

CFP Semifinal at the Capital One Orange Bowl: Georgia vs Michigan

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Michigan Wolverines

Andrew Vastardis

Andrew Stueber

Press Conference



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what works. We know how to play Michigan football, and I think that it's important to continue playing what's best for us and not tailor it too much to the team we're playing. Gad has done a great job all year and will continue to do a great job of calling great plays, forming up great plays, great formations and everything to prepare us for this game, so we're fully confident in him, all the coaches are fully confident in him, and the players are, as well.

Q. Did Dax Hill travel to the team to Florida?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Really that's a question for Coach Harbaugh, not for us.

Q. I'm just wondering if you can each talk to me a little bit about the motivation for this game. I see, Andrew, that shirt, Michigan Versus Everybody. Have you guys been kind of wearing that? I know there was a big push, beat Ohio. What is the push now, and how do you continue to keep up that motivation as the stage and the goal and the prize is bigger each week?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Yeah, I mean, the shirt kind of says it all, but as we prepare for every game this year, we put everything into preparation, and every game is really -- means as much as the other.

This is playoff football. This is the highest level. So yeah, preparation, energy, everything is as high as ever because the stage is the biggest ever.

ANDREW STUEBER: Yeah, I'd have to agree. I'd say that shirt really begins from fall camp and spring ball when we knew that a lot of people would be counting us out. I saw somewhere there was a .05 percent chance of making it to the College Football Playoff. A lot of people didn't believe in us, and it kind of drove us this whole season. Two more games to play, so we're excited to get out there and show everyone what we can do.

Q. When Josh Gattis laid out his vision for the offense, what was that meeting like, and how did you guys respond to that?

ANDREW STUEBER: Our goal was simple. We know

Q. With so much time between now and your last game, how much tangible momentum do you guys still feel you have from your wins over Ohio State and Iowa, or has the long break maybe impacted that?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: I think more confidence, like we know we can do it on a big stage. We can play our brand of football on a big stage, and just carrying that over and practicing as hard if not harder with intensity and detail, and just the confidence continues to build. Definitely riding that into this game, and just ready to go out there and take advantage of every opportunity we get.

Q. I have been asking some of your teammates about this, as well, but no one knows what it's going to be like to go up against the Georgia D-line probably better than your position group. I was wondering if you could give me a breakdown about what specifically they do that makes them so difficult to play from what you've seen on film.

ANDREW STUEBER: They're a great defensive front. We've played a lot of great defensive fronts this whole year. We've prepared great for them, as well, and we've tackled them well I'd say. It's something that we've taken a lot of emphasis on. We've had a lot of time to dissect and deconstruct what it is they do. They're really well-coached, they play hard, they rotate a lot, they have some great schemes, some great fronts, some great movement, but at the end of the day it's something that we focus on ourselves. I think Cade said it before, the offensive line is the heartbeat of this team, so we take that on our shoulders every day to start moving the ball, moving the line of scrimmage, and so it really starts with us. They're a great front, but we just have to play Michigan football, play our game, play what has gotten us here right now, and I

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think we'll do just fine.

Q. I don't know if you guys get tired of hearing about how good the SEC is, but I wonder what it means to carry the Big Ten mantle into these playoffs and take on the SEC's best.

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Like I said, it's a great opportunity. We don't get caught up in conference versus conference, but you do hear a little bit of that, so it's a great opportunity to battle it out and get some bragging rights, I guess.

Q. Growing up and when you're in high school, you obviously dream of being in a position like this, and I know you haven't stepped on to the field yet, but so far how does this experience compare to what you thought it might be?

ANDREW STUEBER: I mean, it's everything you've dreamed of and more. I know for the past three games, this is my fifth year, so it's kind of my last year. The past three games being Ohio State, Iowa and this next one, I've taken the chance every time on the field to kind of take a step back and look around for a second, whether that's before the game or after the game, because it's truly been a dream come true this whole season. I couldn't be more proud of how the coaches have handled the adversity last year, the players have responded to the adversity of last year. It's truly been such a fun ride, and we still have two more for this ride to keep going.

I'm holding on as hard as I can. I don't want to stop anytime soon. This has been probably the most fun year of college football I've ever played, and it's lived up to everything I've thought.

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Going off of that, just enjoying the moment. Definitely having the most fun, and really taking a step back and enjoying the moment because the season has really been a blessing. The people we've been around, the places we've gone, the things we've accomplished. But really just the day-to-day is what makes it all amazing.

Yeah, big stage, great opportunity. Couldn't be more excited.

Q. I don't know how often you guys have practiced ones on ones this year, but even for a great O-line like you guys, what's it like in practice when you face Aidan?

ANDREW STUEBER: I'll take that one because I go against him almost every day wearing full pads. It's

something that it's kind of become a Michigan tradition as I've gone through my years here. I came in, I was on scout team as a freshman, Rashan Gary lined up next to me, Chase Winovich, Josh Uche, then had Kwity Paye come through, and now I have two, Dave Ojabo and Aidan Hutchinson on each side, so it's really wherever you go you're against going the best here. It's something that I personally love doing because it makes the game so much easier. You're not playing Aidan Hutchinson out there in the games. He's just such a talented player in everything he does, and it really forces me to focus on my technique and try to give my best every single day playing against him. I know I give him my best every day, and so it's truly something that I look forward to every day.

Sometimes the practice tape is pretty rough on my end, but I know it's getting me better and it's getting him better, so that's all that matters.

Q. When Hassan is doing what he does, what effect does that have on your team? What effect does that have on the other team? Is there a moment in the season where you can think of that Hassan really changed a game by the way that he runs?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Yeah, Hassan is a great asset, a great player, and a great leader. He just runs hard, runs really as hard as he can every play. Like there's really no other level to how he plays the game, how he conducts his business. It's always all or nothing. That just resonates with everyone else because that's how we play football at Michigan.

It's been a great asset to play as hard as we can and know that guys like Hassan and our backfield got playmakers and they can just do their thing, too. Really it's just -- it's inspirational to watch him work, watch him run, because he runs angry and he plays hard, and we all play angry and we play hard, so it's awesome.

Q. I was just wondering, this group, your offensive line has played a lot of fourth quarter games this year. You've been tested. I'm just wondering, what is that impact on your group in terms of your mental approach to this game, and what does it say about your conditioning, as well, the group overall?

ANDREW STUEBER: Definitely. So yeah, I think it's something -- something that's benefitted this team a lot. We've played a lot of closer games, a lot of fourth quarter games, and when it comes down to it, those are when you win the games, when you win championships, too. It's helped with our conditioning but also our mental state. I think as you get later into games your emotions can kind of vary more because you're tired, you've invested in this

game now, you want to win. So I think being able as a unit, as an offensive line to keep kind of a steady head and keep -- it affects everybody on the offense, and I think that transfers over to the defense.

So yeah, I think being able to play a lot of fourth quarter games has helped us kind of maintain an even mental state, kind of understand how to win those games, how to control the event, how to control your body and your mentals.

I think it's a huge edge we have, and I think it's something that we've built over the season.

Q. I did this sort of season recap package and I ran a byte that you said right after Michigan State that our season is not over, not even close. Could you have foreseen what would happen, you sitting here talking to us today?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: I guess what I said, that kind of says it all. Really when I said that, I was just focusing on staying together and taking it one day at a time. I remember there was an interview with Joel, he's like, you'll run through six walls, that's not good, you've got to run through one at a time, and that's what we did. Really just taking every day, every opportunity we had to get better and prepare for this moment, prepare to get us to this moment.

Shoot, yeah, couldn't have said it any better back then. It's not over, and we're still playing football, and we hope to play a lot more football.

Q. Throughout this season you've talked about in addition to all the goals you wanted to achieve this year, making sure you left the program in a better spot than where it was when you got here. I'm just curious, regardless of what happens this weekend, how pleased are you with the progress the program has made, and where do you think Michigan football stands now looking into the future?

ANDREW VASTARDIS: Yeah, no doubt. Always want to leave it in a better place. That may be a national standing, but I think more so in the impact I have on the people related to Michigan football, whether it be everyone that's come before us that has helped us get to this point, everyone that's maybe not had this opportunity that we're in right now that have worked just as hard if not harder to get here -- well, not harder. We've all given our blood, sweat and tears.

But I think the relationships and how to go about preparing for these moments, how to go about work ethic, that's

really the legacy I think we've left, and obviously this is how we believe it should be. Michigan should be at the top. Michigan should be playing for the top.

I think that legacy must carry on, and I think we have the best staff and young group of players to carry that on because it's not just the old guys bringing that work every day. It's not just the old guys carrying the lunch pail. It's everyone, top to bottom. I feel very confident about that carrying on into the future.

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