

Big Ten Conference Football Championship Game: Iowa vs Michigan

Sunday, December 3, 2023

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

Michigan Wolverines
Coach Jim Harbaugh

Mike Sainristil

Blake Corum

J.J. McCarthy

Postgame Press Conference



does it as a superior athlete. That combination comes together, superior athlete and a guy that does everything right. It's fun to watch.

Glorious defensive performance. Just tremendous, lights-out. Three and outs, I think we're maybe four on the game. Then one first down and out. Incredible shut-out. How many turnovers were there? Three or four -- three plus the four fourth down stops. That's, like, seven turnovers. And giving the ball to the offense in great position.

So just spectacular.

Blake, congratulations on tying the Michigan all-time scoring record for touchdowns, and congratulations to Mikey.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Congratulations to you, Coach.

KIRK FERENTZ: I never left.

BLAKE CORUM: Great having your presence on the sideline.

Q. If you could all talk about what the significance -- I guess it's the first time three outright championships in the Big Ten. Talk about that significance if you could.

THE MODERATOR: Blake, we'll start with you.

BLAKE CORUM: It feels great. I didn't know we were the first three and out. But to have three back-to-back-to-back Big Ten championships, it's a wonderful feeling. We've kind of changed the narrative how people look at Michigan.

So back-to-back-to-back feels great, but like I always say, like Kobe Bryant said, the job is not finished. We set these goals at the beginning of the season, and we hold ourselves to such a high standard, we must accomplish those goals.

Today was a great stepping stone, but like Coach said, we're going to enjoy this one. We're going to enjoy this

Michigan 26, Iowa 0

JIM HARBAUGH: Just an incredible feeling. Great thrill of victory, great thrill of winning. Wonderful, wonderful feeling of winning. It's what our team had planned for, hoped for, worked for most importantly, and they stayed with it the entire time.

It was an incredible performance, and we're just going to enjoy this one. We're going to enjoy this one for a few days. The team will have a week off, but our mind will get on a one-track mind to move on to the playoffs and find out who we're going to play. Then the team still has more goals to accomplish.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Coach, your defense, a few turnovers today. Can you talk about the overall effort, including that guy to the left of you right now?

JIM HARBAUGH: Just a playmaker. When a play has to be made, when the magic needs to happen, Mikey makes it happen. It's been game after game. Especially down the stretch here these final four games, he has been a stalwart. He intercepts. He makes the big hit. He makes the big hit in the fumble, causes a fumble. Just an incredible player.

He does it by always being in the right place where he's supposed to be, playing the right technique at all times, leading other guys to do the exact same thing. But he also

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one, and then we'll get back to the drawing page. But it means a lot to go back-to-back-to-back.

THE MODERATOR: Mikey.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It just feels great. Guys like me and Blake, this is what we came back for, to have the success with this team, like the brotherhood that this team has is one that I wouldn't give it up for anything in the world, and this team is going down in history.

The way we go about our goals is you put everything into the next goal, and there's work -- there's more work to put in and more ways to get better.

Coach is probably going to say it. I'm going to say it first before he says it. The worm has turned around here.

KIRK FERENTZ: I was just about to say that.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Blake just said it as well. The narrative has changed. For some odd reason, people look at Michigan and they'll say we don't play whoever, you know, we don't deserve to be wherever we are, but as we say, the only people -- the only things that matter is what happens inside Schembechler Hall.

JIM HARBAUGH: You took the words out of my mouth. You look at this whole group, and J.J., Blake, Mikey, so many others. The worm has turned. These are the guys. I mean, these Michigan football players, when you look back at the history of Michigan football, wrote the book on getting the worm to turn.

The worm is pretty slippery. That thing can start wiggling back and forth and turning back on you. The hook got put in it. The hook got put in the worm. They've written the book on how to do it.

It wasn't that long ago we were saying, I mean, we're going to do this or we're going to die trying. They just give everything they got. That's all we ask them is to give it their very best, but they give everything they have on a daily basis.

Am I going to pull guys back? I never have to talk them in. The amount of guys that were playing through something tonight, playing with something, could have easily taken a knee, didn't.

I heard Mike B. say it the other day, something that really resonated with me, I'm just ready to go out there and die, you know.

We never ask them to do that. Just go out and give it your

very best and give us everything you've got.

Every guy on this team does it that way, and not just on game days. It's every day.

How does it feel for you, J.J.?

J.J. McCARTHY: It feels great. Obviously to be back and do it again, just like Blake, Mikey, and Coach hit on, this was one of our goals, and it feels great to accomplish it.

What I'm feeling personally is I need to get better, and we need to get better as an offense and focus on the little things. It's going to be a great month of preparation.

Q. Can you sum up your thoughts, feelings on being on stage watching the Commissioner hand you guys the Big Ten championship trophy?

JIM HARBAUGH: Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Wonderful feeling of winning. Great thrill of victory. Yeah, I mean, how many more people can we get up here on the stage. They said three, four, five. Keep bringing them up. It's where we wanted to be. It's what we hoped for, what we worked so hard for, and then it happened.

It's the like kind of pinch yourself, but yeah, the way our defense was playing, the gutty performance, another gritty one by our offense, and then the special teams. James Turner kicking the four field goals, Semaj Morgan with the big punt return. Just so good.

You never know who exactly is going to be the guy, who is going to make the play. I mean, these three, they do it every week. But there's always somebody else that gets in there as well.

Kenneth Grant had a dominating game. So did Mason Graham and Kris Jenkins, Cam Goode, those interior guys. The edge guys were incredible.

But these three every week, it's every week these are the three guys. Then it's always a multitude of other guys that step up and make the magic happen.

Q. Coach, how special is this for you, especially in the town? Your name is up there on the stadium, but also you earned the title "Captain Comeback" here. How special is this for you and the guys tonight?

JIM HARBAUGH: It's the most special. I've gotten to the point in my life where -- I don't know when this happened. It was a while ago. Probably a couple of decades ago where it's not about me. I had plenty of success, but that your players know what it's like to be a champion, that their

families can know what it's like to be a champion. For my wife, my kids to have their dad be a champion. For my parents to have their son be a champion.

That's the great thrill. Friends and most especially my kids. They know what it's like that their dad is a champion, and mostly the players, that they get to feel what it's like to be a champion. That's a beautiful, wonderful thing.

Q. First question for Blake. Have you heard from many former Michigan players at all after tying the record? For Jim, at what point did you realize that Blake tying and potentially breaking this career rushing record was a possibility?

BLAKE CORUM: I haven't heard from any former running backs. Coach Hart obviously. That's my guy.

In terms of Anthony Thomas or anyone, no, I haven't. I haven't even checked my phone. I definitely might, but it feels great just being up there with the greats. You know, the greats, that's something I wanted to do when I came here.

Obviously I wanted to be a great football player, but I just wanted to honestly just leave an impact on and off the field, just be a great person. I feel like I've done that.

There's obviously more to do, but I haven't heard from anyone.

JIM HARBAUGH: I just think just how proud James Corum has to be. He's such a great man, such a good friend. Everything that he poured into Blake, the discipline, the work ethic, the toughness. Blessed from Mom, Dad, and God with the DNA.

Yeah, that's kind of where my mind goes. What it would be like to be Blake's dad, and J.J.'s dad. You know, Jim McCarthy, he's got to be -- gosh, you guys have made your parents so incredibly proud.

Q. Did you think Blake had a chance at the record?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah, there's nothing I don't think Blake can't do. No matter what people tell you you can't do, you just go back and think of all the things that you have done to get you this far.

That's the way these guys were raised by their parents, and I get to watch it daily, weekly, monthly, yearly with these guys. Pretty much everything I said about them is -- now everybody knows, and that's such a sweet thing. Just really sweet and good.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: For the record, I hosted Blake as a recruit.

BLAKE CORUM: He did. He did.

JIM HARBAUGH: Who was your host? Me; right?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It was you. We went to the movies. We went to the movies.

Q. What did you see?

MIKE SAINRISTIL: I don't remember.

JIM HARBAUGH: We were at the bouncy place. I don't know if it's still there anymore.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: It was "Don't Breathe," with the blind guy, the Army guy.

JIM HARBAUGH: That's right.

Q. For Jim and if a player wants to answer too, you've been up here three times, and you always talk about the next step and what's next. Does it feel any different now this third time and what comes next? Do you feel you're better prepared or whatever?

JIM HARBAUGH: I don't have a great answer for that.

You guys got a good answer for that?

J.J. McCARTHY: In my eyes I look at it as act like you've been there before. Coach Harbaugh always hits on that, just like scoring your first touchdown like you've scored your hundredth.

And I feel like we scored our hundredth today, just being able to go out there and win for a third time. It's just like we've been here before, and we're ready to move on and get better.

JIM HARBAUGH: I would just add, to me it feels ten out of ten happy, like it did last year and like it did in '21. I can't remember. Oh, yeah, after the '21 game, I lost my wallet, and on my way to see Colston Loveland, to make a home visit to see him.

I was kind of bummed I lost my wallet, but then I woke up, and we're Big Ten Champions. I don't care about my wallet. You know? That's how I woke up last year. That's when it really sinks in to me, so it will probably really sink in tomorrow when I wake up.

If I lose my wallet, my phone, whatever it is, we're Big Ten

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Champions. It's an amazing feeling. Ten out of ten. Ten out of ten happy.

Q. For Jim and the players. I saw Zak Zinter getting wheeled out of the tunnel and going to see him go out on crutches for the coin toss. I would love to get reaction from all four of you of his presence there today, how much that meant to you?

THE MODERATOR: Mikey.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Zak is a big piece of this team. And he's not a "woe is me" guy, even though he is hurt right now, but he is still going to lead. It felt great to have him out there. It felt great to see him.

I know you know me as a captain, the other guys will probably say it as well, that's somebody that guys on this team turn to. His words mean a lot, and his actions speak for themselves.

J.J. McCARTHY: Just like Mikey said, just his presence in general of being a leader on our team. He does so much for us because he enlivens all of us to play our best for him. When Coach made this game for him, we were doing it for him, it just brought another level of urgency and motivation to go out there and do it for him.

BLAKE CORUM: Seeing my guy Zak out there meant a lot. Because he didn't have to. He just you got out of surgery last week. I bet you he was still in pain, but he did it for the team.

Therefore, we did it for him. Just seeing him go out there on the coin toss on crutches, on the sideline, just his presence, just everything he brings to the team, he doesn't have to say much. Just him being there means a lot.

And I definitely miss my guy on the field. Like I told him, it's just a minor setback, man. You're going to come back better than ever, and I truly believe that.

Zak is one of the guys that came back, just like Mikey, just like myself, for what we call unfinished business. He is still here. He is still here. He is with the team, and he still brings a lot to the team even though he might not be able to be on the field pulling and blocking and protecting J.J. and myself.

His presence, it means a lot to us. He is still there. He is still on the ride. Blessed to have Zak.

JIM HARBAUGH: I would just add, it's definitely just how he was after he got hurt and the whole team lined up. I've seen it. I've seen it go one of two ways. You rally around

your teammate, or the other thing is just incredible sadness and worry.

I've seen a teammate get seriously hurt in high school and in college and in pro ball. It's sad. And he was in great pain too. I know what it's like to have a bone broken because they rub together, until they can get it really stabilized and isolated and get some kind of pain medication in you. Those bones are rubbing together. That's a pain you have never felt before.

Just how tough and stoic he was and signalling to his team. What he said at the hospital was he was going to make it here. Hey, if it's possible, we would love to bring that to life. He was here just like he said.

Yesterday was a super long day for him with the flight and moving around and everything. Yeah, the team wanted to dedicate the game to him.

What do we have to do when we dedicate a game to somebody?

PLAYERS COLLECTIVELY: Got to win it.

JIM HARBAUGH: And they did. They wanted him to accept the trophy at the podium. Just to see all those things come to life is beautiful.

Q. Earlier Coach Harbaugh said it wasn't that long ago where he said we're going to try real hard or we're going to die trying to be up on this stage. Three years in a row now, I mean, can you put into words what the journey has been like over the last three years, with the fight and coming together and all the joy?

J.J. McCARTHY: It's been beautiful. Just tremendous blessing to be able to be a part of it. Through all the ups and downs, through all the peaks and valleys, there's nobody I would rather go to war with every single day than these guys right here and be led by anybody else but Coach Harbaugh. It's just been so much fun.

So many valuable learning lessons just about life, just about being a better man came from all the three years.

So I'm just extremely honored to be a part of it, and I can't wait to see where it goes.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: This team is constantly maturing, getting better as men every single day. It's been a process, but it's been a very great process, a learning process, learning experience. I don't think that you could paint a better picture, but the picture also isn't done being painted.

I can't wait to continue this journey with these guys. Coach says he can't have it any better -- he has it better than nobody when it comes to players, and as a player, I don't think I could have it any better than a coach like Coach Harbaugh who loves us as his sons.

When you have a coach who loves you in that way, you're able to as a player then love your coach as well as love your players. We're direct reflections of how Coach Harbaugh treats us.

Q. This is for Blake. Just with you personally, your journey to get here last year, your absence, and then being the touchdown king tonight, kind of talk about that journey and trying to face the adversity and get through that to be back here tonight.

BLAKE CORUM: It was a beautiful journey, a journey that taught me a lot of things about myself. I remember on December 2nd last year I was going into surgery. It was probably around this time, California time.

Just how the whole 365 can change, you know what I'm saying? It was a beautiful journey. I went through some trials and tribulations. I found myself again and became a better man on and off the field, but to be back out here with my guys, you know, it felt great. It felt great.

It's been a heck of a journey, but the journey is not over. I'm super excited to see what this next month has to offer, this next game has to offer because I know it's going to be glorious. I know it's going to be great.

To summarize everything from what I've been through, last year to now, has been beautiful. I wouldn't trade nothing in the world for it.

JIM HARBAUGH: I would just add J.J. McCarthy, I I've said it before, I would follow him to hell and back. Again, tonight --

J.J. McCARTHY: Likewise.

JIM HARBAUGH: He made throws -- the one throw he made and it got called back for a holding call and some other great throws.

Uncharacteristically we had some drops and uncharacteristically we had some protection issues and things that we'll work on, and definitely Zak was mixed. I mean, he never hung his head. Never got on anybody. He has just got this demeanor, and the more you hit him, the more he is just motivated to come back, which is amazing.

Plus, he is 20 years old. I think he is the best quarterback in the country. Some will argue, but he's got to be the youngest of the best. I see some other guys that are reclassified and been around for forever, but he's just a kid. He's a 20-year-old kid doing the things that he's done, and the record he has speaks for itself.

But the things you don't see behind the scenes... you see the talent, but just the toughness and the dedication that he has for the team is unmatched.

And Mikey, you know, we've been talking about -- I think I mentioned it. My brother, we watched the Maryland game together, and he was blown away by Mikey and how he played and gave me a Lion spike to give to Mikey, which I did. Gift from my brother.

Then after the Ohio State game, he told me how much he's shooting up the draft boards. But what they all don't know is what Mikey will bring to your team from a leadership standpoint. His smile is infectious. It's the accountability that he holds himself to and holds others to. It's just so, so elite.

And Blake, you know Blake. I think you know how good of a player he is, but he's that good of a person as well on and off the field. As rock solid of a guy.

I remember being around guys myself. You make mistakes when you're that age. He's never made a mistake. He's never said a negative word. He's the most positive, hardest working, best guy that anybody could coach.

So this is just a thumbnail sketch. When I say it's like a walk in the park coaching these guys and who could possibly have it better than I do, the answer to that is nobody because of the kind of people they are.

BLAKE CORUM: I'll tell you this. I wouldn't want to play for anybody else, Coach.

JIM HARBAUGH: Love you guys.

J.J. McCARTHY: Nobody. Love you too.

MIKE SAINRISTIL: Love you too, Coach.

Q. Jim, just a few minutes ago alluded to maybe some things on offense that you might want to work on or look for. How do you feel and rate your performance this game, and do you feel that you left any meat on the bone as an offense?

BLAKE CORUM: First of all, Iowa has a good defense.

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Let's not act like Iowa --

JIM HARBAUGH: Fourth in defense and seventh in scoring or seventh --

BLAKE CORUM: They're up there.

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah. Or vice versa; right? Fourth in defense, seventh in scoring or fourth in scoring and seventh in defense? That's a dang good defense.

BLAKE CORUM: Great defense. Now, we made some mistakes. I wish I would have ran a little better. We had dropped passes, pass pro. There's just things we can clean up, but we have a month now.

We have a month to get guys healthy. We have a month to watch a lot of film. We have a month to practice a lot. So we have time. We can't waste our time, but we have time.

Today's performance, it wasn't our best, but there's nothing better than winning. It got the job done. Like I said, shout-out to the defense, special teams. Like I said, Iowa's defense was good, but we have things to clean up.

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah, Blake just said it all. He couldn't have said it any better. Me personally, I just need to do better at staying in the pocket, not moving too early, and trusting my receivers down field all the time.

Just back to the drawing board. Like Blake said, that was a great defense, and can't wait to learn from a great defense. We'll get better from it and continue to tighten things down to make us the most dominant offense we can be.

JIM HARBAUGH: J.J., you didn't make a mistake out there tonight. There wasn't one play where you made a mistake.

J.J. McCARTHY: That husky throw I want back.

JIM HARBAUGH: Maybe the one you could have run on where you threw to Roman on the incompleton.

J.J. McCARTHY: Yeah.

JIM HARBAUGH: But that was it. It was a near perfect performance.

J.J. McCARTHY: Appreciate that, Coach.

JIM HARBAUGH: Blake, that goal line run from the 6 yard line, that was a great run.

BLAKE CORUM: Appreciate it, Coach.

JIM HARBAUGH: That was the best 6-yard run I've ever seen.

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