

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

Sunday, December 4, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

Coach Kyle Whittingham

Utah Utes

Coach James Franklin

Penn State Nittany Lions

Press Conference

KAREN LINHART: Thank you for joining today's head coach teleconference for the 109th Rose Bowl game. I'm Karen Linhart, the Rose Bowl's marketing and media director.

Following opening remarks from both head coaches, we will open up the floor for questions.

The Tournament of Roses is thrilled to host the Utah Utes and the Penn State Nittany Lions in this year's Rose Bowl game. This will be the first meeting in history between Utah and Penn State.

I'm joined today by Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham and Penn State head coach James Franklin. I'd like to start by asking both coaches to give an opening remark. Coach Whittingham will go first followed by Coach Franklin.

Coach Whittingham?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, you bet. We're elated to be back in the Rose Bowl, second trip in as many years. It was a great game last year versus Ohio State. It went right down to the wire, came up on the short end, obviously, but our guys had a great experience.

Rose Bowl, I've been to quite a few of the bowls, the New Year's Six bowls, and Rose Bowl is special. We're going to travel well. Our fans are going to be showing up, and we should have great support there.

Players, like I said, are very excited to go back and have the experience again, and we're just looking forward to the trip.

Penn State, a tremendous opponent. Been doing a little research on them. Play great defense, a couple really good backs, nearly 1,000 yards each, turnover margin in their favor. They do a lot of really good things, things that



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really good football teams do.

It reminds me of us in a way, the way we approach the game and how we go about our business.

Coach Franklin, got all the respect in the world for him, what he's done there. I've had a chance to meet him a few times in person. Don't know him real well but know enough to know that he's a heck of a football coach, and we know it's going to be a big challenge for us, and like I said, we're excited to be there.

KAREN LINHART: Thank you, Coach. Coach Franklin?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yes, truly appreciate the opportunity. Obviously the history and the tradition of the Rose Bowl speaks for itself. We had a phenomenal experience last time we were involved. Our players and staff could not be more excited about making the trip again.

Obviously got a ton of respect for the University of Utah, their history, their tradition, and Coach has done a phenomenal job there. I was able to watch their game the other night, and what a great game for college football. They played so well and really played well all season long.

We're just getting started with the breakdowns and trying to kind of understand who they are. It's one thing to watch the game on TV as somewhat of a fan. It's another thing to study them and break them down.

Really good football team, coached extremely well, an experienced, gutsy quarterback who's a competitor, and this is going to be a great game.

I think there's obviously some really cool facts. The fact that Penn State has played every Pac-12 school except for Utah, it's not too often in 2022 that you're able to do things for the first time ever, so that's really cool.

Then for Penn State, we played in this game 100 years ago, so really, really excited about this opportunity. There's a ton of cool facts and things about it, but at the end of the day we've got to go out, represent the Big Ten well, and play well for our Penn State community.



Q. For James and Kyle, does the Rose Bowl, is it a more inviting game do you think for your players who are considering not playing in the bowl game because last year obviously there was a problem with Ohio State. Is this a more inviting game for those who might be on the fence?

JAMES FRANKLIN: For Penn State specifically, obviously in my 12 years as a head coach, I've never had an opt-out until last year, and I think that's a challenge across college football right now. I think that's why there's a lot of conversations going on about expansion and things like that.

Obviously the Rose Bowl, whether you're a coach or whether you're a fan or whether you're a player, the Rose Bowl holds a special place in a lot of people's perspective.

I think obviously playing in that type of game on that type of stage and against an opponent like Utah, I think it helps. We expect that almost the entirety of our team will play and compete, but that is a challenge in general for college football right now.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, as far as University of Utah, we had no opt-outs last year. Everybody played. Fully expecting that to happen this year. Doesn't mean it necessarily will, but I've heard nothing of the sort to think any differently.

Rose Bowl, terrific game obviously, right in the heart of our recruiting footprint. We have a ton of guys from southern Cal on our team that will be excited to play in front of friends and family.

You never say never, but right now we anticipate everybody playing, but things happen. But right now that's not the case. We're excited to make the trip down.

Q. James, obviously Sean has been through a lot in his time at Penn State; what does it mean to you as his coach to have him end his college career on a stage like this?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I'm happy for him. I'm happy for the whole senior class. Kyle has been through it, as well, with COVID and everything else that these guys have experienced throughout their career. It's been different.

Sean is just a guy, he's really represented our university and our football program the right way, both on and off the field, in his entire career, and he's been doing it for a long time. I'm going to check the picture of that Rose Bowl played 100 years ago and make sure Sean isn't in it

because he's been playing football at Penn State for a long time. He's maximized that entire experience. He's maximized it as a student, as a student-athlete. He's going to go on and be a very, very successful businessman after his football career is done, and he's done it the right way and he's done it with class.

I'm happy for him. I'm proud of him. And I know he's going to prepare like crazy to go out and play the best he possibly can against a really tough opponent.

Q. Kyle and James, just wondering your feelings about playing in this game considering it might be the last traditional Pac-12-Big Ten match-up for a while.

JAMES FRANKLIN: You know, obviously, again, when you talk about the college landscape, it has changed. I think your point is a good one. We're going to be looking at a very different model here moving forward.

Yeah, I think there's some history when you talk about the traditional Big Ten-Pac-12 match-ups, and specifically when it comes to the Rose Bowl and the significance of the Rose Bowl on both of our conferences for as long as you can remember.

We understand the importance of that, the magnitude of that. But again, at the end of the day, we've just got to do everything we possibly can to prepare and play well against a really good opponent.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: From our perspective, I grew up in the shadow of the Rose Bowl down there in southern Cal, and what a great tradition. Looked forward to it every single year.

Things are changing, as you mentioned, and I think there's going to be major changes in my opinion, huge changes in college football. It's going to be pretty much unrecognizable next five, six years compared to what it is now.

We're excited to be able to play in the Rose Bowl this year, like I said, in the traditional fashion and in its traditional time slot and all that type of stuff, so I can just speak for us being elated, as I mentioned, to be there, and the Rose Bowl experience last year was tremendous, and we expect more of the same this year.

Q. What was your first impression when you heard that you guys will be facing off against each other in the Rose Bowl?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, for us at Penn State, obviously you look at the University of Utah and the success that

they've had under Kyle's leadership, to me it was exciting. Then right away I started to think about when has Penn State played Utah from a historical perspective, and found out obviously this is the first time playing each other, so I thought that was something that was, I think, really cool and exciting for our fan base and for our players, as well.

Then after just watching them play here recently, tough, hard-nosed, disciplined, gritty team that finds ways to win all different ways. I've got a ton of respect for what they do and how they do it, and it's going to be a tremendous challenge. That's kind of the first thing I thought of when I heard who the match-up was against.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, me, I would echo a lot of the same things Coach Franklin just pointed out. I didn't realize that it was the first time that the two teams will have ever played each other, but I've been a college football fan since -- my dad played pro football, coached for many years, so I've been a football fan forever, and watched Penn State from afar. What a great tradition. That place is -- I've never been to a game there, but it looks nuts to play in that stadium with that crowd and those fans. Of course JoePa was what I grew up with, him being the guy at the helm, so just excited. It's a storied program, a lot of tradition, a lot of history, ton of success through the years, and we're relatively new on the scene compared to what they've got going and what they've had historically.

We're excited to play and excited for the challenge, and like Coach said, we've got all the respect in the world, as well, for their program.

Q. Kyle, a couple weeks ago you talked about 9-3 wasn't necessarily the record you guys were hoping for this year, but now you're back in the Rose Bowl. This is kind of the goal you guys had wanted to attain. What does this do for you as a program as well as people viewing it from an outside perspective?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Well, I think it's another step in the right direction in the evolution of our program. We're a program that is still hopefully on the rise and trying to make our mark in college football. We had the breakthrough last year with our first Pac-12 Championship, and preaching to the team all year long this year, this off-season and all through fall camp how it's harder to stay on top than it is to get to the top, and the challenge was trying to repeat.

Through some unique circumstances we were able to do that and take another step forward. So that's kind of my take on it is another step forward for the program, and we've just got to keep evolving and keep progressing and stay on this trajectory.

Q. James, Sean has meant so much to the program throughout his time there, but this year you bring in two freshman backs who were outstanding. How much does it help your offense to have that kind of balance and have two players who can run the ball so effectively?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think the balance that we were able to operate with this year on the offensive side of the ball I think was obviously a big part of our success, really as a team, offense, defense and special teams, to be able to sustain drives and make big plays. It's unusual to do it with a freshman, let alone two true freshmen. But both of them complemented each other really well, and we were able to not only run the ball but I think it created more explosive plays for us. Our play action pass game, as well, you mix a little RPO in there, as well, too, I think it's been really good.

I think it allowed Sean to really kind of operate our offense from a run game perspective in terms of how he IDs the front and sets up our blocking schemes, and same thing in pass protection, and allowed us maybe in some down-and-distance situations, which were traditional throwing downs, to be able to run the ball a little bit more.

I think it's really helped our offense. It's helped our quarterback. I think it's helped our offensive line. Those guys have been big-time players for us all year long, and we're going to need them at the Rose Bowl obviously, too.

Q. Coach Whittingham, you've been with this program since 1994 and have seen it through all kinds of different growth periods. Was there ever a point you could envision where Utah is currently at, being at two different Rose Bowl games, back in 1994?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Wow, I don't think I could have foreseen that. Where we were back in '94 as opposed to where we are now is a stark contrast. Not that we weren't good, because we were a good football team, but we were in the Mountain West conference or the WAC actually back then and then moved to the Mountain West.

To say that we could have foreseen the way the program would evolve and the heights that our players would be able to reach, that was something that I don't know if anyone could have seen that or forecasted that.

But we're where we're at because of our players. We've got really good players. Our assistant coaches have done a great job of recruiting the right players into this program, taking those players and developing them, and we just have, I guess, a blue-collar mentality and attitude around here that we bring our lunch pail to work every day and get

after it, take no shortcuts, prepare Monday through Friday, and that's really what the program has been built on ever since Coach McBride, who was the original head coach to hire me and fortunate to be able to come to the university because of that, and then of course Urban Meyer for a couple years, had the opportunity to work with him, and he really started the ball rolling in that direction.

Like I say, we've just been able to continue to get a little bit better each year. Again, college football is all about players, it's not about coaches or anything else, it's about the players. They're the reason for everything.

We've got a great group of players, like I said.

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