

CFP Semifinal at the Capital One Orange Bowl: Georgia vs Michigan

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Michigan Wolverines

Chris Hinton

Mazi Smith

Press Conference



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playing, and I don't know how much that's affecting their O-line, so maybe your assignments aren't changing that much, but how much credence do you give to those kind of things, and does it matter to you as you're figuring out your scheme or your assignments who's going to be in and whether there's going to be -- or which quarterback it's going to be?

CHRIS HINTON: Honestly we like to tune out a lot of that type of noise. We like to just focus on what the scouting report gave us, just focus on our opponent, and whoever comes out Saturday, we'll just adjust to whatever we see. But we're going to prepare like everyone is there because we just like to tune out all of the noise outside of this group and outside the building.

Q. Chris, I've got to ask you about the Atlanta ties and your ties to the Bulldogs. Are there many guys on this team that you feel like you have a relationship with, and what's it going to be like facing them?

CHRIS HINTON: Yeah, growing up I knew -- I grew up with a lot of those guys over there at UGA, just growing up or through the recruiting process or through basketball, so it's going to be fun going against some familiar faces. They recruited me hard and were honestly my second school. That's really my second school, my second option. It's going to be really fun going against those guys. I'm excited for the game.

Q. What has made Mike Macdonald so successful so fast at Michigan?

MAZI SMITH: I think he brings a new version of the game for us to play. I think the way he implements all the things that he's trying to teach us and get us to do, he does it quickly, he does it efficiently. He don't leave no meat on the bone, and I just think using his personnel to the best of our ability, he's got packages for everybody, and he's trying to get the most out of us, and we want to do it.

CHRIS HINTON: I think he does a great job of putting people in great positions to make plays, and he does a great job just relating to his players. We understand what he's thinking, he understands what we're thinking, and we're able to bounce off of that, bounce ideas off of that, and I think that's paid dividends to our success this year. I mean, we love Coach Mac.

Q. I'm not sure how much you pay attention to these reports coming out of local publications that some of the players on Georgia maybe have COVID or won't be

Q. Obviously Coach Harbaugh hired a lot of new assistants going into this season, and just like any group of people, sometimes a group is going to get along really well and sometimes it's not going to get along as well. Why did this group of assistant coaches come together so well and why have they worked so well as a group?

MAZI SMITH: They just all came in and did their best to get on the same page, and I think Coach Mac did a real good job bringing everyone together on the defensive side of the ball. All the players are still behind him, and we always wanted to have success, so we were willing to do whatever it took, and so was the coaching staff.

Q. I don't know how much film you guys watch of Georgia's defense, but in your minds what makes them so good and so difficult to play against, and what do you think your offense is going to be up against on Friday?

CHRIS HINTON: I think something that credits their success is they've got a good front seven. They've also got a good back seven, but they've got a good front seven and use that to the best of their ability. But our offense has gone against good defenses all year, went against Wisconsin, and the team, we have full faith in our offense that they're going to do what they've been doing all year.

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Q. Just wondering from your perspective, there's been a lot of talk about Coach Harbaugh going into the season, about the state of the program. Did you sense anything different about his approach to this season, and why do you feel like everything came together for you guys this year?

MAZI SMITH: It wasn't too much of a difference before his approach, but we just had to get the right pieces around him and get the right people on the field. It was a lot of right people that got on the field this year.

Q. What have you guys seen with David Ojabo and his development this season and the force that he's been able to become for your defense?

CHRIS HINTON: Well, Ojabo came in with both of us. We've seen the special talent, the special ability of him since day one. But sometimes it just takes kids a little longer to understand, to just get comfortable in the game. But we all knew, everybody in the building knew once he understood and once he got comfortable with the game, he was going to be really special, and we're seeing all the work and his patience pay off this year, and he's been having a great season.

But honestly if you ask anybody in this building, it's no surprise. We were just waiting for him to pop out, and he popped out.

Q. You both have talked throughout the season about how much you believed in this defense and everything. I'm curious at what point did you think -- I don't know if it was a certain game or maybe even before the game, you felt this could be an elite defense this season?

MAZI SMITH: During spring ball, starting camp. We just had that feeling. That's what we were chasing for. We wanted to be an elite defense, and we wanted to compete for being the best D-line in the country. I think we did that.

CHRIS HINTON: For me, like he said, spring ball, but there was this one practice during camp specifically, I mean, the offense really didn't get a yard like all practice, and like we knew at that time that this defense could do special things, and the hard work, the hours, the practices, they paid off, and we just had to go finish the job.

Q. Chris, I was wondering when you see Aidan at the Heisman, see a defensive player, a lineman, as a runner up, do you all take a share of that do you think? And what do you think put him on that stage?

CHRIS HINTON: It's funny because at the banquet his dad

spoke, and all these awards and everything, everyone has a piece in it, so it's funny you brought that up. I think football is the epitome of a team game. Everyone -- you need your teammates in football. If the linebackers don't fit or the D-line does their job, then you're still going to get gashed, and that goes on different levels. You can say we had a hand, but at the end of the day Aidan, he is a great player. He makes a lot of plays. He gets double teamed a lot, triple teamed, chipped. He still makes plays. He still wreaks havoc on opposing offenses, on the run game and the pass game. It's been fun playing with those guys on the edge all year. They just help elevate everyone's game because everyone wants to be -- play at that elite level for your teammates. It's just been great playing with Ojabo and playing with Aidan all year.

Q. As dominant as Georgia's defense has been this year and the challenge that your offense has, do you guys take that as a challenge for your defense, to be able to match that level and not put too much pressure on your offense to score?

MAZI SMITH: I think we ain't too worried about Georgia's defense and what they do. We're worried about what we do, and we ain't necessarily worried. We're just focused, because that's the only way we're going to play championship-level ball. As far as like Chris said, we kind of block out all the outside noise and worry about what we've got to do, focus on what we've got to do and get our jobs done.

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