

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Indiana

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Pasadena, California, USA

Indiana Hoosiers

Aiden Fisher

Press Conference

Q. Aiden Fisher, it is Rose Bowl week. How is it feeling, man?

AIDEN FISHER: It's good. Getting out here early is a lot better than the usual 24 hours. Just getting some preparations still done, but it's good to be here. The weather is pretty nice, so happy to be out here.

Q. You've played a lot of football in your lifetime. A little bit different when you have all this time off in between games. What has it been like to reset since the Big Ten Championship?

AIDEN FISHER: It's definitely been nice, reset, refocus. Some guys were able to take some time to go home, see some loved ones, just the things to get you refocused.

It's been great for the preparation. We've been preparing for both teams for two weeks, and we were able to focus on Alabama for the last nine, ten days. It's been great from a preparation standpoint and to refresh, reset, and refocus.

Q. You got to see your family?

AIDEN FISHER: We did.

Q. How was it? Was it all Indiana? Was it all Rose Bowl? Did people get that for Christmas?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, for the most part. I had a rule with my family that we could talk about it in the morning, but when the whole family is there at night, there's no football. Just wanted to spend some time with family and kind of get away from it.

Family is excited. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, everybody is talking about the Rose Bowl and how much it means to them just as fans and supporters. So it will definitely be a good one.



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Q. How did you get your mind away from it? Were you watching Stranger Things or something like that?

AIDEN FISHER: No.

Q. What did you do?

AIDEN FISHER: I have a dog, so that's kind of an easy one for me. Going home, I was with family a lot, playing board games. I'm a big Monopoly guy myself. Any chance I get to play Monopoly, I'm all in. Friends and family over playing all types of games like that.

Q. A dog guy, good man. Tell me about this offense. You're playing Alabama. They looked pretty good last time up. They've been a little up-and-down. What did you learn on film? You've had a lot of time to watch.

AIDEN FISHER: They're a good team. Physical up front, big. They're getting the run game going, which is dangerous for them. Obviously the pass game is elite with a really good quarterback and great weapons around him.

It will definitely be a challenge for us, one I think we're ready for, we'll be prepared for, but a really good offense and a really good team.

Q. What's your preferred Monopoly piece?

AIDEN FISHER: I'm always the boat.

Q. Boat?

AIDEN FISHER: Every time, yeah.

Q. How come?

AIDEN FISHER: One of my buddies would always bring it over, and he kind of got me into it. He was always the top hat, and I didn't want like the dog, like the bird or chicken or anything. So I had to go with the boat. It's done well for me, and I've got to keep with it.

Q. Very good. You came in last year, and it seemed

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like almost immediately stepped into a leadership role. How did that work as a new guy in the program?

AIDEN FISHER: I think just with the culture we were building, me being familiar with it, being with Coach Cig for a while, it was more comfortable for me to be able to step up to the guys where, you know, you go to your first workout, everybody is looking around. Who's going to break us down? Who's going to be challenging each other to win the rep or compete? Who's going to talk trash and break the barrier?

We're all being awkward and transfers and people who stayed here, all those things. For me it was about somebody's got to do it. Step up, be that guy. I was in that role a little bit at JMU as a sophomore. It was a little bit different, though.

I felt comfortable doing it. I felt the guys kind of gravitate towards me when I was able to do that and step up, so just kind of take it and run with it.

Q. You guys as a program kind of kept hitting milestones. You go to the playoff last year. You go undefeated this year. You win the Big Ten. You beat Ohio State. You beat Oregon. Another one here, SEC opponent, Alabama is as big a name as possible. What's the mindset coming in and to take on this challenge?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, you have the opportunity to win another football game. For us, I know I talked about it, just being at the Rose Bowl is a special experience. This game is, like you said, the granddaddy of them all. For us it's just one more game that we're fighting for our lives to play more football.

The preparation has to be at an all time high. Everything we do, the details, the communication, everything, we have to up another level. Just prepare for it and treat it like it is any other game because, at the end of the day, it's just a football game we're going to go play in.

Q. I talked to you before the season, and you said that Big Ten Championship is possible and going undefeated is possible. What's behind that never wavering belief that a lot of people say you can't, and here you are and you did everything that your coach and your team said is possible, you did it? Now you're here. Certainly the job's not finished, but what's the story behind that, this group and this culture?

AIDEN FISHER: I think for me I just need to see our team firsthand. I'm going through spring ball, playing against these guys, playing with them. Even at fall camp, I had a

lot of confidence in our team, first of all, seeing what 15 can do over there with the ball in his hands.

Then you're able to see how the O-line works: receivers, tight ends, running backs. I've been seeing our offense do this for a while. I have all the confidence in the world in them.

From a defensive standpoint, I'm always confident in us. I think it was a matter of how long will it take for us to mesh as we had a lot of transfers, but we were able to kind of hold over the culture that we set last year. I think that kind of made everything a little bit quicker. I think by week 4, week 5, we played Illinois, and we were kind of hitting on all cylinders.

I just have a lot of confidence in this team. Obviously our coaching staff, there's nobody better in the country. Just believing in us, believing in the guys we have in that locker room and coaches, and not set limits on ourselves. We know we can do anything and accomplish anything we want as a team. It just takes the work and the preparation to do it.

Q. To see where IU was to where it is right now in just the span of two years, is that cool to be a part of?

AIDEN FISHER: Most definitely. I think, once I'm done playing, I'll definitely look back, and it will be something really cool to kind of think about. Right now we're all so in the moment that sometimes we don't kind of catch on to what's happening. You've seen the culture change. You've seen the shift in momentum all across the campus.

When I first got to Indiana, I was just asking people around me, what are the football games like? Do you go? How does that work? It was, yeah, the tailgates are awesome, but I haven't been to a game since I was in high school and since I was from Indiana. That was kind of weird. Now everybody is fighting over tickets.

It's cool to see the change from no crowd to sellouts every week. It's what Indiana deserved. Coach Cig called it a sleeping giant when we first got here. They're awake now, and I'm sure they'll be awake in the Rose Bowl as well.

Q. Cig said in Indy, I've got 3 1/2 weeks to get them humble and hungry again. How did he do it?

AIDEN FISHER: He's done just that. Practice, we know there's so much more we can accomplish and how much better we could be as a team. I think that's the exciting part about this team is, when you look at the film from any game we played this year, we haven't put together our best four quarters yet.

I think that's what keeps us so excited and eager and hungry to keep working and preparing. There's so much more that we can accomplish. If we can just play a clean four quarter football game -- obviously it's football. Everything's not going to go your way, but that's what you're chasing. You're chasing perfection with this program and with Coach Cig. It's so exciting as a team. To kind of see that film, we know there's so much more we can do to be better.

Q. You mentioned a focus on culture at the start of the year. How quick did you notice that, or is that something you kind of look back on and it's completely changed?

AIDEN FISHER: I would think through my first year at Indiana, that's when it kind of started to shift. I remember coming out here for the UCLA game in the Rose Bowl, and that was kind of like a test for a lot of people. First Big Ten game, how good are we going to perform against teams that stacked up against us?

Then we came home, and I think it was the Maryland or the Nebraska game at that time, to a sellout. That kind of changed everything for the families, knowing that we're not just going to beat nonconference teams, but to be able to go in and beat Big Ten opponents. I think we needed some hope, we needed some belief. We get that, and sellouts started happening right after.

Q. What was that first sellout like?

AIDEN FISHER: It was awesome. When you walk out through our stadium, there's a window you can see out before you get to the tunnel, and you see all the towels waving, not a single seat was open. It's just special to be a part of. This fan base deserves it. They travel well to every away game. Home games they get loud, they get wild.

It's been special to be a part of, and our fan base is just unbelievable.

Q. How do you explain why these last two years have happened? Do you have a good explanation?

AIDEN FISHER: Coach Cignetti. I think that's the easiest thing to say. His preparation, the belief he has in himself and his players, the way he attacks the transfer portal, the way he evaluates and develops talent. It's all him right there. He's done such a great job with everything.

I don't think there's one stone that doesn't get turned when we go through preparation and everything off-season or

in-season.

Q. You guys have talked all week about this being just another game, but is there a sense in the locker room, in the team that this game means something more to this fan base or just to this program as a whole?

AIDEN FISHER: I think to our program, to our fan base, it definitely could mean a little bit more. For us, we don't want to get wrapped up in that because then you may get something it's not. At the end of the day, it's still four quarters of football that you've got to go play. So you don't want to get tied into the things that could be almost like rat poison in a way.

However, we do know what the significance of the Rose Bowl is, but at this point in the season, it's about playing football games and trying to survive and advance. So you've got to take it one game at a time, one practice at a time with preparation.

Definitely an exciting venue to be at, an exciting tradition to be a part of. We're looking forward to it.

Q. It's been over a month since you guys have played a football game. How do you guys kind of keep the momentum rolling when you've had such a long time off.

AIDEN FISHER: I think it's our preparation and our practices. When you have our defense going against our offense, sometimes it does simulate a game a little bit just because of how competitive we are. We've been able to do that a couple times through practice.

But everyone's kept the main thing the main thing. The goal is to come in here and start fast and be who we are from the first snap to the last snap and not take a while to kind of get going.

I think we've done a great job in our preparation to never be slow and lethargic in practice. It's energetic every single day. We're competing. There's a lot of trash talk. Everything you want from a competitive football team is there in practice, and I think it will translate as soon as we touch the field.

Q. Is it kind of difficult to have a long time off, not playing an actual game, no fans in the stadium. Is it hard to simulate that environment?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, for me, I can get antsy a little bit in my preparation. There's a lot of film that you can click through, a lot of film you can watch. I think I've been through more than any game so far, just having 3 1/2

weeks.

It's been an exciting experience. Going through, you kind of have time to refresh and reset your mind a little bit. I think that's done wonders for our team to be able to come back in, prepare with a new focus and a new mindset, and it's definitely paying dividends.

As you can see in practice and even some of the things we do outside of practice, the preparation just kind of turns to another level. I think a lot of guys are just refreshed and refocused back on football now.

Q. (No microphone)?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, absolutely. In a football way or --

Q. Any way.

AIDEN FISHER: Personal, yeah, absolutely. Coming to Indiana -- I just had this conversation with my mom the other day actually. Best decision of my life. When I look back at it -- and I loved my last spot, amazing football program, great tradition and culture. Everything was great there.

Coming to Indiana, I think I really found myself as a person and a man, especially a man of faith. I was able to kind of isolate myself a little bit the first two months, maybe not by choice, being around a bunch of new people, but it's a really special two years that I've had to kind of be more to myself, learn about myself more, find myself in faith, and it's led me down to where I'm at now.

I mean, there's just so many things I think I've learned, leadership things, how to be a better teammate, how to be a better friend, son, brother, anything that you could think of. I've learned a lot here.

I think being around the people of Indiana has really showed me a lot. Everybody is so nice in Indiana. They just treat everybody with the utmost respect. They really appreciate everybody that comes through, but it's been a special two years, and the best decision of my life is coming to Indiana.

Q. What do you credit the change? Is it a Cignetti thing, or is it a different thing?

AIDEN FISHER: I think it's a combination of both. I've been around some really special players and leaders in my career. Going back to JMU, Taurus Jones was somebody that I really looked up to, just the way he was so competitive and fiery with everybody else.

Then you take that to James Carpenter, who was really quiet, but when it was time to go, he was really loud. Then obviously Kurtis Rourke. Obviously Pat Coogan here has been really good for me, just seeing different ways of leadership and how to be effective in communication with different people. It's not all about just talking to somebody the same way every single time to everybody.

My teammates have done an amazing job of helping me grow as a leader. Obviously I have a great coaching staff that kind of shows me the way or give me the resources to get out and communicate and how do we get things done. But I give credit to all those guys.

Then I think I was just blessed with leadership from the Lord. I think He guides me in ways that I would not have managed myself. It's been special, and a lot of things give credit to that.

Q. Is getting to play Alabama a special thing? You beat so many good teams in the last two years during this rise. But this is the team that was the dominant program in the country while you guys were growing up. Is it a privilege to play Alabama?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, it is definitely. Playing in the Rose Bowl itself is a privilege. They're a really good football team. I know a lot of people say different things, but this is a really good football team we're playing, and we have a really huge challenge on our hands.

Obviously Alabama is the premier football program for the last decade, decade-plus honestly. So it's going to take a lot. Our preparation has to be at an all time high, and I think it is right now. It's a privilege to play in this football game and have a really good opponent like the one we have.

Q. What do you think of their offense in particular on tape? What stood out to you?

AIDEN FISHER: First of all, watching the Oklahoma game recently, I think they did a great job in the pass game. I think this quarterback is really good. I think he does a great job sitting in the pocket, delivering some throws while taking hits. He also does a great job of expanding plays and doing the things that aren't always seen when you look at the stats. He makes plays happen.

He play fakes, if that's handing it off and faking it or just extending the play. He does a great job with everything. And they're getting the run game going, which is dangerous for them. They're big up front and physical and strong. So we're going to have our hands full, and explosive receivers as well.

This offense is impressive, one that's kept me up a little bit at night. I'll just keep doing my preparation, but we're excited for the opportunity to match up against them.

Q. For the past two years, you've talked about how meaningful it is to play for Indiana, to represent this school and this fan base and your teammates. How special is it to play in this game with this group and represent Indiana?

AIDEN FISHER: Yeah, absolutely. I think this team that we have this year is the closest team I've had in my career. It's been so special. Each and every game we just see how we respond to adversity. I think that's been my favorite part this whole season. Every single game, it feels like we get like a challenge. It's like are you going to answer it or not? I think thus far we've answered every single challenge that's come up.

They talk about the old Rose Bowl team a lot at Indiana, especially when I first got here, and to be back here and a lot of people that are going to be flying out to this game and reliving old memories, I think it's really cool for our fan base and the culture of Indiana. Just got to go out there and win this football game because, if not, there won't be any celebrations and it won't mean much.

It's a privilege and an honor to be playing in the Rose Bowl, but we're still playing a football game of four quarters that we have to go win.

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