

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

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Morgan Scalley

Press Conference



Q. How has it been?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Obviously very well done. It's a big time bowl. They do a great job of giving our guys the best experience possible. Our administration has done everything to make sure the players are enjoying this.

Two parts of the bowl game, the game is obviously the most important, but our players enjoying the experience would be a number two. They've deserve this. They've earned it. And happy for them.

Q. How's the weeks leading up to this, kind of the bowl prep in Salt Lake and then here?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Obviously, you don't want them to get stale. So you break up the practices, making sure that they stay active, that they stay in condition.

Coach Whit has done an awesome job throughout the years of understanding what it takes to make sure these guys are fresh as well as in shape when you get to the bowl site, so kind of just standard fare.

Q. This group's experience of having been in bowls and played in big games together, does that make the preparation for the game a little bit easier because big games and things, stages like this aren't new to them?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, we're still dealing with a lot of youth on this team. This is a first time for a lot of guys on this team. Some of the vets, obviously, have played in some big time games throughout the years.

These younger guys, they played in the championship game. We've had to win throughout the season to kind of stay alive and to be in contention to win the championship. So every game's a big game, but these ones are a little bit more special.

Q. When you look at your secondary, especially with how thin you are there, how do you feel you can kind of combat what Ohio State does?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, obviously, a very talented wide receiving core, very talented offense period. What you see is you've got to do kind of a mixture of things, particularly when we're as thin as we are. You have to be able to do a mixture of things to make the quarterback hold onto the ball a little bit longer. So you've got to be great in disguise.

You've got to understand your strengths and weaknesses and where, if we're going to get beat, here's where we're going to get beat.

But, man, our guys have practiced well, and we're excited for the opportunity.

Q. Morgan, just to follow that up, in terms of depth to try to help that, have there been any positions going out of the cornerback spot?

MORGAN SCALLEY: We've experimented with a bunch of guys. Obviously, you've got great athletes that's have come to our university, and some of them have played both sides of the ball. We've experimented with a number of guys, and you'll see on game day.

Q. Anybody that might stick on game day?

MORGAN SCALLEY: No comment.

Q. When you watch C.J. Stroud play -- I know you recruited him a little bit out of high school. This kid's a redshirt freshman and already a Heisman finalist. What stands out about Stroud?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Just his decision-making. For a young player, very good decision-maker. Gets the ball out quick, understands when pressure is coming, where to go with the ball. Very good athlete. He's looking to throw first, but man, when he takes off, he can run.



He just -- for as young as he is, like I said, very football savvy quarterback.

Q. Comparable to anybody you've seen?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Oh, many throughout the years. Justin Herbert is a guy that understood as well coverage and how to attack coverage, getting some presnap reads as to what you're doing, where to go with the football based on what coverage you're in. Also dangerous running the ball. So I would say those two.

Q. Any sigh of relief for a defensive coordinator when Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave opt out?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Not when they're as talented of a team as they are. Obviously, they're very talented wide receivers, but they've recruited and they've got depth. That's college football, right?

You've just got to keep on coaching your guys regardless of who's out there, come with your game plan, and play ball.

Q. Do you go back and -- for as much film as you can find on the guys stepping in or the young guys? Is that what you do?

MORGAN SCALLEY: We have film on all of them, yeah, and they're good.

Q. Do you change your schemes at all knowing that those two aren't out there?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Not necessarily. Stays the same.

Q. How's the secondary looking? I know, especially at corner, you guys have been banged up. Is there a growth, especially having these extra practices? I know you guys have said in the past it's very beneficial.

MORGAN SCALLEY: Beneficial for your down the line guys as well, guys you've redshirted or plan on redshirting. Getting those extra reps in, it's almost like another spring ball for us, being able to get those guys reps.

And, again, it's no secret we've had to experiment with guys playing a little bit at corner that haven't necessarily played there, but that's that -- we've done that with safeties, right? We've played a three-safety scheme for a good amount of the season, and that's definitely something that we've had in practice throughout the season, so we'll have that as well.

Q. I asked Kyle this, and this also applies to you, having played in the Fiesta Bowl, coached in the Sugar Bowl, and now you're in this one, is there a different feel as far as the buildup to this game compared to the Sugar Bowl and Fiesta Bowl?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I don't know. I don't think so. I guess the Fiesta Bowl was one of those deals where you're the first team to bust the BCS, so different feel there.

The Sugar Bowl, I think just the matchup. People didn't anticipate Utah doing much. I think with this matchup, you've got two teams very well respected, they respect each other, and maybe that's the feel is that you're going into it with mutual respect and everyone anticipates a good game.

Q. Kyle has said that this is one of the toughest seasons of his career for obvious reasons. On the flip side of that, he said that he's having more fun now than he has in a long time. Do you get the sense that he's having fun, as much fun as he can have, I guess?

MORGAN SCALLEY: You see one side of Kyle Whittingham, and he's an unbelievable person. He loves the players. He is a very player first oriented coach, who wants to make sure that they're the ones getting the praise, they're the ones having fun, they're the ones that are enjoying it. That's where he gets his fulfillment.

So, yeah, a ton of it for him because of what the players have gone through and the success that they're seeing and having. He's a good man.

Q. You guys have measured success with players that weren't four or five star guys maybe making position changes, developing them over the years. What do you see in guys like that that maybe others don't see when you're out there recruiting?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I think just the continuity of being at the same place every year, playing the same defense, you get a feel for that type of athlete that fits your scheme, right? Then you become more confident in your ability. Okay, here's the skill set we're looking for. Then you have to have confidence that you can develop that skill set.

Coach Whittingham's whole philosophy in our program is recruit, develop, and manage. So you've got to recruit the people in your program that you feel will be a good fit, number two has the skill set that you can develop into a Pac-12 player, and then just take care of them. Give them the tools they need to succeed, teach, hold them accountable. It's a Kyle Whittingham deal.

Q. In a very impatient era, how much patience does it require? Not only the players, but the coaches to go long term?

MORGAN SCALLEY: We have to have patience. Utah is very well respected, and we've spent a number of years earning that respect. We're still not a destination program, according to the rest of the country. We have to be able to develop, right?

You get in the transfer portal, and we're going to take our fair share of kids from the transfer portal. But you also will never lose sight of that high school senior that maybe this was his first year starting as a senior, right? I recruit Houston, Texas, and they get so much depth there that you get these kids that go in the program, just waiting their time, and then they develop their senior year. We've had a ton of success with those kids and developing them, and we'll continue to do that.

Q. Morgan, not necessarily something related to the Rose Bowl, but apparently you had a viral moment on Monday. I don't know if you saw any of this, where you were at Disneyland, and you apparently FaceTimed Kalani to show BYU fans. Can you talk about the relationship and your willingness to help people out?

MORGAN SCALLEY: He's a good dude. Kalani and I will always remain friends. We stay in contact all the time. Had a young man in line, great family that we started talking to. So I FaceTimed Kalani and was able to have him talk to that kid. That's a special moment for him. That's something that Kalani loves to do. That was fun.

Q. Is that kind of just trying to transcend some of the game? Obviously the focus is Rose Bowl and all of that stuff, but do you kind of look for those moments?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Oh, yeah. Listen, just be a good person, you know what I mean? They were great. We stood in line and talked for a minute. Yeah.

Q. You were talking about the developmental program. You and Ohio State, very different programs. Does that add to the intrigue of this game, do you think, because you guys recruit so differently?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I don't know. I think both teams pride themselves on toughness. Both teams pride themselves in doing it the right way. I think we probably have a lot more in common than we have differences.

It's just that we're on separate sides of the country, and

one's obviously a lot more of an esteemed program and one's still trying to continue to earn that respect.

Q. You pried Clark Phillips away from Ohio State. How big of a coup was that?

MORGAN SCALLEY: He's a great young man. Clark chose to come here because he felt like this was an environment where he could thrive and succeed, just as he committed to Ohio State. I think it was a coaching change that was the reason there.

Unbelievable young man, huge addition to our program. It's fun to watch him succeed.

Q. Do you remember the first time on the practice field or whenever it was, first time Boyd kind of did something that made you guys look at each other and say, hey, this guy might be a little bit better than we first thought?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I think it was the Oregon State game. I think it was his sophomore year. Tipped interception, took it to the house, where we're kind of like, okay, geez, yeah, he can do it. That is -- if you haven't talked to this kid already, unbelievable young man. One of the best leaders we've ever had in this program. Humble. He's going to have a ton of success at the next level.

Q. What was that recruiting process like?

MORGAN SCALLEY: He was a wide receiver DB in high school. He had long levers. He had broad shoulders. We knew he was going to grow into his body. Again, that skill set that kind of you're looking for, right?

We knew we could take that talent, as well as his mindset. The mindset is such a big part of it too. And develop him into a very good backer. Colton Swan and Justin and other guys that have coached him did an amazing job, as well as the players in the room. He's grown up with some very good linebackers in that room kind of teaching him how to study film, how to prepare for a game.

Q. Ohio State, they are obviously missing three players. What's the challenge even them missing two receivers?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, they've got dudes behind them who are really good. They recruit for that. The biggest challenge is they do a very good job of mixing tempo. Usually your tempo teams, they're pretty predictable. When they go tempo, they're play set, right? These guys have a variety of plays when they go tempo. So that's one of the challenges in this game, as well as just matching up



with their athletes.

Q. Have you played anyone like them, the talent level that they have?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, USC has always had a wide receiving corps that has challenged you. Washington State is much more pass heavy than Ohio State, but this is a big-time program. They're sitting there ranked in the top four throughout the season. They're talented for a reason. They win games for a reason.

You don't always face that throughout the year. You're going to face one or two teams that bring that same level of talent, and this is one of them. So this is a huge opportunity for us.

Q. It is sort of the coordinator's chess match that goes on, when you see a team have success kind of interrupting Ohio State, but you also know Ohio State has been working on for the last month, how do you approach that as a coordinator, trying to replicate that, but also staying true to yourself?

MORGAN SCALLEY: The challenge in bowl games is you've got so much time to maybe think that you've got to do a bunch of different stuff. So sometimes you diverge away from what got you here. We have to continue to be who we are as a defense.

Obviously, there's going to be some wrinkles here and there that you show. But in a 70 to 90 -- hopefully not 90, but plays in a game, there's only so much you can change. It's going to come down to fundamentals and technique in my opinion, that and just sheer toughness.

Both teams are going to want it. Both teams are physical. We've got to do a great job with the wrinkles that we have of not diverging away from tackling properly and running the football.

Q. Coach, when there's two receivers out like there was for Ohio State, you mentioned other talent coming in, but not as much film of those guys, how do you prepare for receivers that you haven't seen as much in a game?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I think you just have to go with what are their past concepts? What do they do? What shows up every game? What are their go-tos, bottom line. We do run some man coverage, quite a bit of man coverage, man pressure.

So the film that you do have, you just kind of have to get a feel for what's their strength? How do we defend them?

How do they handle press coverage? There's certain things that we try to key in on. Otherwise, it's all about who they are as an offense. They're going to have their wrinkles. They're going to have stuff that we haven't seen before, right? So it's just adjusting on the fly.

Q. Morgan, how big was it for you guys in the program when you guys were able to flip Clark Phillips from Ohio State over to Utah?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I think any time you can get the quality of talent that Clark provides into your program, it's a great victory, right? But at the same time, recruiting is an inexact science. Sometimes you've got a guy that, hey, he's a highly rated guy. He comes in and takes a little bit of time to develop, right? Some guys are big time surprises.

Some guys come in -- Cole Bishop is one of those guys for us, our strong safety. Came in. We were excited about his film. But if you were to say he's going to come in and be a year 1 starter, being a mid-year transfer true freshman, you'd be like, wow, awesome.

It's an inexact science, but that young man is unbelievable. Some freshmen come in, and they just kind of sit there and try and follow the crowd. He came in with a purpose. He wanted to start. He wanted to play right away. He's always in the film room. He's his own man, and I love that.

Q. Do you think it sends a message to other recruits when a guy of his caliber flips from a program like Ohio State to Utah? Hey, Utah is a place that you guys should consider.

MORGAN SCALLEY: It definitely puts Utah in a position where people will start asking those questions, right? Jaylon Johnson was another one of those for us, highly recruited kid out of California. Playing with the Bears right now as a starter at the corner spot.

But usually the young men that are serious about it and ask the questions and come visit Salt Lake City end up loving it.

Q. No. 2 Chris Olave had opted out for Ohio State, yet he's out there still practicing with the team. I know you said you prepare for concepts as much as personnel. Would you be shocked if Chris Olave took a snap?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I don't get shocked. Prepare for everything. He's a very talented athlete. We recruited Chris out of high school. Unbelievable talent. The fact that he's out there just again is a testament to he's a football player, right? He's out there. He's still trying to get better.

Wish him nothing but the best.

Q. What sort of things did you learn from Urban Meyer that sort of extended the Ohio State connection that you have?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Man, master motivator. He came to our program from Bowling Green. The first team meeting, and we were a team that had just come off a 5-7 season, and he sat down. He said, there's only really six or eight teams in the country that do things right. You're going to be one of those teams.

I'm sure there were a lot of people kind of doubting that, and then within two years turned the program around. He found a way to motivate people to do their job, right? Even if it was you were running down on kickoff, he made that guy feel like the most important person on the team. He was able to connect in a way with those players to just get them to own their role.

So I'm grateful for my time with Urban, what I learned from him not only on the field, but off.

Q. Over the years, past years when Ohio State had a defensive coordinator open and your name has come up, I don't know if that was speculation or any fire to that smoke, is it a program that you've kept an eye on?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I love Utah.

Q. I'm not asking if you love the job.

MORGAN SCALLEY: No, no, no, and I know that. If it were up to me, I'd be here my entire career.

Q. Did anything with Urban's success at Florida and Ohio State surprise you at all given what he was able to do with you guys here?

MORGAN SCALLEY: No. Again, just ultra-competitive, right? But he connected with the players on a level that made you like want to run through a wall for him, right?

I get that not every player is going to love a coach, but he was successful for a reason, right? That was our experience with Urban. Depending on where he went, everyone is going to have their different experience with Urban. Our experience with Urban, at least my experience with Urban because there are guys on our team that have opinions themselves, but I just thought he ran the program to a point where you felt like you could compete with anybody.

Q. Do you try to instill that with your guys now?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, I think they've experienced that. I think they've experienced that. So now it's just a matter of we are a power five team. There's that transition, right? Going from a Mountain West conference to the Pac-12 and gaining that confidence throughout the years that not only can you compete, but you can win and you can win consistently.

Kyle Whittingham has done an amazing job of creating a culture at Utah that's allowed these young men to thrive. And now having won the championship, it's just a matter of here's how we did it. Believe it. Trust it. Let's keep on going.

Q. Do you look at the Oregon game that Ohio State played earlier in the season, you played Oregon twice, you know Oregon well, see what they did against Ohio State that worked, does that kind of cross over?

MORGAN SCALLEY: You're looking at everyone that did something that worked. Still Ohio State scored 28 points against them. It's not like -- Ohio State, these guys, very efficient offense. They score points. You can keep them down, but then they score points in a hurry, right?

Very efficient deep ball thrower, which allows you to score points in a hurry. When you've got those wideouts and you've got that ability to connect down the field.

So I think the biggest key for us is limiting those big plays. If we can limit those big plays and find a way to take the ball away, that is one thing I don't think we've done a good enough job of this season, as in recent seasons, of just taking the ball away. That's got to be a big emphasis for our guys.

Q. Is a field goal a win?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Is a field goal a win? You bet. I'd much rather have them kicking field goals.

Q. But in all seriousness, is that --

MORGAN SCALLEY: We tell our guys, when you look at red zone defense, we don't care about field goals. It's touchdown scores that you look at. Touchdowns scored. As long as you're not -- field goals should not beat you.

Q. Ohio State's offense is at a time when they're not finishing with touchdowns, kicking some field goals. Do you see any like -- when you watch film, what's kind of the feel in that area?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Really not a strong tendency one

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

way or the other there. They'll change a little bit of who they are down in the red zone. Some teams have a specific red zone package. These guys don't change much. They keep the tempo. They keep going. It's just, once you shorten down that space, those route concepts, your deeper route concepts are not as applicable. You can use that end line as an extra defender, so it's a little bit harder to fit those balls in windows.

Q. Do you remember the moment where you realized how special Devin Lloyd was, that he was going to be a good player?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Someone asked that question a while ago. We played Oregon State on the road in 2019, and he had a tipped interception and took it all the way to the house. That was his first significant time.

He's always been a guy that he wears you out by coming into your office, right? Coach, what can I work on? What can I work on? How can I get better? It's like, Devin, okay, enough. He just wears you out, right? But that's who he is, and that's why he's gotten to this point. He's always looking for ways to improve, always looking for ways to add value and get better.

He grew up in a room with some very good leaders -- Chase Hansen, Cody Barton, Francis Bernard, who taught him how to study film, taught him how to treat the game as a professional. He has become just as much, if not -- match those guys in terms of leadership, if not exceeded that.

He is compelling, brings guys along. Takes the younger guys, and instead of, hey, scrubs, you guys, you wait your turn. No, he's out there practicing with them. He brings them in the film room and teaches them. I can't overstate what a blessing he has been to us.

Q. Do you get to use him as a weapon in whatever way you need him that particular week? Like you get to use him depending on which opponent?

MORGAN SCALLEY: We try to. We try to use him on the line of scrimmage and an odd front, blitzing from the second level backer position, dropping in coverage. We try to use him in multiple ways where he's just so good at tracking that ball and getting to the quarterback, that he gives you that opportunity. He's got such an unbelievable skill set that you can use him in those ways.

Q. Coach, some would say you're the ultimate Utah man. The Utah fan base is so excited about the Utes finally made it. Can you appreciate how cool it is that you guys are actually here at the Rose Bowl, week of

the Rose Bowl, game's on Saturday?

MORGAN SCALLEY: It's been a special season in a lot of ways, for a lot of reasons. The biggest joy you get is just watching the players. It was devastating in '19 to lose the championship game, and as devastating as that was, it's such a huge -- it's not a sigh of relief. It's not a shout for joy. I'm so happy for these guys. They fought so hard, and they've gone through so much. I want them to enjoy every minute of this week.

Q. You guys seem to have a good mixture of having fun but also crossing that red line. You guys riding bikes to the practice yesterday. How important is all that to kind of mix together?

MORGAN SCALLEY: If you're not having fun, it's going to make for a very long season, particularly the season that we've had. You have to find ways to enjoy it and to smile and to -- early on in the season, it was like where's the light to the darkness? You just keep fighting, and you keep hanging together. Man, what an unbelievable light.

Q. As far as Clark Phillips, did you guys when you were recruiting, did you think he'd be as impactful as he has been?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Again, with recruiting, you never know what you're going to get. You anticipate it. We think they can come, and we think they can do it, but some guys take a little bit to develop. Some guys hit the ground running, and you're like, okay, here we go.

We knew he had the skill set. We knew he had the mindset. Then it was up to him to compete and to learn the playbook and to get that stuff down. Again, his mindset coming into the program was one of the best I've seen, just in terms of, okay, I don't care who's a senior, who's a junior. Here's me. Here's my plan. Here's what we're going to do.

He got together with Coach Shah, and he's been one of the best that we've had some terms of that mindset to come in and play early.

Q. Where has he made the biggest difference?

MORGAN SCALLEY: From year 1 to year 2, it was tackling. A lot of the young guys, they're throwing shoulders without wrapping. He's put on some weight. He's put on some muscle. He's become a much better tackler, more physical football player, and that's shown up almost every game for us.

Q. How does tight end Jeremy Ruckert, how does that



fit into how you come up with a defensive game plan for him? They don't throw it nearly as much as Utah does, but he's capitalized when they do.

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, he's one of those tight ends -- you go into a game plan and say, okay, is this a blocking tight end? Is this a receiving tight end that only is going to catch the ball? And he does it all very good in terms of blocking. They'll use him in a variety of ways doing that as well, motioning him in into different sets.

But like you said, very good at receiving the ball. So he brings the challenge of that matchup, right? Are we big enough to challenge him in man-to-man coverage? Is he going to push off our smaller guys? And then in the box, when he's in the box, can we afford to have those smaller guys play run defense, or do we match him with one of our backers or a strong safety?

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