

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Alabama vs Georgia

Saturday, December 2, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Kirby Smart

Carson Beck

Smael Mondon Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama 27, Georgia 24

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with Coach Smart.

KIRBY SMART: I'll open, like I always do, man, it's unbelievable atmosphere when you play in the SEC championship. I mean, every year that I've coached in this thing, it's just electric. I think it's awesome that we get an opportunity to play in it.

Both crowds were really into the game, a lot of momentum swings like we thought. A field goal that hits the dang upright after an off-sides. We spotted them 10 just off of a turnover, a touchdown on a busted coverage by a freshman.

When you give good teams those things, they're going to be hard to beat. But, man, am I proud of our fight and resiliency. Two times I guess we're down 10 or three times we're down 10, offense battles back, never quits, "never say die" attitude.

This team is really special in terms of how they play and how they compete. They've been through a lot with the guys in and out of the roster, which has been tough on these guys.

I'm proud of 'em and congratulate Alabama on a great game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. Kirby, why do you think the offense stalled after that opening drive? If the committee is watching right



now, what is your case to be in the final four?

KIRBY SMART: Offense stalled after the opening drive? You're talking about the rest of the night?

Q. 2-3 up until the fourth quarter.

KIRBY SMART: They did a good job there. We didn't have quite as much continuity as maybe we've had out there. Look, it's tough, guys. When Brock Bowers doesn't practice for 15 days, and Ladd doesn't practice for 15 days, they go out in the game, timing and rhythm is critical.

But give Alabama some credit. They played good defense, did a good job. I thought we ran the ball well and did some good things.

As far as your second question, Bill Hancock said it's not the most deserving, he said, simply it's the best four teams. So you're going to tell me somebody sitting in that committee room and doesn't think that that Georgia team is not one of the best four teams, I don't know if they're in the right profession 'cause it's a really good football team. It's a really talented football team. It's a really balanced football team.

They have to make that decision, but it's the best four teams. That's critical.

Q. On that fourth and four play, Isaiah Bond comes down with it. Were you able to ask for a review? Did you get an explanation as to why you weren't given a review?

KIRBY SMART: You're talking first half?

Q. Yes.

KIRBY SMART: The first staple of any review is they review it up top, they go quick. For me to ask for a review, it costs me a timeout. They get to watch it.

I was not aware of it being called or not called. I guess you're saying the replay showed he didn't catch it. That was an extremely critical play in the game because they go



on to score there.

Q. Both players, could you comment how tough it is going 12-0 through the season and now your playoff future being in the hands of a Playoff committee?

CARSON BECK: Yeah, I mean, to go through an SEC schedule, 12 games, and to win each and every one, it's not something easy to do. It's not easy, but super proud of these guys.

Obviously to come into this game and not finish the way that we wanted to and kind of leave the destiny of our team in someone else's hands rather than ourselves, that's hard.

At this point it's out of our control. We fought hard. I thought throughout the season we showed that we were really a dominant team.

SMAEL MONDON, JR: What Carson said. It's tough. It's tough. I'm proud of the way the guys played tonight. A lot of guys had to step up. Them guys stepped up. Just proud of the guys.

Q. Kirby, why are you guys one of the four best teams do you think?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's the eye test. You look at what we've done this season, to go on the road, the teams we beat, the teams that are in the top 20 that we were able to beat.

I don't know if this is right or not, CFP era, a team goes in at 1, I don't think has fallen out of that. Not that history says anything. When you talk about four best teams, watch the game. Go ask NFL talent evaluators. Ask NFL scouts. It's about the best teams.

I have no question that it's not one of the best four teams, 100%.

Q. Carson, what did you see on the end around that one ended up being fumbled? How hard is that knowing that winds up being the difference in the turnover margin?

CARSON BECK: Yeah, we've obviously practiced that play a ton. It's a simple flip back. I'm not exactly sure what happened. I'll have to go see it on film. I wasn't able to see the replay.

I flipped it. Next thing I knew all the guys were running, the ball's on the ground.

I really don't know what happened on that. Just go back

and obviously hope to fix it if we ever run that play again.

Q. Smael, can you talk about defending Jalen Milroe and the challenges there, the last possession when you wanted that stop?

SMAEL MONDON, JR: With how good of an athlete he is, it's a real big challenge. As far as defending him, some plays he did good on, some plays could have fitted better on. That last drive, just got it fitted better.

Q. For the players, what would it mean to you if the College Football Playoff committee gave you one more shot to play for a national championship?

CARSON BECK: I mean, obviously it would mean everything to us. I mean, we fought so hard through the season. I mean, it's been a gruesome season. Guys out, fighting to get back. Just like Coach Smart said earlier, like, Ladd, Brock, guys that are going to go on and play football for a long time haven't really practiced at all for the past 15 days, two weeks. They're out there battling.

Obviously we think that anybody that steps out on that field is going to go execute and play. Obviously I have a ton of confidence in every guy that's out there and love them to death. I mean, we're in there fighting together each and every day.

To be given that chance would be everything to us.

Q. Kirby, notwithstanding what you said, would you agree this season is sort of unique from the standpoint there's at least five, maybe six teams that can claim 'we're one of the four best teams in college football'?

KIRBY SMART: I guess that does make it unique. I don't know the history of the other years. The fifth team probably always feels like they didn't. Seems like this is the year that it should be the four best teams because you can make a case for deserving for everybody. It's unfortunate that these kids who give so much and play so hard, not just at Georgia, all these schools, they don't get to decide it really on the field.

It's sitting back with a committee who has to determine who the best four teams are. If it's truly the four best teams, let's put the four best teams in.

Q. Kirby, what is Sunday going to look like for you guys with that announcement coming around noon?

KIRBY SMART: Well, we play Alabama next year I think early in the season, so we're coming in to grade the film, evaluate, see what we can do better and different. The

coaches will have to get on the road and go recruiting. We'll have a team meeting tomorrow afternoon sometime to go over the plans for the future.

These guys need some time. They'll get some time off, but we'll have a team meeting tomorrow to go through what our plans are based on what we find out.

Q. Kirby, you haven't had to address the team after a loss for a while. What was your message to them?

KIRBY SMART: I love 'em. I mean, I love 'em. Guys in there, two classes of guys in that room that have not lost a game. You're looking at, I don't know, 10, 15 NFL players who lose it feels like every other week. There's two classes of our kids that have not lost a game.

Just they're resilient, they're fighters. In life a lot of times you really can't get better until you lose sometimes because you have to find out what you can do better.

It was a sad... Really upset guys. Guys really care about this team. The culture is really good on this team. They were hurt in there, rightfully so.

The message doesn't change. Looking inward and figuring out what we can do.

Q. On what you said about agreeing that maybe there's more than four teams that can make a claim, is that an advertisement for next year's format in your mind, or will that take a little bit off of this game, this SEC championship game, if both teams are going to be advancing anyway?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't know that next year has anything to do with it. I think next year is next year. Nobody is ever going to play in this game and not play it on the line and compete for a championship. You're playing for a ring, something that's really hard to get.

Look at the SEC championship. Our team in the playoff, look what they've done. Y'all tell me the record of the SEC teams in the playoff. It's pretty spectacular.

Twice, two of them ended up playing each other. I mean, who are the best teams? Do we want the best teams?

Q. Do you have any updates on Amarius Mims, and how much did that change your game plan when he went out? What does it say about Brock Bowers and Ladd McConkey limping off the field?

KIRBY SMART: All those guys are just warriors. Literally, I mean, just fighting.

Mims bumped it against -- I don't know exactly what happened, somebody fell on or he stepped on Tate, something happened. He just felt like it was weak and he couldn't go. It threw us back to Truss having to go back out. Truss had moved in for Tate, try trying to play for him some. It threw Truss back out there. He played a little bit at tackle. Just part of what we had to do. We had to move those guys around.

Brock and Ladd, those guys battle and compete. They've been in rehab every morning. We wanted to play so bad against Tech and they couldn't. They were going to be close today. They were out there limping around, not 100%.

But the game matters to them. The team matters to them. Brock Bowers of all people, this guy is going to be a first round pick, and he's just out there battling his tail off.

Q. What led to some of the short yardage issues you had?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I have to watch and see. Golly, we went backwards on two of 'em I think. We decided we were going to go for it if we didn't lose yardage. We lost yardage.

Only thing we can say is they whipped us up front. Late in the two-minute drive, we had a third-and-one, and they whipped us, we had to get it on fourth-an-one on the goal line.

They have big, big humans. People always say, Georgia can run the ball. It's hard to run the ball when they have good size in there. They're a physical front.

But I was very pleased with the run game, not the conversions. That probably was the difference in the game, the short yardage conversions and gifting 10 points away.

Q. What is the game plan tomorrow for watching? Are you going to be all together?

KIRBY SMART: I said earlier. We were going to come in and grade them. I set the schedule for the coaches. We'll go through the game plan, talk about things we can do different. Offense will meet. There's a break in there for the coaching staff to be able to watch and do that. We're not bringing the players in till later to go over the schedule.

We'll have a better idea of what we're doing moving forward. I don't want to bring them in and not know information, so...

Q. Carson, what did you learn about yourself in this loss, struggling at times, but pushing through and getting touchdowns?

CARSON BECK: I mean, obviously to always have the mentality to never give up. It's never over. I truly believe that every guy on that sideline through every second of that game never gave up.

Obviously I'm super proud of this team. It shows how resilient we are. Obviously it didn't finish the way that we wanted it to, but to see the guys fight and care and love each other on the field, truly fight for one another, is special.

I mean, it goes to say how special this program is and how Coach Smart has built this program. I mean, we just kept going out there and fighting and kept going. Obviously it didn't go our way at times.

But just never give up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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