

# CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

Saturday, January 18, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Emeka Egbuka

### Press Conference

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, for me, I think I've experienced a lot of my firsts/lasts. My last home game in the Shoe. My last meal maybe at the facility with my brothers. My last away trip. So there is a lot of lasts so definitely bittersweet. I am just grateful to God for the opportunity that we're able to be out here.

All the adversity and the hard times we been through as a group, especially the senior class, just with an opportunity to be able to cap it off the right way means the world to me.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think time will tell. Monday will definitely be a great closing, but I think I've done the best I could to represent Jesus in how I play, and that's really how you view success. So numbers come and go, but the way you make people feel echoes in eternity. That's a saying that Coach Hart hammered home to us since I was a freshman, so really trying to leave my legacy other than just the numbers that I put up.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: That's a great question. I've never even thought about that before. Maybe if you come back to me I'll have a better answer for that.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: They feed us the same thing every pre-game. Spaghetti and meat sauce, so that's what I stick to ever since I was a freshman.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: Best taste in music would be -- who normally gets the aux. Kojo Antwi, we give him the aux a



**NATIONAL  
CHAMPIONSHIP**  
ATLANTA 2025

lot. Yeah, I would say Kojo, wide receiver.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, it would be a great feeling, but I would really like a national championship more, so that's really all I'm focused on. So doing whatever my team needs me to do to be successful in that aspect is what I'm going to do. So whether it's 20 catches or 0, I'm going to be playing my tail off on Monday, so you can bet on that.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: The microphone -- I don't know if it's working or not. I can't really hear you.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: I believe when you're playing in stages like this you do have to take a second to recognize where your feet are. It's important to be in the moment. We worked so hard to get here to the national championship, so just to treat it like any other game I don't think is right because it is a big stage.

You should be able to embrace that and soak that in and recognize all the work that you took to get here and be grateful to it. So this whole team, we're grateful and thankful. You got to take a second and smell the roses, and we just look back on the season and everything we been through and we just trusted God with the plan he had for this team and he pulled through in a miraculous way.

So it's really about just playing confident and free on Monday night.

#### Q. (No microphone.)

EMEKA EGBUKA: I would say obviously personnel changes year in and year out. They have talented guys littered across the roster. I would say a lot of their personality and tradition and the way they play the game has stayed the same.

Ever since I played them since I was a sophomore, they play the game really hard, they play it the right way. When



... when all is said, we're done.®

it comes to execution they're coached really well. Obviously they're going to be a great team every single year.

I think 30 years down the line you're going to see the same thing because of the culture they built up over there at Notre Dame. Tremendous respect for them, and I think they're the other best team in the country so they made it to the national championship. We get to see the two best teams in the country face off on Monday night; just what you want.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I mean, yeah, I would definitely say so. I don't know if that comes off as bias or not. I think he's the most explosive person I've ever been around in my life. I just think when he sees a crease and hits it, there is not a single back in the nation that can match really what he does, just his selflessness and the way he approaches the game.

If you look at his pass blocking film, it's outstanding. If was a scout or GM, I would definitely be buying stock in TreVeyon on Henderson.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, he's a guy that came into the locker room and you can tell he has a lot of football under his bell. Confident guy, true leader. When you have that at the quarterback position leading your team, it makes the team play a whole lot more confident in your ability and ability to execute and everything like that.

So Will is definitely a great leader for our team. I am so glad he was able to come here out of the transfer portal and have another chance to cap off his college career the right way.

He did nothing but good things for himself. He improved at the game of football when he came here. He got better at throwing the ball, reading the defense, running and commanding a huddle. He didn't come in like some transfers come thinking they're the guy. He came in knowing he needed to get to work; he did exactly that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think that format definitely gives you an opportunity to be able to prove yourself if you fell short in other areas, but I would say my first three previous years when this 12-team format wasn't a thing, it's not like we knew the Top 4 teams were going to get in or weren't going to get in and you would have another chance. We

knew what was at stake every single game.

I think that's just what happens when you fall a little bit short. Whatever the format is, no matter if it's fair or not or whatever the term you want to use, you have to go out there and execute at the end of the day.

The years that we fell out of Top 4 before this format was a thing, all I can say is we should have won those games that kicked us out. Not really another way to put it.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I would say it was good. I think we're all just relishing in the fact we're here in Atlanta. You know, this is kind of where we dreamed we would be and where we worked to be. For a lot of us seniors it's our last game, last trip together.

So there is a lot of great memories that have already been built, and we are just going about this really cherishing each other's time together and we're ready to play for each other on Monday.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, we definitely took a second to reflect like you're saying. At the same time the job is far from done. We are still staying laser focused. You know, it has been a long road since our freshmen year. Coach Day makes sure that we're aware of the fact of all the work it took to get here, all the prayers that have been answered, and everything like that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I mean, you know, I think at the core we're wide receivers so we love the opportunity to be able to go at a DB one on one. At the end of the day whatever coverage they play, our coaches will have a great game plan and we're going to go out there and do what we're coached to do.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I wouldn't say I model my game after a specific player. I think I'm a student of the game. I'm obsessed with learning about football and all the nuances of it. I try to take something from everybody. I don't think there is not something you can gather from someone who's great. There is not one specific player that I model my game after.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think I in previous years probably would've been out of the playoffs for sure. We knew that kind of going into that game. You know, we hadn't done enough to maybe get in. That didn't make us complacent. Just didn't execute, and that is what it is.

We knew we had to get that game behind us because we were going to have a chance to win it all. Now we're staring in the face of the greatest opportunity of our you life.

We can't be thinking about negative things like that. It's all forward thinking.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Good. How are you?

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Let's see, yeah, combo was pretty good. Rose Bowl is always a good one; Tennessee. There is not really a game that Coach Day isn't fired up after we win. Doesn't matter who we play. Winning is not easy in college football. May look easy if we play an inferior opponent, but there is a lot that goes into it. Just to be able to score a touchdown, I mean, all 11 guys on the field have to be doing their job.

So I think there is a lot of unseen things that go in and a lot of people think there is a lot of individual effort out there, but it takes our whole team. Everyone back there should be on the stage just as much as I can I am. It takes everyone to get to this point. That's a culmination of what you see in binning, is that it's not easy to do.

Coach Day recognizes that and is able to celebrate victories with us.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think every chance that we have that we face adversity, I think Coach Day does a phenomenal job evaluating and learning how to get better. That adversity can come after a loss and after a win. The main thing we focus on even after winning games is that the issues are always there.

You have to be able to identify them on film and improve from them. That is not just from a player standpoint, but from a coaching standpoint, what calls you could have made better, what coaching adjustments he could've made better. So he's always learning and growing.

He's a much different coach from when I was a freshmen

to senior. Seeing him develop in a way you normally would like to see your players develop he's also taken to heart, and I think that speaks to a lot of success that our team has had.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I would say that a lot of players that I come across really have amazing game memory. I'm not one of those guys for some reason. I know it was a really hard-fought game, a battle. Obviously Georgia was an immensely talented team, but I remember just putting our foot to the pedal on offense, from on offense perspective, firing on all cylinders. And the pass game was clicking. CJ Stroud was unbelievable in that game; just came up short.

Ever since that game I think the main thing I learned is that you can never leave it up to one play, one inch, because that's going to be the difference between a win or loss. There are things we could have done in that game to put Georgia out a little earlier to where the comeback that they rallied in the fourth quarter wouldn't have made such a difference.

So that's really what we been focusing on.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, absolutely. I think we kind of did that in the Cotton Bowl last week. You know, had a pretty bad memory from there last year. Just having that different memory to replace that felt amazing. We have an opportunity to do the same thing in Atlanta. I remember after the Peach Bowl, a lot of emotions and things happening in the locker room and just a lot of things that I was feeling.

Just the opportunity that God has given me to go out there on Monday and like Cody said, right the wrongs, definitely feels good.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I would say just his relationships with the players. Just how genuine he is. Taking the advice of his players, leadership committee. His humility. I mean, it's hard to point out a lot of the areas he didn't improvement I think he grew overall.

Like you see from a lot of players, you know, there is not really areas they don't improve in when they get here as a freshmen and leave as a senior. They are better in every facet of their game, and I see the same thing in Coach Day.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think our university did a great job of making history, and I don't think it's any coincidence that they were the first team to win that one, and I don't think it'll be a coincidence if we handle business on Monday.

If you look in eyes of my teammates, we're all laser focused and we are here for one goal, to win the game on Monday. We have an amazing opportunity with this being the first 12-team playoff, and just showing how a team can battle back from adversity that maybe they faced earlier in the year.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I would say that I don't recognize the person that I was when I stopped on campus to where I am now. I think my faith has played a key role in that that, and God scooped me up out of darkness and lifted me up. He forgave me for all my sins and everything.

I just remember being invited to church by Xavier Johnson and Cam, and I was looking for community at the time. I didn't know what the whole church thing was about, but God scooped me up in a real way. That faith to just invite me out to church, that invitation, it's permeated throughout the team.

You flash forward four years and it's a culmination of all the prayers of everybody that's been answered. I just look around and I'm so thankful to God, and I think that he does a special thing in your lives when it comes to relationships. This is definitely, like you're saying, the closest knit group of people I've ever been a part. I don't look at my teammates any different than one of my family members. I would do anything for them.

Just having that love for them and the Lord is definitely going to be what pulls us through.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I would say that this week has been a lot of high energy, focus, great practices. I think great look in our eyes that we're ready for the challenge, for the gift that we got when we landed on the plane. It was one of the coolest experiences of my life. The band was playing when we touched down on the tarmac. Tons of videographers and photographs out there and then they handed us a 2025 chain we got onto the busses.

So it was a really cool experience for sure. I think they do

a great job hosting every year. You know, being in the national championship that was the first time it was like, wow, we're really playing in the national championship, because the stage and the lights are brighter, you know, the sounds are louder, and he have thing like that. So it was just an amazing experience.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I think just capping off the season the right way, really my career the right way here at Ohio State. Same thing for a lot of seniors. When you look at some great teams across history they're ran through the seniors. When you have great leadership and great seniors who are focused and bought into the program, it really becomes a player-led program. Coach Day gives us the reins to a lot of things, and we have every intention of ending this thing the right way.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah. I think that my last year when I was making that decision it just took a lot of prayer honestly. I was consulting God and what he wanted out of my future. You know, I remember it was one of the last days to announce if you were declaring for the NFL draft or coming back to school. I felt the Lord challenging me to say if you come back you're going to have this huge stage, all the spotlight, and you can use it to glorify yourself or you can use it to glorify me.

I really took that to heart and wanted to use the season to glorify the Lord. Obviously knew that God was going to show up in a real way on the field, but I think that more important than anything, I could do on the field, is what he's done in the lives of people around me and at my university. The revival he started. I think that was very intentional on his part for me to return for that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I would say that Jack hit it on the money. I won't get into the details of the meeting. I think that's a private matter between me and my team. But we were able to hash out everything that has been built up on or hearts.

You know, when it comes to people like your family, you're going to have differences and going to have to talk things out. That's what we did. It can build resentment or come throughout adversity stronger. That's what we did. We built up our hope and faith in the team and our recognition that we have the pieces to be able to do what hasn't been done here in a long time.



I think just taking all those factors to heart is what you see right now. We are here at the national championship and laser focus and ready to go win.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I'm not really entirely too sure about how many people we're holding back and whatnot, but what I do know in that meeting the truth was spoken and it was received good, it was received bad. There a lot of the emotions flying. We just lost to our rivals four years in a row.

When you put so much into it, the fan bases and all the fans, they don't really know what that rivalry means to us. You know, it's definitely hard when you work so hard toward something and come up short four years in a row.

We're here now on the big stage. So glad and thankful to be here. Everything in the past is behind us. We moved forward. We're stronger.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think that he had to be in there for multiple reasons. I think people were able to speak to him directly and ask him questions and he was able to answer them open and honestly and he was vulnerable with us in multiple ways that I won't get into.

Having a head coach that's personable and be able to be vulnerable with us is very powerful. Above all and at the end of the day he's human, too. He feels emotions just like we do. In my career since I've been here his family has received death threats, he has received death threats, mail scrutiny, you know, backlash on social media. It's like sometimes you forget he's human too.

You know, just being able to level with your head coach, I care for that guy more than anything. I wouldn't really have anyone else at the helm of our team.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, hard-fought game. Georgia was a very talented team. They played the game the right way. The major thing that I learned is just not leaving anything up to chance, not leaving anything up to one play, doing all you can to execute in the game to ensure that it won't come down to a missed field goal, converted fourth down, or something like that.

Got to leave no doubt.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I think the defensive guys can probably speak more to that. When I'm facing him, his IQ and intelligence jumps off the field. Feels like he never makes a mistake. It always in the right check. He is able to do that for other guys as well.

I think obviously he's a freak when it comes to athleticism, but I think his mental acuity is higher than most he the game at very veteran level, especially as just a sophomore in college.

Can't wait to see what his career pans out to be and what it looks like. I pray that he stays healthy. I am so glad he's been ail to become a Buckeye.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think I probably knew about as much about him as the next guy. You hear about Will Howard the quarterback, Kansas State doing this thing. We're not too focused on guys at other programs. When he came in he was almost immediately immersed in the culture. Felt like he had been here for multiple years.

Even still just talking with him every day feels like I known him my whole life. He's really bought into the program, the brotherhood, and I think everyone on the team would say that as well.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, regardless of the coverage that the defense puts out there we have a job to do on the field. That job is to get open. If it's in man coverage you have to win, create separation. If it's in zone coverage you have to space it out and catch the ball and get vertical.

Our job description doesn't change. How it gets done change a little bit. We're going to do what we've always done and been coached to do, and that's just get open for our quarterback.

When it comes down to the run game we're going to block our tails off. Whatever is asked of us we're going to be ready for the challenge.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, I think you have to -- it's a great opportunity for college players to be able to learn the longevity of the game, especially going into the NFL where you have 17 regular season games, a chance for 22 games. It's a long season, so I think the maturity and learning how to be able to take care of your body in an



effective way, keep your mind sharp, staying laser focused, those are things that everybody has learned throughout the season.

It definitely has been a learning curve. I think the guys on our team have handled it with grace. You know, I'm excited to see how this translates to the NFL.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah, the major thing about Will is his energy. He's infectious. You know, he's never worried, never panicked. Even in the games maybe we've been down or face adversity, maybe thrown an interception, doesn't matter. He comes back to the huddle ready for the next play and is motivating us.

So I think he's a true leader in the huddle, true commanding officer. You know, he really gets us clicking on all the right cylinders and all on the same page.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports