

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Indiana

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Pasadena, California, USA

Indiana Hoosiers Isaiah Jones Press Conference



**PLAYOFF
QUARTERFINAL**



Q. How does it feel knowing that you are playing in the Rose Bowl?

ISAIAH JONES: Playing in the Rose Bowl, you know, it's a lot of history behind it, and it's special to be out here and special to be out here with my teammates and playing in this historic game. So it's really exciting to be out here.

Q. This is obviously a first-time matchup. Alabama has never faced Indiana in football. It rarely happens in other sports. What was your impression of Alabama?

ISAIAH JONES: So growing up, obviously I grew up a Big Ten fan growing up watching Big Ten. You always knew Alabama, right? If you were watching the big games, you would watch Alabama on Saturdays. They put a lot of guys into the league, so being able to watch those guys.

Obviously their history, and we watched Coach Saban and the dynasty he kind of built down there. So just growing up knowing that, knowing the history of their program. It's an exciting matchup for us, and a lot of the guys are really excited to play them, because like you said, it's the first matchup. You don't know when you might play them again, so you have to take it all in.

I think we're all pretty excited and ready for the game where.

Q. Where are you from?

ISAIAH JONES: I'm from Columbus, Ohio.

Q. What high school did you go to?

ISAIAH JONES: I went to London High School, a little west of Columbus.

Q. So always Big Ten over SEC?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah. My dad played at Ohio State in '92 and '97. I was always watching them in the Big Ten. Last time they played in the Sugar Bowl I went to the game back in 2015.

Q. What was your impression of Alabama? Was that the first time you saw them in person?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, that was the first time I saw them in person and saw their fans. They got the "Roll Tide" and the pom-pom things. It's a little obnoxious, but every fan base has their thing, so...

Q. Alabama fans don't know what Indiana football is like. They probably haven't been watching you guys. How would you pitch them on what they're going to see on Thursday?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, this is a different Indiana team than it's been the last 50 years. I think they're going to see a team that's relentless. They get to the ball. We fly around. We play fast. We play physical. It's 11 guys doing their job for one another. Just one beating heart, and it's just a different team they'll see on Thursday.

Q. Isaiah, you had the belief in this program. You stuck around before Cignetti got here. How meaningful is it to see that belief in Indiana pay off? You're playing in the Rose Bowl. You had some different kind of games back two years ago, but how now you're on this stage.

ISAIAH JONES: It means a lot. Obviously nowadays the easy thing is just to jump ship and transfer wherever, and that's not something I really believe in. For me, it was just sticking it out.

When Coach Cig came in, I was pretty confident we would be here eventually. I know it shocked a lot of people that it might be this quick. It never really shocked me.

I was always a firm believer in what he's told us and to follow his path and his plan. To be here in the Rose Bowl,

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you know, it's exciting, but I don't think it was ever out of the question for me.

Q. There were a lot of guys that stuck around with you. How would you describe that?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, that group, it's dwindled since we first got here, but those are some of my closest friends. Some of them are here. That's just a bond I'll have for a lifetime.

Actually, one of my friends, one of those guys is getting married next year, so I'll be in his wedding. Those are guys that I'll talk to in 40, 50 years, so it's special.

Q. How have you guys been able to bond with the new transfers coming? Once that coaching change happened, how quickly did that new (inaudible)?

ISAIAH JONES: That's something that our staff, our coaches and Coach Cignetti did really well is the guys they bring, we mold together. We're all the same person. It's very easy to get along with everyone he brings in. I think that's part of the reason he brings them in, and some of those guys, like Aiden and some of the other guys are some of my closest friends now.

We've all molded together. We all hang out, do stuff together. There's no really outliers. You can talk to any position group: offense, defense, special teams. It's a really close locker room.

Q. Whether the players change or not, the fan base and this school has always been the same. What does that mean to you to represent Indiana, represent this fan base on a stage like the Rose Bowl?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, it's been a long time coming for these fans, and they deserve it. What they've gone through in the past, and you really see them come out and start to show where they've been from the last 50 years, but they deserve it.

I'm so proud to be a part of the Indiana football team and to represent Indiana and the state. Just to be a Hoosier means a lot to me. That's part of the reason why I stayed, just to be able to wear the cream and crimson. It's special to me.

Q. Before the season, you had a vision of where you would be. How have you seen the maturation of that vision and continue to develop?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so you know, obviously you got new guys each year, so in spring ball you coming out and

you're trying to get the fit. Guys are learning the new system. You have new teammates, locker room, new playbooks. You know, you see it grow each day in spring ball, and it's kind of step by step.

Coach says it's one practice at a time. Then you get into the summer conditioning and the seven-on-sevens and those teams ones, and once you hit fall camp, for our team this year and the defense, it was just exponential growth. Each day we were taking enormous steps to be the defense we want to be.

Then that's the thing that's special about this defense is it doesn't stop Game 1. I mean, from Game 1 to Game 13 and Game 14, we've gotten better each week. The guys are playing with more confidence. Guys are playing faster. I think that's what makes this defense special is we have gotten better each week, and that's something that we want to do is we want to improve each week. We don't want to be complacent, because complacency kills.

Q. You know you talked earlier about Coach Cignetti and his impact on the culture and seeing the results thus far. How much has that helped you? (Off microphone.)

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so Coach Cig, the first day he came out, I remember his press conference. He came in and told us, I have a plan. My plan works. You guys just have to have complete buy-in, complete belief.

I think the guys that were there at the time were the guys that were going to buy in completely. The guys he brought in had full faith in his plan.

He would always tell us, we're not going to win Game 1 on January 1st when he first got here in the offseason. He's, like, by the time we play our first game, we'll be ready to go.

That's true obviously. Just following him and having a leader like that really makes the players want to play harder for him and just put it all on the line.

Q. Do you feel like you've got the respect you earned and deserved and especially with Indiana now?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, you get what you deserve in life, whether it's good or bad. That's something that we take to heart, and we know that. So if you don't put the work in in the offseason, if you're not in the film room, the weight room, it will show on Saturdays, good and bad. I think we're seeing the positive side of that.

I think it's finally nice to have people talking about Indiana



being a football school and that Indiana football is legit. It's special to be a part of that right now. It all starts with the man at the top.

Q. Growing up, who did you look up to football-wise that inspires you to make sure that you are your absolute best?

ISAIAH JONES: My dad played at Ohio State and played with the Steelers for a little bit. He was my hero growing up. I always wanted to be like him. That's when I knew I wanted to play college football.

Just seeing his work ethic just around our family and being the supportive leader he is for our house, that kind of always instilled in me toughness and determination.

So he's my hero. He's my football hero. That's kind of when I first realized this is what I want to do, so it definitely would be my dad.

Q. Favorite Alabama player of all time?

ISAIAH JONES: Favorite Alabama player of all time? DeVonta Smith.

Q. How do you feel about D'Angelo Ponds?

ISAIAH JONES: D'Angelo Ponds, he's a really good player. Sometimes we have to rotate coverages. We'll trap corner him so he has to take man in one-on-one. He can hold up in the boundary. He does a good job of eliminating one side of the field for us.

Really good man, player. I won't go into detail about his favorite coverage. He has a really favorite coverage, and he always has to let me know when we call it. Good player, great guy, great locker room guy.

Q. I don't think that was an accurate answer. Can you re-answer that?

ISAIAH JONES: About D'Angelo Ponds?

Q. Yeah. That wasn't an accurate answer.

ISAIAH JONES: Like I said, he doesn't really talk a lot, but just great guy. Great guy to be around. It's fun playing with him. You know he can take away the receivers, so I like playing with him.

Q. Can you talk about Mendoza's leadership?

ISAIAH JONES: Fernando, what you see on camera is who he is. Whether it's in the locker room or out to eat with

some of my teammates, he is one of the more genuine people on the team. I get asked a lot, Is that really how he is, and I tell them every time, Yeah.

His leadership, it's just grown since spring ball to fall camp to the Iowa game to Oregon. He's never wavered. His leadership has increased in those crucial moments, and I think that's what makes him such a special player because when the stakes are the highest, he steps up and gets the team going.

He's a guy that people want to get behind and run a play for. Even on defense, we'll go out there and say, let's go get the ball off for Fernando. Fernando is going to drive downfield and win this game.

Just his leadership and his poise in intense situations makes him a special deal.

Q. How did that change on and off the field?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, so his leadership on and off the field is about the same. Like, he's always going to be one of the guys that's looking out and making sure guys are doing the right thing, making sure it's reflecting well on the Indiana football program because you are only as strong as your weakest link, and that goes off the field as well.

If one guys does something, it looks bad for the whole team, so that's something he also helps us with, trying to keep guys on the straight and narrow. We don't really have to do that a lot. A lot of guys are high-quality guys. His leadership overall has been outstanding.

Q. Cignetti has changed the program the last two years. Can you talk about how his style on a day-to-day basis? What changed?

ISAIAH JONES: For Coach Cignetti, when he speaks, it means something. He doesn't run around the field in warmups. When he speaks, it means something. All the guys know that.

He chooses his words very carefully when he talks to the players. He chooses that also, like, very carefully. He doesn't want to say anything to us that's just fluff. He gives it to us straight.

He won't sugar-coat anything. I think that's why the players love him. He'll give it to you straight, and you know whatever he says, he means, and it's the truth. He's not going to go around and hype you up or tell you something you just want to hear. He'll tell you what you need to hear, and I think that's what makes him so special as a coach.

Q. Tough love?

ISAIAH JONES: Yeah, yeah. Just the tough love aspect, it's like all the coaches, Coach Cignetti, Coach Haines, they want to see you be the best version of yourself. You can't do that if you are sugar-coating it or you're not going to coach you hard. Whether you are a fifth-string linebacker or the starting linebacker, you get coached the same. That's what I enjoy about being in the linebacker room.

Coach Haines is the same as Coach Cignetti, the tough love aspect of the game. I think that's when you really build the best players. Everyone, you know, wants to maybe hear the good things, but you shouldn't. You should hear what you need to get better at. That comes from them.

I think that's what you've seen turn so many players that might not have been the highest recruits out of high school into dominant players.

Q. The linebacker room, it feels no matter who is on the field, it feels like it's a great play no matter what the combination is. What is it that makes the whole linebacker room so --

ISAIAH JONES: The linebacker room starts with Coach Haynes at the top. It's just a standard. We have a standard we talk about every day. It doesn't matter who is on the field. That standard has to be upheld.

It's the next-man-up mentality. If one guy goes down, a shoe pops off, or somebody gets hurt, it's the next man up.

Regardless what the number on their jersey is, that standard should be upheld. You have to play fast, physical. You have to hustle to the ball. You have to complete your assignment. The standard doesn't change with who is on the field. That's what we uphold every day.

Whether it's Coach Haynes, me, Elijah, Jeff, K.T., we hold each other to a standard, and no one is treated special, no one is treated different.

Q. What is that standard specifically? What is it a one line mentality?

ISAIAH JONES: It's not necessarily a one-liner. We have a quote on our board every day that says, "Confidence comes with preparation." If you're not prepared, you're not going to play fast. If you are prepared, you're going to play fast, you are going to play confident. When you are confident and you know your assignment, you can play. You can change your name.

You can go from a guy that runs a 4.5, but if you are confident, you are playing at an ungodly speed. Something we always do is linebackers have to play defense. If you can't go out there and run the defense and know what everyone is doing, then you can't go out there. That's really important for us. Yeah, we might know what we do or what (inaudible) does, but you have to also know what the D-tackle does in front of you, if you are a roll-down corner, what the safety rotation is.

The linebackers have to know that, because if you are out there maybe along, you have to be able to turn around and tell them the ball slant. That's the standard is knowing your job and also knowing the defense.

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