

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Oregon vs Ohio State

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Pasadena, California, USA

Ohio State Buckeyes JT Tuimoloau Press Conference

Q. JT, when you look at what this team went through, is that part of something that you guys had that opportunity to really kind of hunt for?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, just like you said, all of us, we had this one goal, this one picture in mind to come back and to understand that we're in the quarterfinals right now and we have a chance to play for the National Championship. We've got to take one game at a time.

It's still cool to just sit back and see everything come full circle, just understanding what we wanted to do is to come back, and now we see everything just lining up.

Q. How do you guys take -- obviously you're preparing for Oregon, but such a great performance against Tennessee. How do you take momentum from that into this game?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I think you've just got to stay disciplined. We understand -- shout out to Brandon Inniss, he came out. Complacency can creep in with games like that. We have to understand that Oregon is a different team, it's a new team, and it's going to be a whole different game.

We've just got to continue to stay in the routine, stay close as one, and stay trusting each other and the coaches.

Q. Obviously respect every team, respect every player, but when you had the opportunity to go up against guys that you know are going to be playing in the NFL, what does that do for your head space?

JT TUIMOLOAU: It's fun. Great competition is always fun. Always just love playing against great guys. This is going to be a four quarter game, and those are the games you just dream of, just playing four quarters and having tough nosed football at the same time.



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You're playing against guys, like you said, who could potentially be your teammates in the future. So just having battles like this is something you can talk about and create a bond quick when you get there.

Q. You guys can do the jersey swaps?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Jersey swaps, yes.

Q. When you go up against your offense, there's so many different weapons and so many strengths for them, how much has that helped, the iron sharpening iron piece?

JT TUIMOLOAU: It helps a lot. Just like you said, you're going against guys who you're going to play on Sunday with or whatever the day may be, but it's just like that when you go against Donovan Jackson. There's nothing but great reps and great looks and just great competition. You get to work on things and get good game reps before the game.

Q. One of the matchups that gets talked about a lot is your offense against their defense, how deep they are and how talented they are. Is part of that in your mind like it's our turn to put up a statement in this game, like your guys?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I know there's a lot of talk there. I think all we can do is continue to keep our head down, not pay attention to the noise, and just give our O-line the greatest looks we can and vice versa. I think we're doing just that. Still have a couple days to be preparing and keep giving each other good looks.

Q. You talked about Oregon being a different team. What stands out? What's changed about them?

JT TUIMOLOAU: They're a very explosive team. I know one game they didn't have Tez Johnson against Wisconsin, but they're just very versatile. From the last games, both teams just grew.

They do a lot of things to just get an edge. They're a very explosive offense.

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Q. There's a group of you guys that are still around. I talked with Jack a little bit about it. What's it like to kind of have that group that was in this game then and now to see where you've come?

JT TUIMOLOAU: It's crazy to think about. That game was three, four years ago? For us being on the sideline, getting a little bit of playing time, watching it, and now we finally get to go in and play a full game, it's just crazy. It's crazy how quick time flies, though, as well.

So that's why we just try to enjoy every moment we can from the media days, from the playoff rooms, just every little thing we can, just enjoy each other's presence. Next year, maybe we all get drafted to the same team, maybe not, but these are just the times you have to enjoy with one another.

Q. What's it like to see where the program's ups and downs you guys have had, the Michigan game and obviously the success you had in getting to the playoffs. What's it been like to kind of go through it all and see where you're at now?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I think of those moments so much. I think those moments really test what our foundation is built on. One thing I'd say about this team, we built our foundation on something that's bigger than us. We built our foundation on the Lord and the Lord's trust and the Lord's plan.

Just to go through those little trials, man, I can't be more thankful for it. Like you said, it's brought us closer together. It's allowed us to really look at everything from a different perspective and just continue to make the choice if we want to split or become scattered or stay close and continue to just work towards the goals that we have planned for the season.

Q. If you had to go back and talk to 2021 JT, what would you say? What kind of advice would you give him?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, I'd probably tell him life goes by quick. There's going to be a lot of things that you deal with off and on the field, both mental blocks to tough losses. Just continue to stay grounded, continue to trust in the Lord's plan and understand that everything that you're going through, there's always something big on the other side.

It may be cloudy, but one day those clouds are going to clear up, and there's going to be sunshine. You're going to look at it and just be very thankful.

Q. Obviously the way college football is going now, there's fewer and fewer of those four-year players. How unique and how special is it to have that group where you guys started where you were and just to still be together?

JT TUIMOLOAU: We're an older group. It's kind of crazy to be considered an old guy now. We're considered an older group, so we're allowed to lead the young pups in just the right way and competing with them to training with them to having each other here.

We're allowed to just continue to lead, continue to just make that pathway for them forward. When we do leave or whatever the plan is after, that they're able to just continue this foundation going.

Q. Here with JT. I don't think you really need an introduction because everybody knows who you are. I've got a couple of questions for you. What's one word that describes the Rose Bowl?

JT TUIMOLOAU: History.

Q. What's one celebrity that would play you in a movie?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I'd probably say either Jason Momoa. He's got good hair and he's Poly.

Q. Which celebrity would you want to come watch you play at the Rose Bowl?

JT TUIMOLOAU: It's not really a celebrity. I'd probably go a different route. I'd probably go with my aunt. She passed away, rest in peace to her. I know she's watching, but it would be cool to have her watching in person and have a front row seat.

Q. Which non-athlete celebrity do you think would make a great football player?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I'd probably say Anthony Edwards. Oh, non-athlete? Shoot, I don't know. I'd probably say -- who played Boobie Miles? I say he could. I feel like, if he was able to do something. Or Nelly. I'd probably say Nelly too.

Q. Which teammate of yours could star in a movie?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Donovan Jackson. Great acting voice, great actor as well.

Q. What is your favorite movie of all time?



JT TUIMOLOAU: I'd probably go Parched.

How was it playing over there with Michael and everybody?
Like that offense, how was it?

Q. Crazy.

JT TUIMOLOAU: Just watching it, they had you and De'Anthony Thomas, and then your defense was -- who was there?

Q. Yeah. Arik Armstead, Keith Paul, Dion Jordan, John Boyett, Terrance Mitchell, Troy Hill.

JT TUIMOLOAU: I remember watching that game. Just crazy because my family, they were all USC fans. My uncle played for USC. They were USC, and I was Oregon.

Q. You went against them.

JT TUIMOLOAU: I went against a lot of things, but I was a proud Oregon fan.

Q. Where you from originally?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Edgewood, Washington.

Q. Let's talk about the excitement of the game come this Rose Bowl day. What will you feel like stepping on the field?

JT TUIMOLOAU: First, just have to give all the thanks and glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for just allowing us to be here.

Once I step on, take a deep breath, take it all in, but understanding this is going to be a big game, big exciting game, and I can't wait. Just to be back here from my freshman year to now getting another chance to play in the Rose Bowl is going to be a blessing.

Q. Who's your inspiration? Is there an athlete or a person that inspires you to do what you do?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I'd probably say my family and my parents, just what they have done for me to get here, the infinite sacrifices they've made for me to be in this predicament I'm in. All the credit goes to them from just allowing me -- my dad getting off at 6:30 to working at the bank and coming home and taking me to the fields at 7:30, 8:00 at night to run my 100s just to get me in shape.

To my mother, just taking care of me and my siblings and taking me everywhere I need to go no matter how busy or how tired she is, same with my dad. I just give them all the

credit for them just doing everything for me and for the love of me.

Q. What words do you live by?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Faith. Faith is just more just trusting. It's just really having full belief in everything. I feel like, if you second guess yourself, then maybe there's not a lot of faith behind that. Just putting faith in the Lord, putting faith and trust in your work and what you have been doing, eventually everything will come out.

My mom has always said whatever's done in the dark will come to the light. It's a verse in the bible. I feel like whatever's done that you've been doing behind closed doors, behind all the cameras, behind the scenes, it eventually comes to show who you really are.

Q. What would you say to all your friends, family, and fans?

JT TUIMOLOAU: I'm here in Cali in the Rose Bowl. I'm proud to just represent you guys. Thank you.

Q. What's the trip been like to be back out here? What's that been like to be here in Pasadena?

JT TUIMOLOAU: It's a blessing. It's great. Long trip. We got a good airplane, so we were able to lay out, get some stretch, get some good rest.

Just glad to be back out here in Pasadena.

Q. What have you guys learned -- you played Oregon once. What are you going to take from that game that you learned about their offense that will help you in January 1st?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Explosive offense. I've been saying that all day. Very talented. We've just got to continue to stay disciplined, stay poised.

It's going to be a four quarter game. It's going to be an electrifying four quarter game just to be able to keep your poise and just understand that, hey, man, there's going to be a lot of swings back and forth. Continue to stay rooted, stay grounded, stay disciplined.

Q. The momentum of a big win against Tennessee, how much did that help your team's psyche and heading into the Rose Bowl?

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, it helps a lot, understanding that coming off a great win like that, you've just got to continue to build off it. You continue to stay in the same spot that

you were when you played them, you're kind of falling behind.

So just continue to take the good things and keep them and build on all the mistakes that you made in that game and just continue to grow.

Q. What's Coach Knowles' philosophy? What's he told you guys this week leading up to the Rose Bowl?

JT TUIMOLOAU: He's always just reminded us and reassured us that we're a great team, a great defense. One thing we also told him, he's also a great DC. Without a lot of this, without him having to be the captain of the whole thing, who knows where we'd be? But we're so thankful to have him.

He always tells us all the good things are on us and all the bad things are on him. We just love him for that to just allow us to have that just the expectations to be pulled off of us and just go play freely and play for one another.

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