

# CFP National Championship: Miami vs Indiana

Saturday, January 17, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

## Indiana Hoosiers

## Isaiah Jones

### Pregame Press Conference

**Q. Isaiah, is there any way to tell the general public that the defense seems at all underrated this because the offenses was scoring so many points and Fernando was so visible?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, as the defense when you have an offense like that that's exciting. When the offense is scoring that many points, if the defense gets -- not overlooked, but maybe not emphasized as much, that's fine with us. Being a defensive player when you're out there and you have an offense like this, that makes you want to play hard and get the ball to them and get those turnovers and three-and-outs.

Because we know the more our offense has the ball the more we're going score, the more games we're going to win.

**Q. Reflecting back on that time when Cig arrived here and I had to chose between leaving or staying, if you could talk to that guy back then about the ride these last two years have been --**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah.

**Q. -- what would you tell him?**

ISAIAH JONES: I would say up to this point it's the best decision he's made in his entire life. Staying to be a part of this and be a part of this program, this team, this brotherhood, being under Coach Cig and Haines, I think that's what's really accelerated my game and turned me into the player I am today.

It's probably the best decision I made.

**Q. Isaiah, what gives you guys the confidence just based on this whole season that you guys can get it done on Monday night?**



# NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI 2026

ISAIAH JONES: That just goes back to our preparation. We have a quote on the linebacker board that says confidence comes from preparation. You don't win these games on Mondays or during the season on Saturdays. These games are won on the Monday night before, the week before, that Tuesday that Thursday, those practices when you're beat up and hurt; film room, the extra hours you take.

That's when we believe the game is won. That's where we got our edge all season, is we can outwork the other team in the film room. When we go to the field we know you're going to play fast and violent and fly around.

On the mental side, that's where we think we take the advantage.

**Q. I'm the guy who saw your grandfather in the parking lot. You think he'll stay an IU fan or go back to Ohio State after you're gone?**

ISAIAH JONES: I think after the last few years he'll remain an IU fan.

**Q. A lot of credit being given to the offensive side of the ball, but the defensive side of the ball have been playing really good this year. You got a lot of good guys up front. How do ya'll stop this running game with Miami this week?**

ISAIAH JONES: That just goes back to our fundamental. We have guys on or D-line that are really talented. They play hard. So we have heard all the sighs, comments, and all that. We try to turn that off and we like turned off the media earlier in the week.

But we know if we go out there and we play like how we play all year, teams have had a hard time running the ball on us. Probably the best rushing attack we'll face. Fletcher is a good running back. Their O-line is big. There are receivers on the outside that we have to also take care of good in space.

We feel if we play fast, physical, and it's six seconds of play and so we -- each play if we go out there and do our

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job we'll like the reaction.

**Q. Does size really matter though? Is it the fight of the dog or the size of the dog?**

ISAIAH JONES: You know, I guess I could let you -- you watch the film from a few weeks ago when all those teams had that's giant, massive offensive lines and just look at the rushing attack from them. See what it says.

**Q. Can you explain to me how rewarding it is for all you guys who had to live through the lows and now getting to enjoy the highs? How rewarding is this for all you guys?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean I can still -- I mean, I'm still -- all the guys that stayed are my best friends, including the guys that came in the last two years. But just being a part of something where you didn't see much success and then you see all your hard work transpire to this, it's pretty special and exciting to see.

When you go from a team that is winning only four games, three games, to winning in a year -- almost doubling those wins, it's pretty exciting. You know, it feels good to see your work and see your hard work and all the preparation you did finally come to fruition.

**Q. What would a championship mean to you and mean to this program?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, you know, first off, this fan base deserves it. Obviously these last few games you've seen our fan base show out. Seeing that makes me happy just as much as celebrating in the locker room with my teammates and coaches.

To this fan base and team it would mean a lot. We know what this game means we know to the state of Indiana, to the country. To be from a team that everyone might have overlooked to go out there and win the whole thing, it's special.

We don't think our journey is done. I don't think anyone is satisfied or content with where we are right now. No one gets trophies for making it to the championship. We know we got one more game to finish.

**Q. A lot has been made about how Coach Cignetti doesn't smile a lot. What do you think is the best way to get Coach Cignetti to smile?**

ISAIAH JONES: Best way, just do your job and do it with all out effort. I know on the defense if you make some big plays, you get a few turnovers, I think he's smiling inside. I

think everyone knows that. We don't really need him cheesing up and down the sideline for us to know we're doing our job.

We just like to make sure he smiles in the locker room when we're singing that fight song.

**Q. You're somebody that grew up in Big10 country. You were here before Coach Cignetti got here. Is this something that you really fathomed that Indiana could be playing for a national championship when you first committed and even just growing up watching Big10 football?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, I did grow up watching Big10 football. Coming here, you know, obviously every high school athlete's dream is when they commit to their college they're going to take it as far as possible.

Yeah, there is reality with that. At the same time, every kid has a dream, every kid wants to make it to the pinnacle of the sport, and that's where we are right now.

I think what this team does a great job of is we're not satisfied with just making it. I know there are a lot of guys that didn't start Power 4 that are at this spot. That's what makes this team special.

We might not have committed to the team that everyone picked to be the national championship, but when you have guys like that that maybe got overlooked and aren't maybe the highest recruits or don't have stars coming out of high school, we're not satisfied just being here. We want to win the whole thing.

**Q. Your favorite story on D'Angelo?**

ISAIAH JONES: Oh, man, there are some good ones.

**Q. Tell several if you want.**

ISAIAH JONES: I mean, my favorite recent one obviously is that pick six to start the game. That's pretty good. I know there is a few probably -- I'm not going share on the national stage but he's a funny guy. D'Angelo being he doesn't talk like as much as most guys but when he talks it means something. He's pretty funny.

Just the last year specifically he's really opened up with the team a little bit more. So I finally get him to start to crack jokes and just he's being around the guys a little bit more kind of opened up.

So I think this also comes from a player that's maybe younger than some of us. I know I'm a senior and he's

younger than me and Aiden Fisher and all the other guys we hang out with.

Ponds is a character. He's definitely fun. Favorite thing about him is he'll just show up places. If we're out, maybe out getting food, next thing you know he just shows up. So that's like his ability, is he can just show up places and then just disappear without a word.

That's what we joke about with him, is his Irish goodbyes and poof he's there.

**Q. I know you touched on it a little bit before I walked up, but this Indiana fan base has really turned out in the bowl run, this whole season. Looking back to when you first came to IU, is this something that surprises you, that we've seen a sea of red at the Peach Bowl and all the Indiana fans here now?**

ISIAIAH JONES: I mean, even in my first two years here, the previous administration with different success rates, Indiana fans have always been loyal. I think what we're you're finally starting to see is the largest living fan base in the world getting what they deserve. This fan base deserves this. They deserve to be here with us. They deserve to celebrate every win we celebrate.

For me that means a lot. I've said before wearing the Indiana Hoosiers jersey means a lot to me. They're great fans. They travel well as you saw last game. But they deserve this just as much as we do. Being able to give them this opportunity means a lot to me.

**Q. When you talk about this fan base, the alumni base is the biggest in the entire country. We've seen what they did down at the Peach Bowl. Like 95% Indiana and 5% Oregon, Rose Bowl, and then we're hearing that it could be a little bit more Indiana than Miami in Miami. What is it about this fan base that you feel like they travel everywhere, give you that support? What is it about them this makes them so special?**

ISIAIAH JONES: Yeah, this fan base, this is a long time coming for them. There might be fans that have had season tickets for 40 years. I think just being at this opportunity where we are now, I don't think anyone would miss it for the world.

Having them at the Rose Bowl where it felt like a home game, I didn't know it could get better than that. The Peach Bowl is the loudest stadium I ever played in in my life. Being out there on defense my helmet was shaking they were so loud.

So I'm excited to see them show out. I know they'll travel

well to this game. I think it's going to be a statement that it's in Miami, and I think we'll still see a very decent amount of Indiana Hoosiers fans.

**Q. For you, when you look at the offense of Miami, you look a little Carson Beck, the weapons they have, Mark Fletcher CJ Daniels, Malachi Toney, what do you see from them on film and what this matchup could be on Monday?**

ISIAIAH JONES: Yeah, it always starts up front in the trenches. You have to win the line of scrimmage. That's something that we pride ourselves in. You can tell they pride themselves in that as well though. They run the ball well and that gives them success to be able to swing out to the perimeter and let Malachi Toney and some of those receivers make plays.

For us it's back to our day one game plan: Stop the run. After that we can kind of open up the playbook. I think you're going to see a really good offensive line versus a really physical defense, and it's going to be a really good game to watch.

**Q. Traditional football is running the ball well like you said in the trenches and then playing that stout defense. Getting two teams that do that very well, what can you say to that, the culmination of college football is strong running game, two strong defenses?**

ISIAIAH JONES: Yeah, I don't think either of these teams are here for no reason without that right there. In this day and age if you can stop the run and then you have a stout defense and your offense can run the ball, not only is that beneficial for the pass game, but that's demoralizing for a defense or offense.

When you go out there and you can't run the ball or you're just getting the ball run down your face, it's demoralizing. It's not very fun to be on the opposing side of that.

You know, we talk about breaking teams's will. That's what it starts with: Running the ball and stopping the run.

**Q. You've talked about what it would mean for the fans to win the game. What does it mean to you to be playing in the national championship game?**

ISIAIAH JONES: To me, I mean, as a kid growing up watching football, watching Big10 football, you watch the national championships as you grow up. To be here it's surreal. I'm very grateful. I just want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for putting me in a position to be here.

Being able to be in this moment with guys that are my



brothers and will be my friends for life, you know, it's all about the journey with them as well. We've worked really hard to be here. Just to be in this moment, you want to take it all in, but at the same time you got to stay level headed and no moment is too big or too small.

I think it'll really sink in after Monday night when we take care of business and achieve what we want to achieve. But we're just trying to take it all in and stay level headed.

**Q. You've been around some great linebackers. You had Jailin Walker and Aiden Fisher now leaving after this game. What have you learned from them and how are you going step into that role next year?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, what those guys taught me is it's all about consistency and preparation. You can be a great athlete or you can be able to run the fastest 40 and be the biggest guy, what really let's you play fast is defensive play to the top of your level is the preparation throughout the year and then when you get into those game weeks it's about how much film can you watch, what tendency are you going pick up, what's the edge you'll get on the offensive line, quarterback, running back.

It's all a chess game. It's all about who can find one little small edge against the opposition. What I learned from those guys is how important that is. That's what makes or breaks the game. That's what makes you play faster, let's you make those plays in the backfield that maybe you might not be able to if you were a step slower.

**Q. What kind of impact has Aiden Fisher made on you off the field?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, Aiden Fisher, he's just a quality guy, one of my best friends here, if not one of my best friends. So spending a lot of time with him off the field, whether it's football related or not, like I said we watch a lot of film together and kind of in the season and offseason, whether it's getting extra work on the field, bag work, drops, footwork, just about the process. The process is what gets you here.

No one just shows up and plays for a national championship. What I learned most from him is just the process of being of the field, process of every rep matters. Whether that's in June, it's a summer workout and you're going to do extra field work. Whether it's January and you're in the indoor and it's freezing cold, snowing, it's all about the process. What are you willing to sacrifice to get to the spot you're in now?

**Q. Do you have a favorite story about Aiden Fisher?**

ISAIAH JONES: Favorite story about Aiden Fisher? I got more stories than you would want to hear. Favorite story about Aiden Fisher is probably -- man, I can't say all of them. My favorite story is probably just being in the locker room and I can remember after one of our most recent games we both got in there and everyone was celebrating and him and I just had to sit down.

We were dead tired. We had to take off our cleats and pads and just slouched in our chairs and looked at each other and knew we earned that win. I think that was one of the -- my more just meaningful moments. When you play a game and you like are dead tired but you earned that win, that was special.

So that's one of my more memorable moments with him on the field and just knowing you get what you earn.

**Q. Wanted to ask you about staying at Indiana. A lot of your friends and a lot of your teammates went in the portal when Coach Allen was let go. What made you decide to stay? What's been your conversations like with the guys who did leave?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so I just remember when we heard the news no one really knew for certain. But when we heard the news about Coach Cig coming, it's cliché, but I Googled him. I saw the winning track record and very quickly we had a team meeting and I just -- I knew from the first team meeting hearing him talking and address the team.

He talked about process, plan. You follow his plan you trust him, you buy-in 100% completely, you're going like the outcome.

From then on I was sold. Met Coach Haines, talked ball with him. That first few weeks going into the defense, being around the culture that they bring, it was a complete culture shift. At that moment I knew I made the right decision and best decision I made so far to this point in my life.

Being able to stay here and talking with guys that did leave, not going to say that they regret it, still haunts them, but they still text about it and ask how we're doing and kind of wish they were still here with us.

So I mean, still love all those guys and everyone has to make their own decision in life. That's what life is, making decisions and sticking with it.

I'm pretty dang sure I'm glad I stuck with mine.

**Q. One of your former, now current teammates, Louis**



**Moore, did that, went in the portal then came back.**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah.

**Q. Seems like first of all Bloomington has a hold on everybody as a community, as a campus. Second of all, seeing what he had and now has again, how do you think that maybe helps -- first of all, did you guys immediately welcome him with open arms?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah.

**Q. And second of all, how does that make you feel knowing that everybody wants to be a part of this program again?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, I think anyone that's been to Bloomington, anyone that has been on the Indiana football team, been to the state of Indiana, it's a great place to live and be a part of.

With Lou coming back, obviously no one really wanted to see him leave. Like I said everyone has to make their own decisions. This is their life, their choice. He made that decision. I think he's lived with it.

When he came back we all, kind of guys that were here before maybe gave him a little crap and said this is a really different Indiana.

He earned it. He earned his spot back. I think he's realized it is a different Indiana and I think he's -- he would be one to get up here and tell you over and over it's the best decision he's made coming back.

Obviously he's an All-American. Had a great season, has had a great year for us. Just one example of the importance of coming back.

**Q. So you've been at Indiana a few years, had some rough years. What has this season meant in particular to you?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so this season in particular, you know, like I said, everyone's dream is to go to college and win as many games as possible and make it as far as you can.

For me these last two years, especially this year in particular, I feel like just a culmination of all the hard work me and all my teammates have put in, the coaches, everyone that supported me, family.

Because my parents still had to come and support me when I wasn't playing and we were losing games. So just

that support system I had is part of the reason I'm here. My family is my biggest support system. I love them dearly. They're part of the reason I'm still here, too, you know, and still love what I'm doing.

But this season, you know, it's special. But I don't think anyone on our team is satisfied. Like I said we'll be satisfied after Monday when we get the victory.

**Q. Coach Cignetti talked a lot about how this has been his best team at executing his message. What is it about the experience and maturity of this unit that allows you guys to go out and do that?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, we have a lot of veteran players on this team, a lot of guys that have played a lot of snaps. Whether that's being old as we keep seeing that we have the oldest team in America, guys that play a lot of snaps and go out there and know their jobs and how to do your 1/11th. That's what's so important to us.

You don't have to make every single play on the field. Just do your job. When the play comes to you, make the play. If everyone does that, everyone is making plays. That's offense and defense.

No one cares who makes the tackle or gets the touchdown. I think if you've see when someone scores they're swamped by the whole team. When someone on offense scores everyone scores. When someone on defense makes a big play everyone makes a big play.

That's what makes this team special. Mature veteran guys that know their job and know what they're doing, do their role to the best of their ability. We have great coaches that get us in those positions to do that.

**Q. And you talked about that camaraderie. How do you feel that has grown throughout the season?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, throughout the season, so, I mean, one thing that makes the team great in my opinion is you can't just be the same team you were week one, week five, week ten, week 11, week 14.

That's something we do great. We self-reflect a lot and we're always looking to improve and chase that perfect game. And then even if you're on defense and Omar, Charlie Becker or those guys score, we're hyped on the sideline. You might see us. We're running up and down. That's us scoring. That's Indiana Hoosiers. That's our team scoring. That us winning. That's us going up 7 points, 14 points.

It's the same with offense. If someone makes a sack, gets

a pick, get a pick six, that's their points. I mean, they get the ball. So I think it's just a team that feeds off each other, and when we get momentum going and we have guys making plays, it's hard to stop.

**Q. The traditional scheme with Coach Haines typically has two linebackers on the field. He said early on in the season couldn't really keep you off the field. How does to know your defensive coordinator has that confidence in you?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, Coach Haines has supreme confidence in all the linebackers. If you're out there you're out there for a reason. It is nice having that your coordinator, linebacker coach will go out there and publically say that. A lot of coaches won't.

That's just the bond that Coach Haines and us all have in the linebacker room. My bond with Coach Haines has grown tremendously this year. Not that it wasn't great last year. It was really tight last year, but when you're out there and you have another year in the system and you're starting to understand the lingo, the bond grows.

Obviously Coach Haines and I are really close. Having him be able to say that gives me the confidence to go out there and play fast and play -- you know, I got the support of my team and my coaches.

**Q. Have you been able to give any thought to the success this team has already had and the history you all have made?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I think I've heard this before, that it might not have settled in and all of us might not get it. I think there is a little bit of truth to that.

We're all so focused and mission driven that maybe when we do win a big game we might remember it that night. Next thing you know it's, all right, who is next? Whether that's Big10 Championship to the Rose Bowl, Rose Bowl to the Peach Bowl, Peach Bowl to now.

Like I don't even know -- like we all were happy after the Peach Bowl, but we knew this was next. I think the attention quickly shifts. I think that's what makes this team special, is we're not satisfied with the Big10 Championship, a Rose Bowl Championship. All these things are great. We'll reflect on it when we handle business Monday and after the season, ten years from now, 15 years from now.

For us right now we're so goal-oriented and focused on our mission that it's a one-week season and we have a lot of seniors, guys that this means a lot to, so it's how can we win the next game.

**Q. So all season not you guys have preached the next-man-up mentality. Jailin Walker, a lot on the defensive line this year. What does that mean to you guys?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, Coach Cignetti, that's next-man-up mentality. There is a standard to playing on this defense, and if you're going out there -- if you're out there you're out there for a reason. No one is going out there if they have not earned it and the coaches don't believe in them and trust them.

So if you're out there, they know that they're trusted in and believed in. They have everyone's support. So when you have the support of everyone like that and you can play fast, wow, who cares if you make a mistake. Just do it fast and we'll fix you. With the D-line you see that.

I mean, I don't know if you wanted Daniel Ndukwe's game against Oregon, but just exploded. Like that's a guy that maybe didn't see the most playing time during the season, but you go out there in a college football semifinal and you're making plays, strip sacks and blocked punts, that's just a culmination of the standard and next-man-up mentality.

**Q. When did it sort of set in that you guys were going on the road, coming to Miami to play Miami, and then just the thought of having maybe more Hoosiers fans than Hurricanes fans there?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, so I know a bunch of us were watching the Ole Miss-Miami game in the hotel the night before. When we won we obviously knew it was going to be Miami.

That's special to go play a team at their technical home stadium, especially for a game of this magnitude. But then I don't think anyone was really worried about the fan base once we saw what happened in Atlanta. We're excited to see what we're going to get down here in Miami. I think Hoosiers Nation will show out, and it's exciting to go see our fans be in their home stadium like that.

**Q. What is it about Coach Cignetti's system that makes success sustainable this season, next year, two years from now, down the line?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so, I mean, the thing that I think contributes mostly to the success in teams under Coach Cig is the standard. Whether that's coaches, athletic training staff, directors of ops, players, strength staff, assistant strength staff. When you walk in the building it's business and it's winning.

Those are the two things. What are you doing today that is going to take us one step closer to winning. Like I said, you're getting better or worse. There is no staying even. Coach Cig drives that into the coaches and drives that into us. What are you going to do today, whether it's the offseason or the day before a game? How are you going to mentally prepare to get one step better or physically prepare yourself to be one step better than you were when you walked in the building this morning?

When you have someone like Coach Cig that that starts that at the top, you have guys that are constantly increasing their growth of knowledge of game and getting better at the game. I think it shows as we continually improved our game throughout the season.

**Q. You guys the last three games have been showered with confetti, held up a trophy. How do you think that experience over the last month has sort of maybe calmed the nerves so to speak heading into this game?**

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, I know that a lot of people this is new for Indiana football to be in the position it is now, but you have also a lot of guys that weren't here at Indiana the whole time.

It's not like it's something that's a culture shock. It is for everybody outside of the facility. Everyone in that facility knows we have a championship caliber team. We knew that since January 1st last year. We knew we had guys that were special. We had a quarterback coming in that was really special.

And just playmakers all around, offense, defense, corner, receiver, safety, linebacker, D-line. We have guys that are all bought in and all believe the same thing.

And so, yeah, getting showered by confetti is nice. What thing that makes the team so special is the hunger to continually improve. When we're getting showered by confetti it might last that night and the very next day we're thinking, who is next? How are we preparing and gaining that edge to beat the next team?

That's what makes it so special. No one lingers on a previous win or Big10 Championship or Rose Bowl game, Chik Fil A Peach Bowl. For us it's the next game and how are we going to win.

**Q. Regardless of what happens Monday night, it's the season finale. Clearly you're a tightknit group. What does that mean to you?**

ISAIAH JONES: This is the closest team I've ever played on. All these guys are guys that I will stay in contact with the rest of my life. Regardless of the outcome, I think we all have one outcome in mind, and that's that we're all really focused on is that outcome and being able to hoist one more trophy and be showered one more time with confetti.

**Q. So who is the best Imposter player?**

ISAIAH JONES: Next question. (Smiling.)

**Q. You don't have anybody that like would be pretty good at the game of Imposter, who is good or bad?**

ISAIAH JONES: Definitely not Mario Landino.

**Q. I know this team as a whole craves physicality. What do you like about this matchup? What do you like about those challenges and going against Miami, another physical team?**

ISAIAH JONES: Miami is a physical team. That's what got them here. They focus on running the ball. For a team like us that also craves that physicality, we're excited for this matchup.

Not saying the last few teams haven't been physical but we want to see -- you always want to see how good can be you, how physical are you. I think this is the game that's really going show who's the alpha dog, more physical team, who deserves to hoist this trophy. That's going to start in the trenches and who is the most physical and violent team play in, play out.

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