

CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

Saturday, January 18, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Xavier Watts

Press Conference

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, they're talented playmakers. They go out there and make a lot of plays. They're well coached. Their offensive coordinator calls good plays to get them open and at the end of the day they make plays.

They're an explosive group of guys and we're excited for the challenge.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, we go out there and do what with we do. We're not going to go out there and try to change what we do. Obviously we will try to go out there and mix some things up, but we play man and we are excited for the opportunity, for the challenge.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Coach Freeman's message, the game wasn't over. We weren't playing great and the game was still close. If we were able to tighten up some things and change the way we were playing, go out there and be successful. Just having the mindset that the game wasn't over and continue to fight.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: He came in there cool, calm, and collected and did what he needed to do. He made some good throws. He just went in there and made some plays and helped us get those points. Credit to him for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, it's crazy. Obviously right now all the media stuff is crazy. It's a big deal. At the end of the day none of this matters. It's going to matter what happens on the field. Step foot on the field everything changes, so



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just excited to go out there and play.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, Atlanta is a great city. Obviously not as warm as I would want it to be. It's cool. Obviously South Bend it's 10 degrees so I was expecting to come to at least 50 degrees, but it's fine. Atlanta is a really good city and excited to be here.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I mean, probably after the NIU loss. We went against Purdue and we kind of went out there and let all our anger out. Each week we just continued to improve. I just think each week we continued to get better and better and seen growth, and here we are now.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, just because I'm from Omaha don't mean -- I don't like the cold. That's my Omaha guy right there, too. He don't like the cold either, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I think just starts with Notre Dame. It's such a special place. You don't want to leave that place. The people there are amazing. You don't want to leave those connections. The alumni network is amazing. Everything about Notre Dame is amazing.

If you've never been that you don't understand it. If you go there you'll understand why. It's something you don't want to just get up and leave.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I don't know. That ain't my job. Those guys get paid a lot of money to do those type of decisions. I go out there and play football. I don't know the ins and outs to really make decisions on what's going on.

Q. (No microphone.)



XAVIER WATTS: Probably Kyle Hamilton. That's my guy. Kind of weird to say, but he's such a good player. Best player I think I've seen in person.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Probably a gift for my parents. I'm not going to tell you what I bought for them, but probably something for my parents.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: It's something nice. There. That's all I can give you.

Yes, sir.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I think the biggest thing with them is limiting their explosive plays. Like I said they're an explosive offense. Going out there and just stopping their explosive plays will help us be successful.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I think he's a freak athlete I would say. 6'3", 215; he is a big-bodied receiver. At the end of the day he's really explosive as well. He's physical. He gets physical and also he rushes by people sometimes.

It's a combination of that and the offense allows him to do what he needs to do.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, JG is an underrated guy. Obviously seen a glimpse last week, but he does that a lot in practice. He does that in fall camp ever since last year. He is a really shifty guy. If you're not patient with him, he's going to get you.

Obviously the hair thing, obviously I'm going to say me. I mean, look at this. I got the full flow down to my shoulders. My hair is better than his for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: A little bit, yeah. Most people think that play is like a really big role with the player I am today. I mean, it helps a little bit, but those are all completely different positions. Honestly I think the biggest thing that might help me in my position is the receiver, like the ball skills, being able to track the ball.

Honestly I kind of just go out there and just play football. I mean, my pass is my pass, but what I do now is completely different, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I'm superstitious. I follow the exact pre-game routine I do every week. My music coming to the stadium I play a mixture of like R&B, alternative, slow rock, country music. When I get into the stadium it's all rap, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, everyone can see he's a great guy. We all were around him in the locker room, in the building, on the field. Just the type of guy he was, his personality, you know, we wanted to be around a guy like that. Obviously his coaching abilities, we had a great defense at the time when he was defensive coordinator, so we knew he could coach and trusted him that he's going to be able to take over our program and do great things.

Ended up being right, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, it's been really good to see. Obviously he was young -- he's still young now, but being a young head coach for a top program is something really hard to do.

Seeing him grow each year, being more confident in the way he speaks to us, his plans, the way he runs the program, he's been able to do some really good things. Like I said it's been great to see him get to year three and a national championship.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Definitely -- I mean, we lost the game so obviously wasn't good. Against NIU the quarterback threw the ball out of bounds and I jumped out of bounds and I tried to throw it back in bounds. Didn't get an interception, but it was really cool that I tried to do that, so that's probably my favorite play.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Obviously I had a difficult journey to college. Not everything is going to go as they're planned. Obviously I've been doing good now, but at the beginning I didn't do good at all. So continue to work hard. It's cliché, but work hard and put your head down and believe in the process, believe in it what's in store for you and just

continue working.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I think just starts with everything we believe in. I think it starts with the brotherhood we have. This is the closest team I've ever been a part of. We all play for each other and are so invested in what Coach Freeman and the coaches have in store for us. We're all invested in each other.

All the hard work we put in, we're just excited to go out there. You know, what we been doing since last year, January, so all the hard work is starting to pay off, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, it's difficult to kind of just pinpoint when I would say we all have been really close knit. I would say like I said just this year, I just think this is the closest team I've ever been a part of. The defensive side of the ball has been close and the team in general. I think that's what makes a team great, is when everybody is close knit. Not just one side of the ball or a specific group of people.

So that's what's allowed us to be so successful this year.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Like I said I don't think there is a specific moment. I think just in general I feel like even back in January when we went to workouts you could feel how close the team was going to be. New guys coming in, transfers, freshmen, they were already starting to bond with us and we're laughing and hanging out.

That time is when you can feel it. That's why I think winter workouts are so important. You got to build on that stuff now so when it gets to late November, December you're so close together and you believe in each other.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I think it would mean a lot. Obviously last time we won was 1988 so it's been a really long time. So just be a really good moment for this program to go out and do something special, a special moment for the team, players, everyone involved, fans.

Really cool moment.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, it's definitely a difficult moment.

Obviously he came in, recruited me. I had committed -- you don't commit to a coach, but obviously they play a role in your recruitment. Obviously he had -- couple weeks I had to -- he had switched he over to defense, so I believed in his plan for me.

Obviously it's a difficult moment, but at the end of the day I just trusted what was going on with Notre Dame. Notre Dame is such a special place. You don't just get up and leave that place. Obviously didn't want to leave it. Like I said it was a difficult time.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, obviously this is a big time program. You want to go to play with the best of the best, be around the best of best. This is the program I wanted to come to. Couldn't pass up the opportunity with the football and academics. Obviously when you come in here you have that in mind. You want to play big time football, and here we are.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I mean, whatever his decision was, it's up to him. I can't speak to what Coach Kelly wanted to do, whatever his mindset was. I mean, I don't know. Whatever he thought was best for him is what he did.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Jaden Thomas. My favorite. You know, I used to play wide receiver. I got to say Deion Colzie too, because I used to play receiver with those two guys. Those are my favorite two guys. They share the throne.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Someone said there is a hotdog eating contest. Oh, okay.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Like a ball hawk, X factor. Any time the ball in the air I'm going to get it.

And then like a speed recognition boost. When I know a play is coming I get extra speed, something like that. For sure, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, Jack has been a really great guy to be around. He's the ultimate Notre Dame guy. He is extremely smart, works extremely hard, good football



player.

The true definition of a Notre Dame man. The way he lives and the way he acts and plays football has rubbed off on me to be a better person, football player.

Been a great guy to be around.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I definitely say my kind of like ball hawking ability. Obviously I just always found my way around the ball. Just truly trust what I'm seeing. Trust my instincts, trust what the quarterback is telling me.

I always just find a way to get to the ball so I would say ball hawking ability.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I would say so. Obviously I played offense in high school and even in college a little bit, so kind of just rubbed off on me on the defensive side of the ball.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Couple guys. I like watching Jessie Bates. I feel like I'm a similar player to him. Antoine Winfield is a good player to look at. Obviously Kyle. He went to Notre Dame. Like watching him as well. Those are a couple guys I like to pay attention to.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, he's physical. Got to be ready for him. He pushes off a little bit. He's a bigger guy so 6'3", 215, 220. Obviously when he gets his body into you he uses his strength. Obviously at the same time you can't really try to relax on him. He's pretty fast. He might just fly by you as well.

You got to just pick and chose and be ready to feel out what he's going to do to you.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah. I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I don't think it's anything like magical. I think it's just a credit to what we been able to do this season. We continue to work hard every day, practice hard, win our games. That's the biggest thing. We've

been able to win our games, win our playoff games, win all season long.

We've earned where we got to right now.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: No, that's one of the things you come to Notre Dame for, the traditions. Obviously you pay attention to the traditions, but they're not like any type of like magical thing for us or anything. They are just cool parts of history that we're excited to be a part of.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, it's a credit to our preparation all week, our practice all week. It start all the way in January with our winter workouts; still that mindset that you can't take any plays off, any days off. Just having that mindset that continuing to go, go, go no matter where you are in life and football.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I can't answer this question for you, sir. That's an inappropriate question right now. (Laughter.)

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: I can't say myself? No? Probably you. And the worst player is probably franchise Christian Gray. Yeah, of course.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Oh, 100%. I probably have the best hands in the program. Not gonna to lie. The entire program. Top to bottom, offense, defense, I probably got the best hands. Yes, sir.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Good. Good calm vibes. I don't know. I got too many. I can't think of any off the top of my head.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, obviously I didn't play too much so I can't really speak on, yeah, obviously those guys. Alabama was really good, but I think all week the practice emphasis of what Alabama did versus us, they probably practiced better; maybe prepared better than we did. I think they just went out there and just played better.

Q. (No microphone.)



XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I think he's done a good job recruiting the right kids into the program, developing us. We believed in everything he had in store for us, the preparation, everything. Just did a good job bringing in the right players.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, just the way he treats us, the way he speaks to us. You can tell everything is real about him. No sugarcoating and fake. Just an authentic coach and players want to play with him.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, definitely I feel like his confidence grew. He's on year three of coaching and you can see how much he's improved. Getting better with how he speaks with players, the way he runs practices, the way he runs the program in general has just improved each year and has gotten the best he could so far is going to began continue getting better each year.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, I mean, Coach Kelly was a little bit more older than Coach Freeman. He's obviously younger. So they're two completely different people. Obviously like I said just younger, different in age. He maybe relates a little bit more with players, Coach Freeman does. They just run things differently, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: Yeah, he's done a better job being confident in his play. He's a talented player. Just continuing to grow and trust in the coaches and the plan they have for him just has allowed him to grow and be better.

Q. (No microphone.)

XAVIER WATTS: That's a crazy question, first of all. But I'm one; Leonard is two; JC is three. Me, you, and JC. O-line, Guerby, Styles, and Anthonie Knapp.

Yep yeah that's a wrap. Sorry guys.

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