

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Indiana

Monday, December 22, 2025

Pasadena, California, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Kalen DeBoer Press Conference

KALEN DEBOER: Good afternoon. Excited about this opportunity to be in the Rose Bowl, a special event and big-time game. Our guys are excited. We've got 15 California football players on our team that are excited to go play closer to home and even more from the West Coast.

That's one piece of it. But obviously the game itself and what it means, our opportunity to continue to take the next step. But we understand we've got a great football team with Indiana. Coach Cignetti, just what he's done is amazing here these last two years, just building the program as quickly as he's done to the level it's at. Really looking forward to us diving back into our process here the next 10 days or so, just getting back to work.

Really important days. I thought we did a great job from the SEC Championship to the first-round game in a lot of ways, whether it's the preparation -- I've got to give a tip of the hat to our training staff and our doctors, Jeff Allen, who runs our training room downstairs, with his staff. An amazing job just putting people together and getting guys as healthy as they could have. Dr. Cain, Dr. Wall drip, Dr. Stewart -- we've got a top-tier group, and I know there's even more.

Just everything they did to get our guys to where they played fast, and were as healthy as we've been in a long time. Need that again here in the next 10 days on the speed part.

Our guys, Coach Ballou, need to give him credit too, our head strength coach. We had as many guys hit their top speeds as we have since the Tennessee game, and that's tied for the most over 20 miles an hour all year. So it's great to have more players playing fast in the big moments.

Looking forward to the challenge. Our guys are as well.



Q. With you and Curt Cignetti in this match-up, got me thinking about just the unique paths that you both took to become head coaches at places like Alabama and Indiana. I wonder how your path and all the different stops and all the levels of college football helped prepare you to lead a program at the highest level with all that's changing in college football today?

KALEN DEBOER: Yeah, just knowing Coach Cignetti, and you referred to it, his path, nothing but respect, again, how he's done it, how he's gotten to this spot. A lot of work goes into it.

I think coming back to your question, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I think there's things that you do that give you an appreciation for the moment you're in, having an opportunity to be here at Alabama. But I also think there's moments you go through. With the playoffs the way they are, us having to go four rounds, been through that many, many years, whether it was as an assistant or as a head coach, going back to Sioux Falls days.

I think building a staff and having the network and the contacts has helped me surround people with a lot of knowledge, but also the right type of people to help lead you, especially in today's day and age of college football and building a team.

I think all of it goes into just being built for these moments that come.

But I've been really blessed, been blessed to be around a lot of great coaches who have mentored me along the way, that I've taken things from to be able to be successful in the moments that we're in now.

Q. As far as the game goes, Indiana's rushing attack has been really productive, even though Mendoza won the Heisman, has been kind of the guy getting more attention. I'd like your thoughts from a coaching chair, what makes Indiana's running game good? How good do you feel Indiana's offensive line has been and is playing going into this game?

KALEN DEBOER: Still diving into it, but I think the thing



that jumps out at me, with the first glance here the last day or so, is how well they work together, the offensive line, in particular, and just everyone being in sync.

They're always moving forward. And the opposite end, the defense, has the tackles for losses and is physical as well.

But I just think with obviously Mendoza winning the Heisman, that doesn't happen by accident. You put a whole season of film together, of games and stringing them each and every week and you end up undefeated because a trigger man can make some plays and do his things at an extremely high level.

I look at their skill around the offensive line, they just all complement each other. They go make plays. When the opportunities are there, they get it done.

And there's great coaching you can see to put them in spots to succeed, but also the guys, you can see they play with a swagger, with a confidence, and as they should with the success they've had.

Q. Wanted to ask you, how have you seen your defense grow exponentially since playing in the SEC and now you guys are in the CFP game, the victory at Oklahoma and now you're playing in the Rose Bowl? What are some of the traits you've seen along the way that have given your team even more confidence?

KALEN DEBOER: Well, I think there's a point -- it was early in the season -- where our guys defensively just kind of kept taking those steps and through conference play got the turnovers in big moments that helped us win games, the stops that were needed, forcing field goals.

I think that continued to breed kind of a belief at a high level. And they've been able to do it different ways. The first quarter maybe wasn't our best quarter, but they were fighting and coming off the field ready to solve problems, to come up with solutions, whether that's the coaching staff or our players.

I know that our whole team is going to fight, but you're asking about the defense in particular. I know they went out there, they're very proud of what they've accomplished, and really did a nice job as the game went along of making adjustments to get more pressure on the quarterback, to obviously come up with an interception for a touchdown, just continued to play.

And the game came back to us. We talk about that as a program, but the game came back to us because everyone just continued to stay the course and forced them even when they got into our territory to force field goals. And

that's a mindset that no matter where you step on the football field, you're just going to play that play, play it to the best of your ability. And our guys do that.

Q. I imagine you haven't like sort of deep dived into Indiana just the last few years. But I'm curious, you were around here at a time when this program was really emphasizing investment in football and really sort of trying to be bold about sort of dreaming bigger and pushing the boat out farther. In what you've been able to see of Coach Cignetti, do you see more of that, that basically kind of the impact of a place really investing in a way that says we want to be more competitive in football and we're going to be really proactive about it?

KALEN DEBOER: Yeah, no, I think you're right. I do pay attention just because it's a place I've been, pay a little more attention. I can't say -- we're worried about your own place and where you're at. But I felt like when we were there, there was a growth, an investment that was happening and there was success in '19 when I was there that felt like you were getting over the hump and that extended into the next season as well.

But there's certainly -- Coach Cignetti has done a great job providing the spark, which really leads to people continuing to be all in. As you get more people all in, you get the moments that you're in right now.

So, I think it works off of each other, the energy, and the commitment to the success, working hand in hand with the people that are there. So, nothing but a great time there that I had. It was short-lived, but one that I remember, and my family as well.

Q. The first question is about Bray Hubbard, obviously his play against Florida State garnered negative attention. We get to be in the season, he's an All-American. How have you seen him just progress throughout the season, and maybe what type of lesson is there, how he started and kind of how he's finished up the season?

KALEN DEBOER: Yeah, Bray, he is who he is. I know he was super disappointed, as well as many guys were, with week one, with just the production.

I would never really question how important it is to him. It means so much to play at a high level, but even more to do it with his teammates. He's a team guy.

And he's just continued to lead us. It doesn't matter if it's on the field, off the field, he's a top-tier person, first of all.



I think the work ethic he brings is something that trickles on to the rest of the guys. He takes it upon himself to make sure that, yes, the unit that's on the field, the 1s, the 2s, that they're playing at a high level and held to the standard. But he also cares about it trickling down to the players who are going to be the future here, too.

He's an extremely hard player. He's a playmaker in the big moments. You've seen him end up with the ball in his hands, interceptions at critical times. He's going to come down in the box. He can play out in space, just does a lot of things for us that are really important to our success defensively.

Q. Zabien Brown, you mentioned big plays. That's been his story since he's been at Alabama. What has allowed him to meet those moments? And then also just what kind of opportunity is it for him and other guys who are from California to get a chance to go back there and play in the Rose Bowl?

KALEN DEBOER: Z.B. has been -- you can call it the right place, but I think you make your own breaks, too. And there's times where you happen to be in the right spot.

But there's also times where you put the footwork in, and I see what he does with his film study. I see what he does on the football field, in practice, whether it's technically, just how important it is for him to be on the same page with the guys around him so he can take those, I don't want to call them -- they're calculated risks, or having an aggressiveness about him, to go make the plays knowing where his help is at, pre-snap, while the play's happening.

He's a really heady player and obviously a great athlete and playmaker.

So I think for him as well as all these guys going out to California, it's just a really cool moment for them. They're just such great kids -- they're not kids, but young men -- whose families have to travel a long ways each and every week, and this time they get to return the favor back to their families and go out there and play in front of them, as well as many friends, I'm sure, that will be at the game.

Q. Wanted to ask you about Kane. He was obviously there at Indiana with you. And I'm just curious, what was it about him? I'm assuming his time at Indiana played a heavy influence on you wanting to bring him on board at Alabama. What's stood out, is there anything about his time at Indiana that stands out to you? I guess also, what's it like for all you guys. I know there's a lot of former IU guys on staff, to come full circle and play this game against Indiana.

KALEN DEBOER: Yeah, I'm probably missing some -- Coach Ballou, Coach Sheridan -- but your reference to Kane, here's what I saw when I was there. First of all, a guy that really wanted me to come, be a part of it. And then when I was there, doing everything he could to be a team player.

Focused on running a defense -- I was the offensive coordinator -- but practice plans, whatever it was, be willing to work to do whatever was best for our team, not just his side of the ball.

Then there obviously has to be a production and a style of coaching that you feel fits. And whether it's what he does as a defensive coordinator or especially down here now with his home for the most part being down here in the East what he could bring as far as familiarity to the league, the region.

It was just a great fit, a great opportunity. And for him to jump on board and be a part of this, see what he's done with our defense, he's a great coach, great person, great family man. Our players really believe in him. Our staff does, too, as he manages them.

It's been really a great opportunity. And I'm glad that he was a big part of me coming there, trying to get me to Indiana. I'm glad he returned the favor and came when I called him as well.

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