

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Oregon vs Ohio State

Monday, December 30, 2024  
Pasadena, California, USA

## Ohio State Buckeyes

### Will Howard

#### Press Conference

**Q. For you just having the type of season that you guys have had, triumphs as well as overcoming adversity, what have you learned about yourself and this team over the course of the season and being in the position that you're in now?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, we're resilient, and I think the stuff that we've gone through this year has shown that. I'm proud of these guys because it hasn't been an easy road.

When you come into a season with the type of expectations that we had, you're never really going to satisfy everyone, and it's about how you bounce back from those tough times. It's never going to be perfect. You're never going to have a perfect game, never going to have a perfect season, very rarely. You've got to be able to bounce back from anything that happens and be resilient.

I think the thing about this team that I love so much is that every time we get knocked down, we bounce right back. I think we showed that in the last game.

I just want to finish this thing the right way for these guys and for this university.

**Q. A couple of guys I talked to talked about Chip Kelly, they talked about the creative mind he's displayed over the course of the season. What have you taken away from Chip and his creativity to be able to be successful on the field?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, with him, he's just such a sharp mind. Being able to be in a room with him every single day is a blessing for me. He's coached for as long as I've been alive. When I was growing up, I was an Eagles fan, he was an Eagles coach. It's just, like, kind of crazy to think about the fact that I'm being coached by him.

Throughout this whole year, I think we've become kind of



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on the same page about a lot of things, and we've kind of gotten in sync on a lot of things, and he's taught me so much. I feel like I've been able to give him some perspective on things, and I think between him and Coach Day, Billy Fessler who doesn't get a lot of credit, he's like my go-to guy in that quarterback room. I've got to shout him out, man. He does so much for me on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. Those guys have turned me into a better player.

**Q. Having a guy like Jeremiah Smith basically at your disposal, seeing his skill set over the course of the season, what are some of the things that we don't see that you all see maybe in practice?**

WILL HOWARD: Man, he's special. I think it's just the way that he approaches every single day. It's not like he's just going out there and making these unbelievable plays. He's doing it in practice every single day, and he's working at it, and he wants this more than anything.

When you have a kid that's that talented and that mature and that young age, you don't find that very often. I'm just thankful that he's on my team, man. He's a hell of a player, and he's only getting better from here, and that's the crazy thing.

I think when it's all said and done, he could be one of the best to ever play this game, and I think he's got that kind of potential. He's just got to keep working, and I know he will. He's humble, too. He's a different breed.

**Q. Transferring in, what kind of learning curve was there, and was there a moment where you felt like you had a better grasp of the offense?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, I think the spring period for me was definitely an interesting transition. Really, I realized -- I've told this story before, but there was a play during spring ball where I went out there and just had go balls on either side, and I decided to throw to Jeremiah to the field, and I went out and took a three-step drop and I took two hitches to throw a go ball, and Coach Day is like, what are you doing, and I'm like, three and two, that's how I threw go balls at K-State. That's the timing that I was taught. He's

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like, you're going to underthrow it by 10 yards every time if you do that here. It's just different. The speed is different.

I was like -- that was the moment where I was kind of like, oh, all right, this is a different level of speed and talent around me, and I'm going to have to raise myself to that level.

Going through that whole spring was a big learning curve for me, just learning the offense, because when I got there, we didn't have an OC. We didn't really have an OC until about a week before spring ball. So I struggled a little bit in the spring, I'm not going to lie. I didn't have my best showing all throughout the spring. I think I got better as it went on. I don't think I was really comfortable until practice eight or nine of spring ball.

But really when we got into fall camp that was when I felt like I had really settled in and understood the offense and really kind of felt comfortable taking on more of a leadership position on the team.

**Q. Did that feel kind of like the culmination of all the work you had put in?**

WILL HOWARD: You know, I think it's a step. I don't want to say that's the culmination of everything because we still have more that we're chasing. But I think that was definitely a good step, and we talked about the first step of the playoffs and getting the first one is big.

I think the fact that we were able to go out there and play well and move the ball -- it wasn't perfect, that's the thing. We've still got to learn from some of the mistakes we made in that game. But I think that was good.

We've got to keep that same edge, though. We have to keep the chip on your shoulder. We can't let a little success make us become complacent because that's when problems start happening.

**Q. It's been discussed how your leadership has taken another step up. When did you feel that?**

WILL HOWARD: It was Indiana week, we're going to a top-5 match-up and we lose our guy, our starting center who's just a dude, man. Easily my best friend on this team. I'd die for that guy.

When I saw him go down and I knew pretty much what it was, we all kind of knew, it hurt me, and I was like -- I was damn near on the edge of tears. I just wanted to -- everything in me wanted to stop and go home and weep for that kid. But I knew that's not what he wanted. He would have wanted us to go and beat the heck out of

Indiana and have a great Tuesday practice. That was when it happened.

I just said to myself, I was like, I can't let this derail this game and this practice. I tried to ask myself what would Seth do, and I went out there and just tried to carry on the leadership that he brought.

**Q. Do you ever allow yourself to stop and think, I'm throwing to a bunch of NFL receivers, or is it it's just Jeremiah and Mek and Carnell?**

WILL HOWARD: You know, yeah. You know what you're getting into when you come to a place like Ohio State. But yeah, it's still surreal. Some of those guys making some of the plays that they make, they're mistake erasers. I say that a lot.

I want to be perfect with my ball placement and I want to put the ball where it needs to be every single time, but the reality is that I might miss every once in a while, but those guys are going to make me right.

The reality is I've just got to give those guys a chance, especially on deep balls, give them a chance, and they'll go do the rest. They've shown that this year.

It's an embarrassment of riches being able to play with those guys. They make me better, and I like to think we make each other better.

**Q. I was asking Dillon Gabriel, how much time do you expect on visualization, not just looking at video but trying to pre-see things before they happen? How much time do you spend on that and how important is that?**

WILL HOWARD: I think it's very important. There's different ways to visualize, and I'm more of a written visualization kind of learner. I like to go through every play, and I say, hey, what if they run this coverage against it, what are we going to do if they run this coverage, what if we get this pressure against it. Those are the kind of things I like to think through scenarios and try to have answers for everything.

Then really the night before I like to sit down and just visualize and see myself making plays. That's that night, sitting in the hotel, that's when I like to do that.

**Q. Like Josh Fryar blocking Jordan Burch?**

WILL HOWARD: Exactly, like Josh Fryar kicking out Jordan Burch.

**Q. Is it easier to do that when you've played somebody before, that process?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, 100 percent. When you play somebody twice, it really brings out the chess game, the game inside the game, and I've said that a bunch. It makes it fun. I'm a football nerd at heart and I'm a geek for the playbook and playing games with your opponents. I think that's what makes it fun playing a team twice, and especially a team of this caliber. I know they're getting their rusher back, Jordan Burch. He's a heck of a player. So we'll have our hands full, and we knew that. You come to the Rose Bowl, you're in the CFP, you're playing the best of the best every single week, so we're going to have to bring our "A" game, and we're excited for the challenge.

**Q. Do you feel like you've learned from the ups and downs of the season?**

WILL HOWARD: I do. I think that we've been able to -- every time we've been knocked down, we bounce back, and I think that speaks a lot to the character of the guys in the locker room and the coaching and just the university as a whole. I think that the ups and downs that we have gone through this year, you feel them, and it's not easy. But yeah, I think that that does kind of give you a callus a little bit, and you aren't affected by things as much.

I think that speaks -- for me personally, in my career, I've probably thrown as many interceptions through my five years in college football as probably a lot of people, but it's about how you bounce back, and it's about how you learn from those mistakes and make sure they don't happen again. I think that we've done a good job of that this year, and we have to continue to do that the last three weeks here.

**Q. Does it feel like a grind at all this year with the expanded playoff?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, I mean, it really doesn't feel any different to me because I was ready -- if I didn't end up here at Ohio State, I was going to end up going to the NFL, and it would have been a long season, assuming I would have stayed on a team. Obviously I made the right choice coming here to Ohio State, but I knew what I was getting myself into, and we all knew what we were getting ourselves into. We did not expect to be here and just play a normal season. We knew -- I remember Coach Mick making us do 17 push-ups at the beginning of the season because we had 17 games on our schedule, so we were ready for this the whole way.

**Q. How would you describe Chip Kelly's offense, and how has the style schematically benefitted this team?**

WILL HOWARD: I think it's really creative, and especially in the run game. I think a lot of the stuff that he does is just different, stuff that you wouldn't even really think of, gimmicks and different things that he's done in the past. It's cool, and it's creative, and it's brought life to this offense.

For me, it makes me be able to critically think a little bit more, and he's pushed me to see outside the box a little more on some things schematically.

But this whole year, just working with him and getting coaching from him, and I've said it, Coach Day and Billy Fessler and Riley Larkin and those guys have changed me into a different player, and I'm telling you, those guys have given me some life lessons and some lessons on the field that I'll never be able to repay.

**Q. Did Chip have a nickname for you?**

WILL HOWARD: I don't think he had a nickname for me. He really just had Chad Ray, Chad Ray field goal. That's what he calls him. It's an inside joke. But we all have our little nicknames and stuff.

**Q. Chip is secretly funny.**

WILL HOWARD: He is. He's a funny guy. He likes to have fun. I love that. Being able to be locked in and grinding but also being able to have fun while we're doing it and joke around a little bit -- shoot, I spent Christmas Eve at his house. My mom went over there and Devin and Lincoln, we went over there and spent Christmas Eve with him and his wife and the dogs, and it was awesome.

I know he as a head coach missed that, being able to interact with kids and having a room, and I know that was part of the reason why he came here. The room that we do have is fun, and I think we have a lot of fun together. He's a big part of that.

It's just been -- everything about my transition here has been awesome.

**Q. Is "Game of Thrones" your favorite show?**

WILL HOWARD: Yes.

**Q. And also who is your favorite character and do you wish the ending was better?**

WILL HOWARD: Dude, I'm a huge "Game of Thrones" geek. I did not expect that to go that viral. I don't know why I was sitting there and I was like -- it was cold, play on

the north thing, and it just popped into my head, and I looked up like "Game of Thrones" North quotes and that was the first one that came up, the Arya after she slays the Freys. I'm a huge "Game of Thrones" nerd. Easily John Snow is my favorite character. I wish he would have ended up not getting sent back beyond the wall. I'm not a huge fan of the way it ended, but I am a huge "Game of Thrones" fan, so that was the reason for that.

**Q. Was seeing Tennessee with their shirts off in the cold, did that remind you of "Game of Thrones"?**

WILL HOWARD: Maybe a little bit. Everyone all week was talking about how cold it was going to be, and them coming up into the cold. Yeah, I had a little fun with it. I did not expect it to be that viral or anything like that. But that was just me kind of being a "Game of Thrones" geek. I just thought it was cool. But yeah, I was just having fun with it.

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