

# CFP First Round: Tulane vs Ole Miss

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Oxford, Mississippi, USA

Vaught Hemingway Stadium

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Coach Pete Golding**

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 41, Tulane 10

PETE GOLDING: Obviously an exciting night for our program, for our fans, and more importantly for our players. They've been through a lot over these last couple of weeks, and it was good just to get back on the grass, you know, at home in front of their fans and get out there and play football, a game that they love.

Didn't play perfect by any means. You know, kind of started pretty slow on both sides of the ball throughout the first quarter, and then came in at halftime. Thought they responded, but we didn't play clean, you know, and our big thing is when guys have the opportunity at this point in the season, they got to take advantage of those.

Then we had some guys late in the game that went in that we need to play a little better.

Super excited for our program. More importantly, for our players to be able to play again. That was the message to them throughout it. You're playing to play again. Don't let this season end.

It's a really good group, a lot of grit, a lot of toughness, that are fun to be around.

So open it up for questions.

**Q. Pete, any update on Lacy?**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, he banged his shoulder up. Obviously he came back into the game and fought through that. We'll address it from here going forward, but he went back in the game, and it's a bruised shoulder.

**Q. Pete, I know you've said you tried not to have this mindset until after the season, but at some point today did it dawn on you that this is your team now, you're the head man of this football team?**



**PLAYOFF  
FIRST ROUND**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, I mean, look, it's our team, but yeah, obviously the ability to make some decisions where before you want to go for it, do you want to punt, do you want to take the points, all those things, things that you've been talking through for years to finally be the last voice, it kind of hit me some.

Then just more the excitement for the players, how they responded. Some of those hugs will get you a little bit, you know. I think there's been so much work to have been done up to this point, you really couldn't take a deep breath.

I think for these players, I just know how it is in the playoffs. If you don't keep them excited to play, working hard, and really focusing on the details, then you're not going to be the last one to win the last game, because there's only going to be one team excited at the end of this thing. We just want to make sure we keep them focused.

But, yeah, it was definitely a couple of times throughout it and obviously the game got to a point to where you could kind of look around at some point, and it was pretty damn cool.

**Q. Pete, you've kind of been putting the spotlight on the players. There was six minutes to go and then with 50 seconds to go, the crowd is chanting your name. There's something about you that the fan base has gravitated towards. Do you kind of know why? Have you felt that?**

PETE GOLDING: Well, we just had a home playoff game in Oxford for the community, okay (smiling). We had a decent signing day, depending upon the terms of it and how it was done. We just won the game.

I'm well aware how the other side goes when you don't win the game. So I've been on both sides of that.

No, I think I've been able to invest a lot in this place over three years, made a lot of really good relationships with a lot of people outside of this building, and they know where my heart is at this place, and I know what these kids mean to me.



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No, it was awesome, but I'm well aware those chants can go the other way if you start losing football games, as it should be.

**Q. You said that you were going to be the defensive coordinator today. Obviously a great performance by that defense. How was it being the head coach and, of course, being the DC, but another big day for the defense?**

PETE GOLDING: I think it was a team effort. I'm talking about as far as attacking the game, the game plan going in, you know, what's the field position-wise and what were two downs and what were going to be two downs, whether we're up and whether we're going to kick, those meetings with Austin and Joe Judge and Charlie throughout the week.

Once you get to the game, there's not a lot of decisions have you to make. You've done your research and you know here's the situation, here's the point differential.

The only thing for me is I think momentum is very important in games, and you have to keep it, and sometimes you've got to go get it. The book doesn't always tell you that. Some of those tonight weren't exactly by the book whether to get the momentum or to keep it.

It's good. We got a lot of help. Joe Judge obviously is a big part of that. Getting Austin back has been a big piece of that from the GM role, too, from the analytical side. It was definitely a team effort going into it.

**Q. How would you describe the process of transitioning out of the chaos of the change to getting everybody sort of back in the building and focused on the job ahead?**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, I don't think it was very hard at all, because I mean, it would be one thing, no disrespect, if this was the Pop-Tart Bowl or something like that, that (expletive) would have been really hard.

I mean, this is the playoffs. People start talking about, Are they going to play, Are they not going to play? What are we talking about? These kids have gone 11-1 up to this point and had a home playoff game, first time in the history of the program. These dudes want to compete.

Just like I told them, they don't care who runs them out the tunnel. That's the truth. They care about their preparation. They care about their plan. Are they getting developed? Are you increasing their value by coaching them really hard and holding them accountable?

The head coaching piece is developing the staff, creating the culture, all those things that are offseason summer-based. By this point in the season, right, the thing is running the way it should. You just got to keep it on the tracks.

There are some things that we can add to it based on experiences that we've had and getting a feel of the team, and there are some things that we can take away that I don't feel like impact winning or losing that I'll let the team vote on, whether we want to do that to a certain degree. Then there are some things that I just believe in, and maybe he didn't.

We're not coming in and reinventing it at this point in the year, and that's what I said the whole time. This reminds me of the COVID season when coach -- I mean, we played the Iron Bowl. Coach ain't there. He's got COVID. Sark ran them out of the tunnel. We still beat the (expletive) out of Auburn. I mean it didn't matter, right, because at that point of the year it was already in place, going the way it was supposed to.

I'm going to work on the cussing thing. My bad (smiling).

**Q. That's two games with Tulane that you guys have held them on fourth downs. I think 0 for 7 over those two games. What's been the key to winning those situations?**

PETE GOLDING: Big guys up front. You know, obviously the plan of what they've done, being able to counter it and having a good plan is important. But at that point it's about getting off, striking a block, getting off, and tackling the guy with the ball. Our guys were better than theirs up front. So I think that's something in this game that we had to win at those moments.

Obviously a lot of their running game is not affecting A to A, but at that down in distance it is normally. Once you put Zxavian Harrison there and the Will Echoles of the world and the Kam Franklins and JB's and all those guys, my money is on them. I thought they came up big just like they did the game before.

**Q. Charlie and the offensive staff have had a lot going on the past couple of weeks. How did you notice them handling the game plan and everything this week?**

PETE GOLDING: I had zero concern with Charlie Weis calling this game for this one reason... Charlie Weis could not afford not to call a hell of a game, all right? All he's heard his whole life: Lane Kiffin's offense, Lane Kiffin's offense, Lane Kiffin's offense. This is his one opportunity



for people to realize Charlie, Charlie Weis, calls the offense, just like he's done all year, and he did a great job of tonight.

I had no concern on that, because the last thing Charlie wanted to do was come out here and lay an egg because then whose offense is it? You would be writing about it. Whose offense is it? That's right. You can say his name. Whose offense is it? No, no, you just said Kiff's. Yeah, yeah, because he didn't score any points, so Kiff wasn't here. Now, oh, Charlie didn't call the plays.

Charlie does a great job. There was zero concern with him. Like I said from the very beginning, he didn't get on that plane without any doubt that he was going to coach us in the game, because that's who he is. So he did a great job.

**Q. When it was 14-3 and you had fourth and four down there, and you decided to kick the field goal, was that an easy decision, hard decision?**

PETE GOLDING: Because the book is going to say it's two possessions still, all right, but I coach defense. It's two touchdowns. That's different for me.

At that point it was keeping the momentum of the game, and at that point we had just stopped them on fourth down. This is where I'm different than the book. So we just got an extra possession that we shouldn't have got because they should have punted, all right, so we got that extra possession. We've got to come away with points at that point to keep the momentum of the game, so that's why we did it.

**Q. Pete, without using any crude language, how nice is it going to be for the next couple of weeks to hear it's just going to be about Georgia and Ole Miss and nobody else?**

PETE GOLDING: We'll see. Y'all control that (smiling).

**Q. Trinidad got banged up, but then came back in. Then he was efficient all day. What kind of was he dealing with? And, also, his game again, just to be able to produce like he has ever since he got in the start?**

PETE GOLDING: I walked over there when he was on the field laying down. I was, like, Look, dude, you don't have to do this for attention. You got your own flags. You got your own song they play in the stadium.

No, I think he got a little bit banged up, but that dude is tough as nails. I mean, you are talking about a kid that

came from D2 to the SEC that was viewed that had a starting quarterback. It wasn't like everybody didn't think Austin was the future. He knew that coming into it.

So to come with one season left to come into this conference with a guy that's been in the system just tells you who he is. Worked his butt off, and obviously Austin got banged up in order for him to get in, and then knew he wasn't going to lose it. So you weren't keeping that kid out of this game, no way.

**Q. What does this performance say? I know you said it wasn't perfect, but it was a convincing win, and Tulane had been peaking lately. Just about the ability of everybody to compartmentalize when there is, you know, some uncertainty about the future, and you're having to work on the offensive staff at the same time as preparing and everything like that?**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, I think at this point everybody wants to increase their value, whether you are a coach or whether you are a player. So if that's a senior, they want to increase the value of their first contract and get drafted higher. If you are an underclassman, the way the portal is, they want to increase the value of their contract, whether that's staying here or being more marketable somewhere else.

So from the very beginning it was in everybody's best interest in this building to coach really well and to play really well, because there was going to be no negative to come from that. Not only for them from an individual, for us as a team, but more importantly, for us as a university.

It's a pretty easy sell. You don't have to sell that. That's just common sense. Go play really well in a big game, in a playoff game, right, to have the opportunity to go play in another really big game, and the better you play in big games, the more money you're going to make, whether you are a player or a coach. That's been proven.

Then when you got a group of guys that we have that actually enjoy playing together and that they don't want it to end, and we talked about what's the legacy that you want to create for this team, and that's what I told them last night. This is going to be the last opportunity this team, right, this team right now, gets to play in Vaught Hemingway. It's the last time.

Those are memories they're going to remember for the rest of their life, and they're going to come back as that playoff team that went undefeated at home in 2025, which is really special in its own sense.

Then I pulled the seniors up last night. Those guys, I've



been here for three years with these seniors that have been here the last three years. They've lost one game at home in three years. Three years, right? That's a credit to our fan base. Obviously, more importantly to our players.

They create an environment in that place that's magical. It's awesome. Our kids respond to that, and they enjoy that. So they were going to leave that out there. We wanted them to go out there and create one more opportunity for us to play together, and more importantly, their last memory in the Vaught is a W, and it was.

**Q. Do you have an update on Wydett Williams or Caleb Odom? How are those guys doing?**

PETE GOLDING: I don't. I don't. Hopefully we'll get one after this.

**Q. Pete, you talked about wanting to kind of keep the team on the tracks, but that you would allow them to vote on some things they might want to change. What might have been the biggest change that you or the team decided to make leading up to this game?**

PETE GOLDING: Have you been in this room before? What used to be right there? What used to be right there? Basketball goal. We got rid of the basketball goal first. We had a basketball goal in here. Does that make sense? They got rid of the basketball goal first.

The other thing is from a uniform policy, right, it's a Nike team. We've had a cleat policy, and I'm big on uniformity and all those type of things, but I did allow them as long as it's team colors, we asked the leadership council, they can wear whatever cleat that's issued by Nike as long as we can see the swoosh regardless of the color. So that was a little bit of their freedom.

It's amazing, right, messing with these kids these days of all the shoes that they have of how important this place erupted when I allowed them to be able to do that. That was voted on by the leadership council. Some of those tonight didn't have the exact same shoes on. Didn't change the uniform.

For me as a player, I didn't like the forced fun aspect of getting teams together. What I mean by that, like, hey, we keep you up here a lot. Now you're off, but now we're going to make a movie night. The idea is to have camaraderie and get them together. Like, they don't want to come together when they have time off.

We got them to make a list of things that they would want to do throughout the week and try to get them involved, because that was a big piece, and that two-week period I

called every player in. I was, like, Hey, give me one thing, the one thing, that you love the most about Ole Miss, and then I called them in and say, Hey, give me the one thing that you would change first in this program if you were the head coach. So we kind of built a list, and we've kind of gone through some of those things for the players and trying to address some of them while we can while they're still here, because some of those guys are seniors.

A lot of those things that are on the list that you are talking about were created from the players. It wasn't something that I came in and just said, Hey, I don't like this, I don't like that. I think right now it's about keeping the routine the same for the players that they like. There's some things that they don't like that we're going to do because it's discipline and it's the right thing to do, and we're not leaving that up to them. But some of the things that don't matter, right, those are the things that we're talking about.

**Q. You mentioned earlier in the month that you just kind of weren't sleeping because there was so much to do. I'm curious, how are you feeling, and how are you? Are you sleeping now? Do you sleep when you're dead? When does that happen?**

PETE GOLDING: I feel amazing. No, yeah, I get some sleep, yeah.

**Q. What will you remember most about today?**

PETE GOLDING: Probably the players' smiles. In the fourth quarter when the lights went down and they're walking by, there's very few games, especially in the playoffs, to where you get that feeling during the game. A lot of that time obviously is in the locker room once the game is done, because it's a different type of game and the momentum of the game.

To know what they've been through and know the direction that they could have gone, but to be able to see that and see the fulfillment within them for their hard work and everything that they did when they didn't have to, it made sense to me.

It's the playoff. You have to do that. They're still 18 to 21 years old, and they came here from some guys that looked like that left them, and they were able to battle through that. For them to get the outcome that they deserve was awesome. I would say it was the smiles of the players probably in the fourth quarter.

**Q. You guys came out jumping immediately. 14 points, basically two perfect drives to start. How critical was that to get the fans continuously in it? Then you guys did it again in the second half. How**





**much did the fans help you guys today, and how critical was your start to the game?**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, I mean, I think they're a huge impact, especially early in games. That's why we're a proponent for taking the ball, especially at home, right, because the crowd is juiced up, and we're rolling. There's energy in it and all those type of things.

We're a really good first drive offense when that script gets going and they have a good idea of the game plan and all those type of things. I think it's really important to start fast. Obviously it helps you from a defensive standpoint as well.

I did not think we executed very well at all on defense tonight. I know the scoreboard shows something different, but we've got to execute better on defense on a more consistent basis.

I am proud of their effort, and obviously keeping them out of the end zone, which is a big piece, but we've got to really improve on some third downs and create some negative yardage plays on base down to get them in some third and longs, but we're going to have to do that next.

But, no, it was good to start fast. The fans were a huge piece of that. I think the momentum building up to it was my concern for the players. It's good for everybody else to be excited. It's good for you to be able to execute because when you execute, they get excited. That's how it works. You execute, they're excited.

And so making sure we're preparing the right way and practicing the right way because there's no doubt they're going to be excited, but you worry about emotion becoming emotional. But they're focused, and we got to clean some things up, but super proud of them.

**Q. For a game like this, going forward, how does a College Football Playoff, winning program now, game change just the trajectory when it comes to things like recruiting or just the vibes around what this Ole Miss program is forever going forward?**

PETE GOLDING: You can stop talking about what you're going to do, and that was the one thing that was really a struggle for me when I first came just from the defensive side of the ball. Everything that I was showing them was coming from places that I had been. Hey, we're going to do this. We're going to do this. Well, that sounds good until you don't do it.

I think now having done it, and that was our thing on defense. We were going to lead the SEC in defense. Well, we did that last year, right? We don't have to say that

in recruiting. Now that's the expectation. We're pissed off this year because we're not.

And so I think it's going to be the same thing for the next recruiting class, the expectation is to make the playoff every year. That's why Keith Carter invests the way he does and runs the program the way he does. That's the expectation.

That's what was unique about this group, because we felt like last year we screwed that up. We had a talented enough team to be able to make the playoff, and we didn't.

All these guys that came into this team, their expectation was to make a playoff, and that legacy has come true for them. I think that's going to be for every class coming forward the expectation of where this program is. It's a top-5 program in the country, and that's your expectation every year.

**Q. I want to ask you one penalty for five yards, how proud are you about the discipline of your team and them being able to be laser-locked focused and taking care of the 1-11 on both sides of the ball?**

PETE GOLDING: I think a lot of credit goes to the coaching staff going into it on both sides of the ball. We talk about undisciplined penalties, okay, and non-aggressive penalties. That's one thing as a head coach for me, there's some aggressive penalties that are going to occur throughout games, and it's a step. Is he out? Is he not? And the guy runs right through him on the sideline. That's an aggressive penalty to me. At times you got to be smart and you see them in the white. So there's some of those, and there's some of the hands to the face up front, and then sometimes, yeah, we got to get our hands down. Those are aggressive penalties.

The non-aggressive penalties are the false starts and the offsides, the dead ball penalties, the personal fouls. We can't have that. You can't have that in the playoffs. It's hard enough to beat good football teams, much less when you give them free hidden yardage.

It's been a big emphasis, and it's been a big emphasis all year. It always has. We show them the penalty report every week. They know the refs. We show them film on Friday nights of what they like to call, how do they call it and all those type of things.

That's the discipline piece for the players, and that's to their credit, and the credit to other coaches holding them accountable throughout the week. That doesn't just happen on Saturday. That happens Monday through Friday. But we got a really good group of kids that do



things right.

**Q. You talked about earlier this week about how your family is excited about this game. To walk off the field winners today with them, how was that moment for you?**

PETE GOLDING: I was just asking them where their sister was. No. No, it was awesome, man. My boys love football more than anything, and I've dragged them about to every state. They've got a lot invested in this sport too and this place as well. So it was super special.

**Q. Pete, you talked about it earlier in the week, that next-man-up mentality. Guess what we saw, we saw Logan Diggs come in and Austin come in. It wasn't perfect. Mistakes were made, but we also saw them execute. What can you say about what you saw from those specific guys that had to come in, and were you impressed with what you say?**

PETE GOLDING: Yeah, obviously we'll evaluate the tape. To the naked eye, I felt like they came in and responded the right way and gave us a spark and ran the ball well and had some good flows and extended some plays.

And then I think there's going to be some truth to this film session tomorrow night as well. A lot of other guys had opportunities late in this game and didn't play well, and that's something that we really focused on these last couple of weeks.

Somebody sitting in these seats that hasn't been a starter is going to need to make a big play in a big game for us to win the games we need to, and some of those guys weren't ready. So that's going to be a reality check for some guys tomorrow night, but other guys took advantage of it.

**Q. With a historic victory like this and now punctuating an amazing season here at Vaught Hemingway, how long do you let this win linger before you turn around and address the one team that has given you an L this season in UGA?**

PETE GOLDING: We're going to enjoy it tonight, and then we'll be back to work at 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

**Q. Your initial thoughts on coming to the Sugar Bowl, a place a lot of your fans can drive to and the support you should get there?**

PETE GOLDING: I'm most excited. My brother had his second child last week, William, that I have not seen yet, and they live in New Orleans. So I get to go see my nephew. I've got a niece, but this is my first nephew, and

I'm super pumped up about.

I was born and raised in Hammond. Obviously recruiting-wise we like to take a five-hour geographical region to recruit from. We have a lot of guys from Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Alabama area. I think that's really good for our players and then obviously our fans. We got a big Jackson group, south group, and the coast and all that.

I think New Orleans is a place everybody enjoys going to visit, and it's a great venue. The Sugar Bowl does an unbelievable job. We've been there several times at several different places, so we're going to be challenged in a good Georgia team, but it's a great venue, a great place to play, and good food.

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