

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Fernando Mendoza

Press Conference



Q. It has been obviously a long season, of course. I imagine it's been a crazy couple of weeks with the Big Ten Championship game, with the trip to New York. How beneficial for you for this team is just going to be having a little bit of time -- not off, but a little bit of time where things power down and everyone can sort of decompress once you're done in this room?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I think it's great because our team has worked so hard throughout the season. We're 13-0, and I believe that we've earned these couple bye weeks here. Not only selfishly, I'm going to say it's great for myself because we want to let this bad boy sink in and my teammates who also went to New York, let all of us recover a little bit.

So we don't have a game this upcoming Saturday. However, I think it's a great honor to have a bye week, and we still have great momentum going into the College Football Playoff, and I think it's going to be a great opportunity to rest our bodies and stay sharp on our fundamentals.

Q. During the ceremony, obviously you met former winners. Anybody there that you were really excited to meet or left an impression? And what was the message from those former winners what it means to represent that not only on the field but off the field?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, in my speech I made sure to include that I promise to carry the Heisman name with responsibility, honor and humility because I know how many people care about it and I know what it stands for a lot of people.

Hearing the stories from those guys and seeing how much that fraternity and how prestigious it is and how much it means to them has only made myself honor it and mean more to myself.

Those guys have said that every single year it goes on, the trophy means more and more to them, so I look forward to that experience, as it means a lot to me now, so I can only

imagine how much it's going to mean 10 years down the road. As those guys said, it's only exponentially gone up.

There's so many guys that it was fantastic meeting that weekend. There's so many. Just to name a few, Tim Brown, Doug Flutie, Tim Tebow, Crouch, Ty Detmer, Eddie George, all those guys and more, Gino Torretta and Danny Wuerfful, Coach Spurrier, all those guys. I'm missing so many, but all those guys were fantastic.

They gave me a lot of advice, gave me a lot of good advice. Those guys are legends of the game, and to be rubbing shoulders with them is an honor and doesn't feel real.

Q. Fernando, the Heisman circus has kind of moved into the past for you now. How do you turn the page mentally to look forward to the Rose Bowl? You do have two weeks to get ready for it, but like you said, you like to watch football and decompress that way. How do you start getting ready a little bit earlier for the Rose Bowl?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, this weekend was a great weekend, great experience for my teammates and I. However, we understand that just like the Big Ten Championship game, just like any other big games we played this season, this page is now folded, although I will be in the fraternity for the rest of my life, which I'm extremely honored to be.

Our focus right now is winning the College Football Playoff. That's what would make this trophy so much sweeter. I believe this trophy is a little bit of a push of confidence on us, on the team, that we're making history for the IU team in history to be 13-0 and also to bring home a Heisman Trophy to Bloomington.

I think this is pushing us forward, and now all our team understands and even the lift this morning, we understand that we need to be humble and hungry. Hey, it's congrats, all this stuff, hey, let's go, we did it, we got the trophy; now it's on to the real trophy or the season's trophy, which is the National Championship.

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Q. Beyond the actual winning, what was the biggest highlight of this weekend?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: The biggest highlight is to see -- other than winning was to see everybody that came out. I believe I had like 60 family members that came out, around 10 to 15 teammates that made the trip out on their own dime, and a lot of family and friends in the community that supported me along the way, not when I was Heisman frontrunner, but those guys and all those people have been behind my back when I was second string in middle school.

To see all them and to see how much it meant to them, it was unreal.

Q. Was Archie Griffin at the Heisman presentation, and if he wasn't there, did he boycott it because Indiana beat Ohio State?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Archie Griffin was there, and he's one of the ones that I actually forgot to say. However, Archie, met his wife, met his kids, met his grandkids, and they were phenomenal. He was actually one of the Heisman winners I spent the most time with and talked the most with, and it was great seeing his old highlights up on the screen, talking to him about Ohio State, Indiana.

He was giving me a little bit of a -- he was messing with me a little bit, saying they're going to get us back in the National Championship. But Archie Griffin, he's a class act guy. It was great being with him this weekend. I got his contact info, so looking forward to keeping in touch with him.

Q. I think in the speech you had, you had mentioned that the staff here has helped you kind of reach new levels that you weren't sure you had in you. What exactly have they shown you or have they brought out of you that you weren't sure you had in you?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, I think that if we hooked everybody up in this room on a lie detector test and told them, hey, do you think Fernando Mendoza is going to win the Heisman this year and we're going to be 13-0, Big Ten champs, the team has a lot of self-belief and unwavering belief, but I think it's tough to make those predictions.

To be quite honest, first of all, I don't even know if I'm deserving of this, and I would have never expected this.

However, the coaching staff, the way that I got there through spring and elevated myself all the way to this point as a player, it's two different Fernando Mendozas. It is two different players. You can ask any coach or player on staff. Even some of the players this morning were like, Bro, when we saw you in spring, there's no way we ever

thought this was possible. It's just a testament to the great team that I have around myself and the great coaches.

Q. Fernando, part of your great success has been the preparation, execution on game day, and then you go back and you watch the film and you hear what people think. We could see your preparation into the speech; you had the great execution. Have you watched the game tape of that, or what have you heard about how you performed?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, preparation is a huge thing for myself, and I believe preparation is what leads to confidence. When you're prepared for an opportunity, that means you have confidence going in. That's something that Tim Tebow, some advice that he gave myself was not to live in the past or to live walking on eggshells per se, but live and make decisions that you won't regret, meaning hey, I'm going to stay up and play some video games instead of watching some more film.

That's a process that I've taken this season, whether it's Ohio State -- that week, whether win, lose or draw I was going to lay my head on the pillow saying I did everything possible I could have done to put my best foot forward. So that's some great advice by Mr. Tebow and advice I'll carry out for the rest of my life.

The speech, I think it was my duty as a finalist to practice and rehearse the speech, and at that point I think -- I rehearsed it and it sounded a lot better in the mirror, and then I got up there and I'm like, wow, I'm really nervous right now. So I started stuttering a little bit.

But I've heard positive feedback from the speech. I think it was great to show everybody that's helped myself throughout my journey. I think it was incredibly special in the speech to shout out everywhere I've been before, and then also I think the highlight of the speech and something that's resonated with myself is back when I was in high school, Devonta Smith gave a speech at the Heisman, and he essentially said something similar to what I said at the end, and I took it from him. Basically saying, if you're too small, too raw, too anything, don't let anybody knock you down; you can do it.

At that point I was a two-star recruit, committed to Yale, and so I took that and I thought it was my duty to push that message to the next generation, the next Heisman winner that's going to be a low recruit and make the underdog story. I'm sure Mr. Smith got it from someone before him, so I was like, all right, it's my duty to pass the torch to whatever is next, hopefully to reach somebody like that.

Q. With all the recovery that you've had to do from the

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games and whatnot, what's tougher, recovering from say the Big Ten Championship, or a night in Times Square with your offensive line?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: That is a great question. However, I will say the linemen and all the -- there was defensive players there, offensive skill players. There was a lot of people there. They're both recoveries for sure. However, we know how to handle ourselves with class. You never get, like, obliterated.

We always have a good time. We stay within our -- we can always control ourselves. That's one thing with us is it's always a good time because we control ourselves and we don't need all that extra "kuchler" stuff, if you get what I'm alluding to, to have a ton of fun. We all just have a lot of fun with each other. So it's more about feeding off of each other and having a good time.

However, I will say the recovery from the weekend of the sleep has been a little tough because it was bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, and I was so overwhelmed by emotion the entire week, meeting all the winners, having an opportunity on the media to shout out my teammates, and then ended up winning the award. It was a little bit of a mental recovery.

Now I believe I'm in a good state right now where I'm humble and I'm hungry right now for the College Football Playoff.

Q. So you mentioned a little bit your speech, and in your speech you directly addressed your grandparents in Spanish. Why was it important that you did that and you spoke to them in Spanish in that moment?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, so my heritage is keep it American. I was born in America; however, all four of my grandparents, born and raised in Cuba. They lived there and then they emigrated to the United States. It's actually made the American dream, sacrificed so much to support my parents and then my parents to support myself. Learning about the heritage, actually them taking myself and my brother back to Cuba when we were in high school to see where we came from, I saw how much it meant to them, and I believe that's where a lot of the pride comes from, the family.

You see like Diego's family, he had like 100 people there, too, and it's like the Hispanic culture, the Hispanic family is so prideful and supportive of one another. I thought that saying something in Spanish, although I wouldn't say I'm the most fluent, I'd like to think I'm conversational in Spanish, would mean a lot to them to show, hey, this is how much of an impact it's had on myself and also for the

Hispanic community out there because I know there's a lot of Hispanic football fans, and it's something that I'm looking forward to represent.

Q. Can you expand a little bit about what being in the Times Square situation was like? We saw a snippet on television or YouTube, and it looked like it was kind of wild, a lot of people there. Did they have heavy security around you and things like that?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, luckily, I had the offensive line security. So we were going to Times Square and it was -- I don't know if anyone would have noticed us, to be honest, until everybody and the teammates were screaming, chanting the Hoosier chant, and everyone was screaming like "Heismendoza" and a couple other chants. Hoosiers on top and just like random things we were shouting and screaming, plus photography. I believe everyone turned towards us, and our linemen were literally pushing people out of the way, like, hey, we've got to go, we've got to go.

This thing is really heavy, so we're passing it off to each other. Aiden Fisher is carrying it, Charlie Becker, Riley Nowakowski, Carter Smith is carrying it, Bray Lynch, everyone is carrying it because we're basically handing it off to each other, switching security guards. At one point we're all trying to get people out of the way. We were able to take pictures in Times Square, and I think it was a great time to be in the Big Apple.

Such a great experience for us to be in the Big Apple, and it's an experience I believe all of us will remember for the rest of our lives. Being in the Big Apple, having a good time with each other, magical weekend, a good weekend to take time to really hang out with each other and have that good connection, and now we understand, okay, we're recovering from this weekend and now it's time to work.

Q. And your linemen were still blocking for you?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Always blocking for me. They're fantastic and can't thank them enough for getting the Elmos and Supermans and all the random people or all the random mascots in Times Square out of the way.

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