

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

Thursday, December 29, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

## Utah Utes

### R.J. Hubert

#### Press Conference



#### Q. How was Disneyland for you?

R.J. HUBERT: Disneyland is awesome. Me and my family, we love Disneyland. Being out there, it was great to take a deep breath and have fun for a little bit.

#### Q. Not your first time at Disneyland?

R.J. HUBERT: Absolutely not. I've been there plenty of times.

#### Q. Do you have a favorite ride?

R.J. HUBERT: My favorite ride overall I would probably say just Space Mountain. And then with my kids, I like to do Jungle Cruise.

#### Q. Speaking of fun, one of the things I like to do, I host the UCLA football podcast, and I like to ask some of the players on there, who is the funniest guy on the roster. Who is the funniest guy on the roster for you guys?

R.J. HUBERT: You know what? The funniest person in my opinion, and the media probably doesn't see this, is Cam Rising. He's funny, he's a goofy guy in the locker room. But he doesn't always show that side to everyone else outside of the locker room.

#### Q. He's one of those guys, he has to get comfortable with you first.

R.J. HUBERT: For sure, he's got to trust you. He's got to get comfortable. He's gotta know you really well, so, yeah.

#### Q. Speaking of Cam, what is he like? Just as a leader, a player, what is something maybe someone outside of the team wouldn't know about him, other than being one of the funnier guys?

R.J. HUBERT: Cam's just a fighter. Once you get to know

him, you know that he's somebody you can trust, you can rely on to make the right plays and make great decisions.

So something that other people might not know about him, I don't know if anything comes to mind right now, but man, he's just a brother. He's just close with everybody and people trust him.

#### Q. And I know Clark Phillips isn't playing in this game, but he's a California kid. Just tell me a little bit about him, what he's meant to the defense?

A. Clark's been awesome. Clark's elevated our level of play for so long this season and really since he's gotten here on campus to Utah. So he's been awesome.

He's helped people in other position groups get better, not just the guys in his room. So he's been a great addition to the Utah football program.

#### Q. For Penn State and what they do on offense, what are some things you've seen from them and that you may be expecting?

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, they're going to run the football. They're going to try to establish a healthy run game. Run play-action off of it, as they should do if you have a good run game going. So they're a really good team, well-coached and they do their assignments really well.

#### Q. We've talked a lot about your injuries and your road to get back here. How does this Rose Bowl run feel differently now that you're healthy, you're contributing and you're playing well?

R.J. HUBERT: Last year was a little bit tough. Being in the Rose Bowl I wasn't part of the game that got us here which was the championship game. So to know that I played a part in the whole season and then having a 9-3 record and going to win a championship and being a big part of that, it really kind of helps -- it's gratifying to say the least.

It helps me to realize I'm part of the reason that we're here. Let's take advantage of this opportunity. Just really



grateful to be in this position.

**Q. What did you think of the parade yesterday and all the pomp and circumstance that went with that?**

R.J. HUBERT: It's amazing. It's something I've always dreamed of doing. I've always loved Disneyland and I've always been the one watching the parade. To actually be in the parade is just a mind-blowing experience.

**Q. You have another year of eligibility?**

R.J. HUBERT: I do have one.

**Q. Do you know what your plans are yet for next time?**

R.J. HUBERT: I haven't decided yet. I've talked a little bit with my family. We've had some discussions, but we haven't come to an absolute conclusion. So options are still on the table, but not one is decided on yet.

**Q. Obviously now with NIL, guys can make money in school. How much of that is part of the decision-making process?**

R.J. HUBERT: I think for a lot of people it plays a part in the decision-making process. People want to make money and you get to a point in your career, I can make money professionally or I can make money still in college. So I think that does play a factor into whether people stay or go in the college football realm.

**Q. Is the NFL still something that you want to pursue at some point?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, that's always been a dream of mine.

**Q. Talking to Devaughn, he's trying to make his decision, he's talking about his age and he understands that age is against him, and you're smiling. How much of a concern is that? Again, you want a legitimate shot at the NFL knowing that the older you get, it gets hard?**

R.J. HUBERT: Devaughn and I are about two weeks away in age. So, yeah, we're both 25 now. So, yeah, we're up there in age and that does play a factor. As your career goes along, you're not getting any younger.

And with age comes the ability to no longer be able to heal as fast from injuries, from things like that. So you've got to be really prudent in your decision-making and as that age comes along. And so that does play a big factor in it.

**Q. When you look at how well Cole has played over**

**two years, how have you seen him grow as a player?**

R.J. HUBERT: He's been awesome. Cole, I think the biggest leap was the moment he got here in spring ball last year, in 2021, and then to when the season started. He made pretty good progress, but as that season came along he made leaps and bounds of progress.

So I've always been excited to see what he's going to do in his second year. He hasn't let anyone down, I don't think. He hasn't let me down at least. So he's awesome. I'm excited to see what he can do this next year as well.

**Q. How long have you guys been out?**

R.J. HUBERT: Like this morning?

**Q. Out in California?**

R.J. HUBERT: Out in California? We got here the evening of the 27th. So I guess two days.

**Q. How was Disneyland? Did you do Disneyland?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, big Disneyland guy. Love Disneyland. We stayed as late as we could. We stayed until 9:00. But I have two boys. We needed to get them to bed. They were knocked out at the time we went on the bus.

**Q. Got to take your family?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, I'll take a free Disneyland trip anytime.

**Q. Your first thoughts on physically being back in California for another Rose Bowl? I know the game is still several days away. But being back here, getting ready for another Rose Bowl, what's the mentality feeling like amongst you and your teammates?**

R.J. HUBERT: It's fun. I mean, you want to enjoy the bowl experience, but I think a lot of us are thinking of this as a business trip. There's a lot of fun things that we get to do, like Disneyland, like go to the wax museum and things like that.

But for the most part we just have to separate that from the work that we're doing, the meetings that we're having, the film that we're watching and the practices. And I think we're doing a pretty good job of that so far. We've just got to keep on that course.

**Q. You talk about wanting to enjoy the bowl experience. But how different is it compared to last**



**year where it felt like maybe just (indiscernible) the Rose Bowl was (indiscernible)?**

R.J. HUBERT: I can say from my point of view it was different because I hadn't played the whole season leading up to the Rose Bowl. I was coming back from an ACL injury. So I was just grateful to be traveling with the team at that point.

And so at this point I played the whole season. So it's like I worked for this moment and it feels different because I actually get to have, I guess, stack those days on top of each other and those games and all that experience just to get to this moment.

**Q. I was talking to Coach Scalley a moment ago, and he said the evolution of the defense is that you guys now are having a lot more fun, even in practice. You guys are celebrating together. How would you describe how this defense has grown throughout the year?**

R.J. HUBERT: When people buy into the culture and we're all unified in one purpose, that's, I think, when people start having fun because we're successful at that point. When we play the game the right way, we by nature make more plays, and in doing so we have more fun.

**Q. What are your first thoughts on the Penn State offense?**

R.J. HUBERT: It's going to be a challenge. They're a good offense. They're tough. They're physical. And they're all the things that we claim to be as a defense. And so it will be a great battle.

**Q. Are there any similarities, when you see Penn State's offense on tape, are there any similarities to what you see in practice on a daily basis against your own team?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, our offense, we pride ourselves in running the ball in the play-action game and booting and stuff like that. So they're similar in those aspects.

**Q. Does that help at all?**

R.J. HUBERT: I think so. I think we do a lot of looking at our opponent especially as of lately and not so much scheming against our defense. But from what we saw against our offense in fall camp, there are a lot of similarities.

**Q. What stands out to you -- I cover Penn State, and when you look at Sean Clifford what stands out to you**

**about him? And obviously he's been there forever at Penn State.**

R.J. HUBERT: I think he's got an element that I have. I'm one of the older guys. This is my fifth year. And so he's just a guy I feel like that understands the program, understands what Coach Franklin wants from him. And he's just a leader. He makes the right decisions for the team to put them in good positions.

**Q. What's it mean for you guys just (indiscernible) you sit back and realize the fact this is the third time you've been here?**

R.J. HUBERT: It's an amazing opportunity to be here. I think it's more than anything great for our program. Our program, we want to establish ourselves as one of the elites in the country. And to be coming back to a New Year's Six bowl game twice in a row is an amazing experience. And I think it's kind of indicative of the trajectory of our program.

**Q. And then what's the challenge for you guys in terms of the secondary? They use the tight end a lot (indiscernible) in terms of tight end coverage?**

R.J. HUBERT: We have a lot of confidence in our safeties and our safety room. And I think that will work well together as long as we communicate to each other our assignments and any adjustments in game.

But their tight ends are, like you said, they're very useful to them. So if we can just key in on that, we'll be all right.

**Q. You mentioned the physicality (indiscernible), the freshmen running backs Penn State has, that's a big part of their offense this year. Has anything stood out when you watch those guys, anything may be different between the two backs you've noticed?**

R.J. HUBERT: Not entirely. I think that they're aggressive. They fight for every yard that they get. And they don't give up. They're like Walter Payton in the sense that they're not going to go out of bounds. They're going to get every yard they can get. So yeah, they're impressive and especially to be freshmen, I'm interested to see how they do the rest of their careers.

**Q. Can you look at your run game and their run game -- obviously as you said a few minutes ago it's a strength for both of your teams. When you get ready for this game, does it help to practice against a run game like yours every day all season long when you're getting ready for this game against Penn State?**



R.J. HUBERT: For sure, we get great energy from our offensive linemen, from our tight ends, our running backs. Those are guys that really get after it in practice. So we see that energy and we try to match it as a defense. And it makes for great practices.

**Q. You guys like to put (indiscernible) what I've been able to watch. What's the best part of that as a safety or as a guy that gets to come down and (indiscernible) a little bit? And why have you guys been so successful (indiscernible)?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, we have blitzed quite a bit leading up to this game throughout the season. I think what's been helpful is how well our corners cover, our corners, our nickels do in man coverage. We have a lot of confidence in them in their coverage skills. So that's why we can bring the blitzes that we do.

**Q. You see a lot of really good offenses in the Pac-12. Where does Penn State fall into some of the other offensive powers that you guys have played?**

R.J. HUBERT: They're a little different in the sense that they're not as spread. They're more of the Big Ten traditional type of offense where they use their 12 personnel, they use their tight ends quite a bit and they power you down and try to wear you out throughout the game.

They're a little different in that sense, not the USC or UCLA or Oregon that we've played against this season. So it will be a little bit of a little bit of a challenge.

I would say the most comparable team to them we've played is Oregon State. Oregon State, as we see, has done pretty well this season.

**Q. (Indiscernible) big Oregon State fans.**

R.J. HUBERT: Exactly.

**Q. Both these teams pride themselves on toughness on both sides of the line of scrimmage. Does that present kind of an interesting challenge for you guys to see maybe who is the tougher team, a little mano y mano kind of thing?**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, I think whoever dictates the line of scrimmage will most likely win the game. So that's kind of a key emphasis for both teams, so I think that will be the deciding factor.

**Q. Your season resembles Penn State in a way in that you guys were sailing along, had a couple of losses,**

**you lose to Oregon, kind of all is lost, we're not going to a great bowl game. Then all of a sudden, boom, here you are. Talk about what that ride has been like for you guys.**

R.J. HUBERT: It's been emotional to say the least. We kind of let a few games get away from us and -- a few too many, that is. And we, for a second, didn't think that we were going to make it.

And the stars aligned, and our opportunity was presented to us, and we were fortunate enough to play in that championship game and we had confidence going into that game.

So I think that probably the biggest difference maker was the way our conferences are aligned. Ours is a little different than the way theirs is, and we all know the Big Ten East and what they're made of.

So I think that was the biggest difference in terms of the championship game. But here we are both in the Rose Bowl Game.

**Q. To get another opportunity so soon after last year to become a first Utah team to win this game has got to be pretty special.**

R.J. HUBERT: Yeah, that would be amazing. I guess keep collecting wins for our New Year's Six bowl games in this program's history. That would be amazing. That would be an opportunity to write Utah football history.

**Q. How do you go about (indiscernible) with Phillips?**

R.J. HUBERT: I don't think you really replace him as much as you just say, hey, next man up. Clark is a guy that brings so much value to a team no matter who it is. And I'm sure he's going to do that at the next level.

So to not have him, it's tough, but we're confident in the guys that are coming back up to replace or to replace as you say here.

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