

CFP First Round: Notre Dame vs Indiana

Friday, December 20, 2024

Notre Dame, Indiana, USA

Notre Dame Stadium

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Riley Leonard

Postgame Press Conference

Notre Dame 27, Indiana 17

Q. That throw that you made to Jordan Faison, the long one down the middle gets you guys down to the 1. Where does that rank among all the passes that you've thrown this season?

RILEY LEONARD: It would have been up there if he could have got in, but he didn't.

Our QBGA was like, boy, you need to step up in the pocket next time, you get these high-edge rushers, and then I did it, and this guy got open for me. But I was itching for it to come open because we called that play earlier and they spun to two, but that time it was quarters, so got to take advantage of it.

Q. Then a couple plays later the feeling that you have when you walk into the end zone and everyone in the stadium knows at that point that that's kind of it right there, just that moment that you had with your teammates, what was that like?

RILEY LEONARD: That's special. It's kind of hard for me sometimes, my head is always spinning all week. It's hard for me to take a second and take it all in. But that was kind of the first time where I was able to look out into the crowd and really embrace this moment because it really is special. My mind is just always spinning; I'm always so stressed out all the time. It was very important for me to take it all in. That was a special moment.

Q. Riley, you're obviously Jeremiyah Love's biggest advocate. I know you talked about him. If he had your touchdowns, possibly in the Heisman Trophy conversation, what does tonight say -- what does his performance say about him?

RILEY LEONARD: Yeah, I got the best view in the house. Every time I hand him the ball, I'm just watching, like what's



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he going to do now. He just continues to impress me. It's like the little things. It's that second or 3rd down where he's stiff-arming guys and getting 1st downs for us. It's these little plays that might be five-yard gains, but for anybody else it might be a five-yard loss possibly. I mean, he's just a freak athlete.

Like I say, if we didn't have a rushing quarterback, how many more touchdowns would this guy have, and he'd be in conversations nationwide. Obviously I think people are starting to see how special he is.

Q. What was going through your mind as you saw him run down the sideline on that 98-yard touchdown run?

RILEY LEONARD: Yeah, once he creases the gap, it's like, all right, head over to the sideline, he's gone. We've seen it time and time again, but once he gets to that secondary, there's no catching him.

Q. Coach Freeman was talking about the need to enjoy it. I'm wondering, is that challenging amid a playoff run, that you guys kind of just became an answer to a trivia question, first time to do this, or is that an easy thing to do, even amid the bigger goal that you're chasing?

RILEY LEONARD: That's a good question. I think this is special for us. A lot of us, me being a guy who -- my freshman year I went 3-9 and didn't have -- was just begging to make a bowl game. To be playing in a Sugar Bowl right now, I've got to go full circle now, and it's really cool.

But at the same time, it's another football game, and we're just staying alive, and we're just trying to play as many games as we can because we love the game, we love preparing for it, and we love representing this university.

Q. Riley, a lot of the talk coming into this game was how you would do as a passer, not just a runner of the football. Why do you think that -- how did you get ready for the moment tonight? How were you ready for the moment?

RILEY LEONARD: Yeah, I think this was one of my better



weeks passing in practice, and then you get out there, and the first throw was a pick. So I was like, bro, are you serious? Like Coach always says, practice like you play, and then this happens. But I had to bounce back kind of like I've been doing all year and kind of like we've been doing all year.

My confidence is just continuing to grow. The better these guys play around me, the more confidence I have in getting them the ball. They're showing out every week, and we're continuing to develop in the passing game.

Q. When you're backed up like that on the Love touchdown run, you're backed up in your own end zone, did it feel like that just set the tone for the whole night?

RILEY LEONARD: Absolutely. Everybody wanted to talk about how great their rushing defense was, and obviously our rushing offense is pretty good. To be able to get that early kind of set a statement, like all right, we're not backing down, we're going to run the rock and kind of punch you in the mouth up front.

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