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Indiana's Defense Comes in Clutch Against the Reining National Champs

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Written By Nick Gonzales (@nrgonzales_)

In 2024 when you think of an Indiana football game, you're usually thinking a blowout where Indiana's offense dominates the scoreboard, which is still very surprising to think about. However, the Hoosiers experienced nothing but a defensive battle against the defending National Champions – after opening up a 17-3 lead. The Hoosiers were having a tough time on offense during the second half, so the defense needed to take action to have any chance of winning.

“It starts with the D-line first. We have a lot of guys up there that do a good job disrupting the pass game which also helped in the run game. Mixing up some of those coverages in the back is something we talked about all week, and I think we did a good job of that,” Aiden Fisher responded when he was asked how they made Michigan's quarterbacks uncomfortable in his postgame interview.

Indiana has been swarming to the ball every play and it is a big factor of their success this season. The defensive line has been outstanding as of late and is in the offensive backfield for what seems to be more than half the game. Michigan's quarterbacks were scrambling around to try and make a play. The ability to charge towards the football has never been a problem for the IU defense this season. So, when Alex Orji fumbled the ball in the first half, Mikail Kamara saw his chance and recovered it to put the Hoosiers in good field position.

“Yeah, I thought our defense played a great game, held them to 69 yards rushing, 137 yards passing. So, 206 total yards. Kept them out of the end zone quite a few times when they were deep in the red area inside the 10 down tight, and yeah, that guy was on the run quite a bit, and so great effort. Flew around. Swarmed the ball.” Curt Cignetti said about the defense in his postgame press conference.

After holding Michigan State to negative 36 rush yards last week, they were able to hold the Wolverines to 69 rush yards on 34 carries (2.03 avg yards per run). If that isn't impressive enough, then contrast that to the fact that Michigan averaged 165.1 rush yards per game in their previous nine games this season. Not only that but the fact that the Hoosiers were able to consistently force Michigan to settle for field goals while deep in the red zone was magnificent. The best example was on a third and goal on the three-yard line during Michigan's first drive of the game. The Hoosiers' pressure caused Davis Warren to fumble the ball and ultimately make Michigan settle for a field goal instead of going for a touchdown.

“I mean applying pressure to the quarterback is huge and disrupts the rhythm of the game, especially to somebody's offense. So that was another focus in there and going to stop the running and applying the pressure. That just kind of gives us a helping hand when it comes to passing, and they don't get a bunch of time to throw the ball down the field, helping our DBs,” CJ West stated when responding to how important it is to apply pressure.

The constant application of pressure made it difficult for Michigan to move the ball downfield for most of the game. It also was very beneficial to the rest of the defense such as the defensive backs who had to adjust to losing starting cornerback, Jamier Johnson, off a targeting ejection near the end of the first half. Terry Jones Jr. stepped up and did great for the Hoosiers in today's game. He had 6 total tackles (5 solo, 1 assist), 2 tackles for loss, and

a forced fumble. Jones made a big impact on defense today and has been a great player all season and will continue to have an influence in the remaining weeks of the season.

Indiana squeaked out a close victory against the reigning National Champs and while it was a very gritty game, there is still more work ahead. The Hoosiers have a week off to rest their bodies and prepare for their trip to Columbus to take on the #3 ranked Ohio State Buckeyes in two weeks. It'll be Indiana's toughest opponent this season and will be a hardy battle to say the least.

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IU's defense saved the win for the Hoosiers today. Their play was excellent as they put pressure on the QB while also stopping the run by Michigan. With the weekly explosion by IU's offense, it was good to see the defense win the game today.



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