

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Florida vs Michigan

Thursday, December 27, 2018



John Hevesy
Feleipe Franks
Van Jefferson
Jordan Scarlett
Florida Gators

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back. We're going to go ahead and let the Florida offensive group join us.

Welcome back. Again, Florida offensive group. We're joined by co-offensive coordinator John Hevesy, quarterback Feleipe Franks, running back Jordan Scarlett, and receiver Van Jefferson.

Coach, we'll start off with you. If you can give us an opening statement on how your Bowl Week experience has been so far and how preparations are going for the game.

JOHN HEVESY: Preparations have been going great. The kids, the coaches, the families have had a great time. The Peach Bowl people have done a great job with their hospitality to us. Preparation for the game, for practice, has been great for us. I think the kids have stepped in. We got here Sunday, ready to go. Monday, got ready. Practice has been great all week.

THE MODERATOR: Feleipe, talk about your Bowl Week experience so far. What has been your favorite Bowl Week event so far?

FELEIPE FRANKS: Like Coach Hevesy said, first thank the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl people for letting us be here at the bowl game and the hospitality they've given us and the players.

It's been a very fun time. The whole week we've been here. But at the same time, I think my favorite event would have been the basketball one, with the little comeback we had.

But at the same time, just every event's been fun for us, just been a team bonding moment.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan, what's your favorite event so far?

JORDAN SCARLETT: My favorite event so far was the go-cart racing. I just liked the whole place because it had bowling and arcade. So it was a lot of different options. So we got to go around and have a lot of fun as a team.

THE MODERATOR: Van, we wrapped up the battle for Bowl Week challenges last night. You had a heck of a comeback, took it down to the wire. What was that like? What was that experience, fighting for the belt this week?

VAN JEFFERSON: It was fun, especially being there with my teammates. Everyone was just hyped up. Unfortunately, we didn't come up with the "W", but it's okay. But like I said, it was just fun to be here, like Feleipe and Jordan said. So we're ready to play the game.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. This is for the players. Just curious what's it been like spending Christmas away from your family in a city like Atlanta, and has being with your team instead of the family at the holidays kind of made you guys -- brought you guys closer together?

FELEIPE FRANKS: It's been different. I think just being away from your family at Christmas, something that you're used to, something that we were -- last year, we were with our families all through Christmas, not being able to be at a big bowl like this.

It's something new but something we want to get used to, playing in big-time bowls and getting the program back where it needs to be at. It's something different but something I definitely want to get used to.

JORDAN SCARLETT: I'm with Feleipe, saying a lot of people would like to be at home with their families, but football players would like to be in this position, playing in a very good bowl game, getting a lot of gifts and playing in a great game. I'm blessed to be in this situation.

VAN JEFFERSON: Like they said, of course we all want to be with our families on Christmas, but we came here to do a job so that's what we're trying to do. It would have been good to be with family, but we're with

our brothers so it was fun.

Q. For Feleipe Franks, I talked with Coach earlier this year, and he talked about your growth coming into the season, not having to be conservative. Can you talk about what you think you've improved on the best that will help you in the game Saturday?

FELEIPE FRANKS: Yeah. I think this whole process, this whole year has been a growing season for me. With the new staff coming in, you've got to adapt to a whole new system. At the same time, it's been for the best for not just me but for the team.

It's helped me become a better quarterback, a whole quarterback, whether it be leadership or actually playing a game. And just going throughout the season, knowing I wasn't playing on a short leash helped me to go out and play freely. Each game, growing with my teammates, having their trust and trusting in me to make plays when I need to make plays and let them make plays when they need to make plays.

Like I said, just being a whole quarterback, it's helped me all season. I think it's going to help me out Saturday become more and more of a leader. And going through the growing pains helped me become a better quarterback from last season as well.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, I'll ask you, given your recent history against Michigan, does that give you any advantages, knowing them a little bit better than maybe some other teams in terms of game scheme and how you're going to attack them?

JOHN HEVESY: I think you prepare each week -- I mean each year differently. We have a different team here than we have in the past. Last couple times I've played them was 15 years ago, and then about 8 years ago.

So I think we prepare ourselves. Everything we talk about with us is just doing our job. Our kids, no matter who we line up against, it's always going to be about us and us taking care of our business, again, especially in bowl games. I think bowl games are a lot like the first game of the season in that minimize mistakes in terms of the penalties, the turnovers, the stuff being out of a game for a month.

So I think as long as we take care of our business and do what we're supposed to do with 11 guys on the field for us, we'll take care of business.

Q. Guys, LSU's kind of the crowning win for you this season. You look at season on a whole, you take away the Missouri and Kentucky loss, you

guys could have been in the college football playoff conversation.

What would beating a team like Michigan just kind of add to the overall feeling and kind of overall resumé you've put together?

FELEIPE FRANKS: I think that we could have easily been a college football playoff team. We have the talent and we have the coaching for us to be there. At the same time, like you said, with a couple losses, Kentucky and Missouri, put us out of it.

At the same time, we're looking forward to a big time bowl. We're in a New Year's Six bowl. Peach Bowl is a good bowl for us. Capping off the whole season with a win over Michigan would be great, especially for just going into next season.

That's pretty much all we're focused about right now is trying to get a big-time win in a big-time bowl game.

VAN JEFFERSON: Like he said, our goal coming in to the season was college football playoff, but we fell some games. But right now, we're in a big-time bowl game, playing against a great program. This will be a huge game for us. Like Feleipe said, going into the next season, potentially being a top-five team coming in, this is a big game for us.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, in looking at Michigan, is there -- what SEC team are they most similar to, and how did you fare against that group?

JOHN HEVESY: There's not one team we saw that was like them. I think there's a couple parts that are similar. They look a lot like South Carolina to me and Missouri, defensively in terms of they're not as big as the LSU, Georgia, to be up front in the front seven.

But when you look at the speed of them, they play more of the Missouri, South Carolina defense in terms of being active. They're very active. They get off the ball. They play sound defense. What they do, very disciplined in their fundamentals and what they do.

So to me, I think you kind of pull from each of them. South Carolina, Missouri would be the two that come off the top of my head. I don't think there's any one team that they're very similar to, because you see a variety in our league of defenses, from LSU being a bigger front seven and it's more active.

Georgia is a little bigger. The South Carolina, the Missouri are a little -- not as big but they can run. So I think you pull from each of them. Each individual we look at is how this corner play might -- you know, from someone else. How the defensive ends -- you know, for me I look as pass rush with them and how they

defend the run. So you kind of take from each game, each person as much as structurally defensively.

Q. All of you guys can answer this if you'd like. Michigan, known for their defense, number one total defense in the country. How much -- you guys as an offense, at certain points of the season, maybe people are criticizing the offense, but I would say overall you've improved. How much are you taking this game upon yourselves as an offense to prove yourself and send a message against one of the best defenses in the country?

JOHN HEVESY: I don't know if it's to prove a message. I think it's for us individually. Each person on our team offensively, from Feleipe to Jordan to Van to all the guys up front, I think it's always a challenge to each individual on a team and a challenge as a unit not -- again, whether it's Michigan or whether it's LSU or whoever we're playing.

I think it's for us, each week to get better at what we do. As a unit, as an offense, but as an individual too, to learn -- every game is a learning experience for them, for us as coaches. So I think the biggest thing for us is just to get better Saturday than we were the last Saturday we played.

It's always a great challenge to play a top-five defense and who they are. I think for us, again, it's just for us to get better and execute the way we're supposed to execute.

FELEIPE FRANKS: I think he said it right on the head. We're going out to not prove anything to anybody, but more so just to improve from the last Saturday that we played, which would have been FSU. We want to improve every Saturday and get better at what we do. I think the coaches are doing a great job of coaching us and making sure we're making minimal mistakes throughout the course of a game.

That's really more of what we're focused on, and it's always fun to play a top-five defensive program, Michigan being one of those. It's going to be a fun experience for us and a great challenge for us. We look forward to challenges like that.

JORDAN SCARLETT: What both of those guys said, I really agree. Coach Mullen always preaches that we should go out and execute regardless of who we're playing, go as hard as we can. That's what he instills in us and we just go out there and do it all the time and we always get good results. So we're just going to go out there execute as hard as we can.

VAN JEFFERSON: We're not trying to prove anything. We're going out there to play our game, executing our game plan. I think if we do that, we can be successful.

Q. I wanted to get all four of your opinion on Mercedes-Benz Stadium and the feeling of playing in such a new and big stadium in Atlanta.

THE MODERATOR: What are your thoughts and impressions on playing in Mercedes-Benz Stadium, playing on a stage like that on what is arguably the best stadium in the world?

JOHN HEVESY: You got that?

FELEIPE FRANKS: It's always fun, when we played last year at the beginning of the season, played out there in Texas, it's always a fun experience when you get to play in, obviously, a big-time bowl game and even better a really nice stadium that just got built and, he said, arguably one of the best stadiums in the world.

So it's just a fun experience for our guys. It's not like every week, week in and week out, you get to play in a stadium like that, especially an NFL stadium. We're cherishing the moment. It's fine. The locker rooms are always really nice. It's just fun. Big field, big atmosphere, on a big stage.

That's what you come to Florida to do, play on big stage and big-time stadiums like that.

JORDAN SCARLETT: I agree also. I like the Mercedes-Benz Stadium. It looks nice from the outside, the way they've got the lights. The inside is pretty good too. They've got a nice restaurant in there.

THE MODERATOR: Are you going to stop by and get something to eat?

JORDAN SCARLETT: I don't know. I'll have to see what the food is like. Maybe.

THE MODERATOR: We'll have something sent down to you, how about that?

JORDAN SCARLETT: I like that right there.

THE MODERATOR: Van, does playing in a venue like that, does that do anything to elevate your game, add a little bit more juice to your play?

VAN JEFFERSON: I think it elevates everybody's game. Like Feleipe said, playing in a big stage, everybody should be hyped up. Playing in a big-time bowl against a big-time team, you cannot not be excited for this. Like I said, we're excited to be here and excited to get a chance to play in this bowl game.

Q. Feleipe and Jordan, can you talk about the team's growth since the last time you played Michigan in the last two seasons and what does it show about this team that all draft-eligible players are in the game?

FELEIPE FRANKS: I think it just shows, first of all from my season, the resilience. The players on our team, we never gave up on what this team's potential is.

As you guys can see, it's kind of crazy how, whether it be a new coaching staff, a new mentality is brought into the program, what it can do.

We went from last year, having our record to this year having the record we have now. It's just like night and day, what kind of team we are. And I can speak specifically for the offense. It's night and day.

We're going out, we're having fun. We know what we're doing. Everybody knows their assignment. You just go out there and play football like you've been doing your whole life. You're not going out there stressing.

It's just another fun experience for us. We're going to go out there and have fun it. I think just the growth is like night and day from last season to this season.

JORDAN SCARLETT: I think -- yeah, I think this offense matured a lot and grew a lot from last season. We definitely built a lot of confidence between all the position groups, whether it's the front five or the tailback, which is me and the other guys, Perine. Everybody had a lot of confidence coming into the season. As the season went on, we started scoring more points and feeling best about yourselves.

I feel like coming into this Michigan game, we've got a lot on our shoulders against those guys, so we're going to come out and play hard as an offense.

Q. This question is for anybody on the panel. You guys have events lined up, the Andretti, you guys went to Andretti's, the hospital visit. Is there anything in Atlanta that you guys want to visit that you may not have time to visit, or something you want to know about Atlanta that you just don't know?

FELEIPE FRANKS: I want to visit the aquarium, but we haven't did that yet.

JORDAN SCARLETT: I don't think there's anything I haven't seen yet. I have family from around here so I'm kind of familiar with the area. But I like the events they took us on. I've never been to the Martin Luther King thing. They're going to take us there today. We'll see what that's about.

JOHN HEVESY: They do a great job, the variety of things they do for the kids, with the Andretti, with going to the Martin Luther King Center tonight. There's a bunch of things that the kids had an opportunity that some kids -- many of our kids are from the state of Florida, so some don't get up here. My group, there's one kid from Atlanta so he knows kind of everything here. The rest of the kids are kind of, what's around?

Any time you go to a different place from where they're from, it's an opportunity to see different things. Again, the Andretti thing, I don't know what they have tonight. There's something else tonight. But then Martin Luther King tonight. I think that will be a great thing for all the kids to learn.

Any time you can teach them history and learn about their history, their past, that's the best thing for them. Plus, having fun, you know, the Andretti thing, having fun and do the things. So a variety of things to learn, to educate them is the best thing they can have.

Q. Just a follow-up, Michigan had several players sitting out the bowl game for draft status. You guys, as far as I know, have nobody sitting out for the draft. What does that say about your guys' program, your mentality, and where does that come from?

JOHN HEVESY: Each individual has their own things and there are reasons for us knowing why their kids are sitting out. I guess that's their business between Michigan and their individuals. I think it the one thing you educate the kids on, you know what it's for and what you're doing. You're playing for your team and we always emphasize team. It's not an individual game, it is a team sport.

For us, all our kids are playing. For them, we can't answer for why they didn't. They probably have their own reasons. That's for them to worry about, and not us.

Q. Anything from you guys, is that something you guys talk about at all?

FELEIPE FRANKS: No. I think he hit it on the head. That's kind of something that I guess they would discuss with them and their family and their program. For us, we're just worried about our team coming in here and winning the game. It's not something we speak about or talk about. It's not really our concern nor our worry.

Q. This is your guys' first year under Dan Mullen. Can you talk about some of the similarities and differences just from going from Jim McElwain to Dan Mullen?

FELEIPE FRANKS: Yeah. I think it's been fun. Obviously, like I said before, I mean, just like last year's season compared to this year's season is like night and day. It's just a fun experience for us to go out there and win big-time games and get the program back to where it needs to be at. That's always a fun experience when you go out there on Saturdays, you expect to win.

Like I said, we won some big-time games this year, Mississippi State, LSU. Been on the big stage and we've won a lot of those games. And like I said, it's just been fun. It's been a fun turnaround. Like I said, our team's had nothing but resilience from last season, knowing how good of a team we had.

Like I said, it's crazy what a new program and new mentality can bring into a program, can change a team. That's what it did for us.

JORDAN SCARLETT: I'd say the difference between Coach Mac and Coach Mullen, I'll say, is the way Coach Mullen instills in us how you've got to go hard, taking a rep at practice or anything. He always stresses, whatever you do, do it your best, go as hard as you can.

Once we started gaining that mentality as a team, it made us do a lot of things better on the field, in the game, and practice better. Making it a routine, being a champion all the time. He said being a champion is not a sometimes thing. I feel it's a true statement. I feel that's the difference between Coach Mac.

VAN JEFFERSON: I wasn't here with Coach McElwain, but Coach Mullen brought to the program hard work mentality. Every rep, work hard and do the best that you can do in every rep. Out-compete the person you're going with. Coach Mullen has brought it to our team and our team as bought into their style of program. Now we're following his lead and he's doing a great job.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up right there. Thanks very much.