

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Saturday, December 30, 2023  
Pasadena, California, USA

## Michigan Wolverines

### J.J. McCarthy

#### Press Conference



#### Q. What's it like to be at the Rose Bowl?

J.J. McCARTHY: Tremendous honor, all the history behind it. Such a legendary landmark, and to be able to be a part of it in the stage that we're on, it's truly amazing.

#### Q. When Alabama got the matchup with you and you knew you had a month to prepare, what was the focus like for the team?

J.J. McCARTHY: Utmost focus. It's one of the best teams in the country, it's not like second to the best. Just being able to go out there every single day and focus on the task at hand and keep things simple, I feel like that's going the biggest difference from last year to this year.

#### Q. You guys were in this position last year and didn't get through. What did you need to change, and how did you guys do it?

J.J. McCARTHY: I felt like the preparation going into it, not being exhausted mentally and physically going into the game, and really just executing on all cylinders when the game does come.

#### Q. How are you feeling physically?

J.J. McCARTHY: Extremely great. 100 percent, even 110 percent. So I'll be ready to go.

#### Q. Where do you guys feel strongest about? You love your O-line? You guys have a run game. You have a great connection with your receivers. Where are you feeling most confident?

J.J. McCARTHY: Just in every single player and every single coach because the love we have for each other is unique and different. That's going to be one of the things that help us win this ballgame, just doing it for each other and going out there and leaving it all out there.

#### Q. How has this week of preparation gone? I know you guys had practice yesterday. How is it going?

J.J. McCARTHY: It's going great. Just attacking every single day, every single meeting, every single film study with the coaches or with just position groups or by yourself. So it's been amazing.

#### Q. We've heard a lot about Zak being around and stuff, and we even heard he's walking, which is crazy. It's a testament to his work and his grit. What does that do for you guys when you see him with you guys every step of the way, still involved after going through what he did?

J.J. McCARTHY: It just reassures us that, man, we made the right decision-making him one of our captains because he's always going to be -- even though he's not playing, he's going to keep uplifting us just fine.

Being around us and walking around Disneyland with us, he's an inspiration everywhere he goes on and off the field. It's just great to have him on this trip.

#### Q. I can't think of a moment, obviously not the severity of the injury he went through, but has he ever battled through anything like that this season or the past couple seasons you've seen with similar traits, or is this like another level?

J.J. McCARTHY: He's had this whole wrist thing going on ever since I got here and never complains. There's a multitude of little ticky tack injuries that I'm sure he's dealing with or has dealt with, and you just never hear a peep out of him.

That just speaks to who he is and the grit that he carries himself with every day.

#### Q. You grew up in Chicago, big time football area. Did you ever watch the Big Ten map commercial when you were growing up?

J.J. McCARTHY: Yes.



**Q. What do you think of that ad? I know it's become pretty iconic with our generation.**

J.J. McCARTHY: No doubt. I love it. It just gets you fired up for football, I'm not going to lie. Obviously there's more sports that go into just the Big Ten as a whole, but I'm excited to see that map expand the next couple years, going out to USC, UCLA, Oregon, all that stuff.

It will be a tradition that will grow and evolve into something great.

**Q. You want them to add in the schools, not make a new ad?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, that would be great.

**Q. Have you ever gone up against Cam Goode in practice? I would assume so.**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yes.

**Q. What's it like when he's coming down as a defensive tackle and coming toward you? What's it like seeing him out there? I know he's a goofy guy off the field.**

J.J. McCARTHY: I love Cam. I've got so much respect for him just the way he carries himself and the type of personality he is. He's a guy on the team that just like, when the time is right, he locks in. But when somebody needs a laugh or somebody needs a joke, you always look to DJ Cam Goode.

In practice, whenever he's not getting to me, he's always going to affect the play in some ways because I've never had my balls tipped more than Cam has at the line of scrimmage. He's a menace on the field for sure.

**Q. He's a deejay too?**

J.J. McCARTHY: He called himself DJ Cam Goode.

**Q. Does he ever bring his mix tapes into the locker room, or is that kept at home?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I think it's kept at home.

**Q. Is there something about defensive tackles? I think Mason's a little goofy. Kris Jenkins is super goofy. They've got that energy about them. Is that a D-tackle thing that you're aware of?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I guess. The ones that I'm aware of and

the ones I've been around, even in high school, so I think you're onto something with that.

**Q. K.G., same way, a little bit goofy.**

J.J. McCARTHY: And all great guys too.

**Q. I heard about the bus trip after Wisconsin. What was it like when Coach Harbaugh started singing The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald?**

J.J. McCARTHY: It was great. Just the entire vibe on the way home, it pretty much summed it up with Coach Harbaugh singing that song. With everything we've been through, especially last year, just having that camaraderie on the bus is truly a moment to remember for the rest of my life.

**Q. What percentage of guys actually knew the song?**

J.J. McCARTHY: A lot of us. I personally don't know it as well. I'm not a Michigander. He plays it all the time in our fieldhouse and stuff. Especially coming up to the big game, that's what he listened to before. It's definitely the team theme song for sure.

**Q. I was talking to Mike just now. Having gone from offense to the defense, when you're going against him in practice, do you see areas of his game where, okay, because of his offensive background, that allows him to do certain things?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yes. For instance, he picked me off December 23rd, before we left to go see our families. It was a high-low concept to the boundary, and he'll bait me to throw the over the top route by sinking down on the flat route and knowing I'm going to throw it. He baits me pretty much telling me where to throw the ball because he knows the rules and sees what's happening around him.

That's a special trait to have, having the understanding the concept of the play and adapting to it and manipulating what the quarterback is going to do.

**Q. When you guys beat Ohio State, most famous person you heard from on social media?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I would say Tom. Tom and Wayne Gretzky.

**Q. What did they say to you?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Just great job. Job's not finished yet. They were proud of me and just focusing on getting to the next step.



**Q. This is the last four-game playoff. Do you have any favorite memories from the last many years? A single play, a player, a game?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I would say just going against Georgia and being able to field a hit to Quay Walker and Nokobe Dean and Nolan Smith and being able to use that as a reference point. That was probably the best defense in the last ten years of college football, and knowing that it can only get lower from there and easier from there.

So just having that to always refer back to is great.

**Q. When you guys found out you were playing Alabama, when you guys were watching, what was the reaction? The team reaction, your reaction?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I was just like let's go. What an opportunity, what a tremendous team to put ourselves against and see what we're made of.

A lot of the buzz out there was acting like we were scared and all this, but we were just shocked that Florida State didn't get in, being 13-0. We were just excited for this opportunity.

**Q. What's it like right now, you're at the Rose Bowl, two days away from the game. What are you guys feeling right now?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Ultimate excitement, jumping out of our shoes. Enjoying every single moment, relishing it, all the experiences the Rose Bowl presented to us. And enjoying ourselves. We only get nine days left with each other, and just being able to appreciate every moment and take in every moment has been the biggest thing.

**Q. What do you think about the last two or three years? Obviously you guys into the playoff, didn't get over that hump to get to the National Championship. How do you use those past experiences to help you in this semifinal game?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Just learning from it. Leading up to the preparation to the game, the execution during the game, all the little details that went wrong last year and the year before, we're just trying to fine tune it as much as possible.

I feel like having that wisdom is going to be one of the big key factors in this thing.

**Q. Have you seen Coach's chicken coop at all?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yes.

**Q. What's your impression of it? Do the chickens have names?**

J.J. McCARTHY: They probably do. But just like the coop is a five-star hotel for chickens. It's really nice.

**Q. What's it like hearing him talk about his chickens? Proud dad moment?**

J.J. McCARTHY: It is. He talks about playing with them in the yard, like an extended member of the family.

**Q. Did it surprise you when you saw him interact with the chickens?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Not at all because my uncle and aunt, they actually have chickens, and they interact with them the same way.

**Q. Are your aunt and uncle in Michigan as well?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Illinois. They're producing great eggs every single day. That's what he's saying.

**Q. Have you tried his eggs?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I haven't his chicken's eggs, but I have tried real chicken eggs, and they're a lot better than the store's.

**Q. Is that your favorite Harbaugh story, the chicken coop, as far as a funny, offbeat story?**

J.J. McCARTHY: There's too many to count. It's definitely up there, though.

**Q. Is there anything he has said -- I know he says a lot of different things -- that really struck you as being particularly insightful? Even if he's acting funny or not.**

J.J. McCARTHY: I think, whether it's perceived as funny or perceived as a joke, there's always like deep wisdom behind it if you really think about it.

The biggest thing for me that I heard from him this year is what's good for the bee is good for the hive, and what's good for the hive is good for the bee. I think that resonates with, not just the football team, but resonates with an organization, whether it's in business, hospitals, anywhere. It just resonates. That was really profound. I'm going to be using that for the rest of my life.

**Q. Just don't get stung, right?**



J.J. McCARTHY: Exactly.

**Q. What's your impression of the Alabama secondary after studying them the past few weeks?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Probably the best secondary I've seen in a long time. Just with Kool-Aid, with Terrion, with Jaylen, with Caleb. Even DeVonta and Jaheim, like those guys are unbelievable, just so fast, so technically sound. Just being able to get them in a bad situation is really tough.

Once you add that with a pass rush like they do, it's a tremendous defense, one of the best in the country, that's for sure.

**Q. Does Caleb look like a freshman on film? I know that's a weird question.**

J.J. McCARTHY: Not at all. I grew up playing against his brother in seven-on-seven. Went to a couple camps with him. Great family. You could just tell that the Downs, they prepare for moments like these, and they always have.

They kind of step up on everyone just because of their preparation and the way they take care of their body, the way they attack every day. It's just special to watch them on film. You can see the future is bright for them, and I can't wait to see where it goes.

**Q. What did you hear yesterday about the whole catapult thing and changing (indiscernible). As a quarterback that's done a lot of film study, how much did that change your preparation?**

J.J. McCARTHY: It changed the convenience of it, but it really didn't take any hours off. It was just adapting and overcoming that situation. The society we live in, you never know what's going on with all the data out there. It was just adapt and overcome and keep pushing.

**Q. Do you get to watch film much with Coach Harbaugh?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, he's in the quarterback room almost every time we watch film.

**Q. Is there anything he keeps coming back to when you're going over it?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Nothing he really keeps coming back to. Maybe just hitting the A gaps more when running and escaping the pocket. But Coach Campbell does a tremendous job every single meeting and really gets us dialed in.

So Coach Harbaugh really doesn't say too much, but he always sprinkles in some really good memories.

**Q. I talked to Trevor yesterday, and he told me that last year he thought that you guys maybe overlooked TCU a little bit. This year he said in the practice plan, this is the most prepared that you guys have been for a playoff game, bowl game, anything. Would you agree that last year you overlooked TCU a little bit too much?**

J.J. McCARTHY: For sure, I completely agree. Myself personally, just saying on this day last year, that it's going to be a smashfest, and that's all we do is smash and all that. Just unnecessary bulletin board material that doesn't make sense because they were a great football team.

Yeah, past two years, we made a lot of mistakes, and we're learning from them and putting them into action this year.

**Q. Last year you said you felt like you were ready for the NFL, but you also said you had some stuff you could come back and work on. This game, Roman said was the money game. He said it puts away some of his NFL decisions when he starts thinking about it. Do you feel like this is the same for you?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I feel like every game is a money game, just different levels of intensity. I'm not worried about the NFL. I'm not worried about what could happen after the fact. I'm just worried about executing the first play at hand, executing practice today, and the rest will take care of itself.

**Q. Does this one feel bigger? Obviously two straight College Football Playoffs, but this the Rose Bowl against Alabama, does this one feel a little bigger?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Naturally you kind of feel that, but at the end of the day, it's two teams going out there and deciding who's going to execute better each and every play.

**Q. Do you have time to reflect on your personal journey, from the Chicago subway to the Rose Bowl to the NFL?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I haven't had time to reflect just because I'm focused on the task I'm doing and where I'm trying to go. One day I'll look back and reflect on it and watch the highlights and maybe reminisce with the grandkids. Right now I'm busy working, and I'm going to focus on getting better.

**Q. What's it like having Blake Corum back after not being able to play the last time you were here?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Extremely huge. He's a keystone to our football team, and just being out there and actually being able to make an impact on the game is going to be huge for us because, like I said, he's a keystone for our offense, keystone for our football team, and it's a blessing to have him back.

**Q. For your offense when Zak Zinter went down in the Ohio State game, what does it take in the locker room to be able to lift up injured guys?**

J.J. McCARTHY: It takes a lot, but I think what you saw from us right after that happened and Blake scoring that touchdown, our whole mentality is next man up. Football is a dangerous game, and things like that happen. It's so unfortunate.

But you always have to be ready to move on, have that goldfish memory, and attack the next play.

**Q. There's IMG guys all over the country. Do you have relationships with any of the Alabama guys?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, J.C. Latham, Tyler Booker, Ja'Corey Brooks. We were on the National Championship team at IMG. That's always a special bond when you win something like that.

Just great human beings. I can't wait to see them and tap them up before the game. They've gotten a little bigger since then, but can't wait to see the boys.

**Q. Do you talk to them throughout the season?**

J.J. McCARTHY: Not as much, but I'm always watching. Whenever I turn on the Alabama game, I'm always looking for those guys and seeing how their pads sit now and see if that weight is making them a little slower. It's not. They've only gotten bigger, better, and stronger. I can't wait to see them.

**Q. Do you have any stories about just playing with those guys?**

J.J. McCARTHY: I just go back to when we were at IMG and just the amount of fun we had just shooting hoops together. We weren't really allowed to just because our coach was paranoid of us getting hurt. But those guys could shoot. So a lot of two ball games. It was a lot of fun.

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