

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

Friday, December 30, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Devaughn Vele

Press Conference



love each and every one of you.

Q. What does it mean to you to be playing in a Rose Bowl game?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It means a lot. I was a big fan of the Rose Bowl game growing up from California. Watched the games. My first Rose Bowl game I ever watched was the USC-Texas game.

It's an honor to be here, and I'm excited for what's in store for us and going through the bowl activities for another year and hopefully come out with a different outcome.

Q. Were you here last year?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yes, sir.

Q. Kind of going through -- speaking of the activities that you go through throughout the week leading up to the game, what is it like to kind of have an impact on the community and how has the community kind of received you for a second time this year?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, it's awesome. Everybody is always cheering on for us. They always tell us how proud they are of us and the obstacles we've overcome.

It's amazing for us to be able to represent on the national -- like, on the national view that Utah can be a part of this tradition that's been a part of college football for so long. So it's an honor.

Q. If you had a message to your family or your supporters to thank them for their support throughout the season, what would you say to them?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Just that I love you guys, appreciate everything you guys do for me, and, you know, everything that I do on the football field is for you.

So I'm grateful for the support. I'm grateful that you guys make the sacrifices to come to every single game, and I

Q. I wanted to ask you, over a month ago not a lot of people thought you would be here after that Oregon loss. It looked like, okay, kiss of death, kiss it goodbye. How were you guys able to stay together and stay positive and just see this through and get back here?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Just understanding that it's just another adversity that we had to deal with. We understood that the odds were against us after that loss against Oregon, but we also understood that there's still a chance. And when there's still a chance, we're going to keep doing everything we can to make sure we make the most of our opportunities so that chance, when it comes, we'll be ready for it.

We understood that it was going to take everything we had and not only that for the stars to align, and it did. One thing I'm very proud of for this team is that when we did get the chance, it wasn't one of those things where it's, like, oh, you know, you only got in because of the other teams, but then we wouldn't be ready to play in the championship game because we lost to Oregon. You know, that it was a fluke we beat USC the first time. No, we came in there and dominated, and we showed everybody that we're a team that no matter what adversity hits us, we're always prepared and we're always going to hit it back in the mouth.

So that's one thing I'm very proud of this team that we were able to overcome that this year.

Q. Speaking of adversity, I mean, no Tavion, no Brant, no Dalton. It seems like the expectations are still for you guys to put up a lot of points, put up a lot of yards. How have you guys got to this point to where you can lose some of your valuable weapons and still have that confidence and the ability to score?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's testament to the philosophy of 'next man up.' We have one hell of a team. We have a lot of great players. A lot of young players as well that are coming in, and they have to mature fast, and that's just

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how it is. That's what Utah football is all about.

When you are ready to play, your number is going to be called, and you have to be ready for it. Those guys when their number is called, they always are ready.

So although it's tough for us to lose great players in Dalton and Tavion and then Brant as well, we understand as well that we have guys that can fill in those spots and bring their own creativity to the offense and put up those numbers that we normally put up because that's just the philosophy we have here at Utah.

Q. You talked much to Brisk?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Actually I'm hopefully going to be calling him sometime after this week to kind of talk with him and see -- get his opinion on where I'm at and what he thinks I should do.

Obviously, it's not going to be like whatever he says is what I'm going to do, but more so it's good advice to hear from somebody that's been through this and done it. Something that can hopefully sway my decision at the end.

Q. Have you talked to him since PAC-12 championship game about getting back here and all that stuff?

DEVAUGHN VELE: No, I haven't talked to him recently. Yeah. Just been enjoying all the festivities that the bowl game has. You know how it is.

Q. What about just the support you guys get? It will be a lot of red on Monday. What does that mean to you personally to this program to have the support?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's amazing. Our fan base is really amazing. It's the same thing that happened last year. The fans that came out to the Rose Bowl last year was unbelievable. It felt like it was just a home game again. It's just in California.

I'm expecting the same thing this year. I understand that our fans are big supporters of everything that we do, and they were with us even when everything seemed against us. So we're always grateful to them, and it's an honor for us to be able to play for them on such a big national stage.

Q. What about Penn State's defense? What do you see from them? What's going to be the challenge for you guys as you face a tough defense like that?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I believe it's physicality. They're a very physical defense. They play a lot like how we are. You know what I mean?

They harp on defense. They put man-on-man. You've got to have your best athletes try to beat our best athletes, and that's just what I see in their defense, and they have a ton of great players. They have a lot of good leadership on that team.

It's going to be a dogfight. It's what you would want and what you expect from the Rose Bowl game. You have two of the best teams playing against each other on a big national bowl game stage, so it's going to be a great game.

We're looking forward to it. We just have to make sure we execute the game plan that's given to us, and I think the biggest thing is being more physical. I feel like whoever is the more physical team on Monday is going to be the ones that come out with the W.

Q. Did you watch film of Penn State?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yes.

Q. Were you amazed how similar they are to you?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yeah, very similar. I don't watch film on them, but even from what I heard even offensively-wise they're the same as us. I feel like we're two of the same teams and the same philosophies that are going to go at it. So I'm expecting a fun game going up against the best.

Q. This is obvious, but how much is it going to mean to you if you guys can break through and make some history, get that Rose Bowl title?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's going to be amazing. That's the only outcome I see in my head. That's what I want to happen.

Our second time being here. Not a lot of people can say they've been to two Rose Bowls, let alone back-to-back Rose Bowls. Obviously, we want a different outcome this year, and that's the only thing that's pushing us right now is that we want to win.

We know what it felt like when we lost last year in the Rose Bowl, and we don't want that same feeling. We want the feeling of being on the other end where we're celebrating and the confetti is falling down on us.

Q. How have you enjoyed punt return duties this year?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yeah. It's been fun. It's been interesting. It's taken a lot of -- it took a lot for me to get accustomed to.

I'm a lot taller than a lot of punt returners, so a lot of those guys are mostly elusive, quick players. I'm more of a little top-end speed like at the end.

It's made me get out of my comfort zone, but it's made me a better receiver in my opinion bringing out different parts of the aspects of football into my game play. So I'm grateful for the opportunity, and I'll keep doing it as long as they want me back there returning those punts.

Q. Cam was just talking about Penn State's secondary. What are some things you've seen from that secondary on the tape that sticks out to you?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I think it's physicality. Their corners are a lot more physical than a lot of the corners that we played. They like to get hands-on, and when they gets hands-on, they like to stay on you. They play a lot of man to where they believe that their athletes can out-athlete our own athletes as well.

So I feel like the biggest thing for us coming into this game is going to be physicality. We've got to beat the man in front of us. I think that's what it's going to come down to. Whoever is the more physical team is going to be the one that wins this game.

Q. If somebody came up to you who has never seen Cam play and said, what kind of quarterback is he, what would you say?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I think the first word that comes to my head is leadership. He is a leader on the field, on the off the field. He is just somebody that you can look to and, you know, you can get behind him. You want to follow him.

So it's a credit to him and what he has done for this team and what he has been able to do for us players, and he is one of those guys that makes you want to be you better self for him so we can do the things that we need.

Q. Describe his will to win. How would you describe --

DEVAUGHN VELE: He is a huge competitor. Like, even off the field if we're playing pool or something at the football facility, he always wants to win in everything.

So I love that guy, and I love his competitiveness because it really drives everybody else on the team to want to win. Obviously, we want to win, but he is one of those guys that he wants to win. He would rather die than lose a game.

Q. What does it feel like to be back here in the Rose Bowl again?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's amazing. An honor. Not a lot of people can say they've been to two Rose Bowls, let alone back-to-back Rose Bowl games. It's an honor to be able to be on this national stage again and represent the program.

Q. Is it any different than last year?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's pretty similar. We're in a different hotel. A lot of the activities we've done before, so it's like a second time doing it, but it's still fun in the same.

This time around I feel like it's more football in my opinion. More football-oriented because we want to come out with a different outcome this year.

I'm a lot more driven to making sure I enjoy the bowl experience, but to make this experience even more great is to come out with the win.

Q. Can you talk about what did you guys learn -- did you learn anything as far as some of the speed bumps you had during the regular season and then being able to come back and beat USC kind of handily in the title game?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's just understanding that when there's a chance, you just keep fighting. When there's hope, you keep fighting. That's all it is. That's what you are on team is built on.

The adversity that we faced in the season, we had a few losses early on in the season where people started writing us off. We knew that if we stuck together and kept doing the things we had to do, opportunity would present itself to us, and we would be ready for it.

That's what happened. The stars aligned, and we were able to get in the championship game, and we were able to dominate against USC, and now we're here back at the Rose Bowl again back-to-back.

If you asked somebody after we lost to Oregon if we would be back in the Rose Bowl, I feel like everybody would say we would not be back here. So it's a testament to this team of how much we were driven to overcome the obstacles that were in our way, and making sure when our opportunity is given to us, we take the most of it.

Q. I've been going around both today and yesterday asking people who do you think is the funniest guy on the roster.

DEVAUGHN VELE: Funniest guy on the roster.

Q. It can be a few guys.

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DEVAUGHN VELE: I think hands down in my opinion Stone Azarcon, yeah.

Q. That's what everyone has said.

DEVAUGHN VELE: That boys is one of the funniest dudes. You just look at him and you just start laughing. He doesn't even have to do anything, and he just has you smiling. That's a shout-out to my boy Stone. I think he is the funniest dude on the roster.

Q. What is it about Stone?

DEVAUGHN VELE: He is just goofy.

Q. Is this just a locker room thing?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It's a locker room thing. Some of that stuff he just be doing is, like, it's just goofy. Like, he is a very funny person, but even at the end of the day he is one of those guys that he is a brother at the end of the day. He can be serious when he needs to, but when he is funny, he will be funny.

So I love that guy so much. But, yeah, it's more of a locker room thing (laughing). You have to be there to believe it, you know what I mean?

Q. Gotcha. As a receiver, you work pretty closely with Cam Rising. Just tell me a little bit about how has kind of progressed over the years and how important is he to this program?

DEVAUGHN VELE: He is a huge part of the program. Everybody always talks about his competitiveness, and that's I think the biggest thing that stands out to me is his competitiveness and his leadership.

Even on a scout team, we were going up against the starting defense every day, and we always wanted to beat them every time. Like, we were on scout team, and we wanted to beat them.

That's just the kind of guy he was. Because he was like that, it made all of us want to do the same thing. I think that's what he brings to our team. We just don't want to lose. That's just the competitive spirit that he brings and now we feel as an offensive unit being followers to this great leader.

Q. As a receiver I'm sure you've had plenty of opportunities during practice to go up against a guy like Clark Phillips. Clark isn't going to be playing in this game, but what is it like working with him every

day pretty much?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, it was awesome. Me and Clark always went up against each other. I also got to experience going up against Jaylon Johnson as well, and I think Clark is a similar cornerback in the same sense with Jaylon. It was an honor for me to go up against those two because I feel like those two helped me become a better receiver.

If you talk to Clark as well, every day we always would go up against each other. Honestly, I didn't really go up against anybody else because we always wanted to go up against each other because iron sharpens iron.

It's credit to him. I'm excited for him in his next journey in the NFL. I know he is going to do great things.

Q. We were just talking to Cam, and he mentioned his hair and it growing out.

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yeah.

Q. I asked if he ever thought he would cut it, and he says he is not attached to it, but maybe wait and see. Do you know or do you remember him with shorter hair?

DEVAUGHN VELE: With short hair? Yeah. If you watch our old film of scout team, you don't even see his hair coming out of his helmet. It's crazy to think now when you see him, you recognize Cam on the field because of his hair. Looking at old film like that, it's crazy to think that he used to have short hair because I'm so used to seeing him like this, even with the mustache too and everything (laughing).

Q. Do you ever imagine him without it or be able to recognize him again?

DEVAUGHN VELE: As long as he has a mustache, I'll recognize him anywhere (laughing).

Q. Did you give him tips about having good-looking locks?

DEVAUGHN VELE: No, he has better hair than I do. You know I have the curl, the Jheri curl, so I have to make sure I do my own thing.

I think Head & Shoulders (laughing). That's something that could do good for him. What would I know? I don't have nice hair like he does (laughing).

Q. Can you talk about your decision to move on to the

NFL?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Actually it's still in the works right now. It's not 100%. I'm still debating for myself what my future is going to look like. Haven't come up to a decision yet. Hopefully I'll come up to a decision after the bowl game, but as of right now I don't know.

Q. What have you learned from being at Utah during your career on and off the field?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, that's a great question. I think the biggest thing is just overcoming adversity. I know that's a cliché thing to say with our team, but I really believe that's what I've learned the most from because especially losing two teammates in the 2020 season and 2021 season and then as well as just even on the field with dealing with losses and people already writing us off, but then having to come back and prove them wrong.

I think that's just another life lesson you can take into life not only just for football, but in life in general. When you are faced with adversity, when there's obstacles in your way, as long as you have the grit and the drive to keep overcoming them, then that's what makes you a successful person.

Q. How did it influence losing those two teammates? How did it influence you?

DEVAUGHN VELE: It made me take a perspective of how short life can be. You know what I mean? Nothing is guaranteed.

I think that's the biggest thing that hit me the hardest, and it made me want to bring my loved ones closer to me. You know what I mean? Just saying I love you or texting them, just letting them know that you are there.

I feel like that's the biggest thing to me because losing those guys, you wouldn't expect that to happen in a college football season.

You see the guys every single day and think you're always going to see them the next day, and when you don't see them the next day, it hits you hard. So I think the biggest thing that that brought to me was just understanding life is short, but just loving the guys around you, letting them know that you love them, and putting an arm around them.

Q. Can you talk about the team's resolve last season and coming into this year?

DEVAUGHN VELE: You talking in regards to the football season or the loss of the teammate?

Q. The loss. Yeah.

DEVAUGHN VELE: The day after we lost A Lowe I remember we came in and had a team meeting where it was just the teammates -- or just the players talking to each other, and I just remember we were talking.

I think at that point is when our brotherhood really became, like, a single unit. We all just came together. It was no longer just individuals. Oh, these guys only hang out with these guys. No, we came together as a unit.

It was one of those things you see everybody and you're always saying hi to them or talking to them or chopping it up. That's what makes our team so much different from a lot of other teams is that brotherhood because everybody knows from that experience of losing a teammate, it's like you want to talk to everybody and get to know them.

You want to know their story and get to know them so they can always feel like they have a brother in you. So I feel like that was kind of the vibe that we got after we lost A Lowe and ever since then I feel like that's just kind of the culture that we built here in Utah is brotherhood.

Q. When you think about what's next for you, do you do pros and cons, or do you also do the addition of maybe I have this type of NIL opportunity compared to what, like, they project my professional salary to be? How do you even calculate something like that?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, I'm still learning on the fly, but -- I mean, obviously pros and cons is the biggest thing. I always try to see what would it look like if I stayed? What would happen? What would I expect? What would I need to do? Then it's the same thing if I went. What would I have to do? What would be the outcome of what I think is going to happen?

So I take all of those things into consideration, but at the end of the day I just want to make sure I'm doing what's best for myself. Not only for myself, but for my family. I feel like that's the biggest thing. I just want to make sure I take care of my family. If that means staying another season, then I'll stay another season. If that means I go, then I'll go.

Still in the works right now. Still trying to figure out what I'm going to do, but I'll definitely be coming up with a decision soon.

Q. Have you already finished your bachelor's degree?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yes, sir. I graduated this last

semester was my last semester.

Q. You're working on your master's now?

DEVAUGHN VELE: That's the plan. Yeah.

Q. What jumps off the page to you about Penn State? What do you look at after watching film?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Physicality. They're a very physical defense. Especially the corners. They have really good corners and safeties as well. They're a lot bigger than a lot of the other corners we've faced in the PAC-12. Yeah, I feel like physicality is probably going to be the biggest thing in this game.

Q. Andy said this is probably the best defensive unit you guys have faced all year. Do you agree with him?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yeah, I believe so. This is a great defense. I've watched a lot of film on them already, and there's always a different player standing out each and every game.

It's just going to be one of those games where iron sharpens iron. Everybody is going to have to do their part, and the team that's more physical is going to be the one that will win the game.

Q. Penn State is without their best corner. Does that change up your route running?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I think No. 4 is a really good corner. Same thing with No. 3. Those are the two I've been watching the most.

I think they're just as good as the corner that they just lost as well. That's just a kudos to the culture that Penn State has already built over there. You know what I mean?

They have players. They have depth, and they're going to be physical. That's just one of those things that we just have to deal with, and we're going to have to stick to the game plan in order for us to win this game.

Q. How much fun are you having this week?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I'm having a lot of fun. It's been great. I think Disneyland was really fun because unlike last year, I was able to bring my wife along with me. So it was really fun being at Disneyland with her.

Q. That's great. What's your favorite ride at Disneyland?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, I probably would have to say -- oh (laughing), I'm still a big fan of Space Mountain. I loved that ride when I was a kid, and that's one of those rides, although it may not be as fun as it was when I was a kid because I thought it was faster when I was a kid, but it's still the memories that are linked to it.

I used to go to Disneyland a lot when I was a kid growing up in California, so Space Mountain was always one of those rides that I would go on it three, four times when I was there.

Q. And Beef Bowl, what's it like the second time around? Oh, we had it last year.

DEVAUGHN VELE: It was nice this year. It was the first time we actually got to go into the restaurant and experience what the people were supposed to be because last year we just had it at the hotel. Still fun. Still good, but this time around it was a lot cooler.

It was awesome seeing Bryson Barnes being the dude to cut the prime rib and then seeing Falcon up there as well tossing the salad. It was really fun. I enjoyed it.

Q. As a wide receiver, what kind of prepped you for your next chapter, whether you stay another season or whether you go to the NFL? What's kind of helped you to be the receiver that you are today?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Just work ethic. It sounds cliché, but that's literally what I was built upon. I mean, I was a walk-on when I first came on to the team. Earned my scholarship after a year, and that's what I have kind of built my whole character around as a receiver is just working harder than the guys that are in the room with me.

I could be friends with them. I'm obviously going to be brothers to them. At the end of the day I'm trying to out-compete them so I can be the one playing on Saturdays. That's what drove me so much is doing extra work, doing those little things, doing extra route running, extra catches after practice, practicing my releases. Just little things like that.

I felt like that's what helped me get to where I'm at. I still haven't arrived, you know what I mean? It's nowhere close to where I want to be. There are still things I have to keep working on, still things I have to do, but I'm excited for whatever is in store for me.

Q. The wide receivers in the NFL now or past that you enjoy watching?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I was actually a big fan of Davante

Adams. One thing that I took from him is implementing basketball into how I play receiver because I was a big basketball player growing up as well.

A lot of just simple cross-overs I can use in the same thing I do my releases. Sometimes if you ever watch my releases, you'll see me doing behind the back with my hand because I'm imagining I have a basketball in my hand trying to do that. He was a big part.

Some of the receivers I loved watching as a kid was Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne. I'm a Colts fan, so watching those guys when they were part of that Super Bowl '05 team with Peyton Manning, Dallas Clark, Jeff Saturday, and all those guys.

Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne were one of my two favorite receivers to watch. They would always catch everything, and that's one thing I always believed in. If the ball touches your hand, you have to catch it.

Q. You have another PAC-12 guy down there in Michael Pittman, right?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Yeah, exactly.

Q. Sounds like talking to your teammates, golf has really taken off as the big hobby on the team. Where did that come from?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I don't even know. I just remember people saying they were golfing after practices and all that, and they were, like, you got to try it, it's really fun.

The only thing I ever heard about golf was that it was expensive, so I didn't want to try it. I remember there was a couple of times that I just went to Top Golf, and we were just hitting the ball around, and at first I didn't like it because I couldn't hit the ball. I didn't know how to hit it.

Then once I got it down that first drive you get when you see it kind of soar up, that was an addicting feeling. So after that I got my own clubs. I got everything. I started going to the courses and everything.

Now all of us are golfing. We've been talking in the offseason let's go golfing when we get time. It's kind of like we've got the golf bug for the whole team (laughing)?

Q. Talking to Micah, he said you are one of the better guys on the team.

DEVAUGHN VELE: At golf?

Q. Yeah.

DEVAUGHN VELE: I picked it up pretty fast, but I'm nowhere near as good as like -- Dalton I think is one of the best players on you are on team when it comes to golf, but I can hold my own if I need to (laughing)?

Q. Shifting gears here, what stands out about Penn State's secondary? Obviously No. 9 opted out, their tight corner. What are some of those guys? Who has impressed you there?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I was already talking to somebody else, but I think No. 4 is a really good corner. Same with No. 3. They both have different styles of playing. 3 is a lot more shadowing, while No. 4 is a lot more physical.

So they're a really good secondary. From what I've seen, I know it's going to be a dogfight at the end of the day, and I think physicality is going to be the biggest thing. I think the team that's going to be more physical is going to be the one with that wins.

When we have those one-on-one matches, we have to be more physical. Not only that, the team that makes more plays is going to win.

It's going to be one of those games where it's iron sharpens iron, and we have to make sure we do what we have to do to win the game.

Q. Does that excite you at all knowing that 4 is pretty aggressive? Do you like that?

DEVAUGHN VELE: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I love going up against the best because it tells you where you are when you play against the best. Obviously, 9 opted out. It would have been a great opportunity to play against him, but I still think 4 and 3 are great corners. I think they're just as good as he is.

I'm excited for that, and I'm excited for those one-on-one matchups to see their best athletes going up against our best athletes.

Q. How would you describe the progression of this offense throughout the season from back in Week 1 at The Swamp until now?

DEVAUGHN VELE: A lot of things we do is just sticking to game plans and making sure players make plays. I feel like the biggest thing that we've been able to do with the offense this year is just be building on each and every single game.

After that loss against Florida, we saw things we needed to



work on, and we continued to work on it and kept building it up. Then we would have another obstacle in the way where we lost to UCLA and saw what we needed to fix. Same thing with Oregon.

I feel like one thing about this offense is we're able to adapt to a lot of the changes and a lot of the things we see on film. It would make those necessary changes to be able to be better in the next games.

Q. How would you describe Cam Rising as not only a football player, but a leader in the huddle?

DEVAUGHN VELE: I think he is a great leader. He makes you want to be better and his competitive spirit, his drive to always want to win every single game, that's what drives the team. It makes you want to be that person that wants to get behind him.

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