

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Pasadena, California, USA

Utah Utes

Ja'Quinden Jackson

Press Conference



Q. How has this week been for you?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's been pretty cool. You know, just vibing with the teammates and putting extra work in getting ready for the Rose Bowl.

Q. Coach mentioned yesterday that you are (inaudible). Have you had discussions about that?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Not really. I just put in their ear and let them know I didn't want to switch back and I wanted stay a running back. I'm having fun with it. I'm enjoying it, so ain't no point.

Q. At what point did you say, yeah, I'm going on stick with running back?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: The day he told me (laughing). No, but once I got the rhythm down and I just seen it from the running backs perspective, I was like, yeah, I think I can do this. So I'm going to stick with it and see where it takes me.

Q. I was going to talk to you about defense. What's going to be the key to success?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: One thing that stood out to me was they play hard. They are similar to our defense. They're a similar team to us, so we just have to do what we have to do and come out there and play football.

Q. I know you didn't play last year at the Rose Bowl, but how different is it knowing that you are going to be counted on heavily tomorrow?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I'm excited. I'm excited about it. Just being able to contribute this year and help the team come out with a W, it's a blessing. I'm glad I can be able to do that.

Q. What's the future of this team look like in your

mind?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: We're going to have a great team. We have some young dudes that are some headhunters, so I'm excited to see what it looks like.

Q. Ja'Quinden, how are you feeling today?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I feel good. I feel good.

Q. Feeling go ahead. How has the Madden series been going?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: (Laughing) you so goofy, bro. It's been going good. Just been getting right, you know.

Q. When it comes to playing Madden, what running back exemplifies your game on the field?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Oh, I watch a lot of Derrick Henry. Derrick Henry is my favorite back, so I'm going to go with Derrick Henry.

Q. So, first off, originally you were a quarterback, and now you made that switch to the running back room. How has that affected (inaudible)?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's been great. Coach Q makes it easy for me, so it's been an easy process. Just soaking what he is coaching and teaching us, and I've been loving it ever since I moved.

Q. You started to break out as a running back when you played Arizona State. (Inaudible)(Question about Micah Bernard).

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's been cool. Probably one of the best duos in the country I would say. But, no, I've been learning a lot of stuff from him too. He has been pointing out errors. We hold each other accountable when we feel like one of us is slacking, so it's been a blessing.

Q. Being behind Cam Rising probably (inaudible) -- do you think that chemistry shifted over into more of an offensive run set mind?



JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Definitely. Most definitely. Me and Cam talk a lot, so the chemistry is there, you know. Like I said, it's a blessing being with him too. You learn a lot of stuff being around Cam also.

Q. (Inaudible) a lot of players are coming down the line, especially defensive line. Do you think your craft in shifting has helped you find ways to go around and maybe get that (inaudible)?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Most definitely. Most definitely. Like I said, we just have to come out there and play physical and play football. That's it. We'll get the job done.

Q. Who would you say is the most influential person that helped you transition from quarterback to running back?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I would say my family because the day it happened, the day we actually talked about moving me to running back was -- you know, they seen what I could do at running back, and they liked it.

And I talked to my mom about it, and she basically told me, like, if you like it, go with it. So I've just have been doing that, and it took off ever since then.

Q. How different is it from playing quarterback to running back? Pretty different schemes and just the technical stuff.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It comes easy, but it comes -- it's not easy, but it's not hard either. It's only hard if you make it hard. Coach Q, Coach Ganther, he helps us with that, so he makes our job a lot easier.

Q. Congress Whittingham has called you a leader in that running back room and overall on the team. How does that make you feel?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Honestly, that's just who I am. I just try to lead by example and hold my teammates accountable. That's just my character. That's how I am.

Q. How would you assess your team's offensive line this year?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: They play tremendous because without them we wouldn't be able to run the ball, we wouldn't be able to throw the ball. I salute our O-line, and I give them their (inaudible), and I hold them accountable also. Let them know when they're messing up, like, hey, come on, that's not Utah football. Let's get this ball rolling. But I definitely salute them because without them, none of

this would be possible.

Q. What's the biggest thing you're looking forward to in playing in the Rose Bowl?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: A good game. That's all. A good game. They play their best, and we play our best. That's all I'm looking for.

Q. Could you have predicted the way this season has gone for you personally? Not just your team, but you personally. Going from quarterback and becoming one of the go-to running backs of this offense.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Really, no didn't expect this at all. I thought I was just going to be sitting behind Cam the whole year. You know, wildcat here and there.

But if somebody would have asked me would you be switching to running back this year, I would definitely be saying no. Like I said, it's a blessing, and I'm happy that I did it. I did it for the team. I did it for me, but, you know, it's a blessing.

Q. Do you feel like there was a point where you were, like, you know what, this is where I can really thrive in college football?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Yeah, most definitely. We was at practice basically just moving around because, you know, I didn't really get that many reps because, you know, I was a three at quarterback, but just being able to just move around and just have fun with the game again, I'm loving it. I'm loving it.

Q. If you had only one choice for a streaming service, which one do you go with? You can only keep one.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: A streaming service?

Q. Like Netflix, Disney Plus, Paramount, HBO.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I'm going to go HBO Max.

Q. What's your favorite?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Really any one of them. They're all good. I'm not going to lie to you, but I'm going to go HBO Max.

Q. For the holiday season what's been the best Christmas gift?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Just spending time with my family. You know, we go so long without seeing them, so



just being around the love and the affection that I've been missing. That's all you can really ask for.

Q. New Year's Day is two things, the Rose Bowl game and New Year's resolutions. Do you have any resolutions for the year?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Just get better and continue to grow as a person.

Q. Finally, team photo day, who on the team takes the most time to make sure they're looking good, looking clean, ready for that picture?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I'm going to go with Makai. He is a light-skin, so he want to be pretty in his pictures.

Q. Do you ever catch your teammates checking themselves a little bit?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: All the time. All the time. They all do it. I do it sometimes too. I'm not going to lie to you.

Q. How do you feel about being here, man? The overall feeling of being here.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's a great experience. Just being able to play football in California is a blessing, and there's a lot of people out here that was doubting us that we weren't going to be at this point. We stayed ten toes down and we kept our head down and kept working and now we're here. So it's just a blessing.

Q. The amazing season that you guys have had, you mentioned some of that right now. You know, just coming in every game, I mean, do you feel like you were overlooked almost every game?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Most definitely. A lot of people had us picked to lose against a lot of teams, so we definitely were the underdogs, you know.

But, like I said, we stayed a efficient, stayed a family, and we kept working, and we didn't care what anybody else had to say about us. We just maintained and kept struggling.

Q. You guys are familiar down here playing in the Rose Bowl, playing at the Coliseum. You had pretty good games here, as a matter of fact. Do you come here with a sense of confidence, or is it business as usual?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Business. Business. We got confidence too because of how we've been playing, you

know, but we treat this as a business, and this is a business trip. You know, we come here to handle business.

We are going to handle business, let's put it that way. You know what I'm saying? We just -- we also want to have fun with handling our business. We just don't want to make it all tensed up and here, football, football, but we want to have fun playing football. Fun winning, you know what I'm saying? That's what my mind set is.

Q. How do you offset that versus when to get up, when to relax?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's just a switch that we all have because we know when it's time to have fun. We know when it's time to go to work. It's just a switch that we all encountered and learned how to have.

Q. How has your week been?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It's been cool. Just chilling having fun with the fellows. It's been smooth.

Q. A little different than a year ago when you were, like, I'm probably not going to play in the game. Maybe, maybe not. You know you're playing on Monday. How has that changed your approach this week?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I'm excited about it. I'm ready to see what the outcome is and just go out there and play ball.

Q. Could you have foreseen anything like this happening, or is this just beyond what your imagination was before the year?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Beyond what my imagination was before the year. I thought I was going to be sitting behind Cam and just see what happens. But, like I say, it's a blessing just being able to experience this. I'm loving it.

Q. I've asked you this before, but just reiterate, how much does your experience as a quarterback help you when you are 5 yards behind the quarterback or standing next to him as a running back?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: It helps a lot. Just being able to know -- just being so far back in the backfield and looking at the defense, just knowing -- just seeing where the blitz is coming from, what coverages they're in, what hole they're going to hit. I know all that before the ball is even snapped. That helps me. Being a quarterback helps me a lot.

Q. What's been the response from friends, family, former teammates, guys like that as you have evolved this year as a running back?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: A lot of them are still surprised, but a lot of people that really know me know that I've been doing this. I've been doing this since middle school and before then.

A lot of peopling back home, they're not really surprised about it, but a lot of people that haven't been around me that long are surprised about it. So I'm just growing and just continuing to strive and get better.

Q. I asked Keaton about you. I'll ask you about the five guys in front of you. Running backs are generally as good as those guys up front.

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Most definitely.

Q. How good have those guys again up front this year?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: They've been great. They've been great. All had 200-yard games back-to-back, so that speaks for itself. They've been excellent.

Q. Give me a read on Penn State. When you put the tape on, you are in the room looking at Penn State's defense, how do they compare to some of the ones you've seen this year, and what do you think?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Penn State is probably the best defense that we are going to experience this year.

They're very similar to us. Hard-mouth football they play. So we know what to expect, and we know what we have to do to win this game.

Q. They have some dudes over there. No. 11 might be the biggest of the dudes, right?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: Most definitely. I seen him on film. He is pretty nice. True freshman. He is pretty nice.

Q. Young guy like you? Younger than you?

JA'QUINDEN JACKSON: I like him. He is pretty good.

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