

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

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Michigan Wolverines

Aidan Hutchinson

Josh Ross

Press Conference

Q. Aidan, when we were talking to David Ojabo yesterday, he said that last off-season he came to you and said, I'm going to be in your hip pocket the whole off-season because he wanted to learn from you. Just wondering what you saw from him during your work together and whether that led you to believe he would have the type of season that he's had this year.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, that's right. Every day in that off-season he was right with me that whole time. He committed to it every day. Even in the days that it was very difficult.

He was grinding his ass off this whole off-season, so all the awards and accolades that he's getting right now, he completely deserves.

Q. We all know the phrase, "those who stay will be champions." Obviously the words have different meanings for both of you. Can you please just describe what they mean to you each personally?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: I think they're pretty similar to both of us. I know Josh has got one more year on me, but he didn't win a championship his freshman year, so we both stayed, we both grinded. We are in it in the hard stuff, we are in the mud, and we came out, and now we're both finishing up our careers and really putting a staple on our legacy here at Michigan, and now we've just got to finish the job.

JOSH ROSS: Yeah, those words, like Aidan said, to both of us mean everything. Coming in here as a young freshman earlier on, you see those words but you never really seen it acted out. We were the ones who stuck it out, who stayed through the thick, who stayed through the



good and bad times and got to the end of the road, and it means everything, and it feels good because we are champions and we've still got more work to do. Those who stay will be champions means everything, and it's a great feeling.

Q. Josh, you're a graduate student. Aidan, you're a senior. I think a lot of players in your position, maybe not a lot, but we see it nowadays where players will decide to forego their bowl games to prepare for the NFL Draft and the next part of their careers. Why was it so important for both of you to finish out this season with the team?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: You know, I think that was never an option for either of us. I don't think it mattered if we were in the playoffs or not. If we were playing in some other bowl, I think you'd see me and Josh both strapping it up again because we wouldn't leave our team out to dry ever just for all the work we've put in.

JOSH ROSS: Yeah, like Aidan said, it wasn't even close to an option. We've been through so much as a team together throughout this whole season, ups and downs, to get to the point where we're at. The only way is to finish what we've started. That's how we feel. That's how this team feels. We're just ready to go get it in a couple days.

Q. You guys come from storied programs, storied schools. What's the vibe been like from your alumni community because there's a ton of people that have come through those halls. What's the support been like?

JOSH ROSS: The support has been tremendous, especially from like the St. Mary's community. Everybody is happy for our success. Everyone is happy to see what not only myself is doing but also the team and how we're succeeding and pushing forward, and they just wish for the best and wish us to go get it this next game and have our best game.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, the support from Divine Child has been great. I got a lot of my old teachers texting me and stuff like that wishing me good luck, all that good

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stuff. So it's really good to have that at my back.

Q. This is a question kind of about just scheme and how you think you'll match up. Obviously the quarterback you are playing again, Stetson Bennett, is a little bit shifty and he's proven he can be creative in the pocket when the play breaks down. How do you think the strengths of this Michigan defense stacks up against what Georgia's offense is going to throw at you?

JOSH ROSS: Yeah, I think the strengths of this Michigan defense match up really well. You've got a quarterback in Stetson Bennett who's a consistent quarterback and extends plays, and as a defense we have to do a really good job stopping the run on 1st and 2nd down and having a great game plan on 3rd down and getting off the field.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, Josh is right. He's a very mobile quarterback, so that's definitely a point of emphasis, but first things first, we've got to stop that run game. That's definitely the point of emphasis, and then get them to 3rd-and-long and let us rush the passer and get after it.

Q. You're both local guys, grew up around Ann Arbor, around Michigan and the area, and you talked about bringing back the culture, bringing back what Michigan was. Was there ever a time where you really wondered if it was going to get back to a stage like this? Hadn't won a Big Ten title in several years. Did you ever wonder if you'd get back here?

JOSH ROSS: You know, from the beginning after last season, after we finished up the season we had last year coming into this year, it was, what are we doing today to beat Ohio State, what are we doing today to make us the best ourselves and make this team the best we possibly can do as leaders, as a team, as a culture, as a vibe. We just grinded and put our head down and worked through spring ball, through camp, and through the beginning of the season, through the thick of the season, through the meat and potatoes of the season.

Obviously it never really was a wonder, oh, could we not or could we get here. We were just about to keep grinding and keep working and keep making ourselves better, keep getting the best we can as a team and look up at the end of year and see where we're at, and we're here now, and it's a great feeling.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, just thinking about it, I know that was always a goal of ours to beat Ohio State, to win a Big Ten Championship. But when you're in the thick of it, when you're in the meat and potatoes of everything, it's hard to see that light at the end of the tunnel because it

was dark there for a while now, and it was just us grinding and grinding and getting after it and not knowing what was going to happen, not knowing the outcome. I think that's what makes us so special is the way that we worked when we didn't win a single game. That's when I knew this team was special.

Yeah, now we're sitting here, Big Ten champions, competing for a Natty. Man, this team has just really come so far.

JOSH ROSS: Don't get no better than this at all.

Q. Obviously you two have been starting for a while, but I think there's been 10 starters on the defensive side of the ball who started for the first time this season. You have David Ojabo, DJ Turner, Rod Moore, a lot of guys who really did well. What do you think was the key to having so many either young players or players who hadn't been able to contribute much not only step in in games but step in as well as they did?

JOSH ROSS: Personally I feel there was, number one, just the culture that was put in place in the off-season, how we worked, how we came together, how we rallied, and not only the culture but the work ethic and attention to detail, especially from the younger guys on our team, how they attacked the film room, how they attacked better in their craft every single day before the season even started, with spring ball, summer, camp, all these times where nobody sees what's going on but we do, and we're putting our most work in, and now people are seeing the light of what we're capable of, how much better we've gotten moving into this game.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I think that goes really to show the attention to detail. Like Josh was saying, with these guys who haven't started. Because a lot of them I didn't think would start this season or get that opportunity to, but injuries happened, things happened, and then guys stepped up. They just make plays.

I guess what's crucial is they understand the defense, they understand the scheme, and they're very elite in their preparation.

Q. Aidan, Kirby Smart told a story a few weeks ago, he got home from the SEC title game, his nine-year-old son was watching Michigan, and the kid couldn't wait to tell him all about you and all about your stats and all about what he thought of you as a player. I'm curious as a defensive guy, how cool has it been to get the attention that's deserved, and two, is it kind of a neat story that the nine-year-old son of the guy you're going against Friday night couldn't wait to tell his dad all

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about you and all that you've done this year?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: That's right. Yeah, when I heard that story, I was laughing and stuff. My dad told me, and we were both laughing about it. It's crazy that the head coach's son of the team you're about to play is a very big fan of you. It's a blessing. It's really cool.

Yeah, it was really a funny thing, and maybe I'll meet his son after the game.

Q. Josh Gattis has said that the offensive line is the heartbeat of this team and maybe any team in general, but do you agree with that assessment, and what has this offensive line shown you guys in the fourth quarter? They've played a lot of fourth quarter games and held pretty stout, and that was a difference from previous years.

JOSH ROSS: Yeah, I would definitely agree, our offensive line is the heartbeat of this team, and just kind of sums up what our team is about. You just see a group of guys, and it's not only on the field, it's off the field, together everywhere they go, eating food together in the dining halls, literally in the hot tubs together every time in the morning, contrasting together, and you see them go out on the field and you see how well they work together, and not only how well they work together but how tenacious they are and how physical they are. It's just a testament to those guys and the work they put in, Coach Moore, all those guys, and being the best offensive line in the country, I'm just so blessed and thankful to have an offensive line like that on my team and also to compete with guys like that every single day because it makes me better, as well.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I agree with Josh, especially with the offense that we run with a lot of gap scheme run game. If your offensive line isn't elite, it's hard for you to succeed. When we were just watching them on the sideline, it's always just so much fun watching them on the sideline and just chewing clock, running that ball, and you can really see -- I think you can really see their chemistry on the field, too. Even you see in that Ohio State game the big boys getting in the fight a little bit, protecting the boys, and you really see the camaraderie between them all because they really are all so tight and you can see it during the games.

Q. Coach Harbaugh coming into the season, I think a lot of people were saying his job was at risk. He was on the hot seat. You have a 2-4 season last year, you lose four straight bowl games in the years before that and he comes back and he wins Coach of the Year, the first in Michigan program history. Obviously he's

proud of you guys, but how proud are you of him and what can you say about what he's done to be able to rewrite that narrative for himself, for the team and for the program as a whole?

JOSH ROSS: I'm so proud of Coach Harbaugh and the way he's adapted, the way he's just changed as a person, as a coach throughout his years of me being here. He's a great coach, and he does a lot of great things. Just to see how far he's come, how far this team has come in the position we are now, I couldn't be more proud of our head guy leading the way.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I agree with Josh. I mean, to do what he did this year, I think he brought in the perfect chemistry of guys this off-season in terms of coaches, in terms of our defensive staff, which was changed up a lot, and I think he found the perfect blend of guys, and it's really what makes the team work. That's part of it is finding the right coaches. He definitely did that this off-season, and that's a big head nod to him, but also how he's adapted over these years and how he's adapted towards the players over these years. He's really a great guy and a great coach, and we couldn't be more proud.

Q. I kind of wanted to ask how you think the style of this team is a little bit different than some of the other Big Ten teams that we've seen in the playoff because the DNA seems like it's a little bit more old school, physical football, more of an emphasis on the run game, whereas the Ohio State teams of the past have just been loaded with these specialists and that's been more perhaps the focus. Do you think that the different identity of this team sets it up to have a different kind of success in the semifinal?

JOSH ROSS: You know, this team is so special, and one thing I can point to in all seriousness is our togetherness, man. We've got each other's back, and we not only say it, we be about it, offense, defense, special teams. We all have each other's backs, and we play for each other, and I honestly feel like that's the separator with us in these games is we've got each other's back, and we're going to play for each other every single snap.

The best possible chemistry of a team you can have, and I'm just blessed to be a part of it and ready to go get it these next couple days.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, and our togetherness is really a big factor. Just going against that Georgia offense, we're going to have to really execute and play our game if we want to have a lot of success. They're a very talented offense, got a lot of weapons, and I think we're just going to have to execute and do what we do and really just not do



anything special. We're a very talented defense. We've got a lot of good players. If we go out there and just do our job, I think we can have a lot of success.

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