

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Josh Paschal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by senior defensive end Josh Paschal from Kentucky. I'll ask Josh to make an opening statement, and we'll take your questions.

Josh, as you head into the 2021 season, just talk about what you're looking forward to as the season approaches.

JOSH PASCHAL: I'm looking forward to being back to a normal season. I know last year we were blessed to be able to play a ten-game SEC season, and thanks to the SEC and Commissioner Sankey for allowing that to happen, for the ADs from each and every school for protecting their athletes and allowing us to get tested so much weekly and make sure that we're all in a safe bubble of some sort.

I'm just thankful to get back to a regular season, to get back to full capacity with fans, to get back to a full schedule, and I just want to say thank you guys for allowing me to be here.

Q. Coach Stoops has really brought a lot of stability to the program. He's second in seniority in the league behind Nick Saban. What do you think that means to you guys as players? And going to five straight bowl games, being part of that, at least four of those, I guess, what's that been like?

JOSH PASCHAL: It just builds a lot of consistency throughout the program, just knowing that your coach has been there since we've been here. This is my fifth year coming up, and he's been here for each and every year. He's been the main guy and the alpha in the facility.

To keep that leadership on that team and to know that you're fighting for the same guy that you've been fighting for for five years, that gives you a lot of confidence, and it gives the team confidence knowing that we have a coach that's standing by our side for Kentucky.

Q. You've got a lot of seniors on defense, specifically



in the secondary. Safety position has a lot of them. What are you seeing from some of those guys? Do you see your defense maybe playing a little bit smaller and getting into some subpackages more than you have in the past because of that depth you all have in the secondary?

JOSH PASCHAL: First of all, shout out to KSR.

But the city, we have a lot of leadership opportunities on the defensive side of the ball. Something I've seen throughout this off-season is the leadership of Yusuf Corker and DeAndre Square, Marquan McCall and myself, just being able to lead this defense from all three levels, from the linebacker position to the defensive backs to the defensive line.

We're just thankful to have the opportunity. Of course we have a lot of depth at the safety position and the DB position as well. I think we'll be able to get into some subpackages, but we'll see more this fall.

Q. I realize that College Football Playoff expansion is too little, too late for you guys at your stage of your career, but do you think it's a positive change for college football?

JOSH PASCHAL: Yeah, unfortunately, I won't be able to experience it. I think it will be a good change just because I think it will bring a lot of competition to the stage because you're going to have an expansion of that so there's going to be more teams to get involved. It won't be like, if you're fifth in the country, you're automatically out of it. So I think it will bring a lot of competition.

Q. Do you think it would change the way you and your teammates approached a season at Kentucky the last four years, changed the outlook on seasons?

JOSH PASCHAL: I wouldn't think it would change the outlook just because I know that we gave it our all each season. Especially at Kentucky, we've been through a lot, not only in Kentucky football but in our athletic program. We took a lot of losses in our athletic program, especially with Coach Schlarman and the football program, and of

course with Chris Oats.

Playing lightly is something that we don't do, so I think we're all good with that.

Q. Finally, some players have raised concerns about the number of games that could potentially mean. Would you have any concerns about that from a length of season standpoint?

JOSH PASCHAL: Of course it would be a lot of games to get tacked on, probably what is it, three probably? That would be a lot of games, but at the same time, if you want to be the champion, you've got to do it. I don't think that would really raise a concern to the people that actually gets into the playoff expansion. Thank you, though.

Q. You all suffered a lot of loss last year. Do you reflect on that a lot, or do you try to put it in the rearview mirror? What kind of approach are you all taking to move forward in the 2021 season?

JOSH PASCHAL: Shout out to KSR again, but with all of the loss that we did take, especially with Chris Oats and Coach Schlarman, that's something that you don't really want to put in the rearview mirror because you want to keep them next to you. Those are two great guys and two great competitors.

I know Coach Schlarman, he had the motto for the team. Coach Schlarman was always -- that's what he stood on. He was going through the most difficult time of his life, but at the same time, he did it all for the team. He showed up to every practice. No matter what he was going through health-wise, he always put the team first. And that's something we always want to keep next to us and keep on our mind.

Q. What have you seen from those other defensive linemen who are competing for that third spot on the line?

JOSH PASCHAL: I'm seeing a lot of competition, and I feel like that's what's going to bring out the best in all three of those guys. I'm seeing guys putting in extra work, not only what's required but time after that. I'm seeing guys get in film, get in film study, and really take that extra step they needed to take.

Competition can bring out the best in you at times, and I feel like that's what's going on right now.

Q. It's early, but what are your thoughts on how name, image, and likeness has been going? And how much of a discussion has that been among you guys as a

team?

JOSH PASCHAL: I think it's been pretty good so far. I know that we had a discussion as a team, just something brief, where we just said we want to make sure that our goal is our goal, that we have our common goal for the year, and that's not with name, image, and likeness.

So to make sure that we're all on the same page as playing football first and separating the two. NIL can be your outside business, but when we're in the facility, we're focused on our goals and focused on being the best Kentucky team that we can be.

Q. What do you guys need to do to compete in the SEC East for the title?

JOSH PASCHAL: To say the least, we just have to execute. We put in the work this off-season, and we're going to continue to. During camp, we're going to continue to preach our goal, which is to get to Atlanta, and we're going to compete.

That's the thing that we have to do. We have the players, we have the talent, and now we just have to execute our goals and execute what we have to do.

THE MODERATOR: Coach mentioned the personal adversity you've gone through. How have you been able to help some of your teammates with personal adversity based on your experiences?

JOSH PASCHAL: For me, I just try to be the light because it could be a time or it could be a moment where a player could be going through something where all they can see is darkness. You want to be able to shed a light to someone.

That's what I try to do. I try to bring the energy wherever I go. We could be running sprints and be dead tired, but you're going to see me smiling and see me having fun. That's something I take personally. I just want to be able to be the light to guys on the team.

Q. A part of that has been a lot of speaking and going on a lot of TV. What has been your favorite memory that you've gotten maybe being able to spread some of that light and some of the cancer awareness that you were wanting to do?

JOSH PASCHAL: I'd probably say I spoke at a decent amount of services, church services as well, and to be able to share my testimony, I feel like that's my favorite thing to do. Then of course, I got to talk on the "Today" show as well, and that was a great experience as well. I got to meet

J.Lo, and that was a highlight, of course.

Q. Explain the J.Lo.

JOSH PASCHAL: I'll set the scene for everybody, all right? I was outside the dressing room because all the famous people and the actual commentators are right there. So J.Lo keeps coming in and out. So my mom, she keeps fan-girling and everything. She loves J.Lo. And I'm like, all right, it's not that big of a deal, but in my mind, I'm thinking it's J.Lo, it's J.Lo, it's J.Lo. I keep seeing her.

So she's changing because she's performing that day. She's changing, and she's coming back, and she's walking up the stairs, and I just look up. I was looking at the stairs, and I look up, and we make complete eye contact. And she winked at me. I hope that wink was real because I've been telling this story ever since it happened. When I tell you I melted, I melted. (Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: It's hard to top that one, so we'll end there. Appreciate your time. Good luck this season.

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