

USF Interim Head Coach Kevin Patrick

Opening Statement:

“I love these guys. Like I told them in the locker room, as painful as this is, these players have changed the trajectory of this program in the last three years. No matter where they go, where I go, I am encouraged that this program is going to keep climbing no matter who is at the helm, because we have built a good culture.

“A lot of things didn’t go our way today. We obviously could have played a lot better, but the love that we have for these guys, and they have for each other is the biggest thing that we got out of this year. They did a hell of a job, 9-4, wasn’t what we were expecting, but at the end of the day, as men in that locker room we got better. We got better as men, and I am encouraged that as they finish their football careers. They are going to be great men in this world. When it is all said and done that’s all I can ask.”

On the importance of capping a season with a bowl game:

“It is the opportunity to compete. It is what I am used to, and I think it puts it on more of a national stage than the regular season. It is crazy what has happened in college football these days. We talk about it a lot. It is not the young men, who are playing, it is the adults, who are messing it up. You can only control what you can control. I can’t control all that.

“I know that the way I grew up, no matter what bowl you went to, it is an opportunity that we should be proud of to go represent our school, our university and all the men and women who are a part of that. That is what bowl season is supposed to be about. It is sad to a degree, but some of that I can’t control. We are just going to adjust over time. I’m proud of these guys, that’s all I want to talk about, how proud I am of these guys and the men and women who stayed here, that speaks volumes about our culture and the future of our program and great, hardworking people like this who come together and fight through some adversity.”

On Chris Klieman stepping down at Kansas State and a lot of good coaches deciding not to do this anymore:

“I haven’t met that coach. I don’t know his reasons or what made him choose to do that. I don’t have any opinion on that. People deal with adversity and change a lot different than how I may have dealt with it. I can’t answer that as to how he dealt with it.”

On quarterback Gaston Moore:

“Gaston played his tail off. He spoke to the guys after, this doesn’t fall on Gaston, (Cole Best) said that ,as well. We look within ourselves to see what we could have done better as coaches and as players, but it’s 11 guys out there who are making plays. I am proud of ‘Gas,’ I’m proud of (Locklan Hewlett). His future is bright, and things like this, you go through some tough times and some adversity like this, and greatness is born. I am proud of these guys and what they did this year. You get opportunities like this, and, hopefully, it means great things to come in the future.”

On the importance of this bowl game and how it can help save lives and get that conversation going:

“My mother-in-law passed away from cancer. My roommate in college got cancer, while we were in college. One of my best friends two years ago had kidney cancer.

“To be a part of this bowl, create more awareness, raise money, I couldn’t be more proud to be a part of it. Joyce Patrick, my mother-in-law, Matthew Seakern, my best friend, and Brad Shag, my roommate in college, we represent those guys win or lose today, and everybody else out there that fights that battle. It is the highest issue that attacks anybody. I couldn’t be more proud to be a part of such a great bowl and benefit to raise awareness and raise money for all those out there affected by it.

“We kind of missed it in the beginning. Coach Rahne and that staff over there and that program, that culture that he’s built. You saw it throughout the year, that is a tough group. That is an angry football team. You come to this game against them, watch the first play against Indiana and how they played, hats off to those guys. Class act, they did a hell of a job, and they should be very proud of what they have done.”

On what this journey has taught you:

“The future of this program is bright. We have great leadership. There are some great players, who are going to step up next year. They are going to learn from this. Hats off to these guys, and what they did this year. We came back here three years ago, and it was dim. The future is bright, and it starts at the top.

“Mr. Higgins and his staff and our administration, and what they are pouring into this program, pouring into the players not only us, but every other sport, you can see that. Hats off to every one of these guys who battled this year. There were a lot of highs. There were some lows. They will work through it. We didn’t give them anything they couldn’t handle. Guys will work through this, and that is life and how it works. There are people going

through a lot worse things than what we are going through right now. These guys will be better. That is football.

On reflecting upon what the last two and a half weeks has been like:

“It was awesome. I love coaching. I love being around these guys. I am thrilled that Mr. Higgins asked me to step in front, and I didn’t do it by myself. We have a great staff that was here. We finished the year off in our recruiting, and a lot of people probably would have hung it up. We signed a lot of great players, a lot of class acts, a lot of great students.

“It was just a great opportunity. I got to connect with a lot more guys. I have had more guys sitting in my office this past week. The last person I hugged coming in here was (Christian Neptune). He came and sat down with me, that means the world. We had so much fun. It’s easy to be happy with all the good times.

“Sometimes you have to look at the rough spots in your life, especially with this sport, you have to smile more. That is how you grow, and I have grown as a football coach, and as a man. I truly believe, once you stop learning, stop growing, you start dying. These guys brought more life and more spirit into my life than I thought was possible. I had a great opportunity and took advantage of it. I can’t do this by myself, we had a lot of great men and women who supported us through this. I will remember this the rest of my life.

“It was a tough loss, but there are a lot of great things I am going to take out of this. (Cole Best), I thought we were always pretty close, every day, but to see his leadership, it inspired me, this is why I coach. This is the biggest blessing I have ever had in my coaching career, and I couldn’t be more proud of them no matter what the score was tonight.”

USF Graduate Center Cole Best

On your time at USF, what's the one thing you're going to remember most?

Cole Best: I'm going to remember this year. I just finished my fifth season here. I got here in 2021, I went through 2-10, 1-11, with numerous coordinator changes, a couple of different head coaches, but I stayed the course. I knew that this place had something special in store for me.

“I had this feeling that this is where I was meant to be, and going and accomplishing some of the things that we did this year, and just these coaches that care so much about us, and the guys that I have been blessed enough to be around, I am going to remember that. I am

going to remember the brotherhood. I am going to remember how not a single guy on this entire team, not a single coach stopped swinging, stopped fighting.

“We went through some of the craziest adversity that you could imagine, and just the will to keep going is what I am going to remember, these guys that I fight with every day.”

On the progress that the team sees in Gaston Moore:

"When we first got here, Gaston was a class act guy. It's a guy that we all trust. We are all rally behind him, have 100% faith in him, not just me, the entire O-line, the entire offense, the entire team. That guy is a grinder, who shows up every day. It wasn't perfect, but I couldn't be more proud of him for the way that he stepped up and led this offense.

“No matter how the game went, he didn't blink. Came right back to the huddle, dapped every single one of us up and told us to keep going. The guy's unbreakable, and I couldn't be more thankful for him.”

On the importance of this bowl game being for a cause and what it can do to help save lives and get that conversation boing:

"Yeah, I have been fortunate most of my life. I haven't been hugely affected, but I know a lot of people who have, and this past year, someone who I love dearly, one of their parents has been going through it -- battling with cancer.

“So, when we got announced that we were coming to this bowl, it was kind of a moment for me, like man, this is where we are meant to be.

“There's a reason for everything, and that goes back to my faith, but to be here, to represent this university and to fight for this cause, and raise awareness and raise money, it means everything.

“It's one of the most pressing medical issues in the entire world, and I don't think there's enough awareness that could be brought to it. But bowls like this, organizations like this doing their part, it makes a huge impact. It is bigger than ball like I said when I first got here. This is a real life thing, and win, lose, or draw, we are fighting for this cause and we are standing up for this cause.”

On the 24-hour rule and how it's going to be tough to get rid of this in 24 hours:

“The process doesn't change. You have to go back. Just because it is the last game of the season doesn't mean we just wipe it or ignore it, there's a lot to clean up. There was some

good, there was some bad, the process does not change. I will be there tomorrow. I will be watching the tape, figuring out what I could have done better, what we could have done better as an offensive line, and I know these coaches will, too.”

On all the all the highs and lows that this team endured:

"It is hard to say right now, what it's going to look like. All I know is that this team has accomplished more than I ever thought we could, and I just couldn't be more proud of these guys and these coaches. Specifically, the coaches that have stayed through all this, continued to pour into us, have shown up every day and worked their tails off, we couldn't be more thankful.”