

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

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Nick Ford

Press Conference

Q. It's been assumed for a while that you would leave school and declare for the draft. Ultimately what went into that decision?

NICK FORD: Just looking that all I accomplished here and my future goals in life and what to accomplish, whether that's on or off the field. I felt like I've accomplished a lot here, all-Pac-12 twice, got All-American honor, got the Freddie Solomon award for community spirit, the Morris trophy. So there's a lot I've done at the collegiate level both on and off the field. I feel like now it's my time to start helping take care of my family and go ahead and start a new chapter in life.

Q. Everything that you just said, do you feel like you've succeeded in whatever expectations you had when you were 17, 18 years old?

NICK FORD: I didn't even expect to go to college and play football. I got a random phone call from a guy named Brian Polian I think my junior year, going into senior year, and he was talking about a scholarship, and I didn't even know what was going on. It way more than exceeded it. I wasn't one of those kids who as soon as you get to high school starts chasing scholarships and starts doing all this. It kind of just fell in place.

Then after that, talking to the coaches here and stuff, I had a lot of trust in them, and they kept their word, which a lot of coaches don't. Yeah, so I guess it exceeded in that aspect, but yeah.

Q. Yourself and the rest of your teammates, you guys are all going to play on Saturday, you guys didn't want to opt out. How important was it for you and the rest of the guys to finish what you started?

NICK FORD: I mean, the thing I keep saying is it's not necessarily about how you got there but the end result. I



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know that the start of the season didn't go too well, and as we continue on, we began to improve over the year, and now that we're here, we've got to take full advantage of that.

So it's really important to not only the seniors but the underclassmen. They see how important it is. With all the adversity they faced this year with Ty and A-Lowe, I feel like it kind of matured them a little quicker than having to stay in the program two, three years.

I think everyone on the team, especially those who came back, find it really important to go ahead and finish because we're here, so why not us.

Q. If you had any actor play you in a movie, who would it be?

NICK FORD: Oh, Ice Cube. Growing up, from LA, always watched him, listened to his music growing up, and then, I don't know, he's a big husky guy, funny guy sort of like me. Got a nice beard, I've got a nice beard, so that's a perfect fit.

Q. Who's the hype man on the team?

NICK FORD: I think it's just a hype team. I mean, especially if you go to practice. Everyone starts screaming offense and defense, especially when we start crossing over going against each other. I think this entire team is really the hype team because it's weird chemistry here. It's fun. Everyone likes to mess with each other and go at it back and forth, so I think it's the whole team.

Q. Something a little bit more football related, but being an LA guy, being able to be a part of the Utah program's first Rose Bowl, how exciting and special is that for you?

NICK FORD: Yeah, it's really exciting. Growing up, you see on the news the floats being made and everything, and then you come down to the day, you see the floats, and just the game experience itself, it's going to be really fun.

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I've got my whole family coming out. They've got an RV and everything. It's going to be super fun. I'm not trying to focus on the overall fun aspect of the game right now. I want to focus on that afterwards so I don't get star struck or anything. But on the inside I am enjoying it a lot, especially the experience.

Q. Were you a parade/game guy growing up?

NICK FORD: Watching it, yeah. I never went in person, so my first one is participating.

Q. Can you give Ohio fans a sense of how excited Utah fans are for this week?

NICK FORD: Oh, shoot. All I know is that as soon as we won that Pac-12, tickets were being bought, arrangements were being made, and people were heading down -- there's people already down here this week. It's one of the biggest games in Utah football history. The fans are going to be amazing. Our fans, they travel well. It's not too far. They're going to be ecstatic the entire game.

Q. Give me the impression that Utah has about Ohio State.

NICK FORD: You know, like you said, I couldn't really speak for the state. All I know is that us ourselves, we're going into the game, they're a well respected team. They have good players, good coaches. They play fundamental football. They play hard football. Whatever happened throughout the season is what happened throughout their season. Today is a new game.

We had an awesome season and we won the Pac-12, but if we come out here thinking we're just going to take it because we had an awesome season, that's not how football works. We're just respecting them and going out there and looking forward to playing.

Q. How much did you watch the Michigan game, and what can you take from that, because you're a similar team?

NICK FORD: Like I said, that's Michigan and that's Ohio. They're both good teams. Michigan had an awesome day, and we watched the film to see what Ohio State lined up like, and we watched Michigan, we watched Oregon, we watched the Golden Hurricanes, Tulsa. We watched everybody. That's the beauty of bowl prep is that we kind of have like an extra week to go ahead and prepare for the game, so we got to break down a lot of film and watch a bunch of different things, but we did watch Michigan, as well.

Q. What are your impressions of Ohio State, especially the defensive line?

NICK FORD: They're talented people. You can't -- you've got to play fundamental football. You can't be too high, you can't be too low falling. You've got to have tight hands. You've got to know how to place your hands. It's really going to come down to getting all your coaching points in place because they're good players, they've got good technique, they've got good strength, good size, good speed, and I feel like that's the same for us.

I feel like at the end of the day it's going to come down to who can do that more consistently throughout the game.

Q. Do you guys view that as an offensive line of controlling the line of scrimmage really being the key to winning this game?

NICK FORD: The offensive line wins games. No matter what game it is, it could be the Rose Bowl versus Ohio State or it could be our opening game versus Weber State. They always say, no line, no shine, right? We're taking a lot of pride in putting this game on our shoulders and we go into every game trying to put it on our shoulders, and if we put it on our shoulders we get it going, and that's what we intend on doing.

Q. You guys as an offense, it seems like your running game has gotten better and better during the year. What do you think it is that allowed you guys to really find your stride?

NICK FORD: I think just the chemistry over time and working with each other, finding each other, how you step, move, what communication needs to be more on what play and stuff like that. Ultimately the running backs, too, learning how we play, learning when they need to speed up and hit a hole, learning when they need to slow down to let a hole develop. It's just a bunch of chemistry that has taken place within the front five to eight because we have all the tight ends, and that's another aspect of the offensive line play is getting them on the same page and having the backfield, the fullbacks and the halfbacks on the same page, and I think over time we've all developed really well.

Q. What has Tavion Thomas brought to your offense?

NICK FORD: He has his own style of running. He's a good running back. He's a physical running back, big running back, and yeah, he just brings his own style of play. His film speaks for itself, and I could say the same thing about T.J. I could say the same thing about Makai. I feel like our running backs are all very talented but talented in their own ways.

Q. What does it mean to you personally to end your career at the Rose Bowl?

NICK FORD: It'll be fun. It'll be fun. Like I said earlier, it's awesome. I'm enjoying the bowl game experience. I'm excited for the actual Rose Bowl itself. I'm not trying to focus too much about these roses behind me. I'm more focused on, okay, it's practice time, got to go out there and practice; weight lifting time, I've got to go weight lift. If it's time to have fun, I'll go out and have fun.

And then the game itself is going to be pretty much the same thing, it's time for a game, not, oh, I'm playing in the Rose Bowl. I think I just do that personally for my mental, but I know that after the Rose Bowl I'm going to act like a little kid.

Q. How much does Andy's system of using 11, 12, 13 personnel and both tight ends change how you've been -- how does that change things for you guys?

NICK FORD: I mean, it just allows our offense to have so much more flexibility, especially with how talented our tight end room is, because there's not very many teams in the country that could send in 13 personnel and line up in empty. That's not a thing really in the country.

You know, I think that gives us an advantage because they have to make their best educated guess on if we're going to be running the ball, throwing the ball, whatever it is, because our tight ends could either be in a formation tight or out wide. That's a big benefit to us, and it's a lot to credit to Brant, Cole, Dalton and the entire tight end room.

Q. The Ohio State guys talked a lot about the physicality with which you guys play. When you put on the tape and watch Ohio State, what stands out to you?

NICK FORD: Pretty much the same thing. They can be physical, as well. I think for me personally the thing that stands out to me and a couple of boys in the room is their technique. I feel like they're very technical in their play. I never really worry too much about checking somebody's physicality because that's going to come down the game. We're going to see how physical people are. So when I do film, I look at technique, and they're very fundamentally sound. They have really good hands, really good hips. They work edges well, they work midline well. Overall I think they're a well-coached defense, and it shows on the film for sure.

Q. Schematically, stylistically, are they comparable to anybody you guys played this year?

NICK FORD: Possibly. I mean, they have a pretty base defense. They expect to hit home with their D-line and their front seven. They don't rely too heavily on the blitz, although they do blitz. Yeah, they're very confident in their front. It falls back to how fundamentally sound they are. They rely on their fundamentals, and they're not going to switch up their game, and they're going to do what they want to do, and let's see if you can do anything about it.

Q. It was such a celebration winning the Pac-12 Championship and then there was awards season, people getting honors and things like that. Do you feel like you guys have turned the page on that and the focus has been Ohio State and the Rose Bowl?

NICK FORD: A hundred percent. We had a meeting and we recognized everyone on their honors, and that's the great thing about this team is we know when to have fun, we know when to talk about things, and we know when to lock in. We kind of fooled around for a little bit, and then all of prior to last week and then a little bit before that, we were all locked in. Talking to Coach Whit, he said it's some of the best practices we've had, and the players have just been doing the same thing we've been doing all year, and that's our main focus; don't get too tense, don't get too loose, just do what you've been doing.

Q. As a SoCal kid playing what will be your final college game, what does it mean to face Ohio State in the Rose Bowl for your last time around?

NICK FORD: It will be fun for sure. I know that growing up I watched it, saw the floats being made and everything, watched the parade itself and the game. But like I said earlier, I'm not trying to get star struck, quote-unquote, and be a deer in the headlights in the game. For me Saturday it's just a game, and after the game, I'm going to be acting like a little kid, man, like realize the entire experience. Like the experience thus far has been amazing. Hospitality has been great, and come the game I'm thinking 60-minute football game, and then once the game is over I'm going to probably be a little kid again.

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