

Notre Dame Head Coach Marcus Freeman Not Focused On Past History With Buckeyes As National Title Game Inches Closer



Image via Matt Cashore-USA TODAY Sports

Among the many storylines for this year's national championship game matchup between historic powerhouses Ohio State and Notre Dame, perhaps the most intriguing one of them all is Fighting Irish head coach Marcus Freeman seeking his first title against his former team.

Freeman spent four seasons with the Scarlet and Gray from 2004-08 as a bruising starting linebacker — earning second-team All-Big Ten honors in both 2007 and 2008 — and had another year with the program as a graduate assistant in 2010 before heading elsewhere.

14 seasons after departing the program for good, Freeman, a Fairborn, Ohio, native, now earns the opportunity to defeat his alma mater in the most important game of his coaching career as over two-score underdogs.

Despite the seemingly Hollywood movie script, Freeman pushed back on this opportunity being a “full-circle moment” for him in his career, saying that nothing he has done in the past will matter when the two teams kick off on Jan. 20, and all the focus is on putting the right plan in place to go win a national title.

“In terms of this season, yeah,” Freeman told the media over Zoom on Sunday when asked if this was a full-circle moment for him personally. “From where we started (against Texas A&M) and the loss to Northern Illinois to now where you’re saying we’re getting ready to play for the national championship, yeah, it’s full circle.

“This has nothing to do with the past and where I went to school. This is about this opportunity that lies right ahead of us.”

Freeman, who has already squared off with Ohio State in his coaching career at Notre Dame, suffering close losses both in 2022 (21-10) and 2023 (17-14), continued to downplay the significance of the matchup against the Buckeyes as the press conference went on.

When another reporter asked him if his team has any extra motivation to beat the Buckeyes because of the last-second home loss to them in 2023, Freeman said his team does not need any more juice with

this matchup. Rather, the opportunity to win a championship is plenty motivating.

“If you need that to motivate you to get ready for this game, then you’re not the right person. That’s the reality of it,” he said. “We don’t need motivation to be prepared for this game. We have a chance to play in the national championship game.

“This isn’t about the past. This is about this opportunity we have right in front of us, and we’ll continue to focus on this opportunity right in front of us. If there are learning opportunities from other games or previous games, absolutely we’re going to use them. If that’s going to help us be more prepared for what could happen in this game, we’re definitely going to use it. But it isn’t for motivation at all.”

Freeman did open up some about some part of his Ohio State career, saying that former linebacker-mate and now-OSU linebackers coach James Laurinaitis is one of his best friends and that they were in each other’s weddings.

“We have a lot of great moments and probably some that I won’t share on this press conference, but he’s a great friend,” he said.

But, as expected, Freeman kept it all business when talking about the Buckeyes. He said he was able to catch the Buckeyes’ dramatic 28-14 Cotton Bowl win over Texas and came away impressed with the skill and play-making abilities Ryan Day’s players have on both sides of the ball, which he thinks should make for a daunting challenge for his team come Jan. 20.

“You don’t get any schematic things out of watching it on TV, you obviously can see playmakers, you can see big plays, and that was evident in that game,” Freeman said. “I saw some guys on both sides but specifically Ohio State’s side making really big plays on offense and defense, and they have playmakers all across the board. We know it’s going to be a challenge, but we look forward to it.”