

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

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**J.J. McCarthy**

**Mason Graham**

CFP Media Conference



COLLEGE FOOTBALL  
**PLAYOFF**

**Q. J.J., can you share in words how valuable Blake Corum is to this team and how happy you are for him in particular coming back from the injury saying it was Natty or bust, putting himself out there and having the season and the game he just had?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Extremely valuable. I feel like he in my eyes is the most valuable player of our team. There's so many of them that are right up at his caliber, but especially from an offensive perspective, I feel like he's one of the guys that makes our offense go. Just everything he's been through, all the adversity that he's been through, just from his upbringing to this past year, just everything about who he is and just his character, how he attacks every single day, it just rubs off on all of us.

It's just one of the most valuable players on our team if not the most.

**Q. Thoughts on how he leads by giving back and the recent toy drive he did on top of the annual turkey giveaway he's been doing.**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, I just feel like that's just a smart part of who he is, just being able to be not just a leader on the field but leader off the field, everything he did with the toy drive and the turkeys just speaks to the character that he is and just having the ability to give back and do it in such a big and profound way when you can keep it all for yourself and worry about buying yourself all the chains and all the cars and all the materialistic things, now Blake is thinking about giving it back to the people in need, and that just speaks to who he is and the culture that's here at the University of Michigan.

**Q. Mason, can you compare Washington or a team that's a comp to anybody you've played this year or in recent years offensively, that the defense would face.**

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I'd probably say maybe Ohio

State 2021. Just watching that offense, a lot of high-powered receivers, good quarterback, good group of O-line, obviously they won the Joe Moore, so it'll be a good challenge for us. But if I had to compare it to one team, it would probably be that.

**Q. Is there any adjustment for you guys in the trenches with a left-handed quarterback? I'm just wondering.**

MASON GRAHAM: Not really. Kind of just the same stuff we've been leaning on all year, just kind of lean on our pillars, our good defense, just kind of keep playing the way we've been playing.

**Q. J.J., with Coach Harbaugh, what's the biggest thing on game day having him on the sideline? In terms of the quarterback relationship, where does he represent you most?**

J.J. McCARTHY: You know, I can't really pick out one way that he helps me. It's just his overall presence, being in whatever situation that arises he's been there before and just having somebody that can kind of -- I can look to after a great play, a bad play, like the first play of the game that like I was expecting to get chewed out and all this, but with Coach Harbaugh, it was just, hey, man, it's good you got that out of your system, let's roll out.

It's just little stuff like that where coaches that haven't been in that situation before or haven't had the experience of playing in the Rose Bowl would maybe just get emotionally off balance and just start freaking out at their quarterback. That's not him.

Just little stuff like him hitting me before the game with -- just getting me ready, getting me into it just physically, and then just little words of advice that he gives every single game day.

I'd say it's not one thing in particular, just his overall presence being out there.

**Q. Mason, you mentioned Washington and the offensive line and the Joe Moore Award. Obviously you guys have gone up against several big offensive**



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**lines in the Big Ten. How would you compare these guys? Is that the kind of style you're dealing with in this game?**

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, kind of just -- I've only briefly just started getting into them. We just got back yesterday, so just kind of getting back into it. But I feel like they're similar to the other O-lines we've faced, good group, well-coached, work well together. It'll tend to be a similar challenge for us up front.

**Q. J.J., obviously other quarterbacks have kind of gotten more shine nationally. How does it feel for you being in this position, leading the drive to get past Bama, despite your contemporaries getting more credit or their acclaim for their production this year?**

J.J. McCARTHY: You know, I've never been about in a. I've always been someone that chases purpose, not fame. I could care less what the media says about me or the light they put me in. All I really care about is winning football games.

Obviously we had numerous chances of making sure that game didn't come down to the wire like it did, and I'm excited to get in the film room today and look at that and correct our mistakes and learn from all the mistakes we made.

But at the end of the day, it's about winning football games no matter what it takes, and I could care less what comes of it, what other people think about me or what they deal me amongst the other quarterbacks in this class right now. All I care about is winning games.

**Q. In regards to film, how many times have you had a chance to sit down with Tom Brady and break down film while in Ann Arbor?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I haven't really gotten a chance to break down film with him, but he's just given me a lot of advice on how to watch film throughout the week and what he did and especially in big games, just little advice like that, just how to handle yourself emotionally and a bunch of other advice about health and well-being and all the tremendous things he's done with his life in that area.

A lot of stuff like that, but I can't wait to maybe get the opportunity one day to maybe break down film with him.

**Q. The last three years of the national semifinals you've been on the field after the games taking it all in, and obviously Monday was different. What was going through your mind when you just sort of crouched down and looked at the stadium?**

J.J. McCARTHY: You know, those moments, I cherish every single one of them, win or loss, just because you work so hard every single day throughout the off-season, during the season to get to points like that.

Just taking it in, win or loss, is just always something that I really just appreciate.

This past one, it was just -- all the extra work and all the different things that I did this past off-season and this season just like reflecting back on those and how hard I pushed myself and like training seven to eight times a week and going to the separate trainer where we would do like these conditioning days and I'm throwing up like 75 percent of the time down there.

Just all the extra things that I did, just kind of taking that all in on the field and just realizing, hey, it was worth every single second of pain that I went through, and I would do it all over again if I had the choice.

**Q. Mason, J.J., Jim just talked about the pressure moments and being able to recover from mistakes. What were your views on Jake and the muffed punt and saving it at the 1?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, I just kind of feel like those pressure situations are what make teams great. I feel like we slipped up in that moment but we were able to regain it. Obviously he got down at the 1 so we were able to have a chance to keep on playing. Just letting us line up again. He did his job, and he got us back.

MASON GRAHAM: I think it was tremendous the way he handled the situation. He didn't freak out. Their punter was outstanding. Some of the kicks he had were just like something I haven't seen before.

The way he handled it and not freaking out once the ball was going towards the end zone and accidentally kicking it or muffing it again and making sure he didn't fumble it when he got hit by those three guys. There's a lot of good that he did in that scary situation that I feel like needs to be appreciated, and that's just a testament to our training and the mindset that we've forged over the last year.

**Q. Mason, you guys did a great job of containing Jalen Milroe, and I know there were plans to keep him in the pocket. You were able to get to him. Do you expect going into this game things may be a little different? Penix can run but he doesn't like to. He doesn't run a lot. What do you think your plan will be in terms of trying to contain him and get to him and get a little pressure on him?**

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I think kind of going into this game with the same mindset. He can still make plays with his feet, extend plays, obviously he's a great player on a high-powered offense. We still have to contain the quarterback as best we can and try not to let them or allow them to extend plays because that's kind of when explosive plays happen.

**Q. You guys have been on the road, and the NCAA decides to vacate some of your wins from the past season, how would that impact you or how would you view that?**

J.J. McCARTHY: You know, obviously from an outside perspective, it would be very unfortunate just to not get recognized for all the hard work we've put in and everything we've accomplished over this last year, but at the end of the day, it's not going to change the amount of accomplishment and the amount of pride for being on this football team and just everything that we accomplished because we know what we put in, we know the work that we've put in, and we know that we did things the right way as players.

Whatever happens with just all the outside controversy is just out of our control, and whatever the NCAA wants to do is out of our control. We're going to appreciate the things we did control and the things we did accomplish.

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, along the same lines as J.J., we've kind of just been working all the way up until this moment. Things happen along the way that don't kind of fall into place. We've overcome a lot of adversity this season. I've felt like it's brought us closer together, and I think everyone is starting to see this in the outside world, but everybody knew in Schembechler Hall that we wanted to be right where we are right now. That's all we're worried about.

**Q. Coach Harbaugh and Coach DeBoer have their message to the team. What specifically is the message from you two offensively and defensively?**

MASON GRAHAM: I'd probably just say focus on execution. The higher rate we execute, the higher rate of winning. Just kind of just keep on the same track we've been all year trying to execute a good game plan we have in place. Kind of just all the same things that we've been pushing throughout the season, just kind of bring it all full circle.

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, I agree with Mason, it comes down to execution, not really thinking about too much National Championship. Obviously we all know that, but

just all coming down to how we execute each and every play and making sure that we are locked in on all the little details on each and every play and making sure that we give it our all and realize we've only got 60 more minutes together, and this has just been such a special group. So many great relationships, great friendships that will last a lifetime, just realizing that it's going to be our last time going to war together.

Taking everything in, really appreciating the moment and embracing the moment and finishing out on top because nobody remembers the second-place winner or the runner-up.

**Q. J.J., when it comes to people involved in this team having some of their better performances when it matters the most this season, I think that statement could probably extend to Sherrone, as well, with the game he called against Ohio State and then the game he called against Alabama. What is it about Sherrone that you think allows him to step up in those moments as well as you guys?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I think just his level of preparation. He's probably one of the most prepared guys in this building each and every week, and I feel like these games specifically he prepares weeks, months ahead of time.

When the time comes, he's got a plan A, a plan B, a plan C, a plan D, just anything he can go to to make sure that he's one step ahead of the defensive coordinator on the other side of the field.

Yeah, I just feel like he always prepares for these moments, so when the moments come, we've already been there before, and it's pretty effortless for him calling that game.

**Q. I talked to Trevor Keegan at the Rose Bowl, and he put in perspective how you guys feel about this sign stealing scandal, that you guys are somehow involved in it or somehow you guys knew. He goes, I study film. I know the safety is coming because I see tendencies. That kind of pissed him off. I wonder if that's the case for you guys, if the knowledge that you have comes legitimately, if that's the word?**

MASON GRAHAM: I'd kind of just start it off, more the allegations are coming on the defensive side of the ball. I feel like we just kind of watch film and we get tendencies from other teams, just like Trevor was saying, and we kind of just pick up on it. I feel like we just have a high football IQ here at Michigan. We go over specific situations multiple times a week, just kind of learning more about the game every day, every meeting, just kind of just building

that IQ and being starter football players all around so we pick up on things faster, even if it's in-game adjustments.

I think little stuff like that, film study really helped us this year.

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, and I also feel like it's so unfortunate because there's probably -- I don't want to say a crazy number, but I'd say a good number, 80 percent of the teams in college football steal signs. It's just a thing about football. It's been around for years.

We actually had to adapt because in 2020 or 2019 when Ohio State was stealing our signs, which is legal and they were doing it, we had to get up to the level that they were at, and we had to make it an even playing field.

I just feel like it sucks, just because like Mason said, we do work our butts off. We do watch so much film and look for those little tendencies and spend like 10, 15 minutes on one clip alone just looking at all the little details of the posture, of the linebackers or the D-ends, the safeties off levels, the corner to the field is press but the corner to the boundary is off, little stuff like that where it's like, you could say it's all sign stealing, but there's a lot more that goes into play, and a lot of stuff that gets masked, a lot of work that gets masked just because of the outside perception of what sign stealing is all about.

**Q. What are your impressions of Penix in particular as a quarterback, and also how much are you guys going to lean on maybe some of the players like Michael Barrett who may have seen him up close back in 2020 when he played at Indiana?**

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure. Obviously Penix is a great player. I feel like they have a great offensive scheme, just a great group of guys on the offensive side of the ball that can really make plays happen, and he's one of the ones -- he is the one that makes their offense go. It all starts with him.

Then talking about Mike B, he's been a leader on this defense, vocal, physical, any type of leader you can name, he's been that for us this year on defense. Not just defense of the team, he's just really set the tone, whether we take the field first or offense takes the field first. He's one of the tone setters on our team, and he's going to continue to do that this game.

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