

CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

Saturday, January 18, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Ohio State Buckeyes Donovan Jackson

Press Conference

Q. Do you know what day it is, where you are now, or is it just a whirlwind?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I have no idea what day it is half the time. There are literally days when we come in the Woody Hayes athletic center, and someone says, yeah, it's Sunday, and I'm like what? We're having a Tuesday style practice.

Yeah, I have no idea. I literally didn't know it was Saturday until I looked at my watch. I'm just living in the moment literally, trying to take every day one day at a time.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Right now, not really. I think of it as a blessing to be in the NFL in general. Hopefully I get to play offensive line. Hopefully they don't ask me to play punter or anything.

As long as I play offensive line, I'm going to give it my all regardless of what position they put me.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: You're talking about Luke? Luke stepped up for us in a big way. Obviously we were very shallow at the O-line position, especially interior. Having him play at such a high level has been so huge for us.

We all knew he could do it, but seeing him do it at the biggest of stages and continuing to improve on himself each game has given the O-line room more life and more strength knowing that we have another guy that we can depend on.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: It would mean a lot. A lot of us decided to come back for moments like this. You decided



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to commit to Ohio State to play in moments like this.

We know we have a tough game ahead of us, but at the end of the day, being here is an accomplishment, and it's just our job to finish it off the right way.

Q. (No microphone)?

TREVEYON HENDERSON: Around this time last year, we had a meeting detailing the new 12-team format and how long the season would go, which means we had to change the way we train, our nutrition, and how we recovered.

So we knew it was going to be a lot more wear and tear on our bodies, but we knew the outcome would be even more. So being able to try to maintain, try to execute at the highest level for as long as we have is a huge testament to everyone inside the athletic program, whether it be trainers, strength staff, and nutritionists.

Everyone's ready to go, trying to execute on Monday.

Q. It's like a video game. What's that process been like for you?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Yeah, guard and tackle are two separate worlds in my opinion. At guard, you're basically fighting in a phone booth. At tackle, you're going against guys who are probably much better athletes than you.

There's different footwork, different hand placements. You're out on an island, which is probably the biggest change. So just being able to be comfortable in your space was probably the biggest change. You have to have confidence in yourself and obviously confidence in the guys around you.

I played in high school, but I think Texas 4A football is a lot different than the high level collegiate football. I practiced against two of the best D-ends in the world, so I have no choice but to get better, Jack and J.T. and Kenyatta, Caden Curry, all those guys. They hold me after practice. We get extra reps after practice so I can get comfortable on my feet, get comfortable in getting out of my stance to try to play at the highest level on game days.



Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Yeah, Notre Dame, they play exceptionally hard. You can tell they're well-coached, all guys in there. They faced adversity, but at the end of the day, they've risen above it, and it shows that they're in the championship game for a good reason.

They're very talented. They play with their hands well. They understand gap integrity, and they know how to get after it.

It's going to be a huge challenge for us, but we're looking forward to it.

Q. (Question regarding Chip Kelly)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I feel like Chip Kelly's brought a lot of different unique sets and unique ideas to the offense. Obviously we have a lot of guys who can be great play makers. He's brought offense that can utilize everyone in the system.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Yeah, we'd love to win this for him. He's the ultimate competitor. He wants to win games more than anyone else in the building. The stuff he and his family has gone through is ridiculous, in our opinion.

We understand the magnitude of the games we play, but some of the stuff he goes through, I don't quite understand. We're here now trying to win a game, not just for him, but for everybody related to the program in the state of Ohio.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: As the beginning of the year on the O-line? We had a lot more people in the O-line. We lose a Remington award winning center, then we lose an All-American tackle, then we lose Zen against Nebraska.

There's a lot of reshuffling, a lot of guys that had to move out of position. My story is just one of many. But at the end of the day, we just had to find our identity again and find a way that we can attack defenses and execute at a high level to get our running backs in space and be able to protect Will as long as possible.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I didn't know too much about Will. I didn't really dive into K State tape like that, but once I watched him a little bit and once he came in and started showing his leadership and how he took hold of the

offense, I knew we were going to be all right.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Yeah, it's funny you say that. He made me play tackle. There were practices where guys were either exhausted or he just wanted to see something, he was like, hey, how about you go play tackle real quick? I was like Coach Frye, I've never played this position. I don't understand why you're making me play this. We have so many tackles in our O-line room, it makes no sense for me to play it. He's like, no, go in there and play tackle real quick.

So I go in there, I get in the guard stance for tackles because I didn't know no better, and I blocked the best I could. He was like, look like, I don't know how this season is going to go, but we might need you to play tackle to win a game. When Josh Simmons went down against Oregon, even then, I was like I don't need to play tackle. He was like, no, I need you to be serious about these reps.

When my number was called to go out for tackle, he was like, look, I made you play it for a while now to sort of get confidence at it. I wouldn't say he was a mad genius, but he kind of saw the worst case scenario and was like, hey, let's make sure Donovan knows how to kick slide out to a wide nine.

I give him all the credit in the world. He's helped me gain confidence at this position. He's helped me grow into a better player in many ways. It's just kind of one of those things in the preseason he asked me, in one-on-one you reps, when I took my guard off, he was like, hey, how about you jump into tackle real quick and see what you can do.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: It means a lot. I think it's a testament to everyone's hard work in the athletic program, not just the players. With this extended format, it means a lot more games. It means a lot more high profile games. It means your body is banged up. You're mentally exhausted, but at the end of the day, you want to go out there and win.

To our strength staff, training staff, everyone trying to get us back at a championship level. Everyone is all hands on deck. And obviously our coaching staff puts us in the right position to go win games.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Coach Day, I think he does a



great job of being obviously the head coach authority figure, but at the same time, being around us and trying to hear what we think and make sure our voices are heard.

I'd like to say he jokes with us, but at the end of the day when we're on the field, it's all business. When he's around us, at least when we're not in a football setting on the field, he tries to be personable. He tries to relate to his players because, at the end of the day, it's the coaches and players that go out there and try to win games, and he wants to win games more than anybody on the field.

He tries to obviously get to know us, tries to be one with us. It's not just a recruiting thing he does when you're getting recruited. He actually wants to see us develop into not just great players, but great young men.

Q. What people say about you at the next level, and it's been all positive. Just wondering in a sense? How do you feel you've positioned yourself for life beyond?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I try to stay focused on what's in front of me, but it's hard not to hear stuff like that. Obviously it's a lifelong dream.

At the end of the day, I've got a mission on Monday. Yes, it feels amazing, feels awesome hearing stuff like that, but it's going to feel even more amazing if we get it done on Monday.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: That's a tough question. I don't know. It's tough. It's tough, especially with this whole new format going on. Recruiting is different. Playoff football goes different. I think a lot of teams are starting their off-season program, we're still playing.

I couldn't say more time off because there is no time off. You're darn near year round at this point. But I just keep playing ball at this point.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I bought a Wii. I've been playing Wii Sports in my free time. That's pretty fun. I feel like that's a very responsible purchase.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I like boxing. The AI generated, African-American guy Matt has been kicking my ass sometimes. Other than that, I'm playing football and watching film. So it's a little downtime sometimes.

Q. When you came into college football NIL hadn't really started (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I think NIL started July of my freshman year. Obviously that wasn't a factor in recruiting. There were talks of it happening, but no one was really using it as a recruiting point, but now it's a whole different thing. A lot of guys are basing their decisions off NIL.

It's a whole different landscape, which I think I'm lucky that I didn't have to really go through because a lot of guys in my class committed to Ohio State just for the sole aspect of playing high level ball and things like that. Obviously Columbus is a huge area for NIL, so that came along with it.

It's different now, and I understand it's a huge struggle with guys choosing where to go and everything like that, but I'm blessed that I was able to come to Ohio State with a great group of guys, a great O-line room and teammates that I was able to be around. I'm blessed with the opportunity to be a Buckeye.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: It definitely wasn't the next day. He was exaggerating that a little bit. I was struggling with the decision because obviously you have the opportunity to leave and come back, but there was one day I woke up, and I had a gut feeling that I wasn't content with what I did at Ohio State yet. I knew that our class was special and what we produced wasn't what we wanted.

So I called him, and I was like, dude, I'm not done yet, like I'm coming back. He was literally the first guy I called, besides my parents obviously. I called him, like, dude, I'm not done. We've got to run this back.

So he was like in his southern -- not southern, his country voice. He was like, brother, let's get after it, and stuff like that. I was happy we came back. I was proud of the result we have so far.

Q. Whataburger or in 'n out?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Whataburger all day. It's all about the Orange W's. In 'N Out is mid. If you get a patty melt with a chocolate shake and a large fries, you're satisfied for the rest of the night. That's all I got to say.

Q. How did that change the concept of the season, the motivation, et cetera?

DONOVAN JACKSON: I can neither confirm nor deny any Chili Triple Dipper allegations. I will confirm that there was

a meeting at a local Chili's in the Columbus area. Stuff was said, stuff was hashed, and now we're here.

I'm not saying the success -- this is not an ad, by the way. I'm not saying that success is related to the Triple Dipper, but it's pretty darn close.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: There's one thing wrong with the question. I am not from Cincinnati. I was born and raised in Houston, Texas. It so happens that the majority of my family lives in Cincinnati, but I myself am a proud Texan and Houstonian. Skyline Chili gets the job done, even an hour after eating it.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: No, I'm from Cypress, Texas, which is next to Katy. It's not Katy, it's Cypress, Texas.

Q. You've had allegations of shoes being in your locker.

DONOVAN JACKSON: I would love to confirm these allegations. My locker mate is a mess. He has a whole shoe cubby, but at the same time, he has four pairs of shoes outside the shoe cubby that end up in my locker. It makes no sense.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: No, no, they're your shoes, Carson. It's the same pair of shoes that end up in my locker. You have a compartment for the shoes, but you don't put them in there.

(Laughter).

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: That's a tough one but also an easy one. I wake up every day blessed to don the scarlet and gray. A lot of guys can wear a multitude of colors, but at the end of the day, it's all scarlet and gray. O-block for life.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Not to brag, but yeah, I probably am. I definitely get it from my mama. She went to a theater arts school. She taught me all the breathing.

I'm just kidding. I sing in the shower sometimes. Guys say I'm good at singing, but I'm going to stick to the shower for

now.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Oh, J.T. actually said that? Yeah, she's an H-Town hotty. I sing Beyonce. I'm not ashamed of that.

Q. (No microphone)?

DONOVAN JACKSON: Yeah, I would say it's the experience of playing in games like this before. I would say my first time being in the playoffs, first time playing in big games, you're kind of starstruck a little bit because those are the games you watch on TV as a kid.

Now at this point in my career, a lot of guys' careers, we've done this before. I would say the newness and the awe is kind of gone. Obviously it's a huge game, games you pray about, games you dream of being in, but at the end of the day, it's just 60 minutes of football. You're playing it with your brothers, your closest friends, your best friends, and that's all that matters.

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