

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

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Pasadena, California, USA

Ohio State Buckeyes

C.J. Stroud

Quarterback

Press Conference

Q. Who steps up for you now? Who is next in terms of the receivers? Who is the star on Saturday?

C.J. STROUD: You've got to go out there and see. I think everybody plays well, do good jobs. That's all that really matters.

Q. Can you describe how this could be kind of a launching point for 2022 with the young receivers? Those are the guys that you are going to be counting on next year anyway. Could this be a blessing that you are getting this kind of opportunity with them?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah. Those guys are young and haven't really played yet, so it's a good opportunity for them to get their feet wet. Julian played, but Marvin really hasn't, and then Emeka. It's a good opportunity for them to get their feet wet, and, of course, like you said, just jump-start next year.

Q. You being in this position as far as being the quarterback and, obviously, playing in a big bowl game and being a Black quarterback, how much does this influence the younger kids that are watching you on January 1st?

C.J. STROUD: I think it's a big influence. I think growing up watching other young Black quarterbacks like myself, but in a different time setting, it was like a big inspiration for me just to let myself know I can do it. So I definitely think that it could be a boost for who knows what type of kid. It could be Black, White, Mexican, Puerto Rican. It doesn't really matter. I just want to inspire young kids to know they can do it just like I am. I think it's a big blessing and big inspiration.

Q. What are some of the quarterbacks you grew up watching that inspired you to be in that position?



presented by



VENTURE X

C.J. STROUD: I was watching quarterbacks like Deshaun Watson, Michael Vick, Cam Newton. I mean, of course, like the older guys. My dad used to make me watch Warren Moon and Ronald Cunningham and showing me the way that they paved for us to even be in this opportunity because back in the day we weren't allowed to play quarterback, you know what I mean, or we weren't wanted to play quarterback because they didn't think we had the smarts for it, so I definitely think that me being in this platform is a blessing.

Q. Do you feel like being in the position with you and guys like Bryce Young and up-and-comers really would be able to expand the game for, like you said, minorities and younger kids as well to see you guys have success?

C.J. STROUD: For sure. Yeah, I think it's a great thing. Especially when you're coming from where we come from in Southern California, you don't really see too many young Black quarterbacks make it out, but I think we're starting to pave the way. We have other quarterbacks as well, like Jayden Daniels at Arizona State and D.J. at Clemson. We have a lot of guys out here balling out in college and even in the pros. I think it's just a blessing.

Q. (Inaudible)

C.J. STROUD: I can't. One more time. I can't hear you.

Q. There's been a lot of talk here in Southern California this year about the quarterbacks from here that have succeeded elsewhere. When you are being recruited, what's the appeal of going elsewhere instead of staying here because it's something that used to not happen?

C.J. STROUD: I can't really speak for everybody, but me personally the local schools didn't really recruit me hard until the very end. To me I will never be a second choice, so Ohio State, they showed me love from the beginning. Other schools did as well that were not on the West, but a



lot of West Coast schools dropped interest on me. So I really didn't take it to heart. I was, like, man, I just have to go play somewhere else. It is what it is. I'm blessed to even be where I'm at.

Q. The first time you were aware of Ohio State, do you remember the first time that it made an impression on you?

C.J. STROUD: It was at the opening when I played with Gee Scott and Joey Clemons, and at the opening camp my junior year they were trying to get me to commit to Ohio State then. I didn't even have offers.

Q. As a Cali kid, what is the mindset going into the Rose Bowl? What does this game sort of mean to you?

C.J. STROUD: Just to have fun. I'm not going to over think it or do too much. I'm just going to have fun with it. Still go through my preparation like I always do, and hopefully I go out there and play well. I'm not blowing it out of proportion by any means. I just want to play well.

Q. Did you watch the game as a kid?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, of course, I did. I watched all football games. Not just Rose Bowl, but, of course, the Rose Bowl is very unique and has a lot of tradition.

Q. Going from first-time starter to being a Heisman finalist, how do you sort of, I don't know, change the way you look at maybe even yourself? I know you're still a humble guy, and your faith is deep-rooted and stuff. Is it interesting how many eyes are on you now as opposed to, like you said, when you were being recruited?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, for are sure. I think that's anybody in college. Not just me. It's a blessing to be able to have the opportunity to go play this game. I'm not anything special to me. I'm just myself. I don't really think of myself as a superhero or anything like that, but I just think I go out there and try to do my job. It's really a blessing, but it does sometimes get overwhelming with all people and dealing with you all with the media. It's not my first time, but it's on a bigger scale. That's the one thing I just had to get used to.

Q. I was over here talking to Jackson. The beat goes on with the Ohio State receiving corps even though two of the great receivers in history are gone. In 2022 are you looking at this game as finishing off the season or more of a step into the next year also from the standpoint of what's coming from the receiving

corps?

C.J. STROUD: I think it's a little bit of both. Of course, you want to finish the season the right way. I think we've had a decent year. Of course, we're not where we want to be, but we're somewhere, so, I mean, that just speaks volumes. I think that if we go out here and play well, that will be a big-time win, and then, of course, that will jump-start you into the next year. You don't want to go into the next year with too bad of a taste in your mouth.

Q. Is there one of the young guys that's caught your eye in bowl prep? I'm talking about Emeka, Marvin Harrison Jr., Julian Fleming? Has one of those guys that really stepped up in your mind.

C.J. STROUD: They all have. They've been good since fall camp. You have two older guys like Chris and Garrett; that's hard to get on the field. And Jackson is playing really well. I feel like God forbid somebody went down this year and they had to step up, they would have no problem. They've been great since they got here. They lift hard. They run hard. They do everything they need to do. They're good in school. They do all the things the right way, so I think that will pay off for them.

Q. I think everybody would say in like a place like Ohio State and Alabama this game day atmosphere is probably more intense and exciting as it has been here. How much does that influence this phenomenon of quarterbacks and other players leaving Southern California?

C.J. STROUD: I think that does play a big part in it. You go to the USC and UCLA games, and quite honestly, it's just kind of boring. Without all the people. Fans aren't in tune. They kind of just are there on vacation and what not. You go to the other schools out of state, and their fans are kind of like fanatics. They don't really care what people think about them. They're wearing all type of stuff and yelling at the top of their lungs. With that comes a great responsibility of you do get criticism with that as well. It's a slippery slope. It's a two-way street. If you want a lot of fans to be supporting you, they'll be hating on you as well. I definitely think that it does play a big part of leaving home because you just want that type of support.

Q. When you play in the Horseshoe for the first time, what's the percentage of excitement or intimidation? What's more prevalent, excitement or intimidation?

C.J. STROUD: I never look up, honestly. I just look down at the field. I don't really have to worry about nobody out there. They're not going to help me win this football game. I try to just keep my head down and not really try to listen

to the noise. I think away games play more of a challenge because it's loud, and it's hard to communicate, so that was the biggest thing for me this year was just trying to over-communicate. Home games aren't really -- they're actually fun. I don't really feel any extra pressure or anything.

Q. Is there a chip on this team's shoulder going into the game?

C.J. STROUD: Honestly, I mean, what would you think? I don't know. Probably. Losing a game like that, yeah. I would think so.

Q. You said you were a little disappointed at the Heisman. Is that true, and does that drive you in this game and into next year?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, it will. I think it will do a lot for me. I wouldn't say I'm disappointed. I would just say -- I'm happy to even be a Heisman finalist, but I don't think it was fair. I don't think that was the truth, but I think it's not my job. My job is not to critique myself or critique others. I'm just supposed to play. I do have a voice, and I will speak my voice. I think it's just making the game fun. Who just wants to see somebody just take the fourth place and be all happy with it? I've never been that type of player. I'm a competitor. I'm not just going to take that and be all jolly and happy with it. It will drive me for the rest of my life probably.

Q. You do understand, as a guy who has never thrown a pass, what an honor it is to get to be a Heisman finalist, right?

C.J. STROUD: To me it's awesome. I'm blessed, but it's not good enough to me. I feel like I did a lot this season, but I could have definitely played better, but I feel like the stuff that I did do -- I'm not saying I should have won. I think Bryce definitely did the most this year. He had the most opportunities. I think if I played a couple more games and I do the right things, maybe things go the other way, but I'm super happy for my brother. That's my brother right there, but at the end of the day I'm super blessed to be where I'm at.

Q. What thing would you say prepared you the most for what you faced this year, whether it be the year before or stuff you went through in high school or camps or any of that? What you do think really prepared you the most for what you did?

C.J. STROUD: Honestly, just even through the bad and the good, you've just got to try to stay even-keel. I think in my life I try to do that even off the field. I think that kind of

prepared me with the off-the-field stuff that I went through, but on the field I think it's just a game. People fail to realize football is just a sport. It's not real life. You know what I'm saying? It's not life or death. For us it is because it's our livelihood, but I think some people realize that we're not like just on TV. We're here in real life, and we're regular people. People approach me all the time, why did you do this? I try not to act crazy or do nothing. Just try to explain to people, you think I didn't want to? It's a two-way street.

Q. Can you talk about, is there a quarterback whose performance in the Rose Bowl impressed you the most?

C.J. STROUD: Probably Vince Young in that Texas-USC game. That was probably the best game probably ever in football, college football. I think that was probably the one that sticks out for me.

Q. What are your impressions of the Utah defense as you have watched them on tape?

C.J. STROUD: They do a lot of good things. Number 0, Devin Lloyd, he does a great job. He is an all-world player. He can play the game. They've got some good DBs. Safety does a great job of reading eyes. The corner, number 8, he is really handsy, and he likes to jump stuff. The D-line, number 42 and 7 do a good job of creating pass rush and doing things like that. I mean it's another week. You always see good opponents, but at this level and, of course, this game you have to take it a little more serious.

Q. What do you remember about your recruitment in Utah?

C.J. STROUD: I had a good time in Utah. I went up there on an unofficial visit. Had a good time up there. Didn't really do too much. I was only there for half a day. Yeah, they treated me well.

Q. How well do you know or did you get to know Clark Phillips?

C.J. STROUD: I knew Clark from being a Southern California kid. I went to a couple of his games. They had played with some of my friends at La Habra High School, and I went up there and seen him play. At the time he was still committed, but I haven't spoke to him too much.

Q. (Inaudible)

C.J. STROUD: It's like every other week against a good corner. You just have to be prepared. Ain't no hard feelings. I don't really care. We have other good corners.

Q. How far are you from Pasadena?

C.J. STROUD: I'm probably, like, 45 minutes to an hour depending on traffic. I've never been to a Rose Bowl game. I've been to UCLA games but not the Rose Bowl.

Q. Utah's defense, is there any team that you played this season that compares to what they do?

C.J. STROUD: Not necessarily. They're kind of unique in their own aspect. Of course, they have number 0, Devin Lloyd, who blows everything up, but I don't really try to compare teams, but I think they're a good defense. That's all that matters.

Q. What's does it mean for you to play in the Rose Bowl?

C.J. STROUD: It's a blessing from God just to be able to come back home and go out there and have fun. I think it's a blessing.

Q. The young receivers that are now going to be playing a lot, what do you sense from them this week in terms of their motivation, how excited they are, any of that?

C.J. STROUD: I think they've been anxious all year to play. This is their opportunity to go out there and prove what they can do. I'm definitely excited for them to go out there and have some fun and just show the world what they can do.

Q. Does it change your mind at all with two of the top guys not being able to play this week?

C.J. STROUD: We'll be fine. My mindset hasn't changed. I'm still trying to go out there and compete and have fun, so I don't really think anything changes.

Q. What do you think the mindset of the team is going into this game? Obviously, you had the playoffs on the line and everything was there for you guys, and now you have the Rose Bowl.

C.J. STROUD: I think that's just between us as a team. I don't want to really share that.

Q. You've got a chance to play in front of family and friends, I assume, here this week, and I realize they probably traveled to some of the games, but this kind of feels like a little bit of a homecoming. You are coming back to where you generally grew up. If you think about what your career could look like and if you

want to continue to play football, is this game going to be something that you think is really special because you have a chance to come back home for the first time as Ohio State's quarterback to play in front of them?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah. If you would have asked me when I first committed to Ohio State, would I play in California ever, I would have probably said no depending where the college football playoff was or wherever the bowl games were. I honestly thought we were going to make the playoffs, but at the end of the day I never would have thought that I would come back home to play, which is an awesome feeling. It just feels regular to me. I don't have to worry about the cold anymore. It's kind of cold out here. I definitely think it's a blessing to have my people who couldn't come out to Ohio come out and see me play that I really wanted to come, so it's just a blessing for me to be able to play back home in front of some fans out here that never got to come see an Ohio State game and in front of my family.

Q. I realize that you individually have had a great season, and the team accomplished at a really high level. Did you set specific goals for yourself at the beginning of the year that you were kind of tracking along the way? If you did, are you willing to share any of those?

C.J. STROUD: Of course, I wanted to be a Heisman finalist. I wanted to win the Big Ten Championship. Of course, we didn't do, but that was a big goal of mine. I wanted to win the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year. Just keep that going in Ohio State quarterbacks history. I don't think the other award that I wanted -- I think it was like the Big Ten Silver Award or something like that. I don't think it's announced yet, but that's something I wanted to win as well.

There's a couple of other things that I didn't get, but those are some of the things that I was thinking about. I think when it comes to that, you just have to win. It's not really about what you think as a person or more like what you want as accolades as an individual. If you win, you could probably get those things.

Q. A lot of people talk about Coach Day as being one of the best quarterback coaches in the country. How has he made you better? Is it any big-picture ideas? Is it little things each week where he is pointing things out to you for previous film? What has he done to make you feel like, hey, my game is progressing the way I like it to?

C.J. STROUD: I think the knowledge that he has coming

from the NFL and he played the position, so that's all things that really help. He is in there with us going over film with us and going over the plays, so it's all good things that sometimes you don't get from your head coach. I think he does a good job with just getting us prepared for that week. Me, myself, I don't cut in I corners. I don't think he does either. I think when you have a quarterback and head coach like that or offensive coordinator, which he is, who don't cut corners and try to just put everything on the line, I think that's a good duo.

Q. If you read the reaction online to Garrett and Chris not playing, people make it sound like you are playing three tight ends -- are they sleeping on the other wide receivers?

C.J. STROUD: That's their prerogative. Everybody has their own prerogative. I just say, watch the game. It will be all right. They'll be fine.

Q. How confident are you in that loaded receiver? We've heard about it for a couple of years, and now we get to finally see it.

C.J. STROUD: I'm super confident. They all do a good job. I think even if the beginning of the season if they were needed, they would play well, so, I mean, this time they just have to step up and play really well. I know they're confident to do it. It's just my job to help give them balls to catch and give them opportunities to make plays.

Q. One of the big things about making a bowl game is that extra month that you get to develop young players. Have you seen the whole team get better since the last time we saw you?

C.J. STROUD: Sure. Throughout the season you get three team in there, they get to play, and they get to compete a little bit. You go back to competing in practice. Not just going with scouts, and that's kind of boring sometimes just playing with scouts. When you got that little action and compete with the ones again and see people actually try to get better at their game.

Q. I know you talked about the homecoming game for you. Are you able to enjoy this week? Is there any relaxation for you, or is it all football all the time?

C.J. STROUD: You definitely have to relax. Even in Columbus I relaxed and try to do my work as frequently as possible, but, I mean, at times you've got to sit back and just enjoy where you are at and just live in the moment and just have fun.

Q. You were one of the guys that we know comes

back next year. Have you talked to some of the seniors about trying to send them off the right way?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, definitely. I think that's the biggest goal is just send the seniors off the right way. They gave so much to us, so we have to give to them.

Q. Southern California has so many stand-out quarterbacks. What you do think it is about this area that produces so many?

C.J. STROUD: I think it's just the competition that you see. Maybe other quarterbacks have theirs. I'm not sure. They're the only good quarterback this their state, but when you come from a place like this, you go to camp or you go play against somebody that week on Friday in high school, you're playing against another good quarterback. I remember about every game I played in high school my senior and junior year was another good quarterback on the other side. I definitely remember those times, and when I went to these big camps and things like that or bowl games in high school, I didn't feel any different of competing. You compete at a high level even in high school going against guys like Bryce, D.J., Jayden Daniels, and Shane Illingworth. Guys like that, I remember playing in high school. That's definitely something that gives us a boost.

Q. You build up any sort of fraternity with any of those guys?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, for sure. I'm really close with Bryce, and then me and D.J. are cool. There's some other quarterbacks. I'm cool with Jayden Daniels. I try to stay in my lane, though. Especially during the season. Just try to focus on what I got going on because I know playing this position, it's hard everywhere. I don't try to bug anybody.

Q. What do you think your best throw this season was?

C.J. STROUD: I don't know, man. I had a couple of good catches. People think I don't have any accuracy, so that's cool. (Laughing)

Q. The one that comes to mind for me was the throw at Indiana.

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, that was a good play. A little cover two, two tackle. Mike trying to push, and he was kind of reading my eyes. I saw him. I thought I could get the ball over him. Jackson did a good job of keeping his route skinny, so I had to put it over Mike and one-inch him a little bit. People don't think I can throw people open or anything. I can only throw when people are wide open, so I don't

know. I guess I got to watch the film.

Q. That one from where I was sitting, I thought, well, that's got to be picked off. Was there any part of you in the film study where Coach Dennis or Coach Day said this was a gutsy throw, or was that just the expectation on that play?

C.J. STROUD: We make throws like that in practice. I try those throws in practice to see if I can do it. I feel like guys especially with the talent to be able to make those throws, so I'm going to try it. I don't want to ever put the ball in harm's way to get intercepted, but I definitely didn't want to do that, of course, but I feel like I can make the throw, so with that, you just have to play with confidence. If I would have thought I couldn't make it, I probably would have threw the pick. That's what I'm telling the young guys that haven't played. Go out there and have confidence. When you play with confidence. You kind of feel unstoppable, you kind of are.

Q. If I flipped it around the other way, what's the one throw that you wish you had back?

C.J. STROUD: Probably that Penn State one to Chris to where I think it was late third or early fourth. I was tired as hell. I had to chase down 40 because they didn't blow the whistle on the screen, so I chased him all the way down trying to catch him, and I came back and threw the drag to Jackson. I was dog-tired, and then I throw the pass to him. I tried to back shoulder him, but I just didn't put enough on it. I know I can make that throw. I just didn't make it then. I wish I did, but that was probably the one that I wish I got back.

Q. You mentioned giving some pointers to the younger guys. How much does that help you get ready for --

C.J. STROUD: I'm sorry. What did you say? I didn't hear you.

Q. When you were kind of getting that information --

C.J. STROUD: For sure, yeah. I had guys like Chris, Garrett who have done it before. Jeremy Ruckert, Thayer Munford, Nick Petit. All the older guys that were on our offense. They have the utmost respect and confidence in me, so I was, like, man, I might as well have confidence in myself. When you have guys like that trying to egg you on and tell you that you are going to be great or whatever it is and just tell you to be confident, I feel like it's your job and your responsibility to do that. That's what I try to do. I try to just, of course, stay even-keel, stay humble. At the end of the day I try to listen to those guys and listen to what

they're doing because they've done it before.

Q. I talked to Coach Tojo (phonetic) the other day, and he said that when you were younger, he really had to drill into you about staying in the pocket and not wanting to take off. Why was that such maybe a hard thing as a young quarterback to figure out, and how did that help you in the long run?

C.J. STROUD: My early years in football, I was probably just running the ball every play, trying to just really -- I didn't really throw the ball at all. I think I started playing when I was 5, 6, 7. My first year I was, like, 5. I mean, your arm is not developed then. You can't really throw the ball. I was just running.

When I got to Coach Tojo (phonetic), he was in the program. When I got to him, I was probably like -- I want to say I was 8, 9, 10. My arm was better developed. He was really holding on me and my footwork. This is at a young age, so he was big on me just getting back there and just trying to be relaxed. It really helped me back then, but it helped me now even when I'm a grown man.

Q. You mentioned how important it was to get the advice from all the older players in the program and to be able to follow in their footsteps. What piece of advice do you have for a young player that is just coming into the college ranks --

C.J. STROUD: I just tell them to be confident, do the best they can, and just go out there and have fun. There's no point in trying to play out this world. You just have to do your job every play and try to execute the best you can. I definitely think those guys will do that, and my job is just to give them confidence and let them know that they're great players, and they'll be great on Saturday.

Q. How does it feel like to come home and play in a big game like the Rose Bowl?

C.J. STROUD: It's a great opportunity for me just to play in front of home fans and people who wanted to come out to Ohio to come see me play but couldn't make the trip. I definitely think it's a blessing for them to actually come and watch me play. I have uncles, cousins, my grandma is probably going to come. I'm really excited for that. Then, of course, like during this COVID world, no one was able to come last year, so I'm definitely hoping that they all get to come and have fun.

Q. How was it like having Justin kind of showing you the ropes and stuff at Ohio?

C.J. STROUD: He did a great job of just showing me what

to do, what not to do. He tried to critique me in my game and help me out with that. It's having guys like that when you first come in as a kid and trying to help you turn into a young man, I think that's a blessing, and it's definitely a positive thing.

Q. Who is on the aux cord, and what's on the play list?

C.J. STROUD: Usually it's our strength coach, Coach Quinn. He plays a little bit of everything. He tries to get everybody happy. You get some rap. You get some rock. I don't really like rock. You get some R & B. You'll get a little bit of everything, so it's usually Coach Quinn, our strength coach.

Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports