

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Keaton Bills

Press Conference

Q. Not the first time Utah has been to the Rose Bowl. Obviously you had a game against UCLA earlier in the season. (Indiscernible) last year. Is it different, is it a business trip this time around for you guys? How are you seeing the trip this time around?

KEATON BILLS: It's a fun time being here no matter how many times you come. Rose Bowl is a big tradition. Just talking to the other people, when they talk about the Rose Bowl, it's the Granddaddy of Them All. That's the bowl game everyone watches.

It's always an honor to be here and it's fun and it's honestly overwhelming to have the honor and opportunity to be here.

Q. Do you feel singled out (indiscernible) and everyone else is...

KEATON BILLS: When I was walking in I was surprised to see my name up here. And everyone is, like, Keaton Bills, that's you.

Q. You had no idea? They don't give you a heads-up?

KEATON BILLS: They gave us an idea it was going to be a table. I didn't know it was going to be isolated like this. Makes me a little nervous, nerve-racking, but it's good to be here.

Q. Never had an experience like this, maybe at home?

KEATON BILLS: Never like this. This is super isolated. But never like this. This is amazing.

Q. What makes you think you were chosen?

KEATON BILLS: Honestly I have no idea.

Q. Maybe one of the better talkers on the team?



KEATON BILLS: I don't know we have a lot of good players a lot of good talkers. I'm just honored to be here.

Q. Speaking of your linemen, I'm not very familiar with the (indiscernible), No. 78?

KEATON BILLS: Sataoa Laumea.

Q. Tell me a little about him. He's a local kid from one of the high schools that I cover. Tell me a little bit about him and how he's kind of progressed. He's a sophomore (indiscernible).

KEATON BILLS: I think Sataoa is one of the better linemen on our team. I think he's just a hard player, every play is 100 percent. He goes out there and looks for someone to hit. He's super athletic, just an amazing player.

He was originally a guard. They moved him out to tackle. He's just been killing it all year, just putting his heart and soul into every game and just balling out. It's great to play with him.

Q. I remember your offensive coordinator said something yesterday, where he had to make a shift early on in the season, I think along the lines of (indiscernible), wanted to get the five best guys he could out there in front with you guys. What was that adjustment maybe like for him, kind of a natural fit for him to move over like that or growing pains early on?

KEATON BILLS: I mean, I think he moved him, like, a week before the first game of the season. And it obviously takes times. When you move position you have to take time to learn. But once he settled in he settled in nice, but he's been doing real well. Big attribute to the offensive line.

Q. When you have a change like that, that was the first game even for you, is there an adjustment for you? Because I know the offensive line is all about communication and you guys have to all be in sync with one another. How does that maybe affect your job at all, if at all?



KEATON BILLS: I don't think it affected us at all. He's been a part of the O line. He knows the communication that's needed. I think he's done well the whole time. I think it just kind of gelled real quickly.

Q. The quarterback, what kind of guy he is and the leader he is?

KEATON BILLS: Oh, man, I love playing for the guy. I love blocking for the guy. Every time we step on the field he just motivates you to do your best. Every time we come off the field, it's always like -- I just love, every time after we come off the field I tell him, hey, man, thanks for leading us out there. He's a great leader, makes me want to go play for him.

Q. Who is the funniest guy on the roster?

KEATON BILLS: Falcon, Falcon Kaumatule. He's the funniest guy I've ever talked to.

Q. Some people -- RJ said Cam Rising is a little underrated as one of the funnier guys?

KEATON BILLS: Underrated for sure.

Q. But everybody keeps saying Stump?

KEATON BILLS: Stump (laughs).

Q. They always have that reaction too?

KEATON BILLS: Stone. Yes, he's so funny.

Q. What is it about Stone?

KEATON BILLS: I think he has a great attitude towards everything. No matter what we're doing, whether we're running gassers or in practice, he just has a way of making things fun and just his attitude is just goofy. He makes you laugh every time you're around him.

Q. I heard it's not even if he's saying anything but if you happen to look at him.

KEATON BILLS: Just his actions, just the way he is. He's a goofy kid. I love that kid.

Q. What's it like for you being back?

KEATON BILLS: It's amazing to be back. Good to be here.

Q. Does it feel different this time around?

KEATON BILLS: It's a little different. Last year we had a little bit of the COVID restrictions. So everything was a little bit more limited. It was a little more rainy last year. I think this year's been night and day difference from last year. Last year was great, but this year has been amazing.

Q. (Indiscernible) kind of like the first trip to the Pac-12 Championship game you talked about the second trip being more business focused. Does that feel how this is?

KEATON BILLS: I think it's a lot more business focused. This year, we're excited to be back but we know we have a game to win and we want to do our best to win. So it's been good.

Q. Why do you think you guys have been so cohesive up front this year? Last year it took about two or three games to kind of get locked in. This year it almost feels like sort of from the jump you guys have been a cohesive five up front, why do you think that is?

KEATON BILLS: I think all five of us, we're just a little more older in the system. We kind of know the offense a little better. We know the coordinator. Honestly the quarterback helps us get gelled right in. I think everything has to do, the whole offense is a little bit more gelled this year.

It's just been fun. I think everyone's motivated to win games and we're excited to be out there. It's been fun.

Q. Who is the regulator on the line? Every good offensive line has a regulator. Two choices I think you might be that guy or Sataoa might be that guy. Who is it?

KEATON BILLS: That's a great question. I think each and every one of us is a regulator at some point in the game, at some point in time. That's a great question. I think we're all there. I can't pinpoint somebody there.

Q. What do you see when you put the tape on with Penn State? A lot of guys have said Coach Whittingham has said best defense you faced this year probably. (Indiscernible) seen the front seven a lot, what stands out?

KEATON BILLS: I think you just said it, the front seven. The front seven come out and play; their motor is outstanding, the way they come and affect every single play is really amazing.

I think we're going to go toe to toe and it's going to be back

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and forth the whole game. Their D-line and linebackers is what really stands out to me. And I'm excited to go against them and see where we face up. They're a great team. We're a great team as well.

Q. Talk about Ja'Quinden. He made that move to running back. What was your initial thought? The guy's a quarterback, not a running back. How did you see him evolve into that as he's gone along?

KEATON BILLS: I remember when I first saw him at running back I was excited because I knew that man had some legs. When he started going out there making some plays I got super excited. And just to see him kind of fill that role and take that role on his shoulders and ball out each and every game that he's been put in, it's been so fun to see him play.

I'm excited to see him play this game and I'm excited to see him play next year when he has a full year of being a nice running back. I think he'll do a lot of great things I'm excited for him.

Q. What does (indiscernible) in the program?

KEATON BILLS: I think just the first Rose Bowl win in program history and make that history would mean more than I can explain, to all the hard work all the guys have put in this year, I think it would mean a lot to end the year with a nice Rose Bowl win.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

KEATON BILLS: Man, it's been fun. Obviously we're all a little bit older in the program. We've all had a few years in the program, few years with the offense. Just knowing my guys. We've all just kind of had this desire to be the best and just to play our best.

And so you always have guys coming in after doing work, staying late, watching film. We're always just trying to get better and trying to find the best way be the best. And I love playing with the guys around me.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

KEATON BILLS: We're just talking with Bill Riley over here. We're just saying the front seven is amazing, the motor they have, they don't quit. They pose a big threat on their blitzes and twists and stuff. Their run stop is amazing.

So we just gotta go out there and make sure we're finishing plays, we're going to the whistle and that we don't give up. Just hoping that we can play a little harder than they can.

Q. Are you focused on the team right now but the program and future (inaudible)?

KEATON BILLS: You know, I think the future only gets brighter from here. We're doing a lot of great things now and we've done a lot of great things. But I think a lot of great things are coming.

Q. Andy Ludwig said he thought this was the best defense you guys may have faced this year. Studying them, how would you respond to that?

KEATON BILLS: I think that's a very accurate assessment. I think all of them come out and play, play hard every rep. You have a lot of great players on Penn State defense. I'm excited to see where we stand against them. They are great.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

KEATON BILLS: Iron sharpens iron and it's going to be great to face the best. We're one of the best. It's going to be a great game all around. I'm super excited.

Q. How much, I don't know what the word would be, maybe satisfaction, does the offensive line take in the situation where it doesn't matter who the running back is they're going to have success, and that's been a strong point over the years as you know it, but especially this year because you have (indiscernible)? The quarterback stick him at running back biggest game he runs over a hundred yards. I would imagine that's going to be at least somewhat gratifying for an offensive lineman?

KEATON BILLS: It's good to see our running backs get some good yards and get some good plays in. But honestly it has to do with them. Has to do with their coaches. Has to do with their work ethic.

The running backs come in every practice working hard and trying to get better and trying to make the right cuts and hitting the right holes and they do a great job during practice. It really shows out during the games.

Q. Wait a second, I thought offensive line weren't taking credit for that.

KEATON BILLS: I can't take credit for how well they do. I can only do my job and take credit for what I do. But the running backs make the plays.

Q. We always hear if the running backs, if there's no room and they don't have (indiscernible) on the offensive line, so the only time you hear offensive line

is when they poke a hole in it. Same thing, this is your chance to brag.

KEATON BILLS: I'm not the one to brag, but I just know my guys, my O linemen, we work hard to make big holes and work hard to get things moving. But I just know my running backs work hard, too.

Q. Not that it wasn't important last year because (indiscernible) now this year it's the second time around. Nobody in the program wants to go 0-2 in the Rose Bowl. With that in mind, maybe how more important is it to get a win this year to make up for...

KEATON BILLS: I think a lot of guys who played last year, this is their last year. This is their last opportunity to win one of these things. We're all out here -- we need that win, right? It's not a want, it's a need at this point.

Q. Have you sensed maybe a different level of seriousness this year (indiscernible) down here?

KEATON BILLS: I think the practices have been super focused, super fast and super physical. We've all been out there every practice trying to get the extra edge, get a little better each practice. I feel our guys are locked in and ready to go.

Q. Did you grow up dreaming of playing in a Rose Bowl?

KEATON BILLS: I honestly never thought I'd be able to play in a Rose Bowl. I never thought about it. Now that I'm here, it's a dream come true and it's awesome.

Q. You've been in the trenches, been watching film on Penn State. You've been going against (indiscernible) all year in practice and everything. How is Penn State looking up front?

KEATON BILLS: You know what, I've been saying it all day. Penn State has a great front seven. They come hard every play. They don't give up. They don't take plays off. It's going to be an exciting game to see who is going to last the longest and who is going to be able to finish the game with all their strength.

Q. (Indiscernible) hair grow longer or (indiscernible) more braids?

KEATON BILLS: You say the hair is the same, but I cut off four inches a couple weeks ago. So it's gotten a little bit shorter. I haven't decided to cut it all off, let it go. It's kind of a day-by-day basis where it's going to go.

Q. Would you say you're top five best hair on the team?

KEATON BILLS: I gotta be at least top two, and not No. 2, if you know what I'm saying.

Q. Who else has great hair?

KEATON BILLS: Cam Rising. I think Makai Cope has great hair. Braeden Daniels has great hair. And Coach Whitt has some great hair, but not top 10.

Q. Any dinner plans for tonight?

KEATON BILLS: Hopefully something good.

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