

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

Thursday, December 28, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Charlie Weis Jr.

Tre Harris

Caden Prieskorn

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll keep it rolling with the Ole Miss offense. Joining us now, co-offensive coordinator, Charlie Weis, wide receiver, Tre Harris, and tight end, Caden Prieskorn.

A couple opening statements. Coach, talk about getting through bowl week and what the experience has been like and now sort of shifting the focus to GameDay.

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: It's been extremely exciting being here at the Peach Bowl. It's been really welcoming, very fun to be here. It's been cool seeing the competition stuff last night and kind of all the festivities you get.

Our players have been great. They've been super focused in the preparation, getting ready for the game. Obviously it's always unique when you have such a long break in between games, but our guys have done a phenomenal job. They're really excited to be here, and we're just ready for the game.

THE MODERATOR: You guys have obviously been able to do a lot of fun stuff off the field. What's been your favorite event so far?

TRE HARRIS: My favorite event was last night going through the College Hall of Fame, just seeing the history and seeing the bowls and all of that and seeing the players that were inducted and stuff like that, it was probably my favorite part so far.

CADEN PRIESKORN: Definitely the same thing, seeing the College Football Hall of Fame. I never got to see or experience that before. It was awesome to see that.

Being at a team event against Penn State, it was awesome to compete against each other.

THE MODERATOR: That was my 24th of those, and that was by far the most energy we've had. I've never seen players stand on chairs before, getting into it that much. That was fun.

Congratulations on the big win. I'm not saying anything, but about 90 percent of the time, the team that wins the belt wins the game.

Q. For Tre and Caden, you guys came from group of five schools. I imagine you grew up watching games like this. Now that you're here and going to play in a game like this, what's the experience, this moment like for you guys?

TRE HARRIS: It's surreal. Exactly what you said, we grew up watching games like this, and to finally be a part of it, it's huge honor to be part of a game like this. It's a dream come true. We all want to go out there and play in the big games, and to be able to do that is huge for me, especially for me and my career and everyone else on this team.

CADEN PRIESKORN: Absolutely. Probably the biggest game of my career. New Year's Six bowl on one of the biggest stages of college football. Just how I came up as a walk-on and all that, just to play in one of these games is surreal.

Q. This is for Coach Weis. I talked to Coach Poindexter in the last session, and he cited tempo as what makes you guys unique to Penn State. What does the Penn State defense do that makes them unique to you?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: I think they're just an extremely well coached, disciplined football team. They play very assignment sound, very minimal bust, very minimal mental errors. They've got great players at all three levels of the defense. They've got a great D-line, linebackers, secondary players.

Top to bottom, they're probably the most complete defense



I've seen. It's extremely impressive in having those players and getting them to play assignment sound, I think just very well-structured overall defense.

Q. Tre, I know we've kind of asked you this before, but now that you're here and through the practices, what kind of momentum can you carry, and Caden as well, into next season with the win and kind of having success this week?

TRE HARRIS: It will be a lot of momentum going into next year if we go out there and get a W. We're playing against a Blue Blood type of program, so it would be good to go out there and get a win against them.

On top of that, we'd be doing something that's never been done in Ole Miss history and getting that 11th win. Having those two milestones ahead of us going into next year would be huge and bring a lot of momentum, especially for next years.

Q. Caden, obviously you dealt with some injuries and some personal stuff early in the season. At what point this year did you feel healthy and ready within the offense, knowing what you needed to do? When did it kind of click for you?

CADEN PRIESKORN: Right after the bye week during the Auburn week, I got mostly healthy or all the way back, and I felt really comfortable in the offense. Because dealing with that foot injury and everything else that's happened, I kind of got set back a little bit, kind of taking away from football.

I feel like that week kind of helped me, getting through the bye week and then getting through Auburn week. I feel like that's when I became healthy.

Q. Following up on Coach Weis' statement, hopefully the guys here can also elaborate on this, you called the Penn State defense one of the most complete defenses you've seen all year. You guys also had the luxury, and I'm going to use luxury in quotation marks, to go up against Alabama and Georgia, who were perennially top defenses in the country.

So how does Penn State compare to Alabama and Georgia in your mind?

TRE HARRIS: For us, they compare pretty well. We know statistically they're the top defense in the country. Going out there against them is going to be a great matchup, and we're really excited for it.

The way they compare to those other teams, I feel like they

have a lot of -- I feel like D-linemen, the way they go out there and pretty much wreak havoc out there, the D-linemen are pretty good, as well as pretty much the SEC guys.

To us, we're going to go out there and play our game, play our tempo, and be the most dominant team on the field.

CADEN PRIESKORN: I feel like this type of defense, they're always in the right spot. So we have to control what we can control and do our part on offense to give us the best chance to win.

Q. Charlie, obviously the injuries on the offensive line the last three games, I know this is a unit that you were worried about at the beginning of the season just because of how many snaps these guys have taken kind of across the board.

What have you learned about this unit through those injuries late in the year, and what gives you the confidence that they'll be able to rise to the challenge against one of the more well-rounded defenses in college football, like you said?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: I think we're fortunate to have guys up front that are adaptable and can play different positions, guys like Jeremy James and our center Bucky. Jeremy can play guard or tackle, and Bucky can play center or guard.

So we're deeper there than we were last year, and that helps with it right there. Giving those guys time to heal up and recover and rest, it's a long season for those guys. A lot of those guys those last three games were playing a ton of snaps. It's good to get them some rest and get them back going.

I think it's great we have guys that have got position flexibility, and that allows us to be creative in where we play our guys. Looking forward to seeing those guys a little bit healthier as we go into this game on Saturday.

Q. Charlie, did the defensive improvement that you all had this year, did that impact the way that the offense was called in any way, in your opinion?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: Yeah, I think every game is kind of independent of itself. Sometimes you've got to play a game where you've got to score a bunch of points, a game like LSU. And at other times when the defense is playing well, you try to run the ball. You've got to do whatever it takes to go 1-0 that week. That's a big phrase that we use around here, whatever it takes to go 1-0. Whether that's scoring 50 points or scoring 17 points, whatever it takes to

win, that's the biggest thing at the end of the day.

Obviously we want to have a ton of success offensively, but it's great going against Coach Golding and his defense each and every day in practice. They make us better every single day. So it's been great having those games where they can step up and control the game for us when we're not playing as well, so same vice versa.

We've been very fortunate. I think that's a large credit to our defense, why we're 10-2 this year.

Q. Charlie, you're sitting up here with two guys that weren't originally from SEC programs. When you're scouting in the transfer portal, how do you know what is going to translate? What do you look for? Is it traits? What specific things are you able to scout?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: There's several things that you look for. I think one thing too you look at is how did they play against top competition when they have had those opportunities? And Tre and Caden were both guys that had a lot of production in those kinds of games.

Obviously the biggest thing for us too is getting guys up here and getting them on visits and what's the fit like? Tre and Caden are both pro mindset type guys, unbelievable in their preparation, the things that they do, and they've got the ability to match it right there.

So you look at the fit. You look at how they do against top competition. There's a variety of factors that go into those decisions, but these two guys right here were no-brainers.

Q. Charlie, Penn State leads the nation in sacks. How can you use tempo to help Jackson in pass protection Saturday?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: Tempo is always a huge part of what we do in terms of getting the D-line tired, not letting them sub, certain things like that. That's just a big part of who we are each and every week.

At the end of the day, we've got to block them. We've got to get the ball out on time. We've just got to go out there and execute.

It's all about us at the end of the day is the thing that we talk about. So utilizing our tempo, playing fast, having success, moving the chains on third down. All those things go together into us having a good game on Saturday.

Q. Charlie, what's the challenges, if they've been challenges, with John David kind of obviously getting that job and bouncing back and forth this past month,

what's that been like for you? Has that even affected what you all have been working on?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: Definitely. Whenever you lose a great coach, other people have to step up. Several of the things that he did in helping put the game plan together, we've got to rely on some other people in those situations. Obviously we're extremely excited for Coach Baker to go and get that kind of a job. I know he's going to do phenomenal when he gets there.

It's always hard when you lose good coaches or good players. It's very similar. Other people have to step up and take those roles when he's gone. Obviously it's been great having him back here for bowl week in preparation and being able to pick his brain and getting ready to go for this game on Saturday.

Q. Obviously we know you had a big season, lots of moments throughout that time. I wanted to ask all three of you is there any moment from this season that you're like, oh, yeah, that's my favorite moment?

CADEN PRIESKORN: Definitely the LSU game, how we came back in the fourth quarter, down almost two scores and coming back. Just how we came back during that game and how it turned out and how it finished, how our fans rushed the field. It was pretty awesome.

TRE HARRIS: I was going to say LSU, but I'll switch it up. I'll say the State game. That was good the entire week. We got screens up throughout the facility from last year with them smoking those cigars because they won the Egg Bowl the previous year. It felt good to go to a rival field and get the win. That was a big win and a real special moment for me as well.

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: The LSU game for me as well. Seeing our guys bounce back from the loss against Alabama, and to come out and play the way that we did, I think that really speaks to the resilience that we have as a football team, as an offense, so that was cool.

These two guys were there for that final touchdown right there, throwing it to Tre and Caden blocking for him. So it was pretty cool.

Q. This is for Tre and Caden. The Penn State secondary is lauded as one of the best in the nation. Kaylon King will be playing on Sunday. Daequan is one of the better slot corners in the country, et cetera. You guys have a good tempo.

For Tre and Caden, what is your mindset going up against a secondary that's as good as Penn State's?

TRE HARRIS: For me, my mindset every week no matter what DB it is, go kill, go dominate, no matter who is in front of me. For me, it is just go out there and play my game and execute the game plan that's being made for us.

We know they've got a good secondary back there, but we've got good receivers. We've got good guys with good pass catches and a good QB that is going to give us the ball on time. So we'll go out there and play our game, and we're going to bring it to them.

CADEN PRIESKORN: Kind of like what Tre said, we've got great players too. We have a great quarterback that can distribute us the ball. So we know they have great players, so it's going to be a battle for four quarters.

Q. I have to ask the question does sugar go in grits?

TRE HARRIS: No. Never.

CADEN PRIESKORN: I've never had them to be honest.

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: I'm right there with Caden. I'm not a grits guy.

TRE HARRIS: Absolutely not.

THE MODERATOR: This has been highly debated all week. It's very split.

TRE HARRIS: Unh-unh. Just straight salt and pepper, that's it.

THE MODERATOR: Cheese?

TRE HARRIS: I'll put cheese in there, but no sugar. I'll put sugar in spaghetti. That's about it.

Q. Charlie, obviously with the wide receiver contingent that you all had this year, you leaned on them pretty heavily. How would you evaluate the development that's taken place of some of the younger guys that you've been able to retain? What's that been like considering the snap counts?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: We're super excited about some of those young guys. Ayden Williams, Cayden Lee definitely stand out as guys that are going to have really bright futures for us. They've done a great job.

Obviously everybody wants to start, everybody wants to get a bunch of balls and all that, but those two guys have had a fantastic mindset throughout the season of always being ready, always having the next man up. If an injury

does happen, they're ready to go.

I'm really excited to see those guys moving forward on Saturday and going into next season taking bigger roles and getting more snaps. We're really, really excited about those two. They're going to be special.

There's a bunch of guys in that room that have done a great job all year. Obviously we've got three front line guys that played a lot, made a lot of plays for us, but we've got very deep rooms. We're very thankful for that.

Q. We talked with Lane and basically every other offensive player that we've had to talk to just about Dart's growth from year one to year two. You said it yourself, just what you saw from the off-season and the spring.

But now that you've had 12 games to see that growth coming to fruition, what ways have you seen that, looking back on that now?

CHARLIE WEIS JR.: I think he just has an unbelievable mindset. His work ethic is top tier. The decision-making I think is the biggest thing, just total understanding of the offense. He's able to go out there, process things at a very high level, not only just what are we doing offensively? What's the defense doing? Being able to get us in and out of checks and getting into good plays, whatever that may be, and just taking care of the football.

I think that's probably the biggest improvement from a year ago. He's always been an explosive player. Now he's explosive, and he takes care of the ball. Very fortunate to have one of the best quarterbacks in the country.

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