

# San Diego County Credit Union Holiday Bowl: Iowa vs USC

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

## Clay Helton Kirk Ferentz Press Conference

MARK NEVILLE: Good evening. Thanks for being here.

Before we get started, I would like to say one thing regarding the passing of Coach Hayden Fry. First of all, on behalf of all of the redcoats, Holiday Bowl organization, our condolences go out to the family and everybody related to the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Coach, I know he was important to you and Gary and everyone in Iowa. Our condolences go out to the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Here we are, just nine days away from the kickoff of the San Diego Credit Union Holiday Bowl. Very excited. One of only three games in the country that are not in the College Football Playoff that are matching two top-25 teams against one another.

It's going to be an electric atmosphere at SCCU Stadium on December 27th. Game is going to be televised on FS1. Kickoff is at 5 p.m.

Here we are at this annual press conference. We're going to get this thing rolling and jump right into it. We'll bring up the coach of the designated visiting team, the USC Trojans, Coach Clay Helton. He'll say a few words. We'll open it up to questions after that. Then we will bring up Coach Kirk Ferentz from the University of Iowa for a statement, then questions.

It's my pleasure to introduce from the University of Southern California Trojans, head coach Clay Helton.

CLAY HELTON: Thank you to the Holiday Bowl. Thank you to the great city of San Diego for having us back. To be affiliated with this bowl game is something special for our university and our football team. We are very, very excited to be a part of this.

As a team our guys are working extremely hard and are looking forward to coming down here, seeing all the hospitality that we've been known for, to be able to come down here and be in San Diego and have a great



time.

We are honored to have the opportunity to compete against Coach Ferentz and his Iowa Hawkeyes. From the USC alumni and family, we would like to pass on our condolences to the Iowa family for the loss of a great person and a great coach in Hayden Fry.

Growing up in the profession, being a coach's son, Coach Fry was who we modeled ourselves after. He was the icon, what everybody wanted to be. He's a legend we will never forget.

We're excited to play Iowa, a very, very good football team. Having had the opportunity to study them over the past two weeks, it will be a tremendous challenge for us. You're talking about two teams that are extremely hot down the stretch, finishing extremely strong.

Coach brings in a defense that I think is one of the best in the country, only giving up 13.2 points a game right now, the highest point total is 24 points. It will be a great challenge for our offense.

You look at them offensively, to have that veteran quarterback, what they do, the physical style of ball they play, it should be really neat to see these two teams get together.

We're excited to be here. We thank you for the opportunity to be here. I'll open it up to any questions that you have.

### **Q. (No microphone.)**

CLAY HELTON: I'm a coach's son. My dad was a 48-year NFL and college coach, assistant coach and head coach. I've grown up in it. I've been in it 25 years.

One of the things you learn as a head coach, you focus on your job. It's hard to win college football games. It's hard to raise 18- to 21-year-olds on a day-to-day basis. If you're not truly focused on doing those two things, you're not doing your job.

I've always believed we as coaches, our job is to win football games and to raise kids. It's the media's job to report and give opinions. It's the fans' job to bring the passion. That's what makes our sport great.

We focused on our young team, a talented team, that has an extremely bright future, that went through some adversity with some injuries, really came together under a very young quarterback, a couple quarterbacks to be honest with you, really put together a great stretch run to be a part of this game. We're talking about the 16th and 22nd ranked football teams in the country getting ready to play.

It's a great honor for our team and a great reward for our team, for all the hard work that they've done this season.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

CLAY HELTON: I'll be honest, I love the expectations we have at USC. They're the highest of the high. We're about championships. We're about playing at the highest level. To be able to compete at the highest level, that's what you want.

That's one of the reasons that this game excites me so much. To be able to have the chance to play a great team like Iowa, to compete against a great team like Iowa, that's what you want to be able to have happen.

That's why we all came to USC, to win championship, have unbelievable expectations and perform at the highest level.

I'm proud of our kids for what they have accomplished this season and what they will continue to try to accomplish in this bowl game.

**Q. You mentioned reward. From a coaching staff position, every staff has a different idea in a bowl game, rewarding them for being here because they earned it, and letting them have some fun, then do what you need to do to win the football game.**

CLAY HELTON: We approach it like this. One of the things that's happening in college football right now is the early signing day. You have a lot of balls to juggle, to be honest with you. You're having to deal with recruiting, you're having to deal with finals that your kids are going through, and preparation for a highly touted football game.

For us, we really took the approach over the last two weeks that we were playing this Saturday. We've game planned the last two weeks, we're actually installing the game plan this week, acting like we're playing this Saturday.

When we arrive next Monday to the beautiful city of San Diego. Our kids can take a deep breath and enjoy the activities that come with a bowl game, review a game plan.

We've taken a sense-of-urgency approach, to be honest with you, about really preparing for what we feel is one of the best teams in the country that we're competing against.

**Q. (Question about Iowa's success.)**

CLAY HELTON: I think they do a tremendous job of limiting your possessions. They work as a team. When you look at the numbers, to be plus-six in turnover margin, very limited in penalties. I think the total number of plays guys are averaging a game is 64 plays a game.

You're not getting a tremendous amount of possessions. Thus, the scores are down. You're looking at games 24-22, 10-3, 12-10. You're talking about a defense that really does a nice job.

But they play great team football. You look at them on third downs, their defense gets off the field. If you're not performing on third down, you're in a world of hurt.

I think they're one of the best execution-based defenses that we've seen. They don't do a bunch, but they do everything extremely well.

Their kids are disciplined. They do their assignments correctly. They play with great fundamentals and technique. They do it over and over and over and over again all the way through the game. Very well-coached.

That's why coach has been doing it for a long time in the exact same place. When you talk about a career like he's had at Iowa, it's pretty dang special. There's a reason for that.

Guys, thank you for having us again. Fight on.

MARK NEVILLE: Thank you, coach.

Before we bring up Coach Ferentz, I'd also like to acknowledge, this was a busy day for these two. For them to come to San Diego to be with us for this press conference, it really is greatly appreciated.

Also the directors of athletics from each school are here, as well, Mike Bohn from the University of Southern California, and Gary Barta from the University of Iowa.

We'd like to bring up the head coach of the Iowa Hawkeyes, Coach Kirk Ferentz.

KIRK FERENTZ: Thank you, Mark.

As it has been mentioned a couple times, college football lost a Hall-of-Fame coach in Hayden Fry. I can

tell you he's a Hall of Fame person on top of it.

I just can't begin to describe the impact he had on the state of Iowa. I got there his third year. At that point they had 19 straight losing seasons in Iowa football history. The impact, the way he captured the hearts and minds of people in our state, it was really evident. Then the good things started to happen after that.

I can't say enough about Coach Fry, the impact he had on countless players, countless coaches, certainly fans, people that interfaced with him at all levels. People out here had a chance to visit with him. It's really a great loss. Obviously our condolences go to the family, all those he worked with through the years.

Going back to those teams, those years in the '80s, a long time defensive coordinator Bill Brashier on our staff, a fellow Texan, Odessa I believe. They met in Texas. Bill had a good way of saying things.

I remember whatever bowl we were going to one year, he goes, All bowls are good bowls, it's just that some are better than others.

I think he was thinking about the Holiday Bowl because we had the opportunity to come back out here twice in the '80s. Iowa came back two years after I left. We had such a phenomenal experience. It's been a long drought. We are extremely excited to be back.

Rita Foley, Coach Fry's assistant, my assistant 41 years now, she started working at age eight for the record (laughter), she made the comment this morning, This was always Hayden's favorite bowl. He loved coming out here, loved everything about it. Maybe there's some fate here involved, whatever.

We're so appreciative of the opportunity to be here. Very thankful certainly to Paul, Mark, everybody involved with the selection. We're thrilled.

When I say that, I can speak for our team. They're all excited about the opportunity to come to a great city like this, and more importantly a great bowl game. They've heard about the great hospitality, all the things that are available. Obviously an opportunity to play against a storied program like USC.

When we look at the film, they've got great players, very well-coached. We know we have a huge challenge on our hands. It's going to take our absolute best.

We're thrilled about every part of this, know we have a big challenge, very much looking forward to getting back out here whenever we finish our finals.

I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. Are there any plans, any tributes to Coach Fry, we might see during the game itself?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll do something during the game. We'll have that finalized probably by Monday when we get back here, have a chance to visit with the media. Something a little more permanent for next season. We'll definitely honor his legacy.

**Q. During the season I think there are three combined losses to ranked teams, came by an average about 4.7 points a game in those losses. As good as that defense has been, was that offense at the end of the year different than earlier in the year when they struggled a little bit? If so how?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we struggled a little bit more mid-season. Had some injuries. I know USC faced the same challenge. Any level of football, college football... That's been our program the last two years, quite frankly.

I think most of our games, all of our losses have gone down to the last minute. But I quickly remind people, too, we have a lot of wins that have gone that way, too. We kind of live in a world of close football games. That's been the nature of our program.

Just kind of developed a philosophy where obviously you go back to critique, correct, try to learn. At some point you move on. Don't really reflect a hell of a lot about things we can't change.

Just really proud of our players' effort, proud of the way they competed week in, week out, the way they prepared. Really all you can ask a team to do.

**Q. You mentioned the long-term tenure. I didn't realize until tonight Coach Ferentz has the longest tenured streak in the country of head coaches. Is it 21 years?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes. I'll make a comment (laughter).

Clay talked about our scores. If I had to live in a world with those 48-39 games, I don't know if I'd last 10 years. Those games kill you. I remember we played Penn State in 1983, I think it was 42-38. It felt like we had been in a marathon. I hate those kind of games.

Hopefully we're not in one this week. I don't know. With the way these guys move the ball and score, I don't know, we'll see what happens.

**Q. Talking a little bit about what Coach Helton went through this year on and off the field, you've seen a lot in your two decades at Iowa, you've had opportunities at the NFL level. How do you manage**

**the highs and lows in football for that long? What is really the secret to navigating all of that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think Clay mentioned he grew up in a football family. I had the honor of meeting his dad. I think it's correct, he is one of like eight people that turned down the job at Cleveland before I got it actually. I should thank him for that. Otherwise I'd be up in Orono, Maine. Not all bad.

I didn't grow up in a football family necessarily, but I've had great mentors long the way. Probably two most notably would be Coach Fry, and Joe Moore, my high school coach. I worked for some great people in the NFL.

The longer you do this, the more you find out all you can do is all you can do. It's true of anything in we do in life, whether raising a family, coaching football, you try to do the best preparing the people you work with, give them the tools to be successful. You hope you go out and do things the way you're supposed to do. All you can do.

Can't dwell on consequences. Every day you waste worrying about what happened yesterday is a day you're going to shut some opportunity out.

**Q. Have the two of you crossed paths at any level? Is this the first time you have gotten together?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I'm correct in saying the draft two years ago is probably the only time we met. I remember his dad coming out to work some of our guys out in the '80s. With the Buccaneers at that time. I can't remember who the lineman was exactly. I remember they went out in Kinnick Stadium, worked out. First time I met him.

We're football guys. We kind of follow what's going on. I followed his career certainly, his dad's career at Houston. You never know where paths take you.

We appreciate it. Thanks for having us here. Thank you.