

University of Kentucky Football Media Conference

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Mark Stoops

Press Conference



Kentucky 20, Florida 13

MARK STOOPS: I'd like to start by saying thank you to the BBN. That's for you. They really showed up in a big, big way today and had an impact on the game. They affected the football game in a very positive way. I really can't thank you enough.

I've been working hard for a long time to provide that type of team. But that's what we need it like every week. We could recruit players when our stadium is like that. Our players will play hard and it affects the offense as it did tonight with some of those pre-snap penalties, really a big shout-out to you really. It definitely affected the game. Playing at Kroger Field was a home-field advantage tonight.

Really happy for our players, our fan base, our coaches. Once again, just a great, great team effort. It was beautiful in so many ways. Just shows the character of this football team and the resiliency they have, the toughness.

Things like that aren't easy. It hasn't happened in a while because it's not easy. Our players just constantly put their head down, the coaches put their head down, take care of things in front of them. I've said it for a long time now, this team, just take care of the business in front of us, they don't need to be anybody other than who they are.

We knew against a team like this we had to play better. We did as far as taking care of the football to some extent. Defensively back to back as good of a performance as we've had in a long time. A credit to Coach White, Jon Sumrall, Frank, Chris, the staff, the players. Played unbelievably hard. Great execution. That's a tough team to handle. They put a lot of stress on you in a lot of different ways.

Offensively we struggled. I give Florida and Todd Grantham a lot of credit, an excellent defensive coordinator. They really had a nice plan and played very good defensively.

Offensively we will get it going. We will get it clicking. It's hard. That's a very good defensive team. But I'm very confident that we'll continue to get better.

You win games any way you can. As I mentioned, that was a thing of beauty tonight. Looking forward to celebrating the win for a few hours, then punching the clock and getting back to work tomorrow morning.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: Amazing. I thought the guys that filled in for Marquan played really hard as well. Didn't seem like they were getting picked on or anything like that.

Josh, as I've mentioned to you many times in these press conferences, it's amazing the way he just empties the tank every day. I mean, he just plays exceptionally hard. He's amazing.

Q. Do you feel like you can put your guard down and celebrate this win?

MARK STOOPS: I thank the people, the crowd, the BBN. But, I mean, for me it's back to work tomorrow morning. I'll celebrate it for a couple hours. I got to practice what I preach to the team. You got to take care of the things in front of us. We want to play in a lot of big games. We have a long way to go. I'm very excited, I'm very proud of this group, but, man, we got to go back and punch the clock tomorrow.

Q. Seven or eight shots at the end, I imagine that's what you imagine, the situations you'd be in, come out on top (indiscernible)?

MARK STOOPS: That was a tough hill to climb right there, to stop 'em seven, eight times. It's brutally hard. If I'm not mistaken, there was another pre-snap penalty down there that helped us, one or two. Once again, thank you to the fans for affecting the play.

I thought Brad and the defense played unbelievably hard. We mixed it up. We went zero a couple plays in a row when we had to. We held up in coverage. We got pressure. We played some zone. We mixed things up.



It's one heck of a stop.

Q. We talked last week about the defense making those big stops after turnovers. Again tonight, and returned it for a touchdown. What does that say about the mentality of that group?

MARK STOOPS: I mean, really special. What more can you say? I mean, tonight was special. That was a thing of beauty defensively.

I mean, we gave up some yards. Again, that's hard. You know what I mean? We got to pick our spots. We could do some things better, but overall just to have that desire, the heart, the guts to stand up and getting seven, eight stops at the end is amazing, especially when we were struggling at that point.

Momentum for our offense had turned a little bit. Long drive, three-and-out, that's tough. We go right back in there and still have the capacity, still have the desire, still have the conditioning to make those stops against Florida seven, eight plays in a row on the goal line. I mean, it's incredible. It's a credit to our team.

Q. Pass defense on the last fourth down stop (indiscernible)?

MARK STOOPS: Well, he's played really well. Gives us some maturity in there. He's made some really athletic plays, tipping the ball, getting the pick, big play. That was him at the end?

Q. Yes.

MARK STOOPS: Good.

Q. There were eight false start penalties on Florida. Have you ever heard this place as loud?

MARK STOOPS: That's incredible. That's a fantastic stat. Thanks again. Thank you. That's pretty awesome (smiling).

No, I can't remember. I'm sure that's frustrating on their end. But I credit our crowd, a home-field advantage. It was really nice to deliver for the fans because we've had things teed up before. I now how it gets, it's hard, we play in a tough league. To have it teed up, have a sellout, to come and deliver, play like that, I'm happy, really am.

Q. You talked a lot about knocking down doors. Does this feel any different?

MARK STOOPS: It's just the next one. I'm sure you'll tell

me about some more (laughter).

Q. (Indiscernible) made one of the biggest plays when he picked up the fumbled snap. What does that tell you about him?

MARK STOOPS: Again, I think he's just going to get better and better. I think he gets so amped up. We had to boot, then the next play he throws the pick. I thought he was a little amped up, missed a couple throws there.

I know he'll put it together, I really do. He cares too much. He's very talented. We're going to get better. I know at times Liam and Will and the offense gets frustrated, but we're going to get there. I'm very confident. They just got to stay the course and keep their head up and stay positive and keep that belief system high because we're doing the right things.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: That's what we saw. He's an unbelievable athlete. I mean, he got that ball, there was no stopping him now. He's a freaky athlete. I mean, he was gone. It didn't surprise me.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: Amazing. No, amazing. Just a great individual effort on the touchdown early. Got us some momentum. He just plays so hard. All his plays, we need him. We'll continue to find ways to get him the ball.

Q. The crowd fed off of energy of Waka Flocka all night. Did the players as well?

MARK STOOPS: I don't know if they saw that or not. I don't know. It was cool having him here. It was fun. We were jamming out in the locker room.

Q. He didn't just come in and do his bit and leave; he was watching.

MARK STOOPS: No, he was in the locker room just now. He was in there.

Q. (Indiscernible) typically where he'd be on that formation or does he...

MARK STOOPS: I think he got the deflection. I think Josh got it, didn't he? Just got the tip. It just bounced his way.

Q. What does a night like tonight do for your program?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

MARK STOOPS: I just hope it propels us, that's all. Just next step. I mean, we're doing a lot of good things. We got to continue to do things. That's what I told the players. Remember how we got here, stay humble, stay hungry, enjoy it but go back to work. We got to go back to work.

I told them that the last two, three weeks when we felt like our performance was good, bad, ugly, whatever anybody thought, I just said, Go back to work. Never apologize for a win. Look at the areas where we can improve and continue to cultivate the good things we are doing and move on.

That's what we'll do. I look forward to another incredible atmosphere next week.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: You think (laughter)? I mean, the only SEC team in the history of college football to be flabbing on that, but that's all right. I do like it. I'd rather stay. I don't want to say anything and have it bite us. We got to come and play good next week. Like I said, we'll enjoy it tonight, but we're ready to go.

Q. You mentioned Will Levis being amped up a couple times. Is that something you're going to address with him?

MARK STOOPS: I talked to him on the sideline tonight. Again, I have confidence. He is who he is. I don't want him to be anything but himself. Just to continue to grow and get better and learn from things.

He's going to be a really good player. I'm going to let Will be Will.

Q. In the past Florida has hurt you with some big plays. Tonight they didn't really do that. What was the key?

MARK STOOPS: You look at it, they had 71 plays to four 45, which is incredible. You hold them to 13 points... It just comes down to, again, some terrific stops. That's really hard to do, especially when we weren't picking up first downs in the second half.

The two long drives at the end with the game on the line, again, the fan base affected both of those drives. It was third-and-one or two, maybe fourth-and-two, they get the off-sides, pre-snap penalty, goes to fourth-and-seven, kick the field goal. That makes a big difference on the next drive. Now they have to get it in. We have seven, eight plays to stop it. Pretty big deal.

Q. Would you like to have the fourth-and-two back?

MARK STOOPS: It's tough. That's a good defense. That's what I told them. They're really well-coached and they're really good. Sure, I mean, wasn't -- in hindsight, we didn't make it. They were stout, they were in there. Later we tried to boot it in a critical moment. They had that covered, too.

They have good guys. They can go out there and pressure you, make you beat them one-on-one and have the edges covered, all the gaps covered, penetration. You're not going to sneak in a boot on them, not when they're playing zero. You got to beat them outside. There's things we can do, and we will, but credit them.

Q. When you talk about all the times you've had it teed up in the past, maybe just missed, anything over the last few years in those situations that you learned?

MARK STOOPS: I don't know specifically. But I think every time you're in those moments, you do grow as an organization, as a program, as a team. Some of these guys weren't even here. But I think overall it does.

It's like the boxers, you know what I mean, just keep on fighting, keep on fighting, keep on. Keep on putting yourself in position, eventually you're going to knock it down.

There's no shortcut. There's no hiding. You just have to be good and do good things. Eventually you're going to get some wins like that. It's not easy. But we'll keep on banging.

Q. Tremendous ball security tonight.

MARK STOOPS: We know we couldn't be sloppy and put the ball on the ground against this team and win. Can't happen. Certainly couldn't happen today. Credit our coaches and our players.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: His ball security was bad, wasn't it (smiling)?

Q. Is it difficult to know when to let him go and when to drop him back?

MARK STOOPS: It is. Remember when Josh was here, some of the coverages he had, too. It just shows his versatility. For us it just keeps people off balance.

The kid's playing, he's not even at 100% yet. He's healthy,



but you could tell. It just takes some time getting the quickness back, just his feet up underneath him. I just credit him for how hard he's playing, coming back off that knee like he is.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK STOOPS: I usually do a pretty good job at interpreting what you say, but not that one (laughter). I love ya. That mask doesn't help.

Q. Do you see this as a breakthrough for the program?

MARK STOOPS: I don't know about a breakthrough.

Q. How do you plan to celebrate?

MARK STOOPS: I wouldn't call it a breakthrough. As I tell the players, I mean this wholeheartedly, we want to play in a lot of big games. You just have to take care of the things that's in front of us.

I mean this, is it's not coach speak. If we do the best we can, do the best way, coach the best way, the results are what they are. We play in a tough league. This is a big step. There's no denying, I'm grateful for our fan base. It's been a long time. We won on the road. But I know beating Florida is special to them. For us it's a big SEC East opponent. It's a big deal. That's all.

I really don't know what I'll do. I'm sure I'll have an adult beverage (laughter).

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