

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Michigan Wolverines

Mason Graham

Press Conference

Q. Just getting started, Alabama has got a pretty big offensive line. I think they've got three guys above 350 pounds. How do you contend with sheer size on the other side of the ball?

MASON GRAHAM: I just feel like we've played somewhere big -- big offensive linemen in the Big Ten, so just keep playing our style of ball. We have a good D-line so I think it'll be a good match-up for us.

Q. You mentioned you play a similar style of ball. Is there any game you've played this year that might be similar to this upcoming contest?

MASON GRAHAM: I would probably say more like Penn State maybe. They had a pretty big offensive line, as well, and they really wanted to run the ball. I think it'll be a similar challenge.

Q. How have you prepped for Jalen Milroe?

MASON GRAHAM: A lot of stuff. He's an explosive athlete that can make plays, extend plays, so we've just been practicing our rush lanes, containing quarterbacks, just stuff like that.

Q. Who is giving you the look for him in practice?

MASON GRAHAM: Alex does sometimes, but there's a few other guys, some other quarterbacks that are a little elusive. They'll help us out, too.

Q. Is there a quarterback similar in the Big Ten to what Milroe does?

MASON GRAHAM: I would say maybe Taulia from Maryland. We kind of had like a similar prep for him. He was a good athlete, and he could extend plays, as well. I would say him probably.



Q. What are the lessons you take from that prep?

MASON GRAHAM: Just kind of reciprocate it but take it to the next level almost because obviously this is a higher caliber team than what Maryland was, but Maryland was also a good team, too.

Q. Going off that, you mentioned that Milroe might be similar to Taulia, but Taulia was able to get some success against your defense. Are there lessons you have learned from that game that you think are applicable here?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure. Just some points in those games we kind of just lost focus and got some big plays hit on us. Really just honing in on all the little details.

Q. When you guys found out you were playing Alabama, what was the reaction? We saw the video. Looked like you guys were surprised when they announced it was Alabama and not FSU. Take us through what the reaction was in the room and how you processed it.

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I just felt like it was kind of like a, ooh, like people really didn't know who was going to get that spot. It was kind of just like an ah moment.

Q. Do you think people took that the wrong way a little bit?

MASON GRAHAM: Everyone in that room really knew what was going on, so.

Q. It wasn't a surprise to you that Alabama was the team you were playing?

MASON GRAHAM: No. I thought they were going to put them in going into it.

Q. When you guys see the Alabama logo come up, what does come to your mind? Obviously they're so ubiquitous in the sport and they've been here so many times.

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I heard like college football invitational or whatever, Alabama invitational, they've been in it a lot. They're used to being here. They've won it a few times, and they're always contenders. It's a good team to go against --

Q. What's been the biggest key there?

MASON GRAHAM: Just playing sound defense. Everyone working together, just kind of like an 11 on 1 mentality.

Q. How is your hand doing?

MASON GRAHAM: Doing good, 100 percent.

Q. Are you in a cast or splint?

MASON GRAHAM: No.

Q. Was that fun for you --

MASON GRAHAM: That was cool. It wasn't too cool when I was in it, but had to get over it.

Q. (Indiscernible) one-upped you?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, maybe a little bit.

Q. What did you break?

MASON GRAHAM: My thumb.

Q. And it's fully recovered?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah.

Q. That offensive line for Alabama, they've got some big guys. What stands out to you about that group?

MASON GRAHAM: They're a physical group. They work well together. Yeah, they obviously are pretty big, and I feel like they're good in the run game, too, and pass game, and they all just kind of work together with their quarterback.

Q. You mentioned Penn State as a comparison with Alabama's run game. What have you seen specifically from McClellan and Alabama's run game?

MASON GRAHAM: I just see that they want to run the ball downhill, and I feel like they're going to try and test us there early on in the game maybe, so it'll be a good challenge for us.

Q. Since Coach Minter has come in because this is his second year as DC, what's been the biggest area that he's had improvement for you guys?

MASON GRAHAM: Probably just our overall defense. We always talk about the four pillars of our defense with the different phases of the game. I feel like that's a big step we took in the off-season that has really helped our defense.

Q. What are the pillars?

MASON GRAHAM: Block destruction, obnoxious communication, ball disruption, and shocking effort.

Q. When it gets late in the game and you're a little tired and back there running around, what's the biggest challenge?

MASON GRAHAM: Probably continuing to have the relentless rush when they're passing the ball. You see a lot of teams on film. They'll only rush a few guys or they'll try to have too many -- like a bunch of spy guys to try and contain him once he leaves the pocket.

But if he wants to leave the pocket, he's going to leave the pocket. Just got to try our best to contain him.

Q. What did you think about the 4th and 31 play that they hit?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I watched that live. I probably wouldn't have rushed three people there, but it is what it is.

Q. Last year TCU game I felt like both lines struggled with playing on that surface. You guys don't play on grass a ton. Is there anything you take from Penn State and Michigan State this year?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, we had those two games this year. We're kind of not used to it. We have a grass field at our facility, but we've been using it a little bit more preparing just knowing we might get to this moment, so just been preparing for it.

Q. What's different for you on grass versus turf as a lineman?

MASON GRAHAM: Nothing really. I wouldn't say there's too much of a difference.

Q. It's more for the skill guys?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, they're probably moving a little faster than all of us, cutting more.

Q. What's been the key when you go up against a guy like Tyler Booker and the offensive line? Everyone talks about their size.

MASON GRAHAM: Probably just getting off the ball, getting to the point of attack really quick, setting them back because they're used to coming off the ball and really getting after guys. We kind of just have to reverse that.

Q. Two of their linemen, JC and Tyler Booker I think blocked for JJ. Has he talked about those guys at all?

MASON GRAHAM: No, I haven't heard anything yet.

Q. What are some of your earliest memories of the Rose Bowl? Did you grow up watching it or anything like that?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I always grew up watching it, but I wasn't always like super focused on it all the time. But yeah, it was right in my backyard.

Q. How many people do you have coming to the game?

MASON GRAHAM: Just my immediate family really.

Q. How hard was it to get a ticket growing up?

MASON GRAHAM: I don't really know. I haven't been to a Rose Bowl Game.

Q. Just never had a desire to go or --

MASON GRAHAM: I just never went, I guess. I don't know.

Q. What was your New Year's Day routine?

MASON GRAHAM: Just probably doing another sport, doing something else, probably another tournament or something.

Q. There's quite a bit of this SEC bias where people say they're faster and more talented, sort of a different conference. What have you heard about that, and what's your thought about the way they're perceived?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I feel like people perceive maybe the Big Ten differently from the SEC. They think maybe the SEC is more like athletic guys and they're faster and stuff like that, but I think we match up pretty well against probably the SEC champions.

Q. You've seen the tape, too. Is it pretty clear you

have the same speed or stamina or athleticism?

MASON GRAHAM: I think we're a pretty good match-up for them.

Q. Source of motivation at all?

MASON GRAHAM: I've been hearing it for a while, so...

Q. (Regarding Big Ten-SEC.)

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, maybe.

Q. You were at Servite, right?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah.

Q. What did you take from your time there?

MASON GRAHAM: It was an all boys' school so it was a little bit different, but you're just there with all your guys trying to complete a goal. We did that in high school, we tried, but we fell a little short.

Q. You fell short of a southern section championship or --

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah. Well, it was kind of like if you won that game, then you're winning the state. We lost to Mater Dei in the section.

Q. Have there been any coaches reach out to you, try to reconnect?

MASON GRAHAM: Oh, yeah, for sure. A bunch of guys out here, some of my high school buddies and some of my old high school coaches have been texting me and stuff like that.

Q. Any names in particular you want to throw out?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, my head coach from high school, Troy Thomas.

Q. A lot of Southern California guys tend to stay like on the West Coast, Pac-12 a little bit. What led you outside of that kind of sphere and to Michigan?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I just wanted to experience something new, go outside of what I'm used to, be uncomfortable. I guess coming to Michigan was probably that and it was a good opportunity for me.

Q. What's been the most uncomfortable part of this whole thing for you?



MASON GRAHAM: I don't know. I feel like Coach Harbaugh and them really make it comfortable. University of Michigan really helps, so I feel like it's been pretty smooth.

Q. Jalen Milroe, people are saying you haven't seen someone like this yet, that it could be a different type of challenge. What are your expectations?

MASON GRAHAM: I expect him to be an explosive player like he's been all year. He's going to make plays. We're going to make plays, too. It's just going to be a battle, and we'll see what comes out on top.

Q. Would you compare him to anybody you've seen yet or is it something entirely different?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I was asked that question earlier and I compared him a little bit kind of to how we were prepping for Maryland and Tagovailoa, quarterback for them.

Q. Earlier in the season you guys had the Michigan versus everybody thing. Do you think this team has adopted that us against them mentality that you might need when you go through a week prepping for a game?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I feel like for us that was kind of like a big thing. After all the stuff came out earlier in the season, it was kind of just everyone was kind of just take away all the stuff we've done all year and just take away how good we've actually been playing.

I feel like that was a little jab to us.

Q. Do you feel like you've been able to internalize some of that and become a little closer?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure, yeah.

Q. How much does Coach Harbaugh factor into that in terms of his mentality?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure. He's the key guy like leading it. He's always -- he's a good leader for our team, just a good guy to have, and he's always just preparing us.

Q. Tell us about the beat Ohio/beat Georgia/beat Alabama drill; how much fun is that for a D-tackle, or is it fun at all?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, it definitely is pretty fun, a little inside run against the best linemen. You're getting the best

every day in that drill, it's live tackle, going against your buddies, too, so it's pretty fun.

Q. How hyped up do people get for that one?

MASON GRAHAM: Pretty hyped up. That's probably the most hyped up period of practice.

Q. Is that fairly early in practices usually?

MASON GRAHAM: Probably like fifth period, fourth or fifth period. Pretty early, yeah.

Q. For people who have never been to football practice, never done 7-on-7, what's the intensity level like when you know it's going to be a run play every time?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, it's pretty intense. You know you're probably most likely getting a double team as a defensive tackle, so you're getting ready to play that and stuff like that, so it's pretty intense.

Q. Alabama's offensive line is heavier than pretty much everybody in the NFL. I'm sure that's something you're prepared for. How do you go about prepping for that in practice?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I just feel like we've been kind of working all of our fundamentals, kind of just sharpening everything, getting to the point of attack quicker, trying to get on them pretty quick because they're bigger guys, so that helps.

Q. What's difficult about facing someone that's like 20, 30 pounds heavier? Do you feel that? Do you notice that?

MASON GRAHAM: I've faced some guys that are 20, 30 pounds, but I don't really notice it too much, but I don't know, we'll see.

Q. I look at Mikey. Does weight matter? That guy is like 170 pounds and hits as hard as anybody?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure.

Q. How much does that matter when you're playing against a 340-pound guard versus a 310-pound guard?

MASON GRAHAM: I feel like it does factor in to some extent. I feel like the technique kind of makes up for like the lost weight, so I feel like we have really good technique on our defensive line, so that'll help us.

Q. And quickness, too --

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure.

Q. Does it wear on you over the course of a game? Do you feel like the accumulated force of that over the course of a game?

MASON GRAHAM: I feel like, yeah, maybe towards the end of the game you'll start feeling like you might be moving a little different. But it is what it is.

Q. The guys were talking about the play when Kenneth ran down Kaytron Allen. What was it like watching that back?

MASON GRAHAM: That was pretty crazy. First thing when I opened my phone after the game I saw that. I showed them because we're usually right next to each other in the locker room. I was like, you see this? And he was like, yeah, yeah, I saw that. And I was like, it's blowing up.

Q. He knew he did it, obviously, but did he know it was going to be that?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I don't think -- I mean, everyone at the moment was like, whoa, but we didn't really know it was going to blow up into what it did.

Q. In the meeting room, what was it like watching it with coach?

MASON GRAHAM: We had kind of already watched all that stuff, so we knew what it was going to be.

Q. It still blows your mind every time?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, for sure.

Q. Do you do any sort of sprint drills with guys like that? Did you know he had that in him?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, I always knew. He was more of an athletic guy. There's some other stuff that he's done in the weight room and stuff that's kind of been like glimpses and flashes of what he can do. I always knew he could do that.

Q. Your stair thing that you do, that can tell a lot about a person. What's that like?

MASON GRAHAM: It's cool. It's what we do in the off-season. It's part of our cumulative performance indicator that Coach Herbert has us do in the off-season.

Q. Can you walk us through what it's like when you're in that, going through that?

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, everyone really goes -- everyone goes one by one and we all watch each other and hype each other up and see who can get the fastest.

Q. Are you sweating? Is that stressful or is there a point --

MASON GRAHAM: It's not really stressful. It's just like just competitive nature.

Q. You're broad jumping or --

MASON GRAHAM: Yeah, you're going like forward and up at the same time, so it's...

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