

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

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Pasadena, California, USA

**Utah Utes**

**Tavion Thomas**

Press Conference



**Q. How's it going today?**

TAVION THOMAS: OH, it's going great. Just happy to be here. You know? So it's going great. I feel good.

**Q. A lot of people say that. I feel like you would have more of a reason to say that just because of the things you've been through.**

TAVION THOMAS: Oh, yeah. That, too. And I'm going against Ohio State. So it's a blessing to be here, man.

**Q. Is that a big thing going up against Ohio State?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, that's a big thing.

**Q. Why is that?**

TAVION THOMAS: So I played them my freshman year at Cincinnati, I believe so. And I still got that bad taste in my mouth. You know, we lost 42-0. So it's, like, just to play them boys again, it's a good experience. Stuff like that. I just want them again, you know?

**Q. How much did you play in that game?**

TAVION THOMAS: I played, like, second half. So I didn't really -- so I ain't really get -- I played them when Chase Young and them was there. So I'm kind of familiar with how their defense, stuff like that.

**Q. Have you decided if you're going to return to school next year?**

TAVION THOMAS: No, sir. I'm going to wait till after the game to decide.

**Q. What goes into that decision, ultimately?**

TAVION THOMAS: Just -- I just want to see how my -- my draft stock is or something like that. I just want to see, like, what's going to be the plans.

So if I got to come back another year, I wouldn't mind to. I would love to come back here. So I'm just going to wait until after the game after everything done, after the season.

**Q. How much are your teammates kind of on you to stay? I'm sure Cam and Brandon, how much have your teammates tried to get you to stay at this point?**

TAVION THOMAS: They on me -- they on me good. But, you know, I -- like I said, I wouldn't mind coming back, you know, running it back-to-back with them boys, for sure. Like, those some great guys. I wouldn't mind coming back to play with them and Coach Whittingham, and Coach Mac and stuff like that. So I wouldn't mind.

**Q. Did you grow up a fan of Ohio State?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, I used to love watching Ohio State. You know, A kid from Ohio, how the Ohio State program was and stuff like that. So it was, like, yeah, I grew up watching them. Braxton Miller, all of them boys. So, you know, I was a Zeke fan, too. So I grew up watching Ohio State. So it was pretty cool to, you know...

**Q. Did you dream of playing there?**

TAVION THOMAS: Where, O-State?

**Q. Yeah.**

TAVION THOMAS: Uh-huh. The crazy thing about it, I was going to -- coming out of high school, I was going to commit, like, sign. But he wanted me to, like, go JUCO first. And I was, like, Nah, I wasn't really feeling that. So, yeah, but it's a love-hate relationship. (Laughter.)

**Q. But you did end up having to go JUCO, right?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, at the long run, that's what --

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yeah.

**Q. Did you look back on it and say, Oh, if I decided to do that, you could have been at Ohio State?**

TAVION THOMAS: Well, not no more. I don't really think -- think about it how I used to think about it back then. But yeah.

**Q. Does that give you something extra to prove in this game, like, against Ohio State?**

TAVION THOMAS: Uh-huh. This is some -- this is some -- what they missed out on. Just a -- yeah, just to show them, like, what they missed out on, stuff like that.

**Q. What do you remember about, like, the process of being recruited by them? Like, did you talk to Coach Alford a lot?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, I used to talk to him, like, every other day. Like, we had a good relationship. I ain't going to lie, we had a good relationship, stuff like that. It just didn't go right, you know, at the end of the process.

**Q. Have you talked to him at all since then?**

TAVION THOMAS: Nah. I ain't talked to him. No, sir.

**Q. What did you like about Coach Alford?**

TAVION THOMAS: I -- what I like about Coach Al, he was just a straightforward guy. And I respected that. I wanted to play for a coach that was straightforward, that's going to -- ain't going to sugarcoat nothing, you know?

So that's pretty much what got me. And he wasn't just talking football with me. Stuff like that.

**Q. Was it hard to hear from them when they asked you to go to JUCO first? Was it hard? How did you take that?**

TAVION THOMAS: I'm like, Man. Yeah, it was hard because I -- I couldn't handle it. Because I -- before all that stuff -- first, JUCO, I heard a lot of stuff about JUCO.

I'm, like, Man, I can't go there. You got to do two years automatic. So I'm, like, Nah, I ain't trying to do all that. I'm trying to go straight to, like, a four-year.

So that was really kind of hard for me, you know, doing all that. Like, when he said that, I'm, like, Man, am I not worthy enough or -- you know? I had doubts in my mind and stuff like that. But, you know, it is what it is.

**Q. When you look back on it now, do you think they were right?**

TAVION THOMAS: Huh?

**Q. When you look back on it now, do you think they were right?**

TAVION THOMAS: Right about what?

**Q. That you needed that time.**

TAVION THOMAS: Needed to go to JUCO? The crazy thing about it, like, I'd probably say, like, yeah, because once I went JUCO, that made me, like -- because, like, I don't know, I got to appreciate everything. My mental got stronger. Like, everything just, like -- everything now, I learned from.

So it's, like, I probably -- it probably would have worked out better for me to go JUCO to my first time coming out of high school.

**Q. Are you happy with how everything has turned out now?**

TAVION THOMAS: Oh, yes, sir. Absolutely. Absolutely. Hey, I be thinking about it every day, I'm, like, Man, I'm here. Like, man, just a few months ago, I was not -- you could not ask me what you going to do a couple months. I'm seeing all this, I'm here in Cali. So it's, like, really amazing, man. For real.

**Q. How much do you feel like you've grown over the course of this season since you got to Utah to where you are now?**

TAVION THOMAS: To be honest, I feel like I've grown -- I really feel like I've grown up a lot, just handling my -- handling situations way better than I was my freshman year. Just taking coaching more. Just, you know, just being a good teammate. So I feel like I've grown up a lot, though.

**Q. For you guys, as a rushing offense, what do you think makes you so successful?**

TAVION THOMAS: Offensive linemen. Them big boys be moving that thing upfront. I ain't going to lie to you. They be working. And we got great tight ends, too. So everybody's doing their thing. And we, you know, we just see the hole, we got to hit it, you know? (Laughter.)

**Q. With those tight ends, the 11, 12, 13-personnel that**



**you guys run, how dynamic does that make your guys' offense and what have you kind of seen?**

TAVION THOMAS: I'm sorry, what did you say?

**Q. With those 11, 12, 13-personnel, what does it do for your offense to allow you or other aspects of the team to be able to succeed?**

TAVION THOMAS: I just feel, like, to put in more people, bodies in front, we get a better push. Yeah, we just get a better push and it -- for me, I can see everything.

But I like having, you know, them extra bodies, extra tight ends on the field. Because it just -- it's grown men on grown men, at the end of the day, with all them big bodies out there. So that's how I like it, yeah.

**Q. (Question concerning Tavion Thomas' stats.)**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, and, like, finishing. See, I like the -- I want to break out, like, 60-yard runs, stuff like that. That's how I really got to up my game to. Because I -- I want to show that and show I can catch out -- you know, my versatility. I can catch out of the backfield, block. I just want to show all that.

That's me, my -- and blocking. So I take pride in, blocking. That's really what I take pride in, blocking. So that's really it.

**Q. Are you still in touch with Coach Powell or anyone else at Dayton that helped you out?**

TAVION THOMAS: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. We stay in contact. We check in every other day, stuff like that.

**Q. What kind of things do they say to you?**

TAVION THOMAS: Just keep working. Don't take -- just take full advantage. Don't take it for granted. You know, just keep working. Your foot -- you not there yet, but you got to still work. Just keep a positive mindset. So he talk to me and stuff like that. So yeah.

**Q. What was it like growing up in Dayton, going to Dunbar and all that?**

TAVION THOMAS: It shaped me to become, like, who I am. Like, just going to, like, a public school and stuff, there's a lot of stuff that goes on and stuff like that. Especially, like, my neighborhood and stuff like that. It just made me, like, who I am. It just made me who I am, for real.

**Q. How so?**

TAVION THOMAS: Just the -- the stuff we went through, the adversity and stuff we went through, it made me, like -- so, now, when I go through something, it's, like, Okay, it's easy to recover -- I ain't going to say it's easy.

But it's like I can recover through it because I've been through all this with my city and stuff like that. So, now, it be easier for me to, like, get over it, keep working, keep pushing, keep that strong mindset.

**Q. Does it help when you have people like Coach Powell who grew up the same way?**

TAVION THOMAS: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, because you know where it's coming from. And it's -- because you're like, He's been through it, I can do it, too, man. He knows where it comes from.

**Q. So then when you're going to other places, do you have to learn to trust people since maybe they have different backgrounds?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, you got to learn. And with me, I'm more of, like, a trustworthy guy. I like to -- I got to have trust -- like, yeah, I got to trust you for me to be, like, comfortable and stuff with you, and just to finally talk to you a bit. Yeah. But I'm trying to work on that. I'm trying to get right.

**Q. Tavion, have you made a decision about if you're coming back or if you're going to go to the NFL?**

TAVION THOMAS: No, I'm going to wait till after the game.

**Q. Do you know what -- if you're leaning to one direction or another, or do you have anything leading that way?**

TAVION THOMAS: No, sir. I ain't going to lie to you, no, sir -- well, like I said, I'm going to try and wait on my -- try to see how my draft stock is, stuff like that. So that's really going to determine everything for me.

**Q. How does that process work? I mean, walk us through, like, how the draft --**

TAVION THOMAS: I'm really -- I'm still trying to -- yeah, I don't really know either.

**Q. Do you feel like with running backs, it's sometimes a little bit different? Because you want to save that wear-and-tear. Is that something you take into**

**consideration?**

TAVION THOMAS: I'm sorry, what did you say?

**Q. Running backs, sometimes the idea is, you know, you have a shorter career because there's so many hits you can take. Is that something you ever take into consideration?**

TAVION THOMAS: No, I don't feel -- because I feel like I can take hits. I feel like -- I'd be in the league for a long time.

I don't know, I just love the game. And I feel like I wouldn't -- I ain't really worry about the hits. I'm a physical guy. So I ain't really -- I ain't really think, like, short term and stuff like that. Yeah.

**Q. When you see what Michigan did to Ohio State, the way they were able to run the ball, do you guys look at that as an example that you want to replicate?**

TAVION THOMAS: Absolutely, absolutely. Like, I know Michigan, they was -- they just more physical and stuff like that. And I feel like we could be -- we can match their physicality with Ohio State. And I feel like it's going to be a good game.

And I feel like we just -- we're going to be able to run the ball. We just got to ignore -- do our assignments and stuff like that. So I feel like it's going to be good.

**Q. Is that something you feel like you guys really pride yourself as a team, being that physical and out-physical --**

TAVION THOMAS: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's our motto every day, physicality. Trying to be the most physical team in the PAC. Shoot, in the nation, for real. Yeah, so --

**Q. What else sticks out to you when you see Ohio State's defensive front?**

TAVION THOMAS: They move. They move. They got -- see, I know Tyreke, No. 11, the D-end. He got good hands. So they move ran around. They know how to work their hands, their D-line.

We just got to -- and we know, like, they young in the backfield, too. Like, in the secondary and stuff. You know, they young. But, yeah, they cool.

**Q. From being an Ohio guy, do you know many of the Ohio State players from high school?**

TAVION THOMAS: I know, like, probably a few players from recruiting and going up O-State visit and stuff like that. So I know a few guys on that team.

Like, the running back room with Mike Williams, the running back they got. Yeah, I know him. He actually was on the visit with me at UC. So I know him, D-end. I know a few guys -- a few cats over there.

**Q. Was it really a lot to take in? At one time, you blew up from an offer standpoint, you know, over the summer, and then by the time you get to December, you got programs saying maybe you should go the JUCO route. I mean, was that a lot to handle at the time?**

TAVION THOMAS: When? Like, when I was transferring to UC?

**Q. Yeah.**

TAVION THOMAS: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I'm thinking -- I ain't going to lie to you, I'm going to be real. I was thinking I had, like -- I had a lot of offers coming out of high school. So I'm thinking once I transfer, I'm think they was going to come back. Then none of that happened. So I'm, like, Whoa. What's going? (Laughter.)

So I'm, like -- yeah, it was -- I was depressed. I ain't going to lie, I was depressed. I had to go to JUCO. Because like I said, I heard a lot about JUCO. So I'm, like, Oh, man, this is going to be -- you know what I'm saying, it's going to be tough.

Yeah. I went and, shoot, it was good. I felt like it was good for me.

**Q. What was it? I heard a couple times there was just something about Utah. Why were you interested?**

TAVION THOMAS: The offense. I always wanted to get behind, like, an offense that ran down hill. Because I had always been, like, in spread. I don't really like spread offenses, for real.

I like to run downhill and physical. So I seen that, I seen how Zack Moss was running and stuff like that. And I was, like, Yeah, I could fit in that system.

**Q. So really just watching them?**

TAVION THOMAS: Yeah, yeah.

**Q. Tavion, it's such a big thing for you guys to get**



**here. How do you go from being super excited to now being prepared to winning this thing on Saturday?**

TAVION THOMAS: Just -- just watching film. See, I watch a lot of things in watching film, stuff like that. Just taking it day by day. Just -- I don't know, just take it, like, day by day. Stuff like that. So...

**Q. It's probably not hard to get hyped up to go and play in the Rose Bowl.**

TAVION THOMAS: Nah, it's very exciting. But I'm trying to keep my composure right now until after the game. It ain't really hit me yet. It's hitting me, but it ain't really me yet. I'm trying to keep my composure, though.

**Q. Can you have imagined having a season like you did this year, breaking the records and running as well as you have this season?**

TAVION THOMAS: You said did I imagine that?

**Q. Could you have imagined?**

TAVION THOMAS: To be honest, no. Because -- like, at first, I had to -- first, I was playing and then I stopped playing. So I'm thinking, like -- I'm, like, Oh, man, it's over with. I done went to Power Five, I done folded. Like, I lost my spot, stuff like that. I'm like, Oh, man.

So I -- I did think, like, did I -- I would have the season -- but I am thankful for my team that keep it going. Like, they kept me going. Like, bro, you got it, just keep working on it. So -- but to answer your question, no, I didn't think this season would happen.

**Q. When I asked you if you were the screenwriter to your own ending, how would your Hollywood ending be on Saturday at the Rose Bowl on Saturday?**

TAVION THOMAS: Winning it. Coming out with a victory. Winning that thing. I ain't going to lie, try to win that thing. I ain't going to lie to you. We trying to come home with that.

**Q. Can you tell us how your recruiting process was with Utah? Like, how did they reach out to you? How did that come about?**

TAVION THOMAS: Like I said before, I texted Zack Moss, and No. 1, Huntley. I text them first, like, Can you show them my film and stuff like that?

But the running back room was full. So it's about like -- I'd probably say, like, two months before we had to leave.

JUCO, Coach Mac hit me up.

And we was talking for, like, a couple weeks. But at first, I ain't going to lie, I didn't know he was going to offer.

So I'm, like, Hey, Coach, what's going on? Because we had been talking. And I had been through the recruiting process and I'm, like, What's up?

Then he talked to me, I got on the phone with all the coaches and stuff like that, and it just went like that. Like, yeah.

**Q. How did you know Zack Moss and text him that you were interested in Utah?**

TAVION THOMAS: Well, I just -- I seen -- I just text -- I ain't know he was going to text me back. But he text me back. So he showed love. And I respect that. He wasn't trying to big time me or none of that. He showed love and now I'm here.

**Q. Did you know him or did you --**

TAVION THOMAS: No, I didn't even know him. I was just, Can you help me out? I'm trying to look for a school, stuff like that.

**Q. Did you have his number or anything?**

TAVION THOMAS: No, it was Twitter.