

CFP Semifinal

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

Georgia vs Ohio State

Monday, December 26, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Kirby Smart

Press Conference



MATT GARVEY: Thanks for joining us, Coach. If you would, just give us a quick opening statement on how bowl preparations have gone so far.

KIRBY SMART: Our guys have been in good spirits, getting after it. Proud of the way they worked. Proud of the way all of them came back locked in and ready to go from a travel break they had and all of them back. They did a great job getting back. They've been awesome.

So we're getting ready now to head over to Atlanta.

Q. Kirby, just want to ask at this point in the week what the availability looks like for Ladd and Warren?

KIRBY SMART: We're excited to get those guys hopefully back, and we'll see how they do this week.

Q. Kirby, not exactly about the Peach Bowl, but you signed two transfers last week. What did you see in them that you thought they'd be a good fit for your program?

KIRBY SMART: We knew about those kids coming out of high school, think a lot of them. They performed at a high level in our conference, and I think they'll challenge and compete with the rest of our roster and be competitive wideouts, which is important in this conference.

Q. I'm just curious, when you turn on the tape of Ohio State most of the year, they seem to be a three high football team. You turn them on against Michigan, they're loading the box committed to stopping the run. I guess which defense do you expect to get, and how do you prepare for both?

KIRBY SMART: I expect to get a little bit of all of them.

Certainly it will determine what personnel we put in and how we use our guys. We've got three, four really good tight ends, and we hope to be able to use those guys in this game.

A lot of that's going to boil down to how we play and what we do and try to dictate to them. They've got a really good defensive football team. They're very physical. They've done a great job dating back to the Oklahoma State days. Very good, aggressive, multiple package on defense, where they give you multiple looks and things.

Q. C.J. Stroud mentioned that Georgia was his second choice school coming out of high school. Just wondering what you remember the most about recruiting him and scouting him as a quarterback prospect coming out of California?

KIRBY SMART: I loved his mom, man. What a tremendous woman. She's awesome. Went all the way across the country and got to sit in his home and visit with him.

He has a really good disposition about him. He's not real high, not real low, not real emotional. He keeps a really level head, which to me at quarterback is one of the number one qualities you can find.

He came on a visit to our place as well and got to see him at the Heisman. He's just matured. To see him grow, he's always had tremendous arm strength and touch and velocity on throws, but he's become a complete quarterback there in their system.

Q. I know you try to keep everything the same in terms of practice routine, schedule. Do you look at the extracurricular things, MLK visit, for example, is it important or as a necessity part of bowl week or more of a distraction?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's part of the bowl process, and



the merger is unique between CFP, the playoff games and the bowl games, because the bowl games have their traditions, have their beliefs, have their sponsors, and those traditions are very important to the bowls.

I mean, any of the playoff games that you can play in, even though they're rotating, they have bowl traditions. I went to those bowl games as a coach or a player a long time ago, and they started those traditions. So those traditions are important to them. The playoff and the meaning of the game is important to them too, but you have to balance the two.

You've got to make sure your players understand this is my off time and they have activities that are scheduled, but we also are here for a purpose, and it's a business trip. It's not just a joy trip. The balance of those two is important.

I look forward to the activities. We had them last year at the Orange Bowl. It's important to get your mind off of the game at times, and those activities allow you to do that.

Q. You obviously have more than just one good tight end. You have two, multiple ones. What kind of pressure does that put on a defense, and how special are yours?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's just different. So much of college football now is 11 personnel, so when you play 12, it's always different from a defensive perspective because you know what sets they can make. They can be a little more multiple, but you probably lose some speed when you do that.

That's probably what makes ours different is we don't sacrifice a lot of speed from 11 to 12, like some teams might. To stretch the field vertically and horizontally, you need speed. So 12's been a good personnel for us this year.

We're excited about 13. We've got some guys that have been out. Through this bowl process it's given us a chance to work those guys.

So it's a good opportunity to get your best football players on the field, and I think you have to do that.

Q. We may have addressed this with you, but if you don't mind, Chris Smith, it just seems like the example from right there in Hapeville Charter, not too far from where you guys are, and he seems to, having come back as a fifth year senior, played himself into an All-American and a legitimate NFL draft choice. What can you say about the progress that he's made and the path that he's taken?

KIRBY SMART: Really proud of Chris and his growth. He came in as really an astute, tough, competitive, fiery, just competitor, and he's grown into this incredible leader, I think through his passion and his competitiveness.

He hates losing at anything. He dislikes underperforming. He's one of those guys, when you give stats in practice, he calls you out and thinks they're wrong. So he's really prideful about things.

But he's a product of our development, and he came in and has really blossomed into a really good safety prospect at the next level. Just proud of the work he's done. He's a great example of, if you stick around and grow in this system, you can be really good.

A lot of his buddies and friends left and moved on, and he stuck around and it's proven to be worth it, just like Devonte and Jordan did.

Q. What's been the key to maintaining the level of success on defense with new coordinators and a new cast of guys for the most part in terms of front line guys?

KIRBY SMART: It's just culture. That's not going to change. What we do is not going to change. It doesn't matter if one coach leaves or another coach leaves. That doesn't impact our defense.

We rep a lot of players at practice. We have a system set up to get our twos and threes ready. So the next cast of defensive players is getting ready right now just like they were last year. I think, if you've got a good formula for getting guys ready, it prevents large gaps in seasons.

Q. It seems like this multiple running back thing has become kind of a staple of Georgia's offense. Is that something that philosophically that you felt especially committed to, and if so, why is that?

KIRBY SMART: It's really about health and necessity. Throughout our conference we've done studies, and very few backs have made it through the entire year with a large burden. They tend to get injured.

Even across the NFL right now, the number of injuries at running backs is rampant through a 17, 18-game season. We're playing off of 12, 13, sometimes 14, 15-game season, not to mention the preseason camp stuff.

We try to build it where three to four backs can contribute and play, and some of that's dictated by whether we have leads in the fourth quarter or whether guys are injured. But

we don't want to get into this part of the season and not have depth. That's what the rotation provides us.

Q. What's the advantage of playing in the same venue three times this year?

KIRBY SMART: Probably that you know where the scoreboard, the clocks, and all the different stuff is is the biggest thing. The field's the same. There's not a lot of difference in terms of the diameter and width of the field, but I think it's more about familiarity of the quarterback knowing the shot clock and the ribbons and the different things.

The biggest difference is both teams are going to practice in there, so they'll be familiar with it by the time the game starts.

Q. Kirby, I wanted to ask you last year -- it's not often you get into the College Football Playoff coming off a loss. You guys did it last year. Ohio State's doing it this year. Can you look back and think about anything you guys got from maybe that bitter taste you had in your mouth and all that time off coming off a loss? Focus, energy, whatever.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it really centered things. You recalibrate, and you look back, and sometimes the reality of your weaknesses pop up a lot more in a loss. We like to say why do you got to lose to learn? You shouldn't have to do that, but it certainly is a wakeup call in teams I've been with. It recentered everybody and refocused everybody.

Obviously we've tried to do that without that. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't. It's just one of those things.

MATT GARVEY: That's all we've got for you, Coach. Thank you very much. We appreciate your time.

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