

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

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Michigan State Spartans

### Connor Heyward

#### Press Conference

**Q. The Michigan State football brand has grown quite a bit in Georgia, and obviously really took off with Coach Dantonio finding a lot of dudes and developing those. As you have completed quite a journey at Michigan State and being from the metro Atlanta area, how do you see the Spartan football brand growing in Georgia? And how cool is it to be a pretty big part of that?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Like you said, Coach Dantonio was getting the guys, a couple guys per class from Georgia before I was in school and since I've been in school.

But Coach Tucker knows that Georgia is a hotbed of football and there's a lot of talent in Georgia. And when you look at college football, there's always a number of guys on winning teams from Georgia.

And I think Coach Tuck, coaching at Georgia, he really understands and knows how the recruiting process works and how important it is to win guys from Georgia. And I hosted a lot of kids that are committing to Michigan State, just telling them that you'll be taken care of and everything is pretty easy. And just go here, grind, that it's different than being back at home but it's a good change.

**Q. Wanted to ask you about playing in your last game, how big this is. And kind of a two-part question, just how big this game is, your last game, could probably be Xavier's last game, other seniors out there, you guys coming together? And I've also heard your teammates talk about playing this game for you guys and how special is that to you to know that they're out there giving it their all to send you guys out as winners?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: It's a big game. It means a lot. Obviously myself and the seniors want to go out in the right way. I think we've had a pretty successful season. And winning New Year's Six bowl would make the season that



much better.

This is an opportunity of a lifetime for us. And we're all just going to seize the moment. Payton Thorne had a good point after practice: Why not as a freshman win a New Year's Six bowl and start out the right way and have momentum going into next year and for the seniors, go out with a bang?

**Q. How often do you talk to your brother Cam during the season? And how much of an inspiration he has been to you throughout your football career?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: I talk to Cameron probably once a week, like one-on-one. We're both extremely busy. But and our family group chat and another group chat, which is all my brothers and me, we message throughout the day, throughout the week as well.

And we all understand each other's schedule. But we're brothers first and that love and that connection, whenever we see each other, it's like we didn't miss a beat. But we're both in season. So we understand what comes with that. And the season's a grind.

**Q. What about his game have you adopted to your game, even though you play on different sides of the ball?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Just his motor, being able to go the whole game without getting tired. And even if you get tired, just pushing through.

You see the Steelers out there with a lot of backups right now on the D line, with injuries and Tuitt being out with his family situation and stuff. But just him being a leader as well, just when things are going good and when things are going bad just always looking for that next play to make a play and always staying level headed.

**Q. Could you describe the reaction to Kenneth making the decision he made about his future? And your memories about playing him with this one season and what do you think it is like with this program? Kenneth Walker, the decision he made, what was the**

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**general reaction of the team and your thoughts on his legacy here?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: I kind of expected it. Running back is one of those positions where you can get hurt on any play and you're taking hits from all different angles. And he's done a lot for this team. And he had to do a business decision for him. We all supported it.

That happens a lot nowadays. And the guys are doing it for their future. Some guys are playing because they have to increase their stock or just to put more film out there.

But in Kenneth's case he's a top pick in the draft. He has to take care of his body. He's probably dinged up from the season. Get healthy and get ready for combine training and that next chapter.

I feel like he's supporting us. I think he'll miss Michigan State. I honestly feel like he didn't want to leave, but the season he had you have to leave.

**Q. What have you seen from the rest of your running backs?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Just them all coming together to push each other to become better every day at practice. You've got Harold, Jordon, Elijah, Donovan Eaglin -- I think the room will be fine. Obviously Ken is a special player, but I think those guys will rally together and get the job done.

**Q. Wanted to ask you about Payton Thorne, what have you seen from him in terms of development, not since you've just been around the program, but this year specifically. If you can think back to the beginning, the Northwestern game, who he is as a player and quarterback now?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Yeah, he's a poised player. He's a leader. He takes control of the offense. And when guys aren't doing what they need to do, he's not scared to confront. And we have a head coach like that, the quarterback kind of follows and falls under that.

And I think the competition in every room has risen to everybody's level of play. You guys have seen the season he's had, he doesn't turn the ball over. He makes smart decisions. He gets us aligned correctly. He gets us in the right calls based on what the defense is calling.

He's a really smart player and a guy that has a high ceiling and a high IQ.

**Q. I want to go back to the running backs a little bit**

**more specifically Jordon. Obviously he's from Georgia, one of the five guys on your team from Georgia, including yourself. How much do you think that he is eager to get out there and have a good performance in his home state, especially, too, with Kenneth not playing, the more carries he may be able to get?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Jordon is one of my closest friends on the team. And he understood his role this year, having a great back like Ken. Jordon is a young back, but they were still pushing each other to get better every day in practice.

I think Jordon is more than prepared for this opportunity. And I told him just go out there, do what you need to do, don't do too much. Just take those 2-, 3-yard runs, cuz those will lead to bigger ones, home run ones.

But you guys have seen he's a solid back and he has a bright future and playing in your hometown state, I think the adrenaline will be pumped a little more and sometimes that's good.

**Q. Does he seem to be pretty excited about it, though, to be able to play in his home state?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: Yeah, we were both just talking about how both of our families and friends will be here, the people that haven't really been able to make it to East Lansing because just due to how far we have been from home.

But I think like I said he's going to be prepared. You guys have seen he's a solid back. And he's produced.

**Q. Matt Coghlin has been at Michigan State even longer than you have. A quick review of some Google images show a variety of Coghlin hairstyles, facial hair, et cetera. Do you have a favorite Matt Coghlin look?**

CONNOR HEYWARD: You've got pictures, right?

**Q. Oh, yeah, everybody has pictures. Quite a (indiscernible) --**

CONNOR HEYWARD: I like the hair. I think he should trim the beard up a little more. I like the beard. Coach Tucker calls him Teen Wolf. I like the hair. Keep it growing. A lot of gingers don't grow their hair like that but I like it.

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