

CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Cody Simon

Press Conference

CODY SIMON: It's nice. We've only been here for a couple hours, but it's still a beautiful city. I mean, we're excited to be here.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: I mean we're confident, and we're excited. I mean, this is the biggest one of them all, so you gotta be ready to go.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Obviously it wasn't the way we wanted to end it two years ago, but I was just talking to my teammate, like everything happens for a reason, so being able to get back here and really right a wrong from here, it's a good feeling, and we're going to try to right those wrongs.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Oh, it was C.J., C.J. Hicks. We were just talking about, like, it's crazy, we were here two years ago. It wasn't for this game, but that's the beautiful thing about it, though. We can do it for this game.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Having this experience of being in all these big games, it definitely fuels the fire for us. We know we haven't done our job in recent years, so to be able to do it now, it's a big thing, and we just want to take advantage of the moment and do our best.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, I haven't thought about it too much, but I mean, it is kind of funny, I think. Just the northern states coming down a little bit, but it's football, and we're all trying to play our best game, so it will be a good one.

Q. (Inaudible)?



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CODY SIMON: I think one of the best parts about him is his instincts. He's like a really smart player, and he's really intelligent, but he can also make plays from 20 yards deep and come down and make a hit. He's super essential. He's a great player, and we're so thankful to have him on our team because he's a great player.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, I would think it is for him because his family is such a talented family, and they all work really hard. But he's put a lot of work in this season and years before. So I think it's a combination of the hard work and talent he's put together his whole life.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: It definitely brings challenges for defenses. I mean, he's had a lot of success this whole year with running the ball, and it's definitely a focus for us. Really our main thing is just doing our job. We have our roles in place to be able to stop plays like that, and we just want to do our best.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah, you never want to get too far. You never want to allow the quarterback to dictate what you're doing. You want to always kind of press the issue. For us, I mean, it's going to be big to make sure he doesn't escape the pocket too much. I mean, he's had a lot of success doing that, and that's going to be our job to try to keep him contained.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Well, I wouldn't say Gabriel was a part of the run game, but he was pretty mobile. So you have to always be aware of where he can extend plays and really make it tough for the back end to cover late in the down.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: I mean, it's always a huge emphasis for us. We don't want to leave any stone unturned, so we're



going to try to focus on each and every detail as much as we can. Special teams is another area where we're also going to pull our focus into, so we're prepared. Our coaches have given us a good plan, and we're going to be prepared for all this stuff.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Famous person on my phone. I don't know. Probably -- probably my mom. (Laughs).

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Commissioner of the sport for a day? Dude, I haven't thought too much about that. Maybe warmer games, I guess. I don't know.

Q. Who's the best player on the team (inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: See, I'm not the biggest college football player, game player, but I was watching Sonny play the other day. He's pretty good. He was giving a lot of people some trouble yesterday. So I'll probably say Sonny.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: It would mean everything. This is the ultimate goal for us right now, and we're trying to put everything towards it. And you don't want to always let the moment be too big, but we know what's at stake right now, and we want to take advantage of it. And I commend to all the seniors who stayed behind and made that decision to come back, because I think it's been worth it for pretty much everyone around here. I'm proud of all my teammates, everyone that's been here.

Q. (Inaudible). How do you think you helped this team that's come together?

CODY SIMON: I think the biggest thing is that I've had to learn and develop throughout this year as well. People say stuff like that, and I really appreciate that stuff, but it doesn't just come and go. Like I've had so many people help me along the way to become a better leader and a better person. So really is just a testament to my teammates and my coaches for believing in me and allowing me to be in that position to be a leader.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Definitely as a leader, like vocally, just emotionally. I think that in years past I haven't really been needed to be that leader, but when I was asked to step up and become that person to lead, I feel like I've learned a lot, and I've done a lot to help myself in that sense.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, it means everything to me. That might sound a little redundant, but this whole thing about this program is about fight, and I want to embody that. And my teammates entrusted me enough to wear this (indiscernible), and I want to honor them and honor my team and honor Buckeye Nation and Ohio State that same way. I just want to be fighting every day I can and giving my best and being the best version of myself.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. They're a great team, a great offense, too. They pride themselves on running the ball, and all good offenses do that, too. And they're going to be a tough team, and they're okay with being that tough, rugged team who's going to drive the ball down the field, so for us our success is going to be where we can get off the field. Being able to give our offense that ball in good territory is going to be a good thing for us, and we just have to do our job. That's really what it comes down to, just doing our job and executing.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: I mean, they're all tough players. They didn't get here from nothing, you know. I think the quarterback, Riley, is really tough, and Jeremiyah is also really tough. So it's going to be on us to do our job and be as physical as possible as point of attack and make sure we're on our stuff at all times.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I wouldn't say it's too much football. I think our coaches have done a great job of kind of balancing it out to make sure guys are always fresh and ready to go for games. It's definitely different for us because the length of the season is more -- not as much football, but it's more the length of the season is what's kind of different for me. But if you're playing for it all, you never get tired. So we're just excited to be down here and ready to go.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest thing I've learned is my resilience. Being here for five years, things don't always go the right way, the way you want them to go. Everyone would rather three years and out. But you just learn that when you get knocked down, you gotta keep pushing no matter what. Not everything is going to go your way, but you just gotta keep fighting. And that's the best thing about our program. They encourage you to fight and

keep pushing and be the best version of yourself.

Q. (Inaudible). What's been your purpose this year as leader of the defense, senior leader?

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I mean, one of the biggest things for me, I think, is I always try to go back to just having fun. Football can be super stressful in this environment. There's all these people here, and there's a lot going on, but I think when you're playing your best football, you're having the most fun, and that's the way football is meant to be. So I just try to go out there and be with my guys and just have the most fun we can.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I mean, having something like two weeks out of the -- right after your worst loss, I guess, it helped us really change our mindset. We knew we were going to have to go on a run if we wanted to win it all, and that was kind of a decision that we had to come together because we knew we were going to have to play a game, but it was like how mentally into are you going to be, and so we all came together and really decided that this is going to be our year and like we have to go and finish it. But we gotta go do it, though, and that's the whole mission of this run that we're doing right now.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: No. Not really. Our plan the entire way was to win everything. So when you don't do that, it's disappointing because you want to accomplish all your goals. But we were prepared to go undefeated and have that first round bye and be able to go all the way. But obviously it didn't work out how we wanted to. It's unfortunate, but we're still right here where we want to be now. So it's going to be on us to finish our job and to go all the way.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. We've evaluated all their personnel. For us it's really not about the other team. It's about our job and executing at a high level for us. I'm not really focused on the other team and some of the troubles they may be having, because at the end of the day, I have to do my job and our defense has to do our job, too. So if we can do that, I think we'll like the outcome.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: It's always tough when a quarterback can run and can be mobile. It's a big focus for us, and we want to be able to limit that as much as possible because he can

extend plays and make it tough for people in the back end, too. They're a tough team. They run the ball well, and it's going to be on us to be able to stop the run, and I think that will be a big dictator of the game. If we can play well in the run game, I think we can play well.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah, Ohio against the world is a term that we use because for better or worse, some people don't want to see us win. And I don't want to call people out or anything, but it's a mentality that we have that we're all we have. Like everything within our Woody, within our state, it's gotta be us against everybody, and you wouldn't want to have it any other way. It's your family. Your family is fighting against everybody. I think everyone would kind of share that sentiment.

And talking to other players, I've talked to a couple of them, throughout what's going on through the season, it didn't go the way we wanted to, but they are still in full support and want to see us succeed as much as possible. I really appreciate them because they really hold up that culture that we are trying to hold up as well, so they want to see us succeed, and they want to see us perform the best on the best stage. So I appreciate all Buckeye Nation and any alumni because they give us confidence, but they also give us that little edge that we need.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah. It's a great opportunity for our conference. I'm not too worried about the little conference rivalry stuff. If you're going to win a championship, you gotta put together a really good season, and we're just worried about playing our best game right now. I don't even want to worry about too many headlines and the big conference talk, but we're just out here to play our best game and execute at a high level.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I've had a couple conversations about that. The way it is with college football, it's tough right now to really have a lot of faith in staying with programs, and I just felt that I love Ohio State. I love Columbus. I love everything about Ohio State. It made me a better person. It made me a better version of myself, made me a better football player. I didn't really see a benefit in looking somewhere else because I just love everything about Ohio State.

I try to share that with some of my teammates who may be thinking about stuff like that, but at the end of the day, they have to make the decision that's best for them and their



family. But my two cents is I just love Ohio State, man. I love Columbus.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: It definitely was, I would say, weird at first because we've never heard of that. You never see it happen. But as I've grown to know him and learn about him and also why the reason he came back here, he's such a great dude, and he's really here for the betterment of our team, and he's going to be a brother of mine now. I mean, he's hilarious, but he's also like a really hard worker, and he helped our culture as soon as he got here. He's such a hard worker, and we're lucky to have him, and I appreciate him, too.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I don't know if you saw in the off season he was one of the -- we had like kind of players of the week in the off season for like the strength and conditioning stuff. He won like three of them throughout the winter workouts and summer. So I mean he's a monster, and he's helped our team out so much, especially like through scout work and through special teams.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I mean, it's probably one of the greatest moments I've ever been a part of in football. I mean, I knew he was going to have that one-on-one, and I just wanted to do my job, and see him do that, and my first reaction was just to run with him, and I saw Sonny blocking the other guy, so after that I was just like, oh, just see all the crowd go nuts, and you're just running behind him. I'm just so happy that he got to have that moment because he deserves it, and he's just been through so much here. For him to have that moment, it was just awesome.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: They may have been, actually. I mean, my brother went there for college. So they were one of the main schools I was deciding on going to. But ultimately I came here, and I'm happy with the decision.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Probably around two or three visits, I think. I think so. I went up to -- I went to I think their playoff game against Clemson a couple years in 2018. Spent a decent amount of time there.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I mean, I think I decided a little earlier on that I wasn't going to go there. I mean, everyone has a different -- what they want is different, and I mean, my brother and I are a lot alike, but in that field I didn't really feel it was the place for me. Not to say that they're a bad place, because he had a great time there. He learned a lot. But it just wasn't for me, and I decided not to go there, really.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah. 100 percent. I was talking to C.J. earlier. It's fitting that we're back here. We can kind of right our wrong here. Everything happens for a reason. So I think being able to come back here and really take it all for us is a good moment for us.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: We have a bunch of Georgia guys here, and they've all been talking it up. But whenever I say we should go to Jersey for a bowl game, they get mad, so I don't know. It's a great city, though. We're having a good time.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: He's one of the best coaches I've ever had. He changed my mentality about football, and I mean, I'm so thankful to have been coached by him. I know that they appreciate him just as much as I did, because he's more than a coach. He's a great man, he's a great husband, a great father. It goes beyond football for me. He was the first person to believe that I could be a captain. I don't take that lightly, and I appreciate all the work he's put in to me. I'm just excited to go against them, and it will be a good battle because it's good defenses.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah. He would always bring his family around. I know his children really well. Even back when it was like COVID, he would invite all the -- trying to keep everyone separate, but he would try to bring everybody together and make sure everyone was safe. Even when my roommate, Mitch, he messed his knee up, he had him stay at his house for like a whole week just to make sure he was well taken care of. He makes sure that he loves and cares for his players, and his whole family is a great family.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: What sets him apart? Yeah. I mean, this is probably the best group of guys I've been around. I think

our resilience and our strive to be excellent. I think all the defense I've been a part of still had that mentality, but these guys here, we all come to work, and I think we all enjoy being around each other.

I mean, these guys work so hard, and I'm just really happy to be a part of it and to be able to go to battle with these guys every week.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, it always brings the issue because it's an extra hat in the box. That running back can block. So now you're dealing with another guy. I mean, really, those plays come down to toughness and getting off blocks and making plays. So we're excited for that challenge, and it's going to be interesting because it always presents an issue for defenses.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Well, I mean, well, now we know he's faster than everyone thinks. But I think he has long legs, and he has a good stride. That stuff makes a difference. He can escape tackles and can really -- I mean he's couple plays of him hurdling people and like jumping over people. So we will take it into account, and we want to make sure we contain him as much as possible.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, no. Each play is different. I wouldn't just consider us going low. I mean, you know he can jump and he can get over people. So we're definitely aware of it and going to make changes for it.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: I think he had -- not the crew you'd want, but I mean, I think he appreciated Notre Dame a lot. I mean he went to Mendoza school there. He played a bunch of games, bunch of big games, and it didn't work out the way he wanted to, but I think he still really appreciates the college a lot. For me, I wasn't as into it as maybe he was, but I don't think -- it's a great place. I mean, there's a reason that they're here, too. They're a great school, great football team.

Everyone has their own decisions, but I feel like Ohio State was the best decision for me, and I still stand by that. I can't say bad things about it. I mean, just everyone has different tastes, and I think he liked it a lot there and he went there.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I mean, we use that term "unfinished business." I just think it's fitting for us to be able to come back here and get a job done that we couldn't get done two years ago.

I was talking to C.J. earlier, everything happens for a reason, so being here, being back at this place, we can always dwell on that past, but we can really look forward to making some new history here and winning a big one here.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Oh, 100 percent. I mean, I think that's the biggest thing about being Ohio State is being able to overcome adversity and not dwell too much and to be able to turn things around. I think that will be the best story possible, because there's so many stories here that can be told about these players and all the sacrifices made to get into this position.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, I talked to RJ a couple days ago. I mean, it's always bigger than the rivalries or anything, but I mean, I just appreciate that he's in this position with me and we can all share the moment. And it's still going to be a battle, but I mean, two guys from the same high school is a pretty cool thing.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I'm not big on trash talk. I just want to go out there and do my job and execute. I think if you can do that, it's better than any trash talk you can do.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: I mean, it was great times. I mean, we went through a lot together, especially in high school. He's a great player, and we had a really good defense back then, too. But we didn't get to win a state championship together, but it was still great times, and he's a great dude. He's had a lot of success in college, too. So I'm happy that he's in that position, too.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: I mean, I think high school was a grind for us. I mean, nobody who went to our school lived within 30 minutes of the school. So whether it was taking a train or whether it was taking buses or public transportation, I mean, guys had to like grow together and really go through these struggles and like find ways to get better together.

So whether it was spending extra time at our facility or weight training or anything, I mean, we had to do a little bit more than maybe somebody who would live right next to their school. So I think that's a big thing.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Oh, I was a train guy. I took the NJ train and then the Light Rail, so probably like 45 minutes to get to school. It wasn't too bad, though. It was kind of fun.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I mean, we have a term called "Prep for life," and I mean, that really does run deep, because there's a lot of people out there who have come from our school, and we always try to stay connected and stay close together, because we all help each other out in the future. So it does mean a lot for our high school.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: Yeah. I mean, he has really good length, and he can bend really well. And, I mean, I haven't watched a ton of their defense and stuff, but I know he's a really athletic player, and he's impacted the game a lot, especially in this playoff. I think he got a sac fumble, so for us, offensively, I think they have a good plan for him and want to contain him as much as possible.

Q. (Inaudible)?

CODY SIMON: He probably would. I mean, obviously I don't wish that, but that would be good for him, definitely.

Q. (Inaudible).

CODY SIMON: He's a super tough and talented player. I mean, that touchdown run he had against Penn State was an incredible play. So we know we have a big challenge for us, and we want to be able to contain him as much as possible.

We're excited for it, though, because we know he's a great player, and it's going to be a good challenge for us.

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