

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

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Irving, Texas, USA

### Ohio State Buckeyes

### Ryan Day

#### CFP Media Conference

BRETT DANIELS: We'd like to welcome everyone to the College Football Playoff head coach media availability. Joining us today is Ohio State University head coach Ryan Day.

At this time I'd like to turn things over to Coach Day for his opening remarks.

RYAN DAY: Thanks, Brett. It's an honor for our team to be representing Ohio State in the National Championship game this year. We're excited to be going back down to Atlanta. They have a great venue there and certainly a great opponent in Notre Dame.

Our players are excited about preparation, and just like we've said, this will be our fourth time now doing this in the college football playoffs. We have to wipe the slate clean and have a great week of preparation.

We brought the team back yesterday, had some great meetings, put the last game to bed, and now the focus is on Notre Dame.

We'll get into what a great team they are and everything that comes with that. But excited for a great week of preparation.

**Q. Ryan, you guys got away with having a lot of uncharacteristic penalties. Do you have anything you can attribute that to? How much has that been addressed, especially like TreVeyon. It seemed so out of character for him.**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, we're disappointed in the fact that we really let four drives get away, five with the turnover in the game, with penalties. Self-inflicted, so we feel like we need to play our best game in this game, and we know that.

There's nobody that came back on offense and was pleased with the fact that we had those penalties. Went



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back on the film and identified them.

The issues are always there. I've said it all along, and you know that, that win, lose, it doesn't matter; the issues are there. The fact that we turned the ball over once and then had the four drives that really got behind the sticks, two 15-yarders and two holding calls. We certainly have the right and opportunity to persevere through those penalties, but certainly sets us way behind the sticks, and we cannot have that in this game.

This is a team here that we're about to play against that has been unbelievable about creating turnovers and creating scores after their turnovers. So efficiency is going to be something that we've got to do a much better job of in this game if we're going to win it.

**Q. Did you get an explanation about the TreVeyon, what happened there?**

RYAN DAY: Just the fact that there was back-and-forth and that Tre made contact with his helmet. TreVeyon obviously feels terrible about it.

There's a lot of lessons to be learned there. Every game you learn, and TreVeyon is somebody that certainly has grown in so many different areas of his life, so to see him respond the way that he did after that speaks to his maturity. But he knows that he's got to play with emotion. He can't let emotion play with him.

Even Austin, he's hustling to the ball, and we're talking about pushing the pile and it's a great effort play, we talk about plus two, and we get the penalty there, which is a 15-yarder, which really hurt after I think it was a 12-yard gain. Those type of things we've got to do a good job of. The holding calls certainly set us back.

But we've got to do a good job with our execution overall, and that's going to be important in this game more than ever.

**Q. Ryan, last year you go 11-1, there's no expanded playoff, you miss out. This year, 10-2, you're playing for a National Championship game. The simple question is how grateful are you there is an expanded**



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**playoff this year, but also, did you change anything in terms of mindset, mentality, preparation, knowing that because of the expanded playoff you could potentially drop a couple of games and still end up in this situation?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, very, very grateful. I think everybody in the program is, to be in this situation, for a lot of reasons.

But I do think the new format has allowed our team to grow and build throughout the season, and as much as losses hurt, they really allow us as coaches and players to take a hard look at the issues and get them addressed, and then it's about the business of getting them fixed as time goes on.

I think that's really been the biggest thing that I've learned about this format, which I think has been great for our players. I think it's great for college football.

Along the way, we looked at a lot of different things and metrics about playing this many games, playing our 16th game, what that was going to be like. We knew it was going to be a little bit of a battle of attrition at times. So depth was certainly a critical part of roster management and talent acquisition, but also how we practice, how we play. So we've taken all those things into consideration so that we're still really, really fresh going into the end of the season.

**Q. Ryan, Jeremiah had been so dominant for you guys through the first two games and Texas obviously found a way to take him away. From what you saw on film, what did you learn about the way Texas was able to take him out of the game for you guys that you guys can learn from heading into this game against Notre Dame?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I think when you look at it, it's a little bit more about execution than it is anything else. They really didn't play us any differently than some of the other teams that we played. But we weren't able to sustain a few of those drives and connect on a couple other plays.

We know typically how teams are going to take a look at us and play us. They're going to play some man, and they'll certainly know where Jeremiah is, and then they'll play some one high and they'll play some two high and they'll mix it up.

But ultimately at the end of the day we've got to execute at a high level and continue to move the ball down the field, so we'll do the same thing this week. We'll put our game plan together. But he's obviously a huge part of our offense, as you know.

There's different ways that teams will adjust based on what he's done and what he's capable of, and so we'll identify what those are in this game and then go from there.

But to me, the story of this past game for us on offense was the self-inflicted wounds that set us back and allowed us to be in the game in the fourth quarter when I think we could have done a better job of executing and certainly made it a little bit of a bigger spread down the stretch.

That's going to be the focus this week. Always things to work on, and that's going to be it this week. We've got to play our best against Notre Dame. This is a very, very good team. They are a very resilient team. They play together. I think Riley Leonard is a tremendous leader and a tremendous player and a winner, and their coaching staff does a great job. Got a lot of respect for their players and their coaches. This is going to be a complete battle, and we know that. We've got to play our best game this season in the last one.

**Q. Ryan, I don't believe Denzel Burke played at all in the second half. Just what went into the decision to take him out of the game and ride with Jermaine?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, he'll be available for the next game. He's dealing with an upper extremity issue that we felt like at the time was the right thing to do, to hold him. Obviously we listen to the doctors and we get the feedback from Denzel, and we felt like Jermaine was playing well at the time, so that was the decision that was made.

But Denzel will be ready to play in this game.

**Q. To follow up on that, what did you think of Jermaine in the second half there? He's been coming along and expanding that rotation to be that third man. But those were some key situations in that particular game, and you guys trusted him to stay out there, or maybe there was no choice, but what did you make of Jermaine's game there?**

RYAN DAY: I think everybody feels comfortable putting Jermaine in the game based on the way that he's played this year, the way that he's practiced this year.

I say this all the time; you have an opportunity to earn trust in your coaches and your teammates every day, and when you get to this point in January, this is from the whole off-season, all of preseason and during the season, and we've talked about how depth is going to be important in this moment, a ton throughout the season, and Jermaine has done a good job.

I think everybody trusts the fact that when he goes in the game, he's going to do his job, and that's it. I felt like he played well. He graded out a champion. He's a very competitive player. He loves the competition. He loves his teammates. He's a gritty type of guy that loves being a Buckeye, loves his teammates, loves, again, to compete.

When his number is called, he'll be ready to make a play in this game, as well.

**Q. When you have a team that is at times even maybe selling out a little bit to defend JJ a little more, what's the balance between using his gravity and attacking other places on the field with wanting to try to manufacture more touches for him if teams are being more aggressive against him?**

RYAN DAY: That's a great question. I think the ultimate goal is to score points and move the ball. There's a lot of things that come into play. We want balance, and that's why it's important to make sure that we have balance across the board.

You did see Carnell get targeted a lot more. He was in a situation where there was a couple situations where they were clouding the Jeremiah side or giving him a little bit more attention that allowed Carnell to have more targets come his way, and so same thing with Emeka, G-Scott had some big plays, TreVeyon.

I think that's the key is when you have weapons across the board, it's a little bit harder, like you said, to just take one thing away, and then it's our job and Will's job to make sure that we understand what they're taking away and what they're giving up. That's the key here.

I think you'll find that most defenses are going to have different plans to take away what you do well, whether it's the run game, a certain player, the pass game, whatever it might be, and good teams and good offenses have tendencies. We'll try to identify what that's going to be in this game, and certainly as the game gets started and gets going, and then make sure that ultimately we're moving the ball down the field, and that's it.

We've got to execute at a high level and continue to move the ball down the field because I thought other than the penalties that set us back, there was a lot of good play. So that's what's frustrating about coming off of the last game, but that's it, and that's football. So we've got to make sure that we're on our game and everybody is doing their job.

**Q. What was your view on the interception? It seemed like they had four or five guys around Jeremiah and maybe only one on Emeka?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, it was just a cover three, and I don't think we get great play action. I think we need to get our pads down lower up front. I think the mesh between the quarterback and the running back has to be better. We sold a counter on that play and it was a cover three so there really wasn't anything done to be taken away with Jeremiah.

We gave a little bit of leakage there on the tight end, which forced Will to really speed up his decision. I think if he had a little bit more time, he would have worked his way out to the field, to your point. I think Emeka ran a nice route right there, and I think he would have worked his way over to Emeka next.

So there was a lot that went into that play. But that was just a cover three that we could have done a better job with our pads selling the play action, which would have opened up the routes down the field better.

**Q. Just to follow up on Denzel, was it all related to the upper extremity issue or was it at all performance related because I think the play he came out was a missed tackle so I was wondering if it was affecting his play?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, it wasn't about the performance part of it. It had to do with the injury.

**Q. Your timeline for a quarterback evaluation last year, last December, was probably different than Notre Dame's, but Riley Leonard was a guy in the portal, as well. Did you guys take a look at him or evaluate him? What was your process in looking at him as your options?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I think Riley made his decision pretty quickly, but he's somebody that I've respected from afar and just the way that he competes, and he's a great athlete. He's got a great mindset.

Again, watching him play this year and the toughness and leadership that he brings, you can tell the offense and the entire team feeds off of him. So a lot of respect for his game.

**Q. Ryan, did you pull a hamstring as you ran down the sideline chasing Jack Sawyer on that play at the end? Caleb Downs, his awareness of what's going on, especially around the goal line and stuff, he and Lathan had a tremendous play on that toss left, which kind of set up things that followed there. But can you speak to the level he's playing on? I'm talking about Caleb.**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, the first part, you went from -- let's just talk about Caleb first in that situation. I don't want to spend too much time talking about the last game because our focus is on this next game. But to make a stand down there like we did, the ball is on the 1-yard line, and as a coach you've got to plan, you've got to see what's ahead. I think it's the job of the leader to look along the horizon and figure out what's coming next and have a plan for it, so in your mind as a coach you're thinking to yourself, okay, we've got to go put a drive together to go win the game.

But then we get a stop on the 1st down play and the 2nd down play when the ball gets to the edge you see both Caleb and Lathan ran to the ball fast and the defense recognized it quickly. To your point, that's all the preparation and work that gets done in the meeting room and walk-throughs, in the film room, to make sure that you're anticipating as opposed to reacting, and to me that's the key.

Both of those guys are playing at a high level and fast, and certainly Caleb played a great game and was able to finish it with that interception.

But then obviously to watch Jack make that play, again, in your mind you're going from we've got to go score to win the game to the game just got sealed, and you could almost see it happening in front of you, just the fact that this is a play that will go down in Buckeye history as one of the greatest, and that's just how exciting, just the elation of all of us. It's as happy as I've been in a long time, just watching the players enjoy that moment, and I think as a coach that's why you do this.

But that being said, that's behind us. We can talk about this in a couple weeks. Right now it's all focus on this game.

**Q. The last time you played Notre Dame, one of the hot topics was the toughness issue, and you guys answered that pretty strongly, and you had some strong comments after, immediately afterward. What did that game do for you, being this is the same opponent?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I have a tremendous amount of respect for Notre Dame and certainly what Marcus has done there. I think they're a gritty group. They're a tough group. They're a great program. The last two years it's been a battle playing against them, and we know it's going to be the same way.

Every year is a different group of guys and a different situation. This is a different situation. It'll be the same

way.

But no, every game, you're either trying to prove somebody right or prove somebody wrong, it doesn't matter when it is, and it will be the same thing in this game here.

**Q. Have you and Lou Holtz ever talked since then, either patching things up or comments between you?**

RYAN DAY: No. No.

**Q. Ryan, the Jack Sawyer play, how much do you use that now moving forward for your players, like this could be you in this game?**

RYAN DAY: We're going to maybe talk about that down the road. We did going into the game talk about how if you want to leave a legacy behind, the best way to leave a legacy is become your own legend, and that was something that was told to me recently that I kind of grabbed on to, and I think it was right on board with what just happened.

It'll be the same thing in this game. These are the types of games where that stage is set to become a legend.

I think these guys know that. But again, all the focus, and I know I sound like a broken record when it comes to this, has got to be on the next game. If we think anything that we've done leading up to this point has anything to do with what's going to happen in this game, we are dead wrong. So wipe that slate completely clean, and then we've got to go back and have the discipline to continue to do the work that we've done in the last three games going into this game right here.

But I can't tell you that there isn't confidence coming off of the last game, coming off the last couple games. That's good. But again, it's got to be moving forward, and this is a very, very good team. They've only lost one game, and the teams that they've played in this playoff are tremendous teams, and they play well together. They're tough. They're resilient. They find ways to win.

We've got to play our best game to win this game. I'm just telling you, we have to play our best game, and that's going to be the focus, and that's where we're going moving forward.

There will be time to tell the story after the season, but the only way the story is told is if we win. That's the sobering message to our team. So we need to understand that. This game is going to get on us fast, so we've got to get to work and make sure we're having great meetings, great preparation, great practice, great walk-through, and that's

it. I wish I could tell you there's some magic recipe, but that's the formula that we've got to make sure we're disciplined enough to make sure we do again this week, to finish it out strong.

**Q. The play of the defensive line kind of the second half of the year but really in the playoff, what has unlocked the potential of some of these guys to do some of the things they've done, not just Jack's play but the defensive line in general?**

RYAN DAY: I think when you've played as much football as these guys have played, the game slows down. You start to understand time, situation, score, and when you're young, you're just playing plays. You don't quite understand the adjustments in game. You don't always understand down and distance necessarily. You don't understand the situation all the time.

As you get older and you play more, you just become more aware of all those things. Setting guys up for later in the game and all those things.

If you look at our guys, they've played a lot of football. I think the second thing is I think Larry Johnson has done a great job of keeping those guys fresh. You saw guys rotating in the game, and that was important, that the guys were able to play well down the stretch. That's a big part of it.

But we all know how big the offense and defensive lines are in these types of games, and it's going to be the same challenge going into this because they have a great front on both sides of the ball.

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