

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Pitt vs Michigan State

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Pitt Panthers

Brandon Hill

Press Conference



Q. Obviously the talk this year about Michigan State was obviously Kenneth Walker and the running game. When you look at their passing game, with Thorne and some of the receivers, what kind of stands out about defending them?

BRANDON HILL: Kenneth Walker was a big part of their offense. And you always want to go against guys like that at the college level, just to experience the atmosphere, experience the game. But playing (indiscernible), they also have a nice, good set of receivers.

So seeing that he's gone we want to make sure the defensive backs and the backs can make sure everything is handled back there and we'll take care of the run.

Q. Specifically on those wideouts and Jayden Reed what have you seen on film from him that you guys have to keep an eye out for?

BRANDON HILL: We've seen a lot of speed and we just want to make sure communication is right in the secondary to avoid any mishaps. If we accomplish that, when we accomplish that, we'll be in a great position.

Q. I want to ask you about the importance of getting lined up as a defense. In the defense you guys run, and in your experience, especially during this year, how important is it to get your defense lined up before the snap?

BRANDON HILL: It's very important. It's very important. In practice, when we think teams are going to run a high tempo offense, we get back to the ball faster. We make sure we get home. We make sure, Coach Bates harps on that, we make sure we get home and get back to the ball so we're in our spot to get to the play. Like you said, to be there for that place. Because once all 11 people line up on our defense, it's hard to drive the ball on us. So once everybody is home, (indiscernible) the play, we're hard to

beat.

So that's very important in our defense to get lined up and make sure we're reading our keys and make sure we can execute.

Q. Connor Heyward is a guy at Michigan State who is used a lot of different ways on offense, the running game and passing game. What jumps out on the tape about him on how to try to stop him?

BRANDON HILL: We just focus on being ready for anything. Our defense, we just be ready for anything, ready to adjust. We can just adjust as we go. We have a very smart group of 11 guys out there that can adjust on the fly and all be on the same page and be one accord. And also have a great defensive coordinator who can call the right plays, when we're in those situations. So, just being prepared for anything is the biggest key out there.

Q. I asked this question of Calijah a minute ago, all season long the Pitt offense got all the headlines and accolades, but in the ACC championship game you guys stood out and won the game against Wake Forest. Do you guys maybe play that game with a little chip on your shoulder to show the nation that, hey, we have a defense here at Pitt, too?

BRANDON HILL: I believe we played every game with a chip on our shoulder. We go in ready to work, ready to battle, ready to play. We had a great offense that led us this year with also followed by a great defense. Once you put those two things together and those mesh well, we'll have a great successful season as we did.

So just always -- as a defense, though, you just want to go in play with a chip on your shoulder. And we may not have got the recognition we deserved this year, but we'll still come out and play the exact same way.

Q. Following up on that question about maybe not getting respect, but talking to you, Calijah, Haba and SirVocea, none of you guys were four- or five-star recruits. So what's the belief system whenever you get to Pitt as maybe a lightly recruited guy and the belief

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that you're going to be a good player eventually some day?

BRANDON HILL: Yes, sir, I feel like it's just the work ethic from all those guys you just mentioned. We've worked countless hours, countless nights in the gym, on the field, in the film room. Everything comes into play when you're out there. So just the work ethic from everybody on the defense is just, I feel like, that's what helped us to have a successful season this year, is just everybody's ready to work. We're all on the same page and it happened well.

Q. The Miami game was a long time ago, seems like forever you haven't lost since then. Wondering, the two games you lost this year, did it fuel you guys, show you guys some things you needed to shore up? And would you have been as successful maybe without those games?

BRANDON HILL: I feel like that Miami game hurt. That one hurt. But I feel like those two games we've learned a lot about ourselves and ourselves as a team and how we responded. Like you said, we haven't lost since Miami.

So how we responded after that, that really says a lot about the University of Pittsburgh and their football team. So we just always just focus on the next week and once we began to do that, it just built our success, fueled our success. And I feel like Pittsburgh is going to be a great university that people will always remember.

Q. You talk about the chip on the shoulder. How much of that starts at the top with Coach Narduzzi, with the intensity he brings and with the culture he's tried to build there at Pitt?

BRANDON HILL: It means a lot, because, well, he always harps on a Pitt tough defense, Pitt tough defense, 11 guys flying to the ball. When one guy has the ball, 11 helmets should hit him. We're always racing to the ball. Me and SirVocea, throughout the season we've had this race, who is going to get the most tackles, who's going to get the ball.

Obviously he beat me this year, but I have obviously more years in me. But it comes from Narduzzi. He's a great coach. He's electric out there on the field in practice. He gets everybody fired up. He makes everybody -- (indiscernible) like everybody wants to play and get in that mode and be the Pitt tough defense that we are.

Q. As a fellow Florida guy, what did Damarri mean to you in your development and how much will you guys miss him in the back end there?

BRANDON HILL: He meant a lot. Me and Damarri are

both from Central Florida. I didn't know that until I came up here. We always have been -- he always been close to my heart in that way, as a big brother to me, I looked at him.

And just him leaving, it's life. It's a big hole. But we have guys that are more than ready to step up, more than ready to step up to the plate and to be that complete defense that we always are.

But he's played a big role in helping guys, just helping them throughout the year, through practice and games, giving us tips and things like that to help us with our craft. And I feel like he's also been part of the success in the secondary this year. And I appreciate him for that.

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