



Team Announcement Teleconference

No. 15 Western Michigan Broncos vs. No. 8 Wisconsin Badgers
Sunday, December 4, 2016

CHARLIE FISS: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Goodyear Cotton Bowl teleconference. Those participating on today's teleconference are from Western Michigan University, Head Coach P.J. Fleck, and from the University of Wisconsin, Head Coach Paul Chryst.

Let's start with Western Michigan first. Coach Fleck, congratulations on an outstanding undefeated season and the Broncos selection for the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic.

COACH P.J. FLECK: Yeah. First and foremost, we're incredibly honored to be picked by the Goodyear Cotton Bowl. It truly is an honor for our community, for our university, for our student body, for our football players, for our staff and all Bronco nation, past present, and future. This is something that's never happened in the history of our program. We're very grateful for it. We're very thankful for it. This is also well-deserved by our players. And we look forward to representing the Mid-American Conference in the Goodyear Cotton Bowl. It's one of the best conferences in the country and definitely one of the most competitive conferences in the country.

A lot of credit has got to go out to Dr. Steinbrecher, the commissioner of our league. I actually played in the Mid-American Conference. And at that time, there was one bowl game. And it's amazing how far we have come in 12 years to now all of a sudden the Mid-American Conference team being invited to the Cotton Bowl with a 13-0 record.

There's been a lot that has been put into this year, but we're very honored. We're very honored to play incredible Big Ten opponent in the Wisconsin Badgers. Coach Chryst is a phenomenal football coach, an incredible offensive mind. And he's got his team playing at a very elite level. They love to run the ball. They're very physical. They're very explosive, and they're certainly well-coached.

We've got our work cut out for us; but we really, really, really look forward to enjoying our time down in Texas, down in Arlington. And we're very honored again.

CHARLIE FISS: Thanks, Coach. We look forward to having you and your team with us here in just a few weeks. It's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. Coach Fleck, congratulations. Just wondering what thoughts or memories you have of Cotton Bowl's past.



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COACH FLECK: Growing up, I think really it's the stadium. In the past when you watch the commercial of watching a tide roll and the history of watching it with my dad and Oklahoma teams, there were so many instances thinking back to my past of when I couldn't wait to watch the Cotton Bowl. And you couldn't wait to watch one of those New Year's Six-type bowls. It really is surreal right now. It really is.

It is really surreal to be able to know that Western Michigan University, a team that I coach, is going to play in those very games that I watched as a kid growing up. And it truly is an honor. Like I said before. It really is an amazing experience. I'd love to be able to pinpoint one thing I actually remember, but there's been so many. And I'm just so thankful that Western Michigan was selected, and I know our kids are excited as well.

Q. Just to clarify, when you say "the stadium," do you mean the old Cotton Bowl Stadium or where the game is now played?

COACH FLECK: The old Cotton Bowl Stadium, yes. Now, obviously with Jerry Dome and going out to AT&T Stadium, I've been there. I've coached in it. I've watched the national championship game in it, so I'm very familiar with it.

And it really is, I think, the most impressive football stadium in America. And when you really have that kind of Cotton Bowl, it takes the old Cotton Bowl Stadium and all the history and really propels it forward into the future. And when you're in that place, it takes your breath away. It really does in Jerry Dome. It really does. So I'm glad that we have the opportunity to play it and represent Western Michigan in the Goodyear Cotton Bowl.

Q. Was that one of the first things that came to your mind or the players' minds, who said, "Hey, we're playing in the Cowboy Stadium?"

COACH FLECK: Absolutely, because all of our players, they play the game Madden on Playstation or Xbox. And they know what Jerry Dome looks like. They see that scoreboard. And I know that was one of the first things they talked about, was "We get to play in the Jerry Dome. We get to play in the AT&T Stadium."

And the biggest thing they talked about was the scoreboard. They used to think our scoreboards were big. The problem now is they're going to play in front of so many -- a hundred thousand people. And then they're going to look at the scoreboard and then they're going to come back to Waldo Stadium. They're going to look at our scoreboard and say, "Coach, can we get a bigger scoreboard?"



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Q. Good problem to have.

COACH FLECK: It's a really good problem to have. Yes, sir.

Q. Just a two-part question. You played a couple Big Ten teams on the road obviously and you were able to win both of those games. I'm curious, A, how your schedule prepared you for this season? And in particular, that Northwestern game to kick off the season, the way you won it, how did that set the tone for the season?

COACH FLECK: Great question. I'll actually go back one more year. We scheduled Ohio State and Michigan State last year, and they were two of the top four teams in the country at the time. Ohio State was Number 1 and Michigan State was Number 4.

And we told our players if you want to be a champion one day, you've got to beat the best and not just the MAC champions. You've got to learn what it's like to play against the national champions, the Big Ten champions. And it was kind of like doughnuts on a baseball bat. You get into the batter's box or the on-deck circle, you put some doughnuts on there and you swing. And then when you get into the batter's box, the bat seems a lot lighter.

So I would even take it back because our senior class of Corey Davis, Zach Terrells, the Taylor Motons, the Robert -- or the Keion Adams, these guys played in those games and they failed. But we define failing as growth. And they took all that experience from that and used it to the end of last year and won our first bowl game. That propelled us into this year.

Once you accomplish so many "nevers" -- we call them "nevers" -- there were 22 nevers we accomplished last year. There's been 65 nevers or firsts, however, you want to look at it, this year. Our players continue to grow higher and it propelled us all the way to the Northwestern game.

One of the last plays Roberts Spillane frisked the ball out at the goal line. We recover it, go on to run out the clock. And I think you can't be 13-0 without really 1-0. But it's very fitting that Robert Spillane, our middle linebacker, from the north side of Chicago, who was our first commit in our first full recruiting class, makes the play at Northwestern to make us 1-0 and ends the season with an interception to make us 13-0 and get -- become MAC champions and then be able to get a trip to the Goodyear Cotton Bowl. It's only fitting.

And our seniors have really come full circle because they were 1-11 and now they're 13-0, an incredible feat by them that I really don't understand -- I really don't think they understand completely what they've just done. They will in about a decade or two decades, I think, when they look back on this.



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Q. You mentioned some of the players. And I'm curious, I'm sure some of the people who have watched your team on play know about your big-play wide receiver. And, again, two-part question: How good is he against no matter what level of competition he faces? And what about some of the other guys, too? Obviously football is not a one-man sport.

COACH FLECK: I think our whole team exemplifies that, that it's not just one man. The entire team we've had to have people step up at all the positions. And so I'll start with, like, look at the wide receiver position, Corey Davis. I think he's one of the best receivers in college football.

Physically, he's considered in yardage the greatest football player ever to play the game in the NCAA. He broke every MAC record, every Western Michigan record. But the great thing about Corey, what makes him special, he's the hardest worker on our football team. The kid came back for his senior year after his junior and could have come early as a third rounder, wanted to come back not to become a first rounder. That wasn't his main goal. His main goal was to finish the job he started for his teammates, and that was to become a MAC champion. And to give up all that money and all that fame to be able to come back for your team is special.

I said two years ago that I would have taken him to Tampa Bay when I was wide receiver coach. I would have taken him as a freshman as probably the fourth receiver. So when you start to think about how good he is, I think he could immediately come into the league and be a Number 2.

He's an incredible out runner. I think he's the best blocker in college football and one of the most selfless people you will ever meet. But when you look at the wide receiver position, we had a kid Daniel Braverman catch 208 balls last year, left early for the draft. We didn't know who was going to replace him.

Carrington Thompson, Michael Henry step in as seniors and both catch about 40 balls, I think it was, and had a phenomenal senior season.

And our running back situation, we got banged up. Lost two of our top backs. And we had a guy by the name of Fabian Johnson, who is really our third down back, come in and run for close to 200 yards, over 100 yards against Kent State. So a kid that really never got many carries.

This team has always been about stepping in, the next guy in. It's not necessarily stepping up because you have to be able to perform up all year. And when your opportunity comes, just step in there and not let us skip a beat. You don't have to play greater just because you're in the game. You got to play amazing and play elite because you've been preparing that way.

Zach Terrell I think is one of the best quarterbacks in the country. Before last game he only threw one interception the entire season, in the regular season. That doesn't happen. But the



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same thing, Zach Terrell is one of the most giving and serving young men you've ever been part of. He's incredibly selfless, and he's one of the best leaders I've ever been around. So he makes everything go.

Nothing happens without the offense and defensive lines. That's where that can be protected. That's where our defense can be able to provide pressure. So when you look at those areas, you know, without specifically talking about everybody on our team, I think those have really been our strengths.

We play a lot of man coverage, and our respective areas have been tremendous. Our linebackers with David Duggan coaching them have been tremendous. They have made more plays this year more than they did last year.

And they're a special team. I'm not a huge believer of playing starters on special teams. So what I do is I think everybody can start on this team. We have eight guys that we call "applied team members," which are on all four major special teams. But they don't start at their offense and defense position.

So those guys are captains, really, of our football team and incredible leaders. But they don't start on O and D. They're backups, but they do start on special teams. Our team is about everybody owns it. It's not just the best players. Everybody owns our football team, and every has a major part and major role.

CHARLIE FISS: Okay. Coach Fleck, we appreciate you coming and talking to us. And I can't tell you how excited we are to have you and the Broncos with us in Texas in just a few short weeks.

COACH FLECK: We're going to be really excited so be ready for some excited Broncos rowing the boat when we get there.

CHARLIE FISS: Coach has joined us. We're happy you're on the ground and on the phone. We have media on the line. Why don't you make a general statement about the Badgers being selected to play in our game and we'll take a couple questions. We look forward to welcoming Wisconsin to North Texas.

COACH PAUL CHRYST: Thank you very much so much. Obviously proud of this team and really excited to be going to Dallas and having the opportunity to participate in the historic bowl game. I'm excited for our team and what this team has done to get us to Dallas.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you, Coach.



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Q. Disappointment in not winning that game last night and just talk about the challenge of trying to get it back together and facing a team that's played as well as Western Michigan has.

COACH CHRYST: There's no doubt there's disappointment. We wanted to win, but this is great. We'll get our focus back on with the opportunity with the Cotton Bowl. And then playing against Western Michigan, they've had an unbelievable season. Really one of the stories of the year. That will grab our kids' attention, and it will be a challenge for us. But I'm glad it's a team like that where our kids will be -- that they got prepared and do all we can. So it will be good for our team.

Q. Paul, until the last two years when Michigan State played in the Cotton Bowl, there had only been one Big Ten team that ever played here. And now all of a sudden this is a Big Ten destination the last few years, it seems. What do you know about the Cotton Bowl? And what do you tell your kids about the history of the Cotton Bowl considering it's not been a Big Ten game the last couple years?

COACH CHRYST: That's part of the fun of it. One of our linebackers, Jack Cichy, his dad actually played in the '71 Cotton Bowl and had a blocked punt and Duke scored on it. I'll share a little of my personal -- that was my first bowl game that I ever saw.

And then my brother used to -- he was helping and working with the Cotton Bowl and just kind of like an intern or something. So we'll go back and make sure that the kids understand the history of the Cotton Bowl and the -- thing that helps them understand what they're part of. And I'm excited to do that with the team.

Q. Hi, Coach. Can you think that the experience of having been at AT&T Stadium? I'm sure a lot of your guys will be somewhat familiar. They won't be as awed or intimidated by the environment. Will it help?

COACH CHRYST: Yeah, I think that will be helpful. But we've got a group that even didn't go down last year with us. So it will be new for some. And any time you're used to a stadium or you've had an experience with it, I think it's good. But it's a dome feel. I'm just excited for our kids to -- what a great stadium to play in. And to be a part of the Cotton Bowl, that's a piece of college history. And our kids will be excited.

Q. Hey, Coach. Congrats on making it to the Cotton Bowl. What do you think -- if y'all go out and win this game, I think it's been a while since y'all have won a New Year's Six. What would a win against Western Michigan in the Cotton Bowl say about the program and the kind of season that y'all had?



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COACH CHRYST: I think it's -- you know, I'm proud of what the team did this year. And I think when you get a chance to play in a bowl game such as the Cotton Bowl, it's definitely a benchmark that it's a heck of a year. You don't earn that opportunity to play in the Cotton Bowl unless you have a good year. And it's our challenge now to make sure that we finish the year off right. But exciting to play Western Michigan. It's a heck of a team. Undefeated. And I think that it's a great way to have a chance to finish this year.