

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Georgia vs Cincinnati

Friday, January 1, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Kirby Smart

Azeez Ojulari

JT Daniels

Georgia Bulldogs



Georgia 24, Cincinnati 21

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Georgia's postgame press conference. We have head coach Kirby Smart, quarterback JT Daniels, and offensive lineman Azeez Ojulari.

Coach, if you could begin with a brief statement.

KIRBY SMART: I'd like to start by saying the Cincinnati team had an absolute incredible effort, toughness. The way they played us defensively, I have a lot of respect for Luke Fickell and his team. The quarterback they have is a talented man. For people to try to take shots at their conference, their level of play, they got a really, really good quality football team, a lot of seniors on that team.

I'd also like to thank Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl, Gary Stokan and his staff. I'm telling you guys, where they've taken this bowl, where it started back when I played in it, to now a New Year's six, and being part of a special bowl package, the city of Atlanta, home of college football. They've got the best thing going. They do an unbelievable job. Chick-fil-A is one of the best companies in the world. I always say if I could run my organization like Chick-fil-A, I can be successful. Same way with the Peach Bowl. So we thank them for that.

These seniors, they tied the winningest record of any senior class to come through. They really got slighted. We're going to remove the asterisk and erase it. Because with the Vanderbilt game, they would have been able to get that done. I just appreciate the guys never quitting and continuing to fight.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Kirby, on the play before the game-winning kick,

you tried a deep pass. Were you confident in your kicker being able to make it from that distance without having to make a shorter completion to help his cause?

KIRBY SMART: Great question. We go through that situation probably every week. You can ask our players, we do it all the time. It was a must situation, must get out of bounds, we must get out of bounds, or get a completion for five yards. They had a really good call. They brought pressure. They trapped the flat. They knew we had to throw the ball out of bounds. We told JT it's either a shot, out of bounds or throw a completion to the flat.

JT made a good decision. I would have loved it if he threw it a little flatter. He might have got Jermaine for a touchdown. But they took a chance and we wanted to take a chance if they were going to max blitz us.

Yeah, I felt comfortable. That's within Pod's range. Pod came and told me before the game he felt good around 37. I think we were inside 37 at that time.

Q. Kirby, obviously you're taking a chance there on punting the ball with the time left. Unbelievable play by your defense. We all understand it. What were you thinking at that moment? Comment on your defense's play in the fourth quarter.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I probably agree with you. It's one of those looking back, we still got the timeouts, still got an opportunity to stop them. Felt good we could get it. We called for some fourth downs earlier that were probably longer than that even.

I always believe if you have momentum in stopping people, defensively I don't know how many three-and-outs we had had, felt like we had the momentum back. We have a history here of we call it get the ball back for a minute. We got to stop them to get the ball back. I felt comfortable we could stop them with our timeouts.

Called one to not spend it on the punt. We called two, gave up a first down. Give them credit, they had a good four-minute plan. The play they actually ran was a play we



worked on down in the red area. It's a pick flat. If I had played it flat and let his man go deep, then recovered, actually got the ball out, which probably was the play of the game. If they complete that, we don't have a chance to win. Did a heck of a job.

Looking back, maybe we should have gone for it there.

Q. Kirby and JT, can y'all kind of walk me through the emotions of James and his father passing away. What was the significance of those tributes? Do you feel like you guys kind of won this game in honor of him, his family?

KIRBY SMART: I'll let JT have that first.

JT DANIELS: James and I have been very close since I got here. I remember when I posted my commitment to Georgia, Cook hit me right away. I got in contact with him. He was one of the first people I buddied up with. He's been like a brother to me since I got here. As soon as I heard, I hit him, made sure he's doing good.

He's a leader, he's a worker. You never hear him complain. He's always doing the right thing. When something bad happens to someone good like that, it sits with you. It was something that us as a team, we all thought about it. You saw Coach Dell with the 4 jersey. That's how much Cook means to us, how much we're there for him when he needs it. We know he'd be there for us if we need him.

Q. Azeez, three sacks today. Why was it important for you to play in this game? Have you thought at all about what your future is, NFL or Georgia?

AZEEZ OJULARI: It was important for me to just to make sure the seniors go out the right way. Their last game, they worked so hard in this unpredictable season. You never know. Just got the opportunity to play for another game, so I took advantage of it, to play with my brothers. It was great.

Q. Kirby, you've won a lot of big games. To win in this style, this season, pandemic, defense shutting them down the last two quarters, it looked like everything came together in the final minute. Your satisfaction level, what this victory means to you now?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I'm certainly proud of our team. I'm proud of the adversity we went through throughout the year with the pandemic. I don't think we played our best game today. My hat is off to Cincinnati. They did a really good job of defensively controlling our run game, and offensively keeping us off balance enough with their quarterback run

game, which we knew he was a good athlete, a good runner. Probably didn't give him enough credit. We couldn't finish on him in the first half. They stole a touchdown right there at the end of the half, then stole one back in the start of the second half.

I'm really proud of these guys, how hard they fought. I don't think anybody really truly understands, not just Georgia, but how hard it was on entire college football to be persistent, to go this long, practice this long. My hat goes off to the guys in the room.

Q. JT, wondering, going through the emotions of this football game, the field goal, what goes through a guy's mind? Were you watching the play?

JT DANIELS: There were definitely a lot of emotions. It was a field goal to win from 53. I trust in Pod about as much as I can. I felt no pressure to try and make a play I didn't need to when we were on the 35. That's what Pod does. We see it every day in practice. He's always on time, always doing his job. Monday through Friday you see him hitting all his kicks.

I definitely say I had trust in Pod. Last second, yeah, I was saying some prayers right there.

Q. Azeez, were you kind of surprised that UC left you guys as much time as they did by throwing the ball some on the last full drive they had and snapping the ball with time on the clock?

AZEEZ OJULARI: I mean, that's what we try to do, try to score or get first down. We just executed what we had to execute, just kept playing hard.

Q. JT, you're still new to this program relatively. What has this ride the last two months been like since you became the starter? What does it say to you about this Georgia team and program?

JT DANIELS: At this point I feel like I've been here for years. Instantly when I came in I felt a connection with the team, a connection with the way this program is run is the way I would say it. We're all about ball. It's something you can say about pretty much the whole team, is that everyone just loves football. We're here to do our thing and be the best players we can be. Every single day, every single practice, Malik Herring, Zeus, George, everyone goes out and practices to their best ability every single day with a focus on getting better.

Over the last two and a half months, I've really just enjoyed the time of being with like-minded guys that are all about work, all about ball, all about competing.



Q. Kirby, obviously you guys are elated with the finish. If the kick had not gone through the uprights, do you think you would have an entirely different feeling heading into this off-season? Does it all ride on that 53 yards?

KIRBY SMART: I said it before, it was going to be the highs of high, the lows of low. The truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Everybody believes in momentum. I would feel much better if we just played our best game. I don't think we played our best game. I want to give Cincinnati credit for that, they created some of that.

The narrative was out there that our team didn't want to be here, they didn't want to practice. That was never true. Our guys practiced hard. They played a really good, motivated football team that was trying to remain undefeated.

To answer your question, I would not feel any different, but the perception would certainly be different all based off of two more yards or less, however far he cleared it by.

Q. Kirby, on defense especially you had a lot of guys that had stepped in and got a lot of playing time today. Quay Walker, Latavious Brini, those guys, what can you say about the job they did today? Also James Cook, the way the team stepped up and honored him today.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, first off, the defensive guys. We had a lot of guys come in out of position, guys down. It was a really tough week in the secondary. We had Tyrique having to move to corner. He's also the backup star. Brini was having to play. We had a couple days there where Lewis possibly out with the protocol, then he was back in. Jermaine Burton wasn't around. Nobody really knows what went on in the last seven days to create major issues. Travon Walker, not able to be with us today. We had some great practices. It changed every day. You couldn't find a rhythm to say this is where guys are going to play.

They rose up today. They played better as the game went on, I thought. Brini got more and more comfortable as the game went on. It's tough.

Q. Kirby, back to Jack. This is the first time where he's really had to kind of make a late kick to win the game. Was there anything you said before he went on the field? Did you sense how he was feeling emotionally leading into the kick?

KIRBY SMART: I don't mess with Jack. I don't mess with kickers. I let them do their thing. I don't want to mess with their mojo, their rhythm. I don't say anything to them. I messed with him a few days in practice, but I didn't mess with him here today.

I felt comfortable with where he was that he would have the leg strength to get there. That's about the spot that we work on it every week during two minute, that I say, Hey, if we get to that spot, we're going to be able to make the field goal.

Probably the best thing that happened is he didn't have long to think about it. They were out of timeouts. It was important that we get out there and get set. You can get a delay of game in the heat of the moment. Get out there, snap it. They can't organize a rush. We do it every week. He drilled it.

Q. Azeez, what was the key for you guys in the second half of shutting out that Cincinnati offense?

AZEEZ OJULARI: I mean, we just stayed within the game plan, executed, did everything the coaches wanted us to do. Made sure we had to get this win for the team. The momentum, we just used it. It helped us our way, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports