

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Pasadena, California, USA

Michigan Wolverines

Mike Sainristil

Press Conference

Q. How are things going for your preparation so far this week since you've been here?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Things have been really good. Practice has been really good. Just everything about game (inaudible) has felt really good. Just since the Big Ten Championship and to finally be able to come here and get the atmosphere down, know what it feels like to be in California, get all that stuff out of the way. All the early events in the week, get all that stuff out of the way and finally being able to shift focus to Monday.

Q. Three straight years for this team as Big Ten champions, sitting here in the College Football Playoff, what's behind the surge this program has had to build to this point where you're a consistent contender here?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Consistency in the offseason (inaudible). And coming up with (inaudible), what do you want this team to be, and leaders stepping up in roles. Pulling guys along, young guys. (Inaudible) help us and the coaches doing a great job with us schematically, helping us become a better team. And just, not even the (inaudible), in the weight room, just simply doing all that type of stuff has allowed us to become a complete team.

Q. Defensively what are the biggest challenges that Alabama poses?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: They have a lot of offensive weapons. Receivers and the quarterback is really good, running back is good. They're a complete offense, but we also are the number one defense in the country. We pose a number of challenges to them as well.

Q. You catch any of the Ohio State game yesterday? Do you feel the (inaudible) SEC-Big Ten narrative? Do you feel like you're carrying -- I know you're playing



for Michigan first and foremost, but is there some Big Ten pride going here?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Not from my standpoint, no. But SEC, Big Ten, doesn't matter what conference you're in, football is football at the end of the day.

Q. How much (inaudible) -- you're tasked as a defensive player (inaudible) and instincts as a DB?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: In a way it allows me to not guess but anticipate, as well as knowing my scheme and knowing what our play calls are, and then down and distance, knowing like, okay, offense might run this type of concept on third and long compared to third and short, knowing what our offense did when I was a part of the offense. Different things like that do help me in a sense.

Q. Do you feel the most you can read and see the body language, like, okay, this is what I would have done (inaudible) a certain (inaudible) or move?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: When I played receiver (inaudible) looking the same. I didn't want to give DBs an easy (inaudible) when I was either run blocking or running a route, as well as how I make my body (inaudible) look the same, so I wasn't giving away any hints on the breakdown or anything like that. But watching the film, you definitely can tell -- tendencies of receivers when they get the ball and (inaudible).

Q. (Inaudible) on both sides how impressive is it (inaudible)?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: He's really good. He's a good receiver, explosive receiver. Even when he was at Georgia he was doing those type of things. And the scheme that they have allows him to be really successful. And he makes plays (inaudible), so it's good for him.

Q. How do you compare Ohio State (inaudible) to Bamas? Are there similarities?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I think Bama has a lot more speed than Ohio State receivers do. They're both two talented



receiver groups. I feel like we have some preparation by playing Ohio State receivers, which has led us up to this point here.

Q. How many times have you gone back to watch the OSU game? Have you done that or is it all --

MIKE SAINRISTIL: We definitely go back to watch the teams that beat us, not just the Ohio State game, every game that we played. We watch where the teams attacked us the most, what coverages, what concepts hurt us the most. And just go back and look at all of them and you put it (indiscernible) to see what's going to help us the most.

Q. Do you feel like an underdog in this game? A lot of people are talking about betting on Alabama.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: That's good for them. Let them take what they want. We care about ourselves. (Indiscernible) going out there and prove ourselves right.

Q. Talking to (indiscernible), he said you brought him along. Can you talk how he's developed? He said you were the one sticking with him the most, and he had to study you. Could you talk about his growth a little bit?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Every day he's becoming more mature as a person not just as a football player. I've known Tamari (phonetic) since my freshman year when he was in high school. I think he may have been in eighth grade -- but Tamari (phonetic) is going to be a very good player.

And to see what he's helped this team do this year, see how he's played a big role on this team, very good to see as a leader. He's going to be a name that's going to be remembered in this program.

Q. How has this preparation this year been compared to last year?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I don't know. I don't think about how we prepared last year. I just know the way we've been preparing this year.

Q. Is it much of a difference in terms of physicality in practice, or how you guys are studying compared to (inaudible) against TCU and Georgia?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I feel like this year we've been able to stay locked in for longer periods of time because of the schedule Coach put out for us. And then when we have (indiscernible) practices they're very intense and physical. It's fast. It's like (indiscernible) NFL practices, just how we're practicing. Everything that Coach has set out for us, the way he made our schedule (inaudible).

Q. Has it been a big difference for you in particular not being able to study at home in terms of preparing and all that?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: No, we go to the team room to watch film. We get the guys together. But I've been able to study as much as I wanted to.

Q. How would you describe the 24 hours past the Penn State game finding out that Coach Harbaugh was suspended and the way that game played out?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It was unfortunate. We were kind of disappointed in the way we found it out, the way we found out. But we handled it very well. Coach was, like, this is what they're doing, this is the case. We're going to try fighting it. If I lose I lose; if I win I win. But regardless we have to go out there and step out on that field on Saturday.

And it just gave us another chip on our shoulder, a bigger chip on our shoulder. So we did what we had to do on that Saturday.

Q. Did it show you something about the team that maybe you didn't know, or did it reinforce how they thought about --

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It definitely reinforced how I thought about the guys, not really worried about what anybody else thinks. No matter what they're trying to do to us or say to us, we're not going to lose focus on what our goal is and we're not going to let it derail us.

Q. Could you describe the way Harbaugh (inaudible) the adversity --

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I think as a team, we all had a moment where (inaudible).

Q. Do you feel he relishes that position of having a (inaudible), not a target, but sort of that mentality (indiscernible).

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Yeah, definitely. You heard him say that (inaudible). And I think that's exactly what's going on this year with everything that's been happening. The team, every single game, every single week, we continue to get closer. And that starts in the offseason. That starts with the relationships that we build, how we train, the things we do in practice (indiscernible).

Q. I know it's like three or four team buses. Were you on the bus when you sang "The Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald" after the Michigan State game?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: No, that's the offense.

Q. What's the defensive reaction when you guys found out, like he's breaking out karaoke coming back from Sparty?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I didn't even know that, actually. We did hear they were singing different songs on that bus, but I never knew that.

Q. As you look back on your career, you played for so long, what are your emotions going into this final one or two games?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I'm just taking it one game at a time, not looking ahead. What happened in the past happened in the past. And I'm blessed to be in this position I'm in right now.

Q. In a game like this, the margins are so small, turnovers can be the difference, and you guys have multiple interceptions this year. What goes into that? Is there a randomness to it or is there a play-making aspect to it? Talk about coming up with those interceptions and big plays.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Taking care of your main responsibility. Being in the spots that you're supposed to be in, executing the game plan. Not trying to do anybody else's job. Doing you're 1/11th of the defense and making the plays that come to you.

Q. You and the guys in front of you, (indiscernible) your linebackers, defensive line get some pressure (inaudible)?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I'm super confident in our front seven. We have a stout D line. We have a great linebacker room and great DBs. So, like I said, if everyone does their job -- we know they'll make plays, but we'll make plays as well.

It's going to come down to who is going to make the most plays when those plays are needed. Who is going to be the most fundamentally sound, most technically sound group on the field that day.

Q. What stands out when you see Alabama receivers on film, and (inaudible) match-ups?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Speed. They have guys who can track the ball very well down the field. But I feel like every single week we've been preparing through the preparation of our own receivers in practice and then who we face every week.

Some teams may not have the same caliber receivers but some people do different things that have challenged us along the way. I definitely feel we've been prepared for this moment.

Q. Charles Woodson had a pretty famous interception in '87. Have you thought about what that kind of play for yourself in this game would be like or anything like that?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I definitely visualize myself making plays. So I'm not going out there Monday looking to do too much, do too much extra. I'll be who I've been, I'll lead how I've led. And I'm going to play how I played. And I'm going to make the plays that come my way.

Q. Who is your favorite player, NFL, college, whoever? Who do you model yourself after?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: When I used to play offense my favorite player was Tavon Austin. Defensively right now, I don't know, I don't think I have a favorite player on defense. I model my game after guys like Mya Hedland (phonetic) and Kenny Moore. Those two guys I look at and watch a lot.

Q. What's your biggest inspiration?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: My inspiration, I'll say my parents. To see what they overcame in their lifetimes, to see the life -- or to see what they've been able to do, how they've been able to provide for my family, the adversity that they fought coming from Haiti, being two immigrants and growing up in America, trying to raise kids and this society, a completely different culture, (inaudible) lives by a different motto is what inspires me.

It pushes me and drives me every single day to be able to wake up and say my parents are still here, they do whatever it takes to provide for this family. The only way I can pay them back is with my own success. That's my inspiration.

Q. What was the biggest obstacle in your career?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I would say that COVID year and the funnel year. Just because I was playing receiver and I felt I wasn't really getting the looks I wanted or I felt like I wasn't getting targeted as much and stuff.

So I was like, you know what, I can only control what I can control. I've always been a mentally tough type of person. I never let it affect me too much. But I would say that would have been the first time I was really in my head

about, am I the guy? Am I who I say I am?

But all I can do is control what I can control and that's practice hard. That's show up every day, be who I am, and then the following year, after '21, I got moved to DB. And then my career has catapulted from there. And that's because of Coach Harbaugh.

Q. (Inaudible)?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Consistency, and if you're really going to do something, you've got to do it. Don't just do it because someone else told you to do it. People can sit there and tell you you gotta do this or do that, but if you don't want to do it yourself, it's never going to work out the way it should. You have to be willing and able.

And a lot of people are able, but it's the amount of will they have in them that's going to drive them or push them to get to the point of success that they want to be. So if you're not being consistent in what it is you're doing, it will fall through and they're not going to go the way you want them to.

Q. How long do your New Year's resolutions last?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I don't think I've made New Year's resolutions for the past four years.

Q. What's one rule from another sport you would add to football?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Maybe slide tackling from soccer.

Q. Who is your top artist on Spotify?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Harley Kodak (phonetic).

Q. One alum you would like to hang out with?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: One alum? Can I give you three, four? Michael Phelps, Tom, (indiscernible) and Charles.

Q. If you're planning a theme for a bowl game, what would you pick?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It could be anything? The Shampoo Bowl. Just have after the game, whatever team wins, have shampoo poured all over the coach, something like that.

Q. Did you go to bed thinking it was going to be Florida State or you didn't really --

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I didn't think about it at all. I knew we had selection the next morning, but that's the furthest I

thought about it.

Q. When you saw it was Bama, were you surprised?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: No, I wasn't surprised. It is what it is. You saw it, that's who I was playing. Let's go. That was my reaction, let's go.

Q. Mentioned after the 2020 season, email around the players, does that ring a bell?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Yes.

Q. What did you think of that?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I don't remember what was on the email, but it was almost kind of like, I'm pretty much sure it was an email across the summit of saying here's the things that we need to do to, not rebuild, but like reshift our focus, in a sense.

Q. Were you inspired by it?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Yeah. I'm inspired by 99 percent everything Coach Harbaugh says. He's a very wise man and intelligent man. And he's never said anything to me that hasn't been in my best interests. So when he speaks, I listen.

Q. What do you think of his speeches? I know sometimes he'll send notes too after he gives them.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I think Coach Harbaugh could be a writer or poet, anything of that sort, because like I said he's very good with his words. Some speeches are different than others, but like when he speaks, when he is saying something, it's very powerful, very meaningful, very deep when he talks.

Q. What about you, you're a musician?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Used to be.

Q. Don't play anymore?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: No.

Q. Do you think you'll get back to it?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. I haven't really thought about it too much.

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