

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Capital One Venture X: Ohio State vs Utah

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Pasadena, California, USA

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Matt Barnes

### Press Conference

**Q. Matt, how's the defense look in practice over the last few weeks? I know a few of the guys talked about being challenged by some of the comments coming out of the game, the toughest level, physicality, and all of that. What have you seen over the last few weeks?**

MATT BARNES: I think our guys have responded. You push our guys up against a wall, and they're competitive. They know what they have to do, and I think we've had a good couple of weeks of practice going into the holiday. Had a good one yesterday. Looking forward to physical, fast, competitive day today.

**Q. When the defensive staff looked at what happened in the big house, what did you see as the common theme there?**

MATT BARNES: Just playing with a chip on our shoulder, playing with great energy. Those are big things. We're moving past that game now. We're excited about this game, another great challenge, great opportunity. We certainly have our work cut out for us. Just looking to play fast and aggressive and play blocks well.

At the end of the day, Xs and Os are great, but it usually comes down to running fast, hitting hard, getting off blocks, making tackles, particularly in a bowl game, you know, when you have had some time off.

**Q. Matt, what stands out about Utah?**

MATT BARNES: Physical, they're a very physical team. They're very well coached. They're a sort of NFL style, and they use multiple tight end personnel groupings. They do a good job with presnap shifting and motions, some of the things you see more in the NFL than you do in college football.

The thing that jumps off the tape right away is their



physicality. They try to run the ball downhill, and they're big upfront. They do a really good job. They're very well coached.

**Q. Considering what happened the last game, is that a good matchup for you? Do you look forward to that kind of matchup?**

MATT BARNES: Absolutely. Again, we feel like we were backed against the wall coming out of that last one. So now we have a chance to regroup and practice hard. I think we're more motivated than ever. And we'll need to be because, again, it's a very, very good football team, very talented, extremely well coached, and again very physical. We'll have a great challenge.

**Q. How do you balance the celebration that is this week with trying to use this as a stepping stone for next season?**

MATT BARNES: Great question. I think that's kind of been Coach Day's thing is it's still the Rose Bowl, right? You work hard all year to have the opportunity to go play in a game that's as special as this one. You have to make the most of the opportunity and make sure our players and the whole organization feels like it's a celebration.

So I think it's time management. I think it's, hey, when we're in meetings, when we're working out, when we're at practice, when we're doing all the things football related, let's be all in. Let's be down early. Let's be ready to roll. Then when we kind of blow the horn and bring it up and hit the showers, so to speak, let's go and enjoy it. It's that ability to manage the time.

**Q. Your thought on Cam Rising, the Utah cornerback, what you saw since he took over early in the season?**

MATT BARNES: He's just gotten better every game. If you watch, he ran over what I think is an outstanding linebacker from Oregon. He's faster than you like. He's more physical than you like. He throws a better ball than you like. He's a really good player that I think has gotten



better and better throughout the season. Particularly as he got into the conference championship game and down the stretch, he's played exceptionally well. So again, we have a great challenge.

**Q. Has it been uncomfortable at all with the Jim Knowles situation and knowing that another guy is going to be coming in, how that impacts the rest of the staff?**

MATT BARNES: We're all professionals. I can see from the outside looking in, but we're all professionals. We understand how this business works.

Just as a film junkie myself, what little bit of Oklahoma State I had a chance to watch, it's an exciting defense. He does an outstanding job. I'm excited for the future of our program defensively.

**Q. Did he meet with the players for a day or two or did he meet with you guys and the staff?**

MATT BARNES: He did meet with our players. I believe they had one meeting, and then we met with Jim individually as a staff.

**Q. Do you know what your role is going to be? Are you going to be back next year? Do you know for sure?**

MATT BARNES: Right now, I'm just trying to go win this game. If you watched Utah on tape, you know how much work it's going to take to try to take to get that done. Sometimes I can be obsessive, and I really just obsessed about this game and trying to give our kids a great opportunity to go win it.

**Q. I'm sure that's the case, but you're human. That's got to be hard to compartmentalize to the degree that you kind of have to. You have to be thinking about your future.**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, talk to my wife, she'd tell you I'm not human at all (laughter). She wishes maybe I would change some more diapers or do some more dishes or something like that, but I can't get away from the film.

Yeah, I'm really just trying to focus on Utah. Again, if you watched them play, you know what a challenge it will be. We're just focused on them at this point.

**Q. Matt, you mentioned the huge challenges that those three tight ends present when they line up against you.**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, I'll tell you this, they're all more athletic than any tight end should be. I think they've done a really good job whether it's recruiting or developing. They're kind of a basketball team. They've got a big center in there in 89. He's a powerful guy, really good blocker. Again, catches the ball better than you'd like.

Then 86 and 80 -- 80, they use as a slot receiver. 86 will flex out. They all run. We get the GPS report saying they all run over 20 miles per hour. They are very, very talented.

So it's a matchup issue. It's who do you put on them? Is it a linebacker? Can that linebacker cover him if he flexes out? Is it a safety? Can that safety go play in the run fit when they're in the core of the formation.

Just in general when you have more tight ends in the game, you create some extra gaps that whereas in a one tight end set, you have seven gaps. Now as soon as you are in a two tight end or three tight end set, you're talking about eight, nine, even ten gaps you've got to defend, and it's just different. It's not something you see a ton in college football.

**Q. Does their back work well in that zone scheme, the number one back?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, he does. He's a bruiser. He runs the ball downhill. He's an Ohio kid, so he'll be geeked up for this one I am sure. He's a really good player. Again, they've kind of got a basketball team at running back as well. They've got a big guy that leans on you, and he's hard to bring down.

They've got two kind of change of pace guys that can go the distance on you. I think it was No. 5 went for, I think, 97 or something like that against Stanford. He can go. He sees it.

They do a really good job. Third down, they do a good job getting those guys the ball coming out of the backfield and creating some man-to-man issues for you. It's a really good group, a great challenge.

**Q. Are there similarities to the Michigan offense?**

MATT BARNES: There is some crossover just in that you get some more tight end sets. I think frequently in college football now, a two tight end set is really just a fancy one tight end set. I don't know how many teams are truly using two and three tight ends to be in those types of formations where a traditional 12 and 13 personnel formations. Ann Arbor certainly does, and Utah does as well.

There are some similarities, but enough differences where you've got to make sure you practice all that stuff and again give the guys a chance to go line up against those formations.

**Q. Given how that game went, is there a benefit to playing a team of similar styles so you've seen it, but also this is an opportunity to I guess reprove yourself?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, kind of what we were speaking on earlier, just a chance to kind of hopefully get that bad taste out of our mouth about are we -- can we be a physical defense? And we certainly know we can. It makes for a great practice, that is what I can tell you. Who knows how the game goes. They're an exceptional team, as you said.

We'll have an unbelievable challenge, but really proud of how our guys have practiced.

**Q. Has that been an ongoing message about toughness or physicality?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, it has. Got to play tough every week, but certainly this week and in this game. Just an opportunity to kind of rebite on that stuff.

**Q. Have you had the opportunity to talk to Coach Knowles about the possibility of working together and how you guys can work together?**

MATT BARNES: We had a very brief meeting. I can tell right away he's an exceptionally talented and intelligent person. Seems like a great guy. The nature of our conversation did not go that long. He had a bunch of meetings, and I'm running to try to get practice organized and things like that. So have not really had those conversations.

**Q. To him personally?**

MATT BARNES: Yes.

**Q. How much would you like to work -- based on what you've seen with the way he runs a defense, how much would you like to work with him?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, you know me, I'm a film junkie. I'm an Xs and Os guy. I'm at Ohio State because I've been fortunate enough to be around some great coaches that I stole everything from. I've yet to have -- almost 15 years in coaching, I don't think I've had an original idea.

I don't have enough ego to say, well, this is mine. I don't. I steal from everybody that I think does a good job. He's done an exceptional job. I love Ryan Day. I love Ohio

State. I love Columbus, Ohio. I love our players. So I'd certainly love an opportunity to remain here.

**Q. It has been an interesting year for you, obviously. Could you kind of assess what it's been like -- self-assess the job you did.**

MATT BARNES: It's been -- particularly early on, it was a tumultuous year. The way the season played out early on, I've said this before, when we weren't playing great defense, I was right at the top of that. I was in every meeting. Believe me, a lot of the decisions we made were things I suggested, and when we weren't playing well and Coach Day decided to make a change.

I think at times we played better defense. I'd love to sit here and tell you it was something I did. It wasn't. It was what we did as a staff, kind of banded together and moved egos aside and just tried to give our kids the best chance we could.

I think a lot of it honestly is we had young players. As young players continue to play, they got better. I don't know how much of that was schematic and whatever else as much as it was just getting organized and getting those guys more experience.

**Q. Every season you go, does it feel like even more so this year because of the change, because of the tumultuousness --**

MATT BARNES: No shortage of grays here on the side. It can always be that way, and particularly Ohio State's a great place because you're at the top of the food chain, and all eyes are on you. That's why it's so great, but it certainly adds to, let's go with stress, I suppose, but that's what makes it fun. That's what we're here for.

**Q. And you've got still a 1-year-old, right?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah. He'll be 2 in February.

**Q. How much for stability would you love to stay here?**

MATT BARNES: It's a wonderful place. I've enjoyed every moment that I've been here. I can't imagine there are many head coaches to work for better than Ryan Day, and Columbus, Ohio is an awesome place.

It's a great place. My wife and I love it here. Henry loves it here. That's what I can tell you.

**Q. Matt, how do you feel you've grown personally in this year as being the defensive play caller?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, I think you learn from making mistakes. I certainly made plenty of mistakes. Hopefully I'm smart enough to learn from the things we did wrong and try to avoid those mistakes moving forward.

**Q. Does it make you a better position coach when you get this experience of being a coordinator and calling the plays?**

MATT BARNES: I think you definitely get an appreciation of what it's like to sit in a different chair. When you're a position coach, you think -- you're focused on what your position is and you say, well, if we do that, that's another thing I've got to install. It's another thing I've got to coach and make sure -- you move over a chair and say, well, we need this defense to be able to go win this game.

You certainly have a greater appreciation for how the whole defense fits together.

**Q. Bowl practice is usually a time where some younger players, newer players emerge. Anybody you're seeing do that here over the last couple weeks?**

MATT BARNES: It would be hard for me to single one guy out. If I'm going to pick a guy, he's a younger player, he's played for us. The guy that sticks out to me that's had an exceptional Bowl practice is Kourt Williams. He's played very well for us at times in games. He was close to being the defensive player of the game at Michigan State. It's not like he hasn't played. He's one guy that sticks out to me.

**Q. I talked to him a couple weeks ago, and you could tell that there was a palpable vibe from him like I think he knows why he didn't get to play more, especially since he was coming in slow, but is that sort of hunger, I guess, to get on the field showing up in practice?**

MATT BARNES: It could be. What I could tell you about Kourt Williams is he's the most motivated, hardest working player that I've been around ever. I don't know how much you've got to light a fire under him. He's lit. He's extremely motivated. He is a joy to coach, an absolute joy to coach.

**Q. Is that going to give you some options for next year to how you assemble things? I know that will be Jim's decision at the end of the day, but getting him and Ronnie on the field at the same time, that sort of thing?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, I think so. I would say anyone in charge of an offense or a defense or any organization, you're always trying to get your best people involved, and certainly those two guys are right at the top of that

conversation.

**Q. Martinez was a guy who sort of in the middle of the season flashed a little bit and was making some plays and then didn't have that big of a role beyond that. Where do you guys still need to see him take the next step to earn a bigger role?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, he played, kind of when we made some schematic changes to the defense, that made a major change for AI, kind of what his best fit was. He's an awesome, awesome young man, great attitude, works exceptionally hard, an exceptional person.

So he handled it really well, but it was a major change. So we kind of moved him from that nickel position, what we've called the cover safety position, back into that free safety role.

You've got to understand, I mean, that's something that generally happens in spring ball. So for him to do that in the middle of the season, that's unbelievable. He kind of was in a rotational role in the Michigan State game there with Bryson Shaw, and Bryson Shaw's played outstanding this year, certainly played what I think was a very good game in the last one.

But Cam gives us an opportunity there to rotate. It's kind of what we did in the Michigan State game. He had a little bit of a setback going into the last game, so he wasn't able to play. But he's healthy now and expecting big things from him in this game.

**Q. Is he going to be a free safety from now on, do you think?**

MATT BARNES: Hard to say. Hard to say. I think in any organization, it's about getting your best people involved, and he certainly has a chance to be one of the best. So whatever position that is, it's hard to predict the future at this point.

**Q. Matt, how do you guys think you'll miss Haskell in this game?**

MATT BARNES: I mean, Haskell's a great player. He brings energy to our defensive front. He's been very disruptive for us over the years, certainly this year as well. So, yeah, he'll be missed. But I've said this before, I think Larry Johnson's the best defensive line coach in the history of college football. He'll do a great job getting the next guy ready to go in the game.

**Q. The fact that Haskell's has been out a lot of times with you this year, does that help at all the fact that**

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**you've experienced guys going in for him?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, again, Larry does -- if you go back and look, we've played a whole bunch of guys throughout the year. We've got guys that are ready to go play in the game. Particularly with 15 bowl practices, you feel like you're able to get those guys enough practice reps to get them ready. So it will be good.

**Q. What stands out to you when you watch this Utah running game, specifically Tavion Thomas, what kind of challenges are they going to present to you?**

MATT BARNES: Yeah, it's a downhill scheme. It's a little bit of zone scheme, a little bit of gap scheme, a little bit of quarterback run, multiple formations, shifts and motions. If you're not gapped out, if everybody's not doing their job, you've got real problems. Even if you are gapped out, they're so big and physical upfront. Then they've got a horse of a tailback that runs the ball downhill and again some change-of-pace guys that, even if you are in your gaps, they'll knock you back for four, five, six. And all of a sudden, they slip through a tackle. The ball's on your free safety to get it down.

It's a great challenge. They're an exceptionally well-coached football team, very, very talented and very physical.

**Q. Does that mean tackling and fundamentals a big point of emphasis for this game?**

MATT BARNES: Absolutely. I think when you have 15 practices, you kind of approach it, at least the front half of it, as a development for your team, which some of you guys have alluded to, the chance to get your young guys going a little bit and maybe get them some more reps. The front end of the 15 practices are heavily technique, technique emphasis. We'll need those things to carry into the game.

**Q. Have you faced a running back at all similar to Tavion Thomas at all? He's a big back.**

MATT BARNES: No shortage of big backs in the

Big Ten. It would be hard to point or single one out to you. There's a lot of bigger guys that run hard. We've seen several guys that run exceptionally hard in practice every day. We don't tackle that guy to the ground necessarily, but we are no stranger to big, physical running backs.

As I said, he'll be geeked up for this one. He's an Ohio kid, and he's an outstanding player. It will be a great challenge.

**Q. It feels like ten years ago Josh Proctor was injured. When you think back on that, the progress he made, the expectations you had this year, how significant did that wind up being?**

MATT BARNES: Josh is a game changing type of a player, so certainly hurt us. Not only is he a great player, but he's a guy that he's loved. His teammates love him, and he brings another level of energy, another level of competitiveness.

So as much as we miss his production on the field, I think maybe more so we just missed his energy off the field.

**Q. Do you guys have an idea yet when you might be able to get back to full go and go through spring, or is it still too early to know?**

MATT BARNES: All I can tell you right now is he's ahead of schedule. From my understanding, he's progressing very well. It's hard for me to say when he'll be back. I'm sure that it's something that we would anticipate easing him into. I don't think we want to just jump him back in there right away. I think the important thing is he's ready to go for next season.

**Q. Matt, I think one of the underrated things about bowl games is the extra month you get with these guys. Have you seen development, significant advancement from your guys?**

MATT BARNES: I think so, particularly our young guys that -- some guys have been down with scout teams for the majority of practices throughout the season. So it's an opportunity for those guys to come back and play the defense and execute the scheme and compete at a high level.

I think, particularly early on, it's given our younger guys, in particular, an opportunity to kind of grow.

**Q. I know a lot of your guys have said today they've been working on being more physical. Have you sensed that? Do you feel like that's a challenge in this game?**

MATT BARNES: It's definitely a challenge. Yeah, definitely a challenge. Again, I think our guys understand that. Coach Day -- from Coach Day down, I think as a staff, it's been something we've tried to disseminate. Our players certainly understand.

So great challenge for sure, but we've got very competitive players who take a lot of pride in their performance. We've tried to make sure that that's what we see at practice every

day.

**Q. From a preparation standpoint, you guys see Big Ten teams all the time, a lot of similar opponents. Is it more difficult? What's it like having a month to prep for a team that you really never see?**

MATT BARNES: The extra time fortunately helps, but you -- if you play a team throughout the years, in three or four years of playing a team, you kind of get a book on them. Obviously, we don't have a book on these guys.

So the extra time has been good, but we realize they have extra time also. So I'm sure we'll see some wrinkles that we haven't seen. We'll have to do a good job of adjusting in game and giving our guys a chance to be successful.

**Q. Matt, you mentioned how guys get a chance to step up with more experience. You mentioned how Ryan said he hit a home run with last year's secondary recruiting class. With Jordan specifically, what do you like about his game that made Ryan praise him as high as he did?**

MATT BARNES: He's extremely competitive. He covers very, very well. He's an energy giver. He loves to play. He loves to practice. He loves to compete.

We guard the best receivers in the country every single day, and he covers them by and large. So just like his approach to the game and then have certainly seen some development from him here in the last eight or nine practices, whatever it's been at this point.

**Q. Just with J.K., what do you like about his game that stands out?**

MATT BARNES: Similar to Jordan honestly. Covers really well. Loves to play, loves to practice, loves to compete, wants to be great. Both of them work really hard at it. You go look every day after practice, the last two guys on the field are probably those two.

So they love the game. Hopefully looking forward to being able to get those guys involved.

**Q. Staying in that secondary, Cameron Brown is a guy who returned from injury and said he's really close with Jeff Okudah. Did you know they had a good relationship?**

MATT BARNES: I know those guys are close. Jeff is an exceptional player, but he's also an outstanding person. Listen, the brotherhood here at Ohio State is real. When

these guys leave, they stay in close contact. Guys that go on to major NFL success, they're still watching our games and talking to our guys and all that type of thing.

**Q. Just a guy like Cam coming back from an injury like that, is he like a sponge when he's learning about the game? You mentioned how he got back on the field?**

MATT BARNES: I think so. He works really hard at it. He's a bright guy. Any player gets better with experience. There's no substitute. There's no film or practice rep that truly simulates what it's like to go out there and play in the game in front of a full crowd. When it's moving fast and something you did in practice and everything's on the line. Just being in an expanded role this year, I know has helped his development greatly.

**Q. Matt, I know the playoff maybe has changed things a little bit for the younger guys, but for us, we think of it as the bowl game. What kind of vibe or feeling do you get when you think Rose Bowl?**

MATT BARNES: I grew up watching the Rose Bowl game religiously and just kind of being enamored with the pageantry of college football. Certainly, I think that's embodied in the Rose Bowl game. I believe it's the longest standing bowl game and so much tradition here. From what a gather, it's just a beautiful setting. I've never been in that stadium. I've never been to this game.

Seeing it on TV and listening to some firsthand accounts, it's a special deal. So as a lifelong college football fan, something I'm very much looking forward to.

**Q. Is there any concern that the game is going to be cancelled due to COVID?**

MATT BARNES: Yes. I haven't heard anything to that effect, but I would just say personally I have concern. For no other reason than I see games around the country being cancelled. I have no information that suggests that our game is under threat or anything like that, but I just see how hard our guys work, and I know that they deserve a chance to go play in this game.

Again, just looking at kind of the climate around the country and seeing other games cancelled, it's certainly concerning.

**Q. What measures has the team taken to ensure there isn't an outbreak to keep the game going?**

MATT BARNES: Masks everywhere, distancing as much as possible. We're just trying to be smart about what positions we put our players in. Where in the past I know

there's been maybe some more events with both teams in tighter quarters. I think you've just got to be smart about how you do those things.

So just taking the advice of what we've all been told here over the last however long it's been, two years, I guess, almost two years now. So just trying to take every precaution that we can.

**Q. Is there a sort of mental roadblock knowing that maybe this game could be cancelled? At practice does it make it a little harder to plan for it?**

MATT BARNES: No, I certainly don't feel that way, and I think our players don't feel that way. We really haven't gotten any information suggesting anything is under threat or anything like that. So our guys are focused on the game, focused on every day at practice. That's really been where our mindset is.

**Q. What's the most gratifying thing about this whole season for you? It's finishing so different than the way it started for you personally. What is the most gratifying thing for you personally this year?**

MATT BARNES: Most gratify are thing for me personally? I loaf to see the development of our players, particularly the young guys. You recruit them for a year or two years, and you get them in and you develop them and you see what a process it is for them. So seeing some of our young guys develop and really start to play some of their best football and that type of thing, that's been very rewarding. That's certainly something that sticks out.

Again for me, just growing up a big fan of college football and a big fan of the Rose Bowl and everything that goes with it. Having a chance to be here and just be a very small part of everything that's going on is a really cool experience.

I'm thankful that even in a day and age where COVID is everywhere that I'm able to do it with my wife Christina and my soon to be 2-year-old Henry.

**Q. We talked about how this is such a relationship business on the coaching side. What do you most appreciate about the staff that you guys have right now and the way that you guys work together.**

MATT BARNES: I'm thankful for everything I've learned. I've learned so much from these guys over the last couple years. I think we've got a room full of all-stars. I made the comment earlier I'm at Ohio State because I stole from 50 coaches that I had a chance to work for. Don't know that I've had an original thought in football.

I steal from our guys every day. Our staff, they're really, really good. I'm proud of the way that even though we had some ups and downs throughout the season, just the way that I feel like we conducted ourselves in a way that everyone can be proud of and tell our families about.

So just who we are as people through adversity this year, I'm very proud of those guys.

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