

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Thomas Yassmin

Press Conference



Q. How has your stay down in Southern California been so far?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Great. I mean, staying in a beautiful hotel and enjoying it as much as I can.

Q. What's been the highlight so far for you?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I mean, Disneyland is always everyone's favorite highlight, especially being here the first few days, it's nice, just walking around. I'm a child when I go there. I love it, Star Wars, the whole shebang, so...

Q. I'm sure you've been asked this a million times but what's your mindset now? Brant out, Dalton out, and you're kind of the man now. How does that feel going into a game like this with that responsibility on your shoulders?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I mean, I just try and treat it like any other game. Obviously the number of reps I'm going to be taking and my role is going to increase, but for me personally I just gotta treat it as any other game and just go in there with the attitude that, yeah, might be a little more tired at the end of certain drives, but I'm just going to try to do the same things that I try and do every other game and just not treat it any differently.

Q. What's it say about this offense that guys like Tavion and Dalton and Brant are out, and yet the expectations are still that you guys are going to put up a lot of yards, a lot of points?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think it's just a credit to our recruiting and our depth. We have guys, you've seen, freshmen stepping up, guys that haven't seen college snaps before, myself included. Unfortunately, I didn't see any snaps the first few years.

They have the mentality and they have the attitude that someone goes down, the next man's got to step up and

we've got to be able to run with the same amount of efficiency we always have been. Can't really stop what we have right now for any reason. Just gotta keep it going.

Q. Penn State is known for their defense, kind of like you guys have for years been known for your defense. What kind of challenges do they pose for you specifically?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Like I said, they're very similar, very physical. They're very strong up front. They've got great DBs, great secondaries. Overall they're just a well-structured defense, very respectable, very physical. We just have to match that, come out, do our thing as well.

Q. When you watched film of Penn State, does it kind of remind you of your team? As you watch them, the way they do things, the way they run their --

THOMAS YASSMIN: Yes, they hustle to the ball every play. Like I said, they're very physical. They have a very high work ethic and, I mean, they're a phenomenal team. So, yeah, definitely.

Q. Probably a little over a month ago a lot of people didn't give you guys any chance at all to get into the Rose Bowl after that Oregon loss. What kept you guys together and just through the ups and downs of the season to get back to the Rose Bowl?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think, as Coach always said, control what you can control. And for us that was just winning that game against Colorado. And that final week there wasn't much else we could do. We dropped the games that unfortunately we didn't want to. But other things fell into place. And Coach Whitt was saying the whole time, control what you can control, and hopefully the other things fall into place. And that's what happened.

And we got our opportunity in the Pac-12 Championship game. And I think we showed why we deserve to be back here again.

Q. For you guys, how important is it to, you've obviously been here, done this before, last year, just to



end it right the way and get a win in this Rose Bowl Game?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think, I can't speak for everyone on the team, but last year it was not the best feeling walking away from that game with a loss, a game that has so much prestige and tradition throughout college football.

Last year was awesome to be able to get there. We're coming here, we want to get this W and want to walk away with that same feeling we had in the Pac-12 Championship game. So to get another first historic win for the program.

Q. What does it mean for you personally and for the team to know that you're going to have so much support on Monday, so many people dressed in red cheering for you guys?

THOMAS YASSMIN: It's awesome. I mean, it was the case with the Pac-12 Championship last year and even this year. (Indiscernible) is something else. And it's nice sort of being in California; at least we, more or less, have that more so home-field advantage. It's always an unbelievable feeling going out there and just feels like another home game at Eccles.

Q. Did you enjoy the Beef Bowl last night?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Yes, that prime rib put me into a coma after, but that was awesome.

Q. How much did you eat?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I had a couple pieces. They were pretty big slices.

Q. It's funny, years ago, it used to be an eating contest.

THOMAS YASSMIN: That's what I heard. Probably not too good for the players, though.

Q. We were a little disappointed to find that tradition was gone. But in this PC world we live in, too, overeating is not looked at as being --

THOMAS YASSMIN: That's true.

Q. -- as good as far as that goes. You talked about the Beef Bowl, the Disneyland thing, there's been a lot of fun things to do on this trip. Have you been able to enjoy that, yet know there's a game to be played on Monday?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Oh, yeah, absolutely. The coaches

are pretty forward about it, separating what we're here for and also separating time that we have for fun. And they want us to enjoy this week. It's an experience.

I think we've definitely had our time to have fun but also when we need to get serious, pretty good at switching to that too.

Q. The team having been through all this a year ago, has that helped this year, do you think?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think so. Especially for the younger guys. I think it's really helpful just sort of walking them through it. Like you said, we've been here before, we know what it's like. For us now it's just going out there and playing another game.

Q. It's interesting, if you go back a few weeks, didn't look like you'd be here. You lose to Oregon and people are, like, where are we going to play and all that. And now here you are. Can you talk a little bit about emotionally what that has felt like? You must have had expectations at the beginning of the year, the playoff, maybe making it back here. What does it feel like to be back here after all you've been through?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Like Coach always says, control what you can control. And those unfortunate circumstances, we dropped a few games and whilst might have seen -- our goals might have been out of sight, like he says, control what you can control. And after that Oregon loss, we just went in there with the attitude that we just need to beat this Colorado team and if everything else falls in place it does.

To our desire, it did, and we go back to that championship game. And I think we really showed guys why we deserve to be back here. It wasn't really just by fate.

Q. Some of the guys we talked to yesterday on your team were talking about after the Colorado win, they knew there were several things that had to happen for you guys to get here. Somebody even said, I watched the Washington-Washington State game. Do you remember what you did after you got back from the Colorado game?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think as soon as that game finished we're back in the locker room. We had the Oregon State game up. Check, that that happened. And then early flight back home, I think everybody put the Washington game on. Check, that happened. And I think already it was Arizona needed to win at the time. And I think that was after the fourth quarter of the Washington game where everyone's, like, we're going back to the championship



game.

Then we all got that team text message, come back here Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon and start preparing for Friday. It was pretty awesome.

Q. I know a couple of your teammates aren't going to be here. Guy that plays your position obviously, and Clark Phillips, a defensive back. Given the fact that they're two pretty key players, has that changed preparation at all for you guys? You know you're not going to go -- you're going to go into this game without them, has that affected the team?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I don't think it's necessarily affected the team. I think like we've had in other situations before, it's just next man up. I've got to fill my role with Dalton being out and other guys gotta step up in Clark's absence. And I don't think it will be a problem for us.

And I think, whilst those guys are unbelievable players and they do what they do, the coordinators are also great in helping adjust to missing those guys and sort of playing to our strengths.

Whilst stuff will change I'm sure a little bit schematically or whatever, but it's just next man up and we've got to go out there and sort of run at the same efficiency we've always been running.

Q. I think both these teams have kind of prided themselves all year of being tough on both sides of the line of scrimmage. Does that make this matchup sort of challenging, you're going to see who is tougher maybe at the end of the day? Are you seeing it from that standpoint?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Definitely looked at it, that aspect. I think that's what we love. Utah football is physical football. And Penn State is obviously very physical football, too. I think that's what it will be the tipping edge. And we'll go out there and we'll see who is the most physical team. And that's what I think we have to go out there and show the country.

Q. It's almost like you guys are more like a Big Ten team than you are a Pac-12 team with the image and the way you're built?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think sometimes the Pac-12 gets a bad rap. But we can be very physical as well.

Q. I didn't mean it from that point, but everybody looks at the Big Ten and say they're physical. And the Pac-12 is more looked at as being wide open, blah,

blah, blah. You guys don't seem to fit that role, but you've done very well in the Pac-12.

THOMAS YASSMIN: I think that's one of our calling cards. Sort of Coach really emphasizes physical football, tough, smart guys is what we like to say. So I think we like to epitomize that as best we can.

Q. You guys are here; you're doing your thing. Talk about the excitement level of being here for a second time and getting a bigger role this go around.

THOMAS YASSMIN: Yeah, just in terms of the team's excitement, I think just like, the guys that were here last year, whilst we're very excited, but we sort of know what we came here to do. And we want to sort of have a better experience obviously than last year.

But in terms of the role, it's also, like, I get my opportunity. I always say I wish it was under different circumstances. But I'm just trying to treat it like any other game whilst my role is going to go up and the amount of reps and what so.

I mean, I've got to treat it like any other rep I get out there and do that a few more times. That's sort of my attitude going into it.

Q. What's it been like having both Dalton and Brant doing all the bowl activities? Are you picking their brain, or is it just more they're kind of there to have fun?

THOMAS YASSMIN: They're great. Just even before the bowl, when these guys are out, whatever, they're always helping me on the sidelines and, like, in practice and giving me tips. Those are arguably two of the best guys to learn from in terms of tight ends at the college football level.

And just having them here at the bowl game's great. I think it sort of helps me just mentally just even having them there for the activities, team activities, just, I mean, at the end of the day they're my two best mates on the team. Just having them there helps me treat it like it is any other game.

Unfortunately they won't be playing in the games but they're going to be there for me on sidelines. And if there's corrections that need to be made they'll help me, tips or whatever they see, or even if it's just any form of reinforcement, they're pretty good with that helping me with that.

Q. If you think back four, five years ago when you first came to Utah, first playing the sport for the first time, what were your initial expectations when you first got

here?

THOMAS YASSMIN: I knew it was going to be a long road. I felt like, yeah, OK, maybe a couple of years. I'm not going to lie, I didn't think it would take as long as it did.

But I mean I think it just makes it that much sweeter, sort of how long it has been taking to finally get the opportunity and show what I can do. I think it's also given me that mental sort of reinforcement that I can do what I can do. Whilst it took a little bit longer, there's also good reason behind that. I happened to come into a class of two of the top five tight ends in college football, Dalton and Brant -- and Cole Fotheringham as well before; he's in the NFL now.

I think it's also helped me a lot to learn behind such high-caliber players. And, like I say, it took a little bit longer than I expected, but I think it makes it a little worthwhile.

Q. Being in this position now and having the season you've had, how gratifying is it to see all those years and all that hard work coming to fruition now?

THOMAS YASSMIN: It's good. Personally, you know, everyone says you're never going to be satisfied. I had 12 receptions. Obviously I'd like more, and I want to be able to do more and show more.

Compared to what I've done throughout my whole career combined, yeah, it's great to at least demonstrate what I can do. And I think also not just even for me, my family, it's a big thing. They sort of know definitely how much I've sacrificed to come here and a lot of what I gave back in Australia.

So I think even for them it's so gratifying to see me go out there and do well. And it's been a big bonus this year for sure.

Q. You've got another year of eligibility, too, right?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Yes.

Q. Have you decided what you are going to do yet?

THOMAS YASSMIN: Look, I'm not going to lie, I'm definitely leaning towards staying. I'd like to stay but it's hard being in college for five or so years -- or four and a half years, five seasons, I guess. So I don't know, that decision, I guess, will come after the game. But probably most likely leaning towards staying, yes.

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