

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

Thursday, December 29, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

## Utah Utes

## Coach Morgan Scalley

### Press Conference



#### Q. How was yesterday?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Awesome. I'm a Disneyland guy. My family goes every year. We kind of know the route. It was a neat experience, and for the guys on the team that haven't done it before, you could tell who loved it, who didn't by how many hit the first bus out. It was great.

#### Q. When you look at the film and everything that you've dissected over the month, how similar do they look to you guys, and is that an advantage if they are?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I would say fairly similar. They pride themselves in running the ball. The quarterback is a smart, savvy football player that understands coverages, and they are a physical football team. Offensive line is very well-coached. The wide receivers, you can tell they block. So you can tell a team that plays physical and is coached the right way.

#### Q. Does it seem weird to face a team that resembles you?

MORGAN SCALLEY: I think we've faced those teams before. Oregon State is very similar to what we do. They're a physical team, a lot of shifts and motions, eye tricks and stuff like that and pride themselves on running the ball, so we've faced teams like that. This is a high-caliber team. They've won 10 games for a reason, and we're excited for the opportunity.

#### Q. What do you think of their young running backs?

MORGAN SCALLEY: 10 and 13 both provide a lot -- I would say 10 flashes a little bit more in terms of the -- just dipping the shoulder, getting those extra yards. 13 is more of the slasher. Both of them very effective, and you can tell they have all the confidence in the world in both of them, and they've been productive for a reason. Great offensive line, and like I said, they do a great job with not only zone, outside zone, their counter, they run everything at you.

#### Q. Are they hard to get (indiscernible)?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Not in the Northwestern game, but hopefully there's enough rain to do that. That was the biggest issue in the Northwestern game. But ball security is something they pride themselves on, as well, so the quarterback does a pretty good job of making sure he's not putting himself in bad situations and throwing the ball into bad coverages.

Like I said, he's been around enough. He sees coverages. They do a great job with checking to the sideline, as well, so the offensive staff sees what coverage you're in. We've got to do a great job of disguising, got to do a great job of post-snap movement. But they're a well-coached team.

#### Q. The Pac-12 has had some excellent quarterbacks this year. How much does playing in the Pac-12 season prepare you for what Penn State can do?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, the other thing, too, is just the different types of offenses that you see in the Pac-12. We've had our running quarterbacks, and then you've had the teams a lot like us that pride themselves in running the ball. They're a play-action team, will hit you deep. So they're a lot more like Oregon State than maybe like a USC.

But if a team can play smashmouth football and beat you up around the ball, it's a long day. It's no fun.

#### Q. What is the versatility of their running backs, having a couple guys that can really run the ball well?

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, they can do a bunch of -- in terms of different personnel groups, they can put both backs on the field at one time. Both of them do a great job of catching the football, as well, so they'll motion the back out on air in some of their empty sets and have no problem throwing to them. Some teams they'll motion him back out and he's just an afterthought, whereas their backs, you really have to cover them. They do a good job catching the ball, as well.



**Q. What has been the biggest difference in being able to get your defense to where more you'd like to see it than the beginning of the season?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, at the beginning of the season, you had Lander Barton was a true freshman, Mohamoud Diabate, getting his feet wet in our defense, some miscues early. But this is a fun group to coach, and they take to coaching. They take to hard coaching. Every week they've come ready to prepare.

I thought they got better every single week, and usually that happens when you have leadership and guys buy into the process and understand, okay, the film is going to show you everything; don't listen to the outside noise, the film will show you everything you need to know about what we need to correct, what we need to fix, and they've done that, and I'm proud of them.

**Q. You talked about the evolution of the team, getting better every week throughout the season. Just the natural evolution of this defense, what stands out to you about the progression to get to this point?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: I would say just their buy-in to each other. You saw early on a bunch of guys just trying to do their 1/11th and trying to get their job done instead of playing together as a complete defense, and you see that a little bit in the celebration now. They all celebrate together, and they're having fun together. They're buying into each other, understanding that, okay, not only am I understanding my 1/11th, but what that 11th does for the other guy.

If you come watch practice, it's fun. They're having fun. It's a group that if you don't have that camaraderie, it makes it really difficult in this defense, so proud of them.

**Q. How would you assess their tight ends and the role they play in their offense?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, first of all, the first thing I look for, do their tight ends enjoy blocking, and they enjoy blocking. So again, another sign of a well-coached team and a team that prides themselves in running the football.

I mean, you look at their productivity catching the football on their away boots, their switch four verts, they have no problem. That quarterback has no problem going to their tight ends. It's kind of a comfort level for them. They do a great job catching the football, sure-handed tight end.

**Q. Do you anticipate them maybe exploiting the loss of Phillips?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: I would, yeah. I mean, it's a reason that we've focused on trying to get depth in that room. Zemaiah Vaughn has done a great job. JaTravis Broughton, we've got Caine Savage who has got some reps this season at the nickel spot, Sione Vaki who's proven to be a fantastic nickel for us. So we've got more depth obviously last year at this point than we did last year, but yeah, I mean, if you've got -- if a strength of a defense is no longer there, you bet you should exploit it or try to exploit it.

**Q. Did Phillips involve the coaches in the decision?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: No, but we're very supportive, and you look at what he's done for our program, the type of kid he is. I'm excited for his future, I really am. He's a kid that sacrificed a lot, that gave us everything he had while he was here, and more power to him. I'm excited for him.

**Q. I saw a picture of you in a Philadelphia Eagles uniform. I'm just curious --**

MORGAN SCALLEY: That was the extent of my NFL career was three days with Philadelphia. I loved every minute of it. I was one of Harbaugh's favorites -- he was the special teams coordinator at the time, and while I piqued his interest, the safety coach wasn't necessarily as interested in me. That was it. Three days and a tryout with Buffalo, and then Coach Whittingham said enough is enough, let's get into coaching.

**Q. Can you just recollect a little bit, when you were recruiting Cole or when you got a hold of his film or how you became aware of him?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Our recruiting staff does a great job, and they understand what I'm looking for. I told them, hey, listen, we're looking for high-IQ, tough athletes that are versatile, that can play multiple positions, his was a guy that to them the film popped. They showed me, and I loved it. Initially you couldn't tell was he a linebacker, was he a safety? I just loved how he would break a drive on a football. He was committed to Duke at the time, had high academic interest, and just got in contact with him and talked to him about the safety tradition in our defense, the versatility of the safety. Him and his dad and his mom fell in love with it, and again, unique in the sense that never visited Salt Lake City and decided to jump on board, but man, has he been a huge, huge addition to this defense in terms of what he's able to do.

**Q. How difficult was it to recruit not only him but anybody at that time in the middle of COVID, guys couldn't visit? How difficult was that?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Difficult to a point. I mean, we still were coming off a pretty good season in 2019. 2020 had its own -- obviously with COVID, its own feel. But we still had a good name, and the hard part for us is we value the in-person evaluation, seeing a kid move in person. Everyone can put together a good highlight film for the most part, but seeing how they respond to tough coaching, seeing how they respond maybe to adversity in practice. We weren't able to do that.

Like I said, with Cole, man, did we hit the jackpot.

**Q. Could you just reflect a little bit on Clark and what he's meant to your defense?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, again, he came in and did nothing but buy into the process, buy into what we were doing.

I wish I had a million Clark Phillips. I'm proud of him for what he's accomplished. I'm grateful for what he's brought to our program. I've learned more from Clark than he's probably learned from me, and wish him and his family nothing but the best.

**Q. You've had a lot of guys go to the NFL, you've had guys level early for the NFL. How much advice do you try to bestow on guys when they are trying to make that underclassman choice?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Oh, as much as possible. Coach Whittingham is obviously the one that's going to spearhead that. He talks to all the scouts. We've got our scouting department. I'll talk to the scouts when they want to ask me questions about kids.

You know, we just want to make sure we're doing what's best for the kid, and if you don't do that, man, it's tough for those guys to ever come back to your program.

Again, what's best for the kid is telling them what we feel, what the scouts are telling us. Sometimes that's, hey, you should move on, or hey, we think you should come back; here are the reasons why; here's what the scouts think. As much of an informed decision as they can -- we provide as much feedback as we can.

**Q. What Clark has done, his resume to this point, did you believe he was ready to move on?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: No question. Speaks for itself, yeah. Excited for him and his future.

**Q. Do you get the sense that it's changing for maybe guys that would be maybe third round or third day with**

**the chance to make NIL money, that there's a chance for more financial benefits in staying for another year?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: You bet. No question, there's a big drop-off in terms of signing bonus when you're talking about maybe late second to late third. That's kind of a big difference in signing bonus. Depending on NIL money that young men can make in your college program, you bet that should be a factor in whether or not they come back.

**Q. What's the strategic difference in announcing the decision to declare before the bowl game? I remember last year there were a bunch of guys who announced that --**

MORGAN SCALLEY: I have not thought about that. I have not thought about it. But hey, you tell me. I'll pass it on.

**Q. Last year a Penn State player literally right after the bowl game was over and he declared for the draft.**

MORGAN SCALLEY: I gotcha. We didn't know whether or not -- who was it? For Ohio State, he's one of their top wide outs, No. 2 -- it wasn't Wilson.

**Q. Olave.**

MORGAN SCALLEY: We didn't know if he was going to play in the bowl game. There's a strategic advantage there not knowing who to prepare for. For the player, it's just hey, let's go, I've finished my career, I'm ready to go, and kind of letting the fan base and everyone know I'm moving on.

**Q. As guys are trying to make up their minds, how important is it for you and Whit and Andy and the rest of the coaches really to give these guys space to try to make up their mind and not put pressure on them?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, very important. Again, it needs to be an informed decision. They need to hear from the parties that matter. Sometimes there's outside voices that can get in there that should not be a factor, but the voices that matter are their family, obviously, what we're hearing from the scouts, which is the most important, and then the advice that we give them along the way.

I was an NFL scout liaison for five years, and you know the things that they're looking for, so you try to educate these guys, their entire time while they're with you as to what these guys are looking for and how you can increase your value, your draft value.

Are we perfect at it? No. But again, it's all about with the



player in mind, his best interest in mind and making sure it is an informed decision from the right parties.

**Q. You talked about the 2019 team, but you've been with Utah forever. Talk about the overall growth trajectory of the program since you were there as a player.**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah. Yeah, we joke about it all the time. We had our old facility, we had one bathroom and you had to go downstairs to use it.

Just from the facilities to just the depth on your team of athletes, your ability to recruit. I remember going to Houston, Texas, and really people asking Utah what conference are you in? And now it's "Hey Scalley, I've got a guy for you." So just completely different.

I remember going to a coach, we were playing Alabama in the Sugar Bowl, and he said, be careful what you wish for, and then we beat Alabama, and you go on and have some of the success that we've had, and those same coaches look at you a little bit differently now.

Coach Whittingham and just the athletic department, the faith they've had in him, he had two 5-7 seasons in a row, but just their belief in him to get it where it needed to be, credit to this university and the administrative staff and credit to Kyle Whittingham who's just done a phenomenal job of creating a culture, sustaining a culture, recruiting to it, and just continuing to have success.

**Q. Is there an offense you've faced this year that's similar to Penn State in any way?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Man, our offense, every week. Just the shifting, the motioning, the different sets, your tough run game, the great play action game. Oregon State, very similar in that sense, as well. So yeah, we've faced a couple offenses, most importantly our own offense.

It's going to be a great match-up. I think both teams are fairly even in the match-up, and it's going to be a physical battle, and we're excited for it. I look across at that film and what I see is a well-coached team, a team that prides themselves in physicality, running the football, a smart quarterback that understands coverages and a coaching staff that pays attention to the details. Much respect for Penn State and what they do.

**Q. You guys have been very good when it comes to pressure this year and creating things with your pressure packages. What's really stood out about the way you've succeeded in that?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, Lewis Powell and Luther Elliss have done a great job really looking at where we deficient, not only in scheme but where are we deficient in technique, how can we become better pass rushers, how can we get a better four-man rush, and also how can we generate pressure from different looks. You've got some smart offensive line coaches, some very good offensive schemes out there, and they do a great job of each week kind of letting me know here's how we feel we can exploit them.

**Q. What do you feel like the Penn State offense does best?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, again, it would be the complementary play-action game off their run game. They make you feel that you've got to load the box and stop the run and just when you do it, it's a seven, eight-man protection and three-man routes down the field.

A lot like us in that sense, right; they pride themselves in running the ball, and their play-action game off of it is very good.

**Q. If you look at this year's New Year's Six, you and Penn State (indiscernible) Michigan, back-to-back playoff years. Given such an outlier that COVID season was, how do you go about -- what you took away from that, how you got back into the groove of '21 and now '22.**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Man, yeah. I wouldn't say you throw that season out because you have to learn from what does the film tell you, and what the film told us is here's where we're deficient and here's where we have to improve. You've got to recruit to that. We didn't feel like we were far off, but that did -- that season did provide some adversity in the sense that we're a man coverage team, and a lot of prep for that season, just because of COVID rules and regulations, we couldn't press. We couldn't do some things in practice that you normally do, and we had some young corners at that time, Clark being one of them, Clark Phillips being one of them, so his entire first season he's playing a lot more zone coverage than we would have liked.

That would kind of be the difference in that 2020 season is we had to change a little bit of who we were schematically.

Having said that, we learned a lot about what we liked about zone coverage, and so you take kind of what you were forced to do and you take the best of both worlds, who we are and kind of things that we liked from that season.

**Q. There's still decisions to be made, guys might be coming back, et cetera. Where do you believe Nate**



## **Richards might fit in in '23 once he comes back?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Oh, we're excited for him, yeah. Gets home on the 30th --

### **Q. Of?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: This month. He's another versatile athlete, a lot like Cole Bishop, like Sione Vaki, that he's going to find his way on the field, and he was a starter for us before he left so I don't anticipate that being my different. He's going to have to get his mission legs underneath him and we'll see how his body has developed, as well, but we're excited for him and we're going to put the best 11 on the field. We're not going to put 11 safeties on the field, but we'll find the best fit.

All our guys understand that you are always competing for a job. We don't promise anything to anybody other than the opportunity to compete, and that's why I love coaching these guys.

### **Q. You alluded to this, but when a kid comes off a mission and comes back to you guys, is there some level of mystery, what they're going to look like, what kind of shape, their body, et cetera?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: You bet. Not so much nowadays because you've got email and pictures and stuff like that, but at the same time, each mission is different. Some missions the mission president gives them access to weights and weight training. Some missions they're out in the middle of nowhere and they've got no access to it.

Doug Elisaia, our strength staff does a great job of when they get off their mission bringing them in, assessing where they're at, letting us know what the nutrition staff what needs to happen in order for the player to be ready enough to -- it's one thing to be running and doing push-ups. It's another thing in combat, right?

They do a great job letting us know when they're ready.

### **Q. Tell me about the RSN model your defense has.**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, our culture is something that we take pride in, RSN, be Relentless Smart Nasty ball hawks. It's something that we established I think my second year as a defensive coordinator, but it really ties into Coach Whittingham's team-like culture. Culture is everything in my opinion, and if you don't create it, it's going to create itself. Sometimes a lot of the time it's not what you want.

Our guys understand that being relentless makes up for a

lot of mistakes on the field. Playing smart is not -- smart situationally, understanding an offense, how they're going to attack you in certain situations. Nasty is not blowing snot rockets and yelling and screaming; it's taking ownership in your role, not giving excuses, not making excuses, and then ball hawks is just the ball is meant for our offense to have it, not for their offense to have it, and we've got to get it back.

### **Q. Penn State has tried to build themselves to compete with the likes of Ohio State. From what you've seen or film how does Penn State compare to what you saw from Ohio State last year?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, you look at the way they run the ball on those teams, and I would say they're pretty effective at it. Each game provides its own match-ups, disadvantages, advantages. I'm not as aware of what those are against the teams that they play. I'm not watching their defenses well. So tough to tell. I'm focused on the Utes.

### **Q. It seems like the national title game is going to be either Georgia-Michigan rematch or an Ohio State-Michigan rematch. When you play a team every year in conference versus maybe playing a non-conference opponent a couple years in a row, how similar or different is that when you have a degree of familiarity from one year to the next?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Well, I would say in these games, preparing for a bowl game is a lot like preparing for Week 1 in the sense that you've got enough time to change some things up. I think anyone that's paying attention to these bowl games and these cross-conference games, it's tough to tell anything because you have opt-outs, you have changes, guys hitting the portal, you have time to prepare and implement scheme that maybe a team hasn't seen before.

So I would say that the teams that fundamentally and technically are the most sound and physical are usually the teams that end up winning.

### **Q. You played Oregon twice last year, USC twice this year. What goes into that dynamic, when you sort of have used all your stuff and seen each other already once in the year?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: Yeah, obviously you've got to do a great job of self-scouting. What did we do against them? What are they going to use to counteract? The primary scheme that we used against USC or a good deal of that is something they hadn't seen before from us. It was a three-down odd front that again, because of our guys'



buy-in, we were able to do something like that.

Credit to our players and our coaching staff for coaching it up, but that's the kind of stuff that you've got to do, self-scout and provide something that second time around that they haven't seen before.

**Q. Clark Phillips is a California kid. Would you mind telling me a little bit about him and what he's meant to the program?**

MORGAN SCALLEY: I wish I had a ton of him. You talk about a guy that completely bought into your program, and from day one was a yes, coach, yes, sir football player, willing to do whatever, can't say enough about things about Clark Phillips. Some team is going to be lucky enough to have him a part of their program. He's going to do right off the field, he's going to do right on the field, and great job by Sharrieff Shah recruiting him and developing him, as well.

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