

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Pasadena, California, USA

Michigan Wolverines

Drake Nugent

Press Conference

Q. Trevor was talking about how he's really seen transformation in Harbaugh. I know you're a more recent arrival, but what have you heard before you got to Michigan? What was your first impression of him?

DRAKE NUGENT: I don't know, my first impression was like, I like this guy. Other than that, I don't really have a first thought that comes to my mind. Obviously, like, before -- obviously I knew him before I met him and like he's a huge name in college football and college football in general.

So maybe a little starstruck, I guess. Like, oh, wow, I'm in Jim Harbaugh's office, this is pretty sweet. But other than that, I like this guy. He's a football guy. He's a pretty gritty guy. He's always working out and stuff in his khakis before practice or whatever or here, getting after it. He's just a football guy, which I love. So that's probably the best thing I've heard about him.

But I think just from what I've heard, maybe a little bit more personable, he calls himself Cool Jim now. Maybe he wasn't so cool back in the 2020 season when I wasn't here, I don't know, but he always calls himself Cool Jim. So I'm sure he wasn't cool back then if he calls himself that now.

Q. Like he keeps his cool?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, so like I guess that's his M.O., Cool Jim.

Q. How do you see Coach Harbaugh and Coach Moore kind of complement each other personality-wise, coaching-style wise?

DRAKE NUGENT: For sure, Coach Moore is personal with us. He's a great coach to have. But then on the flipside, like you have Coach Harbaugh, like he's personal with us, but at the same time like when he talks to you, it's like the true head coach. Like you've got to shut up and listen.



Like there's not really any screwing around when he's talking to you or anything like that.

Or sometimes Coach Moore can get like a little less, like how do I put this, like antsy to talk to him or like everybody's, I guess. When I first met him, obviously Coach Harbaugh, you're not really nervous to talk to him now because I've been around him for a year now and spent plenty of time with him. Yeah, they complement each other very well especially on the offensive scheme side.

Q. In the locker room, is that something you pay attention to?

DRAKE NUGENT: Not really. That was like something I talked to myself and my family when I first came here, like is he going to the NFL. Like, I don't know. Like, who cares. It's his choice, honestly. Obviously it would be sad to see him go from the University of Michigan but at the same time, like, I mean, he's always in the room with me every year. That just shows how good he is as a coach. I'd want him in my organization, too, if I was an NFL coach or owner or GM or whatever.

Q. You came in last year from the transfer portal. Michigan really cemented its offensive line through the portal. Looking to do so again, picked up a couple guys a couple days ago. What advice would you give to a offensive lineman looking at schools?

DRAKE NUGENT: Depends on where they come from and what they want and in their own play. But if you just want to be good -- if you want to be surrounded by good players and good coaches and not just people in the program. But people outside the program who want to see everybody win as much as you do, then you should come here. Simple as that.

Q. How did Michigan live up to your expectations?

DRAKE NUGENT: I mean, I didn't really have many crazy expectations coming in other than, like, I know we're going to win some football games.



But outside of that, it's exceeded a lot of expectations. You know, just like the families that have treated me so well throughout the whole year, the state, the alumni and stuff that we have been able to talk to. It's been great.

So it's been a great experience, honestly. Even just like some of the -- like going to New York, on the team trip back in the spring. Like seeing all the Michigan people who do all of the real estate and stuff like that there. It's pretty crazy to see all of the people who are involved and pay attention to the program.

So yeah, it's been awesome.

Q. Have you had to do much shuffling with the offensive line going into the game? What's the feeling going into the game against Alabama?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, obviously I haven't been able to practice the past few weeks, past ten days I haven't. After the Iowa game, I was down a little bit.

But at the same time, like Carson and I have played back next to each other in camp when he was scrambling around to other positions and stuff. Getting those reps with him and practice and stuff, last week and this week, and kind of going back to that camp mindset, I guess, when everyone is fighting for spots. You know, you're kind of used to playing next to all different sorts of guys and just getting acclimated to each other.

Q. So are you practicing now?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah.

Q. How would you describe what the Beat Ohio or beat Alabama drill is like?

DRAKE NUGENT: The first thing that comes to my mind is the sirens that they play. Like The Purge sirens. I don't know if you've seen that movie, it's like, arg, arg, arg. I don't know, other than that, it's just like that kind of -- that sound plays in my head. And it's like, all right, I don't know what we are going to do but just know that you've got to put your face in somebody's chest. It's not going to feel great but just ready to hit KG or Mason as hard as you can and hopefully a hole opens up. That's really all that goes through my head.

Q. Does it actually play the siren?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, like super loud. Like super loud. But it's kind of awesome. It's almost like an initiation process to hitting people super hard.

Q. Do you guys usually do that indoors?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, we've done that indoors, too.

Q. How important has that period been in reshaping the mindset of the offensive line and just the offense as a whole?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, I think it's been great for us and the tight ends, too. Obviously we incorporate a lot of tight ends in our blocking schemes and stuff like that. I think it's just like making sure everyone is still sharp with, like, you know, their intensity levels. No one is lacking. Especially going up against our own guys, it's huge.

I think obviously like scout team reps are valuable, but I'm a big believer in the few periods that we do do against the ones and two defenses during the week are huge just to keep the speed of the game, keep us sharp, whether it's nine on seven or pass, pro, whatever it may be. Just keep us sharp or obviously Saturdays, or in this case, Monday.

Q. When it was announced you that you were playing 'Bama, did the name of the drill change to Beat 'Bama or did anything about the drill change?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, it did change to beat 'Bama. Our whole M.O. inside the building is what are you doing to beat Ohio State today and now that they have done that, they changed it to the next opponent for the rest of the year. Kind of the same thing with that drill.

Q. What have you seen on film from their defensive front?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, they are big, fast, strong, physical. They chase the ball well. Like they are really everything you want in a defensive front seven, which is, you know, exactly what we want in an opponent. Especially on a game of this calibre, you just have to do everything that you can to beat them and play your best. It's a great challenge for us and excited to get out there.

Q. They have a lot of different guys who can do a lot of different things. What challenge does that present the offensive line?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, obviously you have to account for Dallas Turner being who he is as a First Team All-American, probably going to be first-round pick. Runs super well, super fast. They have got other guys as well, but obviously he takes a lot of the attention, given his stats this year.

Just have to account for certain guys like that each play.

I'm sure they are going to have some kind of new blitz package or something for us, I don't know what it is, but those third downs are going to be critical for us, too. Make sure everyone has communicated and are on the same page.

Q. Anything you've gone through on the film where you knew they were good, but anything pop up on film?

DRAKE NUGENT: Nothing crazy pops up on film. Obviously they are all good players. But like I think going into that, and like knowing who 'Bama is and like the brand that they play, I kind of was expecting to see what I see. You know, it's not anything that I wasn't expecting to see, is what I should say.

So it's nothing -- nothing that -- nothing that we really need to talk about super much, like super much -- I don't know what word that -- too much. Yeah, they are a good front seven. We have to be ready for them.

Q. The beat 'Bama drill is it short yardage situations?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, usually goes from like 20 yards to the goal line. The ones take two, three, four reps, kind of changes; and then twos take two, three, four reps; and then the threes take, two, three, four reps; and then, like, the goal is to score. But like, sometimes it changes. Honestly it's just, like, any insider run drill. Just not really doing too much. It's just hitting people.

Q. All running plays?

DRAKE NUGENT: It's all running plays.

Q. To instill toughness, basically?

DRAKE NUGENT: Basically.

Q. Anything special that signifies it?

DRAKE NUGENT: It's like The Purge siren. We love that.

Q. Was it a sprained ankle before the Iowa game?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, happened at Ohio State.

Q. Seemed like you were laboring through that game. Any worry you hurt it more ahead of the College Football Playoff?

DRAKE NUGENT: Not really. I mean, I knew I had the four weeks coming into this game, which were huge for me. Obviously it feels fine now. I kind of knew, like if we

had a game after that, like the week after that, I probably wouldn't have played.

But the fact that I knew we had four weeks to rest up after, it was like, let's let it ride. And I'm never going to play in a Big 10 Championship again, so why not play.

Q. Sorry if you've been asked this already, but Turner went into some detail about when Zak was hurt and what he heard and saw, and how that galvanized the team; how has it?

DRAKE NUGENT: It definitely has. Obviously Trevor and I were, like, a huge part of that which obviously makes us feel terrible, but kind of it's part of the game in some instances, unfortunately.

But I remember Trevor hit my game and I'm looking and I see Zak's leg, oh, my God, here it goes. And we all heard it. It was like a baseball bat cracking over someone's leg. It was terrible. I knew instantly what it was.

But definitely -- it definitely galvanized the team. The next play we scored, which was crazy. I don't even know, like, that's just like destiny at that point, honestly. I don't even -- it was pretty wild for that whole situation to go down like that.

But yeah, obviously seeing him the past few weeks, like hobbling around facility and stuff, being All-American and seeing his season come short, definitely inspires everyone. Like if anyone wants to complain, like, you shouldn't after seeing that. So it definitely gives everyone an excuse not to complain.

Q. Would you say you're at a hundred percent with your ankle injury?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, I'm fine. I'm back to normal.

Q. This offensive line was quite good this year but maybe not quite where it was I guess statistically when Zak was in, and now you're going into a pretty decent front.

DRAKE NUGENT: Very decent.

Q. What's the message among the line? How do you guys embrace that challenge?

DRAKE NUGENT: The biggest challenge is you've got to play physical. The biggest message is you just can't play scared. You can't really -- like a lot of times in these games, you might have to get out there and feel it out a little bit and kind of like see how they are playing, or, like,

you know, especially a team that you have not played against before, or a front seven you are not used to playing, a calibre of 'Bama, you have to maybe feel it out a little bit.

But this one, you've just got to let it hang and shoot your shot and start hitting people from the very start and get a good jump and start fast in the game overall from the offense.

Q. Coach Moore had everyone stopped watching film for individuals. Has that impacted preparations?

DRAKE NUGENT: Not much honestly because we still have access to the computers downstairs and the meeting rooms and stuff like that that they have got set up for us. I know obviously anyone can go down there any time with a coach or other players and watch.

Q. Have y'all done this before in November before, shut it down a little bit?

DRAKE NUGENT: I remember Coach Harbaugh shutting it down before the Penn State game maybe. I don't remember honestly. It was a long time ago. Just take it day-by-day can do what they tell me and acclimate accordingly.

Q. And they shut it down yesterday again?

DRAKE NUGENT: I don't know if it was yesterday or during the beginning of the week. I just had to watch tape on the computer, so I didn't deal with it.

Q. For the returning guys like Trevor, how motivated are they to change the narrative of trying to change what happened in the previous two playoff games along the offensive line?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, absolutely, I think not just motivation, but I think everyone wants to change the narrative of Michigan Football or how we can't win postseason games or we haven't won a Natty in forever or whatever it may be. They are motivated not just for that reason but motivated to solidify their legacies in Michigan Football.

Like John Jansen talked to us on Monday or Tuesday, and he just kept talking about the '97 team. But he alluded to the fact that he hates talking about that team because it means something has happened since then.

We all know that if we win this whole thing that it really galvanizes Michigan Football history forever. That's what is in the back of everyone's mind. I think that's probably

the biggest motivating factor for us.

Q. Is there anything that gets to you guys after everything you've gone through?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yes or no, if it does, I haven't seen it. Maybe some guys here and there probably can complain and then you get like four or five guys that like put them back in their place. Like dude, chill out or whatever.

But it's kind of almost like comical, like how much stuff has gone on this year, like in the media and stuff. I kind of laugh, like what the hell. There's so much crap out there. It's kind of funny that we are constantly on ESPN or in SportsCenter or some media, Yahoo! Sports or whatever it may be. It's funny to look at that stuff and still be able to win games while it's going on. It's kind of like a big middle finger to everyone, honestly. It's great when you have that much stuff talked about you and you can still win.

Q. Trevor said that Coach likes being the villain; that he likes that role.

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, it's something he embraced, especially over the back half of the year as everything has gone on. Obviously just trickles down to us, and he gets the boys fired up in the team meetings, and we're like, yeah. It's a great way to get the boys rallied around him and get everyone the same mindset.

Q. Blake was saying, being a good-hearted villain, he couldn't place one. Is there one is that stands out, and sidenote to that, do you embrace the villain?

DRAKE NUGENT: A good-heart the villain? It's kind of hard for me because I don't really know of a villain that's good-hearted. Because villains aren't really good-hearted. Maybe like Bane from Batman, I don't know. I don't know if he's good-hearted, though.

That's a tough question.

Q. Did you have a preconceived notion of Jim Harbaugh before you got here?

DRAKE NUGENT: Yeah, he has the reputation of being a quirky guy but I never knew what that meant to be honest. And when I met him, I was like, now I know what it means.

I like it, though. I enjoy his personality. I was telling everyone else earlier that he's just like a football guy. He eats, breathes, sleeps football, and I love that. It just trickles down. Like I said earlier, everything he does trickles down to us and how we approach everything, not just on the field but off the field, and how we go about life.

So it's been great.

Q. Trying to come up with a song he sang after the Michigan State game, he said it was his favorite song ever and no one knew what it was -- Gordon Lightfoot?

DRAKE NUGENT: It might be the Edmund Fitzgerald was. The gales of November came early.

Q. That's the one he was singing?

DRAKE NUGENT: That one or the Jolly Good Fellow, but I feel like everyone knows that one.

Q. Five-minute long-song.

DRAKE NUGENT: Definitely the Fitzgerald one.

Q. Was it on the bus?

DRAKE NUGENT: It was that one, yes. There was music playing but it was very light music, and then you would put like -- we didn't have a speaker on the bus. We had to use the microphone, like if there's a tour guide on the bus, so we put it up to the microphone like this and had them sing in there, too. It would be him up there singing -- like what's going on up there -- it does not sound good.

Q. You said let it all hang out in this game, shoot your shot but Trevor said they could throw different things at you like TCU did a year ago. How do you balance doing that while figuring out the adjustments you need to make?

DRAKE NUGENT: It's all at the snap of a football. There's a certain point, pre-snap you can obviously go through in your head about what you're going through, the play, all the different possibilities that can happen.

But at the snap of the football, those split seconds, like that's when your reaction time has got to be on point. You just have to be sure that you're aggressive, and at the same time your awareness level is at an all-time high for all that different stuff they could bring.

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