

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Friday, December 29, 2023
Pasadena, California, USA

Michigan Wolverines

JJ McCarthy

Press Conference



Q. Are you sleeping well?

JJ McCARTHY: Really well, yeah, fantastic. Long days, but getting the rest I need.

Q. What's your mind like? How is the slowing down, how is that processing?

JJ McCARTHY: Been really good, at an all time high I would say. Staying in the moment, focusing on getting better every day and inspiring my teammates to do the same.

Q. Has this forced you to block out the noise even better than in the past?

JJ McCARTHY: I feel like once I stepped on campus and college football just naturally brings on that pressure, that noise, and just being able to be in college football for three years just makes it so much easier, especially going through this year and this game.

Q. A couple IMG connections on both rosters. Have you checked with Tyler and JC throughout the week?

JJ McCARTHY: I hit up T-Book actually like early on right when we were about to play them, and I told him I can't wait to see you, bro.

JC, I don't even have to say anything. It's just going to be great seeing him. We've got a great relationship. It's going to be awesome seeing those guys.

Q. I think it was JT blocking for Tyler --

JJ McCARTHY: I'm not going to lie, it was like uncomfortable for how comfortable I was back there. Yeah, they're tremendous football players, and I can't wait to see how they hold up against our defensive line.

Q. Does this week feel different leading up to this game versus last year going into TCU?

JJ McCARTHY: Extremely different. I feel like last year I got caught up in the noise and all the emotions of it, and I'm just trying to stay simple, trying to focus on dominating meetings, dominating practice and just being around my guys and enjoying every moment because this only comes around once for us and just appreciating every moment.

Q. I think you said earlier that going into TCU last year you thought there was almost paralysis by overanalysis. Have you adjusted the experience now so it fits you better?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, so we have adjusted. Whether we see if that works or not, we'll find out. But I feel like Coach Harbaugh has done a great job of taking advice from other coaches and just taking advice from players. That's a big step that I think he took this year, and it's just been really smooth and effortless so far.

Yeah, it's been great.

Q. When you think back to that TCU game with the two interceptions, is that your, quote-unquote, worst moment as a quarterback?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, in terms of just the moment that it happened. I've had worse games. If you look back at it, yeah, the two interceptions suck, but I could have had like five touchdown passes and almost 400 yards.

But at the end of the day, just being in the moment, right time, right place, yeah, I'd say it is, and yeah, just been focusing this entire off-season to make sure I'm locked in on all the little details and that doesn't happen again.

Q. Do you remember leaving that postgame?

JJ McCARTHY: Leaving?

Q. Yeah, when you walked off.

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, yeah, I do. That was actually



coordinated with some of the guys that were up there with me. I think it was Mikey and Dono. We were talking about it before, and I thought they were going to follow me out. I was the only one that left, so I was like, all right, got to take it on the chin now.

Q. Was it a statement you wanted to make?

JJ McCARTHY: Just that we're ready to get right to work. It wasn't anything against the media or saying I don't want to answer questions, I'm too mad. It was just I wanted to be in the locker room with my guys, all the seniors I'm never going to see again, and just be there to relish in those last moments with them.

Q. How much pride is on the line for the Big Ten against the SEC?

JJ McCARTHY: I guess you could say a lot, just because the SEC has been in this game and been successful in this game for a long period of time, and it's just going against history.

But at the end of the day, it's just history. The only thing we can control now is the present moment and the future ultimately by handling the present moment. I feel like all that's in the past, can't do anything about it now, and obviously very prideful regardless of who it is to get a win like this.

Q. How much as players do you hear about the SEC being superior, being the best conference in college football?

JJ McCARTHY: You know, I've heard that about the SEC. I've heard that about the Big 12, ACC, Pac-12. You just hear it from everywhere. All it is is just opinions.

Obviously the SEC is tremendous and they've been tremendous for many years. So much respect for all the teams and all the players that play in it.

But at the end of the day, it's just football and boys out there having fun, grinding and playing what they love.

Q. You said recently that you felt 100 percent -- is that a real 100 percent --

JJ McCARTHY: Yes, sir.

Q. Or is it 100 percent compared to what you felt before?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, it's 100 percent. Everything is great in terms of ankles, knees, head, shoulders.

Everything is great.

Q. Can you describe your pregame meditation routine, when you started it and what exactly it looked like?

JJ McCARTHY: Well, I started like a similar meditation routine in high school my senior year. But the one under the goal post, it started with the punter here last year, Brad Robbins. He did it, and I was just like, hey, that's pretty cool, pretty neat, and I could see the effect it could have on the world seeing people meditate, especially football players.

It just starts off with my Pranayama, which is breathing exercises and calming frequency in my headphones that just kind of dials in my physiology and kind of get my mind to a state where it's kind of like white noise.

But it does some things that I can't even really describe. You've just got to experience it for yourself.

Q. What's the sound that you're hearing in the headphones?

JJ McCARTHY: It's like -- you can just look up 963 hertz frequency on YouTube and you'll see it for yourself.

Q. Did the Georgia drills this year, did that actually help you prepare for Alabama?

JJ McCARTHY: I would think so. We'll find out how we perform against them this weekend. Or on Monday.

But it worked out for us with Ohio State, and we'll see if it works out for us on Monday.

Q. How would you describe the magnitude of this for you, for the program?

JJ McCARTHY: I think for the outside, it's the biggest game in Michigan history, one of the biggest games in college football history.

But to us it's just another football game that we're going to go out there and try to execute, play with physicality, and lock into all the little details that are going to show up in these big games.

We've just got to try to keep things simple, and obviously the magnitude of it is huge. But we try not to focus on that and just focus on each play at hand.

Q. When you watch film of Alabama, what stands out about their edge rushers?

JJ McCARTHY: Extremely physical, quick twitch, Chris Braswell plays with a finesse; Dallas is one of the best players I've ever seen. Just in combination with the speed, the size, the technique, he's a tremendous football player, and the motor doesn't stop for those guys.

It's going to be a tough challenge for our tackles, but they're excited for it. They wouldn't come to Michigan to not expect those match-ups, and they thrive on it. It's going to be a fun sight to see for sure.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JJ McCARTHY: Definitely. I've got a lot of respect for Caleb Downs. I grew up playing against his brother in 7-on-7 and going to camps with him and Josh. It's just in their family, like they're dogs. Watching film, he is always a guy that stands out on tape. He's fast. He's physical. He's extremely smart for being a true freshman.

Playing at Alabama and starting right away, he was one of those guys that I've heard from just in the grapevine he was ready to go from the get-go. He's a tremendous athlete, and it's an honor to share the field with him.

Q. Everybody is going to have a tough match-up, but your receivers in particular seem to draw some tough match-ups with Alabama. What have your conversations been like with them?

JJ McCARTHY: Just everything we've done all year and just focusing on just all the little details in the route, making sure there's no stone unturned in the playbook and they are locked in on their splits and their assignments and their alignments and just focusing on what we can control because obviously they're great players.

It's the College Football Playoff, but at the end of the day it's going to come down to how we handle ourselves in that big moment and how we attack each and every play and not beating ourselves at the end of the day.

Q. You said Coach Harbaugh has taken advice. How have you seen him handle this year in terms of everything that's happened?

JJ McCARTHY: In the two years I've been here previously to this year, I've never seen him as happy as he was this year, even with everything that was going on. He's a special guy, special, special dude.

Just being able to see how he handled everything and just the effect that he had on the players and the coaches, just taking everything on the chin, always welcoming the hate, welcoming all the noise his way and trying to deflect it off

his players and coaches, it's like everything you want in a leader.

It inspires me to be like that as a man later down the road, whether I get into coaching or just playing in the NFL. Just being that kind of guy that always takes responsibility and will do anything for the team.

Q. Does he relish being in that position where he's getting a lot of kind of the hate and --

JJ McCARTHY: You know, he's human, so obviously I feel like he feels it a little bit more than he says he does. He talks about how he's got this iron gut where there's nothing that really shakes him. There's no emotion that will really knock him off his speed of just doing what it is he's capable of doing on a day-to-day basis.

Yeah, I feel like he feels it a little bit, but we never see it, and that's what's so amazing about it.

Q. You wore your coach's number during the opener and the Free Harbaugh. What did that relationship between you two really strengthen?

JJ McCARTHY: It's always been strong. Since the second he started recruiting me, it was just a unique relationship. He told me, hey, I'm a JJ, too, right when he offered me. Just him growing up and his background kind of being similar to mine, it's always been a strong connection.

But this year just him not being out there for the first three games and this being the last season for a lot of guys, it was just unfortunate that they went six games this year without their head coach that they committed to and wanted to play with and wanted to be on the sidelines with.

The relationship is strong as it can get and only growing.

Q. You've obviously done some shuffling of the offensive line. How confident are you they can hold up against the Alabama front?

JJ McCARTHY: Extremely confident. I feel like it's going to be extremely tough. They're probably the two best edge rushers we've seen all year besides Chop, and I feel like they just mesh really well and they're always on the same page in practice from what I've seen, and they're going to rise to the occasion.

That's why they came to Michigan, and they thrive in these moments, so I feel confident.

Q. Alabama's quarterback, Milroe, is known for elusiveness and mobility. Now that you're as healthy

as you've been, are you kind of interested in showing what you have mobility-wise, which you haven't been able to do as much of late?

JJ McCARTHY: I feel like naturally it will have to show just because the pass rush is going to be so good, and they fly around and they get to the football.

I feel like in order to beat this team, when you see the teams that get close to beating them or have beaten them, the quarterback is running the football a lot, and getting those six yards when nothing is to be had.

I feel like that's just going to rise naturally.

Q. You guys have had 38 penalties all year. I've never seen anything like this. How do the coaches get you guys to operate so cleanly? That will matter in a game like this.

JJ McCARTHY: I appreciate you recognizing that because we pride ourselves on that. Just all the -- Coach Herb, our strength coach, he harps on the attention to detail and always making sure that our shoes are tucked and tight every single time we take them off in the weight room, and that translates to when we go back home.

Just always focusing on the little things, and it just creates this discipline to us that we're not trying to hurt ourselves and we're going to do everything proactively so we don't have to be reactive and get behind the sticks with penalties and all that.

I think just the little things in the off-season show up on game day.

Q. Can you give another example of things he's teaching you, a couple other ideas?

JJ McCARTHY: I would say like every couple months or so he makes us clean our lockers and they'll come and check, and he'll literally take his finger and go to the back corner and rub his finger right down the line, and if there's a spec of dust, then we don't get the plus 2 for the day.

Q. Does it got that military feel to it?

JJ McCARTHY: Exactly, but it's a good military feel.

Q. What's the plus 2?

JJ McCARTHY: Plus 2 is being in a competitive environment. We do these certain lifts, certain exercises where you kind of challenge yourself and everyone does the same thing, and let's say like we have these blocks

where it's like a foam block with a little wooden platform on top and you balance on it, and we have to pick up like a 70-pound med ball one time, stay up there, bring it to your chest, bring it down, and if you drop it or your foot comes off or you touch, then you get a zero for the day.

Those exercises add up over time, and you see how many plus 2s you can get, and then there's a little leaderboard that everyone sees on a day-to-day basis.

Q. Who's on top?

JJ McCARTHY: Caden Kolesar. He's a stud in the weight room for sure.

Q. Alabama's defense, what stands out the most?

JJ McCARTHY: Extremely well-coached. Coach Saban, Coach Steele, right place at the right time. Obviously athletic freaks all over the board. They're physical, they're fast, they play a lot, and they check a lot, and they make sure that they're in the right calls, and they game plan very well.

I'd just say the biggest thing about them is they're so well-coached with such an athletic team it makes them really dangerous.

Q. The speed, is that tough to simulate?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, very tough to simulate. The only thing I can really think of is just going back to Georgia in 2021 and playing against that team. It'll be good to just have that as a reference point, and that's about all I can say about that.

Q. How do you explain this incredible attention to detail in one respect, you guys having to answer questions the whole season about how you've overcome these distractions?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, it's just been staying in the present moment for us. That's something that Coach Herb always harps on and Coach Harbaugh, one-track mind, always focusing on the task ahead of us, because if you focus on the one that's two steps ahead, all the outside noise, then you are not focused on what is right in front of you.

That's probably the biggest thing I've realized this year that's kept us so on track, and yeah, we just try to maintain it on a day-to-day basis.

Q. You talked about Jaylen earlier, all these graphics comparing you to him. Do you get tired of seeing that?

JJ McCARTHY: I actually don't see it. I stay off social media as much as I can just because a lot of that, whether you think it doesn't influence you, it does, because whatever you look at, whatever you focus on grows.

I'm just extremely excited to see him out there. I have so much respect for him as a player, as a quarterback, especially as a quarterback. His deep ball is unbelievable. He makes things happen with his legs.

I'm extremely envious of his ability to pump fake and get up field and just explode.

Yeah, it's just going to be great to see how my defense shapes up against him because he is such a tremendous player, and I think he's going to be playing football for a very, very long time.

Q. Do you feel like you're a little bit slept on? Is there something to prove at this point?

JJ McCARTHY: I wouldn't know. I don't know what other people are saying about me. I'm just going to focus on doing what I do on a day-to-day basis and give it all I've got.

Q. Have you ever asked Coach Harbaugh or is it fair for any of the players to ask him year to year are you going to be back, now that we have this other set of circumstances?

JJ McCARTHY: That kind of goes back to what I was saying about focusing on the step ahead and not focusing on that. That's so out of our control that Coach Herb mentioned last year when he added the Minnesota talks, yeah, we're happy for him.

If he wants to take that opportunity, go do it. That is one of his dreams, and he's done it before. But still, that's a tremendous honor to be in that position.

We've got to focus on we, what we have to do. I think we've done a good job of that.

Q. You guys had Michigan Versus Everybody on shirts earlier in the year. What does a slogan like that do for a team?

JJ McCARTHY: I think those two things has ultimately put a label on the mindset of the team and the culture of the team, and I feel like it's just something for the outside world to know like what's on our mind on a day-to-day basis and how we feel about ourselves and how we feel going into each and every week.

At the end of the day, you hear it, it's great to see on a T-shirt, it's great to see on headlines and stuff like that, but at the end of the day, we just focus on the task at hand and just trying to get better on a day-to-day basis.

Q. What's your relationship with Jaden Davis during the recruiting process and what are your early impressions of him?

JJ McCARTHY: Extremely, extremely cool. I haven't been in this position where I've been the starter for two years and guys are coming in and just being able to have that relationship with such a great guy and great family. It clicked from the start.

Just tremendous athlete, tremendous thrower of the football. I trained with him a couple times this past summer, and the sky is the limit for him. Just such a great leader, such a great teammate.

Just have so many good things to say about him, but I can't wait for him to show you guys.

Q. You mentioned how Harbaugh protects you guys to a certain degree from the outside noise, but some Alabama players say they're careful on their iPads or whatever because of the reputation. What do you think when you hear stuff like that?

JJ McCARTHY: It makes sense just with everything going on and the society we live in today. But like we haven't been watching film on our iPads all of November just because of everything that's been going on, and just making sure that we get that time in the facility, that time to watch film and really dissect whoever we're playing.

But at the end of the day, just making sure we get what we need to get done and just adapting what we have to.

Q. Blake and a few of the defensive players, they've mentioned with all the draft prospects on the Alabama team, this is kind of a money game or a chance to prove themselves. What's your mindset of that when you see those first-round prospects in the secondary and on edge for yourself?

JJ McCARTHY: Yeah, I feel like every single week is a money game. That's just the levels of intensity of it vary. This one is at one of the highest intensities it is. I'm not going to sugarcoat it or downplay it.

But at the end of the day it's just going out there and executing and doing whatever we can to win the game and not worry about all the stuff that might amount to winning the game. It's just focused on one play at a time and

winning that rep.

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