

CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Coach Jim Knowles

Press Conference



**NATIONAL
CHAMPIONSHIP**
ATLANTA 2025

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I know that's how we preached to the players, since I got to Ohio State, that we need to be accountable, we need to be able to be a major part of a championship run, so when it comes to fruition I know the players believe it; and they want to be on the line for the team. They really do.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Silver bullet defense means top 5 defense. I mean, that's basically what he expected, and I expected. You need to be a top 5 defense. How you rate that, because there are a lot of categories -- but I think when you look at a defense, you know whether they're a top defense or not, and that's what he expected, and that's what I expected.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Caleb is very mature for his age, and he handles himself like a pro on the field and off the field. Not only is he talented, but he studies the game. So, he's a great influence on the other guys. I think he raises the level of expectation and preparation for everyone around him because he's serious all the time.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I don't think it affects our preparation because they're obviously a very good team, very well-coached offensive line, and across the board on offense. I fully expect they will be able to make adjustments and not experience any setbacks.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: No, I wasn't surprised because we had gone through the recruiting process once, and again, when he was in the portal. You know, my interview with Caleb Downs was harder than any interview I ever did for a job. I

mean, he wanted to know every detail of the defense. So, when he arrived, I fully expected him to operate the way he has, like a real professional.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You know, you come to Ohio State, you expect to be the best, play against the best, and, you know, have coaches who expect the best. So, I don't know what it was like before I got there; you know, I really don't. I didn't spend much time on that. I just knew from the time I arrived this is what we were going to be, and that's how I drove it.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I was very happy for Jack, you know, because he's such a great young man, great team leader, and you love to see guys shine when they are that kind of kid. But, you know, I had to start thinking about the 2-minute drive that was coming up. And I didn't get to celebrate, and that's not my job. Let the players and people on the sideline celebrate. I was thinking about the next play.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Honestly, I try to keep the emotions out. I spent a long time working on myself to train myself that way. You know, when you are younger, I think you get very emotional, and then you realize that's not my job. My job is to think about the next three plays. You know, and we had been there before, multiple times during the season, and we come out with stops. I had confidence we could do it again, so I'm just going through the game plan in my head and thinking what comes 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th down.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You know, I couldn't say a definitive answer for that. You know, even in the two losses, they were total by 4 points, right? I mean, we're right there, and we've been right there all year long. But, yeah, in a way, I guess the second one made us closer, because... you know, on the first one, there were a lot of fingers being pointed at the defense. So in the second one, it was kind of

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the other way, and I made a point to our guys to say, remember what that felt like the first time. You know, you need to go out of your way to pick up your brothers on offense. And they did. In a way, it kind of really merged us and made us stronger.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, he is a powerful, athletically talented guy, he really is, and he's got a great personality. He doesn't get down. He has been a force for us at really critical times, like in the goal line and short yardage. You know, I think he's going to be the next great defensive tackle at Ohio State.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: It takes a lot of practice, you know. It comes with experience, and it just takes a lot of practice. For me personally, it's something I need to work on all the time, just to be able to stay calm in those moments. You can't pull it out at that time. It's something you have to think about beforehand and think about, how am I going to react in those situations, and just try to remove all the emotion because my job is to make the next call and for it to be right.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Ou know, I think the expectation when you come to Ohio State as a player or coach is that you need to be the best at everything you do. You are not allowed to lose a game. And you need to have your unit be the absolute best it can be. You know, the past isn't really important. It's like, hey, this is where we need to be. We need to attack perfection, even though we're not going to get it, we need to push and chase perfection, because that's the expectation.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Coach Day is an awesome person and a strong head coach in that he doesn't allow any of those things that are going on to affect the staff. And he really protects the staff from all of that. So, it's not something we talk about, because we try to just put our heads down and work.

In the end, as brothers in arms, you are happy that he is being seen for the quality of person and coach that he is, because he does a great job, and he cares about the players. And he's in tune to what's going on with the staff, so you hear about all those things and how hard it is. You know, you feel for him, but, you know, the only thing you can do to help is win. And so I'm glad we have done that.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: He's fantastic. I don't know what else to say. He's got great contact balance. He's strong. He's tough. He can make the cuts. He's definitely an NFL back. We'll have our hands full.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Well, Caleb brings a premier skill level. He is a top DB safety in the country, and he's been that way since high school. He has talent above and beyond. And then he brings also a professionalism with the way he studies the game, and a vision where he kind of sees the play before it happens. All those things make him great.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: From the first practice.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, he's great, he's dominant in whatever he does, and he's a hard worker too.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I think he'll go down in history as one of the greatest Buckeyes of all time in a program that has had a lot of great players. Jack will live in infamy for the plays he made and also the spirit and leadership he's brought to the program.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: What's coming through my mind is what am I going to call during the two-minute drill that's coming up.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You always want to have the chance to earn it on the field. I think it's been a struggle in college football because a lot of the decisions were made off the field. So the more teams get a shot, the more it gets to be earned on the field.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I think how you plan out the entire season, I think Coach Day has done a great job of knowing it's a long season, like you said, you know, taking care of the players. And the way our offense functions, you know, with not being fast-paced, hurry-up because they could be.

You know, less plays in a game equal a lot less plays when it comes to a season this long. You save 10 plays a game, well, you are saving 150 plays.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Caleb is a total professional. I mean, not only is he really talented, he studies the game, and he pays attention in meetings. He sits on the edge of his seat with his notebook open, ready to go from the time he enters the meeting room and always asking questions. You know, I think our other guys see that from the time he arrived. Not only is he talented, but he's a professional at studying the game.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: The second he went in.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, what I remember is we didn't do a good enough job on defense, and we need to do a better this time.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Everything. He's Mr. Ohio State. He's silver bullet defense, and passionate about the defense, passionate about the program, leader, steady, Captain Jack, he's everything.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, you'll really have to change everything you do and practice more like NFL-style. And the walk-ons, everywhere I've ever been, I don't think people understand how much they add to the program. They do so much for the team in practice, and they never get to play. It's a selfless position, and, you know, it's an opportunity for those guys to really feel a part of something, you know, bigger than themselves. So, I think we're missing out when we have to cut guys out.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, that's above my pay grade.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, JTT will be full, yeah.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Eah, you know, we have to make sure he

gets to the game. You know, so, yeah, we all have to -- including him -- we all have to pull back, because it's just the reality.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Oh, it's everything, right?

I mean, you know, when you can really generate that pressure without having a blitz or bringing in extra people, it really changes the game and the way you call it.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, that one... I think I'll remember that one.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah. Actually, the play before, he had a good inside move, so the next play he beat him on an outside move. So honestly, I was just trying to set up the same situation for him to be able to go one-on-one.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, we were very intentional about it, but that comes from the head coach. That's Coach Day and his vision on the long season, and offensively, how they are going to use time and clock. You save 10 plays a game, you saved 150 plays, which is a lot of plays. I know everything was set up by him from the jump for the long season.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Denzel's fine.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, it's different, you know. I mean, you look at the last three games that we faced. Really, the offenses were different to what Notre Dame does well. So we have to make that adjustment, because they will be hard to handle.

Q. Coach, talking about JTT, how disciplined do the edge rushers have to be knowing Riley? You'd want to be aggressive, but they have to make sure that they keep him in the pocket as well.

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, say, pass rush lanes are everything and caging him, because he's exceptional at making those plays. But you also can't execute a pass rush unless you execute a pass rush move, you know. So it's

like you can't get a hit unless you swing the bat. It's really going to be a constant balance, and knowing he can make those plays, everybody has to be aware of it.

Q. Defense has been unbelievable in the playoffs, actually unbelievable all year long. What's been one or two things that comes with the defense all year long?

JIM KNOWLES: We always talk about limiting explosive plays, you know. Guys know that, they know that. We talk about all the standard things that defenses do. But I think the expectation is important, you know? From the jump, I talk about chasing perfection even though it's not possible. We have the talent to do that, and we have to expect that from ourselves that we're going to be as close to perfect as we can.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, and I think veterans and guys who have been in the system, you spend a lot of time together, and they start to understand how I think, which is really important. When you know the guy who is calling the defense, why he's calling it, and how it works. Because every call has strengths, but every defense has weaknesses. So they just start to understand that, the longer we're around each other.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I mean, you can tweak things week to week in the game plan, and they pick it up seamlessly, where at other times you have to be careful. But, when you have a veteran group that understands the system, it works well.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, it's been a constant pursuit of perfection. Up to me to put them in the right call and get them in the right places. When they make good plays, it's on them, and, you know, if something goes wrong, it's on me. So, I think it's continually investing in them, trusting them, and letting them go play.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I grew up on the main streets of North Philly, and that's where it came. Yeah, raised by a Philly cop, so there's an intensity that goes with that. You spend time around them, and you, and, you know, it's my job to be hard on them in practice. Be detailed, and on top of my game, and have all the answers, and find what motivates them. Because on game day, that's the time for them to play. That's my job during the week. My job during the

week is to be the bad cop and let all the other guys be the good cop. Thank you.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: That's a ton of additional pressure, yeah, that's a guy who can beat you with his feet or his arm, and that changes everything about the game. I mean, it's a big deal. You know... Riley, he's really established his own mark and his own place because, not just his athletic skill, but his toughness. I mean, he's really, really a tough-minded person and player.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, a lot of times we do. Yeah.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Makes my job easier, that's for sure. They are great players with experience, who are also really good people, and they want to be coached. They listen, they pay attention, they make adjustments, they don't flinch in tough times, so I'm really blessed.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I think it did. I think it really did, you know. The sooner you can get back to playing, the sooner you can write a new script. So I think that was a good thing for us.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Definitely. Feel bad for a little bit, then we got to get back to work. Any time you can get back to work it helps you get over those things.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Losing at Ohio State is never a good thing. You are expected to win every game. But, if it does happen, that's the job as coaches -- we have to find a way to get some benefit out of it, you know? And I feel like we did that. Thank you.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I like the adjuster. That's why I named him the adjuster, because he adjusts. Yes.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I think it allows all the things you talked about in terms of disguise. It gives coverage relief to

the other guys. I think he sees things even better from that position. And so the results speak for themselves too. That's all theory until you get out there and do it.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: From the time we recruited him, I always knew that he could do that and it was just a matter of getting to it as the best thing for the entire defense.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, it hit us hard. Put a lot of time into it, and thought we put our best foot forward. But, that's why you don't overreact in the situations. You give him his respect for his decision and his family, and say, hey, if you ever need us, we're here, because those things come around.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Absolutely, absolutely. You know, still using a lot of Oklahoma State film when we were trying to recruit him, and another year gave us the opportunity to put more stuff on tape to show him.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, he's a very serious student. You know, so it's almost like if he sees something when you are teaching, he's not going to say it right then. He's one of those guys that will come to you after class and, you know, then bring it up. But he is very serious about the flow of teaching, and, you know, not interrupting, but he picks up on everything. You have to be on your toes.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I think what you said, Coach Day and Chip did was we experienced the benefit of that, right, because of less plays and shortening the game. But defensively, you also said it, you really don't have a choice in the matter. You know, you get whatever the other team throws at you. You got to react to it.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Not me. You have Coach Day, sets up the entire program to have all the nutrition people and, you know, the sports science and all that to do that. I don't treat it any differently. Your job is defense, you got one job, stop them, that's it. Then do it again the next series.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I mean, there's luck involved, preparation, strength staff, nutrition, sports science. All that is a big deal. That's why we have great people who do it. And then you got to be fortunate.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I think it really started at Duke, to be honest with you. It evolved, you know, where at Duke you got great kids, and maybe not quite as talented as your opponent sometimes, you got to find ways to win. It allows you to be more creative. And then you get to Oklahoma State, and what you do at Duke doesn't work because the Big 12 is different, you know, or was at the time, right? I mean, trying to score every play, and then you have to adapt to that. And then you go to Ohio State, and you have the best players in the country, and that's an adaptation too, right? Because, you know, things maybe you had to do in the past you don't have to do anymore. So you look for different ways to get an edge.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Work. And good kids, you know. Put in the work. Have the answers, and then have good kids who want to be coached and listen. You know, it's really a big deal.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Work. Same answer. It's work. You work, but you have to study yourself. I think it's a big deal. You have to take accountability when something doesn't work, you know, you have to study all the ways that teams have beat you, and have answers. But really, it's just... a lot of study. A lot of time alone, and a lot of work.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I really try to take myself out of the equation. My job is to put the players in the right position to win and be successful, and to serve the head coach. I mean, I would be thrilled for our players, for our head coach, and realizing that Ohio State is a tough place. And you are right, we had our ups and downs, so I would be thrilled for them to be able to come out on top.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Bad internet. There you go. Just trying to beat Notre Dame.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, sure. Yeah, I mean, we do that

some, you know. Figure out what he is seeing, and what he likes, you know, kind of talk to a quarterback, hey, what do you like? He's just such a professional at what he does. A lot of times I don't have to ask him. I can kind of see... I can watch him in practice and I can see, you know, what clicks with him and what doesn't. Because if it doesn't click with him, that's on me. Because he's not only talented, but a student of the game. So a lot of it just comes from me watching him. When I watch him in practice, and how he reacts to certain situations, I kind of can see right there how well that call is going to do, or what are the flaws. I can see through him a lot. By how he plays, I can see what the pluses and minuses of the defense are.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I've had a lot of good ones. I really have. Guys that have gone on to be successful in other careers, you know, but he has all that plus he has tremendous talent, you know, which is different.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: What a great family. You know, from his parents too. I mean, apple trees make apples. I mean, they are a fantastic football athletic family, but also very spiritual. They put it all together. But you are right, the innate athletic skill, you know, we can teach so much, and he can study so much. But still, not everybody can do the things that he and his brother can do.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I'll be honest with you, I don't focus on the meaning of it. I mean it's another game, it's my job to get them prepared and ready to perform, you know, I feel like I'll focus on the meaning of when I get old.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Cigar place! Sushi, I have had very little time for anything like that. As much as I can. You know, I mean, I tell you, you're right, it's limited sometimes, but, you know, I get my moments.

Q. Have one picked out?

JIM KNOWLES: I don't pick them out, just let it happen.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: It's all about preparation and, you know, mindset, really, right? Mindset and execution. You have to have the right mindset when you take the field, and to be able to start fast with that mentality, but then you still have

to execute, you know. So I just think we executed very well.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Notre Dame. That's all I'm focused on. You are right, these things happen, I guess, when you have success. And players are making plays, and my job is to put them in the best position. But, everybody, these things come up when you do well.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: They're just doing their job.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Just sometimes you get on a good streak with that. I mean, everybody tries, you know what I mean, like everybody's working. Sometimes you get into a good lane and just got to try running with it.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: We weren't in a great situation, you know, because we still had the big people on the field, goal-line people. You can get into some tough situations when they spread out like that, and you're in big people. And now it just comes down to guys actually recognizing what they're seeing. Get out of the mindset, oh, they're just going to try to run up the gut. Because typically, when I call that defense, they're going to run up the gut. So during practice, those plays, you kind of sprinkle that in a little bit, but focus here. So it's just a matter of recognizing.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You know, when you get that kind of plus one, we call it run game. No defense is built for that because it creates an extra gap in the defense. So now you are always trying to patch it up. Hey, you go from here to here. And you go here... it creates all kinds of issues.

Q. [Question, off mic]

JIM KNOWLES: That's his job. Yeah, nice guy. I appreciate you.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You know, I think when you have a guy like Jermaine, your first year you are just playing and having fun, and then I can see what he's saying that now it's like, hey, I've proven I can do this, and I feel good about myself.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: I'm really happy for him and I think his best days are still ahead.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I don't know that. Nothing in the old MAC conference. Don't remember.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I think, you know, it's good, a lot of guys have worked hard. A lot of guys, you know, guys who have studied the game, and handled the ups and downs, and it's good to see guys who have been around a little bit do well.

JIM KNOWLES: He's got multiplicity. You know, being able to run the ball as effectively as they do from a lot of different sets, a lot of different ways, put pressure on the defense with the quarterback run, just kind of stresses you at all levels.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Oh, yeah I followed him, because he came in then, you know, knew he was coming and I left, but he's just a high character kid whose extremely competitive, and really, really tough.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: A lot of work. A lot of great players who are also great people. I mean, that makes a difference. You come to Ohio State. I'm a guy that worked my way up, and all sudden you are dealing with 4 and 5 star athletes, so you really have no idea how they are going to handle my style of coaching, But they are really good people, and they want to be coached, and they've done everything I asked them to do.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: You know, my job is just try to put them in the best position. I love those guys. I just want to give them every chance to be successful.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: IGB, he had an effect on our program, the minute he arrived, and his competitiveness. And sometimes that competitiveness then started to lead to some penalties. But he was smart enough and coachable

enough to understand it and improve, and I think that's our job as coaches, you know.

Q. (Question off mic)

JIM KNOWLES: Yeah, I think CJ has skills. For him personally, I wish I could have used those skills more. But ultimately, the team and defense come first, and he knows that too. But that's my job next year is to make sure that happens.