



Saturday at the Rose Bowl, there were a lot of surprises. UCLA Faced off against Utah, last year's Pac-12 Champions, who were ranked number 11 in the country. UCLA was 5-0 but only ranked #18 because it appeared that they had faced a weaker string of opponents in the run up to this contest. Add to that is the fact that against Utah, UCLA has been 0-5, since last beating Utah back in 2015. Let's just say that in spite of the show of pre-game enthusiasm by the UCLA fans there were serious doubts running through the expectations of the UCLA fans, not to mention UCLA's Coach Chip Kelly. Utah only lost to the perennial powerhouse Ohio State "Buckeye's" by 3 points, 48-45 in last year's Rose Bowl, in one of the wildest and highest scoring games of the 2021 season.

It was a good crowd at the Rose Bowl, and the weather was clear and a little bit hot. But the game got off to an off-key start when UCLA lost starter Stephan Blaylock on what L.A. Times reporter Ben Bolch called a "bizarre Targeting" penalty, and was disqualified for the game. Disqualification is like a "Red-Card" in soccer, where the foul is so dangerous or egregious, that you are automatically ejected from the game. It didn't seem to make much of a difference however, because UCLA has depth, with more than one player having significant playing time at each position.

The first quarter was a little slow, with the only score coming late in the quarter on a 7-yard run by UCLA's quarterback, and possibly the game's MVP, Dorian Thompson-Robinson. Barr-Mira's kick for the extra point was the final score of the first quarter, which ended up UCLA- 7 Utah - 0
Things got moving quicker in the second quarter, with Utah scoring a field goal after stalling part way to the end zone, so far it was UCLA 7 Utah 3.

Dorian Thompson-Robinson, who was returning for his 5th year at UCLA, returned the favor for a UCLA score on their next possession, throwing to Wide Receiver Jake Bobo for a 7-yard touchdown. Bobo is a rare duck, so to speak. At first I didn't grasp how Bobo had played for Duke for 4 years, appearing in 43 games from 2017 through 2021 but was now playing for UCLA! How, you ask? As I did. Because he is a graduate student playing Varsity football! Bobo graduated from Duke in 2021 with a degree in Economics and is now working towards a Masters in the graduate program in UCLA's School of Education! Now, I have seen it all!

Four minutes or so later, Utah responded with a short run by Running Back Tavion Thomas a 6'2" (238lb) Junior. Kicker Jordan Noyes secured the extra point for Utah. Some reports seemed to feel that the stats didn't reflect the actual flavor of the game, or that UCLA was somehow overwhelming. There was a lot of skill and talent on both sides, as Cameron Rising, Utah's quarterback was excellent, and had led Utah to victories of 73-7, 35-7, 34-13 and a 42-16 win over Washington State before meeting UCLA! Utah had 50% more first downs (32-22), with total net yards only 23 less than UCLA. Passing 287 to 299 and punt returns 2 for 23 yards to UCLA's 0 for 0. In fact, Utah made only one interception and turned it into an 80-yard touchdown which ended up being the last score of the game, while UCLA made one interception for all of 6 yards! All in all, not exactly overwhelming statistics.

After the half-time festivities, it was back to business for both squads. UCLA struck for gold only 4 minutes and 10 seconds into the quarter on another Thompson-Robinson short pass (5 yards) to wide receiver Kam Brown. To say that both quarterbacks are versatile and talented would be an understatement, as evidenced by Utah's response. Quarterback Cameron Rising ran it in himself for a short gain and a touchdown.

The game wasn't without its humorous moments, as both teams proceeded to blow easy extra points. The first one came as the kicker hit one of the up-rights, and the opposition responded on their next possession by missing the goal entirely! For much of the game, kick-off returns were sort of ho hum, nothing exciting, but I will give UCLA credit, as their special teams finally turned two of their kick returns into near touchdown runs. One more blocked tackle or just the "Right Move" and it would have been "off to the races" in both cases. Utah had no luck in that department from beginning to end.

The final score of the third quarter came on a 10-yard UCLA pass from Thompson-Robinson to Jake Bobo to add another 6 points, and the 7th on a Barr-Mira kick for the extra point. Utah opened the fourth quarter on another 9-yard keeper by Cameron Rising for his second Touchdown of the game. Although Utah led the game in time of possession, they made quick work of it, with this score coming only 3 minutes and 21 seconds into the quarter. The response was even quicker, as it happened only 22 seconds of actual running time later, as Dorian



Thompson-Robinson teamed up with Jake Bobo for a pass and run of 70 yards to make it 35 to 25 UCLA after the extra point. Utah failed to score on their next possession, and UCLA quickly made it 42-25 in their favor on a 1 yard run by the very productive Running Back Zach Charbonnet. On the day Charbonnet had 22 possessions for a very impressive 198 yards rushing. It seemed like Thompson-Robinson liked Charbonnet because every time the stadium announcer said "And Thompson-Robinson hands off to" It was to Zach Charbonnet!

At this point, it was 42-25 in favor of UCLA and the clock was running out of daylight for Utah, when Thompson-Robinson threw to ... Oops! Utah's Clark Phillips III, who turned the catch into a stunning 80-yard interception return. The point after by Noyes was good, to bring the score to 42-32 UCLA, a surprise, either good or bad depending on your viewpoint.

It's easy to simply give the numbers and announce the winners and losers, but there is a lot more to the game than that. To put the right light on things, let's talk about a few of the stats or records. One overwhelming stat was the new record for touchdowns set by UCLA's Quarterback, Dorian Thompson-Robinson. Due to the Covid Pandemic, the NCAA allowed players to remain eligible to play an additional year. Thompson-Robinson elected to return and play for a 5th season, and I am sure that he is glad that he did. Although the season is long from over, with an additional six games to play, including Oregon in two weeks, Thompson-Robinson surpassed Brett Hundley as the all time career leader in touchdown passes for UCLA.

The interesting part is that Dorian seems to be more concerned to see that the rest of the team, or as he calls them "His Boys" get the credit for the wins and their hard work. In the post-game interview room, Thompson-Robinson went out of his way to mention "My Boys" as one of the reasons for his and the team's overall success. Even with a 6-0 record so far, and his obvious talents and stats, no one has been mentioning him for a Heisman Trophy. When a reporter asked Thompson-Robinson if he felt he was being personally overlooked for something like the Heisman trophy, before he could open his mouth to respond, his team-mate Jake Bobo loudly exclaimed "YES"! When Dorian could finally get in a word, his response was "Heisman, LIKE what Heisman?", and added "It's really my first time thinking about it, I'm focused on this team, that's the reason I came back. I didn't come back for anything personal, I came back to make sure that these boys were in a good spot when I leave here". He added "And to leave a legacy that's well known to remember and I think I'm doing a pretty good job of it now". "I'm just trying to keep it going forward. I'm here for these boys, I'm not here for myself". Maybe not Dorian, but you are doing a pretty good job of it, both for the team and for yourself!

He knows what the national football community and press thinks about long-ignored UCLA, and he uses that as fuel, or a chip on his shoulder. When asked if he comes into a game with a "Chip on His Shoulder", he exclaimed "Oh (Blank) yes, and it's getting bigger every week!" With eyes bordering on tears, he said "Wait until Oregon in 2 weeks!" "We want more... You say Top-10, I say top 5, we want Top 2, we want it all!". Let's just say, that even after 3-4 hours on field, screaming his lungs out to be heard, the man is enthusiastic!

UCLA coach Chip Kelly, was equally as enthusiastic, albeit somewhat lower key. After a lengthy question and answer period, when the UCLA Press officer tried to cut off more questions, Kelly waved him off and happily took a few more from the crowded interview room.

As happy as he was, it wasn't just cheering. He too, like Thompson-Robinson, was quoted as saying something to the effect that "we are going to celebrate for about a day, then we will have a week or two of improvement, before we head to Oregon". He refused to be drawn into comparisons or "what if" questions, and quietly chided some of the gathered press when asked those questions, by responding to the effect of "That's your guy's job"! And like Thompson-Robinson, he was also more concerned with the team's overall growth and outlook, mirroring the spirit that it was only half of the way through the season, and that they were going to strive for continual improvement as each opponent loomed in the future.

On Dorian Thompson-Robinson's attitude and growth, Kelly said "Really happy for him, to see how he's grown as a leader. It's cool to watch and it's well deserved" Although there are still 6 games more in this season, with potentially one of the biggest challenges ahead of them on the 22nd at perennial powerhouse Oregon, as they say, only time will tell. If they get past Oregon and run up a 7-0 record, then there is the cross-town rivalry with USC on the 19th of November!

Anything can happen, and when you think it is going well, misfortune can strike at a moment's notice. But with the aggregate skill and depth this team seems to have, and the attitude I saw in both the players and staff, 2022 might be a record setting highlight year for the Bruins!







