

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Cole Bishop

Press Conference



Q. How is everything going so far?

COLE BISHOP: Good. We went to Disney and everything yesterday. That was pretty sweet. Back to it today.

Q. Are you excited for Lawry's?

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, I'm excited because last year we just sat at the hotel. It's going to be a little better this year. I'm excited. It's going to be cool.

Q. How is all the prep going for the actual game?

COLE BISHOP: Good. I think it's better this year just because everyone -- we did it last year already, so everyone is more focused on the game. But I'm excited for it.

Q. Is it weird to have such like a break? I know you guys get a bye week during the season, but for an extended period of time?

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, for sure. I mean, just being able to go home and see your family and everything, I think it's good for everybody to have a little bit of a cool-down part. But it was good.

Q. Are you used to being out in LA? Where are you from?

COLE BISHOP: Georgia. So the only times I've been to California is for games, and then went to spring break in San Diego last year.

Q. Did you get to go back to Georgia for the holidays?

COLE BISHOP: Yep. Mm-hmm. I went back the 23rd and then flew out here the 27th.

Q. Did you guys get slayed by the weather?

COLE BISHOP: It was cold in Georgia. Colder than I remember it ever being. But other than that, it wasn't bad.

Q. Does it ever snow down there?

COLE BISHOP: Like once or twice my whole life I think.

Q. What do you see when you see this Penn State offense?

COLE BISHOP: Definitely very physical team. They like to run the ball a lot. The quarterback's good. You got a good receiving corps as well. But mostly a physical, running the ball team.

Q. You say that running the ball thing, that has not been -- it's not who they were last year. But this year they've had a lot of success with it. Have you noticed anything about either of those two freshmen running backs and how they go about doing their job?

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, I mean, just being able to have success early your freshman year shows that you obviously have the capability to do good things. And they make it happen on the field.

Q. What do you feel is like the most difficult matchup-wise for you guys on that offense? Is there somebody that you're like, all right, we can't lose this guy?

COLE BISHOP: One of their receivers, I think it was their leading receptionist, he is out, so him being off the list definitely allows us to focus more on the run game I feel like instead of just being able to -- everyone do their job and win their matchup is what we're focused on.

Q. When did you guys get out here?

COLE BISHOP: The 27th was our first night.

Q. What's been the best thing so far?

COLE BISHOP: So far Disney was pretty sweet. And then tonight we've got the Lawry's thing. I'm excited for that.



And then the Wax Museum. I thought that was really cool last year.

Q. So we were talking to R.J. yesterday. He said that last year's performance, you guys gave up a lot of passing yards and points, things like that. He said it's kind of motivated you guys and left a bad taste in your mouth. How much do you want to get that out and just perform better on Monday?

COLE BISHOP: More than anything. Last year was such a close game. Everyone is always saying like, oh, that was such a good game. But on the defensive side, we played terrible. We gave up all those points, yards, interceptions.

And it's just -- that's all I've been thinking about, for the most part, is we can't do that again. And us being not nearly as depleted as last year I think is going to help us do that.

So having our secondary, pretty much everybody, for the most part, will help us succeed, I think.

Q. Not having Clark, what kind of a difference does that make for your guys?

COLE BISHOP: Obviously, I mean, he's an All-American corner. He's definitely going to be a big loss. But we got JaTravis Broughton, Zemaiah Vaughn, like we've got two guys that are still going to get the job done.

Q. What about just his leadership? I mean, he's been -- I mean, obviously kind of took you under his wing and stuff. But not having him there, who is going to fill that leadership void? Is that something you look at?

COLE BISHOP: For sure, I mean, he was the captain of the team. So him leaving definitely leaves that void. R.J. ended up being voted for honorary captain of this game -- or not -- you know what I mean. And obviously me, R.J., like I said, Zemaiah and J.T., I think the secondary has a lot of experience. So us all being able to lead in our own different ways will definitely help us I think.

Q. What was your reaction when you found out Clark wasn't going to be with you for this game?

COLE BISHOP: I was happy for him. Obviously, you want everybody to play, but people have to make their careers, and I think it will be worth it for him. I'm excited for him.

Q. What has he meant to the program in the time you've been here?

COLE BISHOP: A ton. I mean, this past year, this whole

off-season, I was working out with him, doing hot yoga three times a week. And just being able to learn from him and learn how he works and how that paid off for him taught me a lot.

Q. So you guys became pretty close, I imagine.

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, for sure. Mm-hmm.

Q. How excited are you for his future?

COLE BISHOP: I'm extremely excited. Especially, like I said, seeing how he works and just seeing the work he put in off the field will pay off at some point, and it's paid off for him this year.

Q. How about for you, looking at what Clark's been able to do, do you see yourself like him, it's going to be me going to the NFL someday?

COLE BISHOP: That's the goal. I mean, obviously seeing him perform like that and me having a pretty good year and just knowing the more I work the better off I can be is just super exciting.

Q. What have you seen from the progression of the young guys on this defense? Had some struggles early in the year and stuff, but just getting better and better as the season has gone on?

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, definitely. I mean, guys like Lander Barton, Connor O'Toole, guys that this is their -- like Connor switched to defense, and then Lander, being a freshman, just the more and more game experience we're getting, just the better off our defense has been.

Early on we had a lot of mistakes, missed tackles, missed assignments. But as the weeks go on, those definitely minus out, and we've been playing some good defense.

Q. You guys won Pac-12 last year, got to the Rose Bowl, lost, kind of a heartbreaker. How much does it mean to you to finish this off with the win on New Year's Day?

COLE BISHOP: A lot. Everyone always says things like, oh, the Rose Bowl is once in a lifetime, but for us, we got fortunate enough to do it two times. And just being able to go back and change the outcome and become able to say that we're Rose Bowl winners is definitely something that is important to me.

Q. How would you describe last year, just being in that environment? It's kind of iconic, the Rose Bowl and on that day and that setting. What was it like?

COLE BISHOP: It was awesome, being able to run out, and all the fans and everything. I don't know the exact percentage, but it felt like there was a lot of Utah fans there. And just knowing that I'm pretty sure we've got a lot of guys traveling this year for the fan base.

And I think it will be cool having the red and the blue, different colors, so that way you can see the -- because last year everyone was in red, so it was hard to tell. But, I mean, it's an amazing atmosphere.

Q. The defense, what is the main key for you guys against Penn State offense?

COLE BISHOP: Owning our 20 square feet. That's a big thing that Coach Scalley harps on and we all try to practice in our everyday lives. If everyone just does their job, beats their guy, does their assignment, then we can win this game.

Q. Does Penn State remind you of any team you've played this year?

COLE BISHOP: I wouldn't say reminds me of any specific team, but they do a lot of things, I mean, they're successful in the run game, like certain teams we've played. They've got a good throw game as well. It's not like they can only run the ball. But, yeah, they're a really physical team. So just being able to go on that.

Q. What do you make of the two young running backs?

COLE BISHOP: They're impressive, obviously, being able to come in and do things. I don't know if they're true freshmen or redshirt freshmen, but two freshmen running backs being able to succeed like that is pretty impressive.

Q. And then quarterback, veteran guy, been around a long time.

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, he's good. Obviously you see him making plays all over the field, whether he's running it or throwing it. He's able to scramble if he needs to. But he's a good guy.

Q. The two running backs are true freshmen, by the way. What are your impressions of them, and how big a role are they on your offense?

COLE BISHOP: Good. They got No. 86, a few other guys. He's the main guy that I've seen. He has a good bit of receptions. He's a good athlete it looks like. He's a physical blocker. And that's usually my guy, so that's

usually who I've been watching mostly. But, yeah, he's a good player.

Q. How do you make up for the loss of a player like Phillips? Do you try not to do too much? What goes through your group's mind?

COLE BISHOP: I mean, we're playing the same as if he was out there. We've got Zemaiah Vaughn, JaTravis Broughton. We've got a lot of guys that can still make plays.

Obviously, Clark, All-American corner, he's just declared for the draft. He's elite. But having the depth that we have right now is just, there's -- we're trying to not to have a big drop-off and change in our game. But we'll miss him for sure, but, we've got guys that are going to step up.

Q. For somebody who hasn't seen you guys play live, seen the games, what makes your defense so successful?

COLE BISHOP: Our physicality and our relentlessness, I feel like. Us having all 11 guys running the ball no matter -- if you miss a tackle, you got 10 other guys right there to help you out. And I think people will see that on Monday.

Q. Who is the funniest guy on your roster this year?

COLE BISHOP: Going to have to go Stone Azarcon. He's a walk-on from Colorado. He's a really funny guy.

Q. One of your teammates mentioned him. Was there a particular moment, or just any --

COLE BISHOP: Every day, man. In the locker room he's always making jokes, being funny. But definitely him I would say.

Q. And I think R.J. mentioned that Cam Rising might be one of the funnier guys, maybe underrated too.

COLE BISHOP: He's up there.

Q. Maybe he has to gain your trust and stuff first. Would you rate him as one of the funnier guys?

COLE BISHOP: Oh, yeah, for sure. He's up there as well. Where you're at in the locker room depends who you're around too, like Cam and R.J. are in the same area, so he's around him a lot. And I see Stone all the time. But Cam is a funny guy.

Q. And just speaking of Cam, what has he meant to the program? Obviously you're a defensive guy, so



you guys go up against him quite a bit during practice. Just what kind of player is he and what has he meant to the program?

COLE BISHOP: He's a great player obviously. Being on the offensive, defensive side, you don't get to see him interact with the offense, but in winter and everything, he's -- in our team settings, he's a great leader. I think that's one of his best attributes, and just him being able to make plays on the field and still be like a really caring person is awesome.

Q. And I know you've been asked about Clark Phillips, and obviously he's not playing in this game, but he's a California kid. What has he meant to the Utah program? And obviously you share that secondary with him.

COLE BISHOP: A ton. I mean, this whole off-season me and him worked a ton, like pretty much every day after workouts and stuff. We'd go do yoga and different things like that. And just being able to learn from him and his work ethic and see him make it pay off on the field has been pretty cool.

Q. You mentioned yoga. Is that something that just you and him do?

COLE BISHOP: A few people do. I don't know what everyone is doing on their own time, but me and Clark would go together a lot. Connor O'Toole would come. And just being able to do yoga, become more flexible and just help you become more athletic.

Q. And speaking of Penn State and their offense, what have you seen from them on film? What are you expecting from them?

COLE BISHOP: They're a really physical team. They run a ball a ton, obviously. They still throw the ball and they're good at that too. But their two running backs, like we talked about, are pretty good freshmen guys, and they're really physical.

Q. And their quarterback, anything about him stand out?

COLE BISHOP: He's a really good quarterback. He's got a lot of experience. I'm pretty sure he's been there for a few years. And he makes plays.

Q. Beginning of the year, you struggled against the run. The end of the season it got a little bit better. You've got two running backs, and I'm sure you've been asked about them. What do you think that's

different about your team now that gives you hope against a team like theirs?

COLE BISHOP: Just experience mostly. I mean, playing -- like you said, early on we missed so many tackles against Florida, and then we cut it down slowly. UCLA, we missed a lot of tackles. And then since then I feel like we've been doing a lot better tackling.

And just having everybody running the ball, like I had mentioned to somebody else, is so important. If I miss a tackle, I know that Gabe or Karene or anybody is going to be right there because they're getting tackled in the yard with everyone running to the ball.

Q. What do you think has been the change on the defense this year?

COLE BISHOP: I think experience is such a big thing, having everybody play together. We had a lot of new parts to it. Obviously we had a lot of returners, but having everybody be able to play together, and just effort and our relentlessness to the ball has been so helpful.

Q. A lot of people want to say that your program and Penn State kind of mirror each other in a lot of ways. Do you see that on film?

COLE BISHOP: To an extent. I mean, everyone calls us a physical team who likes to run the ball. I don't know anything about their defense. But we're known for playing good defense, running the ball, being physical. And they run the ball and they're pretty physical too, so I can see where people say that. But, I mean, we'll see on Monday how the programs contrast.

Q. This may be similar to that Oregon State game in the sense that kind of another team that resembles you. Do you feel like you can take from that game or that each game is too different?

COLE BISHOP: For sure. Actually I almost said that to somebody else, but I didn't -- I didn't want to, like, throw anything out there that I was wrong on, just in case they're not that similar, but I was going to say that, which is funny.

But, yeah, I mean, like I said, they run the ball a ton. They got physical guys. And just like our biggest thing right now is being physical and doing your job. If we can all out-physical them and beat your guy, do your assignment, then we'll be just fine on defense.

Q. You committed to Utah. I'm sure, like any program, you're sold on kind of what the success will be and everything like that. You make it to the Rose Bowl

your first season, I mean, did you ever envision that this would be your trajectory two years in?

COLE BISHOP: Not necessarily. I mean, last year everyone would always, say, oh, this is a once in a lifetime -- my family, friends were like: That's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You better enjoy it. And then losing just really sucked because you never know if you're going to get that chance again.

So, yeah, I played in the Rose Bowl and we lost, so it's not that cool, but having another opportunity to do it again this year and just being able to redeem ourselves is special for me.

Q. You talked about redeeming yourself. Is that kind of what's driving you guys this year?

COLE BISHOP: For me, at least, personally. I mean, defensively we played terrible. Everyone -- it's a terrible feeling when everyone is talking about how good of a game Ohio State was because, yeah, it was close, but they had a ton of yards, they killed us on defense.

So just seeing us being able to have another chance to actually stop an offense and us be contributing. Obviously, we contributed last year, but not as much as we need to.

Q. Is it nice knowing that you have at least full help outside of Clark not being there?

COLE BISHOP: Yeah, for the most part, everyone, but, yeah, losing Clark is a big loss. But like I had mentioned, we have depth that we didn't have last year. We had Micah Bernard playing corner. And just having Clark leave and having JaTravis and Zemaiah being able to be right there just in case, I think we'll be fine.

Q. What has Sione Vaki brought to the team? Obviously he wasn't getting any playing time, coming away from his mission and everything. What have you seen from him?

COLE BISHOP: He's a great player. He's a dog. I mean, he's so helpful and shown up tackling in the secondary that you don't always have. Cornerbacks aren't always super eager to go make plays on the screens and everything.

And having Vaki right next to me, being able to run through blocks and everything is awesome. You're running up there, you're expecting to make the play. So it's exciting to have him out there.

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