



Washington Postgame Press Conference

Janaury 1, 2024



QUESTIONS FOR HEAD COACH KALEN DeBOER, MICHAEL PENIX, JR. AND BRALEN TRICE

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, you saw it. You saw what happened out there.

Obviously, I'm proud. I'm proud of the way our guys every single week bring everything they've got. And it doesn't just happen on game days. I think that's the thing I told them in the locker room just now, is a lot of people make choices to do something special. But the work doesn't always support the goals that they have.

And these guys don't just do it on game day. They do it each and every day going back to the time a year ago when they decided to come back and make this vision happen a reality.

So, thought we played a really sharp game in a lot of ways. A couple of opportunities that were missed. Unfortunate situation with the clock. And thought we'd end up with just maybe 10, 15 seconds to have to work with and then go the whole length of the field. But the defense had to stay out there and play every down until the very end.

And so proud of the resiliency and finding another way to win a football game.

Q. Michael, was there a time in your life where you felt like a night like this wasn't possible with all the injuries that you went through? And what is it like to get here and get to a national championship game?

MICHAEL PENIX JR: I wouldn't say I ever felt like this wasn't possible, because all things are possible when you believe in God. So for me, it was a tough time. I was going through some tough things throughout my career.

But I always say, man, I feel like everything I've been through built me for this moment. Built me into the man and the person and the player I am today. So I wouldn't change it for anything. I'm super blessed to be in this position, and I'm super blessed to be able to do it with the dawgs.

Q. What was the nature of Dillon Johnson's injury? And then for Michael, what was it like watching that last drive from the sidelines?

COACH DeBOER: Again, I haven't even talked to the training staff. I caught Dillon just a second. And it's related, I think, to what he's been going through the last couple months. So, obviously, he was down and in some pain. But he's been in pain the last couple months, so just working through it.

He's a tough, tough guy, tough kid. Not a kid anymore. But tough player for us. He's been just so strong and keeps pushing forward. It goes back to two or three weeks left to go in the season when really this injury happened, I think, based on what I understand.

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Yeah, for sure. Prayers out to DJ. He's been amazing for us all year. And he's definitely -- I saw a video whenever I was getting interviewed. He was going off the cart, pumping his fist, just super excited, screaming at the crowd. Man, that's just the person he is. He's just full of



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excitement. And he wants to see everybody else be great. But obviously, seeing him go down was hard for us.

But watching the last drive from the sideline, it was just believing. Coach [Kalen] DeBoer, he always preaches to us, we're built for this moment and we believed it. And no matter the circumstances, the adversity that we went through during that drive, I know everybody on the sideline continues to believe. Continue to believe in the defense, that they were going to get that stop, because they've done it all year.

You've seen it so many times, each and every week throughout the season, them coming up with big-time stops and big-time moments. So we were just waiting for the play, and it was bound to happen.

But just super blessed, and we were all believing on the sidelines, though.

Q. What do you feel like a performance that Michael [Penix Jr.] had tonight does for his legacy at Washington?

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, he set the tone pretty quickly. And, I mean, just made all the throws. And obviously, there's other people that have to make the plays as well.

But I thought he just was just so good with his feet in the pocket and resetting and making throws, things that we know he's capable of doing. And with a good defense like we were facing in Texas today, he had to kind of resort to all the tools that he has and all the skill sets that make him special and make him, in my mind, the best player in college football.

This guy really all month was on another level as far as his mission to make sure that this happened. And I think you saw it all week in practice. There was just nothing he was going to let slide by where we would leave a doubt that we were going to find a way to win.

Even last night, I don't know what the meeting was about, but he asked to get the guys together. I think just sharing his mind, sharing his heart. Certainly, as a leader of this football team, those guys respond and you saw that today. Those guys play with passion, and it starts with No. 9 right here.

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Yeah, I'm just blessed. I couldn't do it without the man above and obviously without my offensive line and everybody that's been protecting me all season. They've been doing an amazing job, just keeping me clean. And obviously, I got the best playmakers on the outside. So it's like they make it easy.

You got the best players on the outside. You got Joe Moore winners. Man, it makes my job so easy. I'm just super blessed to be in this position.

But, man, the job's not finished. I feel like it's definitely going to take more. I'm going to push myself to get this team more next week. And, man, we're just super excited for the opportunity for sure.



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Q. Kalen, on a night with big pass plays one after the other, [Ja'Lynn] Polk had the first one on the catch-and-run. How important was that for kind of setting the tone for what you were going to do? And then, Michael, Polk's touchdown catch where he tipped it to himself, what was your view on that play? And what did you think of that one?

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, I think that first drive and just coming out and Michael [Penix Jr.] putting the ball in a perfect position for JP (Ja'Lynn Polk) to catch it. And then JP making a couple of guys miss and getting a quick score, kind of just with a month off, you don't know how you're going to come out and what type of rhythm you're going to have. And I think that got Mike into a rhythm very quickly and gave us a lot of confidence that we can move the ball up and down the field.

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Yeah, man. That's a play we've been running all season. Just got the right look. And me and JP was on the same page. And just having to avoid pressure and make the throw. It was just like a routine play, man. It's just something that we've been repping all year.

And man, JP, he's a guy that's been making plays all season. You see him show up each and every week. So he's somebody that I trust. I mean, I trust all my guys, but he's somebody that I can trust to make those big-time plays. And I knew once I threw the ball, it was going to be a touchdown. Tipped or not, I knew he was going to find a way to get it because that's what he's been doing all year.

My voice is going out (laughter.)

Q. For Kalen and Michael. Kalen, you have not been afraid to go downfield all season. Even tonight, there were times toward the end, four or five minutes left, and you're not afraid to take shots downfield. Could you talk to me about just that philosophy of not just worried about the clock and getting the ball downfield?

And, Michael, a few weeks ago, y'all win an emotional game in the Apple Cup and you have to turn around and go play Oregon, and you're underdogs there. And now you win this emotional game tonight. And here you are a week from now going to Houston to play Michigan. How does this team get itself back up and get emotionally ready to go for this game?

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, I think the aggressiveness is just who we are. And I think time and time again, even look at the drives where we kind of stalled, I know a lot of the times we just look back on it and we were like, man, we just need to give Michael [Penix Jr.] a chance to have the ball in his hands because he was feeling it and his guys were making plays. And he was putting the ball where it needed to be and making good reads, and the O-line was protecting for him. And so not losing that aggressiveness.

I thought we did a good job even coming out of the half. And you never know how it's going to go. You would like to run some time off the clock. But it's what we've done the last two years here, is just stay aggressive.



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Give Michael and the guys a chance to make a play. And, again, pushing the ball down the field, even to Rome [Odunze], getting the PI and things like that. We are just trying to put the game away. Don't want to be reckless, but that's our style, that's for sure.

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Yeah, man, just keeping a 1-0 mindset. That's what it's always been about all year. Yeah, we're going to celebrate this win. But we're going to have a quick turnaround. You got to be ready for the national championship. We're going to be playing a good team.

But, man, it's been amazing. Everybody just collectively just continues to believe and continues to trust the process.

That's the thing about us, I feel like each and every player on this team, we fell in love with the process. And I've said it since -- I think it was around fall camp, that our goal was to win the national championship. And some people probably didn't believe us. But we had the opportunity to do that. So we're not going to get distracted and forget about that goal.

Obviously, this was a step towards it. And it's given us the opportunity to be able to play in that game. But we're still motivated. We still got more things we want to accomplish. And the natty is right here in front of us. And our focus is going to be on that, and we're going to be ready for the game.

Q. Question for any of the three of you. This team has talked all season about the belief that it has in prevailing, getting the win. Can you talk about what that belief looked like on the final drive in a stressful situation?

BRALEN TRICE: From a defensive perspective, that belief just stems from all of our preparation throughout the whole season, throughout these past three, four weeks that we've had to get ready, early on before the season in our training periods.

But it's part of our standard. It's a player-led team. We do that every single day, right? We put ourselves in those situations in practice where we're ready when that happens. And I think you can think we were shook out there, obviously, but we weren't. We were ten toes down, ready to go.

Q. Talk about the third quarter, how you guys dominated the third quarter and held Texas to five plays with keeping your offense on the field. You turned the ball over a couple times. Really, the talk about this, going into this game, was the Texas defense may be able to stifle y'all. But y'all used your offense to stifle the Texas offense. Can you talk about that a little bit?

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, the defense did a nice job getting off the field, whether it be take-aways or getting stops. I think we started feeling it there at the end of the second quarter, going into the third. And getting a chance to have the ball to come out of the locker room and marching it right down the field.

And then kind of getting that ten-point lead, that was a big time in the game for us, to be able to be a little bit more in control. So that was good team football we were playing right there.



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And I think that's what we've done a good job of, especially the second half of the season, is being there for each other. But getting stops and then going down and getting some sort of points. Every point mattered, obviously, tonight.

So getting field goals, even when you know you would like to get more, but getting some points on the board and special teams coming through with the field goals there, making all their opportunities.

The guys just coming out of the locker room and knowing there's 30 minutes left and leave it all on the field.

Q. Bralen, this last week you heard about that you're an underdog over and over again. And you seem to get a little impatient with that, wanting to come out with a decisive win. You've been the underdog in three of your last four games. Do you feel a little bit better, maybe you've sold more people on who you are and what you do?

BRALEN TRICE: Obviously, yeah, I feel better about that.

Yeah, I just think we prove everybody wrong time and time again. And we'll continue to do that. And this is what we do as dawgs, at UDub up in Seattle. We're bred for this. We prepare for this. And you can overlook us all you want, but we go out there and we prove everybody wrong every time.

Q. Michael, before the game, Coach talked about how he knew you were a Heisman-potential player back in Indiana. Having this kind of a performance on this stage, how much do you think that solidifies and maybe answers questions about how the Heisman voting ended? And also, if any of you guys watched "College Gameday" this morning, was your performance to let naysayers know, if you will?

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Man, I feel like everything happened for a reason. Coming out of high school, I'm going to be honest, like coming out of high school, when I committed to Indiana University, my dad, he didn't really want me to go there. He didn't understand why I was going there. So that was something that was hard for me, just having somebody that I love the most not really -- he didn't see my vision.

But obviously, it led me to here. Going to Indiana helped me meet Coach [Kalen] DeBoer, and our relationship that we built throughout the years has been amazing. And I wouldn't want to play for anybody else. So I'm super blessed.

And as far as the Heisman thing, that's over, man. It don't matter. Right now, man, we're looking to win the national championship. That's been my goal since day one. You won't find an interview or anything of me saying that I want to win the Heisman. Like, that was never my goal. My goal was to win football games for this team. And we've been doing it. 14-0 here and we got one more to go. So that's my focus.



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The Heisman committee, I never like talk down on them at all. They do an amazing job with their votes. And Ja'Lynn Daniels, he's an amazing player. He's made plays all throughout the year as well. So I don't take anything away from him and the decision that they made.

But the only thing I can account for is what I do to help this team win football games, and that's what I'm all about.

Q. For Kalen and for Bralen, I have to know what your thoughts are on Elijah's [Jackson] play. What was going through your mind when he made it there at the end, from both of your perspectives on the sideline and on the field?

BRALEN TRICE: From my perspective, I was just obviously happy that he was able to make that play. I do like E.J. He works really hard every single day. He's a big part of our defense and a big part of our team. And to see him capitalize on an opportunity like that is huge. Especially for me, being a vet and seeing younger guys I've been looking at and watching and playing next to ever since they came in and seeing them get opportunities like that is huge. I mean, it makes me happy. It makes our whole defense happy. It makes these guys happy. It's awesome.

COACH DeBOER: I think, from a coaching standpoint, first things first, you love seeing just the team come through and find a way to win. And then when you look at individual performances and you see a guy who has come so far, even just this year and the confidence he continues to build.

And playing corner is so hard. Guys are going to make plays. You get to this level and this type of game and there's going to be a play that's going to be made and being able to just erase it from your mind and go make the next one, he's just really become someone that we can count on. And he's gotten better. And he's got a mindset. And we got a lot of belief in him across the board, both offensively and defensively. So it's really cool to see him use his skill set and his length to go knock that ball away.

Q. This is for Michael and Bralen. You two have had plenty of adversity through your career. Michael dealing with injuries at Indiana. Bralen being at UDub for now your fifth season. Talk about how this process has shaped you into a player that's prepared to go and compete for a national championship next week.

MICHAEL PENIX JR: Yeah, man, I say it all the time, I wouldn't change my journey for anything. And obviously, that might seem crazy to say because of what I've been through.

Like, if I would say that I had to get hurt four times for me to get to this point, that's not something that I would have thought of. But, man, I feel like it was all worth it. I feel like everything I've been through is definitely worth it and shaped me into the person, the player, and the man I am today.



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So I'm just super blessed to be in this position and to be able to be on the other side of everything I've been through and continue to climb. I just continue to trust my faith and trust everything that I believe in. I just let everything just go and just have fun and not really worry about anything that I've been through. But always remembering where I came from. To get to here, it's definitely made my journey even more special.

BRALEN TRICE: Yeah, as a guy that's been around for a while, since 2019 over at UDub, as a guy that's been around for a while, it's crazy to see the adversity we've been through and the point we're at now. All the guys around us that stayed around, stuck around through the mud to get to where we're at, it's a great feeling to know that we're at this point in our careers now where we can look back and be like, man, we had to go through that to get to where we're at.

I'm just proud of everybody on the team, both sides of the ball. It's a great feeling to be where we're at, but we're not done.

Q. Kalen, what is your game plan for the coming week? I assume y'all are going home tonight, or sometime. Long flight home.

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, the coaching staff is going home tonight. And they'll get rolling. Fortunately, we gain a couple hours going back.

The team will stay here tonight and then leave mid-morning and get back. It's going to be a quick turnaround. We'll get a couple practices in and then head down to Houston and kind of have what we would normally see as a Thursday/Friday down in Houston. Those practices. But Tuesday/Wednesday for us. That will take place up in Seattle.

So give us a chance to be able to kind of be back at home and be around our facilities and get back into the routine. It's going to happen fast and furious. One crazy thing that we got is we actually start our quarter tomorrow.

So we have some newcomers, high school and transfers, coming in. And we have to be around them from a coaching standpoint.

But I can tell you 100% of our dedication will be on getting ready, obviously, to play this game.

I'm not expecting these guys will be too consumed going to school or anything like that. So their time is done.

Q. Can you get in the work that you need? And how does this compare taking those bus rides to the NAIA championship games?

COACH DeBOER: Yeah, these are a little easier. You got a few more people around you, and the plane rides are much shorter. We'll enjoy tonight.



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I think the one thing that was really apparent in the locker room is ever since probably the mid-season Oregon win, when it was really emotional, I think all these wins, as much as when you're in the locker room, you're excited. I think the focus really has gone into kind of a job's not done, and the next one is most important now. So I even felt that in there tonight.

And guys just enjoying the moment, realizing what we've accomplished again tonight. But realizing, man, you know, we got to pore everything into getting our bodies right, our minds right, getting healthy as quick as we can here, getting the game plan in order, and go back to work.