

College Football Playoff

Media Conference

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Alabama Crimson Tide

Najee Harris

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF

Q. Najee, we've seen you hurdle defenders going back to your Antioch days. What do you recall about your first hurdle at Antioch, and what kind of spark -- what got you doing that? Why do you enjoy that?

NAJEE HARRIS: I mean, it's cool. I don't really remember the first hurdle really. But I mean, it was just a way -- so I got tired of getting chopped in the legs, man, in the ankles. It hurts. I guess I just started hurdling. I don't really remember the first hurdle, though.

Q. Now that you're almost a year removed from the decision you and several of your classmates made to come back to school, what's the feeling like to being this close to having everything work as you all had hoped?

NAJEE HARRIS: I guess you could say it worked out. The decision was -- of course it was coming back. We all came back. We made the decision.

Really in the beginning I think we all agreed on that, like if we come back, we can't come back and walk through things and like think that since we're coming back and going to be seniors that it can come easy to us.

So we all, I think, bought into if we're going to come back, we have to come back 100 percent and I guess show people the example of how we should practice and how we should play for the young guys coming in.

I think that it worked out so far.

Q. There was a time when guys like you from California and the East Bay would stay in that region, Pac-12, whatnot. Why are guys like you and Aaron and Isaiah going east, leaving the area?

NAJEE HARRIS: Yeah. I think -- well, I don't know for them, why they did it, but for me personally, I feel like -- they say a lot of West Coast guys can't play in I guess

conferences like this, the SEC, so I wanted to like see, like kill that hype, I guess, in a way and that show that we can play, that West Coast people can play.

We have a lot more guys from the West Coast playing in the SEC than before, so it's good to see a lot of guys travel across. But I think it's good for people to stay home. I think it's good for people to go to other states to get, I guess, a better experience -- a different environment I guess you could say, of culture around here.

I've been here at Alabama for four years. I learned a lot of new things, the weather one of them. Being a West Coast guy you're used to sunshine; over here it's humid.

At first I didn't like it, but when you're here long enough you find out that this is like the best place to train for upcoming sports, to train in this humidity. That's how I take it. And just seeing a new culture, a new environment, like I said, and showing people that West Coast guys can play in conferences like this.

Q. Ohio State's run defense has been one of the best in the country this year. Just what do you see when you watch them on film?

NAJEE HARRIS: They've got a good defensive line, a really good defensive line. Their front four is all really good, and of course Baron up there at the linebacker position and the other guys, all them are good.

All them play a role. All them are really fast off the ball, too. They're really good in dissecting things out, really good at coming down and playing the run and dropping back into coverage when they have to. Really good lateral movement, stuff like that. They're really good at chasing the ball and really rallying around the ball.

They're really well-coached, though, on the defensive side. Their secondary is good, DBs. All them guys can play, so it should be a good game.

Q. I'm assuming you guys have the mentality that no matter how good the run defense is you face that you can run the ball. Can you just kind of describe what that mentality is?

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NAJEE HARRIS: Yeah, I think our offensive line is playing really well. Really we have a game plan that's set from our coaches and we follow that game plan. I feel like we have weapons everywhere.

So I guess you could say that we can run the ball, but that's not really what our focus is. Our focus is what -- is really balanced, I guess you could say.

They have a really good run defense, so it's not going to be easy. They have a really good pass defense, so it's not going to be easy.

So we just try to balance it as much as we can and try to look for weaknesses.

Q. Just wondering, what do you hope the legacy of this team will be?

NAJEE HARRIS: You said the legacy?

Q. Yeah. How do you hope this team is remembered?

NAJEE HARRIS: You know, a team that doesn't quit. A team that doesn't give up. A team that shows real integrity. A team that fights and a team that plays as one.

Obviously we hope that we can win it all and go undefeated, but we worry about the small things first and then work up to the main event, and that's playing Monday.

Right now we're just worrying about practicing, getting to the game on Monday, and then from there we can just -- like I said, we hope to be victorious and be another undefeated team, but like I said, we worry about the small things first to build up to Monday, and hopefully Monday's outcome will be victorious.

Q. You've played on numerous College Football Playoff teams at Alabama in the past. What would you say is different about this year's team than previous years?

NAJEE HARRIS: Yeah, like you said, I have played on a lot of playoff and championship teams. I think what separates this team really is really all the distractions that we had outside the program, of course, with the coronavirus and social injustice happening and not being able to play or not, and we all just came together really and grinded it out throughout the summer, throughout the year, not knowing if we'll play or not, having a game postponed, having a game canceled.

You look out in the football world, some conferences not

being able to play. You wonder really if we're going to be like that.

So really the -- just really us bonding together more and more as a team and knowing that every game we're going to get the best of everybody and that we have to just really play to our standard, the Alabama standard.

I learned personally when I was a freshman and I was on the team, I wanted to play a lot. I wanted to play a lot, and I didn't really have the opportunity to play until, I guess you could say, the National Championship really.

But me being here now, I've got the young guys behind me, so sometimes I kind of get out the game early so I can let them guys play so they can get experience, so they can get more reps, so they can get game reps so when they get in the game, God forbid I get hurt of something like that, they can be able to -- there won't be no dropoff or anything like that.

And those guys being Jase, Roydell obviously, Keilan all them boys. For them to get as much game reps as possible, get enough game experiences, really that helps out.

So I think you could say just bonding together a lot and knowing that we need each other.

Q. You talked about the talented rush defense Ohio State has. When you have an opportunity to go against a group that you know is going to challenge you, does the excitement level increase a little bit with you guys, the offense as a whole?

NAJEE HARRIS: Yeah. For me 100 percent it increases. 100 percent. The best thing that can happen or the best thing you can do to get me excited is say, look, this is going to be the best whatever we play against, the best run defense, the best pass defense, the best talent.

That's one thing that really excites me in the game of football really is just knowing that across the ball is good competition, great competition, people that's going to be on the next level, people who won all these awards, stuff like that.

For me to have the opportunity to play against these people, there's nothing really more exciting to me. I love competition and I love stuff like that. For me personally, yes, that gets me excited because I know that it ain't going to be easy. It ain't going to be no big runs like that. It ain't going to be like no -- I guess you could say the hurdles and stuff like that or any, like, explosive plays.

It's going to be their best against our best, and then I've got to make the most of it, and that's what I like.

Q. This past off-season Alabama had a big change in philosophy in the strength and conditioning program, and obviously some staff changes there. How did you think that change happened for you as a student-athlete in terms of what they did, in terms of how you train, but also how have you seen it help you on the field this year?

NAJEE HARRIS: Yeah, so obviously Coach Coch left us to go to Georgia. It was his time, I guess. Shout out to Coach Coch who was a great mentor to me for the years that he been here mentoring me.

But we got in Dr. Rhea and Dr. Ballou, and we got Dr. Rhea and Coach Ballou, and they came in here and they've brought different things that they had with the program that was out -- like you said, the velocity things, measuring how explosive you are, different type of workouts to complement the athlete that needed to get worked on that specific thing.

For me it was a lot of speed and explosiveness, agility, I guess you could say. I work with Dr. Rhea on tat a lot still to this day. He helped me out a lot, though, like I say, still to this day. He has a workout specifically for that athlete, and that's what you need, because not all athletes are the same.

So you need a program that will help that athlete in what he needs to improve on, and that's what they do a good job of finding out. They know all their players, so they know, okay, this person needs this, this person needs that. So that helped out all of us really this whole off-season.

And us having a short off-season -- there was no spring practice, right? Am I tripping? There was no spring practice, right? So being no spring practices we didn't really get to see their whole program, but the little stuff they had, it helped us out a lot.

So I'm excited for what they have next year for other guys to see what else they have to provide to better the athlete.

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