

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Penn State vs Utah

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Penn State Nittany Lions

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Press Conference



Q. Trying to figure out if you guys have any special hobby that you guys do together, like what type of activities do you guys do outside of football?

ADISA ISAAC: Outside? It's more like a bonding experience for us, especially a lot of us, California is new to us. So really just trying to sight see and see something different and just experience it with the guys.

Q. Are you guys like big sneaker head teams? Do you guys do video games, what's...

ADISA ISAAC: A little bit of everything. We have a couple of sneaker heads, got a couple of game heads. We've got a little bit of everything. A lot of personalities.

Q. What gets the most competition -- golf, ping-pong, anything like that?

ADISA ISAAC: I'd say Madden. Madden gets the most attention. Sometimes ping-pong, though. Ping-pong's good variety, pool. You get a little competition there too as well.

Q. And any other guys in this room pool sharks?

ADISA ISAAC: Let me see. I heard Tig (phonetic) was in a couple of people's heads in Madden, and Curt, too. That was probably the two game heads I know of.

Q. How have you seen the defense kind of grow through the year and (indiscernible) the defensive scheme now that you've gotten into it for a while?

ADISA ISAAC: I've seen it grow a lot. Just the chemistry we build throughout each game. You could see in each game it's building to the form we're at now. But it was more of a chemistry thing. There's a lot of new guys on the team, a lot of new guys on the defense. Just getting that feel back. And as the year went on we started gelling together and it gave a lot of success to us here.

Q. And you've seen a lot of play. How do you see the ability to keep you guys fresh and (indiscernible)?

ADISA ISAAC: It's a credit to the starters, trying to put on that good example for the guys behind us so we could all work as one unit. So I feel like it's just us working together as one unit, which makes it special.

Q. When Penn State defense is at its best, how would you describe it?

ADISA ISAAC: Attacking, dominant, fearless. I feel like we're one of the top defenses, for sure.

Q. As kind of first year fully starting, how have you seen your year develop?

ADISA ISAAC: I feel just the more reps I'm taking, especially coming off a injury last year, I feel the more reps I'm taking I could see the step coming back, just the confidence growing. And that's ultimately what every player wants is that ultimate confidence when you step on the field.

Q. How familiar are you with the historical importance of what the Rose Bowl Game is and what it means?

ADISA ISAAC: You know, I've watched a couple Rose Bowls in my time playing football. And every time it's always been one of the greatest events there is when it comes to bowl games. So it's definitely going to be a great, new experience for a lot of us. My first Rose Bowl.

So, like I said, new experience for a lot of us. We're just really looking forward to this opportunity.

Q. Before this, when was the last time you made it out to California?

ADISA ISAAC: First time. This is the first time in California. So, like I said, it's just everything is all new to me. But I'm glad I get to do it with my guys here.

Q. How do you feel the defense has kind of come



together this season?

ADISA ISAAC: Every game, I feel like we just kept taking one step, just kept taking steps each game. As you can see, like, towards the end of the year we were kind of getting in our groove, and just the chemistry is building a lot much better.

And that's really the main thing when it comes to defense. We have to be one unit. We can't have one guy out of place. So that was one of the main things was just keeping everybody accountable and just putting on a show for guys.

Q. An opportunity like this, do the coaches talk about not only that this game is important, but this is a part of continuing to build Penn State and how this translates into next year?

ADISA ISAAC: For sure. You always try to have that 1-0 mentality. Regardless of what the game is we just try to focus on us and try to block out outside noise and hone into who we are as Penn State, just try to stick to our identity not veer off of that. It's helped us out throughout the year.

Q. Have you decided about your future after the Rose Bowl, whether or not you're going to come back for your next season at Penn State?

ADISA ISAAC: Not as yet. Once this Rose Bowl concludes I'll have a much stronger answer for you guys. But right now it's more I'm just trying to lock in on this game one more time with the seniors and the guys that's here on the team with us now.

Q. What are some of the things that you will weigh when you make the decision, what will you consider?

ADISA ISAAC: Just family, just the pros and cons of it. Everything that comes with it, how I feel about it. Just all the important factors that come down to it in my future.

Q. We were talking to Curtis, a guy who has decision-making (indiscernible). What have you seen out of him this year just the strides he's made (indiscernible) how he's been preparing himself?

ADISA ISAAC: He's definitely grown as a player and as a person. This extra year for him, from the time he first got here until now he's become a great leader, an even better person, especially on the field.

So just the way -- to see him grow game by game, who is telling what's his ceiling? He's got a lot of potential, great

player, great skill set. Just want to see him flourish.

Q. You've grown as a player and as a person because you worked through injury and came back from that, a number of different things, you've been able to accomplish (indiscernible). How do you feel you've grown in that way?

ADISA ISAAC: I feel I've grown a lot mentally. I took a lot of time this past year just to self-evaluate on my weaknesses, just trying to come back better than I was before.

I feel like I just tried to take my weaknesses and build them up and that was just really the mental part of it. Trying to build back that confidence in my body, in my talent. So that was really it.

Q. What was the point, what was the hardest thing you had to go through last year being...

ADISA ISAAC: I would say just the mental process of am I going to be able to come back. It's a lot of mental blocks you have because a lot of guys I've never really sat out a whole year of playing football the whole year. Since I started to play football, I don't think I've ever sat out a year.

Just that whole year break of self-reflecting and trying to figure out what I can do to come back better, that's really what it was.

Q. Do you feel like you're back where you were physically before your injury?

ADISA ISAAC: I feel like I'm close. I'm way close. I'm the closest I've ever been back to my old self. Obviously I always want to improve no matter what. Even if I do come back 100, I want to go 110. That's the mentality I have. And I feel like I'm pretty close to where I was.

Q. That's a long time. I wasn't expecting to you say that.

ADISA ISAAC: Yes.

Q. When you got hurt, what was your initial timeframe?

ADISA ISAAC: It was six to eight months. So it was six to eight months, but normally a full year is really, like, a cap on the recovery, your rehab. After that it's more like you just getting your body feel back, et cetera.

Q. What do you feel like, there's those areas that you want to get to, (indiscernible) those areas. I know it

will be 100 (indiscernible) can do, what is it?

ADISA ISAAC: It's more of a feel thing, just certain power moves, certain moves that I have to drive on. Just it's certain movements that I do that I can feel the little difference but it's not really much hindering, but you can feel it, though.

Q. What did you rely on most to help you get through those lowest points of recovery?

ADISA ISAAC: I would just say the D line. And credit to PJ. Unfortunately he had an injury as well. So we ended up right in the same place for rehab. So he was the main guy. He was in my room before that.

He was one of the older guys that I leaned on even when I was a freshman, just seeing how he played and his approach to everything, how he worked. So that really just helped me really just finish out my rehab and just keep that mentality all the way through, not like halfway through.

I'm feeling, like, I don't know. But just seeing him come back again the next day, come back again the next day, just kept me driven for sure.

Q. What does having Smith back mean for you guys, and how do you think he's handled what was obviously a difficult situation for him?

ADISA ISAAC: Having Smith back is big for us. He's been back behind the scenes working, working his tail off. He hasn't been complaining not one bit. So just a guy that has that mentality, just always wants to work, and when my time comes I'm there for it, those are the guys you have to watch out for because they're sneaky talents that are very productive.

Q. What are some of the sneaky talents that he has that you've seen so far in his career?

ADISA ISAAC: His physical build. He was a former basketball player like me. He has a lot of the same twitchy movements just in a bigger frame and a lengthier frame. And he's a very powerful guy. A lot of his moves and the way he moves on the field is really difficult to stop because you don't see a guy with that amount of length and reach and also speed that he has as well.

Q. What have you seen (indiscernible) this year?

ADISA ISAAC: Just getting a feel for playing at this level. I feel I had no doubt he wasn't strong enough, wasn't fast enough. It was more getting the IQ of the speed of the game. Once he get adjusted to that, I feel like he's going

to start taking off.

Q. You've been in locker rooms at least before and after the transfer portal became a thing. How does that work in the locker room? Is it hard to get guys in there, is there anytime disruptions or awkwardness when you bring guys in, or are we at a point in college football where it is just what it is?

ADISA ISAAC: I think uniquely, for us, the guys we're bringing in are a match made in heaven. For the past transfers we had, especially on the D line, it's like these guys have been here already. I don't understand how we're getting these guys that are just so perfectly fit to our system but it happens. And I'm grateful for it as well.

Q. How do you handle it as a player. Let's use Chop (phonetic) for example, bring a guy in and he competes against (indiscernible) and don't know he's coming in. How do you handle it as a player?

ADISA ISAAC: There's obviously competition in the room. But first we're brothers. We're on the same team, we're one unit at that. It's more just getting a feel for the person first and then you go from there.

But like I said, like the guys that have been coming to this program that transferred in, they're great guys. They're great personalities. It's not hard to gel with them or even get along with them. I feel like the guys that have been coming here they've been perfect for us.

Q. The things that Coach Franklin preaches that he does to recruits, as you were. Do you think that's the reason that you bring in guys that fit the culture and the things that you're talking about?

ADISA ISAAC: I'm pretty sure. Coach Franklin's been doing this a pretty long time so he has a great scheme to how he gets guys here. And it's working because all of us have pretty much the same mentality, the way we carry ourselves. I feel like that's a big part.

Q. First few weeks of the season we talked to you (indiscernible) not quite 100 percent. After the injury, after a whole season of play how do you feel your body has held up?

ADISA ISAAC: I'm proud of the work I've put in this past offseason. I'm blessed to finish the season healthy as well. But I feel like I'm as far as I've been throughout my whole rehab, I feel I'm as close to my old self as I am right now.

Obviously I want to grow and keep getting better, I want to pass 100 percent, I want to keep going. But I feel like I'm

up there, I'm up there, back to close to myself.

Q. It's interesting, I remember at the start of the basketball season, Myles Dread had been hurt for a while. We asked him, what does it feel like to be healthy. For someone that's been banged up for, into the season, what does it actually feel like to be 100 percent healthy?

ADISA ISAAC: It feels good. Certain things that you felt like you could do before, you are kind of doing it a little bit now but not as fluent. But as reps go, that's going to get fluent. I'm not even worried about certain things like that. But it's more of a feel, a movement.

There's a lot of movements that you can't plan for. They just happen. So just things like that. But other than that, I feel like I'm in a good spot. I'm in a good spot to keep going and keep developing it.

Q. Who were some of the guys, the defensive linemen, who came before you, you look at them now, see what they're doing on Sundays that have inspired you and give you hope?

ADISA ISAAC: Like who went to Penn State? Odafe, the way he came out his rookie year, his splash plays and the way he carried himself that first year, it really gave me motivation. He was one of the guys, came in, he recruited me (indiscernible), really one of the guys that saw me from the jump and really helped me throughout his time at Penn State. Just seeing his transition really motivates me as well.

Q. I know you've been asked this several times already. Are you still sticking with what you told us at media days in terms of waiting until after this game to confirm your 2023 plans?

ADISA ISAAC: Yes.

Q. That aside, Smith Vilbert is back in play, wearing his practice jersey on the field. Assuming he can play Monday. What does it mean for this game and then looking long term for Penn State in 2023?

ADISA ISAAC: That creates depth. That's what we've been doing this whole year, having depth on the D line rotating and keeping guys fresh.

When you add a guy like Smith Vilbert, that adds a lot of productivity. The last bowl game he went to he had three sacks. Just another opportunity to come out, show a little bit, get his feet back wet because he's been working this whole time behind the scenes just been working. I'm

happy to see what he can do for us.

Q. Did Hakeem Beamon's experience and the validation coming back and playing, does that lay a blueprint of sorts for if you stick with it, if you stay on that practice field, do you think that was kind of a good thing there, carrot on the stick for him?

ADISA ISAAC: In a way. I feel certain guys have different ways of how they carry themselves in that position because you know it's not easy to be ineligible or not be able to play for a certain amount of games. It's really just the mentality you have during that time. And like you said, just sticking through it the whole time, you come out with success at the end, being able to play again.

Q. How difficult is the challenge, when you're getting a lot of information, your family is juggling and processing who to trust, how do you deal with that?

ADISA ISAAC: Like you said, it's a lot of information. So it's really just taking it one by one, breaking down the pros and cons, what's really important to me. And just trying to have -- just trying to gather as much information to make the best decision for your future long term. Not just what's best for me right now, how do I feel right now, trying to look at the bigger picture.

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