. It's to give them that kind of hope and to really open their eyes to what we're doing. We're doing this for you. It's not just that we're doing this for us. That's a huge part of our program. And that's something that's really, I think, changed a lot of guys and their perspective on life and why we do what we do.

He wants us to embrace everything. Everything is a learning experience. For these young guys what a tremendous opportunity for them to learn on the biggest stage. For us older guys, we've played in a lot of big games. We have never played in the Cotton Bowl. For these freshmen, this will set them up for the rest of their career.

That's the great thing about Coach. He doesn't want us to shy away from these opportunities or to hide how big the moment is. He wants us to embrace it and enjoy it and live in the moment. I think it's huge. For these young guys, that's going to be invaluable for them. And for us older guys, we have played a lot of football. At the end of the day, the field is still 100 yards long and we are still playing with the football. And it's just the game we love. And nothing has changed. It's just in an amazing stadium, which we got to see last night -- AT&T Stadium is just unbelievable -- against an elite opponent in Wisconsin.

*Q. What's it like to play for a coach who is always on?*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** Always on. He was getting on me this morning saying I didn't look awake enough and that I looked grouchy. I was like, "Coach, I'm feeling good." This has, like, been -- yesterday was one of the best days I have ever had as a football player, and we didn't even play football.

He's always on. Like you said, energy and passion. Those are the words that come to mind. That is what you get every single day from him, and it is not fake. I can assure you. People actually

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wonder whether or not that's what he brings. Come to our team meeting. We have a team meeting every day, and he's the same way.

He comes in and he brings it. That's why our team responds so well to him, because we know every single day we have to be on as well. Because, if our coach is going to be like that, us players have to bring that same type of energy. It starts with him and trickles down to our senior leadership and then to the rest of the team.

*Q. Have you ever seen him down?*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** No, never. I can honestly say, I've never once seen him down. Like he said up there, nobody has spent more time with him than me. I have seen him in every different situation, around multiple different people. When you would think maybe he would be down, he's not.

I've talked to Heather, his wife, and asked her whether or not he's down when he's at home. And the answer is no. The only time, I guess, you're going to see him down is when he's on his boat fishing. My guess, even when he's on his boat fishing, he's still on. That's just him.

He's a competitor. Just like he talked about that crack up there. He has that same type of crack as a coach that he did as a player. We're the same type of people. We have that hunter-dog mentality. We all embrace that as well. We really feed off that.

*Q. I asked you about your initial relationship, which I guess has been kind of maybe blown out of proportion or not exactly accurately portrayed. He did say he asked you about you don't seem to be really -- you're not like he is.*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** The best way to describe what our relationship was, I don't think we understood each other. I think that was the clear message when we both met. He kind of said what he thought about me. And I was really shocked by what he thought and his perspective of me. We just didn't understand each other.

I didn't understand what rowing the boat had to do with a Bronco. I'm a pretty smart guy. I couldn't figure it out for a little while. After a little while it became clear. It has nothing to do with a Bronco. It has nothing to do with football. It is a mantra and the way to live your life. It took me a little while to understand it. Now that I have fully embraced that and see where that came from, he's been very open and honest with the media about -- for most people they wouldn't be willing to share stuff like that. That's the thing about Coach. He's so open and honest. The easiest way to learn is through other people's mistakes and other people's life. He's

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an open book. That helps us learn a lot and has really helped me grow as a person. That's why our relationship has continued to build. We are more like best friends than we are coach-player. That's very, very rare.

*Q. What have you learned from the phrase "Row the Boat"?*

**QB ZACH TERRELL:** It's everything. It's not just "Row the Boat." It's everything that it encompasses. I think people might think it's some silly slogan. Like I said, it's a never-give-up way of life. There are so many different parts.

We have Bronconese, which is a list of 50 -- it's a list of a lot of different things. They are just different little nuggets here and there that you can take with you and that you will use throughout your life.

We even got a test on the way down here of some of that Bronconese to remind us, especially those younger guys, what we are about and who we are and what we stand for. These little things will stick with us for the rest of our life. That's the cool thing.

I have been in job interviews and I've pulled out Bronconese and blown employers away. It's different things that I never thought I would use. You never know when you are going to need it. That's what he gives us everything, whether or not we need it now. He knows eventually we're going to run into something we're going to need it and something to pull from.

It really has changed my life, and those different things have set me apart from a lot of other people who don't get these experiences and don't get that type of wisdom or vision.

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