

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Ole Miss vs Penn State

Tuesday, December 26, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Lane Kiffin**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement, Coach. If you'll talk about getting to Atlanta and getting the team settled in and getting bowl week off to a start.

LANE KIFFIN: We're excited to be here, to be part of this huge matchup and big time bowl game and to be able to play Penn State and Coach Franklin that have done such a great job, not just this year, but a lot of years in a row here of a great run.

So this is a really big challenge for us. We're excited to be in Atlanta with a lot of events coming up and a lot of work to still do.

This is Tuesday of a work week, so we have practice coming up here in a little bit in the stadium in our first practice here. So a lot of work to still be done.

**Q. Coach, you've worked all over the South. Atlanta -- with the Chick-Fil-A Kickoff games, the Peach Bowl, Playoffs -- kind of fashions itself as the capital of college football. I was curious if you had a thought on the city's place within the sport.**

LANE KIFFIN: I don't know that I've thought about it that way, but obviously a tremendous amount of great players in the Atlanta area, in the state of Georgia.

This is a really cool stadium to play in, whether that's being kickoff classics, whether it's years ago at Tennessee playing in this game, and Alabama, playing this game as a playoff game. So really neat to be part of and to be in this big of a market.

**Q. Just wanted to ask you, obviously I saw over the last couple of days you had an extension. A lot of that is due to the tremendous work that you've done over the last several years. Question to you is, I guess, what just puts that fire in your belly or what keeps your**

**engine going to have this team humming at such a high rate of success?**

LANE KIFFIN: I'm very grateful to be hired here in the first place four seasons ago and to get an extension, which didn't change any financial part of the situation, just added length and commitment that this is where we want to be and commitment from the university.

So just really pleased to be part of that. Very grateful for our staff, for our leadership here and our players. They've done amazing to win 10 games two of the last three seasons. I think of where it was when I got here and where it is now and what's going on in recruiting that will lead to next year is really amazing just to be a part of.

Excited to watch these guys play one more game.

**Q. So from what you've seen of Drew Allar so far, what have been your main takeaways of his game at the quarterback position?**

LANE KIFFIN: He's hard to beat, takes care of the ball really well. Really good mixture of being able to throw the ball and then get out of trouble and make a play and make a first down with his feet.

These guys are always really hard, what I call student of the games when you see them play. They rarely make any mistakes. When you couple that with the best defense in the country, that's a really good combination. That's why these guys have won so many games.

**Q. Curious how Penn State having co-coordinators on both sides of the ball for this game -- interim co-coordinators, that is -- affects your preparation?**

LANE KIFFIN: Well, the first thought, people would think, well, that's in our favor with Manny leaving, but that presents challenges too. We don't have any idea what they're going to do. It's like opening the season with no preseason games or being someone's second game. That's actually a really big challenge.

It's just more that we're going to have to be ready for

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whatever they play and play really sound and play really good football.

**Q. Just a quick question, how does playing in the Southeastern Conference prepare you to play other conference ins bowl games and everything? And what makes the Southeastern Conference that much different from the Big Ten and the ACC and other conferences?**

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I just think it's so balanced and there's so much elite talent. So that's not disrespecting any other conference. I think that we're in analytics and stats and proof of things, and I think the draft shows that by the number of SEC players drafted over the years compared to other conferences.

You play such elite players, really elite coaches -- not just head coaches, but coordinators -- and you play in really, really hard environments. Almost all the environments are soldout, very difficult environments to play in. I don't think any other conference has all those things from top to bottom.

**Q. Lane, you made the comment a couple times this year, specifically after wins, that this team, you're privileged to coach this team. What makes you say that, and what makes this team different than the teams you've coached in the past?**

LANE KIFFIN: I think, because of the time frame that we're in with the portal, especially the way that we put together a roster, a lot of times it's not going to be quite as enjoyable as it is to have recruited kids and them develop for a couple years in a system and pick the school initially in their first pick versus their second pick.

That doesn't always work, no different than free agency or professional sports. Look at the NBA. They put together these dream teams, and all of a sudden don't have very good seasons once they start going bad. So it doesn't always work that way, just like it doesn't always work when you sign five star players out of high school that you're going to win.

So I've really enjoyed that these guys have come together from all these different places around the country and really put aside their egos because some of them don't play as much as they want. They maybe only play special teams. That says a lot about them.

I don't think that is the common theme nowadays in this generation, in this system that's set up that's free agency every year, going all these places and in a lot of ways, chasing money. That usually doesn't equal really good

team chemistry.

**Q. To follow up on what you were saying about preparing for new co-coordinators, how do the Penn State opt-outs for the bowl, does that further complicate your plans? Adding some uncertainty with the personnel that you'll be facing. When we spoke to you at the bowl announcement, you said you didn't anticipate any opt-outs on your side. Does that still hold?**

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I probably jinxed myself by saying that. Kind of a surprise to us, Cedric Johnson decided not to play in the bowl game. So we wish him the best of luck. We'll miss him. He was a really important part of this team.

But everybody's got to make their own decisions nowadays, and kids think about things differently. So it is what it is. But everybody else is here.

As far as those guys, they've got a lot of great players. They've recruited a really high level for a lot of years in the row, have not built through the portal. So I think they can sustain injuries or opt-outs more than a lot of programs would be able to.

**Q. It seems you've got a couple early enrollees with you on the trip. Is it all 12 of them, some of them? What is being around this team --**

LANE KIFFIN: We do not. We had a couple come to practice when we were back at home, but not traveling with us. I wish they were.

**Q. Coach, you said earlier that you feel Penn State has the best defense in the country. Obviously there's statistics to back that up, but aside from the numbers, what have you seen from Penn State's defense that would make you give such a compliment?**

LANE KIFFIN: I think they play really hard. Obviously they have great players, elite talent, great coaching. But they play really, really hard and really physical at home and on the road.

Sometimes you see these teams with electric home atmospheres and advantages, like these guys have, like some of the SEC teams, but then they won't play quite as hard defensively on the road. These guys are not like that. These guys bring an old school mentality with new school elite talent.

**Q. We talked with James Franklin a couple weeks ago where we just kind of asked him about his schedule with transfer portal and signing day and bowl prep and**

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**everything kind of going on right now. Can you explain your schedule and how this section of college football, this December sprint kind of works for you?**

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, we're actually kind of finally to a normal part now where today's Tuesday and we actually play on a Saturday. So it's a normal week for us. We're just in a hotel in a different city.

Previous to this, it's been a little chaotic, with not just recruiting and flying around trying to get back for practice, a lot of the assistant coaches not at the practices, but then dealing with the portal, going to other universities to see kids and dealing with keeping our own kids.

Again, it's a terrible system, and no other -- I wouldn't think any other sports, professional sports have ever set up a system where free agency starts while the season is still going. It really makes no sense.

You can leave. You can stay. You can go other places. Coaches can call you. And our season is still going. It would be like before the NFC or AFC playoffs start in a couple weeks, all of a sudden, hey, free agency the week before open, so you can start recruiting other people's players and fly them on trips and get them to transfer. So really in a really bad system.

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