

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

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Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Micah Bernard

Press Conference



Q. How excited are you to be here for your second Rose Bowl Game in about 365 days or so?

MICAH BERNARD: It's very exciting. It's a very different feeling. I think it's more of a come on, we've got to get this one feeling. Last year it was nice to be here, but this one is going to be the one.

Q. To me it sounds like this is more of a business trip?

MICAH BERNARD: It is, it's more of a business trip. We done everything last year, so Disneyland and everything, it was cool, but it's a business trip. We got to do it last year, and we're strictly here for business, to get a W.

Q. What type of support did you receive from friends and family last year who got to see you play on this huge stage?

MICAH BERNARD: A lot of support. Everybody didn't know what was going on last year with me playing DB and now running back, and now they ain't got to worry about that because I'm going out there to play running back this year and they're going to give me the same support they did last year.

Q. How did you manage that? It's rare to do that on a college level. How did you manage the energy it took to succeed on both levels?

MICAH BERNARD: I was just talking to Coach Shaw all game last year. He seen me struggling but he said you've got this, you're built for this, your mental is good, your physical is good, you're built for this. That's what kept me going, just listening to his words, listening to his voice the whole game.

Q. Did you have a voice between the two positions?

MICAH BERNARD: I did. I did have a choice, but I'm a

level running back, so I'll come back to running back any day of the week.

Q. It's been a few years since you were playing high school football, but what do you remember about playing at Gahr and growing up in the Long Beach area?

MICAH BERNARD: I think high school football is so much easier than people think. It's so much easier if you have a three-star, four-star, five stars in college, none of those things matter, everybody is great. I think just being able to run all over everybody in high school was just the fun part of it, and that's the memorable part, and now everything is so much tougher.

Q. Last year I think you were showing that you could catch the ball, but you've been displaying that, as well, this year. How important is it to you to be considered an all-around complete back?

MICAH BERNARD: It's so important. That's what they're looking for now, and you've got to adapt yourself to the game and what people are looking for. Last year I did exceptionally well, but this year I think my numbers have doubled so far this season.

Q. A different opponent this year, same conference, Ohio State, Penn State, they play different styles of football. They're different teams. What do you think is going to be a key from where you're going to be at the running back position?

MICAH BERNARD: I think it's just you've got to play hard the whole game. They don't stop playing hard. There are some tough guys. They're physical. But we're tough and physical, too. We've just got to go out there and play our brand of football and not let them play theirs.

Q. I feel like that's in their ethos of Utah football is playing tough and physical. I even see it in the recruits that you guys bring in year after year. It's almost like you guys are really great players but still a little bit looked over. Did you feel like that coming out of high school?



MICAH BERNARD: I did. I think it's the star ranking. When you see your stars, you're like, why am I this, why am I that, and you're like, all right, whatever, we're going to get it done regardless. But I think coming out of high school and coming to Utah we were slept on, but we're evolving every single year, and you see year after year, going to the Rose Bowl back-to-back years, we're evolving as a whole team and as a Pac-12.

Q. Last year everybody was trying to figure out what you were going to do, offense, defense, all of that. Everybody knows you're going to be a running back. What are the friends and family members saying about this opportunity to watch you play?

MICAH BERNARD: They're happy I'm going to be playing running back this year. They'll love to see me play both sides again, but they know my love and they know what they love watching me do, so it's going to be running back for the rest of it.

Q. What are you guys doing collectively as a running back unit to keep putting pressure on?

MICAH BERNARD: We just go in the film room, watch film and we know what we have to do. We have to be physical. We have to run hard. We have to be efficient and we have to be tough. That's what we do as a running back room, and we instill in all our guys.

Q. What makes this unit so resilient?

MICAH BERNARD: Just the coaching. The coaching puts you in a good situation. They tell us to never give up, always believe. You've got a great leader in Cam. He helps us believe all the time. It's just everybody is just a well-knit team.

Q. What are you going to have to do as a running back with pass blocking given how they put pressure on the quarterback?

MICAH BERNARD: We've just got to attack them. We can't let them get too far in the line of scrimmage. We've got to beat them at the line of scrimmage and punch them in the mouth and let them sit there.

Q. What does it mean to this team being back in this for a second year and also the fact that you guys have chance to win the last traditional Rose Bowl?

MICAH BERNARD: It means a lot. We want to come out here and win. We didn't get it done this year so that's our mission this year. It's strictly a business trip. We've just

got to come out there and get it done.

Q. How much does it game come down to how teams start? How can you really set the tone in the first quarter?

MICAH BERNARD: We've been preparing for this for forever now, since last January when we lost the game. Just knowing what we have at stake and what we want to get done and accomplished, that's going to give us the motivation to go out there and just do it right from the jump.

Q. How would you assess how things are going in practice and what are your goals the rest of the week to be successful on Monday?

MICAH BERNARD: I think we're doing pretty good at practice. We've got the game plan in. Everybody knows what we have to do, what we have to get done, and for the rest of the week, just making sure we're locked in mentally. We're going to do what we've got to do physically. We've just got to be locked in mentally.

Q. How was Lawry's last night?

MICAH BERNARD: Oh, so good. Had me full.

Q. Was it different, having the whole experience?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, it was way different. The food just tasted different when you have it catered than when it's actually cooked right there and brought to you. The steak was good. I think the corn was the best part of it, though.

Q. Obviously last year you were kind of dealing with double duty and everything. Where are you at right now in this bowl game and what are you wanting to accomplish personally?

MICAH BERNARD: I just want to accomplish what I've been doing all season, being good out the backfield, catching the ball and running the ball. Last year being able to go on the other side of the ball really helped me in my game this year, and I think you could see it in the film, that it's really helped me with my route running and stuff like that.

But right now I'm just focused on just continuing what I've done all season.

Q. A lot of people like to talk about how tough this Penn State defense is, kind of resembles what you guys do on defense, as well. Do you feel like that gives you an advantage, that you've seen that in practice? I know you're not going with the ones all the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

time, but does that help you in terms of how you approach this game?

MICAH BERNARD: Oh, yeah. Our defense we think is the most physical defense in the country. During fall camp and spring ball we go against them every single day so we know what they're capable of and that's what the coaches instill in them over there on the defensive side of the ball so just looking at Penn State, they are physical, they are tough, but we've been doing that all season long, all year long. We've just got to keep going at it.

Q. This Rose Bowl, is it any different than last year in the sense of maybe a different purpose for you guys?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, last year was just the experience. You got here, now let's experience everything. This year we just look back and we experienced everything. The only thing we didn't experience is winning the game.

Now that's what our goal is, to win the game. We've done everything. We went to Disneyland, we've been to Lawry's, we ate. Now we want to get that W and finish the week.

Q. You've had this opportunity to play a bunch of these blue bloods and all these different things in football. Do you consider Utah getting into that in this modern era of college football?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, since I first came here, we started to exceed expectations, and we're still doing that. Now we've just got to finish it. We've had a hard time finishing it, but I think this is going to be the one where we finish it.

Q. Have you made up your mind on your future yet? I'm not asking you to tell me, but has that kind of settled in yet or are you still kind of waffling?

MICAH BERNARD: I think it's settled in. It's settled in. I think I made my decision.

I think it was actually this past week I made my decision.

But right now I'm just focused on getting this W here at the Rose Bowl, and we'll see what happens next.

Q. How hard is that, to kind of balance that as you're preparing for a Rose Bowl and all the other stuff?

MICAH BERNARD: It's very hard. Everybody asks you what are you doing next, what are you doing this, and this is -- it's a hard thing for someone like me who I've just turned 21, so it's hard for someone like me to process and

try to figure out.

Q. What stands out about Penn State's defense?

MICAH BERNARD: Just they're almost like a carbon copy of us, but not really. I think we're the better physical team, but they're physical, as well, and they're tough, as well.

Q. How are you similar? How is your defense similar?

MICAH BERNARD: They don't stop playing. We don't stop playing and they don't stop playing. It's going to be who's going to give it up first. I don't think it's going to be us.

Q. If somebody has never seen Cam Rising play, what would you tell them?

MICAH BERNARD: I would tell them to watch out. He's going to surprise you. When he first got on campus, I told everybody, hey, Cam is going to be the guy. I told everybody Cam was going to be the guy, and nobody wanted to listen to me. Look at us now; he got us two back-to-back championships.

Q. Is he charismatic? Does he have a lot of charisma? Do people kind of gravitate toward him?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, he has this laugh -- I don't know what laugh, it's like a weird laugh he has, but once you hear him do that, and his smile and his hair, everything just meshes together well. It feels like you almost know the guy already once you meet him.

Q. We watched the Pac-12 Championship game and James Franklin mentioned it a few weeks ago about (indiscernible) got right back up. Do guys notice that, that bounce right back up? Is that a very good example of his toughness?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, it's a very good example. We've seen Cam get hit many times and bounce back up and play the next down. That's what you look for in a quarterback, somebody who's going to lead you, who's going to show you the way, and he does that every single game. Just to see him bounce back after that hit, we knew he was going to do that. We knew he wasn't going to stay down. That's the type of guy he is.

Q. What can you take from last year's game that can apply toward preparation? What did you learn about last year's experience?

MICAH BERNARD: I think we've just got to play the whole game. We played the whole game last year, and it wasn't

enough. I think we've got to play the whole game plus more just to pull it out. This is a big game, and emotions are going to be running high. We want to win, they want to win, and we're two very good teams.

We have to play the whole game and better.

Q. Having to jump in at corner, what do you remember about that, and was there any carryover to how you played offense going forward?

MICAH BERNARD: Yeah, it carried over a lot. I mean, just thinking back to that game and the weeks leading up to that, because we're practicing out here right now, it was just a different feeling just watching my fellow offensive guys practicing every single day and not being over there with them and just learning the whole defense in a week or two weeks. It was much harder than I thought.

But this experience so far has been easier because I just have to play one position, and I know the position so well. I know the offense so well.

Q. Your quarterback and your offensive coordinator have mentioned Penn State's No. 11 as a guy that sticks out. What have you seen from him on the tape, and what has stuck out to you about him and anybody else that you've kind of noticed on Penn State from watching film?

MICAH BERNARD: I think No. 11, he's a great player. He knows how to use his size. He knows how to get around the line. He's very physical. That's why we've just got to go at him.

We don't think he wants to be hit so many times, so that's our game plan. We're just going to hit him, hit anybody else who tries to hit Cam. That's the game plan. Also I was looking at, I think, 16 and 23, they're pretty good players, as well. That's the same game plan. We've just got to go straight at them.

We say this all the time, nobody wants to play with us, and that's our mentality, that's our mantra, and we're going to make them not want to play with us.

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