

# CFP First Round: Ohio State vs Tennessee

Saturday, December 21, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Ohio Stadium

## Tennessee Volunteers

Joey Halzle

Tim Banks

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State 42, Tennessee 17

**Q. Tim, why do you think they had such success in the passing game in particular? (Indiscernible)?**

TIM BANKS: Yeah, they're a really good program, a lot of good players. They just really did a good job tonight. They didn't do a ton of things that we necessarily hadn't seen on tape.

Our hats off to those guys, but they did a tremendous job tonight, and obviously it wasn't our best showing.

**Q. Joey, can you talk about the difficulties in the passing game, and did you expect to run Nico as many times as you did?**

JOEY HALZLE: A lot of the runs that Nico ended up doing was just him extending plays on his own. We did have some design quarterback run on the play he scored on and a couple 3rd and shorts.

Yeah, we weren't creating big plays in the pass game, weren't creating big windows. We had difficulty up front. It was just an entire unit where from start to finish it couldn't get anything to pop going right there.

That's why you ended up seeing him running with the ball in his hand a lot.

**Q. For both of you guys, Coach Heupel mentioned losing one-on-ones a little bit tonight. For the offensive line and for the DBs when that happened, what is the message in the middle of the game to keep them engaged and prevent that from happening again?**

TIM BANKS: Yeah, we've played a lot of good football around here, and we've beaten a lot of good teams. You're



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going to see good skill week in and week out. I thought our guys competed all night and gave it their best effort. Just unfortunately we just came up a little bit short tonight.

JOEY HALZLE: Similar answer. You go on the road against good competition, if you're not playing on the right side of the margins, it gets real tough real fast.

Similar to what Coach Banks said, we've played really good defenses in the past. Tonight we just weren't on the right side of those margins and the small details to allow us to make the big plays on the back end.

**Q. Joey, I know you had a couple of your key guys at receiver that were hurt tonight, but when you can't make big plays down the field, either guys aren't getting open or you're not protecting well enough, how much does that hinder what you're trying to do offensively, especially against guys that are this talented?**

JOEY HALZLE: Yeah, it's kind of a sum of all the parts. When we're not creating the explosives, whether it's poor calls or poor execution, whatever that may be, it puts you in a phone booth a little bit. Those guys start teeing off up front.

It's just the entire sum of the entire night is we didn't stretch them enough. We didn't force them to respect us going by them enough to make them change up what they were doing.

When you let them play comfortable, when you let them play in their game plan and don't make them change, it creates long nights like what happened tonight.

**Q. Joey, what do you think contributed, not just tonight, but over the course of the season to sum up the games when you've had a lot of explosive plays in the passing game?**

JOEY HALZLE: Yeah, again, it's never one thing. It's a lot of situations of everyone taking a turn, like where you get somebody open and then maybe you don't win up front and then you're dominating up front, and then you dominate up front and you get open and you miss the throw.



Like if you just take your turn over the course of 65, 70 plays, if 11 guys take their turn one time, that's a big percentage of your plays right there.

So it's about playing -- offensive football is always about playing as a unit. If one guy is off, it ain't going to work. That's what you're fighting, you're clawing, you're competing for all off-season, all week in prep. And yeah, like I said, tonight we weren't on the right side of that.

**Q. Joey, we asked Heup about upgrading personnel this off-season. How much of the plan in terms of protection and receiver needs to be about maximizing Nico next year, adding guys that can help you?**

JOEY HALZLE: You know, I'll let Heup answer that part about the personnel, but as far as -- it goes through your quarterback. That's who it is. When you have a quarterback, that's who it goes through. That's why the guys in the NFL, that's what everything is.

It's about supplying a team around him. If you've got a quarterback that can make it go, our job is to make sure that we have the pieces and the scheme to allow him to be his best.

**Q. Joey, how much did you expect to have Dylan available tonight, and just how much did the game plan change?**

JOEY HALZLE: We knew Dylan wasn't at 100 percent. We knew he was going to go early and he was going to give it a shot. Whenever that guy is not at 100 percent, you know, he's SEC offensive Player of the Year, right, he makes everything go.

So losing him and actually not even having him at full speed was tough. But that's part of the job, is when you're not healthy, when you're not 100 percent, what are you going to do to get the job done. We didn't get it done tonight.

**Q. Without Sampson does it change your game plan or your play calling?**

JOEY HALZLE: It can. We knew he wasn't at 100 percent. We were hopeful he was going to be able to go full speed tonight, and then the other thing is we didn't get him going, too, as much as we would have hoped.

But yeah, whenever you don't have a guy of that caliber, it hurts. It makes it more difficult, yeah.

**Q. Tim, you guys had a couple stops there in the**

**second quarter to kind of get you guys back in the game, then the third quarter you weren't able to sustain on defense. What were the issues to start the third quarter?**

TIM BANKS: Yeah, it's always difficult. We had a couple calls that didn't quite go our way based on the situation. I mean, again, I don't want to be a broken record, but you've just got to take your hat off to Ohio State. They did a tremendous job tonight.

Like I said, I have the utmost faith in our guys, and I'm very proud of what they've done to this point. It's super disappointing. We only got a couple stops. To beat a team of that caliber, we obviously need to play our best game, and unfortunately we didn't do that tonight.

**Q. (Regarding Ohio State controlling the line of scrimmage).**

TIM BANKS: Yeah, I think anytime -- it goes hand in hand, your back and your front, different things you have to do coverage-wise to give a front the best chance to be successful and vice versa. We just weren't able to find that combination tonight to give us a chance to play winning defense?

**Q. I'm curious, how much do you think their success offensively was because of what they did and how much of it was you guys not doing what you're capable of doing?**

TIM BANKS: Yeah, I think the truth always lies somewhere in the middle. You've obviously got to be a defense that doesn't beat themselves. Obviously we're playing great talent.

Obviously we'll evaluate the tape a little bit closer to have a better answer, but I think overall there were some things that we'd like to do better, and unfortunately we didn't.

**Q. You guys both this year had the luxury of a lot of multiyear seniors up front. What's that going to be like, saying goodbye to a lot of friendly faces who played a lot of football around here and just kind of developing again for next year?**

TIM BANKS: Well, for me, I told those guys in the locker room, when a lot of guys decided to leave here when we took this job, those guys stayed. So I'll forever be grateful for that. I love those guys. They gave us everything they had.

Then the class that came right after them, we were still building, and those guys came to be a part of it. We're

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going to miss those guys. It's going to be very hard to replace the leadership that those guys gave us, but we feel really good about some of the young guys that we've brought in and some of the guys that show some promise early in the year. The standard will be the standard. We're excited about the youth that we have.

Yep, we'll miss the leadership, but we've definitely got some guys that are going to pick it up.

JOEY HALZLE: Yeah, so a guy like I see Cooper Mays afterwards. It's like, man, it's going to be weird walking into the facility the next time and him not standing in there. For those guys, when we got here, everybody had the opportunity to leave because with the coaching change and the rules with the portal and everything, and the fact that those guys chose to stay and that they're still here and where they took this program from '21 to '24 where we're in the College Football Playoff. Like, man, the Tennessee fan base should long love that entire group of guys that helped bring this program back to where it is.

As Coach Banks was saying, for the young guys in there, the message is this doesn't happen. Like you don't just get to go to the College Football Playoff. What those guys did to get us here, it's now their time to step in and become those leaders, become the vocal and the physical leaders, become the guys that make the plays. They've been watching for a year or two years and now it's time for them to step up, but the biggest thing is none of this ever just happens.

Nothing in this game is given. Nothing just happens by surprise. Everything is earned. Everything you get and everything you don't get. That's the message moving forward. There's a lot of competition out there now. There's a lot of open spots that are up to be taken. So we should have a really high-end off-season to go get us back to where we want to be.

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