

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Florida vs Michigan

Thursday, December 27, 2018

**Todd Grantham**  
**Chauncey Gardner-  
Johnson**  
**Cece Jefferson**  
**David Reese**

Florida Gators

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the Florida defensive group, defensive coordinator Todd Grantham, linebacker David Reese, defensive lineman Cece Jefferson, and defensive back Chauncey Gardner-Johnson.

Coach, we'll go ahead and start with you, if you can give us an opening statement on how your Bowl Week experience is going so far and preparations for the game.

TODD GRANTHAM: Sure. First of all, I'd like to thank the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl Committee, their sponsors, for allowing our team to be here. I think these players have really worked their tail off throughout the season to get the program headed back in the right direction. We're certainly excited about where we're moving from here on.

It's a reward for the players. But, really, the hospitality that we've had here, the events, the venues. I mean, to be able to practice in the new stadium here in Atlanta and to see that is a great experience for our players.

Of course, there's a big game here next year, and that gives us a goal, moving forward. So really, it's been a great event. The venue's been awesome. The things that the players have been allowed to do from a fun standpoint has been fun and that will continue throughout the next couple days.

It's just been an enjoyable time for myself, my family, and our entire organization.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

David, we'll go to you. Talk about what's been your favorite event and your favorite experience so far



during Bowl Week?

DAVID REESE: So far, it's been the competition events, going against Michigan. Unfortunately, we didn't come out with the win yesterday, but it's fun to compete. Just doing things we love. We just appreciate being here. We didn't get the opportunity last year to go to a bowl game. We're taking it all in. The hotel's been great. The staff has been great here.

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

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: The food.

(Laughter.)

No, just being with my team and being here in Atlanta. Like he said, last year, we didn't get the opportunity to play. We're just taking advantage of it. We didn't come on top against Michigan in the little games we played. But other than that, just being here with my teammates soaking in the moment, because last year we didn't get an opportunity.

Thank the coaching staff, and thank Chick-fil-A, the Peach Bowl, all you guys, put your time in to put us in this game. Hopefully, we'll show on it on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take your questions.

**Q. This question is for Chauncey. Chauncey, how does it feel to know that you're going to be able to live out your dream with the NFL draft coming up and why was it so important to play in this football game?**

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: Right now, I'm not thinking much about the draft or the NFL. I'm thinking about winning this game. My teammates made it easier for me all week, just being around them, practicing with them, just soaking in the moment.

Because like I said, NFL ain't going to be there for long, so while I'm here I'm just going to enjoy everything I can, play hard, practice hard, and just enjoy the festivities we got here. Because a lot of people don't get the opportunity to be in a New Year's Six bowl. It's my first one. Probably the best one we could have.

Like Coach said, bowl game is not fun unless you win it. So I'll be here ready to compete, playing fast and practicing with my teammates and soaking in the moment.

**Q. David and Chauncey, a lot of people on Twitter have a debate about who is DBU and Florida is definitely within that name. Do you guys believe you guys are -- do you believe you're DBU, and how do you feel just being in that conversation for that?**

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: Yeah. I mean, Coach Grantham brought back a style of defense where we just play fast, and go out there and do what we're supposed to do. Like I said, it wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for the D-line and the linebackers, they hold the most responsibility. They just get us playing fast and physical. But if it wasn't for my D-line and linebackers, we wouldn't know what was going on, because you can't play the game without these boys. We've got one of the best D-line in the country, best dual linebackers in the country, in the SEC, so they're going to show you guys Saturday. We're just going to hold the name up or however you want to call it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, in your film study on Michigan, what SEC team are they most similar to schematically and is that a scheme that gave you any trouble?

TODD GRANTHAM: First of all, they do a tremendous job. They're multiple in their personnel groupings. They have talented tight ends that allow them to create multiple tight end sets and those kind of things.

I would say LSU is probably one of the comparable teams that we played this year that we would kind of identify with what they do with the quarterback, his athletic ability, ability to extend plays, as well as just being multiple in their offensive formations.

**Q. Chauncey, beginning the year, I talked to your dad, Brian, about what the name change meant to him. Ask you about it as well. Just curious, as you've played the season as Chauncey Gardner-Johnson, looking back on it now, a year later, since you changed it, what has it meant and have you thought about it as you've played with the name on the back of your jersey.**

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: It's for my dad. My dad's been there since I was 3, ain't missed a game since. It's emotional when I talk about it. But I made a decision this year to honor him because he's always been there. He's my stepdad technically, but I call him my real dad, because like I said, everything he's done for me. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here. He kept me motivated, kept me positive.

Every day, I talk to him. If it's negative, positive, he just brings light to my day and I make sure I show love for him and he shows love for me, my two little brothers, and stuff like that.

So I just hold the name up, because without him, none of this would be possible. So I want to thank my pops for everything.

**Q. This is for Coach Grantham. Coach, you know, you had success just from going from different schools in the SEC and ACC. Can you talk about what you think has helped you be successful at Florida and what is just a long-term goal you want to achieve?**

TODD GRANTHAM: The number one reason we've had success is the players with me right now, it's their ability to buy into what we're talking about, to understand this is the identity we want to play with, which we always talk about being fast, physical, and aggressive. There's really no magic dust to playing that way. It's a lot of hard work and preparation.

These guys, they've been the pioneers for our team, particularly on defense, to make sure we play that way and we practice that way.

Because the way you play is an indication of how you practice Monday through Thursday and the preparation you've put in. So really all that credit goes back to the players and the way they've bought into our system, bought into what we're trying to accomplish.

And I think that asking what we want to do moving forward is we want to continue to develop that tradition to being one of the most dominant teams in the country defensively. As long as we've got guys like this buying in and doing the work, we'll achieve our goal.

THE MODERATOR: David, in your film study on Michigan, in looking at those positional groupings, what do you see out of their backs, what sort of jumps off the tape in looking at them and their style of play?

DAVID REESE: Even though their number one back is not playing, you know, Chris Evans is a great back. He's elusive, he's patient. He sees the hole well. Wilson, 13, he's more of a downhill back. I know him personally, got a chance to see him in play in high school.

They've got a veteran O-line, even though one of their tackles is not playing, Michael Onwenu, big guards, like to run behind. They've got a lot of different personnel and do a lot of different things with the tight ends. As long as we do what we've got to do, I feel like it's all about us, not them.

THE MODERATOR: Cece, evaluate the front group. What challenges do they present?

CECE JEFFERSON: They're big up front. They're physical. They try to knock you off the ball. They try to move you. They're a veteran group and work well together. So we'll just try to pick up the tendencies that they do, the ways that they like to operate.

I feel like we've done a good job of that. So it's going to be a good game and I'm extremely excited.

THE MODERATOR: Chauncey, talk about their receiver group and what do they bring to the table? How are you going to defend them?

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: They're like LSU, they're big and long. They have good hands, they're physical. They compete. Like I said, nothing we haven't seen before. We've just got to go out there and do what we do best and just hold them down and make sure our D-line and our linebackers eat up front.

**Q. Last question for everybody. Just curious, what was it like spending Christmas here, 24th, 25th, instead of with your family, with your teammates and coaches?**

TODD GRANTHAM: We did get to spend it with our extended family from the football program. Our families as coaches, we're here. I thought it was cool to be able to go to a church service together as a team, be around each other in that setting and then watch the guys go get their Santa gifts afterwards and see the smile on their faces when they were able to open up presents and see the things that were under the tree for them and just sharing that.

Of course, they had a Secret Santa where each guy had to get a gift for another guy on the team. Seeing them exchange those gifts was a lot of fun. I think it brings your team closer together and allows them to see us as coaches in a different setting than just on the prox field.

We all get to see them as young men and how they're continuing to develop and grow as people and spend time together.

THE MODERATOR: David.

DAVID REESE: Like Coach said, these guys are my brothers. I don't feel like I'm away from home. I'm from Michigan so I'm always away from home down in Florida. These are my guys. I wouldn't trade them for the world so it wasn't too bad spending Christmas here.

THE MODERATOR: Cece.

CECE JEFFERSON: For me, it was tough being away from my son. But this is my first bowl game. He understands. He got a flat screen for Christmas. He's probably watching Paw Patrol or something, he's not worried about it. Hitting on what David said, if I had to miss Christmas with my family, there's no place I'd rather be than with my brothers celebrating.

Like Coach Grantham said, it gives us a chance to see coaches in different settings. They can't yell at us like in practice with their families around. That was pretty cool.

We've been enjoying the trip. Everybody's been having a good tie. Santa was good to everybody and we're ready to go out Saturday and win the game.

THE MODERATOR: Chauncey?

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: The same thing. What Cece said. It was hard because my son's on the way, with my girl being pregnant. It's been hard being away from her.

But being around my teammates, just giving a gift to my teammates, showing I care, and our coaches seeing another side of us as a player. We see another side of them, around their family. Being a Secret Santa to my teammate means more to me this year than anything. Because it shows that outside of football, I think of you more as a brother, a family member, somebody we're going to know for life. Because we can always come back and say I was teammates with these guys. We did this in Atlanta, in the New Year's Six bowl, actually being Christmas with the New Year's Six bowl, it's probably a blessing that a new team is not going to have, so I'm just thankful for everything.

**Q. Cece, how old is your son?**

CECE JEFFERSON: Three.

**Q. What's his name?**

CECE JEFFERSON: Luke.

**Q. Chauncey, have you had your son yet?**

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: No, my son will be here in April.

THE MODERATOR: Do you guys have any questions you want to ask each other?

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: Yep. All right. This is for Coach Grantham. I want to ask you this. If you could go back and play football with us right now, what position would you play?

TODD GRANTHAM: I'd probably be on the other side of the ball. I don't run well enough to be on the defense. I would be on the other side of the ball. I'd block Cece, though I know his tendencies.

THE MODERATOR: We can set that up at practice.

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: Yeah, let's definitely set that up.

TODD GRANTHAM: 20 years ago.

**Q. This will be the last time that you guys play together, any of you three at Florida, anyway. Hopefully maybe in the future.**

**Can you each say something about the other two guys on stage, about them being a Gator and being part of your family?**

CECE JEFFERSON: I'll start first, since I'm the oldest. With Chauncey, when he first came in, Chauncey was the most aggravating person in the world. He would never stop talking. Every corner you turn, you hit Chauncey Gardner. I'm extremely proud, watching him over the years, the way he's matured, the way he's being the leader of the team, embracing the role.

Now when Chauncey talks, everybody listens because everybody knows he goes out and works hard. Whatever he says, you should definitely listen to him because he can definitely help you. He just comes out to work every day and he's had an amazing season. And I'm extremely proud of this guy.

David Reese, he's the guy that comes in, works hard every day, doesn't complain about anything. So generous, helps out his linebackers. He's a huge communicator, so that's huge on any football team.

He's been that way since he stepped foot on campus. So extremely blessed to have the opportunity to play with both of these guys and make memories with them and I'll never forget you guys. I love ya.

DAVID REESE: I'll go next. Chauncey, man, that was my first roommate. Crazy experience with that man. I didn't know nothing about Florida. I didn't know nothing about anything about down south. He's the first one telling me, oh, man you got Florida, man, it's DBU. Let's get some work in the endo.

I'm like, man, I ain't even moved in yet. That guy's a character. I love him to death. We did so much together, living at Keys, doing all types of crazy stuff.

We had me, Josh. We had a great room. Just watching him grow up, like I said, he really took strides,

really matured a lot since he first got here.

And C is like an uncle. He's the old man on campus since I've been here. He's been doing big things since I been here freshman year. That's one of those guys you always knew about when you hear about the program, hear about the guys. You heard of Cece Jefferson. You see everybody wearing 96. You see how he treats his family. You know he cares about us. He means a great deal.

THE MODERATOR: Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON: I'll start with Cece. We've been boys since we rode scooters on my visit. We got past a lot of media people, and we were just laughing and joking. In that moment there, it changed my life. At that time, I didn't know what school I was going to choose. Just bonding with a player. Most players, you go to their house, play the game, sit around, chill, wait for the letter. We rode around on scooters on campus for like three hours. That was what I cherish.

David, me and him have ups and downs, running to class, but I ain't going to hold it against him. But other than that you know, he's the uncle on campus. Everybody walk around, if you're with Cece, you know you're good. Other than that, you know, like I said, he treats his family and his teammates the same way. You see Cece, you see Little Luke. When you see Cece, when I first met Little Luke, he's bad. You know he love his dad and his dad love him. I cherish every moment I have with him.

Reese, that cat's weird. Being from Michigan, when we first moved in together, with his big old Timberlands, I ain't never seen Timberland before.

So just meeting him and his family, it's a blessing because you may never know what happens in the future. We're brothers. Every day, we talk about different stuff. Been through a lot of stuff. Keys, went to Best Buy, bought the lights to hook up in the house. Had Christmas lights inside the house, running every day. So you know you don't pay rent in the dorms, you can run the light bill pick up.

Like I said, me, Reese, Josh, Jachai, Jordan, doing good now. Bonding with my boys, being there, all three years, you know, it's been tough. It's going to be hard telling these guys goodbye. But everyday they know they have a brother, they can call any time, answer the phone, I'm still going to be aggravated. So it's all love.

THE MODERATOR: Cece, I'm going to put you on the spot here and make you the voice of the defense. We can't leave coach out. On behalf the defense, what

would you say about Coach here?

CECE JEFFERSON: About coaching?

THE MODERATOR: About Coach here.

CECE JEFFERSON: Man, Coach Grantham? No. Coach Grantham, he's a great coach. You know his system, if you buy in, you know obviously the results that we had, the success we had, it speaks for itself.

He's a guy that's not only all about football, he cares about what's going on in your life, how your everyday life is going.

So this, as a player, really shows a lot about a coach, because being a college athlete is not easy, as I'm sure all y'all know. You got to lift weights early in the morning. You've got to go through countless hours of meetings. You've got to go to tutoring, you got to go to class. Your days is continuous and never stops.

So for him to not just talk to you about, you know, what's your assignment on this play, what's your assignment on that play, to actually ask you about what's going on in your life outside of football, you know, that really makes you feel good as a player. Because it shows that he's not only looks at you as his player, he looks at you more like a son, and he's going to ask you about those things and he's going to take care of you.

I think that's big. We appreciate Coach Grantham and what he's done for the program. And it's definitely in the right hands going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, gentlemen.