

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

Friday, December 29, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Lane Kiffin

James Franklin

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We always start with our State of the Bowl address. I'll welcome Gary Stokan, CEO and President of the Peach Bowl.

GARY STOKAN: A few Pittsburghers clapping for me, huh? Thanks, Matt.

I just want to welcome everyone from the national media, local media, as well as Penn State and Ole Miss media. Thank you so much for being here and covering our bowl game.

I also want to recognize Bob Schuler by the door there. Bob is our chairman of the bowl. I appreciate his leadership and all the board helping us with the staff. Also want to recognize all of our volunteers who have done a great job this week, as well as our staff.

Let me first start by complimenting both James Franklin and Lane Kiffin. We've had a wonderful week with the student-athletes, respectful, first class. We couldn't be any humbly prouder to host both Penn State and Ole Miss in our 56th Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl.

We're the ninth oldest bowl game, but we're the first game founded for charity. I'm celebrating my 25th year as CEO and president. I game here with two initiatives, two main focuses. I want to talk a little bit about both of those, and then we have a special announcement to make as well.

The first initiative was, as we were founded in 1968 to be the bowl for charity, we've kept that as our mission, our DNA, and we've become the most charitable bowl organization in the country out of all 44 bowls.

We've given \$62.7 million back to charity since 2002. This year \$5.7 million will go to charity and scholarships from the Peach Bowl. This is the sixth straight year that we've donated more than \$5 million to charity and scholarship



and the 17th straight year where we've eclipsed \$1 million in charitable donations.

Because Penn State and Ole Miss are playing in our game, we'll donate \$50,000 to the John Lewis Legacy of Courage Scholarship that we've endowed in every school that's played in our game. We now have 35 universities, so we'll donate \$50,000 to Ole Miss and Penn State. Chick-Fil-A will match that to make it \$100,000. For playing in this game, both schools will get \$100,000 in scholarships.

They're earmarked for kids in Atlanta and Georgia. They're Title I kids, which means they're less fortunate. Some of these kids we've endowed these scholarships to are the first child in their family that's ever gone to college. So we're trying to make a generational change with these endowed scholarships.

The second thing we've done from a charity perspective is we've donated \$22 million to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta to find cures and trials to eradicate childhood cancer. We now have 14 trials with 34 patients in five different hospitals in four different states. Over the next year or two, that will go up to 100 patients in ten institutions nationally.

Our trial for leukemia is in its second phase, which means they've tested it positively in animals. They've tested it positively in adults. And now they're going to test it in second phase kids 12 to 18. And if it works there, it will be tested in younger kids. We hope that drug at some point, we can get that drug across the goal line and end zone to get it FDA approved to save a kid's life for a day, a month, a year or maybe even a whole lifetime. So we're more than just a bowl game. We're using football for the greater good.

The second initiative we had was to make Atlanta the capital of college football. A lot of media have recognized us as that. It came with a lot of work and a lot of money. We endeavored to move the College Football Hall of Fame to Atlanta.

Back in 2009, we signed a 30-year license with the NFF to move the College Football Hall of Fame from South Bend



to Atlanta. We put \$13 million in to build and sustain the College Football Hall of Fame.

We created the AFLAC kickoff game, which changed the face of college football on the front side of the season. Prior to Alabama and Clemson playing in 2008, two ranked teams, there was a lot of nondirectional schools and a lot of nonconference games that weren't viewed by a lot of people, weren't attended by a lot of people. We've changed the face of that where now you have major games at the beginning of the season and sellout experiences. So we've done that to give back to college football.

We've also evolved the Peach Bowl. When I started in 1998, our local newspaper called us a third-tier bowl game. We're now, although only 56 years old, mentioned in the same sentence with the Rose Bowl, the Sugar, the Orange and Cotton Bowls that are 85 to 105 years old.

We do as they do, we provide economic impact during the time of the year where not a lot of people are traveling to your town with giving out \$1.5 billion of economic impact in the last 25 years and \$90 million in tax revenue that's flowed back to our city and state. We sold out 23 of the 26 games.

We've also endeavored to manage and operate the Dodd Trophy, which is the preeminent College Coach of the Year Trophy. It stands for winning on the field, but also stands for leadership, scholarship, and integrity, after what Bobby Dodd did at Georgia Tech.

Lastly our future to continue to become the capital of college football and maintain that moniker, we'll start the season next year in our AFLAC kickoff game with Georgia-Clemson. We'll also have the first CFP quarter final game in our Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. We'll have the SEC Championship game. And then we'll host the National Championship game here in Atlanta, the first city in the CFP era to do it twice. So pretty nice to be able to host two National Championships in the span of the 12-year contract of the CFP.

In '25, we'll host two AFLAC kickoff games with Tennessee versus Syracuse and South Carolina versus Virginia Tech. We'll host the SEC Championship here in Atlanta. And then we will host the CFP semifinal game in the last year of the CFP contract in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl.

So 6 of those 8 games will be top ten teams. So we've got a lot of great college football coming through Atlanta, the capital of college football in '24 and '25.

So those are our two initiatives. One was to be the most charitable bowl game in the country, and secondly is to

endeavor to make Atlanta the capital of college football. I congratulate our staff, our board, and our volunteers for getting together, working as a team to make all that happen.

I'd like to transition now to the Dodd Trophy, which you see the trophy here, which is the preeminent College Coach of the Year. In 2014, we assumed management and operation, working with the Dodd Foundation. We were able to bring PNC on as a partner for the naming of the trophy. It's now presented by PNC.

This year's recipient had 35 of its student-athletes earn academic all conference honors for the '22, '23 academic year. In the community, he and his wife have established the Keep Climbing Family Foundation as an action-based organization built on faith, service, and focused on meeting the needs of others.

On the football field, this year's winner led its team to a perfect 13-0 record, highlighted by an ACC Championship Title, and both firsts for the program since 2014. His team led the nation with eight wins this season over bowl eligible Power 5 conference teams and placed a program record 25 selections on the All-ACC team. It's my honor on behalf of PNC, Peach Bowl Inc., and the Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year Foundation, we're proud to announce that Florida State head coach, Mike Norvell, is the recipient of the Dodd Trophy this year.

I appreciate you guys being here. I'll be here if there's any questions you have of us and the bowl. You can talk to me or Matt or Dillon. Thanks again. I'll let Matt bring the coaches out. Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Gary. Just to echo some of Gary's sentiments, we sort of believe that the media is our third team. And so one of our goals is to make sure that you guys have a great week and a great experience. This is a reward for you guys as well.

So we appreciate you guys being here, all the great coverage you've given to us and our teams this week and looking forward to closing it out today and tomorrow with hopefully a great game.

At this point, we'll go ahead and welcome our head coaches. It's my pleasure now to welcome our head coaches. First of the 11th ranked Ole Miss Rebels, Coach Lane Kiffin, and the No. 10 ranked Penn State, Nittany Lions, Coach James Franklin.

First, Lane, start with you, talk about how this week has been in general and maybe how this compares with other bowl trips you've had.



LANE KIFFIN: Thank you. This has been a great week. Our players and staff have had a blast, so many neat events. So we thank everybody for putting those on. Hotel's been great. Georgia Tech's practice facility has been very helpful.

So we're excited to be here. This is a huge challenge for us, playing one of the top teams in the country, one of the best coaches in the country, and the No. 1 defense by far in the country. So we have our hands full and very excited to be here and excited to be playing in this bowl and in this setting.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Just briefly, if you guys don't mind, I'd like to recognize two of our beat writers, Pat Principi of WGAL-TV. He's been covering Penn State for 34 years. And David Jones from the Harrisburg Patriot News has been covering Penn State for 33 years. Both are retiring, and this is their last game. I'm not sure. Are those guys here with us today? You mind standing up real quick?

(Applause.)

Appreciate you guys.

Yeah, we've had a great experience. We've been here almost a full week. We've had a great time in the city of Atlanta. Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl have been phenomenal.

I want to thank Georgia Tech as well, and Coach Key has allowed us to use their facility. We've been there one day, and we've been over in the stadium practicing the other days, which is a phenomenal facility.

So we've had a great experience. Been treated in a first class manner. The hotels have been great. Had a chance to interact with Lane, which has been really good. We have a lot of coaches and friends in common, but we haven't really spent a ton of time together in the past. We were at the Dodd dinner last night, which was a great event, but we're excited about playing a really good opponent in SEC country.

I've been a head coach in the SEC as well, so I'm very familiar and got a ton of respect for Ole Miss specifically and the conference as well. And it should be a great game that's soldout, and we're looking forward to it.

Q. James, now that we know that Saturday will be Adisa's last college game, what would you say about what he has meant to this program, and what's the biggest way you've seen him grow over his time at Penn State, whether that's on or off the field?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Well, what I was happy about is that Adisa put that out on social media, and this is one of the few ones that Lane didn't retweet with a smiley face because Adisa is playing in the game, so that was good.

Adisa's a great Penn State story. Kid out of Canarsie High School in New York, has really come to Penn State and thrived. I think you guys all know his story and his family. Really maximized his time and experience at Penn State.

I think he improved his stock as a football player over his entire career, but specifically this year, I think he's going to end up getting drafted really high. Graduated from Penn State, really just did it right. We talk about high production, low maintenance guys all the time. He's a perfect example of that.

I'm a big Adisa Isaac fan. His mom has been phenomenal throughout this journey as well. He's a good example. I'm still a big believer of the college athletics model, and I think Adisa is a perfect example of a young man that took advantage of that, and specifically Penn State. And I'm looking forward to watching him play this last game. I think he's going to play really well.

Q. Coach Kiffin, some of the Penn State defensive players have taken note of your team's tempo. I know the Penn State defense versus the Ole Miss offense has been a topic of discussion this week. What do you expect the Penn State defense to kind of throw at you to disrupt your tempo tomorrow?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, maybe James will answer that question for us.

(Laughter).

I don't know. I think it's very complicated with new coaches, with Manny moving on. So I think everybody that the first assumption is, oh, that's great for the opponent because the coordinator is not there, but it's also complicated because play callers have tendencies.

So we don't know really what to expect. We know it's a major challenge of phenomenal players and a really good scheme. I don't think the coach matters as a play caller.

Under Coach Franklin, the defense plays really hard regardless of who the coordinator is. They have a special thing over there with the way that they play and the style that they play. So this is a huge challenge.

Q. Coach Franklin, Greg or Paul?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Greg or Paul?



Q. Look at Chris.

THE MODERATOR: The question is Greg or Paul?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I'm not following you.

Q. Kinkade or Paul? Don't worry about it.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. That really didn't work out the way that we had planned.

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's early, and I haven't finished my first cup of coffee. Kinkade.

Q. This is for both coaches. What have you guys decided in terms of will you or will you not have sideline iPads and also in-helmet communication for this game?

LANE KIFFIN: I'm still trying to figure out what that was. Was that some inside joke that we were supposed to know?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I guess. I was specifically. I'm still not totally.

LANE KIFFIN: Okay.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I think the way the NCAA set up the bowl was that both teams had to agree to use the technology. And for whatever reason, we've not decided to do that. So we will not be using it, from what I understand. But that was an option.

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah. We decided on our side not to. Just we're used to a system in college football how it's been, and I don't necessarily with the style that we play that it would be as beneficial to us as maybe it would be to some other people.

Q. This is for Lane and James. Lane, what have you seen from Penn State quarterback Drew Allar, and James, what have you seen from Ole Miss quarterback Jaxson Dart?

LANE KIFFIN: I think he does a phenomenal job of taking care of the ball, first off, and commanding the offense, getting the ball in the right place. When it is not there, breaks it down, does a great job of vertical scrambling and making plays and moving the sticks.

So those guys are always challenging because they're going to win a lot of games by the style that they play. They complete with the ball. They don't turn the ball over,

and they don't make negative plays. So they've done a great job.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Jaxson and Ole Miss, I think the thing that jumps out from my perspective is balance. And a lot of times when you talk about balance, people think you're talking about running the ball 50 percent of the time and throwing the ball 50 percent of the time. And the reality is they have done that too.

I think maybe their perception of Lane and Ole Miss is throwing the ball all over the field, but their running back is a challenge. And I think they do a great job of running the ball and running into advantageous looks.

The other thing, when you talk about balance in my mind is also being able to spread the ball around the field, that there's not one receiver that you have to stop. They've got three receivers that have all been really productive, probably the best combination of production at the receiver position that we've faced this year.

Obviously, they've been able to run a ton of plays, and that's a combination of tempo, but just as much tempo as it is offensive success. They've been successful. So they've been able to put drives together and get on the field and get off the field.

I think the quarterback has done a really good job of being able to make plays with his feet, being able to make plays with his mind, and being able to make plays with his arm and distribute the ball to multiple playmakers that Lane and their offensive coordinator have done a really good job of putting in really good positions to make plays.

Q. You've embraced social media and haven't been afraid to speak your mind publicly. Was there a moment in your career or something that happened that allowed you to feel comfortable to start doing that more often?

LANE KIFFIN: Actually, it started a long time ago when the NCAA allowed us to direct message kids on Twitter, but we couldn't text on our phones. So that leads into a lot of rules that make no sense and ones that we live in now.

So really that's why it started. As a coach, that was your only way to communicate in certain periods of the year, and then it kind of just grew from there.

Really, I think the reaction, you know, you recruit so many kids out of your own area, no matter where you are for the most part, that it's kind of a connection that sometimes when a parent comes to visit or you go into a home visit, maybe you haven't met them before and they feel like they

have. They'll say, wow, I love following you on Twitter. And it's kind of a starter. It kind of starts the relationship with someone. So I think in that way it's been helpful for us.

Q. You're ending the regular season heading into the Peach Bowl as top 12 teams. What does that say about the state of your program at the end of 2023 and how you can take that into 2024 with a Peach Bowl win for either one of you?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that it's been a really exciting season for us, probably some similarities with two losses to two of the elite teams in college football.

For us to be in a position in our program, having never won 11 games is really amazing for these players. Especially to me the way we built our team, whether it's right or wrong, is very heavy through the portal. So a lot of new players. So I commend our coaches and our players of coming together. That's not very easy.

Otherwise, free agency, these dream teams and people put them together in professional sports or NBA, they don't always work. And it takes some unselfishness because they all come thinking that everything's going to go their way and then it doesn't, so they've got to buy into the team. So I'm really proud of our guys.

Then catapulting into next year, we've had a lot of guys -- again, this calendar is nowhere in other sports. We're in free agency. And we're still playing a game here tomorrow. So we have players announcing they're coming back, announcing that they're coming in and leaving. So I think that we've had a really good, I say off-season, but we're in-season, in that area to lead into next year.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think the way we ended last season with a Rose Bowl win, I felt like the momentum was a real positive for our program, whether it was recruiting, whether it was transfer portal, whether it was just a general feeling and excitement with our fans, with the media, with our players in the locker room. I think that was helpful.

I think in some ways obviously a bowl game is the ending of the previous season, but in a lot of ways, you can also look at it as the start of the next year.

I think our programs both are similar in some ways, but very different in others. We have not been a big transfer portal team. We've been more of a traditional high school recruiting team, but we do accent our recruiting through the transfer portal.

We're excited. We're excited about playing this game and

playing this opponent and hopefully playing well enough that, again, we can have this momentum going into the off-season for recruiting, for spring ball, for the confidence that a lot of players that are going to play in this game that maybe haven't had as significant of roles earlier in the season.

So I think there's just a ton of reasons why this game is important for both programs and looking forward to playing it.

Q. Coach, I wanted to follow up on something you said about preparing for Penn State's defense knowing there's a different play caller. Anthony Poindexter has been a defensive coordinator at other places.

Do you find there to be an advantage in studying how he's called defenses in the past at past jobs, or is that kind of irrelevant given that there's so many other circumstances?

LANE KIFFIN: Again, I don't think you can figure that out because it's very abnormal. Normally, coaching changes happen, and they have spring ball and they have a whole off-season.

So when you open with somebody and you go study where they were the coordinator before versus a place that just had a few weeks to prepare for this game and also they've played so great in all situations on defense, the guess would be there wouldn't be a whole lot of change when they put their players in such good position and played so well. So I don't really know that answer.

Q. This is for both coaches. With the transients of the portal and opt-outs, just recently in the last three years, have either of you guys embraced any kind of overall philosophy of keeping the team engaged, keeping everyone together? Has it been more of a challenge or not for bowl games and prep for bowl games?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We were discussing it a little bit last night, to be honest with you. I think that's the challenge, right? This is new. This is new to all of us, and it's really changed year by year.

Transfer portal windows, NIL, I think all these things have changed. So that's one of the more difficult things is I think in the previous structure, you could kind of rely on past experiences, but this has been a moving target. I think we're both trying kind of different approaches and trying to figure out what is the best thing for both of our programs.

But I think it's a challenge for everybody right now.

This is one of the more challenging times in college athletics and specifically football, specifically when it comes to, like Lane mentioned, the calendar and the bowl games specifically and obviously the information that the players are getting from multiple resources.

Q. Lane, through these practices this week and the last couple weeks, I know you've always mentioned how much is at stake to become the first team to win 11 games and continue this momentum with recruiting, all that stuff. But from the players' side, how would you assess their sense of urgency throughout these practices for this game?

LANE KIFFIN: To finish the second part of that question because you look frustrated that you didn't get the other part, I'm not saying this because he's here, but I think Penn State and Coach Franklin has really been a model of whatever they do of how to do this as far as guys not going in the portal, guys not opting out for games, and they've done a phenomenal job over the years of it.

I think that's rare nowadays. I think that I've been very critical of the calendar, very critical of the system, even though we try to obviously maximize the system, but it's really not good.

In talking with a lot of coaches over the last two weeks, there's been a lot of struggles, and it's a poor system. You don't have free agency during the season. That doesn't happen with no parameters around it. And that's what we're dealing with. Talking to coaches around the country dealing with players coming in, they're going to opt-out for the game or they're going to transfer if they don't play this many plays or they don't get this much money. I mean, what are we talking about?

Again, you've got a system that is not going to get better until it gets fixed. It's going to get worse because ask NFL teams, if they were getting ready to start the playoffs, would they ever put free agency right before it? And not just players negotiating for the next season, negotiating whether they're going to play in the playoffs. So it's a very poor system.

Q. James, is Johnny Dixon with the team, and do you expect him to play on Saturday?

JAMES FRANKLIN: So Johnny Dixon is not with the team currently. So obviously we don't anticipate him to play in the game.

Q. This is for both of you guys. Lane, you called it a poor system on the calendar. James, you talked before about it. I guess how would both of you guys

go about potentially altering this calendar, and what concerns do you have about next year considering the timeline gets changed with the playoff semifinals and all that as well?

LANE KIFFIN: That, to me, is a long discussion in a lot of different areas, whether that's the calendar, whether that's their employees. Do they have real contracts? Do they have public contracts that we would all know what they were, you know, like professional sports. To me, that's a long conversation of a lot of different areas of a system that's very broke.

Again, I'm not complaining. Don't get me wrong, we try to maximize the rules and what they are to try to create the best team we can, most competitive team, but it's really -- again, you just heard my kind of speech on it. It makes no sense, and it doesn't happen anywhere in professional sports to have a system like this, where, again, you have free agency that now you can go in whenever you want and go in multiple years and change teams whenever you want and you can change teams before postseason happens.

I don't know why that's really good, and it certainly isn't good for academics, as they continue to transfer, continue to lose credits. This was, in my opinion, not thought out at all, and now a two-time transfer is really not thought out.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Chip Kelly made some comments a few weeks ago, and I think he said some things publicly that a lot of coaches have been talking about privately for a while. I think Lane obviously brings up some really good points as well.

I think at the end of the day, and I've said this before, I think the reality is a commissioner of college football would be valuable. I think there's a reason for a commissioner of college football to be able to work with the commissioner of the NFL because I think the NFL should be working with college football.

Then I think the commissioners of the major conferences really all need to get into a room together and really spend some time working through all these issues. I think Lane's point is a good one. We could talk about this for a long time.

Right now, the way I see it, the commissioners of the conferences are the best people to solve these problems. Get them all into a room together. You could have representation from the NCAA as well, the NFL, and sit down and really start from scratch, a whole new calendar, a whole new model, recommendations. I think that's how this is really going to get done moving forward.

But it needs to happen, and I think it needs to happen quickly. Right now there's no parameters. There's no guardrails. And I don't really feel like it's in anybody's best interests.

I think, to Lane's point, I don't want it to be misinterpreted, I've been supportive. And I think most college coaches have been supportive of the players being able to earn. I think everybody would agree with that. But I think right now there just needs to be some parameters and everybody needs to be kind of working under similar constraints. I think that would make a ton of sense for everybody involved.

I think me and Lane came up in this profession where it was started -- the starting point was based on education. Right now there's not one rule or decision being made based on education. I think there's a way to really balance both and be able to get both things done.

Q. This question's for James. You guys have had a lot of success, been in a lot of these New Year's Six games, but the last couple years, haven't gotten over the Big Ten hump at the top. How do you balance that success with that reality and where the program is? And how much are you looking forward to an expanded playoff?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think the first thing, when you're in a place like Penn State, you embrace the expectations. That's why you came here. That's for our players, and that's for the coaches, and that's for myself. We embrace the high expectations.

But I do also know that we take a lot of pride in the consistency and how we've been able to play over the majority of our time at Penn State, and I think sometimes people take that for granted and don't realize how challenging that is in today's college football.

For us, it's being appreciative and recognizing what we have done well, but then also taking a deep dive and being very, very transparent and saying where do we need to grow? How do we get better? And how do we attack those things?

I think one of the things I've been pretty vocal about is really our first year with alignment from the chair of the board to the president of the university to the athletic director who played football in the Big Ten and myself. This is a situation really in my ten years that we have not been in, and I think that's going to put us in a very powerful position moving forward.

Q. Coach Kiffin, your career has taken you from West Coast to East Coast, now obviously here at Ole Miss. You've had a lot of experience in these past two decades. But just to be able to get here today, if it were this time next year, we would be talking about a playoff. But right now if you'll just take me through what it's like to be a head coach and how you got here to this point.

LANE KIFFIN: I've been very fortunate and blessed to have a lot of opportunities, grew up in the profession with my dad and had a lot of opportunities because of that, and to be able to work for some amazing coaches and be offensive coordinator on National Championship teams for Pete Carroll and Nick Saban. So I'm very fortunate that way.

Then just be able to continue to grow and learn. I think there's probably a lot of things I don't do well or we don't do well as a program, but I think we do evolve well and we change and we think outside the box. Change with the rules, whether that's the playing rules of the game in our offensive system, or whether that's the portal and transfers and NIL. So I credit our coaches a lot with that.

Q. You were able to get your coordinators on board here in December. Now that that process is done, what have you accomplished with Andy and Tom respectively this month with getting them on campus and down here in Atlanta?

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think like Lane mentioned, it's not ideal. Obviously we'd prefer to be in a situation where our staff was still in place. Obviously we've had turnover at both positions or change at both positions for different reasons.

But I think the value of having these guys here not in coaching roles, I think is going to allow the transition to go smooth. We did this when we hired Manny. Brent Pry left to go be the head coach at Virginia Tech, and Anthony Poindexter was in a position to call the defense and be the defensive coordinator in the interim and did a phenomenal job.

I think Manny being with us, building relationships with the players, getting familiar with the staff, understanding the culture and how we operate from an organizational perspective, I think really allowed him to hit the ground running the day after the bowl game.

I think the model we're using with both coordinators during this whole bowl prep period, I hope we don't have to do it again, but I did think there was value last year. In talking to both Tom and Andy, I think they think it's been invaluable.

Things that they like, things that they have questions about, we're able to kind of work through those things. I think it will be really valuable for us moving forward.

Q. Many in the media, including myself, have dubbed you the portal king. Through traditional recruiting, you usually have top 20 classes. How do you balance the needs for both between the portal and recruiting? And do you feel through that balance Ole Miss can get over the Alabama/Georgia hump in the SEC?

LANE KIFFIN: I don't think many people have gotten over that hump. So I know that we get criticized when you don't get over the Alabama hump and Georgia, but really outside of the one LSU year, I don't know many people have.

In my opinion, you build a roster -- like you build a roster different depending on where you are and a lot of variables. Where we are at Ole Miss, I just feel that this is the best way to do it. We're a very heavy portal, probably top 10 percent of teams, and I just think that's the way to do it where we're at.

That may change someday even where we're at, as we maybe experience more success on the field in games like this and are able to sign more five star type of high school players. So it just is what it is now, and I think eventually the rules will change some too, and we'll just continue to evolve with that.

There's a good and bad to all of it. Ideally, the traditional model is the best if you can do that. If you can sign great high school players, 25 of them, and build that way, but I also don't know that's going to work quite as well as I think us coaches would all like it to work because of the transfer and because of the kind of five-star syndrome.

So now those guys signing the top classes that are celebrating on signing day, I don't think that celebration is quite as much as it used to be, at least down in our area.

Like I said, James has done the best job of keeping players probably of anybody in the country, but a lot of these others, as you look at the classes the last two years, these five-star guys aren't paying off.

They're getting them into their program. Let's be honest, they're paying a lot of money for them. And when it doesn't go exactly right, they're in the portal and going to someone else. So I think there is no exact way to do it, and you've got to do it different depending on where you're at.

Q. Lane, you were just mentioning that Alabama/Georgia hump. This question is for both of you coaches. Do you kind of see similarities in the two

of your programs in Ole Miss and Penn State being close to the top of that conference and kind of working your way to get over there to be at the No. 1 kind of spot? I guess starting with you, Lane.

LANE KIFFIN: Penn State and Coach Franklin, they've been doing this for a long time. He's been in these type of games for a long time. I think I read something where they are the only team that could win all of them, all the New Year's Six bowls.

We're kind of new to this. That's a big challenge. Those are two of the top programs in the country. Like I said off the top of my head, outside of Ed Orgeron and Joe Burrow the last two years, who's really gotten over the hump of those two? So we'll just continue to work at it.

Like I said, they've been up here for a long time as top ten teams, and we're happy to be up here for the second time in three years. So we'll just continue to work at it.

Q. James, you mention the Kalen, you have him for one more game. Just curious now with Johnny how you'll manage the time in the secondary, the playing time? Who else are you counting on in the secondary?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We'll play all the other guys that have played this year. They'll have a more significant role. I think that's going to be in some ways an opportunity, an exciting opportunity for them and for us.

Obviously it's going to be challenging because the type of wide receivers and offense that we'll be playing, but these are the guys that we are also going to be depending on next season. So it creates some more opportunities in this game. We've embraced it with a next-man-up mentality. Again, we're not the only program that's dealing with a little bit of this.

I think there was a previous question, but to be honest with you, I forgot what that was.

LANE KIFFIN: About getting over the hump.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think in a similar way that Lane mentioned, up until the last two years, we were the only team in the Big Ten that had won a Big Ten Championship. So it is challenging.

But I also think there's that fine line of what we discussed, which is winning 10 games, winning 11 games in a conference like the Big Ten or in the SEC is more challenging on a consistent basis than I think people realize.

Then after that, it's being very, very transparent and honest with yourself and your entire program of what you need to do to take that next step, whether it's recruiting at a higher level out of high school, whether it's going more into the transfer portal.

I think Lane's point was a really good one. The high school model really only works anymore if the players and their parents will stay and allow them to be developed. If you put all your time into high school prospects, but they won't have the patience and take the time to allow you to develop them, then all you're really doing is developing them for somebody else's program. So that's the challenge.

I hear high school coaches and sometimes players being frustrated that some programs are being more portal heavy. Well, I think that's part of the discussion that needs to happen. Are you going to come here and allow yourself to be developed over four to five years? The problem is none of them see themselves that way. They all think they're going to be the three-year model.

So it's challenging, and I think all of us have to look at our programs specifically and the regions of the country that we're in and what's going to be in our program's best interests moving forward. They're not easy discussions.

Q. I wanted to ask both of you these questions because I asked your players and your staff, no pressure because they had great answers, so I'm counting on both of you. James, for you, Wawa or Sheetz?

JAMES FRANKLIN: You're putting me in a tough spot. For everybody in here that maybe doesn't cover Penn State closely, we're in central Pennsylvania, so right in the middle of the Eagles and the Steelers. I grew up just outside of Philadelphia. So I'm a Wawa guy. But now I live in central Pennsylvania, and it's Sheetz.

Lane's looking at me like I'm crazy. He probably doesn't know what Wawa or Sheetz is. I think I've got to stay with Wawa. I've got to stay with my roots and kind of where I grew up. But I have really learned to appreciate Sheetz being in central Pennsylvania.

And I'm willing to negotiate if Sheetz or Wawa would like to work with our players moving forward with some NIL opportunities. I'm willing to negotiate.

LANE KIFFIN: And if they don't respond to his negotiations the way he wants, he's not going to coach the game tomorrow.

(Laughter).

That's what we deal with now.

Q. Lane, question for you is I obviously know you're a huge Taylor Swift fan, and I asked your team about it. I just saw you blink. I know, I'm sorry. I asked your team what is their favorite Taylor Swift song. That same question to you, and can you sing it for us?

LANE KIFFIN: I can't sing, nor will I right now.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Lane, we all think you should though.

LANE KIFFIN: I know. I know. I don't know. She's got a lot of great songs. I just think she's really amazing that she can connect to so many people. I kind of think a lot of times movie songs nowadays, it's like how fast can people pump them out and make money. I feel like she takes a lot of time, and there's a lot of meaning in them, and they can relate to a lot of people. I don't know that I can pick just one.

Q. James, you talked about the Martin Luther King Museum for your players and that experience. For you, how has that experience been for you, and how significant is it for you?

Lane, what has kind of been your favorite experience from the bowl so far?

JAMES FRANKLIN: It's interesting because it's kind of going back to what we talked about earlier with, I think, the challenge with college athletics and specifically college football, and when we got into the profession, a huge part of that was the educational component. I think that's being de-emphasized with a lot of the rules that are being passed or changes in rules that are being passed.

I think whenever you can take time with your team to pour into them experiences and opportunities like being able to go to the Martin Luther King exhibit was powerful. I think the bowl had it as an optional experience. We made it kind of mandatory for our team. We didn't tell them that it was optional. We just kind of put it on the schedule and went.

I think it was great for all of our players. I know it was great for me personally. As much as I feel like I knew a ton about Martin Luther King and the background and the significance for our country and race relations, I learned a ton myself at 51 years old that I didn't know. Being able to go into the Ebenezer Baptist Church and take that all in was powerful.

To think about that time in our country, as a black man at 35 years old, to win the Nobel Peace Prize is amazing. I thought it was a great experience for our coaches. I think it was even more powerful for our players. A number of our players had been there before, but I think also through the bowl, we were able to get a maybe different and more significant experience with the tour, which was also great and very, very appreciative.

We've been fortunate on a lot of these different types of trips to be able to gain some perspective and some experience. So it was powerful for us, and I'm glad we did it. I would do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Kiffin, your favorite experience?

LANE KIFFIN: I thought that both teams being in the College Hall of Fame with so much tradition and history there and being able to see that, but then to have a competitive environment where they were playing a game show, it was really neat to see guys be comfortable and be competitive in that environment. So I thought that was pretty cool to be part of.

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