

# CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

Monday, January 20, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Ohio State Buckeyes**

**Coach Ryan Day**

**Will Howard**

**Cody Simon**

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State 34, Notre Dame 23

**RYAN DAY:** Yeah, I just can't say enough about our guys and what they've overcome to get to this point. They now have something to show for it.

I thought Notre Dame had a great season, and I think Marcus does a great job and they have a very, very good team and had a really good game plan.

That first drive went right down the field. I thought we responded in a big way, never flinched. And I think, again, if you think about the run we've gone on here in the playoffs, a big part of the way we've responded coming off the end of the season, but then even the way the Texas game went and the way we responded early in that first quarter, and then even in the second half, just continued fighting the momentum because Notre Dame was fighting to get it back.

We just kept swinging and got a huge stop there on 4th down on defense, got the missed field goal, kept swinging, kept playing.

And I give this guy a lot of credit right here, Will Howard. I think he ran the ball 16 times in the game. We knew it was going to be that way. It was the last game we had so we were going to let out all the bullets, and he really put the team on his back and really delivered a huge 3rd down conversion which sealed the game.

We just felt like in this game the No. 1 goal was to win. That's where it started on offense, defense and special teams, find a way to win the game, and that's what we did here in the playoffs.



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Now the stories of these guys will be told because they've cemented themselves in Ohio State history, the ninth national champ and the third really in the last 50 years. There's been some great, great teams in the last 50 some-odd years at Ohio State. Great teams, great players. Only three of them have been national champs, and these guys are one of them.

**Q. Will, Coach Day talked about your rushing performance, but 13 of your first 13 in the game, can you talk about the rhythm of those first 13 throws and your rhythm throughout the game, including that big one at the end to seal the deal to Smith?**

**WILL HOWARD:** Yeah, coming into the season, I think something that Coach Day and Coach Kelly and Billy really emphasized to me was completions. Get completions, take completions.

There was a couple times early where maybe I had to check it down or it wasn't perfectly how it's drawn up, but you want to just keep the ball moving and stay on schedule. It may not always be pretty, and you may have to go pick it up with your legs.

But I've got to give all the credit to my guys, my O-line giving me time, and those guys, my receivers. We've got the best receiving room in the country, it's not even close. The running backs did a hell of a job, and everybody stepped up when we needed it.

**Q. Ryan, you've talked all year about the idea of leaving no doubt, and obviously the last four years haven't always been pretty for you. As you're realizing in real time that you're about to win a National Championship and join some of the legends at Ohio State, what's going through your head as you kind of look back on the journey to get here?**

**RYAN DAY:** That God made it hard for a reason. You just never know what's in your path along the way. But this game can give you the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. It can take you to your knees some days as a player and as a coach. I've been there before.

For all those coaches or people who are on a journey to

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what they're looking to accomplish, if you're trying to achieve greatness, you're trying to become national champs in the most competitive environment there is in the entire world. There's nothing more competitive than college football, in my opinion.

It's going to be hard and there's going to be things you learn along the way, but if you surround yourself with great people, you're resilient, and you believe in the guys around you, and you just keep fighting and keep putting one foot in front of the other, you give yourself another chance.

And that's really what it was. You think back when we were in the stadium last time, I couldn't quite come to grips for a while with why we just didn't quite finish that game against Georgia.

But I understand now. It all makes sense. And here we are. I couldn't feel better.

**Q. Will, you played lights out down the stretch. How do you stay mentally steady as a quarterback through that, that's so important to the position? And, Ryan, what have you seen from his development at Ohio State since he came over from Kansas State?**

WILL HOWARD: Speaking to that, I feel like it can be a lot. The lights are bright. It's a spectacle, and the TV time-outs are like four minutes long. It feels like everything is kind of a show a little bit.

You have to block all that out, and we talked about that all week. Eliminate all the distractions. Don't listen to any of the outside noise. Just finish the job.

When you get into big games like this, whoever is able to have the poise in the noise and be able to overcome adversity because it wasn't always pretty today. It wasn't always perfect. It's never going to be. But I think the team that we have and the leadership that we have with Coach Day, just the resilience this team has shown all year, it's just unbelievable.

RYAN DAY: Yeah, it started with me when I first met Will. I saw something in him, a football IQ intelligence. I saw him play on film at Kansas State and win championships and win big games and be able to make an impact with his feet but also throw with accuracy and anticipate throws. And those are things that are hard to find. Then you see a guy, you meet him, and his football IQ and maturity is what kind of captured me.

I had a feeling that we would be in a situation like this where we needed his feet to go win a game, and that's exactly what happened in this game.

But what I didn't know was how special his leadership is and his resilience and his positive mindset. It's something I learned a lot about -- I learn from these guys all the time. I've learned a lot from Cody Simon since he's been here, and I've learned a lot from this guy in one year. I've told stories about some different times in practice when he has such a positive mindset around the players.

And we decided to go in the huddle this year for the first time since I've Ohio State because we knew the season was going to be long, and we wanted to be fresh. And I felt like we were fresh in the playoffs, and I think that had a big part to do with it.

But what we didn't understand along the way was the impact that he was going to have and the offensive line was going to come together and the offense was going to come together because there's 11 guys in a huddle, breaking the huddle together. Even in walkthroughs, when we break the huddle together, it was just a crispness to it that they were together on that I think made the difference to these guys on offense.

But I also just want to make sure that we recognize how hard the defense played in this game and how great they've been throughout the season. This guy is one of the great leaders that I've been around, Cody Simon. And I think Jim Knowles and our defensive staff deserve a tremendous amount of credit not only for the game plan they put together but also just throughout the season, how they've taught technique, how they've built confidence in our defense because they've been lights out the entire playoffs.

**Q. For Ryan and the players, ever since Denzel Burke said in March "Natty or bust" and you guys embraced that, the pressure on you guys has been immense, especially after the Michigan loss. How did you get through it? Did that galvanize you? Ryan, what does it mean to win a National Championship, and why did you make the call for Jeremiah on the last one?**

RYAN DAY: You guys can talk about what that's been like this season, and I'll follow up.

CODY SIMON: When we went into the season, we knew that we had a lot of chips in the pot and we had the expectations were really high. But I think the biggest thing that came out of the season was just every day just stacking each day one on top of the other.

You guys heard about the foundation and how we're building bricks every single practice. I think that was one of the biggest things that brought this team together to get

to this level because you go through camp and you go through the season, and each day kind of molds together, but each day you look back and see the foundation you've been building. We knew the end goal was to win this game, and we knew that our foundation was meant to survive for this game.

I just appreciate that all the guys were up for the challenge, and we all stuck together because there was times we really could have frayed apart. But I'm so proud of all the guys on the team.

RYAN DAY: I think this playoff system allowed our team to grow and learn and build. You can say whatever you want about people talked a lot about how much money guys were making in NIL and different things like that. That was just because NIL was available. The majority of our team came back. These guys have been here for a long time.

Certainly Will was a huge addition, Caleb was a huge addition, don't get me wrong. But when you hear that number, that doesn't mean a whole lot other than the fact that the market value for our guys in Columbus at Ohio State is pretty high. That's what it means. When that got tagged on us early, there was a lot of pressure put on our players.

But that's nothing new at Ohio State. I think the difference is that we finished the season the right way, and we grew. We built, and we responded to tough times. Man, isn't that what life is all about.

These guys learned a bunch of life lessons, but they're going to go down in Ohio State history as one of the greatest teams to ever play at Ohio State. After all the things that have been said throughout the year, these guys are going to be cemented as one of the best stories in Ohio State history and one of the best football teams ever. Only nine teams have ever done it, and three in over 50 years. These guys right here. There was a point where not a lot of people had that vision, but these guys did, and they saw it through.

Ohio State may not be for everybody, but it's for these guys, and I'm really proud of them.

#### **Q. The Jeremiah play?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, I wanted to call it sooner, but the guys were talking to me about running the clock down, which I was good with because it was the right thing to do. I think there was a point we mismanaged it a little bit and we snapped it a little bit too soon --

WILL HOWARD: That was on me.

RYAN DAY: No, it wasn't. We could have communicated it better to Will. We should have snapped that at like two seconds, but we did not communicate that well to Will coming out of the huddle. So that's on us. That's on the coaches. I was upset about that.

But I thought overall the game was called tremendously. I thought the game plan was excellent, and I thought the guys handled it really well. We felt like we had an advantage with Jeremiah on that shot, and we talked about it all week. We really hadn't thrown one all game, and it was like, you know what, game on the line, let's just go. Let's you know aggressive.

I just thought to myself, only one National Championship, you only get one opportunity a year to do this, let's just lay it on the line and put it out there and be aggressive. And that's what we did.

I talked to the defensive guys and I talked to the offensive guys that we were going to continue to be aggressive throughout the game. I told the team that leading up to the game. And I had to make sure I followed through that.

But ultimately we have to make the plays. The protection was excellent by the offensive line, and then the throw and catch by Jeremiah and Will was special and, again, a huge play in Ohio State history.

**Q. You guys are the first team ever to go through a system like this, win four games at the FBS level to get to a National Championship. Can you describe how that's similar or different to how you had it two years ago, making the semifinals, and in some ways did it give you guys a chance to hit reset and figure out some things about your team that maybe you hadn't during the regular season?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, but I wouldn't say that it was a reset. It wasn't like at the end of the year we were broken. It wasn't that way. We had an awful day. I don't know how else to describe it. We had an awful day, and we just said we could never do that again.

And I think it's the job of the head coach to take the responsibility when something goes bad like that, but then on days like this, make sure that everyone understands it's the warriors and guys on the field that deserve all the credit, not the coach. The coach gets too much attention sometimes. I want to make sure these guys are the ones getting the attention.

In terms of the playoffs, yeah, it's very, very different. It is extremely different than what we've gone through in the

past. This is much more like the NFL. Guys are not in class. But our team has come together so well over the last month and a half. There really isn't any school, and all we do is spend time together. It's like being around a family. This is the tightest group of guys I've ever been around before.

To think we're not going to be together again I'm not looking forward to. I'm going to miss these guys. They're great people.

**Q. Will, talking with Coach Milano at Downingtown West this week, he said you're no stronger to adversity, and he highlighted to me a meeting he had with you and your mom ahead of your junior season at Kansas State where you said you just wanted to be given a chance to compete. When you think about your career since then, what's the overarching emotion of the crazy path your career has taken?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, it's crazy to look back at all the things that have happened in my career, going from really playing as a freshman at Kansas State, not really knowing what I'm doing out there, and going into my junior year kind of lost, not really thinking I'd be playing, and then ended up winning a Big 12 Championship.

All that, I just had to trust in the Lord, man, and trust that He had a plan for me and that all the adversity that we were going through, all the tough times that I went through. Coach Milano is a great man.

Between all the people back home in Downingtown and my family and then my family at Kansas State, my family here at Ohio State, I leaned on a lot of people. I wouldn't have been able to get through some of the stuff I had to go through myself. I've got to give all the credit to the Lord and to my brothers, man, because I wouldn't be here without them.

I'm just so thankful that I got the chance to come here and to be a Buckeye and that Coach Day believed in me and that these guys believed in me. I'm blessed, and I'm just so unbelievably thankful that I got a chance to be a Buckeye, even if it was for just one year.

**Q. Ryan and Will, first three drives, three touchdowns, excellent play design on that first touchdown pass to Jeremiah. With Chip Kelly, there was a lot written about him and the hire. What had you guys clicking, and what does it mean to win a National Championship given his career and how long he's been at it?**

RYAN DAY: Yeah, very excited to see a big smile on his face after the game. For him to come and leave a head

coaching position to come work with me meant a lot because he's obviously someone who's a mentor to me and certainly would not be where I am without him.

He has just a great feel for the game, and he really helped me this year spend more time outside of the quarterback room. Certainly wasn't involved very much with the offense, but allowed me to spread out a little bit and spend more time with the guys on defense. Not as much as I'd like to, but still enough to just bounce in and out. I think it brought us all together. I think the guys would agree. Wouldn't have gotten that done without Chip.

I also want to make sure I recognize the guys on offense, the offensive staff. I think Will will tell you between Brian Hartline, Justin Frye, Keenan Bailey, Billy Fessler, Carlos Locklyn, you go through all the different guys in that room, we've got a great staff in there. And I thought they came up with a great game plan. But they work at it, I mean work their tails off at this thing.

It really showed itself I think in this playoffs because it's about ball. When you get into the playoffs, it's about ball. It becomes almost -- this is what I feel, almost more like the NFL. You've got to wipe the slate clean and put a whole new game plan together in about ten days and go put it on the field. Hats off to our coaches.

WILL HOWARD: I think Coach Kelly, speaking to what he's meant to me, he's been amazing, and he's really been a great mentor for me on the field and off the field.

I think he's been through so much and he's seen so much at the college level and at the NFL level. He just knows how to deal with situations.

Even more than coaching me on football things, going into this game, he talked to me about how his quarterback the last time maybe got a little worked up going into the game, and he said, man, just be yourself, just be chill. He was great for me in calming me down and making sure I took things one play at a time, let the game come to me.

And like Coach Day said, everyone in that offensive staff room, I go in there and those guys are grinding every single day on the game plan, Coach Day included.

They've made some unbelievable game plans in these playoffs, and I've been so confident going into every single game because I know our game plan is so sound and so thought out and thorough. We really had an answer for everything they could have given us. That's just a hats off to them.

**Q. Cody, the question I had, after the first drive with**





**Notre Dame, it seemed like they never were able to get settled on offense again until probably midway through the third quarter into the fourth. I was curious what adjustments did the defense make or what did you make to help with that?**

CODY SIMON: Yeah, I would say that first drive was kind of uncharacteristic of us. We expected to go out there and kind of dominate that first drive, and they had a good first 15 plays, and they were really getting into 2nd and 3rd and shorts.

When you have a running quarterback especially like our offense, it makes it tough to get those stops. Really we focused on winning that 1st down. And when we win 1st down, a lot of stuff opens up, and a lot of the work from our front seven, the senior D-linemen, they put in so much work.

I think we really settled in and were able to get the stops we needed to get the offense to a lead that we wanted, and we still had to get more stops at the end. Me as a ball player, I wish we could have done better down the stretch. But just got to do what we got to do to get the win. I'm just proud of all the guys.

**Q. For Cody and Will, what you can say, Coach talked about Ohio State isn't for everybody but it's for these guys. Why was Ohio State for you? Coach, you were celebratory throughout the game, having fun with the guys. What can you say about being with this specific group this season?**

WILL HOWARD: I think when you come to Ohio State, you guys talked about it earlier, but the expectations are high. You can say that the pressure is high and all that stuff.

But I think C.J. said it a couple years ago, pressure is a privilege, man. If you don't have pressure on you, then are you really doing anything meaningful?

I feel like we've just embraced that all year, and we've kind of blocked out all the noise and just said, man, we just love each other too much, and we've embraced it.

I wanted to be a Buckeye. When I came -- when I talked to Coach Day, when I first had the opportunity to have some interest in this place, man, it was pretty soon after that first conversation, I was like, man, I want to be a Buckeye.

There's something different about these guys and this place.

I'm just so blessed that I made the decision to come here, man.

CODY SIMON: I would second that. What drew me to Ohio State was the culture. You don't really know about it before you get here, but when you learn that it's all about fighting and it's all about being the best version of yourself and that's what you fight every day to do, that's our whole team in a nutshell right there.

Every day was a grind for us, and especially down the stretch when not everyone was on our side and not everyone believed in us, all our guys just kept fighting. You never want to give up.

Even some of those times we were on the goal line on defense and you never know what can happen, you've got to keep fighting. I think that's a perfect example of our team.

RYAN DAY: I just enjoy being around these guys, and I wanted -- I did bed check last night and talked to these guys about how much I wanted it for these guys.

Once you got into the game and you got a feel for how it was going, you could just feel it. We had confidence coming into the game. We felt like we had momentum going into the game. Man, isn't that life? I shared that with these guys. There's times in life where things aren't going well, you've got to keep hanging in there, but when things are going good, get all you can get. That was the message going into the game, and I took that same mentality with me.

**Q. I can't imagine how much pressure you might have been under in late November and a lot was made of a lot of the things you and your family had to go through as a result of that. I was wondering if it's occurred to you now, having won the national title, that you are probably going to be standing on the field in Ohio Stadium in 30 years and you're going to have 105,000 people cheering for you and you're a person now that's indoctrinated into Ohio State history? I know it just happened, but it's been kind of a crazy six weeks in your personal arc and I'm wondering if that has landed for you and what that means to you.**

RYAN DAY: Well, I feel like from the start of this thing, we've been knocking on the door, and I think about the '19 team and the '20 team and the '21 team, the '22 team, you keep going through these seasons, and we weren't that far off.

But you've got to find a way to break through and make it to where we are right now. I think in today's day and age, there's just so much that goes with wins and losses and social media and people have to write articles and there's a

lot of things that are said that, yeah, certainly have an effect on you and your family.

But when you sign up for this job, that's what you sign up for. You've got to be strong enough to withstand those storms, to come out the back end.

Now it's an even better story. Nothing is guaranteed, but I always in the back of my mind felt that the people of Ohio and all of Buckeye Nation, after going through difficult times and seeing a team and a bunch of coaches go through difficult times, to achieve their goal, it would mean even more, and I hope they're all proud of what we've done.

**Q. Will, you mentioned you've gone through some tough times and you had to lean on the Ohio State family, Kansas State family, Downington people back home. Can you take us through the hardest times that you've gone through?**

WILL HOWARD: Yeah, man, there's been a lot. It's Downingtown, by the way, sorry. A lot of people back at home get pissed about that. (Laughter). The W isn't silent.

Man, my freshman year at K-State was tough. I'm not going to lie. That was one of the tougher years because it was COVID. I'm living alone. I'm starting -- I think I ended the season with like eight touchdowns and 11 picks. I was playing bad football, and I didn't feel like myself.

Really my junior year they recruited Adrian Martinez to be the starting quarterback and I felt like that was kind of my time to step in and be the guy, and going into that year, I think it was week 2 of the season -- I didn't play until week 6, and I think week 2 of that season I lost my grandmother and that was one of the tougher times in my life. We were really, really tight.

But again, I had to lean on my faith and my family, people around me. It hasn't been easy here either, man. We've gone through some hard times. That Oregon loss, that team up north loss, they were tough. We had to lean on each other.

I'm just so thankful that I have a group of guys in this locker room and group of coaches and my family that I can lean on and they can get me through all those tough times, and here we are, man. It's kind of surreal to feel like personally and as a team, all the things that we've been through this year, to come out on top feels pretty damned good.

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