

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

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Irving, Texas, USA

**Ohio State Buckeyes**

**Coach Ryan Day**

**Will Howard**

**Cody Simon**

CFP Media Conference



**COLLEGE FOOTBALL  
PLAYOFF**

When we got into this thing, Coach Day, I think, really going into the Cotton Bowl was talking about our story is written, but it needs to be told. We have some unbelievable individual stories and then as a team.

I'm just so glad that we were able to get it done. Years down the line we can tell the story about this team, and there's just too many unbelievable guys and unbelievable people in this building that need their stories told.

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I would just echo that. The humility and the resilience of not only the seniors but just everyone on our team. People deciding to come back for another year when they could have made all the money in the NFL and be first-round picks, they came back for the love of the brotherhood and the appreciation for the culture and all their teammates.

I think that story is about determination, resilience, humility, just thankfulness, faithfulness, just everything good that comes out of a team game and a team sport. I think our team has showed it this year.

RYAN DAY: I'll just add that I think that our team can serve as a story for others. What makes Ohio State great is its fan base, and for all those fans that are out there that are going through difficult times in their lives, to hang in there and fight the way that our players did this season, I hope it serves as an inspiration because that's exactly what happened here, and there was a point in the season where a lot of people counted us out, but we kept fighting and overcame those odds because that's what life is about.

There were life lessons learned here, and I hope maybe there's just a couple people out there that are going through a difficult time that keep fighting and keep swinging and they'll get the thing turned.

**Q. I was just wondering, the emotions obviously I'm sure you're going through, one, the time frame, how much do you allow yourself to enjoy this, and how does this compare to the emotions you felt after the Michigan game when I'm sure it just seemed like the world was crumbling around you and everybody you held close to you?**

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's College Football Playoff news conference. We are joined by Ryan Day, offensive player of the game Will Howard, and defensive player of the game Cody Simon. We'll start with an opening comment from you, Coach.

RYAN DAY: Just waking up this morning, just grateful that we had an opportunity to be with this team and certainly I would say that everything that came with the season and all the hard work was worth it. It was worth it.

I'm proud of these guys. And again, we'll go down in history and cement themselves as champions. I said it before, that there's been some great teams in Ohio State history, nine who are national champs, but in the last, I think it's 53 years, up until this game there's only been two that have been national champs, and this is the third right here.

We're going to take some time to celebrate, enjoy it, because these guys deserve it.

**Q. For Will and Cody, Coach talked about telling the story of this team but it would only happen if you won. What do you feel like the story of this team should be?**

WILL HOWARD: I mean, I feel like the story kind of speaks for itself a little bit. Every player on this team, especially the seniors that were here for three, four years, decided to come back, each and every single one of those guys have a story.

We collectively get to tell this story of this season because there were ups and downs. There were trials and tribulations. Ultimately we were able to overcome them and win the big one at the end.



... when all is said, we're done.®

RYAN DAY: Yeah, if you define your happiness by the results, then yeah, you can find yourself focusing on those things. I don't. I'm just as proud of this team no matter what happened. But now the best thing is, again, you get to hear about these guys for the history of college football, and these guys get to go back to the Woody and put their arm around their wife and their kids and say, look what dad did.

To me, that's all that matters because that's why you get into coaching. It isn't to hoist trophies or make big contracts or anything like that. The reason you get into coaching is to help young men reach their dreams and goals, period. At least that's what I and our staff are in this thing for.

When that's your focus, then you wake up and you realize that as awful as some things can happen during the season, you look at those as opportunities, and now you get to tell an unbelievable story behind it. That's exactly what life is all about.

Just the feeling of seeing our guys and the elation in the locker room, the euphoria, everything about it makes it all worth it. But again, that's what life is all about. Nothing great was ever achieved without going through adversity along the way. That's what makes this team special.

Not only that, I think it's easy to say -- or not easy to say, I guess, but can be argued that this was the best run in the history of college football. To go play at home against Tennessee who's a very, very good team, then go to Oregon, the No. 1 team in the country and win that game at the Rose Bowl the way we did and then beat Texas in Texas, which that was a road game. I don't care what anybody says, that was a road game, a very difficult game, and then play a really good Notre Dame team like this, I think in the history of college football, I don't think there's been Top 5 wins like that.

All things that we're very proud of.

**Q. With all of the stories, what's an under-the-radar story that you would like to be told?**

RYAN DAY: Well, I think if you just pick one, you'll be taking away from somebody else. That's why -- Donovan Jackson, I could talk about him for 45 minutes. What he did this past year and the unselfishness and the play -- he went from guard to tackle and became one of the best tackles in the country. He was going to the NFL, and then at the last second decided he wanted to come back and play.

Lathan Ransom, I could talk forever about Lathan Ransom,

the fact that the last time he was at the Rose Bowl was when he broke his leg, and to have the courage to go play the way he did in that Rose Bowl at Oregon and the inspiration he's had, these guys will tell you, you talk about a guy who just was, like, obsessed with winning this season, Lathan Ransom.

You can just keep going through -- like Ty Hamilton. You talk about one of the most unselfish, unsung heroes on this team, all he does is work. He comes in and works every single day. That's Ty Hamilton.

All these stories need to be told now. They need to be heard. There's so many of them, and hopefully over the next few months we can continue to talk about these stories, about these guys. A guy like Tyliek Williams, probably one of the more dominant players in college football this season, and where he came when he first got to Ohio State, it was during the COVID run.

We were on the bus driving over to the spring game and he was sitting next to me. He said, I can't wait to get over to the stadium. He goes, man, I can't wait to see it. He goes, I've never seen the stadium before. He said, during the recruiting process he never even visited the school.

There's a good portion of the guys on our team in that year, that recruiting class, that actually didn't visit Ohio State until they come here to check into the dorms.

Again, we can go on for a while. That's not for right now. But I'm just glad their stories will be heard and Buckeye fans will be able to enjoy those stories for a long time to come.

**Q. I know it's been a long night. Have you guys had a chance to sleep, and how has the celebration been for all of you?**

RYAN DAY: You can talk to these guys about that.

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I got a good two, three hours, but I think the greatest moments of my career at Ohio State is just being around my teammates. The wins are all great, but I'm never going to forget my teammates. All the moments we shared in the locker rooms and in weight training, in the cafeteria.

You create so many unbreakable bonds through this journey and through these years that I'm so happy to be a part of this team. Like he said, all the stories that can be told, like every single person on this team has got a story, and everyone has been so resilient and so unselfish and has given all they can.

I think when we started this playoff, there was just something different about when we all came together, it was just, like, you felt the energy, you felt the togetherness of the team.

Some of those moments I felt during this playoff and I'll never forget because it changed the course of my life and the course of this team, and I'm so grateful I got to go through it with these guys.

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, sleep is for the weak, so we'll sleep on the plane. But man, no, we want to enjoy this one and celebrate it accordingly with our teammates, man. I think we got back to the hotel and really just hung out with each other, and that was awesome. Just getting to share some fellowship with the guys, man, and everyone that really had a hand in this season.

I'm excited because now we get to go home to Columbus and do the same thing and just enjoy some time with our brothers for the last time because this was our last game together, and it's kind of sad to think about, honestly, when I sit back and think that I'm not going to get the chance to wear a Buckeye uniform again. I'm not going to get to wear the scarlet and gray again. It's a little bittersweet.

But I'm just so thankful that we were able to end it the right way.

**Q. Will, when you tell the story of the night, where will the golf cart incident go in that? Second of all, to be a National Championship quarterback at Ohio State, a guy who was only here for one year, when that hits your ears, what does that mean to you?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, man, obviously the golf cart incident was pretty funny. Coach Day, I hope you're all right. He got jolted a little bit.

RYAN DAY: I'll send my medical bills to the CFP. (Laughter).

WILL HOWARD: No, man, it's humbling. Coming to Ohio State, obviously the expectation and the goal is in the end to win a National Championship. The fact that we're sitting here today as national champions, it's surreal, man.

You've got to really just take it in and thank God for the opportunity to be here and for the opportunity to be on this stage with these guys that I love.

We're going to be brothers for the rest of our lives because of this. We are bonded for life. It's more than blood now, man. We've got rings to show for it, and we're going to be able to get together and tell this story of this team for years

to come.

I'm just so blessed that I was able to come here and be a part of something like this.

**Q. Ryan, there's a lot of pros playing college football, but Jeremiah is a pro who's a freshman, 19 years old, has to play two more years. What does his future look like? How does he get better without damaging what he is right now?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, he's obviously a special talent, and I think that we had a plan coming in. I think Brian Hartline has done an unbelievable job throughout the recruiting process and his family of putting that plan in action.

What we envisioned this season came through, but maybe even a little bit more. For him to be able to sustain 16 games of play the way he did was pretty remarkable for a freshman.

He needs some rest. That body needs some rest. He needs to get away from football for a while because he really grinded throughout the season. I'm really proud of what he did.

But there's still parts of his game that he can improve, and he'll tell you that, and we'll put that plan together in the off-season and work through those things.

It's clear to see, like we said from the jump, he is a generational talent. He's a special player, but he's a great person.

Just to see the way he came up clutch in that game but also in some of the other games, and make no mistake about it, early in the game they were doing everything they could to take him away. You have to be unselfish in those moments to say, we've just got to go win this game, and his body language and energy couldn't have been any better.

What a season for such a young player who we all know is special, but we'll put that plan together in the off-season and then put it back to work.

**Q. Ryan, I think last night the celebration is probably a little bit of a blur, but I wonder how much the moment with Carmen is burned into your brain with the family and the trophy, and Cody and Will, who's the first person you wanted to seek out when the game hit zero there?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I think a couple people asked me, if you win the game, what will your reaction be, and for me, I

couldn't go there. Didn't know what this week that we're about to go into even entailed, celebrations or anything, because for me, I couldn't go there. I just wanted this so much for these players.

So it was just like focused on right now, and these guys will tell you, I was just obsessed with all right, how do we get better today, how do we do a good job with this walk-through, how do we do a good job today with this meeting, this practice to get ourselves prepared for the game.

Once we win the whole thing, we'll figure out what's next. That's kind of where we're at right now.

But yeah, there was a mix of emotions there. At the end of the day, to be there with your family -- when you talk about family, you have your wife and kids who if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have been able to make this run that I went on. And especially just the last month and a half, just what they provided for me in terms of strength, I just can't say enough, especially my wife. They've been unbelievable.

But then when you talk about family, you're talking about our team. This has become family.

Every team is together for a while, but then when the playoffs started, we went on this special run, and we were with each other, like, 24/7 for the last month and a half. We were spending more time together than we were our own families. It's like a big family.

Just to see those guys enjoying and smiling and have something to show for all the work that they've put in, it was a mix of emotions, but I couldn't be any happier for these guys.

**Q. Ryan, I know you want to talk about the team, so Will and Cody, maybe you could help make him answer this one. Paul Brown, Woody Hayes, Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer, Ryan Day. Those are the five Ohio State coaches who have won national titles. How does it feel to have your name on that list?**

RYAN DAY: Well, it's an honor. It's an honor to be the head coach at Ohio State. I'd probably say that this job is not for everybody, and every year I've learned more about myself than I thought going into the season. A big part of it is these players, and I shared that with the guys this season.

I felt like we were knocking on the door several times leading up to this game. You think about the '19 team, you think about the '20 team. Every year I felt like we were

close, but we just couldn't get through. This team was different. This team was special. The message was to leave no doubt. Don't leave it to one play. Don't leave it to one call. Don't leave it in the hands of somebody else. Don't do that.

I felt like the throw-and-catch there to Jeremiah at the end was like, okay, we're leaving no doubt with this thing.

To answer your question about the other part of it, I don't know. I just know that Ohio State is a special place. It's an honor to be here, an honor to be around some of those names that you just said, because when you hear some of those names like that, they're some of the best coaches in the history of the game.

But the only way you do that is with great players and great people, and obviously this is a great place.

**Q. Ryan, you've never shied away from talking about the pressure that comes with the position that you have and the expectation that essentially you have to win every game you coach at Ohio State. When the buzzer goes off last night, where on the spectrum from relief to happiness did you actually land?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I guess both. I don't know if it's a spectrum. All of the above. Yeah, all of the above. There's a mix of emotions there. It's hard to really put into words. But yeah, you just want to let out a scream. Like I threw my headset; I don't know where that came from. I looked back and I forgot I even did that. I don't know what that reaction was, but I guess whatever you're talking about, jubilation, relief, but more than anything happiness for these guys.

When you say happy for your family, this is the family right here. This is it. But also for my wife and kids, I think for all of these guys now, they can have some peace, and to me that's important.

**Q. For Ryan, winning a National Championship means your staff is likely to be in demand and you've made changes in the past. What's your level of confidence in having continuity with your staff, including Jim Knowles?**

RYAN DAY: I just think there should be great opportunity for all these guys. We'll work hard to make sure that they have an opportunity here at Ohio State, but if they have opportunities to go other places and do other things, then that's part of the reward of winning a championship.

We'll put this next group of guys together and figure it out because these guys deserve opportunity for what they've



done. This coaching staff has done an unbelievable job. There's a lot of guys in different positions, and whether it's promotions or whatever it might be, they deserve those things.

I'll start quickly with the coordinators. Jim I think is the best defensive coordinator in the country. Does an unbelievable job; did an unbelievable job throughout the season. His staff, Tim and Larry, again, you could talk about James and their entire staff. Unbelievable. The game plan, the scheme, but then just coaching up the confidence, and then on offense with chip, what he's meant to me and being able to be more present with the entire team and Justin Frye, what he's been through last year losing Seth and Josh and being able to pull this together. The offensive line was excellent last night. Brian Hartline is the best in the business at what he does. We all know that.

But I don't take it for granted. Keenan Bailey works his tail off. He's a great young coach. Carlos Locklyn really has got those running backs in a big way playing very physical, very hard. Billy Fessler did a great job this season stepping in in a big way and helping that room out.

As you go through all these different guys, the No. 1 thing to me was loyalty throughout the season. These guys were loyal. And there's a lot of guys now on our staff that have analyst roles, GA roles, but they all stuck together.

After you win something like this there's opportunity and we're going to fight like heck to keep these guys the best we can, but when opportunity knocks and they have opportunities they deserve to do that for their families if that is what's best for their families.

There's no better place than Ohio State, so there will be a lot of reason for them to stay, but we'll figure that out as we move forward.

**Q. You talk all the time about ignoring the outside noise, but sometimes in Columbus it's so deafening that you can't. Was there ever a moment that you struggled with self-doubt in the last six weeks? Cody and Will, it's clear he never lost the locker room. You guys always stood by him. What was it about your head coach that you guys knew he was the guy to get you on that podium?**

WILL HOWARD: Man, first and foremost, I owe so much to this guy sitting right next to me. He gave me a chance here and he bet on me. I am forever indebted to him for that.

One of -- probably the best coach I've ever been around.

I've never seen someone work a game like Coach Day does. He thinks of every single possible scenario that could go on in every single play. I've never been coached this hard.

I knew I was going to get coached hard, and that's what I needed. I needed that. If it were not for me coming here to Ohio State and getting developed by Coach Day and Coach Kelly and Billy Fessler and Riley and all the guys in that room, man, I really wouldn't be the player that I am right now.

I think that coming here was just an unbelievable opportunity for me, and Coach Day -- we all knew it. None of us ever doubted for a second that he was the right guy to lead this team, and we stuck together and we said we want to do it for each other, we want to do it for our coach, and let's do this thing, man.

I'm really glad that we were able to finish it the right way.

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I would agree with Will. No one ever on our team lost any type of faith. Obviously there's noise all over the world, but we know what happens here within the Woody. I'd just say there are times when you get in early to the Woody and you think you're getting work done and you go and walk past the head coach office and he's already there. He's been watching film. His eyes are bloodshot. He puts that extra time in that no one in the world is really putting in.

When I see stuff like that, there's no one I'd rather trust than Coach Day, and I wholeheartedly believe that he is always and will be the best coach that I've ever been a part of.

The story of our entire team is all because of we all trusted in the leadership of Coach Day. I can't say enough good things about him because he led us all the way, and all the stuff he's been through, and he talks about -- he's going to talk about self-doubt, but no one ever doubted him on our team.

Within the Woody, it was always the Woody versus the world, so we'll stand by that.

RYAN DAY: Yeah, some people might have doubted, but we didn't and I didn't. I knew it all along. A lot of things get said and a lot of things get written, but that never affected us. It never flinched; and these guys never flinched. They never frayed at all. They stuck together. It actually brought them together more. Yeah, this is a special group of guys, and just the loyalty. That's it. That's it.

I always wanted to be the hardest working guy in the



building as the head coach and lead that way and care and love these guys the best I possibly could and focus on the process, not the results. Weather some storms along the way and go from there. But that's it.

There's nobody in the Woody that really ever doubted each other, and we just kept pushing. Now you're seeing the results of that.

**Q. Coach Day, what would you say was the difference maker between this team and previous teams that you have coached in the past? You have had a number of talented guys that came through your program, but it was this team that won the National Championship title. What would you say was the difference between this team and those previous teams?**

RYAN DAY: That's a great question. I think it's experience. Yeah. This is an experienced team. They've played a lot of football. When you look at the maturity of our team, we were able to physically sustain 16 games, mentally sustain 16 games, and then emotionally sustain 16 games.

I think in the end, that was the difference.

**Q. For Will, few people get that feeling to just sit back there and rock and throw a ball in a clutch moment like you did last night. You came here with the idea of improving yourself for the NFL Draft, also. You talked about that last spring. Then for Coach Day to follow up on that, coming back to my question, Will, does he think he's done that, but you used to help pick quarterbacks for the NFL, Coach Day. Where do you rate this guy now?**

WILL HOWARD: Man, coming here to Ohio State, I felt like going into last year or coming into this year really, I didn't feel like I was in the best place I felt like I could put myself in in the draft, and I felt like I wanted another shot at it, and I felt like coming here to Ohio State was the best opportunity I had to better my chances at the next level.

To be honest with you, I'm not thinking about that right now. I am just so ecstatic that we won this thing. We were able to do it with my brothers. We'll worry about that probably when it comes up in the next week or so.

But I've been developed here like I've never been developed before. I've been pushed. I've been coached. I've been nitpicked to the point where I just -- I've gotten so much better here. Yeah, it's a credit to Coach Day and Coach Kelly, again, Billy Fessler, all these guys for investing a lot of time into me.

We'll worry about the NFL whenever that comes up, but I'm just so glad we got this one done.

**Q. That ball coming off your hand, what did it feel like?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, it's when you tee up the driver and it feels real nice, 300 down the middle. No, I'm just kidding.

But that was one we had drawn up for a 3rd and extra long call. We knew they were going to potentially play us in man and give us a shot over the top, and JJ did a great job of attacking his leverage and stacking them, and all I had to do was give 4 a chance and let 4 be 4.

RYAN DAY: But that didn't just happen. There was a lot of time spent to get to that point. Will really put it in. We had quarterback school and all these different things, man, and 42 yards down the red line to the field and the footwork that has to go with that, it didn't just happen.

When Will's feet are right, he is as good as anybody I've been around. His accuracy, his ability to see, the way he commands the team, his work he puts in. I think the thing that nobody is probably going to understand how much credit he deserves is how much he can take on.

I don't think there was -- to say 90 percent of the calls that went in the other day had two or three plays into it. He's calling a play or two in the huddle and then checking the play at the line of scrimmage. That's NFL material right there. That's special.

Whichever organization decides to draft Will is going to get, like, a pro day one walking in the door.

**Q. I almost hesitate to ask this question, but in nine months you're going to start this up again. You've got guys leaving but you've got a talented group coming back. What can you say about next year's team and maybe not feeling the immense pressure that you have this year? Expectations won't be quite as high.**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, try losing the first game and see how that goes at Ohio State. We'll see about that.

I think we have a great group coming back, but I think what these guys have had an opportunity to do -- we had 145 guys on the team, and a percentage of those guys were newcomers, freshmen, and also some of the transfers that are coming in.

The thing I told them is you have to use this time as an opportunity to learn what it's supposed to look like, and these guys set an amazing example and I asked the

captains in particular what do you think about bringing these guys on to the team because they can be a distraction a little bit.

I mean, this is a team that's been together, all of a sudden you add 25, 30 new guys to the team it can be a little bit of a distraction. They said, no, we want these guys around because we want to hand the torch to them so they understand what the brotherhood is like, they understand what this is supposed to look like so when we leave they can take over for that.

We do have a talented group coming back so we'll get back and try to figure that out. I don't know if spring practice is going to look like it usually does. I don't know if it can for the amount of games these guys have played. But for the young guys we've got to get them going, get them indoctrinated into the program and then we'll ramp up soon.

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