

# CFP National Championship: Miami vs Indiana

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Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

## Indiana Hoosiers

### Aiden Fisher

#### Pregame Press Conference

**Q. I want to talk to you about your faith real quick. You're no stranger to adversity. Throughout your whole life. What does your story tell you about God's faithfulness to you?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great question. For me, my faith has been my everything. You're just going through a lot of ups and downs and trials and tribulations throughout my career, and my life, honestly. And I think coming to Indiana, I really learned that, how to walk in my faith a little bit better. For me, in the book of Matthew when Jesus is watching Peter and them, when they're on a boat, they're going through the waters, a storm is coming. Jesus walks on the water, and Peter just, you know, If it's you, show me. And as Peter walked on the water, he takes his eyes off of Jesus. He looks at the storm around him, and that's when he sinks in the water, but Jesus is there to pull him out.

For me, that's been something that has kind of stuck with me, just going through a lot of readings and things like that. But you when you think of in a sense of how that translates to my life, it's just keep your eyes on Jesus. You're going to be in big moments like this, you're going to be in times that aren't good, times that are great. It's all those times that you need to just keep your eyes on Jesus. It will lead you in the right way. Just don't look at the storm. Look at Jesus, look at him guiding you and leading you in the right direction.

And it's been huge for me. I would not be sitting here without my faith in Jesus, the way that he's been able to use me at a platform to glorify Him and share the testament and just reflect on what he's done in my life, that's how I'm sitting here today. Thank you. That's a great question.

**Q. What's been the message in the locker room all week?**



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AIDEN FISHER: All week? For me, I've just been telling the guys, I just need one week. I need one week of your everything. Every distraction, every single thing that can take your mind off of this game, I promise it will be there after. It will be even better after if we can just get a week of everything you have, mental preparation, physical preparation, everything that goes into it. Just give me a week of your everything and we'll reap the benefits after. But just eliminate distractions, be in the moment. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that you have to take advantage of and be in the moment.

**Q. The switch for NFL, who is your game pick, Texans or Patriots?**

AIDEN FISHER: Texans have a great defense. Both head coaches are phenomenal. I saw a clip of Vrabel, and I think it was Milt Williams out there where he got a little roughed up. And that's just, like, really good energy to me. That's going to be a really good game. I love the Texans' defense, but I think I got the Patriots in that one.

**Q. What is one word you would use to describe this season?**

AIDEN FISHER: Surreal.

**Q. What has it meant to be a part of this turnaround and be able to play in the final game of the season?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, I don't know I can use the word surreal. This team is special. We knew that in January, just seeing the guys we brought in, you know, seeing it in spring ball, then the growth into fall camp. It's been so special to be a part of this, not only the turnaround, but just to meet so many different walks of life across my journey, if that's teammates, coaches, people in the community in Bloomington. It's been special.

But we still have a task at hand that we're excited for. But just being a part of this team with these coaches and these players has been everything to me and I'm really proud to be here.

**Q. Pat Coogan has been in this game last year. Has**

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**he shared anything about what this week is like and what that game is like?**

AIDEN FISHER: He's been great with any insight. Obviously he has experience being here before, just giving us the kind of the ins and outs of what he went through last year, what he learned, what he thinks we can be better at, what he thinks could have distracted him a little bit from last year. So he's been a great help not only for this game, but all season he's been phenomenal for us and being able to have that big-game experience, especially as specific as a National Championship, is huge for us.

**Q. What has been your family's reaction to being in the National Championship game?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, they're excited. They get to travel and see a lot of cool places, you know, from L.A. to Atlanta and now here. My sisters, I think, are more excited to see Miami than L.A. and Atlanta, but my mom's, she's been so excited about it. I've gotten a lot of messages this week from her just saying just kind of sit back and reflect for a minute.

Back when I was in high school, I probably never could have pictured, first of all, playing in the Big-10 and then playing in the National Championship, so for me, it's been a week just talking to them and reflecting on a lot of things and then just being in the moment. I think that's their biggest thing for me is appreciate where you are. Your hard work has gotten you here, and just appreciate being here and what led you here.

**Q. What sets the tone in a game defensively like this for you guys?**

AIDEN FISHER: In a game like this, it's just going to be physicality. Both teams are extremely physical. They want to run the ball. We want to stop the run. And then, obviously, outside of that, there's going to be a lot of things that just come down to winning your one-on-ones.

But I think with both of these teams that we have being matched up, it's going to be all about physicality and who is going to continue to deliver the blow, who can throw the most punches while being -- also taking the most punches. At the end of the day, it's just who is more physical.

**Q. You guys have already etched your name in Indiana history forever. On Monday, you have a chance at immortality. Has that begun to sink in at all or do you think it will all hit on Monday when the game kicks off?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, I think for me if, I were to give myself that time to think about the history of it, it would kind

of sidetrack me a little bit from the game itself. Obviously, we know what's at stake. It's the last game of the year. We've earned the right to be here. We deserve it. But for me, it's just another game. It's going to be another game of four quarters of 15-minute football. So it's all about just being in the moment, coming out on top, and doing whatever you have to do to do that is the biggest thing for me.

But obviously, I know the magnitude of this game, I know how much this game carries, but for us, it's just all about one more game with all of our guys, being able to prepare and come out on fire and win the right way.

**Q. We know Coach Cignetti doesn't smile a lot, so I'm going to ask you a fun one. What's the best way to get Coach Cignetti to smile?**

AIDEN FISHER: There's been a couple moments after everybody's kind of gotten on him for not smiling. After the Peach Bowl when we were on the stage, I shook his hand, and I said, How about a smile now? And I still didn't get one, but I got wink, so I got pretty close. But that's just who he is. Maybe after this game when the season's done, I'll get a smile out of him. But it's been funny to see all, like, the memes and everybody saying stuff about it.

**Q. What would be one word to describe Fernando Mendoza?**

AIDEN FISHER: There's a lot of words I could use to describe Fernando. I don't know if I can say a word, but a phrase is just he's the hardest worker in every room he's in. I think he's been so deserving of everything that's come his way just because of the way he works.

One of my favorite stories about Fernando, just to speak to his work ethic, is he locked himself in our facility one time because he was there too late. I think it was, like, 11:30 and he's there watching film, and at a certain point the locks shut off because nobody is in there, and he locked himself in the staircase just because he was there too long. So.

Just funny things like that, but it just speaks to his character and how hard he works. He's watching film, preparing, and sometimes he does it a little too much, just locking himself in a staircase.

**Q. I think Mark Fletcher from Miami is a big part of this game. What have you noticed on film and watching him that you've got to be really aware of?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, he's a great running back. He's a downhill runner. He's physical. He does a great job not

letting one guy tackle him. So when he gets downhill, it's physical, you have to wrap him up, you have to get a lot of hats to the ball. And then he has the breakaway speed when he gets out in the open.

So it's a huge challenge for us, one that we're excited for. And I know for us linebackers, at least, this is why you want to play in these games. You want to play against the best players in the country, and that's how I would describe him, as one of the best players in the country.

**Q. The physicality of this team is something that has stood out at every round. Where does that come from with this group?**

AIDEN FISHER: I think it's just how much -- or how hard we want to play for each other. We know that if you can continue to be the more physical team, it's going to wear down a team. I describe it to the linebackers pregame every time, is nobody wants to get hit in the mouth over and over and over again. So what I tell them is you throw the punches and when it looks like the guy's done, throw one more and make sure.

So it's just about being physical, playing for your brothers as hard as you can, and we know eventually if you can out-physical a team, it will chip away at them, and you'll come out on top.

**Q. Two years ago did you feel like you had to take on a leadership role because you knew the system, you knew the coaches? And how have you balanced being a new guy with being kind of a voice who could provide some leadership?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, I think for me, when I first came in, I had the familiarity with the coaches, the scheme, everything that was involved in that. But for me, our first workout, guys were just kind of looking around, looking for somebody that was going to step up and lead.

In my sophomore year, I stepped up a little bit into it, but we also had a lot of older guys that kind of had that vocal leadership already going. For me, it was just about -- it was my time to do it. These guys were looking around and needed somebody to do it. I kind of felt it was a gravitation from everybody else. But I mean, these guys have been the reason I've been able to do that. They respond extremely well. We talk about it all the time. Sometimes you're a good cop sometimes, sometimes you're a bad cop, and when I first got here, it was a lot more bad cop, which is hard as a new guy.

But I think at the end of the day, they all saw the fire I had, the desire I had to just -- I want to win and I want to be

really good at what I do, but I think they all appreciated that. It was something new to the Indiana culture after the last couple years of down years. So we had a group of guys that were hungry to win, and I was excited to kind of bring that to this team, and everybody kind of gravitated towards it a little bit.

**Q. Is part of being a bad cop reassuring guys to stick with it, I know this is hard, I know you might not get it right now, but stick with it because I know it works? Is that part of the message of being a bad cop?**

AIDEN FISHER: Absolutely. When I say bad cop, it's more so just kind of getting on people a little bit just with the details. It's a standard that we talk about, the expectation, and I wasn't willing to kind of let that slip just because we're in a learning curve. But just letting them know, like -- I think every one of our guys knows that if I'm doing that, it's out of the goodness of my heart, that I just want to be great at what I do, I want you guys to be great at what you do.

And I think that's why it's been able to be communicated effectively. It's just because it's not coming from a bad place. I just want to win that bad. I want to be the best in the country that bad. And everybody here is like-minded, so everybody kind of agreed with that. And they get on me sometimes if I'm not on my Ps and Qs, and I appreciate that more than anything. So it's all about just how bad you want to win, what are you going to do to sacrifice, what are you going to do to step out of your comfort zone to make sure that I'm communicating effectively, but the point's getting across and it's not in a way that's demeaning to anybody.

**Q. What would you say -- I know you guys don't like to think much about the future, but what would you say about this linebacker group that's going to be filling your shoes next year?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, I'm extremely confident in the guys that we have right now and the guys we're bringing in. I had a couple conversations with the freshmen that are coming in. They're all great people and they're all going to be great players. You can kind of tell the way they're wired. It's just the way we recruit people. They're all kind of like-minded like the guys we have.

But to talk about the guys we have, Rolijah Hardy and Isaiah Jones, it starts with those. Then you have Kayden Turner, you have Jett Utzinger, Kaden McConnell. You have PJ Nelson is going to come back. There are a lot of keys -- or a lot of guys in that room that are going to step up make and a lot of big plays for a really long time. I'm excited for them. I hope I left a mark to leave them with

something, but I would be extremely, extremely proud of those guys. And Indiana fans, you're not going to be missing much. Those guys are going to be unbelievable.

**Q. Have you given any thought much to the history that this team has already made coming off a historic season last year?**

AIDEN FISHER: No, I haven't. My mom kind of gets on me a little bit sometimes because I don't do that. But for me, I'm one game away from being able to reflect on it, and I'll do it after this game. But to me, I just want to get on to the next thing, and this National Championship is the next thing and the best thing for us.

After this game, I will definitely sit down and reflect, but right now, I think I'm so in the moment and I'm so focused on this game and I just want to win this game that it's been hard to kind of reflect on that. But I do know how much this team means to the Bloomington community and to Indiana as a state itself. I would be a fool not to recognize that. Our fans do a great job of letting us know they appreciate us.

**Q. What about what Coach Cignetti has built makes that success sustainable for 2026 and beyond?**

AIDEN FISHER: It's Coach Cignetti. He's going to be successful regardless what the year is. He's done a great job in the portal. Some of the guys I've seen come in are just like, wow. He's done great job. And the guys that are developing and stepping up now, I could speak firsthand of it. Rolijah Hardy and Isaiah Jones have stepped up and were All-Conference players for us.

So the track record they have of development, bringing guys in, getting them to play at a high level, it's just going to continue. And that's not just the linebackers. That's every position we have. Indiana's -- they won't go anywhere any time soon.

**Q. All year long you guys have made it clear that you don't really care what the outside noise is. You keep it all internal. What as a leader have you done this week to help the team as a whole block all this noise? Because it's at an all-time high right now.**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, no doubt. I don't have any social media right now. I have Instagram that I'll check occasionally, just with certain things going on right now for me. I deleted Twitter. I deleted all the other stuff.

And I tell our guys, I just need one week. I need one week of your everything. It's been no different all year. Our preparation has been at a high level. But one week of

whatever's distracting you right now, I promise you it will be there after this game, and if we do what we need to do, it will be even better after this game with the distractions. So I just need one week of absolutely everything, your focus, your energy, your intent. Everything that you have, I just need it for one more week, and then whatever you want to be distracted by, let it happen after this week. But that's been my message is just one week of your absolute everything. We'll reap the benefits of it if that's what we do.

**Q. How would you say the defense has kind of evolved these last couple years under Coach Haines?**

AIDEN FISHER: It's been unbelievable to see. I joke around with Coach Haines all the time about the way this scheme has evolved and grown. I remember making jokes with him at JMU just about running different coverages, and he would just kind of make jokes back, and then we started doing it.

Just the way our defense has grown, not only from what we run, but how we run it, the presentations we give to other teams. And then just the way he calls games is unbelievable. He's a wizard when it comes to defense. But this defense has grown so much, not only because of the scheme we do, but because Coach Haines has grown as a person and a coach to be able to be such an effective teacher. And he has the right guys under him that do the exact same thing. They're teaching guys the right thing, and not just our scheme knowledge, but football knowledge in general.

I think half the time that we're playing a team we kind of know what they're running half the time just with our preparation and what we're doing. It's been special to see. Coach Haines has grown so much as a coach and a person that it's been fun to play under him for the last four years.

**Q. How would you just describe the bond the JMU guys have? D'Angelo was talking a little bit about it. It kind of shows other guys at smaller schools you can do it. But, like, what is it like the fact that you guys all started at a lower level, now here you are in a National Championship?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, it's been special. Those JMU guys, I've been close with for a really long time. We still have some guys that are still there, and now they're transferring other places. For them, I know it's, okay, our best friends just did it at Indiana. Why can't we do it? I think that's something huge that we kind of left a mark on with JMU.

But the relationship I have with the guys here, even ones



that graduated last year, they're extremely tight, extremely personal friendships. Now I couldn't tell you a difference between me and my JMU guys here or me and my Indiana guys. Everybody's meshed together so well. It's been special.

But those JMU you guys will hold a really special place in my heart being able to come from that level to producing here at a high level. So it's been very special to be a part of.

**Q. How did it work when coach said he was going to Indiana? Ponds came later on, but a bunch of you guys went with coach. Did coach sit down and say, Hey, I'm going to Indiana? How did that work that you guys followed him?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, when Coach Cignetti got the job a lot of us had a lot of uncertainty on our hands, especially staying at the place we were at. So once we all entered the portal, then we started to hear from the coaches, started to hear from Coach Cignetti again, Coach Haines, all of them. But once we hit the portal, we kind of got the communication started again. It was a no-brainer for me.

**Q. Why?**

AIDEN FISHER: I mean, the development that I had, the growth that I've had as a player and a person with this staff. And I trust Coach Cignetti's plan. He has a blueprint to win. I know a lot of people really doubted him coming to Indiana, who was historically not a great football program. But it was just about trusting him, trusting that he was going to bring in the right people, which he did, and the coaches that I was able to flourish under at JMU.

**Q. What was your recruitment like? Did you have any high majors out of high school?**

AIDEN FISHER: Not in high school at all. It came down to two programs in Virginia. It was Old Dominion, James Madison. Obviously I chose to go with Coach Cignetti. I love winning football games. I didn't do a lot of it in high school, but that was something I wanted to be a part of. And just Coach Haines was, I mean, obviously he was huge in my recruitment. So just knowing that I could play linebacker and be successful in a defense that the linebackers flourish in.

**Q. I remember I talked to you at the 2024 Big-10 media days, and I asked you, What are you looking forward to most about Indiana. And you said, To prove myself inside of a conference like the Big-10. Now competing for a National Championship, the nucleus of this defense, do you mind reflecting on this journey a little**

**bit before your final game?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, my mom brought that up the other day, just about where I came from, the things that I had on my mind, why did I want to come here, what did I feel I had to prove. And I still feel that way, but it's been a special journey that I think has been a testament to not only my faith in Jesus Christ, but just a belief I had in myself to do this. I think I can speak for a lot of guys when it comes down to that, just believing in ourselves, believing in the plan that we had set in place for ourselves. But it's been nothing short of special. I didn't realize how much of a decision this would be for me to just come to Indiana. I mean, it changed my life. I said it before, and I said it to my mom the other day, it's the best decision of my life, not only as a football player, everything has been great. Everything's -- I would be lying if I said it went according to plan. But how much I've grown as a player and a person, it's been unreal, and I'm so blessed to be here and in crimson and cream and playing for Indiana.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Malachi Toney. What have you seen from him in film and what will be the keys to slowing him down?**

AIDEN FISHER: He's a game breaker. He's extremely talented. Such a special player. You have to know where he's at all times. He really can do it all. You don't really talk about receivers all the time that can throw the football. But, I mean, his speed, his quickness, his route running, he's elite at every level. And to see a young guy doing it this fast is special. But we have to know where he's at all times. He's a special player that can really break a game if you let him.

**Q. Playing against Carson Beck. Can you talk about that.**

AIDEN FISHER: He's a really good player. He's seen a lot of football. He's special. He can make plays on the ground or in the air. When you go against a veteran quarterback like that, they do a much better job at deciphering coverages and blitzes and things like that. So we're going to have to do a lot to kind of keep him on his toes. But he's a special player that's led them this far. He's been great all year. We just have to do a great job of kind of confusing him, kind of get in his head a little bit. But he's a great player.

**Q. Everybody talks about Indiana's offense, what do you want people to know about Indiana's defense?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, this defense is special. I think we've done a great job all year. I think it's just the way we play with each other and how well we've meshed together



this far. Those offensive guys they deserve the credit when you have the Heisman sitting to my right, and then a phenomenal O line and elite weapons at running back and receiver and tight end. So they get the credit, deservedly so, but this defense is just put our heads down and work, blue collar guys, just want to be the more physical team week-in and week-out. We just love what we do. We love to execute at a high level and communicate. We're excited for one more opportunity together.

**Q. Going into that Rose Bowl against Alabama there were a fair amount of people picking against you. Did you guys take any extra motivation from that and then what was the key to kind of doing what you did against them?**

AIDEN FISHER: For us I think we get doubted every week. It's something we have kind of grown accustomed to when you're wearing an Indiana logo at this point. But for us every game is kind of the same for us. You prepare the same way. You go out there and execute and communicate the same way at a high level. And it's been special to be a part of.

But the Alabama game in specific, we knew we were going against one of the most prestigious universities, when it comes to football especially. We all had that chip on our shoulder that we get another opportunity to go out there and prove it. I think we did a great job executing. And, honestly, our fans in that game were the difference maker. That stadium felt like a home game and it was special to play in front of 'em.

**Q. What has Coach Cignetti done to keep you guys focused as you've gone through all the kind of this throughout the playoffs?**

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, for us I think we're so accustomed to just going to the next game, being in the moment, and then we have an extremely veteran and great leadership-based team. The guys all sitting right here on this row have done a great job of just, we can't sit back and think about that last game a lot, it's on to the next. We have a great opportunity in front of us, Coach Cignetti has made that very clear, and so have the guys that have been part of the senior leadership.

**Q. That whole process that he has, it sort of sounds like what Coach Saban used to preach at Alabama. Has he mentioned that any of that came from him or has he mentioned any lessons that he may have learned coaching under Coach Saban?**

AIDEN FISHER: He's reflected on how much he's learned by Coach Saban, but I think this is his own blueprint and a

proven one with a great track record. It's been his process, one that he's kind of grown and developed, but it's one that works. So he's done a great job. He's the best head coach in football, and he's just a phenomenal person to play for.

**Q. You guys are no stranger to facing talented opposing offenses. What is it about Miami that makes this another challenge for you on Monday?**

AIDEN FISHER: Miami's phenomenal on offense. They have a great O-line that's big and physical. They want to run the football. They have a veteran quarterback that's seen a lot of football that does a great job. Obviously they have weapons everywhere. Running back is elite. Receivers are elite. Tight ends are great. And obviously they have Malachi Toney who has done a phenomenal job as a freshman. So for us it's just going to be about being more physical. We're going to have to stop the run. And I think it's two teams that aren't willing to break in that aspect. They want to run the ball, and we want to stop the run. And then when it comes down to playing the pass, we do a great job communicating, recognizing where different players are and different things like that. But it's one that we're excited for, another opportunity to go out there and prove it.

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