

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

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Pasadena, California, USA

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Ronnie Hickman

### Press Conference



**Q. Would you believe that it's actually cooler here in California than it is in Ohio where you just left?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yeah, I actually just got news of that last night. It's actually very unfortunate but I'm happy for the guys back in Ohio.

**Q. As you prepare for the Rose Bowl, a lot of people want to talk about Ohio State; what do you say when people say this game is not as special as it should be?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Well, you know, that's them. We are in a very prestigious Bowl game. We are very fortunate to be here and we are very excited so we're taking this very seriously. We are definitely trying to get the win.

**Q. What do you see when you watch the film of Utah?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: An offense that they do what they do well. They have fast guys, physical guys. They play hard and they play fast. It's going to be a great challenge and we are definitely looking forward to it.

**Q. Do you see any similarities with Utah's physicality with maybe that team up north, just maybe some of the struggles that happened in that game, do you see some similarities or is that over-simplified?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I mean, they are a physical team. A lot of teams in college football are physical. I would just kind of leave it at that.

**Q. How would you describe the defense your team as being physical?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I would. I would.

**Q. What have you learned throughout the season that's prepared you for the Rose Bowl?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Well, you know, in the beginning of the season, we had a lot of inexperienced guys. Guys who just didn't have much time on the field. So just having those games under our belt just helps us overall. Looking forward to next season and finishing out this game right here.

**Q. What does playing in the Rose Bowl mean to you?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It means a lot. You grow up watching the greats playing it and having a chance to play here, and representing your team and your family is a blessing.

**Q. Are you going to have downtime?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Most definitely.

**Q. Being an East Coast guy, did you watch the Rose Bowl yearly? Obviously it's a national game, probably means more in Big Ten country and Pac 12 country but is it a game you watched a lot as a kid?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I definitely did. I definitely did. I grew up an Ohio State fan, so whenever we were in it, like in 2018 and stuff like that, I definitely watched it.

**Q. We sometimes forget how young you guys are. What was your first Rose Bowl memory? You sit there and look at Ohio State, 10, 11 years ago, played Oregon, do you remember that game? Does it go prior to that?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I would say the last game -- the first game I remember like actually watching and kind of knowing what was going on, I would say Georgia versus Oklahoma. I just remember sitting on the couch with a few of my guys from my hometown and we watched that game which was a great game. I would probably say that Georgia Oklahoma game.

**Q. Haskell was one of the four players to opt out.**

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**Bittersweet seeing him not being able to participate in the game, and going on to his next chapter?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yeah, you know, those guys, they put in the work. It's time for them to take the next step and really chase their dreams and goals and accomplish things. So we are excited for them and we support them.

**Q. Who do you expect to step up?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Whoever is called. We have a thing called competitive excellence, so whenever your number is called, you've got to be ready, so I'm sure the guy whose number is called will be ready.

**Q. Playing in the Big Ten, how does that prepare you for Utah?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: We play great teams week-in and week-out. Guys prepare well. They play tough, they play fast and they play physical, so it only helps you get better and prepare for next games.

**Q. Where are you at as a defense? Are you playing at your best right now? How would you describe where the defense is at right now?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: We definitely didn't play our best against the team up north but we have been putting in the work and preparation, so we are excited to show that on Saturday.

**Q. I know you don't want to give up any of the game plan... would never ask you to.... but should people maybe expect to see some different things potentially out there, some new wrinkles?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I would say look for a fast and physical defense, that's what I would say.

**Q. Heard that Jim Knowles came through town, the DC for next year. Did you get a chance to talk with him?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: We had an opportunity to speak with him and it went well. We're excited for him.

**Q. Your focus is on Utah, but have you watched any Oklahoma State film to see, hey, this is what this guy is all about, or is that January 2nd or beyond?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I definitely have. But like I said, our main focus is to get this win against Utah.

**Q. What's the biggest challenge offensively that Utah poses for you?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: The quarterback is a really good runner and a really good thrower. Savvy quarterback so we have to keep our eyes on him. They have some really good running backs. They like to run the ball a lot. So just being able to stop the run and also control the quarterback will be huge.

**Q. Having a mobile quarterback yourself, you're used to practicing against guys on the run; right?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yeah, I mean, we don't really go on the quarterback anyway when they are live in practice, but yeah.

**Q. Big Ten starts playing Bowl games today. Do you cheer for the conference?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Most definitely. Most definitely.

**Q. What about the team up north who is busy playing on New Year's Eve, do you cheer for them?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I mean, you can probably answer that yourself.

**Q. How would you evaluate the way you've played this season?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I would say good. From not having much experience from the previous year, I would say good. I was able to contribute to my team in the wins that we had, so I'm very grateful for that.

**Q. What goes in your goal-setting for the year? Do you think about the season, what you want to do personally, what you want to accomplish as a team? What are the things you try to evaluate when you set your goals for the season?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: The No. 1 goal is to win the national; we come here for that. That's definitely our No. 1 goal.

But personally I look at the things that I need to work on and I need to improve on, especially off of this year and attack it from there.

**Q. How do you balance trying to celebrate and energy this week for everything that you've accomplished this year and at the same time, know that the team is trying to use this as a building block for next season?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It's not hard. Our main goal is to come out here and win. We're not too focused on next year or anything like that. Our focus is right here, so it's

not too hard at all.

**Q. Have you had a chance to talk with Jim Knowles when he came in?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yes, we did. We are excited to have him. It was a short conversation but we're definitely excited and looking forward to meeting him.

**Q. What was your impression?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I thought he was a cool guy. I didn't get too much of a read on him, but I will in January.

**Q. Does it feel weird that we're having these conversations about the next coordinator, and you guys meet him in the middle of preparing and there's still one more game on Saturday?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It's a business at the end of the day. Stuff like this happens. You just have to adapt to it and move on.

**Q. How do you see your role changing at all into next season?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I honestly cannot answer that question. You know, I don't really know what their plans are necessarily for next year, but I'm sure I will know soon in the future.

**Q. Has Josh been around at all lately to start moving, getting ready for the spring?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Josh Proctor? Well, I'm pretty sure he's at a good place in his recovery. He'll be ready for next season.

**Q. How has your experience been in L.A. so far and Disneyland, all the events?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Despite the rain, and it's a little bit colder than I expected. It been cool. This is my second time out here in L.A. so I'm fortunate. I'm just taking it all in out here with my guys.

**Q. How does it feel to be surrounded by so many of your best friends and the team atmosphere?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It's good. These moments last for a lifetime. You're out here with your brothers and trying to make the most of it so we are definitely taking it in and cherishing it, so it's exciting.

**Q. One last question for you. If you were to pick one**

**actor to play you in a movie, who would it be and why?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: That's a great question. I like a lot of movies. I'd probably have to go with either Seth Rogan or Denzel Washington. I know that's kind of wide but those are two of my guys. I love both of their movies, so I'd go with those two. Either one of those would be fine.

**Q. When you look at Utah, is there a team that you've played that you can compare to?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: They run a lot of 12, some 13 personnel. Not too much 11. You get that sometimes in the Big Ten, so it's not too much of a shocker but it's definitely a little bit more run I would say oriented, more bigger people on the field than some games that we play.

**Q. What kind of challenges does their offense present? They have a reputation for being physical. Are you excited about that opportunity?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yeah, we are definitely excited for it. They like to run the ball a lot. They like to put big people on the field and they have a good quarterback as well. He's savvy and he's been there for awhile, so we are so excited for the challenge.

**Q. You have a chance on Saturday -- what would it mean to you to reach a hundred plus tackles?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It would be really cool. Just being able to contribute throughout this whole season has been a blessing for me and for me to reach that milestone would be something that I would definitely take dearly.

**Q. Have you had a chance to sit back and reflect on your season, your role in the defense?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Yeah, I would say it would be easier to do that after this game. Our focus is still trying to get this win before the end of the season. But yeah, definitely after the season, I'll definitely be able to do more.

**Q. Is there one area of your game where you felt you really improved?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Honestly this is my first time playing football this season since 2019, I believe. So definitely I would just be comparing everything to this year kind of.

**Q. How was it getting back on the field --**

RONNIE HICKMAN: It was great. I definitely had some ups and downs on my process to getting there. It wasn't all good. But I stayed strong. I stayed focused. So it's just a

blessing to be out there and help my team get some wins.

**Q. Is there anybody throughout the course of the season that you leaned on, maybe a veteran or a captain for advice?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I would say pretty much all the guys in the room. You know, we have a tight-knit group. I feel like I can go to anyone on the team honestly, so yeah.

**Q. The secondary in general, how would you assess the level of play that you guys have had all season and where you guys are now?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: We had a lot of improvement. I said earlier, we had not too much experience coming into the season, especially in the secondary with Cam Brown being the only returning starter in the secondary.

So we needed room to improve. We needed games under our belt and experience, and I think we've got that. Our chemistry has definitely gone, not only as a secondary but as a whole defense, so I'm definitely excited for the future.

**Q. How would you evaluate Bryson Shaw? It looks like you came in and got more snaps than he ever has. How did he seem preparing for games, and what's his demeanor like and how does he work in practice?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Bryson is definitely one of the hardest workers on our team. He's a very detailed guy. If I ever have any questions about anything that the coaches are installing, I know I can definitely go to him.

You know, I love being out there with him, looking to my left and my right and seeing him out there on the field, it definitely gives me a boost.

**Q. Can you just see his energy in the final game of the regular season, we saw his energy throughout the whole season, but also got an interception; what did you see in that play?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: From Akron? Yeah, that was actually kind of definitely one of my favorite moments I would say of the season. I kind of just went in for the tackle not really expecting the ball at all just thinking I was going to make a third down stop. But the ball went right through the tight end's hands and it just fell into my pocket. I looked down and saw the ball and it was like, I've got to run, that kind of thing. Yeah, that was really cool for sure.

**Q. What's it like prepping for a game, you're in a weird situation with Jim Knowles about to come in and it's the last game of a defensive era, waiting for a new**

**defensive area to start; what's that been like?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: No, not too confusing or anything like that. The coaches have done great job of making sure our focus stays strong on beating Utah, so that's been our main goal. That's our main reason why we are out here right now. It's not been too bad focusing on that.

**Q. You talk about X's and O's and film watching in practice, but just mindset in practice, what has it been like?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: You know what, out here, it's game week. So we are full throttle in every aspect. We are excited for this game and we know what needs to be done. Preparation is key and that's what we are doing now.

**Q. I know you don't lose a lot of games here and you always want to get back out quickly, this time, you had to sit on one more a month. Are you getting frustrated or impatient wanting to play?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: I wouldn't say that. I would say we are excited for this game. We are ready to play, and like I said, we are excited.

**Q. How familiar are all the players with the history this game? Are you familiar with the history? Do you talk about that?**

RONNIE HICKMAN: Most definitely. You grow up watching the greats play this game, so some of the greatest players ever to play football played in this game. We all pretty much have the knowledge of it and we know this is a big deal. Like you said, it's the granddaddy of them all.

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