

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

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Michigan State Spartans

Matt Allen

Press Conference

Q. We've been talking about the Allen brothers on Michigan State offensive lines for like 10-plus years now. I want to ask you how important wrestling was to your background and development as a player? And if you can settle once and for all which of the Allen brothers was the best wrestler?

MATT ALLEN: I think wrestling has definitely played a huge part in literally every single asset of when it comes to football, especially when you're playing offensive line or defensive line, just being able to tell which way guys are moving just by like pressing them out, or like certain blocks like become a little bit easier because you've been in that position so many times from wrestling and the other situations like that.

But if I had to say who was best, I'd probably say myself. But if you ask Brian, he would say himself. And if you asked Jack, he would say himself. So it's a little difficult to tell, but I'd say me.

Q. Wanted to ask you about Payton and what you've seen from him that maybe we don't as the season's gone along, from who he was as a quarterback, player, guy in the huddle at Northwestern to who he has become now. What differences do you see and what can you kind of share about that?

MATT ALLEN: I would say the main differences are just his leadership. I mean, I know that Payton -- I watched Payton in high school, because he went to Naperville Central, so I knew he could play from the time he committed here.

But definitely his leadership. He's just stepped up in every asset of that, whether it's on the field or off the field. He's always trying to come up to the O line on the sidelines and at practice. And he's just a very good, vocal leader and very good leader by just talking the talk and walking the



talk.

And he really cares about the team and every player that's on it. It's one thing I love about him. He's a really great guy and I'm glad we have him with us.

Q. Payton was talking about "why not." Why not this team finish out on a New Year's Day bowl, the seniors going out the right way and building something for the future? What are your thoughts of what was behind that message that was delivered?

MATT ALLEN: I would say the main thing behind that is really, my goal when I came here was to leave my jersey in a better place than where I started. And hopefully I think I've done that. But I just want to be able to help the younger guys and help the guys that are coming in as much as they possibly can, so that when their time does come they don't skip a beat and they're ready to go right away.

And I think by what I said, leaving my jersey in a better place helps start a good stepping stone for the next upcoming season. And I have a lot of confidence in this team, a lot of confidence in Coach Tucker and his staff and I know they're going to do great things in the future.

Q. When you look at Pitt's defense, they do a pretty good job of generating a pass rush and getting to the quarterback, but maybe don't necessarily have a superstar player like an Aidan Hutchinson sort of guy that you faced earlier in this season. What do they maybe do from an Xs and Os standpoint or having any creative ways to generate such a good pass rush?

MATT ALLEN: I think they have a lot of good, just like, twist games as well as just trying to create disruption and penetration up field. I mean, they may not have, like, big name guys like Aidan Hutchinson, but I think they have a lot of really good players on their defense as well as the rest of their team.

It's going to be a good challenge for us, but I'm excited for the challenge and excited for what they're going to bring for us. And hopefully our preparation will help handle it.



Q. You talked about leaving your jersey in a good spot when you leave. You're talking about the team building and how special this team is for you. What was it like leading up to the game itself, with the events and the hall of fame and just kind of wrapping everything up this season?

MATT ALLEN: It's been pretty surreal for me. Like I said, when I was a little kid, all I ever wanted to do was have an opportunity to come here. And now that I'm basically almost out the door after this week, I've just really been trying to take everything in and not take any moment for granted with my teammates or just even on the practice field or in the weight room. Just cherishing every moment while I still have it before I'm gone.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about, I guess, this extra year that you got and what it's meant to you? I think I remember you saying at spring ball you didn't know if you would be welcomed back or you could come back. Now that you've got that second opportunity and you're going to be in a bowl game, a New Year's Six bowl game like this, talk about what this year has meant to you and just being able to participate.

MATT ALLEN: It's just been very surreal. When I asked Coach Tucker to have the opportunity to come back for one more year, he said I'd be able to.

And from that point on I just started working every day as hard as I could to be ready to be in a position to play and help contribute to the team this year.

And there's been a lot of special moments throughout this entire season, whether that's beating Michigan or going down to places like Miami and beating them at their place, which was a pretty cool moment as well, just being able to go out with a winning record and how we've always wanted to do things here is a very good thing.

And I've been very blessed and excited to have the opportunity to be a part of this team. And I'm just ready to take on one last challenge against Pitt this Thursday.

Q. You've been around a while. I wanted to ask you, just from your perspective, what was it like blocking for Kenneth Walker with his style of running and the things he was able to do? When he was doing some of those special highlight reel type of things, did you always know in the moment or how often did you notice on film that something was sort of extraordinary?

MATT ALLEN: I noticed from the second he got here in

spring ball that he was a really special kid. And what I love about Ken is that he's an even better person than he is a football player, which is usually hard to come by when you're that good. But he really is a great person. And I was very blessed and excited to have the opportunity to block for him this year. And there were some really cool moments on the field where usually you'd feel like the running back was about to get tackled and then he'd break it for another 30 yards and score a touchdown, and that just brought a lot of excitement into the games, into my life.

I was blessed to have the opportunity to know Ken and play for him and help him achieve his goals this year.

Q. Matt Coghlin got here in 2016 also. Coghlin has featured a wide variety of hairstyles, hair lengths, facial hair. When you look at that, you've seen it all, do you have a favorite Coghlin hairstyle?

MATT ALLEN: I kind of like what Cogs is doing right now. When you look at pictures of him from when he was a freshman it's almost like difficult to even realize that's him. But I kind of like what he's got going on right now with the long hair and the beard. It's pretty nice. He's got a lot of good ones.

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