

Heisman Memorial Trophy Presentation

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Aidan Hutchinson
Kenny Pickett
C.J. Stroud
Bryce Young

Media Conference



I'm really proud of him, and I know he's proud of me.

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, for us to kind of grow up together in the football world, for us to kind of grow, both of us, from us knowing each other at a young age to all we've been through and accomplished now, again, we're always talking. We see each other -- we're proud of each other, always rooting for each other, and to have someone like C.J. to know we've always got each other's back, to have a brother like that that we're always locked in, and for it to culminate in a weekend like this is magical, so I'm super happy for this experience.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome. I'm going to start off with questions for our finalists.

Q. Bryce, what would a win like this change for you at all if you did win the Heisman?

BRYCE YOUNG: I don't think it would change anything for me. To be here for a special weekend like this in itself is a huge honor, a huge blessing to be able to share this weekend with these guys. It's amazing. But anything individual like this is an honor to be up for it, but it doesn't change anything for me.

Again, it's something that you can't control and you can't really -- you don't dwell on it or make any decision about how you work, how you do or what you have to do in the future because of it. This is a huge honor to even be here this weekend, but regardless of what happens, nothing really changes for me.

Q. Bryce and C.J., can you guys reminisce about your middle school days for a second? What does it mean to first play against each other in middle school and now to be next to each other as Heisman finalists?

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, I think it's a blessing to be two young Cali guys growing up in this football world together, learning from each other, playing against each other, playing with each other. It's really cool to have a brother like this that's doing the same thing I'm doing. We often FaceTime. We don't even talk about football, we just talk about life.

When you have a brother like that, it's a great feeling, and

Q. This is the first Heisman I can remember where college athletes can earn money from name, image and likeness. I was wondering if you could talk about some of the big deals you were able to get and is it now just as important for you to get a CPA as an agent?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, yeah, I think it's incredibly important. I know a lot of us are doing the big NIL deals and making sure you've got people looking over the contracts so they're not taking your rights or anything and being set up good financially with a good financial advisor. I think it's important to get those guys in place, especially for up-and-coming athletes in college.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, I agree with Aidan. I think it's important to be smart and just do your due diligence with every deal you make, include teammates, give back to the community, so all great things if you handle it the right way.

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, what those guys were saying, just to piggy back, I think it's also a great start for maybe a future in the NFL where it's a bigger scale, so I feel like it's a good jump start. I know my guys who are representing me at Athletes First are doing a great job. Everything is really organized, and I really appreciate them because they keep everything organized, and I really just focus on ball, and they just approve or decline things for me.

On top of that, it's a blessing just to be able to provide for my family a little more. I know sometimes it was tough

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growing up financially for me, but now I'm able to provide for my family and sisters where I never thought I would at such a young age, so I'm truly blessed from God.

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, kind of just to piggy back on what they said, I think it's really good for everyone to kind of have this opportunity. There's a lot of athletes in the past that weren't able to capitalize like we kind of are now, and I'm glad that all of us at least have that opportunity, so just blessed to be in the situation that I am.

Q. Bryce, what would it mean for you to win the Heisman Trophy as the first quarterback from the University of Alabama?

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, there's been such a great legacy at the University of Alabama, and there's such a rich quarterback history, from all the guys that have been there, from being around obviously Mac the most, but being around Tua a little bit and then to Jalen, so all the guys in the past that I've watched and studied and learned from through watching film and hearing stories about, just to hear that history and just to hear what they've meant to the program and meant to all the coaches and people that they've encountered, that's something I don't take lightly at all. For me trying to live up to that standard and build off of it and to make them proud means a lot to me.

Again, I'm just happy to be here for this weekend. This experience has been amazing. Whatever happens tonight, I'm just happy to be here this weekend. But I take a lot of pride in doing what I can to make those guys proud and continue the history and continue that legacy of Alabama quarterbacks.

Q. Kenny, has Tony Dorsett reached out to you about being a finalist?

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, he has. It's incredibly special to have the next opportunity for Pitt to bring home the Heisman, with Larry Fitzgerald, Dan Marino and Tony Dorsett, all the guys that were around that were awarded, and Tony Dorsett winning it. I'm extremely grateful to have my name alongside those guys.

Q. Kenny, this morning coming in from Baltimore, laying your eyes on the Heisman for the first time, what was that moment like for you?

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, it was really a special moment. Just kind of looking back on where I was a minute ago to where I'm sitting now, this time last year was a lot different for me. I was debating on going to the NFL. Was probably around a fifth-, sixth-round pick. Made a decision to come back, and me and Aidan were talking, we weren't even on

the odds to be here.

Looking at where I started and now being here, just a lot of thanks to the people that helped me get here and my teammates, my coaches. Extremely grateful to be sitting up here with these three guys.

Q. I cannot imagine being in your shoes; can you tell us more about what this weekend has been like for you guys?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: So this is my second time being in New York. First time a really long time ago. Don't remember a whole lot. But being here in the city, I'm not a big city boy, but we got to walk around a little bit and see the tree and see the famous ice rink, so it was cool.

Seems like the people here really love the city, and yeah, it's really been great, just kind of experiencing it with these guys. Just doing the whole ceremony, it's going to be really cool.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, it's been an unbelievable weekend coming from Baltimore after the Johnny Unitas award and now sitting here, I'm from 45 minutes south of here, so I have a lot of family, friends and coaches that are all watching it, and I'll be able to go see them and kind of go celebrate just the season in general, so it's a special night for sure.

C.J. STROUD: Yeah, man, special for me, as well. This is my first time ever being in New York. Well, being from Southern California, like the LA area, definitely a city boy, but this is kind of different. There's a lot going on. People drive crazy out here, and I'm not really -- I ain't really been used to that.

But I mean, it really has been just a blessing to be around these guys. They're great football players, and I feel like it's an honor to have my name just considered. I'm truly blessed from God and really excited for tonight and to see what's going to happen.

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, it's been an amazing experience to be able to share with these geez. Obviously I've known C.J. for a while, but meeting Aidan and meeting Kenny, they've been super cool, and I'm getting to build those relationships and getting to share this weekend with them has been awesome. Again, getting to see the city, I've been here a few times before, but it's kind of my first time really being able to explore it and walk around and see it during Christmastime, also, has been really special. It's been super fun. It's been a blessing to be here and it's been an amazing experience. So yeah, it's been great.

Q. Aidan, you play a 7 technique and a wide 9. On the next level how do you feel like bumping down, the one or the three, how do you feel comfortable?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: I don't think they're going to bump me down. They're going to keep me on the edge. I think I'm a very elite edge player, and I proved that this year standing up, being in kind of the Ravens' defensive scheme with our new defensive coordinator. It's been great.

I flourish in that scheme, and whatever team takes me, they're going to get my all.

Q. The postseason continues for you guys; what has been the sort of homework load that you've been sent with to start focusing on your respective bowl games?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: For the bowl games? No. We've been off for a week, Michigan, and then we're back on Monday. We're hitting it, we're going to hit it hard then.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, we've been off, as well, just a chance to enjoy the weekend and get back to work.

C.J. STROUD: Personally I haven't been off. I know we didn't play last week sadly, so I've been doing my homework, watching Utah, studying their plays and their defense. They do a lot of great things. They like to blitz four on a side, so that's really tough to pick up, so I'm going to have to be on my job to pick up the protections and make sure my guys are in the best suit to win the game.

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, we've glanced at it a little bit. When we get back, that's really when we're trying to start game planning and start our process. But just glancing at stuff a little bit.

At the same time, trying to live in the moment and experience this weekend because it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So just trying to balance that.

Q. Kenny, as someone who goes to a school with a rich tradition such as Pitt, what's it like for you to be mentioned amongst some of the greatest players to ever play, specifically Dan Marino and having your name mentioned alongside him with some of the records he's broken, and hypothetically where do you see yourself potentially in the NFL Draft and what team would you potentially like to go to if you have a chance to choose?

KENNY PICKETT: That's a loaded question. It's pretty surreal to have your name alongside Dan Marino knowing what he's done to the game and the kind of legend he is. I

had a chance to spend a weekend with him before the ACC Championship game on Friday night, just kind of get to know him better as a person, and he's an incredible person, obviously a great player.

I guess to add on to the NFL question, I don't have a preference to where I go. Like I said, you guys just heard me story a little bit. I'm just grateful to be in the discussion of where I am now. I'll be as prepared as I possibly can be, and like Aidan said, whatever team takes me, they're definitely going to get my all, so I'm excited for the next level.

Q. Aidan, what would it mean for you to be in the same company as a fellow Wolverine in Charles Woodson to be the only defensive players to win the Heisman, and can you speak on the significance of getting Michigan into the College Football Playoff for the first time?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, Michigan, we've been having a legendary season, something nobody really thought we could do this season. We're the first unranked team in the playoffs. We won the Big Ten Championship really against all the odds, and kind of individually, being in the same discussion as Charles Woodson, that's someone who I grew up knowing, I grew up knowing he was the only defensive player to win the Heisman, and now I'm sitting here my senior year being a Heisman finalist, and I've got a chance to win it tonight. It means so much, and Michigan has kind of got a little trend going for defensive players being Heisman finalists, and he's the only one to win it.

It would be such a blessing to do that here tonight.

Q. C.J. and Bryce, I know you're both California kids and you guys have some pretty flash jewelry on tonight. Wondering if there's any sort of friendly competition between who's best dressed.

BRYCE YOUNG: Dressed? No. We didn't really talk about dress. That's about the only thing we have a friendly competition about, though. Yeah, I guess not tonight.

C.J. STROUD: We're glad we both look good. We are representing for Cali right now; know what I mean? It's all good.

Q. Bryce, you've been cool, calm and collected throughout the year, 4th and 7 against Auburn and you didn't blink. Was there a moment here where you got a little nervous and thought, this is a little different going into the Heisman?

BRYCE YOUNG: I wouldn't say so. This is something

really, again, I can't control. It's something that it's out of my control. It's whoever wins is who the voters choose. It's not something I can control, so really I don't feel like it's anything to be nervous about.

Also it's just really been about the experience of the weekend. For me I've just been soaking in the weekend, getting to be around these guys, getting to be around the city. It's been a great experience. It's been a lot of fun.

I've just been enjoying the weekend and been having a great time.

Q. Kenny, you mentioned growing up 45 minutes away from here. What's it mean for you to be in New York City right where you grew up?

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, can't really put a lot of words to it. Very special, a lot of family and friends that are traveling up, being so close to home. Win or lose, it's a very special weekend. I'm just grateful to be up here.

Q. Kenny, you took a huge step forward this year in terms of your game style; how do you think before the season -- did you make any adjustments in your workout, play style, scheme that you think really helped out, and is there anyone you tried to model your game after going into the season?

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, specifically I wouldn't say there was one single person, but I think collectively as a unit we did this together offensively, just really dedicating ourselves to our craft and getting everyone to throw in sessions, watch a lot of film, making sure we're all on the same page. This is our third year in the same system. We kind of had different coordinators throughout my career at Pitt, being able to have my third season with Coach Whipple, really getting to expand the offense and get our guys in the right position for us to succeed, I think it kind of went as a unit, not so much as me individually.

Q. Kenny, I know you're going to the Senior Bowl, but I wonder what your plans are as far as training for the draft, training for the combine and things you might be doing after the first of the year.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, I'll be training at TEST Academy in New Jersey, which is really close to here, like about 30 minutes from where I lived, and training with Tony Rocioppi who I've been training with since I was a freshman. That's all planned for after the bowl game.

Q. What are the things you might be working on?

KENNY PICKETT: I mean, obviously just getting my body

back to where it needs to be. It's been a long season battling through some injuries here and there, so really trying to get as healthy as I can be, and then obviously building everything from fundamentals and strength, speed, all that stuff.

Q. Who is the person who most inspired you to love football?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: I think growing up, it's a common answer, but I think it's just my dad. He was an All-American at Michigan, and I grew up going to all the games. I think he really inspired me, and seeing him on the walls in Schembechler hall in our football building, I think it made me want to be like him, and I think that's something I did.

He's been such a true inspiration to me, and I'm grateful to call him my dad.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, my dad, as well, coached me since I was five up until eighth grade. Still is like a coach. Call him after every game and talk to him throughout the week, and he asks a lot of great questions, kind of keeps me on my toes with my coaches. Just having a ton of great memories through football, just grateful for the sport, but my dad definitely had the biggest influence on me.

C.J. STROUD: Me personally, it's probably been my whole family. Growing up, sometimes it wasn't the easiest things, but they were my motivation for me to get up at whatever time in the morning and go work out and go kill myself just so I can make it. Even in high school I had that mindset just to make it out just so I can provide for my family.

Yeah, my whole family is probably my biggest motivation.

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, I'd definitely say my dad. He had played and then he was always -- obviously always a big football fan. We were always watching games and watching football together. He was always super passionate about it, and he was always super supportive. Yeah, I'd definitely say my dad is my biggest inspiration.

Q. Aidan, I was just wondering, where were you when you found out you were a finalist and your initial reaction?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I was in Vegas at a different awards show, and I got -- I first saw it on social media and some of my friends texted me, and then one of the dudes from the Heisman called me and told me I'm a finalist. I was filled with so much joy and so much gratitude, and just being there as a defensive player.

Q. You've talked so much about Mike Macdonald. You mentioned him earlier. What exactly or is there something you can pinpoint that he did to this defense to make you have the season you've had and have you in this position among the four finalists?

AIDAN HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I really just think the overall scheme of the defense, just how it's built. It was built perfectly for me and for me to produce and flourish, had me standing up on the edge, and he really let me have a lot of freedom to really just do what I want and be a playmaker. I'm super blessed that Coach Harbaugh hired him this off-season because I don't know if I'd be here without him.

Q. Kenny, talk a little bit about the season and the pressure you guys were feeling late in the season and then how you were able to overcome that. A lot of games you really had to win, and you won every one of them.

KENNY PICKETT: Yeah, I think we kind of went after every ACC game like it was a championship, and as the season goes, the games just get bigger. It's something that you welcome. It's something that you want, and we haven't had that at Pitt in previous years, so to go out there and win the coastal, then win the ACC Championship, which we've been preaching since I walked through the doors in 2017, just a very special moment for our team and for our university.

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