

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Friday, December 29, 2023  
Pasadena, California, USA

## Alabama Crimson Tide Justin Eboigbe Press Conference



### Q. How are you liking California so far?

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: What did Tupac say, I love LA (laughter).

### Q. Where were you at at this time last year?

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: This time last year, was down at the Sugar Bowl, trying to cheer my team on. Doing a little bit of rehab and strength and conditioning. But still uncertain what my future hold.

It was a blessing to look at the year in review, how hard work pays off. Can't do nothing without God, and just each and every day working, understanding there ain't no tomorrow, everything happens for a reason.

And I just truly believe that. I told myself each and every day I would come back from it. And I truly meant that. I truly believed it. Each and every day in practice, each and every game I try to go out and prove myself right. And just understand that adversity that happened, it made me better. It made me mentally stronger. It made me physically better because I feel like I truly did come back better.

### Q. I know you guys are excited to be here, but for you is it a little more special given what you just talked about last year?

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Of course. Of course. Just the challenges of the season. I would say I don't think nobody, after week two, thought we'd be in this position. Even after week three, I don't think anybody thought we would be in this position.

But just truly each and every game, each and every practice, we just came together, understood that it's us. Anything that we're going to accomplish, it's us. And I feel like truly we became close as a team through all the

doubts, the adversity that happened, and we just truly understood that we still controlled our own destiny.

It came with beating Ole Miss at home, going on to beat LSU, beat Tennessee and controlling off it to and get to Atlanta, and going on to beat the No. 1 team in the country at that time. Understanding that we're prepared for this situation, prepared for this opportunity, and we earned the right to be here.

### Q. You're watching film, what stands out about their running back?

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: He's a patient runner. He's a very good player. A lot of times in the games you'll see guys get out of their run fits. He exploits it and he'll take advantage of it.

So just understanding that we have to be disciplined, we have to fit the line, stay in our gaps because as soon as we get out of our gap, he's going to explore and hit the gap that he was in. Just being disciplined on the team, understanding we are playing a great running back. We are playing a great O line, and we have to treat them as such.

### Q. Take us back to your mindset, the Sugar Bowl, what extent were you in your rehab process, did you know you would be able to come back, but was it still up in the air at that point?

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: It was still hopeful thinking. At that point I was still doing like band workout, nothing weight-wise. I was just trying to run a little bit. It was like the first few weeks I was cleared to do band workouts and be able to run.

I was just grateful to be able to do that but also just grateful to have the opportunity to be with the team because it was something that was missing during the time that I was out.

So it was kind of like a little rehab in itself being around the team, being around the guys. So just grateful for that opportunity because it makes me think back on how far everything came.



I understand that always carry that with me because it's something I can tap into in them hard times, understanding I came from that, where I was, and taking care of the moment, taking advantage of the moment. Any opportunity that's given, take full advantage of it because you never know what may happen.

**Q. Has there been a moment or game this year where you really felt that or you've been able to take a step back and appreciate that?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I would say just the first game against Middle Tennessee, being able to go out on the field, even, you know, people wouldn't consider that a big game, but I was like, man, I'm here.

And then going out playing against Texas A&M, last time we played them we lost. Going on the road, being in a hostile environment, and being able to have one of my best games, not just one of my best games, I felt the defensive line, they had one of their best games. The guy over there had one of their best games. T.K., Tim Keenan, Jaheim Oatis, Tim Smith, just the whole D line, I celebrate things like that when other guys are going too.

**Q. When you were struggling, quote/unquote, earlier in the season, do you hear from former players? How does that work at Alabama?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I mean, honestly, you can go on social media and, you know, see their response to what was going on, but we understand that's all from a place of care.

They did the same exact things that we did: The hell of workouts in the summertime, the grind of the workouts in summertime, the fall camp practices and the grind of Tuesday, Wednesday practices during the week.

So they know what it takes. Everything that they say is from a place of care, a place of love.

We try not to -- when we go out on the field, we try to live up to the expectation of what Bama is about. Because that's where it is. People call it D line, UDBU, linebacker U. And we just try to live up to the expectation and be something that they can be proud of.

**Q. It seemed like Coach Saban was really intentional about being publicly supportive of the team and how hard you guys were playing even though you still had a ways to go to become the team you wanted to be. How is that received in the locker room when he does that?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: He always say he loves this team. And we truly do believe that because of the adversity that has been faced and everything that's happened. Guys are uncertain about their position, the loss early on, the doubt from the media and all that, like he loves saying: Let all naysayers know.

So just his reception of him backing us and truly believing in us even at a time when we felt at our worse. If you saw the locker room after week 2, it was a very bad feeling.

Even coming out that week 3, with USF, it was still the same feeling. But the next week, just going on, Ole Miss, Tennessee, the second half against Tennessee. LSU.

Just we responded to adversity very well. I feel like that's something that has built, carried in this team. It's something that we have taken to get us to this part, to get us to this game here.

**Q. Considering everything that you've been through, was it to take the lead in that aspect, hey, you've been worse through football games, maybe the defense in that manner?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Of course. I try to be somebody who tries to lead. Not only by words but by actions. You see me out there each and every day working, each and every practice. I never take a day off. I'm not going to take reps off. If I can go, I'm going to go because at the end of the day I want the trust and the belief of not only the coaches but the players that everything that I do, I earned it and it wasn't just given to me.

So if I'm playing a lot of plays, just know that Monday through Friday, I was taking all them reps for a reason. I don't look at it like trying to get my body right for the game. I'm going to show each and everybody that I work during the week to get this opportunity.

**Q. Size-wise, how does this Michigan offensive line stack up against the offensive lines you've faced this season?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: You really don't know until the game. You be ready for that first hit. You never know how hot they might be. Because on film, somebody can look like they're coming off the ball but until you go up against it, you really don't know. But in the past they won the Joe Moore Award, right? So giving somebody the best O line.

Just the opportunity to go up against a great O line like that. But just understanding that one of the guys got hurt, I think Zach Minter, but they were still able to go on to win the Big Ten Championship. And just understand that

they're a great O line unit. And it's going to take 60 minutes to impose our will.

**Q. How cognizant are you guys of J.J. McCarthy's rushing ability?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Very. In practice, a guy, Ty Buchner, has given us a great look by scrambling around. So it's been an importance on containing the quarterback, our scramble rules, running to the ball. Because this is it. You've got to lay it all on the line.

Same way how we try to get to the national championship, they're trying to get to the national championship. So they're going to come out with all the tricks. They're going to leave it all on the line, and we're going to do the same.

**Q. Which team do you feel like is the real underdog in this game?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Do we still have doubters that we shouldn't be here? So I feel like it's us. Ever since week 2 I feel we've had the underdog mentality, and we proved a lot of people wrong, and we're just trying to prove the people that still believe in us right and prove ourselves right because we earned the opportunity to be in this game, and it's on us to show Monday the reason why.

**Q. (Indiscernible) played in this game, but there are young guys in practice. What do you see from them (indiscernible) and a guy like LT Overton?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Just the maturity. Understanding they may not be able to play, but they're going to give us right, whether it's individual drills, giving us a good look or going on the scout team and giving the O line a good look. At the end of the day, you can still help the team by getting the guy who may be playing on Monday -- it's weird not saying Saturday -- giving the guys playing on Monday a good look.

You can help the team out. Just because they may not be on the game field doesn't mean that you can't help out in the practice field, in the film room. Helping guys out, that's what it's about.

Everybody has a role on this team, and just because your role may not be of a guy like Kool-Aid that gets all the attention, you gotta realize that at the end of the day if we accomplish what we want to accomplish, each and every one is going to get a ring.

**Q. How much tackling do you do in practice over the course of the season?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Not much because we try to keep guys up, and it's all about keeping guys healthy. But it's all about the fundamentals. The approach of the tackle, the wrapping up, but you gotta stay up because you don't want to get no guys hurt. You don't want nobody on the ground during practice. But at times during scrimmages we do a lot of live tackling, full go at it.

**Q. The reason I ask is it sounds like Michigan, they do a lot of tackling in their 9 on 7s. I assume you guys do thud when you do 9 on 7.**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Yeah.

**Q. How do you establish, keep those periods physical knowing you're not full tackling?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Trust and belief. (Indiscernible) alive and full at it. And sometimes we do make mistakes. Guys do go to the ground because the runners, they are taught to run through a tackle and finish the play.

And the only thing we try to do is we try to keep guys healthy, but we can teach the fundamentals by the approach of the tackle and also wrapping up. Just because we're not taking guys to the ground as full-on tackle, you can still practice the fundamentals.

**Q. Do you like 9 on 7? Or do you know if it's a day that's coming up, it's not your favorite?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I like it. It's usually a Wednesday practice. But I like it all. The periods we look forward to is the team run, the good on good, mano y mano, the O line try and move us off the ball, we try to move the O line off the ball, and the backers try to make their run fits, the safeties coming down.

That's what it's about. I feel like that's something that anybody on the Bama defense looks forward to. That's going to be a telling sign of how our day is.

**Q. Before this, what did you know about Michigan?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I mean, I knew it was a good team. I know they like to run the ball. It's something we pride ourselves on, stopping the run.

Clearly undefeated. They're a team that deserve to be here, and I have all the respect in the world for them.

**Q. What's been your impression of LT Overton since he's been here?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Good guy. Coming in, learning the



system. Trying to be successful in it. Great team guy. He's on scout team right now. Of course he can't play in the game right now, but he's giving the guys on the O line and offense a look.

**Q. How much do you think is skill set (indiscernible) able to provide, height, weight, size?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: When he gets in the winter conditioning, summer conditioning, his body is going to change. He's going to get bigger and stronger. But he's a guy who, I think, plays edge at Texas A&M. He'll come in play D line. He's going to put a little bit more weight on. But I feel like he's going to be very successful in the system.

**Q. What advice would you give to him joining this defense after you spent so long with this defense? What did you tell him about what to expect, I guess, from it?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Just to expect that it's expectations each and every day. Going to have to come in and work and understand that the expectation of the last place isn't an expectation here. It's a grind each and every day.

And it's a competition each and every day because it may be a guy that's younger than you are, a guy that's behind you in the depth chart wanting the same opportunity as you.

You have to prove it each and every day, whether it be in the weight room, whether it be experience or whether it be on the field, you've got to understand that it's a competition. That's what makes it so successful.

**Q. A lot of people forgot about Alabama week 2. Did you guys feel as players that you were in real trouble, you lost to Texas at home, et cetera?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: No, we never felt like we were in trouble. We understood we still controlled our destiny. Texas was not an SEC opponent. At the end of the day, it wouldn't hurt us as far as getting to Atlanta. We knew it was going to be a tougher role, but we had to win out.

But it was going to take one game at a time, and we were going to have to really put importance on taking it one day at a time, each practice trying to get better, trying to minimize mistakes and do this.

**Q. They weren't just questioning you guys, they were questioning Saban, which having been in the program a long time, when you heard people say maybe he's not the coach he used to be, what sort of went through**

**your mind?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Just use that as motivation. Use it as fuel. They made a trademark letting all naysayers know, understanding if you're not with us, you're against us.

Understanding that it's going to take us, all the guys in the locker room, in the room, the coaching staff, everybody, the support staff, everything, it's us against the world. Understanding that it's going to be one day at a time, one game at a time, and we controlled everything that we controlled and we deserved the right to be here.

**Q. Were there a couple moments where he really pulled you together, where things potentially could come apart, and here's your 72-year-old coach, coached like when he was 42?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I would just say understand that he put confidence in us saying that he still really loves this team. And just putting importance on showing us that he believes in us. If he still believes in us, what everybody else has to say doesn't matter. He never stopped believing in us one day, he never stopped coaching us or looked at it as the season as a failure.

It's something that made us come together even more. Even after that week 2 game, the week 3 game, USF. Jalen became the starting quarterback, and we finally knew who was going to be the quarterback, and we rallied behind him. He became a great leader because we finally knew who was going to be the man in charge.

So just understanding that he put confidence in us, put confidence in Jalen, still had confidence in the defense, and we are here because of all of that.

**Q. Justin, have you seen LT in practice when he transferred over and (indiscernible)?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: He's been at practice with us. Great guy. Definitely helping out the offense. So hopefully it helps out on Monday from all the stuff he's done in practice, going up against us. Great guy because when it comes to individual drills, he's the first guy up, ready to help us give us a look. So I have nothing but great things to say about him.

**Q. Have you seen anything in the last year to make you think he's close to walking away, Coach Saban? Have you seen anything in him this year from that makes you think he's ready to say --**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: No. No. He always say why would I walk away and do what? First day I came in he still has

the same fire and passion that he does now. I truly believe him. I know when I was getting recruited people said he was going to walk away, and he still hasn't.

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**Q. All year Michigan has talked about the TCU game it played last year, this big learning experience. From your perspective, is that a game you look to as to how to throw Michigan off, how to throw McCarthy off?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Not really, because each year is different. Each game is different. If you try to compare us to the week two, we're not the same team.

I'm not going to compare what happened last year because that's not the same team that had different players, different mindset, they learned a lot of things.

And they can have a learning experience from that, but we're going to take what they can give this season as what they are.

**Q. Kool-Aid said that Michigan reminds him of Auburn. Do you agree with that?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: I mean, a team that has nothing to lose. They've been in this position before, so close to the national championship. So they want to play spoilers for the season that we want to have. It's still all about us.

**Q. Similar offense to Auburn?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: As far as they like to run the ball. That's their bread and butter, they like to run the ball. I'm pretty sure they're going to have their mindset to run the ball.

**Q. What do you think about Blake Corum?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Great back, very patient back. Takes advantage of people getting out of the holes, getting out of the run fits. And he's somebody that came back from an injury last year. So I'm glad that he came back and had a successful season.

**Q. Do you like the game Ole Miss, tempo, rush, rush, rush?**

JUSTIN EBOIGBE: Honestly, it's crazy, early in the season that's all we played was tempo teams. But I just like the challenges of each and every week playing a different team, playing a different style of game.

And it's just fun because a different level of preparation that you have to have, especially with having all this time to prepare for a team, it's something that you look forward to.

