

# CFP National Championship:

## Miami vs Indiana

Monday, January 19, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

### Miami Hurricanes

### Coach Mario Cristobal

### Akheem Mesidor

### Mark Fletcher Jr.

### Rueben Bain Jr.

### Postgame Press Conference

Indiana 27, Miami 21

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions for our student-athletes. Pleased to introduce Rueben Bain, Jr., Akheem Mesidor and Mark Fletcher, Jr.

**Q. Mark, at the end, you spent a lot of time in the end zone. What was going through your thoughts at that moment? I assume looking for your mom. I don't know where she was in the stands. What did you take away from those couple of minutes?**

MARK FLETCHER JR: I was just waiting for my family to come down. I just wanted to see them. They've just been such a great support system, and those were the first people I wanted to go hug after the game, so I was waiting on them to make their way down.

**Q. Akheem and Rueben, on the 4th down touchdown run from their quarterback, can you say what you saw on that play and maybe what y'all thought they may do and kind of how it unfolded from your vantage points?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: They did exactly what we expected and we talked about. It was just miscommunication.

**Q. Rueben and Akheem, you guys had a season this year unlike many defensive end duos have had in college football. What memories will you take with you as you move on to other things?**

RUEBEN BAIN JR: Started everything, even today. From the first time we met each other into the future, we're going to keep continuing to communicate, see each other, talk to



# NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI 2026

each other, this, that and other things. It's been a long journey, long process.

My first year here, he was my mentor. Coming into my second year, it was the same thing, even my third. Now we actually got to live out that dream that we always talked about when I got here. There's a lot of moments that's going to be cherished, a lot of convos to reflect on and some that we'll continue to build on this brotherhood that we got.

AKHEEM MESIDOR: Yeah, this is my brother, man. I seen Rueben grow. I was a true senior when he was a freshman. I've been in his corner since day one. We've been roommates ever since he got here, game day roommates. That's my brother, man. He makes me better, and I'll always be grateful for that. There's nobody else in this world I'd rather play beside.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you want to jump in with an opening statement, then we'll resume questions.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: First and foremost, thanking God for the opportunity to be here today, and really I'd like to recognize these three young men and their teammates for -- they're the best thing that's happened to Miami and the University of Miami in over two decades.

It's not the result we wanted. Credit to Indiana; they're a great football team. But to these guys right here, I couldn't be more proud to be associated with them. I love them. They're absolutely incredible human beings, competitors, resilient, and I want to thank them and the rest of their teammates.

It's a tough one. Tough one to have to eat, but we will. That's it.

**Q. Coach Cristobal, unfortunate ending for Carson with that interception, but can you describe what you saw out of him and overall this season as a prospect and a player?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Same thing we see from a lot of our guys, a lot of resiliency, just continued really tremendous



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work ethic, earned the respect of his teammates, teammates working hard with him. We win together, we lose together. Proud of him.

Like to have that last one back, but again, a lot of the plays made throughout the course of the year from the guys up here on stage to the guys in that locker room got us here to this moment and gave us an opportunity all the way to the end. So proud of him.

**Q. Can you just reflect on the journey that these three guys, especially, but everyone that's been with you since you got here, that you've been on to get from where you came in to now, to this moment?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: They had the guts, the faith and the trust to look at a place that was a complete mess and say, I'm going to be the person, I'm going to be a man of action, and I'm going to make things real, and I'm going to make the University of Miami a prominent program once again and we're going to win and we're going to win big and we're going to change the culture.

That's not easy. A lot of people look at that, they shy away from it. These guys are legitimate big-time human beings. Going to be awesome fathers and husbands and leaders of the community, way beyond football.

I think everybody associated with the University of Miami and really even if you're a college football fan, you've got to be fans of these guys because these guys certainly, they represent the way it's supposed to be done.

**Q. Mario, as a follow-up, it looked like there was some miscommunication on that last throw. Can you take us through what happened there?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It's the right place to go with the ball. Just got to be a little bit further and a little bit farther outside. We didn't connect on it, and turnover.

**Q. Coach, just a couple days ago you talked about the need to be a fighter, to jump into the fight, and taking those steps to build that program, and in the past perhaps sometimes those steps maybe as painful as they are have not been taken appropriately. Is this a painful step in that process, and is it just one more step that you have to take and get through in order to get one more win next season?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I mean, any loss of course is always going to be painful, but I'd like to reflect upon the fact that these guys won 13 games this year and won a postseason playoff game. Got to the playoffs for the first time in Miami history and beat four top 10 teams, beat seven top 25

teams, won the Fiesta Bowl, won the Cotton Bowl, and I'll take full blame, we're one drive short of winning the National Championship.

I don't see anything a negative, but I do see pain in moments like this, and we should if we're a competitor that's worth anything. You feel it and you use it and you give those feelings a direction.

I know the guys coming back will, and I know that the guys moving on will also use that as fuel.

**Q. You talked about the guys who are coming back. Mark finds the end zone twice tonight, Mally gets in there once. I know there's time to get ready for next season, but how good do you feel about the leadership going forward?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think it can't be understated what these guys have done. I can't understate that. The ability to take a team on November 1st that was lower than low and to find a way that every single day hold people accountable, demand the best of them, bring energy and enthusiasm to practice and get the results on a weekly basis, a 1-0 for I think seven weeks straight, it is a testament to what they are. It's a testament to their choice and their determination and being true men of action.

Again, they're the best thing that's happened to Miami, the University of Miami and our community in 25 years.

**Q. Now that you've gone against them and been on the field with them, can you help us get a little insight as to what makes Indiana's defense as effective as they are?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Good players, good scheme. They're mature, they're older. They understand how to leverage the ball, communicate really well. They certainly had a really good first half against us. A lot of credit to them.

I thought in the second half we were starting to generate a lot of yards and points and whatnot and felt at the end we were generating some good chunk plays, and then credit to them. They came up with a big play right there where it counted at the end.

But they're a very well-coached operation, very high-end players. I know that sometimes we lose sight of the fact that guys develop. They've been developed well both at James Madison and here, and credit to them. They won the game.

**Q. Mario, you mentioned players using what happened**

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**tonight as fuel. Knowing how much you have put in, how much will you use this as fuel as you move forward to try and get a championship for Miami?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I mean, it's not about me. It doesn't matter the day or the time, I'm always going to be really, really motivated because this is not for me, this is for the University of Miami. Our drive and determination has always been off the charts, and it's fueled by them. I want to do well by them, and the fact that they leave here without the national title in hand, that's really hard to deal with that.

Again, if you're worth a damn as a competitor, you take all that stuff and you give it a direction, and the direction is to always let these guys know wherever they are in life, always got their back, always a phone call away no matter what, like my coaches always have been for me.

And to the ones that follow them, they will understand what the standard is, and they'll be held to it. They'll be held to it, to that standard by these guys wherever they are, but they also learned it now, and now it's got to be put into action. You don't just automatically return to a game like this just because you're mad.

I think that's the biggest misconception in sports; well, they almost got there, they'll be back next year. That's a bunch of full. You've got to improve from a roster standpoint, a regimen standpoint, discipline, everything, and move forward, and these guys have set the standard to help us get there.

**Q. For Mark, what was the message from Coach in the locker room, especially because you are coming back and you can kind of help lead the new group of guys that are going to be coming in and some of the other guys who are going to try and help get you guys a championship?**

MARK FLETCHER JR: He just told us let's get back to work. This one hurt, and it's supposed to hurt. Like he's been saying, if you're worth a damn as a competitor, it's going to hurt. But the people coming back, we know what it takes, and we've just got to go back to work. That's all we do.

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