

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Georgia vs Cincinnati

Monday, December 28, 2020

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Mike Denbrock

## Desmond Ridder

Cincinnati Bearcats



It would probably bode well for us if we had another 30-day layoff just to get ready for a lot of the things that they do and how they do it. But it's a great challenge obviously to match up in any way against this group. But we're going to do the best we can when we get our opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: We're back with offensive coordinator Mike Denbrock and quarterback Desmond Ridder.

We'll take a statement from coach.

MIKE DENBROCK: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the offensive side of the ball for the Bearcats. We're really excited about the opportunity to play in this game. The players have worked their tails off since early August, even July, to kind of put themselves in this opportunity.

It's obviously a reward for a very good hard-fought season, to put themselves in this position. We're awful proud of them. We're awful proud of the progress we've made offensively. We're hoping to get our opportunity to show what we're capable of doing when we get an opportunity to go against what we feel like is by far the most talented and deepest defense we've faced this season.

We look forward to watching Desmond and a bunch of the other guys have a big day on Friday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead with questions.

**Q. Coach, you just kind of mentioned it, but looking at their defense on film, there's a lot of talk about difference in recruiting rankings, things like that. Is there immediate talent or size/speed difference that jumps out based on who you guys have faced so far this year?**

MIKE DENBROCK: There's an immediate everything that you mentioned. Big, physical football players that can run, tackle very well in space, contest everything. Really, really aggressive with their scheme, what they do. On top of that, they're incredible with how multiple they are in the different looks that they give you, the different things you have to prepare for.

**Q. What have you seen from your guys so far in these couple practices that you've been able to get in that leads you to game planning this Georgia defense, trying to solve the Rubik's cube that is a team that does so many things well?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Yeah, I mean, I think the first thing is we're excited to be in this game, excited to have the opportunity to play it. With all the uncertainty of this season, I don't think any of us knew where it was going to end or what opportunities were going to be available to us as a football team.

To have this incredible opportunity to play against what I would consider a blue blood program, somebody that year in, year out does it as good as anybody does it in college football, to take our football team down there and have an opportunity to play against them and use it as a growing tool, use it as a measuring stick, as a way for us to put our program on display I think is something that is very exciting to the players and everybody in our program.

**Q. Desmond, bigger picture question here. What led you to become a quarterback? How in general did you start at that position?**

DESMOND RIDDER: I would definitely say it started when I was younger. I played a lot of sports growing up. Baseball was one of them. I was always out in the backyard tossing either a football or baseball. Really what ultimately got me into football, one of my best friends was playing. My dad convinced me to play. Once I got there, I was just pre-practice throwing around the football. They were like, Hey, you play baseball? I was like, Yeah. Okay, let's put a football in your hands.

That's about it.

**Q. Desmond, you can't really do a lot till you get out**



**there and make pre-snap reads, as far as watching Georgia on film, what are some things that jump out at you about this defense?**

DESMOND RIDDER: Like coach said, they're big, they're fast, they're strong, physical, and they're smart. Their lengthy on the outside. They play smart ball. If they make a mistake, they're going to be able to cover like anyone else, make up ground. They're big up front. They like to win. Their backers are smart, physical players. They like to fill gaps. They cover ground and play football.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk about the SMU game, how the offense seemed to jump-start after that. What do you feel was your best individual performance so far this season and why?**

DESMOND RIDDER: I would definitely say either SMU or Memphis just from an execution standpoint. One of the main things we pride on offense is executing, finishing plays, drives, finishing games. That was one thing we did I feel like from start to finish, was finish the drive, finish the game.

**Q. Coach, in what way does Georgia getting No. 99 back impact the game from your perspective?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I mean, he's a huge disruptive force. He's not the only one, but certainly the way he goes about his business. He's great with his hands, he's good at getting off double-teams and splitting double-teams, making it very hard on what you're trying to accomplish just because he's so disruptive in what they're doing in their scheme.

**Q. Desmond, it was asked of Coach Fickell earlier about a lot of teams have had opt-outs, whole teams. You have been able to hold together all year. From a player's perspective, what has that been like or say for you guys as a group to stay together? What have the talks been like as far as everybody being able to stay together to this point?**

DESMOND RIDDER: It's been a crazy year with COVID and everything. COVID really is the only other reason that people would opt out other than declaring for the draft. It's something we haven't seen in previous years.

But it really just shows our true culture as a team, how we can stay together as a team, what we've worked for. We know we want to achieve one goal. We're going to need everyone to do that. Everyone staying together, be on one team. It's what Coach Fickell has preached since he got here and what he'll continue to preach till he leaves.

**Q. Probably too soon for this. Have you put any thought into what your plans are after this season draft-wise or otherwise or is it too soon for that?**

DESMOND RIDDER: Too soon.

**Q. Desmond, if you look from last year, losing Mike, Josiah, two of the biggest pieces on offense, who do you feel has stepped up this year to allow you guys to become such a complete team on the offensive side?**

DESMOND RIDDER: I think everyone, all around the ball. It starts with the five guys up front. We've had a shuffle up front, going with guys that have just started, one game with James Hudson at left tackle, Harper got some time last year at right tackle.

The three in the middle, other than Vincent McConnell, they haven't really got much snaps over time, but they've been playing really well for us. Haven't allowed very much pressure, very many sacks. They're stepping up big-time.

You have guys like Josh Whyle and Leonard Taylor, Bruno Labelle, who stepped up and made big plays for us, fill the gaps, catch balls. Everyone outside. Michael Young, Alec Pierce, all those guys stepped up big for us. We can give the ball off to Jerome Ford or Gerrid Doaks, let them go make carries.

It is a team effort and everyone around us make plays.

**Q. Coach, given your background at Notre Dame, what is your perspective of them getting in the Playoff and you guys not as an undefeated team?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I'll leave that. That's a Coach Fickell question. I'll leave that to Coach Fickell and some of the other powers that be in college football. I'm just trying to get ready to face an incredible opponent on Friday.

**Q. When you're preparing for a team, watching a defense for the first time, what are the first things you look for?**

DESMOND RIDDER: Size, speed. Look at their DBs, see how they cover, see how they play against press, how they play off, just tendencies, just see how they fly to the ball, see what type of team they are, see if they're going to go from whistle to whistle, like coach says, A to B. See how fast they fly around the ball.

Whatever you see on film, you're probably going to get something different on Friday, Saturday, not just from the actual play of their game, but just how physical they actually play. That would be one thing.

**Q. What jumps out about Georgia when you say that?**

LUKE FICKELL: They're big, fast, strong. We're going up against one of the big guys in the country. We're going to see and feel that unlike we have all this season.

**Q. Coach, a little bit about Dan Lanning and Kirby. I know you have talked about Georgia's physique, speed. In terms of what they like to do scheme-wise, I know they are multiple, but as far as things you know you're going to get from Georgia, what would you put on that list?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Yeah, I mean, I think number one, they do a really incredible job of trying to scheme you and take away what you do well. Their goal is to eliminate that from what you have on your menu to do. They're going to start there.

Whatever tendencies you have offensively, whatever things that maybe you've used a little too much or done a little too much, they're going to make sure they've got answers for it. Not just one answer, but they're going to have answers to your answer.

This is a game going against those two great coaches in particular, Coach Smart obviously from his well-chronicled history of being a great defensive coordinator and running great defenses.

We've got to have just as many answers as they've got to what we're doing. We've got to have just as many adjustments to kind of tweak our game plan as the game is going along. When they make a chess move, we've got to be able to make a chess move. When they do something to take something away, we've got to do the best that we can to exploit what they're trying to take away, maybe go the other way or whatever it happens to be.

Answers to their answers is a huge piece of it. The game is going to flow. We're going to have to adjust. We know that going in. Just having a plan if they do take some of the things that we're really good at doing away from us, what do we do then. That's what I'm spending time on. You can tell by the bags under my eyes. That's what I'm spending most of my days and nights trying to make sure we have answers for what they're doing.

**Q. How much of a bonus is it having a guy like Desmond?**

MIKE DENBROCK: It's a huge piece of it for us. Obviously, Des has made incredible plays for us all year, whether that's with his arm or with his legs. Getting out of

the pocket, being able to make some plays at the quarterback position, being mobile, I think is a big piece of the puzzle against this defense. I think it's got to be part of keeping the football and moving the football and being effective.

Everything that we do offensively runs through Des. He knows that. I think we've got to just make sure we're doing a good job not only of using him when we need to, but we've also got to protect him and give him an opportunity to make some plays down the field with his arm.

**Q. Desmond, when you think about making it through a season with COVID, what has been the biggest adjustment?**

DESMOND RIDDER: The testing, that's almost every day. That kind of gets into a routine, a little bit of a habit. But honestly I'd say the biggest thing with us is doing that socially distant. We talk about being a team, being as one. Part of that is just the locker room, the brotherhood that you create within the locker room.

Unfortunately with COVID, we're not able to have everyone in the locker room, all 121 guys all packed up in a big space, sharing those times together you would in a locker room.

Instead we have at least four to give different locker rooms where guys are spread out in that we've been doing all season to keep everyone socially distant. I don't want to say we lost our brotherhood, but it definitely makes it tougher for us to become true brothers, just learn everyone from inside-out.

**Q. Georgia is always seen as one of the top defensive units in the country. You've talked about why. How much of it do you look at it as a personal challenge to put yourself up against one of the best defenses in the country?**

DESMOND RIDDER: I would say a huge challenge. They talk about us as big guys versus little guys. We always have to prove everyone wrong. We go out and play with a chip on our shoulder every game. That won't change this game.

But we're going to go out and play football. Doesn't matter who it's against, where it's at. Once the ball is down, we're going to go play.

**Q. Coach, you have no impact on what the broader discussion or talk is about your team. There's always talk about more complete teams. How do you feel the success Desmond and you as an offense have had this**



**season has impacted the broader national perspective on Cincinnati football?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I hope it enhances the discussion about our football program. I think it has to a certain extent.

I think there's much work to be done, but I love the improvements we've made on the offensive side of the ball. I feel like we're much more of a complete football team than we've been the past couple years. We've got the ability to throw the ball effectively. We can run it effectively. We can be multiple in what we do offensively. That's obviously kick-started with the work that the guys have done up front, being able to more than hold their own at the line of scrimmage.

It extends through the changes that we've made in the wide receiver room and the development of other players along our offensive unit. Opportunities have come along and guys have taken advantage of them. Nobody is a greater example of that than Desmond Ridder.

We're just excited for our chance.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys.

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