



Head coach
Kyle Whittingham

The Undefeated Never Rest: *Coaching Utes Football*

An exclusive interview with Kyle Whittingham of the 13-0 Utes

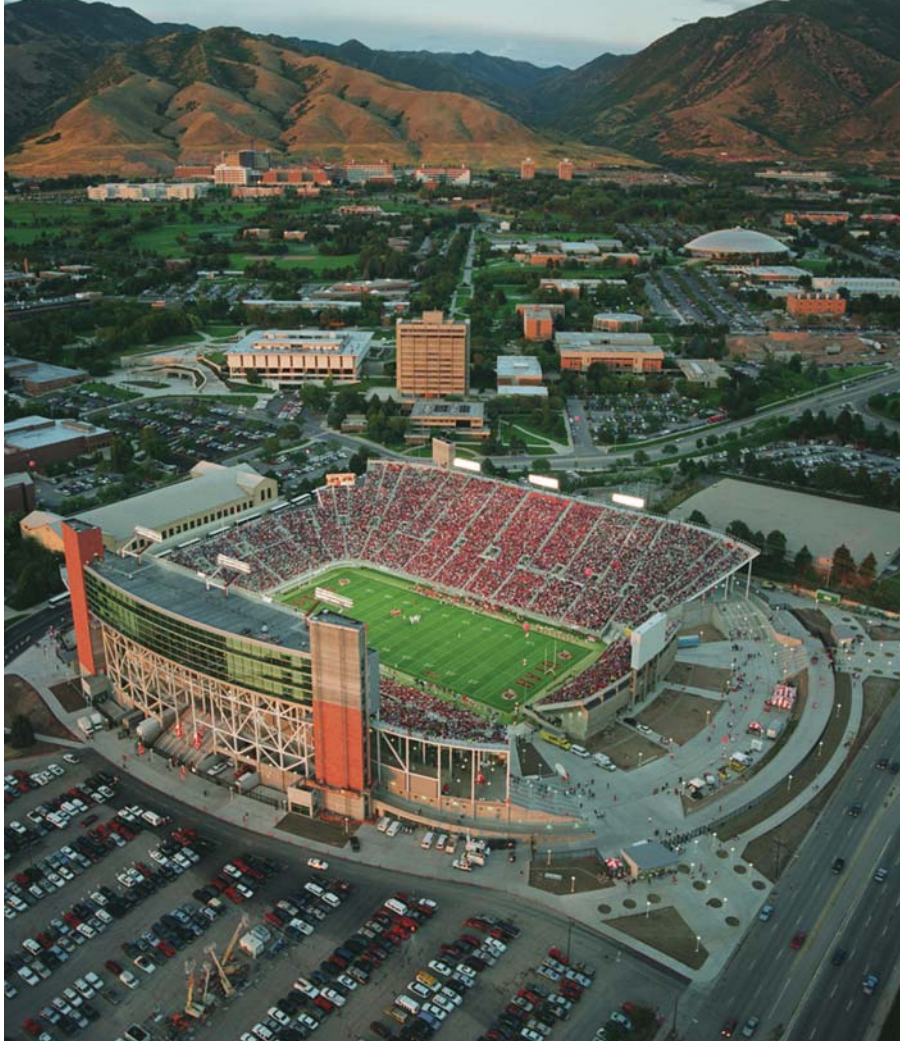
Taking over a losing program is always a challenge for a coach. How do you change the offense and defense, if at all? How do you motivate your players to develop a winning attitude? What areas need to be focused on in the strength and conditioning program? But the question on Kyle Whittingham's mind when he took over as head coach of the University of Utah's football program in 2005 had to be "How do I top a 12-0 season?" The answer was with a 13-0 season!

In upsetting the fourth-ranked

University of Alabama 31-17 in the Sugar Bowl on January 2, the Utes earned the title "BCS Busters." Not only did they become the only non-BCS conference team to win two BCS bowls – the first being under Coach Urban Meyer in the Fiesta Bowl four years earlier – they also finished as the only undefeated team in the country. Although the University of Florida edged ahead in the polls as the number-one college team in the country, there is no denying that what this team from Salt Lake City did was certainly unprec-

edented and unexpected.

Kyle Whittingham played linebacker for Brigham Young from 1978 to 1981, earning first-team all-WAC and WAC Defensive Player of the Year in 1981, and went on to sign with the Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Rams. His college coaching career started in 1988 at the College of Eastern Idaho as defensive coordinator, followed by six years at Idaho State, where he became defensive coordinator in 1992. In 1994 he became the defensive line coach at Utah, and from 1994 to 2004 he



The University of Utah boasts one of the most scenic stadiums in college football, located in the heart of Salt Lake City. Ute games are characterized by plenty of colorful pageantry.



served as the Utes' defensive coordinator. Since Whittingham took over as head coach in 2005, Utah has won 73 percent of its games and is a perfect 4-0 in bowl games. Last season he was named National Coach of the Year, and he has signed on to coach the Utes for five more seasons.

In this exclusive interview for BFS, Coach Whittingham reflects on this remarkable season and the challenges he's faced.

BFS: *What was the most valuable lesson you learned from being a part of Urban Meyer's success at Utah?*

KW: First of all, the opportunity to work as an assistant under Urban Meyer was an invaluable experience for me in my development as a coach. You will not find a more organized, detailed or disciplined football coach than Urban. To say that there was a single most valuable lesson learned from Urban wouldn't be accurate. What can be said is that a lot of what Urban brought to our program during his time here at Utah is still being implemented.

BFS: *What was the most difficult aspect of switching from being a defensive coordinator to a head coach?*

KW: The biggest adjustment was not having a position group to be responsible for. I really miss position meetings with the players as well as having your own position group to work with on the field.

BFS: *Were there any aspects of your team that performed better than you expected last season?*

KW: We felt we were a solid football team across the board. We really had no glaring weaknesses or areas of deficiency. When you have talented players to work with that believe in what you're doing, that solves most all of your problems.

FEATURE STORY

BFS: Many critics of the Mountain West say teams such as Utah don't have the strength or speed of teams such as Florida, Alabama or USC. How do you respond to this?

KW: We believe our game against Alabama in the Sugar Bowl says everything that needs to be said con-

cerning this issue. Our team's speed and athleticism is on par with other teams across the nation.

BFS: Do you personally get involved in the strength and conditioning workouts of your team, or do you let the strength coach exclusively handle

this part of your program?

KW: Doug Elisaia is our head strength and conditioning coach, and he does an exceptional job training our athletes. He handles all aspects of our strength and conditioning program. The strength coach is one of the most vital cogs in a football team's success,



Strength and conditioning played a major role in the Utes' success this year, and work has already started on a \$1.5 million expansion of their weightroom. The facility was made possible in part by a \$500,000 gift from Alex Smith, a former Ute quarterback who led his 2004 team to an undefeated season.



and Doug does a great job for us.

BFS: Every year you seem to have some really tight battles with the Air Force Academy. Why is this team so difficult to prepare for and play?

KW: First and foremost, the United States Air Force Academy has

players that are mentally and physically tough, possess high character and are extremely disciplined. When you combine that with their triple option attack on offense and a swarming defense, that makes for a very formidable opponent.

BFS: Sometimes after a game the

media can be especially critical of your play-calling or of an athlete's performance. Do you discourage your players from reading all the press about them, or listening to sports reports on radio and television?

KW: Our players have handled themselves very well with the media. They are well grounded, and rarely, if



81 Bradon Godfrey
35 Louie Sakod



68 Zane Beadles



3 Brian Johnson

After their victory in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl, Salt Lake City gave their undefeated Utes a hero's parade.

ever, do they provide bulletin-board material for the opponents.

BFS: *What can you say about the amount of support you've had from the student body, administration and community for Utah football?*

KW: Averaging more than a sell-out crowd for each home game this season really says it all. The support from the student body, administration and community has been tremendous. Our student section, "The MUSS," is as good as anyplace in the country. The atmosphere that the MUSS provides on game day is a huge boost for our football team.

BFS: *After having such an amazing season, are you concerned that your players might not work as hard in the off-season?*

KW: We have excellent leadership on our football team and an excellent work ethic as well. Our players understand that last year is over with and new challenges lie ahead. So far they have handled their success from last season very well and have been able to stay focused and keep things in perspective.

BFS: *Having finished spring ball, what are your expectations for this coming season?*

KW: Winning the MWC Championship is always our number-one goal, and we hope to compete for that again this year. **BFS**



2008 Utah Results (13-0, 8-0 MWC / 1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	RESULT
8/30	at Michigan	W, 25-23
9/6	UNLV	W, 42-21
9/13	at Utah State	W, 58-10
9-20	at Air Force	W, 30-23
9/27	Weber State	W, 37-21
10/2	Oregon State	W, 31-28
10/11	at Wyoming	W, 40-07
10/18	Colorado State	W, 49-16
11/1	at New Mexico	W, 13-10
11/6	TCU	W, 13-10
11/15	at San Diego State	W, 63-14
11/22	Brigham Young	W, 48-24
1/2/09	Alabama (Sugar Bowl)	W, 31-17

