

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Florida vs Michigan

Friday, December 28, 2018

Dan Mullen

Jim Harbaugh

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Everyone, at this time, it is my pleasure to introduce Florida head coach Dan Mullen and Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh.

Coaches, Dan, we'll start with you, if you don't mind, give us an opening statement and talk about how your Bowl Week experience has been so far and maybe how this compares to other bowl trips that you've had.

DAN MULLEN: First, I want to thank the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl and all the hospitality they've given us. Obviously, it's been fantastic for our players, great experience for our players.

Obviously, it's unique any time you come and when the game's being played, coming here over Christmas week and being able to celebrate a holiday season with the team being together. We've really enjoyed, I think, that time together as a team.

But the facilities, the hospitality, everything's been fantastic, and I think it's been a very educational and enjoyable week for our players.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

Coach Harbaugh, your experience so far.

JIM HARBAUGH: It's been tremendous. I think the thing that stands out the most is the Peach Bowl staff, the people, the volunteers. Over 350 that are going out of their way on the holiday, on Christmas Day, to make sure that we have a good experience here.

There's been a lot of great things to do. It's been great getting to know Dan and his family. Also, our team being together this week, over Christmas, it's the first time we've all been together as a team on Christmas Day. It's been a great experience.

Atlanta is known for its hospitality, and I can say A-plus-plus with that has been our experience. It's a good-looking trophy. I'd like to get that. I'm sure Dan would too. That's a nice-looking trophy.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We actually have an activity planned tomorrow that will determine where that's going.

All right, everybody. We'll open it up for questions now.

Q. This is for Dan. You've had your finger on the pulse of the team pretty well this season. You've kind of known what to expect going into games. What's your sense of how the team's been committed this week and focused?

DAN MULLEN: I think they've done a great job. The big challenge they're going to have now is really getting into game mode. I think they've accepted the challenge and done a great job of transitioning from kind of your pre-bowl practices, where you're working technique, fundamentals, into game-planning at home, into coming here and balancing and understanding when it's football time, when it's fun and relax time to enjoy all the different events at the bowl game.

They've done a great job of that. Obviously, after practice yesterday, you're really transitioning into game mode, which we have to get into lockdown, get your preparation, get your routine down, have a great Friday walk-through today, meetings, have our Friday night routine, get up, wide-eyed, ready to go tomorrow morning and go perform.

They've handled it very well and I want to see us continue that into that game mode, getting ready for the morning.

Q. This is for both coaches. Wonder if you guys could tell us a little bit about your interactions this week, getting to know each other a little more and if you could compare and contrast each other's styles, similarities, and differences you see in each other.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Harbaugh, start with you, please.

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah, just been really good to get to know Coach and his family. He's a great guy. Got a son who is a heck of a good golfer named Canon. He's the 110th rated, 9-year-old in the world. I think that's just awesome.

Great to just learn about him and some of his career.

Been following it from afar and been a fan.

He does a tremendous job everywhere he's been as an assistant coach or head coach. His teams have been good.

DAN MULLEN: I think it's fun when you see people -- you get to see Jim and you get to -- I mean, I watched him when he was playing in the NFL. Got to see his career and I always respect people that, I mean, even has come up from a family of coaching. Started at small schools, worked his way up to where he is now. So you have a lot of respect for that.

Get to talking, it's been fun sharing different thoughts and ideas, how to do things. We were talking last night about the trips they take with the team around the world, different educational experiences they present to their players.

All these things you get to look at and evaluate yourself, evaluate your program, and always evaluating not just football, but evaluate how you can make a better experience, better educational experience for your student-athletes.

Q. Jim, with Karan not being here and Devin, are you going to appoint a couple of other gameday captains as well to join Ben and Tyree?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah, Chase Winovich and Grant Perry, along with Ben and Tyree.

Q. Jim, and for Dan as well. But Jim first, you've talked about wanting as many playoff games as possible, expand the playoffs as much as possible. Has that stance at all changed as these playoffs have unfolded and as players have opted to sit out games? Does that make you think more or less that a larger playoff is necessary?

JIM HARBAUGH: I'm still for a larger playoff.

DAN MULLEN: I love the bowl system kind of as it is. I think the bowl experience for so many teams is such a special deal. So I don't know that the expansion of the playoff is going to -- it would serve what everybody is looking for.

The great thing about college football is you kind of enter into the playoff week 1 of the season, and you've got to perform from game 1 all the way through.

But the bowl experience, the experience these players get to receive, I think, is special. So I'd hate to see that ruined for not just - you know, that it's only a special deal. There's a bunch of seniors on both teams that are going to get to play their last college football game, and one of them is going to get to walk away with that

trophy. I think that's pretty unique in college football, that they get to finish their careers that way.

Q. Dan, for this team not going to a bowl last year, how much of an incentive for this season do you think that was? They seem to be really happy to be here and happy to be enjoying some of the benefits that come with a bowl game. Was it a motivator for the team this year?

DAN MULLEN: You know, I think you're at the University of Florida, you expect to be playing not just in bowl games, you expect to be playing in New Year's Six bowls and championship bowls. You expect to be playing great programs like the University of Michigan.

So I think -- for our guys, I think that the motivator of living up to what the Gator standard is, to be involved in these games. More than just getting to a bowl, but trying to get to premiere bowls, I think, was a motivator for this team, especially as the season went on, and they realized they're starting to have some success and what that feels like, what that taste of success is, and how to continue that.

Q. Jim, how has the team adjusted and adapted to the four guys who chose not to be here? And do you at all -- do you understand and in any way agree with their decision not to play?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah, I mean, we respect it. It's someone's right to -- we respect that it's their decision to make. We don't push anybody in the back to go play football.

I will say even further, I think I've grown in terms of even respecting people when I don't agree with what they're decision is.

It's just a respect that it's their decision to make, and it's the decision that they've made, and after that we're ready to play football.

Had a good week of preparation, and we have flipped the switch. We're in game mode and playing a great team in Florida. We've had a chance to watch them, and they are really, really good so we're excited for the competition and the challenge.

Q. Coach Harbaugh, Coach Mullen talks about the Gator standard a lot. I'm wondering what's the Michigan standard in your mind and how would winning that trophy help boost that Michigan standard?

JIM HARBAUGH: That's our goal, win the next game that we play. This is a big game for us. It's on a big stage against a college football, elite historic program.

The best part about it for us is the competition. We

love that. We love competing in football, and we really, really enjoy winning. So we know it's a big challenge in the game tomorrow. That's what also makes the competition the best part, when you're playing somebody really good.

So we just want to go out and have at it.

Q. Dan, Van Jefferson last year had some interest from a bunch of different schools, like Michigan, and took a visit with you. What do you remember from that visit, those early conversations, and what was sort of like your thoughts on his eligibility chances at that time?

DAN MULLEN: Well, coming in during the recruiting process, I think you always hope for his sake that the NCAA would give him the opportunity to go play and not punish him for mistakes made by other people and other institutions during that process.

We just spent a lot of time together. I think his family living in Florida certainly was a help. I think being able to stay around family was very, very important to him.

I think the opportunity of coming into a program where we're walking in with a new head coach, a new program, where he could come in and not -- kind of everybody was starting new. And he was starting new. And I think that really was a great opportunity for him to come in. There was no preconceived notions. There was no set depth chart. There was no anything.

Everybody had the opportunity to come in and start fresh, and I think that was very attractive to him to have a situation where he was starting fresh in his college career, and he'd have that opportunity with a program where everybody was doing the same.

Q. For both coaches, you've both had recruiting success here in this state and in the Atlanta area. I'm wondering, with the early signing period, how did that impact, if it did, your ability to take advantage of this bowl trip to do some -- to make recruiting gains here.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Harbaugh?

JIM HARBAUGH: Didn't really help me make any recruiting gains. Signing day was the 19th -- December 19th, and we traveled down here on the 23rd of December.

Q. Does that mean for the future -- I know you had recruits visit you at a practice. Were you looking down the road, future years?

JIM HARBAUGH: Two of the signees on December 19 came out to practice, and we did have five players sign from the Atlanta, Georgia area. So hopefully, you

know, we acquit ourselves well, and I think that's something that people look at, how your team does on the field. So we hope to do well. It's a very, very good area for high school football, as everybody knows.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mullen?

DAN MULLEN: This is a great area. When you look at high school football, and you look at all the colleges that come in here to recruit, I don't know that playing specifically in this game is huge. We're only a five-hour drive from this area to get to Gainesville so we're pretty accessible to all the players that are in this area.

But I think the opportunity to play and the prestige of this game, more than the location of this game -- playing in the New Year's Six bowl, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl for a lot of the young players out there, they have the opportunity to look and say, hey, these are -- this is a program, I can go play at the University of Florida and have the opportunity to go compete for championships.

I think one of the big goals for us, obviously, is to play in this game again next year. I think for guys in this area, when they look at the ability to be here this year, certainly shows that we may have the potential to be here next year, and that's the type of program they want to play for.

Q. So much is made of conference perception when it comes to the college football playoff, whether that's accurate or not. People talk about it all the time. I'm curious, with two teams like you, both hoping to make the playoffs in future years, how much do you think a game like this could affect your conferences maybe getting the benefit of the doubt, if you will, in the future?

DAN MULLEN: You're looking at two premiere conferences in all of college football, so I don't know that our game will have a big impact on that.

I think the competition between the two programs is really what it comes down to more than just the conferences battling. So obviously, next year, going to be a whole new year, whole new teams, whole new setup.

So I know, I'm sure both our teams are going to look, starting after this game, head back to school in January, starting to make that push to make that playoff for next season.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Harbaugh?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah, I really haven't thought about the way you framed the question. But I'm sure there's

bragging rights, people that -- you know, their teams are from the Big Ten, they'd rather see a Big Ten win, and teams from the SEC would like to see the SEC team win and say they have the best conference. Probably that's the most simple way to explain it.

Q. I know you've got one more to go, but have you had a chance to assess the overall growth of the program this season, from where you guys ended last year?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yeah. It's been -- we started off playing a really good team in Notre Dame and lost a tough one down there. Then we won ten straight games. Team played really good against a lot of really good ball clubs, and didn't play our best game on November 24th.

Since that time, we've been preparing for this game, this ball game against Florida. Want to go out on a great note playing our best football. That's what it's going to take in this game to have a chance to win and be successful, and that's our goal. Playing our best against a really good team.

Q. Jim, you said a couple weeks ago that you're staying at Michigan and not going to an NFL job. Have you or your representatives still been contacted by any NFL teams? And why isn't the NFL something you're interested in?

JIM HARBAUGH: I really don't have any representatives. No agent or anything.

Q. Jim, you had talked about, before this, the hunger to get the 11th victory. Now that you've been here for a while, have you seen in your team signs of that hunger, that they crave it as much as it has been talked about?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yes, we're ready to go, ready to compete.

Q. Dan, it's been a 13-month process to get here. Players all have an opinion on it, with whether it was the first team meeting, the strength program, or a certain game. What was the one moment for you that stood out that kind of made you realize that the team was capable of reaching a point like this?

DAN MULLEN: I don't know if there's one moment. I think -- early on, I think the key was lack of resistance. Everything that we asked the guys to do, they welcomed. I don't know that we did it very well. I don't know if we did it to the level that I expected it to be done. I don't know if we even did it to the level close of what we expected it to be done.

But they didn't resist, and I think they tried to be very receptive of everything that we were asking them to do,

starting in last year's off-season program, going to class, how they carry themselves in the community, how they come together as a team in a lot of different team events that we do, how we practice.

I think it was very different for a lot of them than what they've done in the past, and I think if anything, the thing that allowed us to have success was our older players. I mean, you look at guys like Martez Ivey and the rest of our seniors. They came in and they were willing to try whatever we were going to ask them to do.

I think when that happened, and then they started to realize they were having some success in just -- in every aspect of their life. Even last spring before we started playing games, I think it made them -- it made it easier and easier to continue to buy in to what we're trying to build.

Q. Jim, will Jake Moody continue to kick for you guys? Also, have you chosen a backup quarterback yet for this game?

JIM HARBAUGH: Yes, Jake Moody will continue to kick for us. And yes, backup quarterback in the game will be the two we've always said with the backup quarterbacks, Brandon Peters and Joe Milton.

THE MODERATOR: Coaches, I'll ask you a question. If each of you could talk about your opponent. I know you guys have done a lot of film study this week in preparing your game scheme. Coach Mullen, talk about Coach Harbaugh's group. What do you think they do very well that is going to pose to you the biggest problem tomorrow?

DAN MULLEN: Obviously, one of the things, to me, that really stands out when I look at -- when you look at teams, obviously, schematically, in every phase, defensively, they bring a lot of different pressures, but they're very sound in what they do attacking your weakness.

You look offensively, all the different formations, personnel groups, shift motions, the different matchups they try to create on the field are great.

Those are the schematic parts of coaching. One thing I think that I've seen with the team that I have a lot of respect for what they do is how hard they play. You watch their players, you watch the physicality, the strain at which they play with. How hard they play not just on offense and defense, in special teams; probably the best special teams team we face this year.

When you get to that part of the game -- because just like us, on signing day, on December the 19th, we didn't have anybody signing to be the left guard on the punt team. We didn't sign anybody to be an up back

on a kickoff return or to be the L-4 on the kickoff coverage team. Guys didn't sign to do that.

But when you look at a program, when those guys play with that intensity every single snap, that's coaching. That's guys that believe in what the program represents and what the program stands for.

That's the one thing that stands out to me. If there was a perfect offense or perfect defense, everybody would just run the same thing and it would be kind of boring. It's the guys buying in and believing what you do.

And I've watched, and the thing that I think -- the biggest challenge they give you is they are very sound, they are very disciplined. They have a great scheme in what they do. But beyond that, the intensity and how hard they play and what they believe in what they're doing is evident on film when you watch Michigan.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Harbaugh, what does Florida do that's going to give you the biggest challenge tomorrow?

JIM HARBAUGH: I'd echo some of the things that Coach talked about. Schematically, they really get a lot taught. Both offensively and defensively, special teams-wise, multiple fronts and coverages, sophisticated blitz patterns. Really, a smart team. They have a very smart football team.

They're really good, really athletic, long and fast. Put together a really fast team, really stands out.

And the other thing that's been really impressive is that you get play out of all different classes. You have freshmen that are playing that you guys have come right in and coached right up right out of high school. That's been really impressive. You've got your sophomores, your redshirt juniors, you've got seniors, a few fifth-year seniors.

That's really impressive to be -- come in as a first-year coach and get the buy-in from the whole team. You see it throughout the roster and Coach has done a fabulous job and so have his assistants. It's really a good year of coaching for Dan and his staff.

Q. Coach Harbaugh, just to kind of piggyback what you were saying, Florida and Michigan didn't play too long ago. What are the biggest differences that you see from this Florida team as you see them on tape, compared to the time that you played them in 2017? I mean, I know it was a while ago, but it wasn't that, that long ago.

JIM HARBAUGH: That was pretty long ago in football. Football years, I guess.

Q. But there's certain, some of the same personnel on the team and stuff. Just the growth, I guess.

JIM HARBAUGH: It's been that long. I really hate to compare.

Q. I'll give you guys a fun, free marketing question here for the Michael Jordan brand. A lot's been made of Jim Harbaugh's style a little bit over the years. I'm curious, since you're both joining teams here, how have you both utilized the Jordan style and seen it maybe in each other?

JIM HARBAUGH: Wear it a lot.

DAN MULLEN: We each got our own styles, I think.

Q. What shoes are you wearing?

JIM HARBAUGH: I'm wearing a pair of dress shoes.

DAN MULLEN: I got the Retro 4s. I think Coach got -- his style is above the waist. My style is kind of below the waist, right? I'm more ankles down, right, in our fashion statements?

JIM HARBAUGH: I don't know about that. Don't know what he's talking about right now.

DAN MULLEN: I think the Jordan brand, though -- I think when you look at what the Jordan brand represents, the Jordan brand represents excellence, and I think, to be honest with you, you look at the schools that are represented by Jordan are not just premiere athletic schools. They're also premiere academic schools. And so I think it just shows the uniqueness of having that brand and that brand representing excellence not just in one sport, in every sport.

I think we're very fortunate to be represented by the Jordan brand.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Harbaugh, a final comment on the Jordan brand.

JIM HARBAUGH: Nope.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Having fully explored both coaches' fashion choices and the Jordan brand, we will end it there. Coaches, if I could ask you to stay and we'll get a couple of photos with the trophy here.