

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Georgia vs Cincinnati

Tuesday, December 29, 2020

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Todd Monken

JT Daniels

Georgia Bulldogs



THE MODERATOR: First up today will be offensive coordinator Todd Monken and quarterback JT Daniels.

We'll go straight to questions.

Q. Coach, I'll come out hot today for you. Can you talk about the weeks following JT getting cleared, what you were looking for as far as him getting game ready, the decision to wait till after the Florida game for the opportunity.

TODD MONKEN: We could spend a half hour to an hour really discussing what all goes into the decisions at any position to play guys.

Obviously I will just talk about JT in terms of how he handled, first of all, our recruiting process to get him here, how excited he was to be a Georgia Bulldog. The pandemic obviously was a setback in terms of his rehab. Getting him here was probably the best thing we could do. He can speak a little bit more to him.

All he did was work his rear-end off to try to get healthy, to learn the offense. He's a rare individual in terms of loving football and studying the game. He didn't get his opportunity early on, he can speak to, again, his health. He was eventually healthy, but he requested to go down to the other end and continue to work.

Obviously you can't give everybody reps. What he did is continued to work and compete. When his opportunity came, he took advantage of it. Obviously there's a number of things, I'll be 55 in February, that I will look back on and think I would have done, should have, could have, would have maybe done differently. There's no sense in looking back on that.

The moment JT played and prepared, it was time to move forward. I think he's done a great job not only for his opportunity but then since then.

Q. How much have you guys kind of learned about each other over these past, what, four to six weeks? How much better do you know each other, know what you do well, know what you want to do?

TODD MONKEN: I think there's a part of any relationship, I do think right away when we met there was a connection there in terms of what we were looking for and what he was looking for moving forward. I think that was a really good start.

You don't know anybody when you're in the courtship stage. Obviously I'm different than what I might have been for a few weeks trying to recruit him than when he gets here. Good and bad. Some better, probably some worse.

From JT's end of it, I'll just speak from my end of it, one thing about it is he's a sponge. He loves to be coached, loves to have the answers, which is a huge start at the quarterback position. There's a lot of things you can do with JT that you can keep it as quarterback control because he's going to study the film, he's going to want to know the answer. You don't have to tell him everything. You don't have to look to the sideline and change the play. He can do that on his own. He embraces that challenge of being in control.

That is stuff to being an NFL quarterback, the quarterback being in control. It's been great. From the get-go it was. The amount of work that JT is willing to put in to be the player he wants to be. Very few people have a love of the process of playing the game of football like JT does.

JT DANIELS: Obviously we speak the same language, especially in terms of football. It's something that I learn more as the season goes on. But even when I wasn't playing, I was still on the sideline with Coach Buster during the game. I was hearing all the play calls. Started learning more and more how he thinks.

It's something that I got to learn originally when we were on Zoom calls when I was getting recruited here. We used to watch film, do whatever we could through transfer portal rules. I think it's just grown and developed.

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At this point there are times where I'll get the formation signaled in, I will know exactly what he's calling. The more I learn about him, the way he calls the game, the more time we spend together, it just grows and gets better, and we have a better understanding.

TODD MONKEN: It was hard at the beginning because we were building what we want to do offensively. Without a spring, it's hard to put together what we want to do from different places I've been in the staff collectively. You're going through things but there's no guarantee. What we're doing today could have been completely different than what we were introducing in May. It just is.

I think we're only going to get better and get on the same page more and more during the off-season and 2021.

Q. JT, I remember you were talking about doing all the Zoom calls, all the coaches around the country, your background as somebody that studies football is documented all the way back to sixth grade. You talked to a lot of offensive gurus, probably could have played anywhere in the country. What was it about Monken that made you know it was worth traveling across the country to play for him?

JT DANIELS: There were definitely a lot of great offensive minds I was able to speak to. There was definitely an instant connection. The thing I tried to do with most coaches was see how they call games, take me through the offense you run, your kind of philosophy.

There was an instant connection as soon as I watched the first game of Coach Monk on I think my first Zoom call with him. It was just something that he sees the field very similar to how I see the field. I think we both have very similar kind of philosophy for how to attack a defense. It was something that I knew was exactly what was best for me.

Q. Todd, you alluded to 2021. When you look at the progress the offense has made as the season has gone along, where do you see it going with the number of returners that could be coming back for next season?

TODD MONKEN: Well, it's exciting. When I first got here and I saw some of the young skill players, some of the freshmen wideouts, the backs we had, I think we have a chance to be really good on offense. I don't know when, when it all comes together as a staff, when do I do it better for our players, when do our guys mature. George is still a young player as well. When those guys start to mature a little bit.

But we are excited about not only the guys that will be playing on Friday but the young players we have, especially at the skill positions. As we're able to move forward, a guy like JT, who is certainly capable of distributing the ball, understanding where we want to go with the football.

It's an exciting time, especially for me. Hopefully we'll have a chance to have a legit off-season, be able to study what we did, what the difference is that we want to change as we move forward.

College football is different than NFL. There is a lot of differences that I think we'll continue to build off of and develop who we are as we keep moving forward.

JT DANIELS: Yeah, there is a lot of talent on the roster. There's guys, as fans, not many have seen yet. People have seen Arian Smith make one catch, Jermaine is growing a lot. You have a whole young group of O-linemen that work every day. I've got to see them grow, guys like Sedrick Van Pran, see how they attack the game.

I think you have a really good class of young guys that aren't just talented but are also guys that enjoy the game of football. They show up every day with a good attitude. They're here to learn and get better. It's something good to see, something I think you'll get to see as they grow. You'll see a lot of it next year.

Q. JT, did you fly out here or drive? When you did, coming along the way, what was some of the stuff you were thinking about? What was that trip like?

JT DANIELS: I got here in June. I flew out here and I slept the whole plane ride, so I couldn't really tell you.

Q. What was your immediate reaction two, three weeks in?

JT DANIELS: Two to three weeks in? One, I think as soon as I got here just driving around, you see a lot of Georgia everywhere. That was from Atlanta all the way into Athens. Everywhere you go is Georgia, everything is football here. Something I instantly fell in love with.

I think the environment of the just entire state of Georgia, and this is my first time in the state of Georgia, it's something that fits me really well. There's so much support and community around Georgia football as a whole. It was something that instantly grabbed my attention, something that I instantly fell in love with.

Q. Todd, when the story of your first season at



Georgia is written, how much did Jamie Newman's opt-out decision affect what you planned to do? With everything that happened this year, including no spring practice, the QB situation, has the offense you envisioned when you came here been different than what you envisioned?

TODD MONKEN: First, let's start with Jamie.

Not much in terms of changing. At the time when Jamie was practicing, we were still in competition. There were certain things we were doing with guys that were a little bit more athletic that we probably don't do nearly as much now with JT.

It's hard to say what you envisioned. Obviously it was tough without having spring, without really the preparation you'd like. But at the end of the day no one really gives a shit. We're in a get-it-done business. There's a lot of other teams that lose players, that didn't have a spring, changed coaches, didn't have as good of players as we have. Everybody has their own issues they've got to deal with.

Yeah, there's certain things I wish I could have done better, that I would have coached better, I would have communicated better, I would have made better decisions on game day or during the week in terms of preparation. That will never change. It hasn't as long as I've been coaching.

Obviously we certainly had our opportunities. At Alabama we certainly did. We certainly had our opportunities at Florida, and didn't take advantage of it. Just speaking offensively.

I am excited about the guys we do have. I really, really enjoy our staff. I think our staff does a great job collectively in the areas that they have in terms of game planning, in terms of bringing ideas to the table. This is never a one-man show. It never can be. Coaches want to be involved in terms of their areas, contributing to the game plan. I just happen to be the one that finalizes things and gets to call it.

I'm really excited about our staff moving forward and our young players.

Q. JT, can you talk about your development since taking over at quarterback in terms of how much of the playbook has been made open to you? How much more freedom have you been given now that you have had the extra bowl practice?

JT DANIELS: I wouldn't say there's too much extra in terms of freedom. It was something that instantly Coach

Monken had told me on my first call that made me want to come here, is that you don't have to develop the ability to do that. We want quarterbacks that can play the game, get us in the right play before the play is snapped.

Every quarterback here since the offense was installed, we have the ability to check something or if we're in a certain play and there's something stopping that play, get us in the right play. It's always been there. I wouldn't say there's anything that's too new in terms of that, what we're doing. But it's something that we've always been able to do, get us in the right play. We have the freedom to do that before any play.

Q. JT, I've heard a lot of talk about 2021. What are your plans for next year? Are you coming back? Coach Monken, how big would it be for your offense, how much would it mean for what you want to do to have JT come back?

JT DANIELS: Yeah, it's not something I've honestly given too much thought to. This year is going by fast. I'm focused week-to-week. South Carolina, I was focused on South Carolina. Missouri, I was focused on Missouri. Vandy, I was focused on Vandy until that was no more. Since then I haven't gone home since I've been in Georgia. I was here through Christmas, here through Thanksgiving. I've been here getting ready for the bowl since that Vandy week was over.

I really haven't given too much thought to anything. This week is Cincinnati. Once the off-season comes, I'll be thinking about the off-season.

TODD MONKEN: Very similar-wise, I think our guys have done a pretty good job of focusing on the task at hand, which is the game this Friday, enjoying one more game together with this team. We have a number of guys that it's going to be their last game as a Georgia Bulldog. Obviously it's been a different year in terms of just off-season, travel, how we go about things. I'm just excited about one more opportunity together with this group come Friday.

Q. Coach Monken, can you tell us a little bit about what you expect to get out of Brock Vandagriff now that he won a state title, join your quarterback room? JT, you basically committed to Georgia sight unseen? You'd never been to the school, just decided that's where you're going, showed up with a backpack and clothes?

JT DANIELS: Coach Smart met my parents before he met me.

Q. How did you go about that?

JT DANIELS: Location didn't mean anything to me. It was the best situation, best team, best staff. I found all three of those in one school. Did not matter to me where it was.

Q. Give us a breakdown of what Georgia is getting in Brock Vandagriff.

TODD MONKEN: When I first got here, I was talking with Kirby, he talked about a quarterback being right down the road, a young man that had been committed to Oklahoma, but was trying, if he could, stay closer to home.

I think what you're getting is a high-level competitor. It's one thing being around him, for a young man, he loves to compete. He loves football. He loves the weight room. He played through the back half of their year with an issue with his knee. That resolved.

You talk about someone that obviously his dad being a coach, being around it his whole life, athletics, his sisters are athletic and competitive. You just love that about him, how much he enjoys the process of being a really good player, loves competing. To me that's probably the biggest thing is he's a competitive joker.

Q. Given the way this season has transpired, the way this offense has kind of started to come together, South Carolina, Missouri, are you disappointed this is the last game? Do you wish you had four or five more games to see? It feels like this offense is still in the development stage right now.

JT DANIELS: I do feel like we've been really hot as of lately. I think a lot of young guys have matured tremendously from George to Jermaine to big Warren on the line. There's a lot of guys that have gotten a lot better. I think you're seeing what that's looking like now. Obviously a little later than we would have hoped.

I'd love to play with this team forever. It's an amazing team. I think there's great central leadership. There's a lot of great things on this team. Obviously that's not the case.

For me, I'm just focused on giving Cincinnati the best we have. It is, as Coach Monken said, a lot this week. This is the last opportunity to play with this whole team. As much as I'd love to keep going, keep playing with these guys, this is the last one. We're going to go give it everything we have.

TODD MONKEN: It's been an interesting run over the weeks that we've had with some games being canceled, who we played, our guys maturing. I'll just reiterate what

JT said. It's interesting. I don't think any given week at a certain point we took for granted that we would play. It got to the point where certain games are being canceled or moved. We've been going at it a long time. I mean, since we came back in June, our players have been off the charts in terms of how they've worked and prepared and understood to control what they can control.

It's been a long grind, it has been for our guys. College students as a whole, this has not been easy for them. The enjoyment of the college environment, home games. Our seniors didn't get their family here for Senior Day.

They've been awesome, about as good as you can ask from our team to keep working. It's continued. I'm just excited about seeing how we can finish off the year this Friday.

Q. Todd, what have you made of the progression of Darnell Washington this year? How do you go about trying to get tight ends involved in your offense?

TODD MONKEN: First of all, Darnell has from the moment that I saw him, you can certainly see the upside of a big, athletic, tough young man. You can just see that. What his upside can be as a raw player. And, to boot, he is an awesome kid. He is an awesome kid. Always smiling. Got a great disposition about him.

It is hard at times because we did have Tre' McKitty who came here. With Fitz and him, trying to get the guys on the field to maximize their measurable skill set, what they do as a young player. Try not to overload Darnell early on. As he's progressed and we've gotten more and more comfortable at quarterback, obviously we tried to get him involved a little bit more at Missouri as the game progressed. I do think he's got an unbelievable upside.

It is hard for our guys because there is really only one ball. I got really good runningbacks. If you asked them, I promise you they'd want more touches. For a while everybody was on my ass not getting to George. Then Jermaine makes some plays, everybody wants to throw it to Jermaine.

That's what we do. You're hopeful we have enough skill players that they have to defend the whole field, and all the players on the field are capable of making plays, which is a sign of a really good offense. The best offenses have that in terms of weapons, tight ends, wideouts, and runningbacks, which gives you the opportunity to take advantage of mismatches and make them defend the field.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

