

# Indiana University Football

## Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Zach Horton

### Press Conference



**Q. Coach Cignetti and Mike Shanahan talked about the revamped red zone offense, and you were with them at JMU. This year's red zone plays, is it more aggressive?**

ZACH HORTON: From last year, JMU compared to this year, I would say it's getting -- I think we're more aggressive. I just see ourselves going for it more on fourth downs compared to last year. Definitely see us being more physical this year compared to last year. That's really about it. Calling the same things. Seen everything since then.

**Q. I've asked everybody this, but you guys have talked since the beginning of the season about just the standards you've held yourselves to, the ambitions you've had and the belief that this team could be basically on this stage, playing in the playoff, playing for a National Championship. Was there a moment for you, though, where it almost kind of went from ambition or the goal to something that you just looked around and because of what you were seeing, the way you were performing, the way your teammates were performing, whether it was in a game in, practice, whatever, you just said, this isn't just like an expectation, I know we can do this because I'm watching it happen in front of me?**

ZACH HORTON: It was pretty early for me, because I have a full belief in Coach Cig and the staff and everything they do. So just following them from JMU to IU, I knew from the get-go that whatever we do is going to be special. I knew that we were not going to be far behind or there would be much catching up that we needed to do.

I know Cig is going to get the people that he wants and he's going to run a tight business and everybody is going to follow along. He's going to get everybody to buy in and do everything that a coach could do. I knew from the spring when I got here we were going to do something special and they were going to see something they have never seen before.

**Q. Coach Cignetti described you as a blood and guts type of player earlier in the season. When do you think you acquired those traits in your game and where do you think that comes from?**

ZACH HORTON: I've been playing the same way since I've been able to play. I would just say it came from, I guess, my family. I mean, how I was raised everything and I was taught. Just playing backyard football with my brother and the guys and always just taught to be tough. You know, you're representing a lot, not just you, but other people, so be careful what you do and just always play hard and smart.

**Q. What's the season been -- how rewarding has this been for you personally with the journey that you've had on the field moving high schools and then transferring colleges, lightly recruited? How rewarding has this season been for you?**

ZACH HORTON: It's been pretty fun and rewarding. Like you said, transferred high schools and transferred to college and was under-recruited from high school. For me to be able to be on this stage and my senior year to be playing for the College Football Playoffs, it's such a special thing to be a part of. It's truly been a blessing and I'll never take it for granted.

**Q. I wanted to ask you a question on Kurtis Rourke, top rated guy and top in Heisman voting, and you've played with him and you're around him all the time. What are the things that we don't see that make him as consistently good as he is?**

ZACH HORTON: I see him always being calm. He's always calm, and he's always learning from his mistakes, and he takes coaching really well. That's what I notice when he's on the field.

He's a great guy, too. He's just a good leader all around. He's always encouraging us. Always picking up the energy. Yeah, he makes a lot of plays for us but even when he's out on the field he does a lot for us and he's always keeping us confident and being a great leader.

**Q. Assuming your family will be there; how special will it be to play in the College Football Playoff with your family in the stands?**

ZACH HORTON: I mean, they have -- they haven't missed a game since this whole beginning of the season, and even when I was at JMU. I'm grateful for them. I'm glad that they are still healthy and be able to move like they are still be able to travel. For them to travel to Notre Dame and play at Touchdown Jesus, it's a special thing. For my parents to be there for the whole season means a lot to me.

**Q. Both Justice and Jailin who were just in here mentioned you specifically both with the offense and defense helping them out in practice. What does it mean to you to have that effect on your fellow teammates in getting ready for this playoff game?**

ZACH HORTON: That's what our whole team does. We just all make each other better. I mean, it's hard to block our defense, and I hope -- and I tell them, I hope I make you better by me trying to block them.

That's what we're all preaching since the beginning of season, trying to make each other better. Just go out there Friday and try to play to the best of our ability.

**Q. Notre Dame is good at forcing turnovers. How much have you guys emphasized ball security during practice this week and what do you do to -- it's always important, but how do you re-emphasize it game-to-game?**

ZACH HORTON: Just got to keep in mind have a good tuck on the ball. We've been doing the same thing since the beginning of the season and since the whole season started, just really preaching it. Just making sure we have good ball security whenever we have the ball. Just be careful with the ball. Just basically doing the same thing, I would say.

**Q. After Ohio State you mentioned that when you watched that film, it was hardly even you guys, right? When you kind of look back on that and the magnitude of what lies ahead, is it almost motivation for you to show people who you really are?**

ZACH HORTON: Yeah, that we can play in these situations and that we can play in these type of games. Watching the Ohio State game that wasn't us. We felt like we have a lot to prove and that we are ready for these big-time games and that we can play no matter where we are at, and we can really stay confident.

**Q. As you look at the season you've had this year, what has prepared you for this moment on Friday night, a moment as big as the playoffs?**

ZACH HORTON: To keep everything the same. Just being, you know, fast, physical, relentless, and sticking to our brand of ball and just doing what we do best. Just sticking to the small things.

**Q. Jailin Walker was in here talking about how much of a family and brotherhood this team has. How much has that helped you over the course of the season and how much will it help with Notre Dame?**

ZACH HORTON: Just like any team if you're really tight with your teammates you're going to be there for each other. That's really what we've been this whole year. It's hard for teams that bring in a lot of transfers, but within minutes and moments in practices, we all connected as one. It's huge for games like this knowing we have each other's backs regardless and that we'll always be there for each other.

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