

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Allegiant Stadium

Utah Utes

Kyle Whittingham

Press Conference

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: University of Utah is very excited to be a member of the Big 12. Very good football conference. Love good teams. Good coaches. Good players. New challenge for us. New opportunities for us. We're definitely excited about the new playoff format and the opportunity to make the playoffs on your own merit and not to be voted by a committee to get into that exclusive club.

Got a good football team coming back, got a lot going for us. Starts with our quarterback, Cam Rising. We missed him last year, obviously, but he's back and ready to go, barring any unforeseen setbacks. Getting Brant Kuithe back, who we were missing last year as well, will be a big plus for us.

We feel we've got a lot going for us on the offensive side of the ball. Offensive line is solid. Tight end room is maybe as good as it's ever been at Utah since I've been there and added some real weapons on the outside at receiver.

Defensively we should be solid. Played good defense at Utah a lot of years. That's been our calling card. Don't expect it to be any different this year.

But bottom line, we're ecstatic to be in the Big 12 and can't wait to get going. And this signifies that the season's right around the corner when you get Media Days, although we're the first Media Days out of the gate, I realize that, so there's still a little bit of time, but it means that football is not far away.

Q. Talking about that, obviously coming into the Big 12, not too far in the past you came into the Pac-12, Pac-10, making it the Pac-12. What do you take from that? Obviously the map has changed, but what do you take from that coming into the Pac-12, taking that into the Big 12?



KYLE WHITTINGHAM: It's a transition we made before. Although when we went to the Pac-12, we were a G-5 school, trying to come up a level, which there was a little bit of a curve there that we had to endure.

This is actually the fourth conference I've been in since I've been at Utah. We were in the WAC, the Mountain West and the Pac-12, and now the Big 12. So nothing new for me personally as far as changing leagues.

But we feel like we've got a roster that's equipped to compete right away. Obviously the media feels the same way as far as being picked the favorite. I think that's a show of respect to our players and coaches that have done a great job competing through the years that the media has selected us number one.

But in the final analysis, that doesn't mean anything. Obviously you've got to play the games, and our players are fully aware of that. But, again, it's a nice show of respect for our program from the media.

Q. You open Big 12 play in Stillwater. What are your expectations of going there and playing the Cowboys? And, second, with Oklahoma State's head coach and you both being so long tenured, I'm just curious if you could reflect a little bit on what you think in your mind helped you to be at Utah as long as you have been?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Okay, first of all, that is our conference opener. We do play Baylor in week two, but it's not a conference game. So the first official Big 12 game will be against Oklahoma State. Coach Gundy has done a terrific job there, just competitive every single year. Fields quality football teams. They're tough. They're physical.

Reminds me a lot of us. I think there's a lot of parallels between the two programs. I think myself and Coach Gundy are weeks apart from when we took over these programs, so we both have been anomalies, I guess you could say, in our own respect.

But it should be a hard-fought game. Never been to Stillwater. So it will be a new experience for myself, and I'm sure very few, if any, of our players have been there.



But we'll find out right away where we stand. They're a very good football team, and looking forward to that opportunity.

What do I attribute that to? In a word, recruiting. If you recruit the right players and get the right players in your program that fit into your culture, fit into what you're doing, then you've got a chance.

Our assistant coaches have done a phenomenal job of identifying those players. They're the guys on the front lines making decisions and judgments on who we should recruit and bring into the program. And really the key to me having any success there, my longevity at Utah, is due to our assistant coaches and the recruiting that they've done and the culture that we've built there.

Q. To follow up on your longevity answer, I mean, being one of the longest-tenured coaches in the entire country and now with the game changing, evolving with the NIL, transfer portal and recruiting becoming even more challenging and kind of trending towards paying the players, what can you say are some of your strengths on how you're planning on making an impact in this new conference how the game evolves?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, it's not trending towards paying players, we are paying players. That's in place. I've been in this profession a long time, and you talk about four, five years ago we couldn't give them a ride to the dormitory or a slice of pizza to what's going on now, it's incredible.

And there's more change to come. We're not done yet. I promise you that. Not by a long shot. There's big changes on the horizon.

But the bottom line is it doesn't matter whether you love NIL, transfer portal, hate it, it doesn't matter, you've got to embrace it. Because if you don't, if you don't adapt and update with the times, you're going to get left behind and you're going to be eliminated.

So I think our program has done a very good job of embracing the changes. I think we've had really good portal success as far as if you look at who we've lost and who we gained, our net result is very good in that regard. Our NIL, we're competitive right now in that space. Always trying to get more resources.

But the bottom line is, like I said, have you to adapt, you have to change with the times; otherwise, you're not going to be able to compete.

Q. You mentioned the four conferences you've been

in. What does it say to the way you guys play that you've dictated some of the things that have gone on and been successful instead of you having to get used to the conference?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, physicality is always a good thing in football. That's our calling card. We pride ourselves on being a physical football team year in, year out.

Defensively, we've been very consistent. And if you're good on defense, you're going to be in every game every week. It's something that our philosophy, our culture, I think, stands the test of time. And obviously we've got good players.

And that's where it starts, as I mentioned, and I've said several times, 80 percent of your success in college football or lack thereof is tied directly to recruiting. If you can't recruit the right way, then you're going to struggle.

We feel like we've got a good roster right now, 1 through 85, and ready to compete in this league. And I think it's a really good, good league. We're picked number one, but in my estimation there's eight or nine teams that could win this thing, and we'll have to see how things unfold.

Q. Your 20th season, they've already named Morgan Scalley as the coach-in-waiting. Do you have any idea when that's going to happen? Do you think about that? What kind of hands is the program going to be in once Coach Scalley takes over?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, Morgan Scalley is an exceptional football coach. He's a proven commodity. He's a Utah guy, played high school ball in the state of Utah, played at Utah, jumped right into coaching at the University of Utah when he was done playing. He's invested in this program as much as anybody ever has been.

He knows our culture inside and out. To me, it's very comforting for when that transition time does occur and it's time for new leadership to have a guy that's going to be able to carry on the values and the cultures that we've put in place.

Now, that's not to say he won't put his own stamp on it, because I fully expect that, but I believe that he is the right choice. We have a lot of good coaches on our staff, guys that are going to be head coaches in the near future that are deserving as well. But for this program at this time, Morgan is the right fit.

As to when that happens, that's a great question. I take it



day by day. I'm as excited and enthused about the season as I've ever been. A lot of that is the excitement about going into a new conference, the new challenge, the new opportunity. But it's just going to be a day-by-day process. And I'm not getting any younger, but at the same time I feel I've got a lot of energy right now.

Q. How do you feel your program fits stylistically in the Big 12?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: I think we're a good fit. There's not a ton of difference between the Big 12 and the Pac-12. In fact, there's not a ton of difference among all the Power 5s. There is subtle differences. Some teams are more committed to running the football.

But overall you've got to block, you've got to tackle, you've got to shed blocks. There's so much to football that is not scheme oriented that are really the keys to success or the lack of success.

And so I think that we're going to be able to make that transition. I don't think there's going to be any -- there's nobody running the wishbone or anything like that in the conference. So it's predominantly a spread league, which, like I said, every conference is the same in that regard.

And so do have some new venues that we're going to play in, new teams, places we've never been. But that cuts both ways. There's a lot of teams that are coming into Rice-Eccles that have never been there. So don't foresee that as an advantage or disadvantage, just different circumstances.

We know we'll travel about 40 percent more in this league than we did in the Pac, but that's just part of the deal and, again, should be a nonfactor.

Q. I wanted to ask you, with the lack of a downfield passing game last year, one of your biggest portal additions was Dorian Singer. How is he fitting in with the offense, and how is his chemistry with Cam?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Dorian has been a great fit. Had a terrific spring. Very easy to understand how he was able to have over a thousand receiving yards at Arizona a couple years ago. But what he did in spring was impressive.

We also added Damien Alford, who is from Syracuse, who is going to be a good addition for us on the outside. Although he was not available for us in spring.

But we feel we've really helped ourselves on the outside. And having Cam Rising back, that's the biggest factor for us this season is to have Cam back at quarterback. He's

the alpha dog of the football team, the unquestioned leader. And we have to keep him upright this year. We keep him upright, we've got a really good chance.

Q. You just answered, I was going to ask, but Cam Rising, when you think of Utah football in the past few years, it's hard not to think about him. What can we expect to see from him this year, and how is his overall health?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: His overall health is as good as it can be right now. Barring unforeseen setbacks or something that pops up, we feel he's going to be absolutely ready to roll. He took every rep in spring, although he didn't get hit, which obviously we're not going to hit him in spring ball.

But he's ready to rock. The last two years that he's been on the field he's thrown for, what, 6,000 yards or close to that.

He immediately makes us better. And Cam has that "it" factor. As much as he does for us in play, it's his leadership that really is probably the most valuable asset that he brings to the football team. He's one of those guys that's able to make everybody around him better. And that's really what a great player does, is he makes his supporting cast play better.

Q. Following up on the Cam question, what does this mean for his team around him just to have him back on the field?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: It's a whole different feel. When he's in the huddle and at the quarterback position, there is no doubt who's in charge. He's got the respect of every single one of his teammates. They believe in him. They're confident in Cam. And it's just the moxie and the field general mentality that exudes from him is contagious. And it's, like I said, the "it" factor that you can't coach, you can't teach. You either have it or you don't. And Cam has it in spades.

Q. Wanted to ask about Brandon Rose and Isaac Wilson. What have you seen out of those two and the confidence you have in those two as far as being a part of this team?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Great deal of confidence. We just got Isaac in the program in early January. He was an early graduate from high school. And relative to that situation, we thought he had a phenomenal spring, especially the second half.

Was lacking a little bit of timing, rhythm early in spring ball,



but as he settled in, got more comfortable with the offense, by about midpoint in spring, he was really playing good football. Had an outstanding spring game, the culmination of spring ball. So we think he's got a great future.

Brandon Rose, third year in the program. Big arm. Good mobility. And he's to the point he probably would have been a factor for us last year. But he had an injury that kept him out six to eight weeks, I can't remember exactly the timeframe, but that really set him back. He was never really able to recover from that.

But that's all behind him now, and both him and Isaac had terrific springs. And then you add Sam Huard to that mix, who is here now and will be competing in fall camp to see where he fits in the pecking order.

Q. You've pretty much dominated every conference you've coached in, whether division championships, titles and all that. But especially for this senior class, how much does it kind of weigh on them knowing they haven't managed to put it all together to get the bowl win that they're looking for, and how much does it kind of fire up your team, especially Cam and the senior class, to go out, not only with the division championship, but actually conference, but actually win your bowl game?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Been to the Rose Bowl a couple times and played some really good football teams, Ohio State, Penn State, came up short in those games, which is disappointing. We've traditional been a very good bowl team and had a good run, but that obviously has been a downer. And then last year right here in Las Vegas where we came out on the wrong end with Northwestern, who played a good football game against us.

But this move to this conference, for the seniors in particular, has got them really excited. They're looking forward to the challenge. They're looking forward to being able to control their own destiny as far as being able to get to the playoffs now, whereas before we had to rely on outside help, as I mentioned. Now it's all in our hands. And that's something that means a great deal to them.

And just by looking at them in their workouts this summer, what they're doing, this is a focused football team that really has their sights set on high goals.

Q. As one of the few Big 12 teams to have played Colorado last year, what were your impressions of that game? I know it was a big difference, you both started backup quarterbacks, but what were your impressions about that game, Coach Prime's first year at Colorado, and what do you envision that match-up to be like this

year?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, Coach Sanders has done a great job infusing excitement into that program and talent. His own sons are terrific players. We didn't see Shedeur, but he's -- obviously, watching the tape, he's a terrific talent.

Essentially he's put Colorado football back on the map. Year two, I'm sure they're looking for progress. They started off very strong last year. Injuries caught up to them and didn't end the way they wanted, I'm sure. But he's definitely rejuvenated things in Boulder.

Last year, that game, yeah, I think we were playing -- well, I don't think. We were playing our fifth string quarterback, and they were on their second or third string quarterback. So really not probably indicative of what the game could have been like. We were able to come away with a win.

But we got to go to Boulder this year. It's a tough place to play. And last time we were in Boulder there wasn't many people in the stands, and now it's full every week. So that will be an environment that we have not experienced there.

Q. Wondering your footprint, you mentioned the WAC, the Mountain West, the Pac-12 and playing your games here in Vegas, and bowl games in Vegas, yearly games back in the WAC and Mountain West. What are your thoughts of Vegas and just what it's meant to your program?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: First of all, this building's been very good to us. We've had a chance to come down here and win a couple of Pac-12 Championship games. Obviously last year in the bowl game, we didn't fare so well. But Vegas has always treated us great. It's a great city. The bowl, in particular, John does a great job with the bowl and the bowl experience for the players.

So nothing but very positive memories and experiences here in Las Vegas, and of course this is one of the best venues in the country right here, this Allegiant Stadium. We've been opportunistic to be able to -- it's been a great opportunity to be able to play here as much as we have. We're going to open here in '27 against the Miami Hurricanes. I probably won't be sitting here, but somebody will be, and that's going to be a great opportunity again to come to Vegas and play a game.

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