

StaffDNA Cure Bowl Game Week Press Conference Transcript

Monday, Dec. 15, 2025, at Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld

Old Dominion Head Coach Ricky Rahne, OL Zach Barlev, DL Kris Trinidad, OL Stephon Dubose-Bourne, South Florida Interim Head Coach Kevin Patrick, LB Mack Harris, OL Cole Best, and WR Christian Helms.

OLD DOMINION

ODU Head Coach Ricky Rahne opening statement...

Yeah, I lead the country in the briefest opening statements. So, I'd just like to say we're really excited to be here at the Cure Bowl. This was the bowl that I personally picked out as the bowl I wanted to come to for a number of different reasons, not the least of which is that my mother is a breast cancer survivor, so obviously this means a lot to me and to my family. It's great to be at a bowl that actually stands for something, and it's been first class so far, and we're excited to go against a really good opponent in South Florida. Questions?

Question: Hey Ricky, this is in no way a commentary on the preparation of your team in past bowls, but how different is it having lost two, coming in here and really wanting to win one?

Coach Rahne: I think we wanted to win the last two as well, but I do think our team's been very focused. We've practiced hard. We've had the pads on and practiced very physically because we know we've got a really good opponent coming in and this has been a nice transition for us. I know for some of you who are from here, this is the coldest day of the year, but for us, this is our warmest day of practice we've had in the last two weeks. So we left a snowstorm to come here which is a very rare thing in Virginia, but we did leave a snowstorm to come here. Our guys have been locked in and focused no matter what the weather was, no matter what the circumstances have been, so our guys are certainly ready. They would like to end this season with a 10th win and a bowl ring.

Question: This is for all the players, since you're all upperclassmen. Zach, if we can start with you, then Kris and Stephon. What does it mean for you guys to try and end the season the right way, get that 10th win, and create one more memory with this group?

Zach Barlev: That means a lot to us. Winning nine games in the regular season is a great feeling, but adding that last one and hoisting a trophy? I think for all the guys, it's going to be an amazing thing if we could do that.

Kris Trinidad: Yeah, like he said, we came here, and we want to do great things here. Coach Rahne has a good plan and we're ready to set things in motion, so if we can get this win then I feel like we can get the dice rolling.

Stephon Dubose-Bourne: Getting this will mean a lot. Coming in as a freshman, they're always talking about getting a championship, you know? So we might as well finish it up the right way.

Question: Ricky, I want to ask, along the same lines, what would a 10th win mean for this program after this season and going forward, and building on going into next year.

Coach Rahne: One thing I learned a long time ago is that each team is an individual team, it's not like you build momentum from one thing to the next, and I think even in today's college football, that's particularly true. But it would certainly mean a lot to these guys up here to go get 10 wins. That's something that I wouldn't say we necessarily had out as a goal, to have double-digit wins, but we certainly thought that this team had the talent to do those sorts of things. To be able to have it branded, to always be able to look at and remember this team, and to have a tangible thing to be able to hold; it'll bring you a connection back to this team, and I think it's going to be important. This is a pretty special team in terms of how tight we all are. I put 'we' because I think the coaches are just as tight, the coaching staff together is tight, but we're also very tight with the players. This is a team that I will remember for a very long time, so I'd love to have a piece of jewelry that I would never wear, but I would like to have a piece of jewelry to be able to put in something that I can look at and have a fond memory of.

Question: Hey guys, for all the players. Bowl games in 2025 are so hit or miss about who's coming back and who's not. What does it mean to you guys to have 99% of your roster decide, "Hey, we want to do this. We want to get this 10th win and finish this thing together when we started"?

Zach Barlev: It shows a lot as a team. We can look back at last year, how our team ended the season, some guys are leaving, some guys are staying, and coming into this year, we have our whole team staying for this bowl game. For only being here for two years, and seeing that difference between the two teams, it's an amazing feeling.

Kris Trinidad: I think it definitely reflects how close and tight that this team is, and regardless of what's going on, we are finishing this thing out the right way to start our offseason.

Stephon Dubose-Bourne: I agree with [Kris] Trinidad, we definitely started the offseason with all of the hard work that we put in, we did the workouts in summer, and now we want to just go out there and finish it one last time.

Question: Coach, I know there's been a lot of talk about the offensive side, with personnel and things like that, but it's a very interesting thing. When I look up your defense, and look at you guys for a little bit, you have, I think it's 18 tackles for loss amongst your defensive backs. With no disrespect, Chris, to you and to you big boys up front, what kind of dynamic is it for your defense, to have that complete involvement, and how will it help you face USF here on Wednesday?

Coach Rahne: Obviously our defensive staff, starting with Coach Seiler [Blake Seiler, defensive coordinator], they do a great job. They put the kids in a great position. Honestly, it starts up front with the defensive line, and what they're able to do. People have to focus so much on how they're going to block those guys. We play around 10 defensive lineman. It's not one of these things where it's just, Chris isn't playing the whole game, right? Chris is in there, he's fresh, and he's owned things. So there's a lot of other guys, and he trusts those guys to make plays. And what it does then is that it allows us to blitz at the right time, and those guys have been able to come up and make some huge plays behind the line of scrimmage. I think we don't blitz maybe as much as Coach Orlando [Todd Orlando, defensive coordinator] does, but when we do blitz, we've been very productive in doing it, mainly because we've been able to get such a powerful pass rush with our defensive line.

Question: It looks like it's going to be possibly a big day for you fellas on the ground here, Steph or Zach, but what does it mean, what's the opportunity to get heavily involved in the running game for your last opportunity here to really get in there and just play physical?

Stephon Dubose-Bourne: It means a lot. Coach Hutt [Alex Huettel, offensive coordinator] installed a very hard hat mentality, starting up front with us running the ball, and then it helps the pass game. So, it's going to be a lot.

Zach Barlev: Yeah, our big focus for us is the run game. We emphasized that a lot the last four days and we've probably had the four most physical practices, I think, all season. So that's what we know coming into this game that we're going to be a physical team.

Coach Rahne: And I would just say we're seventh in the country in rush offense, and that's just what we do. I told people before the season that although I thought we had a lot of talent on both sides of the ball, I knew our offensive line and our defensive line were going to be who our team was. And a lot of it is because of the three young men sitting up here right now, and that's who our culture is. These guys drive the culture of the team. I use a word that I know I'm not supposed to use, but I use it a lot, which is violence, and we play a very violent brand of football, which is, I think, the way it's supposed to be played. If not, we go play another sport. This game allows you to do that and you're usually rewarded for it. And so we play between the whistles, and we do it the right way. But our guys do play a very fast and violent branded football and it starts in front.

Question: You guys went to [Universal] CityWalk last night. How has your time in Orlando been so far, are you enjoying yourselves?

Coach Rahne: I'll answer first. For me, the bowls are always a little weird, because everyone here knows how much it matters, and you guys know how much I love my wife, but you probably are also aware of how much I dislike wives' trips, mainly due to my record in those things. So it's one of those things where my wife is very attuned to try not to distract me, and which is really hard because I'm not distracted all right now, but she does not want that to be something that she has to hear about for the next 364 nights. So that's been my experience in the bowl. I'm sure these guys have it a little bit differently.

Kris Trinidad: This is actually my first time in Florida, so I'm just soaking everything in. It's beautiful out here and I love it.

Stephon Dubose-Bourne: I love Orlando, I haven't been here in a long time so it feels good to be back out here.

Question: This is for Coach. We've heard a lot of stories over the years, and for those of us that have covered this game since it started, it serves a purpose. It's made a big dent in the research that's done here for cancer. As I said, we've heard a lot of stories, and you have a positive ending to your story. How's your mom now? And how is it for you to step into this realm knowing what you went through?

Coach Rahne: Yeah, she's great now. She'll be here later this week. Actually, she might even be here right now, she gets in here today. Oh, yeah, I think that there's a lot of positive impacts. Over the last six years, we've become very good friends with another family in our area, where the mom has also overcome cancer, and she's doing fantastic. And those are

great stories, but the real impact here is the fact that there's some stories that didn't turn out the right way. The fact that this amount of money can be served to just get one more person, like me, to have 10 to 15 more years with their mom is a pretty special thing. I think that's something that, when you think about a bowl, has a lot of impact, to say that we get to go play one more game, and we get to spend three more weeks with each other, and maybe somebody else gets to spend three more years with their mom or aunt or whoever. It's pretty impactful.

Question: I noticed the players were nodding their heads. Have you had any family members that have been impacted by cancer? And what does this game mean to you, what it represents that you're helping the cause?

Stephon Dubose-Bourne: **Yes, I tragically lost my grandma to breast cancer awhile back, so this game** means a lot to me.

Kris Trinidad: I lost my great-grandfather to lung cancer awhile back, and he's actually the reason I wear the number 43.

Zach Barlev: Ever since I was a kid, I always wore pink. My favorite color is pink because of breast cancer, and even in high school, every October, I would always dress out in pink, and I wish in college we could do that, but this game means a lot to me.

Coach Rahne: I'll say, about Zach, we were going to maybe have some pink on our uniform or not. Zach really felt passionate about it, did a whole presentation to some of our athletic staff, and got that done. So, we'll have a special helmet out there, and I think that's really cool. Not only was he passionate about what it meant and the impact of it, but also enough to give a presentation, and so I think that that was a pretty cool thing. It showed the power of what education can do. So, Zach is graduated now, all three of these guys are, and he's already given his first work presentation and was successful. So, pretty awesome.

Question: Zach, what did you do for that presentation?

Zach Barlev: I wrote a whole petition. I was asking a lot of players if they wanted to sign a petition with me to get this thing done, and a lot of people had stories, and wanted to have their stories told, so I just told their stories to our board.

Question: How much time did you put into it?

Zach Barlev: I'd say a solid two or three days. Once I figured out that they said it might not happen, I wanted to get it done, and I got about two or three days in.

Question: Does the passion come from somewhere, from a personal experience, or is it just you watching what everyone else is going through and being sympathetic?

Zach Barlev: Yeah, there's a lot of people around me in everyday life. He's not here, but there's Elijah Hoskin, who is one of my best friends on the team. I know his mom had to deal with breast cancer, and there's another good ending to that story as she's a survivor of it. We have

players on the team that just have a lot of passion for it too. I think that's where I want to be the voice of their passion.

Question: Tell me about South Florida. What about them worries you? What do you have to do to win this game?

Coach Rahne: They're a very good football team, they're 9-3, and have an explosive offense. They're able to run the ball but they've also got a lot of weapons in the pass game. They have a very experienced offensive line as well, just like we do, and that's really what carries the day for them. Defensively, they blitz quite a bit. Coach Orlando is one of the best defensive coordinators in the country. They do a nice job of mixing that up. They have the players that make it powerful when they do blitz, and they've done a nice job. They have really good players at all three levels on defense. Special-teams wise they play pretty fast and run to the ball, and they play really physical. So this is going to be a great challenge for us. Basically, we're assuming we're the road team here, because they won't have to travel that far, and that's fine. We've got some good road wins this year, so this is another opportunity for us to do that. I think our team thrives under the pressure of being underdogs. Our team thrives under the pressure of being looked past, which I think maybe some teams did the entire year to us, or people do the entire year to us, and so that's kind of who we are. Our team plays a little bit better when we have a chip on our shoulder.

Question: Coach, you mentioned you're the visiting team, but you're in UCF's backyard. USF is a bitter rival of UCF. A lot of fans that come to this game and will support this program are UCF fans. What would you like to tell them now to get ready for Wednesday night, because they will be on your side.

Coach Rahne: I think they should come out and support me since I'm Coach Frost's former roommate. I lived with Coach Frost for a year when we were both GAs at Kansas State, so I've known him for a long time, so I'll take any support we can get. We have an unbelievable fan base and unbelievable alumni base, but where we're located, we have a transient population, from Navy and from some other places. A lot of people, and maybe they didn't go to Old Dominion, become fans, and they buy season tickets, and they're some of our biggest and most ardent fans. So I always tell people, I have no problem being somebody else's second favorite team. If they want, we can be the second favorite team for this. Monarchs are very close to a knight, right? We're close.

Question: Have you seen Coach Frost? Will you see him?

Coach Rahne: I haven't, I called him the other day, and he called me. I think he's busy getting ready for — well, we don't really have an offseason anymore. This is the calm before the storm.

But no, we have talked and those sorts of things. So I do know that it's exciting for him to be back, and this is where he feels at home.

Question: You mentioned teams overlooking other teams. The expectations for you guys to come into the season externally, were pretty low, if you might recall. With that being said, how gratifying is it to be in the position that you're in now?

Coach Rahne: Well, I've been off social media now for two years, as you know, so I don't know quite what our expectations were. I do know that I got reminded of it every time I was blessed to speak with the media. But we have a great team, and I think that we have guys who work really hard. I think our coaching staff and our recruiting staff did a great job of evaluating the new pieces that we needed to bring in, but I think even more importantly, we did a great job, thanks to our team doctors and some other donors and things, we were able to retain a lot of our players that we developed. These guys have continued to improve throughout the offseason and really throughout this entire season. I think we played our best football towards the end of the year, and that shows a lot about the type of commitment that these young men have towards getting better each and every day. And that was a fun group to coach because of that.

Question: Zach, your thoughts on that? What does that tell you about the meaning of preseason polls?

Zach Barlev: They didn't matter at all. I can't remember what we were in the preseason, but maybe we proved a lot of people wrong. We won a lot of games people didn't think we were going to win. Like I said, the preseason? None of that matters in the postseason. So here we are

SOUTH FLORIDA

USF Interim Head Coach Kevin Patrick opening statement...

We're excited and glad to be here. Not too far from home, so very comfortable. It's been an exciting couple of weeks for us. It's a great example of just how resilient of a team that we have.

Over the last couple of weeks, we've kind of worked through some things, but you see how much you love a ball. It just makes it fun to be around and is the reason why I coach. It's been fun for the coaching staff, and everyone involved. We're looking forward to it. We've got a great group of guys, and it's going to be exciting.

It's a really good Old Dominion team, you know, very similar to who we are. They are just from a different part of this country. I mean, they have the exact same record as us.

We have an opportunity to play for great cause for the Cure Bowl and make a statement here across the country about who we are. We'll continue the process and keep building upon our culture, so we're excited.

I'm just fortunate to be in the position that I'm in. Thank you to our administration, and Mr. Higgins, for trusting in me to finish things strong and get ready for next season. I think that's the bottom line, and we're going to finish our season strong.

I've been fortunate enough to be with this program for 11 years now. We've had an 11-win team, and a 10-win team, but like I told these guys I practice the other day, you put that aside, you know, the teams that we've played, the schedule we've played, some of the greatest teams we've had here, we've only got the nine wins. So, we've done some really great things, but we can really put our statement in college football is in the 2025 season. And really a stamp on who we are and where our program is headed. And this will be a big game for us. It's all business. When we get across those lines, it's all business. These guys are enjoying each other and when we get to Wednesday, we'll be ready to play.

Question: Has there been any talk that you guys are here at a bowl game in UCF's home city of Orlando, but they aren't this year.

Coach Patrick: It's all about us. It's all about these players. Anything outside of this team is, you know, we haven't thought about it. We've been focused on our process and what we're doing. I really didn't even think about that.

Question: Talk about what it means to have these guys still sitting next to you and the job that they've done this season.

Coach Patrick: These guys have all done a heck of a job and it's made a difference in a lot of ball games. Mack's done a phenomenal job, you know, on the field, but the probably the most impressive thing that he and several others, is what they've done in the locker room and what they've done off the field with each other. They'll also tell you that they haven't done this thing by themselves.

I mean, you look at some of the things that I hear Mack saying on the sidelines. I hear him at practice. Everything's tied together. I mean, you know, there's some help. You know, the guys in front do a heck of a job. I mean, the guys in the back here have done a heck of a job. And I think he'll tell you that. I mean, you know this, not any of the call are designed for any one player. It's designed, you know, for the defense, for the team, and, you know, some people stand up and they can make those plays. And Mack's done a heck of a job. All these guys have done a great job.

Question for Mack: When Change is happening within your program during a season, how were you guys able to come together as a group, and why did you want to come together?

Mack Harris: Well, I would say the answer to the high how and the why would just be the love that we have for each other and the love that we have for the game, you know, a different situation for us. I've never personally been in a situation like this, where, you know you do good things throughout the year, and you know it creates opportunity for other people. But you know, we look at each other every single day and we go out and play for each other. So, whether it's practice or the game or whatever it is, like, KP says it all the time. We should be able to go out there and run practice on our own as a power player that we are. But I would say it stems from just the care that we have for each other and the respect and love that we have for the game.

Question for Cole: What is the DNA of this football team?

Cole Best: Man, this football team. I've never been a part of a group of guys that, like Mack said, that love each other and truly have each other's back like we do. The way that we've handled this situation, you know, is a direct reflection of just the brotherhood and the love that we do have for each other. And just like Mack said, as well, the leadership on this team just focusing on what we need to do and where we need to go.

Question for Christian: How have you seen that translate in practice?

Christian Helms: I think, like KP said, is coaches steer the boat, but the players, you know, make the thing go. There's going to be a lot of transition, and there's a lot of uncertainty for little bits. But we knew we had the opportunity to come in here with a lot of pride and a lot of guys on the team really care about USF, so practice didn't change. I think he said earlier, we should go out and practice without coaches. So, every day we go out and, you know, if you're not being the same, we wouldn't let the coaches do that. It's all about us. And you know, he said they're not going to remember the coaches after the season without the players. And so there's a bit of a pride, and that's why we've been working so hard.

Question about cancer and how it's affected their lives.

Coach Patrick: I had a roommate in college that if he did break his leg in one of our camps, I don't know if they'd ever found that cancer as quick as they did. That hit home to me immediately. This is my roommate. My brother was from my hometown, Brad. It was really one of my first experiences. You think we're all young men, and we think we're top of the world. It could get anybody.

I could not anticipate, you know, just being an opportunity to be here in a bowl like this is, of course, such a huge cause. It's humbling and it's a reminder, too. I mean, we're very fortunate to do what we do. To be healthy, and get out there on the field, and it's a blessing that these guys take for granted.

One of my best friends over the last year or two, back home in West Palm Beach, got kidney cancer. You know, I never, I'll never forget that too. Just overwhelming. It was just overwhelming for me just to see such a great friend go through what he went through. And I think everybody, to some degree, either is encountering this, or soon well, and I just couldn't be prouder to be a part of something so strong and to help, because it'll humble you in a heartbeat.

I just talked to both of them right before we came over here and they were excited that we're bowling, huge football fans that are athletes themselves. And told them, again, we're going

to win this game for these players, but also, you know, for them as well. And I told them about that, and they did touch me, and it touched me a big deal. So I'm very proud to be here, and I'm very proud to represent the University of South Florida, in this bowl. And the opportunity to play here in Orlando.

Question: The opportunity to play on a big stage at Camping World Stadium.

Mack Harris: I think for a lot of us, especially for myself, again, being able to play another bowl game just closer to home, so that a lot of family and friends can come down and watch us play. But honestly, it's not really about the location necessarily. I'm just happy to be able to go play another one with my brothers and go out and put on the field where our culture is and what we stand for, and create a standard for the USF Bulls.

Question: Talk about what you see from Gaston Moore as he steps into starting on Wednesday.

Cole Best: Yeah, absolutely. Gaston Moore, he's done a phenomenal job all year being ready to go. Everyone in this program has full faith and trust in him. He's a great guy. He's always got a smile on his face. Everybody on his team loves him. He's a super competitive guy. He's really serious about his work, and he understands what it takes. And, like I said, everybody trusts him, and I'm really excited for him to have this opportunity and go out and kind of showcase his skills in this game.

Question: How do you think you guys will rally around him?

Cole Best: Yeah, absolutely. I mean full faith, full trust. We got his back. You know, we told them all week. We're going to go as you go, we're going to protect you, and we're going to buy you all the time. You can put the ball where everything goes. So we have full faith and trust.

Coach Patrick: I don't think that's just popped up here recently. I think, you know, being at camp on the other side of the ball. I think he's impressed people. We had a phenomenal player Byrum, you know? I think Byrum will tell you the same thing. These guys are true. He's impressed us all. Yeah, there's many times that was unbelievable. He has a ton of confidence. He's really impressed the team and has always been the next man up and he's ready to roll.

Question for Christian: What have you seen from the coaching staff that has been chosen to lead you guys for this game?

Christian Helms: I grew up USF fan, and he was coaching there before I just started going to games as a little kid. But having KP, chosen to lead us, I was super excited. He was there when the team started, so that's special for me. But so many coaches stepping up in different ways, just like the players are as well. A lot of guys doing jobs that they haven't been doing all season, and we're doing more on top of what they're already doing. So, we need to come out and just step up. So, it's been a total team effort and we're looking forward to the game.

Question for Mack: When you see an opponent lined up opposite of you that also has nine wins, what does that do for you?

Mack Harris: It's always motivating. This whole team, I think is full of competitors, we're glad to go out there and play against a team that we know is going to put up with the same fight that we will. ODU is a great school, great team, and they very, very talented. So we definitely have the utmost respect for them. But again, at the end of the day, we'll go through our process and listen to these coaches who have done a great job over these few weeks of just getting us prepared. And we'll go out there and just play the way we know how to play.

Question: How special is it to play in this game, knowing what it represents that it raises money for cancer research?

Mack Harris: it's super special. Not too long ago I had an uncle passed away from terminal cancer, so it's super special for me to be able to get out here and represent a great cause. I think it'll be huge for my family to see that and be pretty cool for them. But again it's a great cause, and I can't wait to get out and wear that badge.

Cole Best: Yeah, absolutely, same with me. I think we've all known somebody or been affected or touched by, you know, cancer in some way. So, to come out and represent and kind of fight for something that's bigger than ball, you know, it's huge. And it really hit me deep last night our welcome event, when all the directors of this great bowl, they kind of got up and shared a little bit of their stories and talked about why we're here and what this really represents. And it kind of made me take a step back for a second. And this is a real-world problem that so many people suffer from daily. So, just to be here to represent this fight for this cause, it's an honor.

Yeah, for me, personally, I've done a lot of stuff this season for my dad's situation, battling kidney disease. So, with the purpose of this bowl game, that does a lot for another disease that a ton of people battle truly means a lot. And his sister also passed away from brain cancer, so having a personal connection there, but also just playing something bigger yourself. It's a lot bigger than ball. And we'll all tell you, football is what we do is not who we are, and so being able to represent something bigger is a very cool opportunity to share.