

Indiana University Football Media Conference

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Justice Ellison

Press Conference



Q. I've asked a lot of the guys about this but you have all talked about kind of the belief you had, the ambition you had, all year long, believing you could be a team that could play at this level on this kind of stage. But was there a moment for you at any point in the process when something happened, whether it was a game, whether it's things you were seeing in practice, whatever, that almost kind of validated that in your mind that it kind of went from that's our ambition to I know now this team is capable of what we thought we were capable of?

JUSTICE ELLISON: Without a doubt. We had a scrimmage in the summertime, and the offense, we kind of like -- that was our second scrimmage going into the season and we didn't look too great.

And so we had an offensive meeting, just players, and you know, that was a moment that I knew that we were going to be a very talented team. I knew that we were going to be a team that had fought through a lot of adversity and be really resilient.

So we had a team meeting and we let everybody know, hey, I believe in you, you believe in me, and we can do it together. We don't need the media and everyone else to believe in us, but we believe in each other.

That moment right there, me and a few other guys, we led the meeting and we locked the doors. We had a heart to heart and we went around the room, explained to each other what do we want to get out of this season? Why are we here? Why come to Indiana?

So we had that in the back of our mind every time we step on that field.

Q. Where did you have that meeting?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It was in here actually. We cut off this part and this was this side, the offense side.

Q. You've been more willing to be reflective than a lot

of players. What has the last couple weeks been like, and how have you framed it in the context of your career and your life just reaching this moment?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It's been amazing for me. I've been dreaming of this moment since a little boy and my mom and dad always told me take advantage of every opportunity, be thankful for everything you have and cherish the moment, whether it's an interview, whether it's a run, whether talking to the team or I'm in the film room or even getting treatment.

Just me accepting and taking it all in. You can't play football forever. I've just been enjoying it, and that's the reason why I came here. I came here for this. I came here to win. I came here for the playoffs. I came here to do it with guys that I haven't done a lot of football with.

I'm just thankful and that's the overall message.

Q. Just in terms of the opponent that you guys have on this stage, it has been decades since Indiana has played Notre Dame. What is the excitement either in the facility or on campus and in the community at-large about getting to play the Irish again?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It's amazing. Best of Indiana. When they made that selection, I was on the phone with my mom and Dad and they told me who we were playing. I was excited. I was so excited. It's an opportunity. Our best against their best. They are ranked; we're ranked. They have a great program and we have a great program.

Just to be able to duke it out at and compete a high level, that's something traditional and I'm excited. Hopefully we can make this a great rivalry and we play them every year.

Q. After the Ohio State game, a lot of the talk was about keeping Kurtis Rourke on his feet and keeping him protected. How in preparation for this Notre Dame game have the running backs been involved in protecting him and keeping the pocket clear?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It's just about technique and trusting your eyes, you know. You play on the road it's a little



tough because a lot of times, one, they are able to jump the snap count. They are able to do different things that kind of throw the offense off.

We have been doing a really good job as just the running backs of just who do we have to block? What's our assignment? Communicating the with O-Line. Because at the end of the day we have to be on the same page as them.

When you are both on the same page, after that, it's about technique and your athletic ability to take over. For us bits being focused. You're going to have mistakes. I knew that was going to happen. We're going to hit some adversity down the road. I knew that was going to happen.

We're going to do everything that we can do and I know we're going to execute come Friday.

Q. A lot of guys we've talked to today have brought up faith and confidence, a lot of similar words. How easy does it make it for you as a leader that a lot of the guys share the same mentality and faith in God?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It's amazing. Being an older guy, I've always challenged myself, coming into this year, to make sure -- I'm going to let people know that, hey, man, you've got to believe in something that you cannot see. You know, when you're able to have that mindset it doesn't matter what anybody else telling you you can't do.

There's a lot of people who have a lot of careers and they have gone and done a lot of wonderful things in the world and that's because they believed in themselves first. I've been trying to harp on all the guys like maybe we haven't had a great play, maybe we haven't had a great series, but we have to stay in the middle, can't get too high, can't get too low, and continue to be playing.

That's been my motto and my mindset, and I'm going to continue encouraging the guys whether we up 74-4 or it's a tie game 13-13 at the half.

Q. The running back room has been key to this team's success all year but how have you seen it grow?

JUSTICE ELLISON: I would say attention to detail. Coach John Miller, he's been telling us it's great to look at the good things you do, but really think about the things that you could do better. There's always things you can critique in your game.

That's what makes us I would say professionals in a way. We are always trying to grow. Everybody has something to work on, no matter how great of a game you had the day

before or maybe how bad of a game you had. It's attention to detail and guys are hungry to get better. You're seeing it week-in and week-out, you know what I mean. So that's why the running backs are able to show up every single week.

Q. Obviously you're at a different school this year, but how much can you take from playing Notre Dame last year at Wake Forest and apply to this matchup?

JUSTICE ELLISON: I would say when we played them last year, it was -- I soaked it all in. It was an historical game as well. Wake Forest was playing -- Sam Hartman was playing his old school, Wake Forest. Being in the atmosphere with a packed crowd, I think it was one of the largest crowds they had had in a really long time when we played them.

I took it all in. I was thankful. We went out there and was pretty much tied for are the majority of the game and they ended up stretching out the lead so it happened. I knew I was going to come back. I knew I was going to come back and get another shot at it. To see it all full circle I think is amazing.

Q. With Coach Cignetti leading the way this season, he's sweeping all the National Coach of the Year awards; just what's it been like playing for him as a head coach, and has he stuck out to you that he's having a National Coach of the Year-type season?

JUSTICE ELLISON: Definitely. I was telling somebody the other day, he's taught me how to be a man. You know, be the same guy every single day. A lot of people want to work with you. A lot of people want to have you in the head of their offense. A lot of people want to look up because you come off the evident single day the same guy, who wouldn't want be with that guy. Same guy, no matter positive or negative that you had the day before.

You know, accomplishing the great moments and also be being able to add on to the adversities. He's a guy that I watch all the time and I kind of see how he handles when we do well and we don't do well. Coach Cignetti has taught me so much in one year. I wanted him to be my coach back in high school but I ended up taking my time to Wake Forest. But now it's full circle. I'm thankful to be at a place with Coach Cignetti for sure.

Q. After Nebraska you mentioned the idea of elevating the brand. Have you elevated it and is there any extra motivation considering all you guys have ahead of you now?

JUSTICE ELLISON: Definitely. The history has been



made already but we have much more to do. When I first got here I wanted to leave a legacy, you know, be a part of something bigger than me and we're doing it as a team. You know, it's not me but it's the team and I'm so excited and happy to do more. People kind of say, like, oh, don't you get warm fuzzies a little bit that you've done a little bit. But we are staying focused in the moment. I have plenty of time down the road to look back on what we've done. But right now, it's time to lock in and stay focused. Yeah, it's been great.

Q. Notre Dame is one of the better teams in the country at forcing turnovers and you guys have been good at avoiding turnovers. Is there anything you've done this week, working with the slip-skin footballs, anything like that, and how do you replicate when the weather conditions today are not the same as what you'll get on Friday?

JUSTICE ELLISON: It's pretty much your details, squeezing the football, protecting the quarterback. You keep up -- that's going to eliminate those turnovers. As a running back, you know, not even just the running back but the whole team, the whole program, you might have some issues here and there.

But you know, you've got to be able to squeeze the ball and be able to run hard at the same time and have low pads. All those details go into the play about protecting the football. They are a team that wins off turnovers. We go in there on Friday and take care of that, I know that we are not going to have any trouble down the road.

So I'm excited for the opportunity. I know the guys are, too. Focus on those details and we'll be able to come out on top.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...