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JANUARY 2024

## A NEW YEAR BEGINS...BUT FIRST!

Happy New Year to everyone -- I hope your holidays were ones to remember.

Before we turn the calendar completely, let's take a quick look back at Las Vegas Bowl Week 2023.

One of the guiding principles of our bowl is that it's MORE THAN JUST A GAME -- and this year's version was no different. I am so proud of the work done by our staff and committee members along with the two participating teams in giving back to our community leading up to kickoff. Whether it was Northwestern and Utah players making lifelong memories while visiting Opportunity Village or Wildcat and Ute cheerleaders and mascots creating smiles at Dignity Health's St. Rose Dominican Hospital or our successful Just One Project food distribution event at Allegiant Stadium, this bowl game continues to make a real impact in the Valley. And that doesn't even include \$40,000 raised for the CFP Extra Yard for Teachers program, the \$25,000 for our friends at Just One Project, or the \$8,000 for the Southern Nevada Sports Hall of Fame.

As for the game itself, it was a tremendous success in terms of viewership as the Las Vegas Bowl continues to lead the way in attracting eyeballs. In fact, more than three million tuned in to watch Northwestern defeat Utah, which represented an impressive 26% increase over the previous season's rating and was by far the most for any bowl played before Christmas.

A sincere Thank You to everyone for their efforts as we now begin preparations not just for the next bowl game but also the highly anticipated Vegas Kickoff Classic between USC and LSU on Sunday, September 1 at Allegiant Stadium. It will be here before you know it.

Here's to a memorable 2024!

John Saccenti  
Executive Director

John Saccenti

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## WILDCATS CAP MEMORABLE RUN WITH WIN OVER UTAH



**Ben Bryant, Rich Abajian Most Valuable Player**

LAS VEGAS -- The Northwestern Wildcats opened the season losing four of their first seven games under first-year coach David Braun with little to no hope of a successful campaign.

Saturday night they completed an improbable 5-1 finish to the season with a 14-7 win over Pac-12 foe Utah in the 32nd edition of the Las Vegas Bowl.

Ben Bryant, who was named the 2023 SRS Distribution Las Vegas Bowl MVP, passed for 222 yards and found Bryce Kirtz in the corner of the end zone midway through the fourth quarter for the game-winning score.

"We had a little slant-go there," said Bryant, a sixth-year senior who transferred in from Cincinnati. "It didn't look like he was going to be there, but I trusted him through that collision. I threw it up to him and he made the play."

Bryant, who left the game briefly after a scary hit just before the game-winning drive, was 22 for 34 with two touchdowns as Northwestern (8-5) closed out its season with a fourth straight win.

"Ben being a transfer, (Ben) embodies what it looks like it brings a transfer to Northwestern," said Braun, who inherited a team that went 1-11 in 2022 and improved to 8-5 with a bowl victory in his first year under the headset. "It's about the right person. Not the right athlete, but the right person."



The Wildcats limited Utah (8-5) to 221 yards and had two interceptions and a fumble recovery.

Bryson Barnes was 8 for 13 for 55 yards with two interceptions, and Ja'Quinden Jackson rushed for 55 yards on eight carries to lead Utah, which lost three of its last four games.

Utah's 73 passing yards was the fourth-lowest in Las Vegas Bowl history and lowest since Utah had 71 in 2015 against BYU.

The Utes have now been involved in the two lowest-scoring Las Vegas Bowls, beating USC 10-6 in 2001, and Saturday's loss to the Wildcats.



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"Tough to win a football game scoring seven points," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Our defense was pretty good, kept us in the game. This is not the players' fault. We as coaches have to get them better prepared."

Northwestern senior defensive back Jaheem Joseph had two interceptions, which both came in the first half, tying four others for the Las Vegas Bowl record for most in a game.

The Wildcats struck first when Bryant connected with Cam Johnson from 12 yards out for a score with just 1:20 left in the first half, capping an eight-play drive that covered 75 yards. Northwestern's 7-0 halftime lead was the lowest first-half score in Las Vegas Bowl history.

Both defenses were dominant until an action picked up in the fourth quarter, when the Utes tied the game with 12:38 left behind a 6-yard TD plunge from Micah Bernard, who was playing for the first time since injuring a knee in the season-opener against Florida.

The Utes, who will move from the Pac-12 to the Big 12 next season, will hope to rebound from a disappointing season with quarterback Cam Rising, who missed the whole season with a knee injury, returning for 2024. It will be his seventh season of college football.



## LVBOWL MOST WATCHED PRE-CHRISTMAS BOWL GAME

Of the 18 pre-Christmas bowl games, the SRS Distribution Las Vegas Bowl had the highest television ratings, coming in at 3.2 million viewers. That's up 26% from last year's game. Here's the top five:

<b>SRS Distribution Las Vegas Bowl</b>	<b>....3.2m</b>
76 Birmingham Bowl	..... 2.8m
Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl	..... 2.5m
Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl	.... 2.4m
Avocados From Mexico Cure Bowl	..... 1.9m



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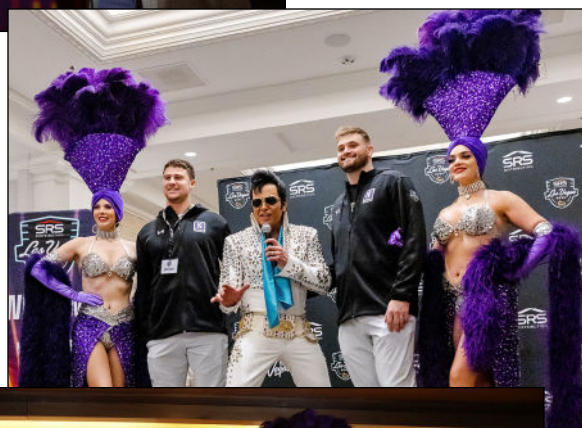
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## WHAT A FABULOUS WEEK IT WAS!



Northwestern and Utah were greeted by Elvis and the Showgirls upon their arrival and then spent some time with the media for photo opportunities and interviews in advance of the big game.



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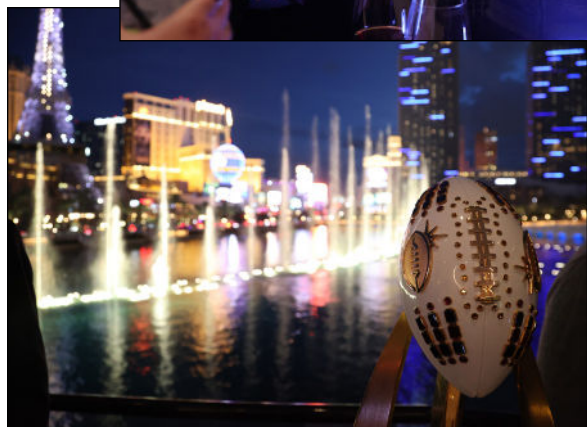
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The coaches and athletics staff from both teams were treated to a VIP reception and a little magic at Spago while overlooking the Bellagio Fountains. The VIPs then headed to the Wynn Resort to experience Awakening, one of Las Vegas' featured shows.



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**A visit to Opportunity Village provided a great and memorable experience for players and staff from both teams as they interacted with the residents of Betty's Village. Opportunity Village serves people in Southern Nevada with intellectual and related disabilities, to positively impact their lives and the lives of the families who love them.**



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**Only in Las Vegas... A Welcome Reception like no other. Both teams were treated to a dinner from Buca di Beppo, followed by a video show on the world's largest video screen at the Fremont Street Experience. Both teams took to the stage for some friendly competition with a rendition of Family Feud and an electrifying dance off.**



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**Spending the day at Downtown Summerlin... Kids' Day featured lunch and video games at Dave & Busters, Build-a-Bear and Corks & Crafts. Meanwhile, the ladies enjoyed lunch at La Neta Cocina Y Lounge and a day of shopping during the annual Las Vegas Bowl's Ladies' Day event.**



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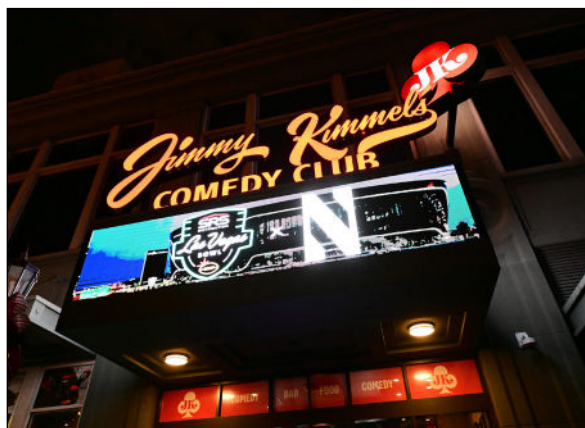




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Northwestern and Utah spent the evening at the Jimmy Kimmel Comedy Club where they made their selection of items in the player's gift suite, and then took in the talents of magician Mat Franco.



**MAT  
FRANCO**  
MAGIC REINVENTED NIGHTLY

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The Just One Project, presented by Aristocrat Gaming... Players, coaches, LVBowl Committee and Huddle members spent Friday morning in the rain providing food to more than 400 Las Vegas families in need before the holiday.



Northwestern and Utah cheer and mascots visited Dignity Health-St. Rose Dominican Hospital to spread great holiday cheer to hospital staff and administrators.



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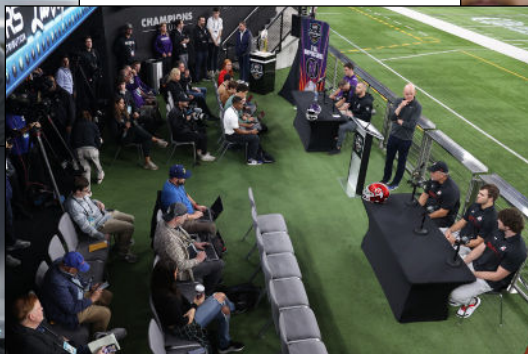
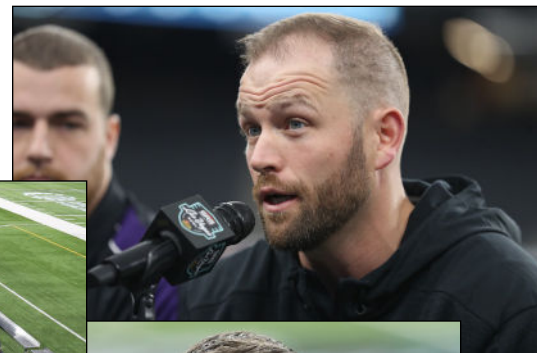




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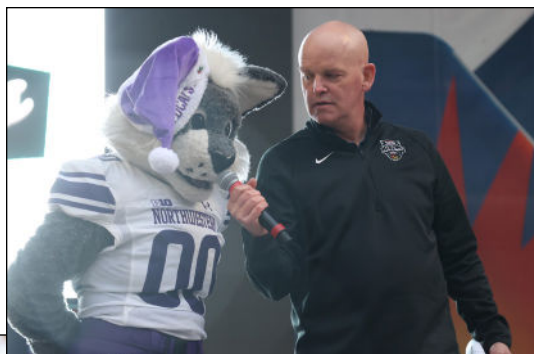


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The Kickoff Press Conference provided the media one last opportunity to quote the coaches and players the day before the game.

Meanwhile, fans had the pleasure of enjoying the bands of their respective schools perform at the Pep Rally, presented by Coca-Cola.



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The final two events of the week got everyone ready for the game. The night prior to the game, One Vegas, presented by Toyota, celebrated the Sports and Entertainment Capital of the World, while the Corona Extra Fan Fest on game day allowed all fans to join in on the pre-game festivities.



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COMING SEPTEMBER 1, 2024!



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John Saccenti  
Executive Director

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