

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Indiana

Thursday, January 1, 2026  
Pasadena, California, USA

**Indiana Hoosiers**  
**Coach Curt Cignetti**  
**Fernando Mendoza**  
**D'Angelo Ponds**  
**Pat Coogan**  
Postgame Press Conference

Indiana - 38, Alabama - 3

**Q. Fernando, so many people enjoy your enthusiasm, your genuine joy in just playing the game, almost childlike sometimes in the joy and everything. What has this meant to you? And how confident are you right now with the way the team is playing?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I'm very confident the way the team is playing. It's not just myself, I think our entire team and our coaching staff really enjoy football, and I think that's why we work so hard at it. We work really hard every single day because not only do we enjoy football, we also enjoy winning. And we know what that takes. So every single day we're always going to put our best foot forward.

**Q. Fernando, what does it mean for you to win here in the Rose Bowl in California, Los Angeles, before this huge audience? If you can answer in Spanish that would be amazing.**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I would say, if you asked me three years ago I'd be able to speak in Spanish, however now I'm conversational. However if you ever say something I could completely understand you 100 percent.

However, I think it means a lot I actually have a lot of Mexican family over here. And a lot of my family from Miami came over here to go watch. And it's such a great, historic venue, the Rose Bowl. It's such an iconic point of not only college sports, of all of sports.

So I think it's such a great opportunity for all of us to be



able to to be Rose Bowl champions. However, we have a very tough opponent in Oregon so we're looking on them.

**Q. Fernando, there was a lot of talk about the rest and how it affects teams -- they're 0-6 in this game -- and your coach kind of talked about practice and how difficult it was with the travel. How did you guys overcome that for such a dominant performance today?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: It's definitely a huge struggle. And I think Coach Cignetti and you know did a fantastic job of a trickle-down effect of really making sure there was no complacency. Because you know you have, I think it was 26 days off that's very, very tough.

And especially in the first drive as an offense, myself included, I think we got off to a slow start. And then other than that once we got our feet wet, we got the ball rolling and we got back to playing Indiana brand of football.

And so I think it was a great -- overcoming that challenge as a team, having such a long time off. But I think we overcame that challenge and that showed on the field today.

**Q. Can you describe the culture that your coach demands of you guys that then resulted in today's win?**

PAT COOGAN: Coach Cignetti, it all starts with him. The complacency factor, the afraid to death of complacency, the never-ending journey of improving, taking it day-by-day, taking each day as the most important day in the history of the program.

It all starts with him, and he makes sure all of our eyes are focused forward and we're all thinking alike as he always says. It's real. It's what happens. I believe that's why we see success on Saturdays. That's one of the main components.

**Q. Pat, your thoughts on winning as an offensive lineman, MVP of the Rose Bowl. And why were you guys so dominant up front today?**



PAT COOGAN: It's pretty great. It's probably the first, if I had to guess, offensive lineman MVP, but it's all a credit to my teammates and my coaching staff for, first of all, just believing in me and the ability to make my calls and diagnose a defense and fully entrusting in me and my abilities.

And a credit to all my teammates. These guys are unbelievable. The belief that we have in each other, the ability to bounce off of each other and say, hey, what are you thinking, or do you see that. It's just been, kind of like I said before, never-ending growth, never ending improvement.

And there's certainly a lot of things we have to clean up, especially in that fourth quarter. Stuff was moving pretty fast, and we were kind of sloppy especially up front.

And it all starts with me. I'm the center of it all. I've got to make sure the guys are on the right page. But it's a credit to my teammates for just being just studs.

**Q. D'Angelo, you guys held a very good Alabama offense to three points. I know you guys talked a lot during the week about what you were seeing and all that stuff. But how did it play out actually on the field in regards to being able to shut them down as much as you did?**

D'ANGELO PONDS: I feel that's a testament to Coach Bryant Haines. I feel he did a good job scheming them up. He knew what they liked to run, their tendencies and stuff like that. I feel he put us in the right positions to do that, and we came out victorious. That was the goal.

**Q. Francisco, you played a game here as a freshman back in 2023. What do you recall about that night? And how would you describe your journey getting to where you are now since then?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Like you said, it's been a long time ago. I believe it was the last "Pac-12 After Dark" game. Pac-12, a great conference. I think it's resurging right now. I was playing against UCLA, and Dante Moore was their quarterback. Good to have another rematch against Dante Moore and a great Oregon team next week.

And I think the Rose Bowl itself, the venue, the grass -- I know there was a little rainy today -- but it's still the perfect college football venue and such an honor to play with my teammates and an honor to the two times I played here to come out victorious, I think it's a great honor. And give all the glory to God.

**Q. You had mentioned yesterday that you felt like the preparation was really going that great or you were -- it would probably bring up concern for people in that situation. What changed from that point to now to where it didn't look like there was really much of a layoff that you guys were on?**

COACH CIGNETTI: Sometimes my messaging is intended for the players to hear to further reinforce my message to them, because preparation's hard to gauge. Alabama had to do the same thing we did, come out on a Wednesday and then have their first practice on site, and I mean, there is disruption there compared to your normal routine, which we're all creatures of a routine.

So I think our guys -- we had a great walk-through yesterday. We went to SoFi for that, and that was great for our players, I think, to get there.

I thought our mindset was really good. I liked our prep, for the most part, once we knew who the opponent was. It was a hard-fought game early in the game. Alabama made some plays, they had us off balance offensively, they had a new all-up blitz.

But we were able to kind of make the plays when we needed to and take it over in the second half. And you know it's a great win for our football program. I'm proud of our players, our coaches, and everyone. Again, a big win against a team that's got great tradition like that and history, a lot of good players, and great head football coach.

**Q. Felt like another kind of one of those games you've had this season where your run game just kind of grounded them down. As the game worn on and you popped explosives in the second half. What does it say about the offense and maybe specifically that ground game, the way it can lean on an opponent as a game wears on and maybe really tire a defense out?**

COACH CIGNETTI: I think that's what you would always love to see as the head coach, things we used to preach when I was at Alabama, about changing the way they think, breaking their will, and that's the best way to do it, running the football.

It takes a while. It doesn't happen in the first quarter, the second quarter, it happens in the second half at some point, hopefully, when you're able to achieve that goal.

And I thought our line did a nice job. I thought our backs really ran hard, and I'm sure there were some nice blocks down field too, but the backs, I was really impressed with how hard they ran.

**Q. When your offensive lineman wins the MVP and your Heisman quarterback is grinning from ear to ear, what does that mean to you, and how does that describe the chemistry on this team?**

COACH CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think you hit it right on the head. I'm, at this point, probably used to it. Fernando's a very special guy. He's very unique. He's selfless. He's the ultimate team guy. And then we've got some other guys, like Coogan, who is really the same way; he's the ultimate team guy.

We've got a lot of other guys on the team that played last year, like Fisher, Carter Smith, just to name two. I could name a lot more that are ultimate team guys. I think that's one of the reasons that we're so consistent and efficient. We are efficient, is how I would label us, is because we have good players with very high character. They're great team guys and really good leaders, and they listen and they buy in.

**Q. Bryant Haines talks about how you've always been the same guy in the way you run your program, the way you operate. What does it mean to you to take the system that you started at the D-II level to this level of college football and have success like you did at that lower level?**

COACH CIGNETTI: You know, I learned from my mistakes, one thing about it was I did make a lot of mistakes year one, and then the second time through, you always get a little better, and every year you do. So I can't say that I'm the same coach I was year one, because I'm not. You're always looking to improve because you get better or worse; you never stay the same.

The things they've talked about, the constant striving for improvement, I mean, I do try to live that way. You're either getting better or worse; you're separating or somebody is gaining on you.

My journey has been kind of surreal, but I think every move kind of prepared me for this challenge at this time with the changing dynamic of college football.

**Q. You've been in big games this season. How do you temper a win like this? And what does a win like this teach these young men for life after football?**

COACH CIGNETTI: Well, I'm not going to assume anything like we bounce back from a number of big wins and we'll be fine, because it's a process. So we'll have a very big challenge ahead of us next week. It's very hard to beat a really good football team twice. There's no doubt

about that.

What was the last part of your question?

**Q. What's a win like this teach these young men about football and about life?**

COACH CIGNETTI: That's the great thing about football, I think. It's a great vehicle that helps people, used properly, become more successful in their life's work later on and raising a family. A lot of great lessons there about teamwork, leadership, overcoming adversity, meeting challenges, preparation, commitment, discipline, work ethic, toughness. We've got a lot of the guys that have the right stuff, and I'm proud of them.

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