

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

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Clark Phillips

Press Conference



**Q. What do you think about the fact that you were committed to Ohio State, now you're playing against them?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: You know, man, it's just crazy. You just never know God's plan. Just thinking two and a half years ago I was fully committed to Ohio State and I was excited about becoming a Buckeye as a senior in high school. Now we're playing against them in one of the biggest games I've ever played in.

**Q. Why did you make the switch?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: You know, there was coaching adjustments with Ohio State. There was coaching certainty with Utah, and I really wanted to be a part of a program with a great defense, which Ohio State had, which was why I was intrigued, and also Utah had, and I feel like I made a great decision.

**Q. How hard a decision was it?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Hardest of my life, man. I wouldn't wish that on anybody, but it took prayer, it took a village. My whole family was with me and they helped me make a great decision because I wouldn't want to be anywhere else right now, but I am grateful for the experience and I am grateful for the Ohio State recruiting me as well as the Utah staff.

**Q. So was it after Jeff Hafley left?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, man, I loved Jeff Hafley. Still talk to him sometimes. Proud of what he's done at BC, but yeah, when he left, he was the D-coordinator at the time and he was helping with the corners, so definitely wanted to explore some other options, and Utah was someone I was talking to pretty often.

**Q. Were there any periods of time in between where you second-guessed yourself?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: No. I think it's a part of it where you kind of get like cold feet, whether they call it cold feet, or dang, did I really make a good decision. But I just stayed prayerful throughout the process and I asked God to give me strength and encouragement that I needed and confidence with the decision, because shoot, when you sign the NLI, it's like, now it's real, so it's like I've got to really have confidence in it.

So it took a lot of discernment. So when I got up here, things just started to happen. It was a whirlwind, and after game one there was no looking back.

**Q. Did you build relationships with Ohio State players in that recruiting process and have you had conversations with those guys leading into this game?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Not really, but I saw -- I think I saw a new coach in the bathroom at Disneyland, and I was, hey, Coach, how you doing. But it's still family, it's still love and stuff, but it's different. Yeah, definitely did build a great relationship in the recruiting process and during that recruiting process, but I feel like, yeah, it's all just kind of led up to this game.

But I'm just grateful for that staff and grateful for this staff, and I'm grateful to be in this game. It's huge.

**Q. Which coach did you see at Disneyland?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: It was a new coach. I didn't really recognize him, but I knew he was a coach because of his attire, and then I saw the Ohio State, and I was oh, man. So I felt obligated to say what's up.

**Q. How late in the process -- seemed like it was almost signing day.**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, it was signing day. People kind of had a clue or an inclination, but I didn't make that



decision until signing day.

**Q. You had to call I'm assuming Ryan Day?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Tough call. Tough call. Love Ryan Day. Love what he stands for. But yeah, when I had to -- we talked very often, and he was a big part of my recruitment, so of course out of respect that was a conversation I had to have first, and he understood, as great coaches do, and he knew that I had to do what's best for me, and that was coming here.

**Q. How hard was it to -- how hard did Ohio State try to keep you? What was that like?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: You know, it was definitely something that I felt like they were going to be -- they made it clear that they'd be missing me and that it was like really -- that's really, really hard, especially because I had decided to do it on signing day and it was so late in the process. I was planning on coming in early and wanted to make an impact. I think that made a big splash in that recruitment. It really hurt.

I was just prayerful that I was making the right decision because it was harder for me than probably I assume for a lot of people to see. It was definitely a hard decision.

**Q. Is this what you envisioned when you signed with Utah, that you'd be competing for Pac-12 Championships and competing in Rose Bowls?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, it's everything. You make goals at the beginning of the season and you just never know if you're going to accomplish them or when it's going to be. This was one of those things I would have never expected, but also excited for and you work for every single day, and I'm just like so grateful because who would have thought it would have been in my freshman year. I know it's my second freshman year, but who would have thought it would have been freshman year.

**Q. When you signed with Utah, I think you were one of the highest rated recruits that ever signed. A lot of people were like, why Utah? Do you feel like you set an example that Utah is a good place to go?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: In a way, yes. I can't say I paved the way because I remember guys doing it before I did it, but I can say that maybe I made it a little bit more comfortable for guys to make that switch because it was really, really tough, going from being committed to one of the biggest programs in the country to trying to go somewhere different. It was like, okay, what are you doing, why are you making that decision. So I feel like when you have

success doing that, maybe it gives other guys confidence or the ability to say, hey, you know what, I can go somewhere else and not be looked down upon or maybe looked down upon and still be successful. So I feel like that's a great way to put it.

**Q. What made you so comfortable that Utah could have this kind of success?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Faith. I knew the culture. That was the big thing for me. That's why for me it was like, all right, I understand these guys. When I was talking to the staff, when I saw the players in the locker room, when I got to talk to them, talk to guys like Terrell Burgess on the Rams now, and I saw the culture. The culture was super strong. They have a great defense, and they're just -- the way that they are, I was like, okay, I could be a part of this, and I wanted to be a part of a great defensively focused team, as well, and Coach Kyle Whittingham, I know that speaks for itself, and I was like, I want to be a part of that program, and so it was easy for me.

**Q. Talk about the emotion of the Pac-12 Championship game and the season as a whole for the whole team.**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Very, very emotional. We went through a lot this year. We made goals at the beginning of the season, and at the end of the season we lost some people. We lost one of our dear teammates in Aaron Lowe. We lost Ty Jordan last year. Just being in that game, it was something that we dreamed of and that those guys dreamed of. We felt like we were playing for something huge, something way bigger.

Yeah, man, it was really, really -- it was a special -- what a bittersweet moment because it was like, dang, just so glad that we got here, so glad that we won. I hugged Sharrieff Shah afterwards and we both just started crying because we couldn't hold it back. It was like, this is what we worked for. This is what Aaron wanted. This is what Ty wanted. We did it. No, it was super emotional.

**Q. Do you guys feel that you still have to prove yourself on a national stage?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah. That's the goal. When you're a program that's trying to gain notoriety and gain a name in terms of success, I feel like these games definitely help. Pac-12 Championships help. We've just got to continue to keep on dominating at a high level.

**Q. How would you describe your play, the way you've been playing?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: I think I did really well. Honestly for me I wanted to take that second step. My first season I only had five games, but it was something that I really wanted to do. People always talk about either the sophomore slump or that guy really raised his stock, and I felt like this year I raised my stock.

**Q. How excited are you for the challenge that is the Ohio State receiving corps?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Man, I'm so excited. I know some of those guys. But I'm just really excited because I know that whoever they put out there, those dudes are all good, and they were all the best of their class, the best wherever they were, and Ohio State does a really, really good job of developing receivers, so I'm excited about that.

**Q. Is Jaxon one of the guys you know?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, I heard of him, but not really that close with him, but no, that dude is a baller.

**Q. I imagine that would be match-up for you given the guys that are sitting out this game. Going up against a guy, a 1,000-yard receiver and everything he was able to accomplish, how do you see that match-up from an outside standpoint?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: I'm excited. I prepare every single game somewhat the same, somewhat different. The receivers are different, but in particular this match-up I'm excited for, man, because of course it's the biggest stage. This is the Rose Bowl. Shoot, you don't want nothing but good things to happen when you go up against a great receiver.

**Q. I'm sure you've been asked a few times already, but the fact that you're playing for Utah and this game is against Ohio State, does it feel a little surreal given your history with them?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, I was just saying like how two and a half years ago I was committed fully to Ohio State and I was excited about getting up there. I was all the way in and talking to Coach Day every day, I was talking to Coach Haf every day, and I was ready to enroll as soon as I committed really. It's surreal.

I feel like it's all glory to God because it was a tough decision being that I'm all in, but it was like -- it was a decision that I had to make, so I'm just excited for the opportunity to play against those guys because who would have thought that I'd be playing against them two years later.

**Q. I know in your recruitment the flip had a lot to do with Coach Haf. Even after Coach Haf left were you still very close to committing before Coach McDonald showed up again?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, I was still talking to the guys up there, but when Coach Haf decided to make that transition, I was kind of like -- I was already looking at other options. I was already talking to Utah consistently and stuff, and I was like, I don't know. Felt really, really comfortable with everybody, but I just felt like I had to make a decision, and this one was best for me at that time.

**Q. As a competitor, is it disappointing that you don't get to play against Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson on Saturday?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: You know, some people were asking me that. Honestly, I feel like whoever they put out there, like I said, is going to be a challenge, is going to be a match-up. Respect everybody, fear none. That's my mantra. That's my mindset.

But I do think very highly of those guys. Proud of what they accomplished. I actually got to cover Garrett Wilson at a 7-on-7 event back in high school. Chris, I've talked to him on my visits and stuff. I look up to those guys and think they're great players, but at the same time I know whoever they put out there I'm going to have to show up and bring my "A" game.

**Q. Do you know CJ Stroud at all, you guys being California guys?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, we saw each other at a lot of camps, saw each other at a lot of big-time places, so I feel like that dude, man, another guy I'm super proud of. Was proud when I saw him at the Heisman thing. I thought that was super big. But at the same time we're excited to play against them.

**Q. Coach was just talking about how in terms of the depth at cornerback that you guys have experimented with some non-cornerbacks trying to figure it out. What are the difficulties of a guy changing positions trying to learn something new on the fly?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: I think the biggest one is just like confidence because especially with a position like cornerback, confidence is going to be really, really fragile. I feel like on the surface it can be straight, but you give up some stuff or something happens, I feel like you really have to be strong rooted and really confident and the team really has to continue to build you up, and you have to get a lot of reps in, and I think that's why it's great that we're

doing the experiments now. Even last week we were doing it. We were trying a lot of different guys.

We were just trying to make sure that we could get someone that understands the position, someone that's athletic, of course. No one is not athletic at this level, I don't think, but someone that can really do it and someone that's smart enough to learn on the fly, as well.

**Q. When you say a lot of guys, did any of those guys stick?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Yeah, most guys. We're just trying to get rotational reps because this position is all about repetition. You can go one day and you can be great and then the next day it's like, okay, he's not repped up, he's not looking right. We've been just trying to try new guys but keeping the same guys in the rotation. A lot of different guys, though.

**Q. How do you not let the emotions of this game kind of get too much knowing that this is the school you decommited from? How do you keep that in perspective?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: Man, prayer and meditation. That's something I do daily. It's something I take really serious. It's something that helps me visualize before the game, and then just keeps my spirit kind of like in a nice -- at ease I would say because I just like to pray that God relieves me of an anxious spirit. When you prepare the way that I do and the way a lot of guys do, you can build up anxiety. You can build up, like dang, I'm a little bit nervous for this, a little bit worries. But that's what I pray that doesn't occur. I pray that God gives me a calm spirit and the confidence to go out there and to dominate.

Yeah, I just feel like it's just prayer and meditation, visualization, and then I go out there and I'm loose and I'm ready to go.

**Q. How much would it mean to you personally as well as the university to beat Ohio State?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: A whole lot, a whole lot, personally and to the university. I'm excited about it. I know it's going to be a great game. Got a lot of respect for those guys on the other side, and I think this is our year.

**Q. How did you get into the meditation part? You don't see too many young guys at your level, at your age getting into meditation. How did that start?**

CLARK PHILLIPS: I've always looked at the great ones like the Kobe Bryants, I've always looked at their

philosophies and their things, what do they do to become great and what do they do to help them get that edge and things of that nature or to help them have the mindset that they do in the game. I've also studied -- I'm Christian, but I've studied some Buddhist principles, so Phil Jackson, I found it super fascinating that he talks about the art of staying in the moment, and so that was something that he preached to his teams from Kobe Bryant to -- even Michael Jordan, he talked about how he admired him because it was like, a lot of people -- when you prepare, when you work super hard and stuff, you can be looking forward to the next day and looking forward to the future. But if you stay in the moment and master the thing at hand, you can push through anything, so I thought that was super cool. It's something I try to focus on, so that's been my focus recently, just kind of staying in the moment. Especially down here, the bowl experience, every day is something new. Just stay in the moment, go to practice staying in the moment. So that's really big.

For me getting into meditation was super big because I just felt like it kind of calmed, it centered me, allowed me to realize everything. I just literally think about the day, I'm thinking about what the plans are, what my goals are, and it's just a way for me to be reflective as well as kind of see my goals.

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