

Louisiana State University Football Media Conference

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Ed Orgeron

Weekday Press Conference

ED ORGERON: Good morning, everybody. Good to see everybody.

Tell the Truth Monday. I thought our defense played its best game the whole year, holding Texas A&M to 13 points. Tremendous job. Holding them to 267 yards total offense, their lowest output of the season.

They were two of 16 on third downs. We've been phenomenal on third downs the last two games on defense. I thought the turnover on fourth-and-one was an excellent effort play. I watched it about 20 times. Turned the outcome of the game. They was about to go up 17 points. Just a tremendous effort by the defense.

On the offense, number one, the scheme has to be better. I watched the film yesterday. We need to put our players in better positions, call better plays, have answers to their blitzes. Too many free blitzes hitting our young quarterbacks.

Our execution has to be better on run blocking. We did not control their front or blitzes. We watched that yesterday, identified what went wrong. We came up with a lot of solutions. Today is going to be a big day on fixing what went wrong on offense.

Two turnovers, minus three in the turnover battle. We had a turnover on special teams. Special teams did not play its best game. We had a missed field goal. We had four penalties. Zach was running for his life back there. Thank God he's athletic. He avoided a couple of blocked punts. I thought Zach did a tremendous job of getting us out of trouble.

Terrace Marshall has opted out. Been a great LSU Tiger for us. Heated battle for him. He was the number one wide receiver in the state of Louisiana, a must-get, a great family from Shreveport, Louisiana. We wish him the very best.

He's going to have a great career in the NFL. Always going to be a great Tiger. He did a lot of things for us.



Seven games, 10 receptions. He just thought this was the time to opt out. We're going to respect his decision and wish him the best.

Today is going to be about fixing LSU and a little bit about Alabama, then tomorrow we'll move on to Alabama with a scouting report, get ready for them.

We practiced Alabama seems like now for the third week. We kind of know them very well. Obviously a great football team, great football coach, led by their offense, 48 points a game. Matt Jones is having a tremendous year. Najee Harris is going to be the best back we see all year. Devonta Smith is an outstanding player, 72 receptions. Sarkisian does a job of getting him the ball. Probably be the best offensive line we'll see all year.

Looking forward to playing Alabama. Hope we have a great crowd there, as many as we possibly can. It will be a wonderful night for the Tigers.

Q. Did Terrace talk to you about his decision? You alluded to maybe the timing was right. Secondly, this season, we all knew it was going to be different. Did you have to adjust your mindset, set your jaw for a different scenario with these kids, they may opt out mid-season? Do you have to understand and smile through your teeth for them?

ED ORGERON: Terrace did come talk to me yesterday morning, like a man. Terrace and I have a great relationship. I played with his uncle, Joe Delaney. We talk about Joe all the time. It was a little bit different between me and Terrace, almost like family.

He came and talked to me like a man. He told me his decision. I respected his decision. Yes, this is a different time. Like Ja'Marr Chase opting out, Terrace Marshall, two of the best receivers in the country. Tyler Shelvin. Something you got to deal with, next man up. We got a lot of young guys that get to play now. They're excited. I think this is going to help us in the future.

Q. I got off the Zoom with Coach Saban. Recovering from COVID. He plans on being back for the game against you guys. What kind of challenges does that bring you with Coach Saban on the sidelines instead of coaching from home?



ED ORGERON: He's a great coach. Look at what he's done. He's done a fantastic job with his football team. You can see the same traits in and out with his football team, execution, great players, great coaches, great plays. I think the guy has done a tremendous job with his program.

Q. We'll assume that y'all sent the Kayshon Boutte play that was reversed to the SEC. What was your interpretation of it? Did you get a response from them?

ED ORGERON: Yeah, we did get a response back. We definitely sent it back. We'll see what they say.

Q. Can you say whether you have an opinion on the call?

ED ORGERON: Sure, I thought it was a touchdown, no question (smiling).

Q. You talked about preparing for this year with all the opting out. As the season continues, do you expect more players to follow? How do you approach that talking to the team in the wake of this?

ED ORGERON: Yeah, that has not been discussed with anybody else. I haven't heard anything. The first time I heard about Terrace opting out was Sunday morning. He had a tremendous game.

But we're going to take it day by day. Other players can opt out, that's the rule. Nobody has talked to me about it. Again, we'll take it day by day and see.

Q. You talked about protection, offensive line, working on that today. Is it at all similar to the frustrations you had a couple years ago in 2018 where you had to bring other people in to protect, it limits you a bit? Y'all talked about that spreading out allowed y'all to give the quarterback less pressure sometimes. Is it at all similar to that? How are y'all finding the answers?

ED ORGERON: We like the spread. We like to keep one back in for protection. We also like to empty it out because you get rid of the ball quick.

What happened in this game wasn't the amount of people that were blocking, it was how we were blocking. They were overloading one side. We turned away from it and those guys came. That's just scheme. It's something that we can fix. It wasn't about bringing extra people into the protection. We like to get as many people as we can out.

We had enough people in protection, but we just wasn't

sliding it the right way.

Q. Last year obviously everything is hunky-dory, couldn't have been better.

ED ORGERON: I like that (laughter).

Q. This year it's been challenging. You, the face of the program, the head coach, where is this program heading? Where is the light at the end of this kind of dark 2020 tunnel?

ED ORGERON: We built a championship program. We will be champions again. Recruiting is going well. We got some great young players. We had some stuff we have to get fixed, I know we have to fix it. I've done it before and I'll do it again.

Q. I know you're big on culture. Pete Carroll your mentor has talked to you about that. Do you feel good about the culture inside your building?

ED ORGERON: I feel good about what we built here over my length as the head coach. I think that we have some things to work on, we have some leadership things to work on. I have some things to work on to get better.

Overall I think we built a great culture inside the building. This year has been a challenge obviously with COVID-19, other stuff going on, has kind of put a little spin on everything. You don't know when the next guy is going to opt out, who has opted out.

I think overall we built a good culture here and we have a good, young foundation.

Q. Obviously with Terrace gone, you can't replace that production. Who are some people, some players, you're hoping can step up in his absence?

ED ORGERON: I like to get Arik Gilbert the ball more. I think he is an outstanding player. We can move him out to receiver position. Jontre Kirkland is sitting in the wins. Hopefully we can get Tre Palmer back. We have two great young receivers in Kayshon Boutte and Koy Moore.

We have a lot of guys that are hungry to catch the ball. I think the next man up is going to prove they're very good receivers.

Q. Now that Terrace is gone, did he have COVID earlier in the season or does he have it now?

ED ORGERON: I can't comment on that, yeah.

Q. Considering the speech Terrace made to the players sticking into the season a couple weeks ago, what do you think the players think now and what do you think of that?

ED ORGERON: I think it's something we got to deal with. Obviously he had a change of heart. I thought when he said it, he meant it. The team believed him. Obviously he had a change of heart.

You never can tell what goes on with guys when they talk with their families, people they need to talk to, and they make personal decisions. I think this was a strictly business decision for Terrace. I can't speak for him. Let him speak for it.

Again, we support him. He's been a great LSU Tiger for us.

Q. You talked about the challenges of this season. Look at you guys or a team like Penn State, maybe Louisville, that were coming off solid years last year, have certainly not lived up to those expectations this year. How much of that do you think is related to the challenges specifically of 2020 and COVID? While there's the upside of guys getting reps, continuing to build the culture, do you worry about damage done to the culture or the brand by having a season that is underwhelming?

ED ORGERON: You always got to represent LSU with pride. The standard performance here is very high. We have not met that, okay?

You know what, I'm not going to make any excuses for COVID, for young players. We just got to get the job done. There's a lot of factors that came into this year. I think the biggest thing was the loss of all those great players. You can look at the NFL today, they're dominating the NFL.

If you want to know why we had a good team, look at the players we lost. Now we have some young players that are going to be just as good, they're just not there yet.

Q. What do you plan to do, if you can say, about your quarterback position this week? Do you plan to settle on one or will you play two? When will you make that decision?

ED ORGERON: We're going to see. The game plan throughout the week, surface was wet, we the only reason we pulled TJ was to put Max in, to try to do some quarterback runs. We planned that all week. We thought we could get that done but we couldn't.

We're going to see this week. We're going to practice both of them, then make that decision at the end of the week according to the game plan and what we need to get done on offense.

Q. Obviously you gave that explanation about the offensive line, what you think was going on. Do you think there were mistakes or something you have to change with how you were scheming it?

ED ORGERON: I think both of them. First of all, you have to look at scheme. We did not have them in the right position a lot of the times. There were some free blitzes coming in. The way we turned the protection, the way we protect, those things can be fixed easily, things that we have done before.

There were a couple times we got beat one-on-one. We have to have better together. We have to play better and compete better.

So it was a combination of both.

Q. You mentioned Kayshon and Koy was a couple of guys you'd like to see more of down the stretch. Where are those two freshmen receivers in terms of their development, how ready do you feel like they are? What are things you need to see from them?

ED ORGERON: I think they're ready to play. I think they're ready to play and will play well. Obviously there's some things we need to work on. COVID guys are getting quarantined, not been in practice for a couple weeks, missing some time. That's hurt them a little bit.

I think overall both those guys have demonstrated in practice they're ready to play.

Q. Each week you talk about things you wanted to see cleaned up on defense. I assume that list was shorter after the weekend. What was key for them when you saw the film?

ED ORGERON: Simplification, communication, the things we have been working on, having their cleats in the grass, things we've been working on.

I think the biggest thing that came out of the game was no explosive passes. That was a big improvement for us. We had some explosive runs, but didn't have mistakes where guys were running free down there scoring touchdowns.

I thought our man-to-man coverage was great. I thought our plan was great. I thought our defensive line played very well against a very good offensive line. We tackled

well. Our linebackers got to the football. We missed a couple of fits on the counter plays, on the big plays. But to hold them for 13 points, 267 yards was a great output by our defense.

Q. On that theme of defensive improvement. You mentioned third down earlier. How have you improved so much in that area after struggling earlier?

ED ORGERON: Four-man rush and great coverage. All works together. It all starts with the four-man rush, tight coverage. The quarterback doesn't have a long time to throw the ball, doesn't have many (indiscernible) to throw the ball. We had some good pressure on the quarterback, five-man blitzes. Our man-to-man coverage was pretty good.

Q. What did it mean to you when you consider all the criticism that Coach Pelini has been under this year to see the defense improve as dramatically as they did last week? How much do you think is it coach adapting to his players or them kind of figuring out what he's been trying to teach?

ED ORGERON: I think it's a combination of both. The criticism, that's outside noise. We can't react to that. We have to control our own mindset within the building. Got to believe in each other, fight for each other. One team, one heartbeat. Coaching staff and players together.

I think it's a combination of Bo learning what our players can and can't do, and our players learning what they can and can't do, understanding the scheme better. You can see it working.

Q. I know this year you've talked about getting to the championship apex, especially tasting it last year. Removing COVID from this season, with this type of adversity in 2020, do you need a season like this to get to that championship pedigree again?

ED ORGERON: I think you need to build grit within a football team. I think you need to build toughness. The young guys need to learn how to go out there and play and win. But we need to coach them better.

I think it's a combination. Nobody wants to go through a season like this. But I do believe we're building character and grit and it's going to pay off for us later on.

Q. Back to the Terrace speech again. Are y'all concerned about what that will do for the morale of the team?

ED ORGERON: It's something we can't control. That's

something that happened last week. I never thought this would happen this week.

You know what, we got to deal with it. This is a year we've had to deal with a lot of stuff. You just got to be ready to go, stay positive with the football team.

I think the team is going to look at it and say, Okay, Terrace is gone, next man up, we're fighting. I think the thing you saw against Texas A&M was fight in this football team, the will to win and compete. Our guys have that. I'm proud of them for that.

Q. Defensively, with the exception of two runs, you really kept Spiller in check, a lot of tackles for losses at the line of scrimmage. Can you relate the challenge that faces your defense this week with Najee Harris, a bigger back, a guy obviously able to catch the ball in the backfield?

ED ORGERON: No question. First of all, they run a little different scheme. This is the best offensive line we see come into Tiger Stadium in years. This is going to be a challenge. One of the best runningbacks. He's very physical. They know what they doing. The margin of error is going to be very small. We have to play well up front, we have to tackle. We have to eliminate the explosive plays.

Q. I'm not sure the greater challenge, not only your coaching job, but you the motivator. You mentioned the outside noise. How will you keep your kids from not looking ahead, instead of four touchdown underdogs?

ED ORGERON: We never talk about that. That's never been mentioned. This is Alabama. This is LSU and Alabama. It's about us. We can control what we can control. Let's go in there, play our best game we possibly can play.

Q. Maybe this is a little on the same lines. Normally when you're playing Alabama where it falls in the calendar, there is still a championship on the line. There isn't that now. What do you tell your team this week? After watching the film, how did you grade out the quarterbacks? Were there differences you saw on film than what you saw real-time?

ED ORGERON: The quarterbacks were under the (indiscernible). I can't put anything on those young quarterbacks. I thought they did the best that they could. They made some mistakes. They made some miss-reads. When there's free blitzes, they're attacking them, all that, the young freshman quarterback, we got to have a better scheme number one.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

What I tell them this week, tell the team this week, We're playing Alabama at home. That's all we need to hear. Playing Alabama is a great rivalry for us, a great game over the years for us, a tremendous challenge. They're the No. 1 team in the country coming to Tiger Stadium. Let's play.

Q. You mentioned about limiting the explosive plays. Coming off your best game defensively, what goes into limiting those explosive plays?

ED ORGERON: You got to find where Devonta Smith is, number one. You got to know where he's at, what he's going to do. You have to cover him. You may have to double cover him, you may not. If we do have single coverage, we have guys that can do that. You got to be able to eliminate him from getting the ball over the top.

Sarkisian does a good job with his play action pass, called a gap pass. Take shots time after time. Can't get your safeties too far up to play the run because they throw the ball over your head. I think that's the number one deal.

Q. Since this game is a reschedule, if you were to look back at your team when you were supposed to play Alabama, do you think your team is better today than when you were supposed to play them?

ED ORGERON: Yeah, we have enough people to play. First week, we didn't have enough people to play. That's all there was to it.

I'm glad we playing them. I glad we got to reschedule. We look forward to playing them.

Q. I know how much you wanted to have the spread offense. In the SEC everyone has it. You're about to face two really good offenses the next couple of weeks. Do you feel like these quarterbacks that have come along, do you feel like their protection is a direct result of the spread, seven-on-seven?

ED ORGERON: Yes, no question. No question. Put athletes in space, let them make plays. People scoring a lot of points. The quarterbacks are being groomed in the seven-on-seven league. They're going in there, it's quick, it's shotgun, getting the ball, throwing the ball, throwing it deep. Again, when you have some great athletes like they have, you have success.

Q. How much was not being able to get a push in the run game, not having Troy Carter available? What is his status coming back? Is Arik kind of more in the position to block?

ED ORGERON: Torrez will not be available this week. At fourth-and-one, we go hurry up. We got beat at the line of scrimmage. That was a big play in the ballgame. We're trying to run the leads inside. There was no room to run them. We got to be more creative, get the ball outside and we got to block better.

Q. Feels like this is the longest and strangest buildup to Alabama I've seen for a while. What has been behind the scenes? You said you wanted to play this game. How did y'all talk about it?

ED ORGERON: It's about LSU. Alabama is a great team, a great program. This is about us, about us getting our team ready to play a great game, doing the best that we possibly can.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

ED ORGERON: All right, guys. Go Tigers.

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