

# CFP National Championship: Miami vs Indiana

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Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

## Miami Hurricanes

## Francis Mauigoa

### Pregame Press Conference



# NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI 2026

**Q. How have you been?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I've been good.

**Q. Talk to us about having an offensive lineman as a head coach, you being an offensive lineman, and kind of the special attention he's able to give working with you guys on a daily basis.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, it's part of why I chose the University of Miami, because we're talking about Coach Cristobal. He's been a leader. He's been under Coach Saban and all that. But he himself is a great leader. He's always with the offensive linemen, so he pushes us the most, and we're kind of like the tone-setters right now.

**Q. Do you remember the first time when you got on campus that he really got into you, yelled at you, let you have it?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: (Laughing). Yeah, yeah, yeah, I remember that first day. When that heat started hitting, you know, it was all mentality from there. He would start blowing in my ear and all, but it was amazing.

**Q. You're obviously a mountain of a man. You're a big boy. What's that pregame meal looking like? Because, obviously, it's going to take a lot of fuel to keep you going.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: My pregame meal, I always go with steak, chicken, rice, a side of mashed potatoes. That will be it.

**Q. Yeah, keeping it simple, but you're a big guy. You got to have your red meat?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: You got to have a lot of carbs too.

**Q. Who would be your Mount Rushmore of Miami**

athletes?

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Right now?

**Q. All-time Miami football.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: That's hard. We got a lot. We're talking about Ray Lewis and all those greats there. But Mount Rushmore? So four. Ray Lewis definitely should be up there. I would take Ed Reed, Michael Irvin, and Brian McKinney. I look up to Brian McKinney a lot.

**Q. A lot of these kids, your teammates, but also from the other team, they're locals. You're from American Samoa, which is 7,000 miles away. But even for, like, a tiny state y'all put out a lot of football talent. Could you name some players who influenced your career and then specifically at your position who are from Samoa?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: In college or in --

**Q. Overall.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I mean, we have Penei Sewell. Some kid that -- Frankie Luvu. He was my mom's student in American Samoa. We have a lot of greats that were former NFL players, but we have, you know, Troy Polamalu, Junior Seau. But in the NFL, I think there's a lot of guys that represent the island of Samoa and I'm pleased to be one of them.

**Q. Is it like a football culture in Samoa, then? Because you have, like, 50,000 people, but you can name some NFL -- or college football greats already, so...**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, it's what we do best. We grew up as warriors and the only thing -- we don't have the mindset to be, like, a scholar, so next thing we know how to do is destroy people. So obviously football is the next best sport.

**Q. When you look at this Indiana offense, they don't make a lot of mistakes, but Miami's been able to make**



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**teams make mistakes. What can you say about those two things converging on each other, a team that's played almost perfect and a defense that's relentless in this Hurricanes defense?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, when I look at Indiana film, I mean, like you said, they don't make a lot of mistakes, but we still have to play our brand of football, we still have to play the Miami brand of football, and just stay true to ourselves.

**Q. What Mario Cristobal has done to create what he's created here, just his leadership, what it's like to be coached by him, and to get to this moment.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: It's an awesome experience. Coach Cristobal not only is a head coach, but he's part of our O-line men group. He's able to push us, he's able to come aside and push us to be great. I mean, he wants us to be the tone-setters and that's what we're going to be.

**Q. Is that the challenge, to be great inside yourselves as well as what the coaches are asking? As a group of linemen, is that the challenge, to feel like you want to be great?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, a lot of -- all the athletes want to be great, but the standard that Coach Cristobal has instilled in us is something that we've got to uphold every day, and that is to be great, that is to be the tone-setters of every practice.

**Q. Do you look ahead before every game and envision what you can do on the field, based on the opposition and what the film study's been? Do you get the sense -- you're seeing the circumstances before because of the film study and you feel like this is what I can expect?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I can't really hear that.

**Q. Going into every game, after you've had your prep and your scouting and you've watched film of the other team, do you mentally go through, this is the guy -- or guys I'm likely to be up against, and you feel like you have a mental plan, this is the way I've got to be today?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, Indiana has gotten here for a reason. They have a lot of guys that are really great at what they do on the defensive side. Talking about their D-line, they're always constantly moving, they're always chasing the ball, and they're always -- they have a motor. Talking about their backs and their skill guys on the defensive side, they're all elite at what they do, so all we

have to do is play our brand of football and just doing our job.

**Q. You have an opportunity to go out and praise God, and I've actually heard you talk about worship recently. What do you think about in this -- on this biggest stage to be able to go out, play your position, and do it to the glory of God?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I mean, yeah, God put me on this platform for a reason, and that is to give glory to him. I want to use everything that I have to give glory to God whether it's with football, whether it's in person, whatever. This sport has given me so much, and it's not from the sport, but it's from God. God gave it to the sport, the sport gave it to me, so I want to glorifying him no matter what.

**Q. What do you guys draw from the former players that you see around the program all the time -- not even on game day, when you see a Michael Irvin or Ray Lewis on the sideline. Like, if you see someone during the week, what do you guys take from that or what do you take from that experience as a team or as a player?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: You can see the sense of brotherhood that the program of Miami has. Seeing a lot of greats come back and cheer us up and being on the sideline, you know, it's something that you don't get often. With Michael Irvin and Ray Lewis coming back on the last game, we can't afford to lose in front of them because they were the tone-setters back then, so we want to continue on their legacy.

**Q. Any former offensive linemen come through that you have time to spend with?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I spent time with Brian McKinney, Jon Feliciano. I know Dana Rivers is coming back for this game, so I'm looking forward to seeing him.

**Q. I asked Ruben this question. What does it mean to you as you guys believe in the vision that -- where this is personal, do you believe in a vision when no one else -- you're coming in a team that was 5-7 and you're sitting here three years later and playing for a National Championship when people may have told you, why you going there? What does that mean to you to be here?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I believe in Coach Cristobal, man. I mean, I saw what he did at Oregon, and he's done a lot of great things. But then when he came to Miami, of course, he came back with not a roster that he recruited, but when we came in, we wanted to turn this thing around. It was

more a of a form of mentality more than ever. We just believe in Coach Cristobal and his teachings. He's an old-school type of coach and I love that.

**Q. As an offensive lineman, there's nothing that's more enjoyable than knocking people over. How has it felt these last three games where you just hand the ball to Mark Fletcher and you guys are running people over and establishing that dominance up front? And what do you guys say in that huddle every play to each other? Like, you relish that type of moment?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We've built a lot of connection with Mark Fletcher and all of our running backs, so what we do is we just open up a lane and let them do their thing. We just want to be there for them and we're just supporters.

**Q. We were asking Carson about his touchdown run. Obviously, you had two big blocks on that one. What did you guys see when you lined up for that and then what did you see as you turned around after making that seal block and saw him walk into the end zone?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, so I was on my D end on that play, but then my D end dug. So nobody has contain, so I was waiting on my right guard, Anez Cooper, to come pick up the block, and then suddenly he came and picked it up, and I was looking outside and I see a big guy running to Carson Beck. I was like, no way, you're not coaching my quarterback, and then I ran over there and made a block. Next thing I know I turned back and he was on his way to the touchdown. I was like oh, glory to God. It was awesome.

**Q. What's it like to not only be playing in a National Championship game, but to be playing in your home stadium on your home field, even it maybe you're on the visitor sideline today?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, after our last home game in the season, we made a deal that we're not done with Hard Rock yet. So that's going to be our last game at Hard Rock for this season, so we're not leaving anything behind.

**Q. That was a long shot. Not many would have believed that at that point.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, we're not done with Hard Rock yet, because we knew before the season that the National Championship was going to be over here, so it was like after the -- what was it? Was it Syracuse?

**Q. Did you do the math? It was going to take three**

**wins away to get back here?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Whatever it takes. 1-0.

**Q. You've got a lot of people watching you back home?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah.

**Q. How many hours time zone difference?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, they're seven hours behind. So most of our games they're, like, in the middle of their day, so it's awesome.

**Q. How many people do you have? Do you have a sense of how they will watch the game?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: My parents are over here. They currently live in Miami. But I have a lot of cousins and aunties and uncles back home that still watch the game. They take pictures and they send it to our group chat. It's such a relief to see them enjoy the game.

**Q. Your family has had to sacrifice a lot. You've moved from Tonga, your parents have come from there. How have you sacrificed for this moment?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: For this moment?

**Q. To play in a National Championship?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Well, yeah, I mean, everything led up to this, but it all starts with my family, with my parents. They sacrificed. Me going at a very early age by myself to San Bernardino, California, with my brother to play football there just by ourselves. Then they made another big sacrifice for letting me go to IMG Academy by myself. In a Polynesian family, that's very hard, especially at an early age.

But we all knew it was for the greater good. So I didn't want to let them down and it all led up to this point. All the sacrifices we had from -- many, many kids often go out, and I just made the sacrifice to stay in and, like, do my studies and do my work. But all that sacrifice led up to this point, so I'm very glad that I made those sacrifices.

**Q. To follow-up on the pact that you guys made that you're not done with Hard Rock, tell us, was it in a team meeting? Was it a group of guys? Describe that moment for me.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, it was in the group chat. I mean, we had that mentality from when the season was



over. We was not done with Hard Rock. When we had the chance to go into the playoffs, that's all we needed. Obviously, now we're back here in Hard Rock, but all glory to God.

**Q. What I got there is a grip strength test. Carson did 159.6. Wondering what you are able to get to on that. You got to squeeze it as hard as you can.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Oh, shoot. 187 on this hand. 187.

**Q. 187. Very solid. Thank you.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Sure.

**Q. The road of this playoff for you guys, I mean, this is a ridiculous road. You go on the road, you get No. 7, you play No. 2, you get No. 6, you've been on the road for like the last two months, and now you're playing the team ranked No. 1 in the country. I mean, that type of roll, all the crap that people may have talked about, saying Miami shouldn't be here, is this the type of thing where it's like, here you go?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, we keep those noises out, man. We keep focusing on what's ahead of us. We don't really care about the media that much. We just continue to work on ourself. I mean, at the end of the day, the goal is to be 1-0. That's all we have to do.

**Q. Do you keep a notebook like Ruben Bain does?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I don't write those stuff in there, but I do write my goals and what I need to work on. But I don't write those stuff (laughing).

**Q. The opportunity to end the season where it started, from the Notre Dame game on, what have you learned about this team leading up to the title game?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Are you talking about Indiana or us?

**Q. You guys.**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Oh. This is a team that fights to the end. We have that mentality that if there's still time left, we still have a chance. We saw that versus Ole Miss. We saw that versus multiple other schools, like Texas A & M. But, you know, this is a team that is relentless, that will fight until the end, and that's what I'm proud of.

**Q. Are you embracing the underdog mentality, the underdog role in this game?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: (Laughing). Underdog, alpha dog, it

don't matter. I mean, you still have to go against us. We still have to go against them. I mean, we'll all see it to the end.

**Q. What would it mean to win a national title at home and here for Miami?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I mean, it would mean a lot, man. I mean, winning a national title, it means that you're the best in this year. So I mean, for us to be able to do that, we need to take care of each other, man. I need to take care of my quarterback, I need to take care of my running back, and I just want to do this for them. I mean, we all play for each other. We all play for -- because this is a brotherhood, this is a family, and we just do it for ourselves, we just do it for each other.

**Q. Miami's produced a lot of legends over the years. When you look and see guys like Ray Lewis or Michael Irvin on the sidelines, what's it mean to have them along this journey with this team?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: It means a lot, man. When I see those greats on the side, it gives us an extra boost, an extra mentality that, you know, we can't lose today. When we have greats on the side, we need to put it on for them. They've come a long way, they've put a lot of sweat, tears, and blood on Greentree for us to disrespect them. So it means a lot.

**Q. You got here three years ago, joining Cristobal's first staff, and now you guys are in a spot where you're one game away from a National Championship. What does it mean from this development of the team of what you've seen from since you've gotten here as a freshman to now?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: The mentality, man. When we got in, I mean, yeah, we were good, but, like, the team -- there's still some kids on the roster that was like, you know, kind of iffy. But the biggest change from that team to this team is that everybody got that dog mentality. Everybody wants to get on the field. Everybody wants to compete. That's the biggest change.

It all starts from Carson Beck. When he came in, he put on that dog mentality with Keionte Scott. I mean, with them people on the defense, you know, it gives us a lot of juice, a lot of energy when we come to practice.

**Q. What does that mentality look like for Monday?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Something -- you know, it's a scary place. No other people -- I mean, I believe no one wants to be in that mentality. We're just in that dog mentality. We're



just in the hunt mentality. We just hunt, and just to be 1-0, it means a lot.

**Q. As somebody who blocks for Mark, how would you describe his running style, the way he runs the football? And second part is, is it real obvious to him how much he wants to rep South Florida every time he goes on the field?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, we like to say this in the meeting room, he runs mad. When we say he runs mad, he runs like -- he runs with urgency. He runs with a lot of juice, with a lot of -- he got a whole mindset behind him when he runs. That's something that we took in as when we finish the block. When we finish the block, we want to finish mad, like, how he runs. And whenever he runs and he gets stuck, when's pumping his feet, we want to be behind him and finish the block and finish the game and finish the run. That's what we're most thankful for is to have him in the back field as somebody that not only set the standard, but goes out there and just runs over somebody.

**Q. What about him rep'ing the South Florida -- he grew up here, played here, and just seeing how much that means to him?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, I played him, I think, my junior year in high school, IMG versus American Heritage. I mean, it was stacked. That was my first time meeting him, and to be able to look at him playing how he played at American Heritage and leading up to this time, I mean, I'm glad he's on my team.

**Q. What's the first thing you're listening to in the locker room on Monday?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: (Laughing). I listen to gospel music, yeah, before the game.

**Q. Any particular artists?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I go with Travis Greene and then transfer it over to CeCe Winans. Then it goes to Kirk Franklin, Tye Tribbet, and then it goes on from there.

**Q. When you got here two and a half years ago, you were entering a situation where this program wasn't yet built yet. These last three years you've been one of the key members of helping build this team to where they are today. How much does you being a part of it all just mean to you?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, I'm very thankful they gave me the opportunity to play here at the University of

Miami. To be under Coach Cristobal's wing, that's something special, his offensive line coaches as well, and he pushes his offensive linemen to be the tone-setters for every practice. He wants us to go full speed every time, not only in, like, full-padded practice, but in, like, walkthroughs as well. There's no lack-offs for the offensive linemen, and that's what we wanted. We wanted to be the tone-setters, so that's what he's upholding for us.

**Q. This defensive line you're going up against uses a lot of stunts, movement, and chaos, kind of similar to Ole Miss. So did the preparation for that game help with this one or do you just approach this one with a whole new blank slate?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, Indiana does stunts a lot. I feel like that's what's causing a lot of major issues for a lot of -- they got very smart guys on their defense as well. I was talking to some of my guys at Oregon, and they said No. 4 was the biggest problem. No. 4 knows everything from every call to every signal to everything. We kind of did our background check, and he used to be quarterback, so of course, he knows what all these calls are.

We're going to do our best. I mean, if you know what we're going to do, we're just going to -- you still got to stop it. I feel like that's going to be our mentality and, yeah, it's going to be -- they're going to run stunts and everything just like Ole Miss did, and we're just going to continue to do what we do.

**Q. If you don't mind sharing, just what else did some of your friends at Oregon say what stood out to them about Indiana's offense and their offensive line?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I haven't talked to them about the offensive side, but I talked to them about the defense. Yeah, I mean, the defense is very smart. The backs, they always -- they're headhunters. No. 4 is like their quarterback on their defense, and he knows everything. Talking to the center from Oregon, they tried to do some mixed signals, and No. 4 keeps catching up on it, and it's something that is impressive. It's like playing against Luke Kuechly. He'll know everything because there's a lot of evidence on what we do, and I feel like he's going to pick up on it very quickly, which we're just very prepared for it and we're just going to do what we do.

**Q. How would you describe the way that Carson has handled this whole season from coming in when he couldn't play in the spring to then earning the respect of the guys and winning the job and just all the attention that comes with being a high-priced quarterback in the NIL era?**

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FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, he's one of the hard-working dudes in our program. When he came in, he had surgery. I keep seeing him in the treatment room just going at it, you know, getting rehabbed and everything. He's been very good at it. Talk about the mindset, I mean, he's still got that mindset, dog mentality, and he handles business very well. He's not only a great teammate, but he's a great leader. He's a great human being as well.

**Q. Staying on Carson, just how much do you think this offense and this whole team has kind of taken after the standard that he brings, the story that he brings? What kind of impact has he had on just the whole personality of this team?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, I mean, he's the head of this offense. The call comes from him. He knows everything, not only on what the receiver's doing, but as an offensive lineman too. Like, he comes in and changes our calls and that's something that's very impressive. When it comes from the quarterback, that means the quarterback knows what he's doing, and it's not surprising when you have Carson Beck back there. I mean when he played at Georgia, he knows a lot of things, and, you know, Carson has been a great impact to our offense.

**Q. When you were a freshman, you had guys like Matt and Jaylen to look up to as leaders and such. Just now that you're a junior and a leader of this team, how have you helped guide some of the younger linemen on the offense?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, coming in I looked up to Dana Rivers and Matt Lee, like you said. Javion Cohen. I mean, they taught me a lot on like how to handle stuff, like time management-wise. So the first thing that I talked to the young kids when they came in was using their time wisely. If you have time, don't spend it on video games and all that, but to be able to spend it on film, getting better, extra hours in the weight room, stuff like that. When we are in practice it's a no-brainer to help them out with things that they need to work on. Things that might work in high school, but doesn't work in college. That has been a major issue with me when I first came in as well.

**Q. What were your first impressions of Malachi Toney when you saw him, 17-year-old kid walking into your environment, what was that like?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: At first I didn't notice him. He was kind of a quiet kid and he held his head down. I mean he was just a humble kid that just doing whatever he do. But then later on in practice he started making these catches and started making touchdown play making, you know, then I get to know that you start asking around, who is that.

They call him Baby Jesus. And I was like, What? He's got to be doing something special to be called Baby Jesus. And now I see why. Throughout this whole season he's been balling.

**Q. Who gave him that nickname?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I don't know. But I heard from the other kids, they were like from Anez Cooper, he's like, Oh no, that's Baby Jesus. And I was like, Baby Jesus? I'm a religious guy, and to be able to be called Baby Jesus, you got to be something special.

**Q. When he pushes the pile into the end zone like that, as an offensive lineman, how good is that?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, that all started from the Notre Dame game. Just seeing him dominate, finish the blocks on the DBs and all that, like he's doing his assignment to the best. After the game he comes up to our offensive line coach and he asks him, like what do I need to do better to block better. That's every game. And that gives you the mentality that he's not only focused on making plays, but he's focused on like being the best teammate. That's awesome.

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