

CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

Saturday, January 18, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Ohio State Buckeyes

JT Tuimoloau

Press Conference

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, the leadership role he's taken on full head of steam. I was thinking about it driving home two days ago. I'm truly proud of him, kid from Ohio, things he has been through. His whole college career he's had a lot criticism but stuck with it, kept his head down and kept working.

To see where he is now, I'm just blessed to be a part of the story and be a brother of his.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, extremely close. The amount of losses we took, really tested our faith in our brotherhood. Are we going to lean on those two things, the Lord and each other, or are we going to become splintered, everybody on different pages.

We came together and said a team prayer. We understand the Lord has guided us for a reason. Maybe the losses are part of his plan. We don't know why, but he makes no mistakes and we continue to trust in him. It got us here today.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I mean, it means everything. It's a true blessing to have that happen. God willing we win the national championship, we can finally put a period to the story and turn the page and start writing our next chapter of what the Lord has done in our lives.

Q. (No microphone.)



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JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, I probably say after game days. I think it's just helpful to really understand where you get your true power from, and at the same time get your mind away from football and become relaxed. Just being able to breathe and understand that you have an identity in Christ and not just in this game.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I'd probably say he had a one-handed catch this week. I don't know if it got in. He was out of bounds, but I thought it was overthrown. He did some super human things and went up and caught it one handed and came down with it. That's one of the few things he's done in practice that I've seen.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I don't think I want to out shine him. If they see my catches, he's up there. I don't want to take his shine away, you know.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I don't know. That's a big one. Probably say our Lord and savior. He has been hands-on with this team. He has allowed us to do a lot of things. He brought us together. I feel like he's the MVP of this team.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Who? I'm playing. Yeah, we can't play them. Every time we go we make sure to use us or another team. Thank you.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah. I took off running. I don't know why. I was like, man, he's out there. I'm going to try to run full speed with him. Got to the 30 yard line and I'm like, all right, I want to slow down, but we're already here. Might as well finish off strong.

To be in that moment, I'm glad I ran down, just to run down with him, see the crowd reaction, our crowd, their crowd.



I'm glad I ran down. As tired as I was, I'm glad I made that run.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Legendary. I mean, he has put his name in the books and he's not done yet. His story is not written yet. More things need to be added on. Just to be a part -- like I said, a part of his story, his family, him being part of my family, it's a blessing to share those moments with him.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think I can hold my own. I feel like that's one thing I pride myself on, is basketball skills. I feel like I can hold my own. I'm a very fundamental basketball player. I wish I had a couple runs with our team just to see what it would be like.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I feel like for me, knowing the team they are, they're tough. They love each other. They play as hard as they do for each other, like we do. I'm expecting them to come out and play as hard as they can. Huge respect to them and their team and the coaches they have over there. Tough program.

Grit, very hard-nosed football, and I'm expecting they're going to come out ready and we got to continue to prepare for everything.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, it's a blessing to be part of the first one. It also gets us ready, it's so down the line, but next year the NFL, it's just as long. It allows us to understand how important our bodies are to us, how important we have to take care of our mental, our bodies, and withstand all the physical things that football brings to withstand the whole season.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, I think -- was it fourth down? Fourth down, fourth and six, you know, we understood that it was -- I think Coach Day said it before that drive. Hey, these are the inches we talk about. That was one of them. I had a real front row seat of the whole play. I just seen him come across the edge and get a great hit on Quinn and then scoop it up.

I was like, dang, he really got it. Looked forward, man, it's nothing but green grass. And just to be in that moment

and have that point of view, I mean, man, I don't think you can get a better view than that. (Laughter.)

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, just to be back, have a second chance at the Mercedes Benz Stadium. Will brought it up. In life you're not blessed with a lot of second chances, and when you do have to make the most of them and not take them for granted.

That's what we're thinking about. Understanding, hey, we're here for a reason. We got to enjoy this time with one another. We are a very close team. Sucks we have so little time together, but with the time we have we have to make the most of it.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I mean, you know, like you said, we wish we had this in the regular season, but we knew during this playoff run we had to be on our A game, we had to elevate. Big credit to Coach J, Coach Knowles, everybody for continuing to push us and trust in us.

Now it's just starting to show what we're capable of.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I got blessed with great timing.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Tough dudes. I mean, they battled through a lot of injuries, and that just shows how much they love each other. We understand that it's going to be a hard, a tough game, so we have to be on our A game and just be ready to endure this battle.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, I think we're blessed to have some former Buckeye legends that have played here. Maurice Clarett, Coach Hartline, guys who have been part of big moments. Just hearing from them, understanding they want us to take advantage of the moments, every opportunity and all the time we have with one another.

So national championship is a big game. You can get your -- you nervous system can be all over the place. I got my brothers to lean on and help me take my mind off it sometimes.

Q. (No microphone.)



JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, things just -- talk about the losses, the loss against Oregon and taking a big loss against the team up north, it really just got us ready for what we couldn't see down the road. That's why I feel like the Lord's plan, sometimes it's like why am I going through this? At the same time he will reveal what the true -- what's on the other side of the door.

That was really just a test to our brotherhood and our faith, and got us ready for now. Just to be able to go through all the testing and trials and just understand that, man, we lean on the Lord and each other, great things can happen, I think that's what we been doing.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, so, yeah, I think the first play, the goal line inside zone, and before that I was like, man, people talk about how good our goal line defense is. Be pretty cool if we make that statement true.

It's kind of crazy. I said it before the play jokingly, and, boom, we got a stop and pitch to the right and got another stop. And then Jack, I don't know if people notice, third down he got there, got a pressure. Made Quinn force a pass and then, boom, it's money time, fourth and six.

Said hike, Jack made a great move off the edge. I've seen him do it in practice so many times. Haven't seen him take one to the house from that far. Got a little glimpse at Purdue.

Just to see him pick it up, and call him moving, he was moving a little bit. Just to be a part of that moment, I mean, just felt like the whole world stopped for a little bit. The crowd went silent. It was just us running like in practice.

But that was the whole scene, and a true blessing to be a part of it.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I mean, I'm not surprised. Donny is a great athlete, great man. He's just man of many talents. Don't tell him I told you this. If you ask him it sing Single Lady by Beyonce, that will explain how he's able to move positions so quick. Get better at left tackle or move to left tackle and just do his thing at left tackle.

You didn't hear it from me, but I say you bring it up to him and just let him speak for himself.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: That's a tough one. Mitch, that's my boy, shoutout Mitch.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Dream vacation? Probably got to go back to the islands, back to Samoa, see the roots. Great one, you know what I mean?

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, it's an honor, a blessing. The two losses we took we didn't really understand what was ahead of us. If we just stick together, lean on the Lord and our faith and the brotherhood, it'll take us somewhere far.

Having a chance to play in this one and really erase all the things we haven't accomplished yet, it will be an honor. We understand we got to take some crucial steps to get there, starting with today at practice, making sure we're on pointe and sharp about everything.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, I wasn't going to miss this game or miss the opportunity with my brothers. I would lay my life on the line for each and every one of them. I'm glad to be out here and have another game with them.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Oh, yeah. I mean, I wish I caught it. I got a lot of my boys hit me up and said, you know, I didn't show a lot of athleticism there, so I got make up for it.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I think it has yet to come. We got a little spot filling in. Probably has to be Jack's scoop-and-score to seal the game. I think that's top right now. I feel like there are more moments to come.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, let's just say Jordan Hancock make it look worse. He caught up to us with ease. So he was fast, but Jordan Hancock, he's a skill position for a reason. It's his fault that we look slow out there.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Probably play tight end. Yeah. You know, I like to model my game after G, Jelani, Will Kacmarek, Pat Gurd, down the list. Feel like those are my role models when it comes to tight ends. Just blessed to

be around some great dudes, you know what I mean?

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Myself. No doubt. (Smiling.)

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I don't know. I would probably say -- I have to explain it before. So the reason I will say Luka is because he's big but he plays that position so differently. Plays at his own pace. He gets the shot he needs to. Understands his game.

For me, I understand how I am, how I play, and I play at my own pace. I feel like that would be a great dude to model my game after.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah, I mean, I know the exact -- where it first started. It's when they played Penn State at home when Saquon Barkley was there. Just a game to remember.

From there on, I never knew about out how good they were. I was also an Oregon fan. Family was around USC a lot. I was like, hey, dad, this team looks really good. They have a guy, Sam Hubbard, another guy, his last name is Bosa. This team looks solid. Look like they produce D-ends.

Turns out Coach Johnson is a guru, so I was led here for a reason and blessed to be a part of the D-line community and the Ohio State community.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I mean, it sounds small but he doesn't slide. He's a tough quarterback who is willing to fight for extra yards. You see him go down and come back. That shows how much he loves this team, how much he is willing to put his body on the line.

I got to give great respect to him and the whole team over there, just how they're built. Just to be able to play against another tough team like that, it's going to be a true honor and blessing.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah. We just got to be very disciplined and know how to rush as four. We got to know how to be very, I'll say it gain, very disciplined. He's one guy who's very smarted. As tough as he is, he knows what he is he's,

the down and distance. He's a guy that can take advantage of all the slipups. We just got to be ready to play as 11, play 11 strong.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah. I'd probably say just being yourself. He's always just like, hey, you guys are athletes. Trust your athletic ability as well as know your assignment. With him, his personality, I don't know if you guys talked to him, I always called him Batman. He is in his cave, and he comes out and you never know what he has in store, but you got to get to know him.

Once you get to know him, that's one guy you'll have on your side. To be able to play for him as a DC it's a blessing.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: He allows us to play free. Before every game he tells us all the mistakes are on him and the plays are on us. To hear a defensive coordinator tell us that, our coordinators got our back, we got his. For are him just to put everybody in specific situations to make plays, I mean, you can't ask for more than that. We're locked in for life.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Yeah. It's crazy how time flies. That was, what, 2021? To see all that made a really good impression on me and I'm here today. Just to see that, you know, I give all -- I thank this team a lot. The things I go through behind closed doors, being able to come here and lean on my brothers allowed me to understand how big the brotherhood is, just to be able to say I have 120 plus brothers and sisters and extended family on this team.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Not at all. This is a national championship. I know they're going to come out ready to play. They battled through injuries. They are a tough, hard-nosed team. They're going to give their all in this game. You can't expect nothing less. Coach Freeman is a great coach. This team is a tough team. I feel like their culture is tough as well. I know it's going to be a battle.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: Me? I probably say my dad's red chicken. You know, but if it's not his, probably nothing at all.

Q. (No microphone.)



JT TUIMOLOAU: Man, big shoutout to Coach Day. I know we have been criticized as players, but Coach Day has gone through a lot of, taken a lot of heat for us. Never thought about leaving and been by our side.

Coach Day has been there every step of the way. I love him as a coach, as a person. I mean, he has my back and I have his. To be able to come out with a win, he understands this team has been through a lot and we do so much for each other, and just not let anybody just be alone.

Q. (No microphone.)

JT TUIMOLOAU: I mean, I think it's just my brothers. I'm blessed to be here. I share a room with you. Hero Kanu is asking me questions. I share a room with him, share a room with a lot of guys. Coming in just allows me to be -- everybody welcomes you with open arms, checks on you as if you're just a brother.

To be able to be in an atmosphere like that, it's hard not to smile and be happy and take it all in.

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