

# CFP Semifinal

## Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

### Georgia vs Ohio State

Tuesday, December 27, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

### Ohio State Buckeyes

### Kevin Wilson

### C.J. Stroud

### Emeka Egbuka

### Press Conference



**PLAYOFF  
SEMIFINAL**



THE MODERATOR: Couple minutes early. That's never a bad thing. We'll go ahead and get started. We're joined by offensive coordinator, Kevin Wilson, quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver, Emeka Egbuka.

Coach, we'll start with you. If you can just give us an opening statement on getting to Atlanta and the transition into bowl week and how preparations are going so far.

KEVIN WILSON: Thank you. Had an opportunity I think right after our last game to get a couple light practices, kind of keep guys in the swing of things during the championship week. We thought we'd have a chance to maybe be playing in a top level bowl. The guys responded great. A year ago, I think people questioned whether we're going to play. We practiced well. We've had great practices again this year.

A lot of respect for our leadership, our top guys. We've had good practices. We got in here Sunday. Yesterday was a late start, kind of now into Tuesday of game week and had some good prep and looking forward to a great challenge on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: C.J., next for you. Kind of talk about the event last night and getting settled into bowl week and your thoughts on the event.

C.J. STROUD: It's been a blessing to be down here playing four national championships. It's been a goal of mine since I got to school. Last night was fun. Kind of just let things loose and just really enjoyed the time with your brothers and playing against them was fun. It was

competitive. At the same time, it was -- it wasn't very competitive like you would think. So we were just having fun, and it was a good time.

THE MODERATOR: Emeka, how about you? You guys dropped the first one, but you came back strong in the second event and were tied at one to one.

EMEKA EGBUKA: Yeah. Last night was definitely fun. Just happy to be down here spending time with my brothers and getting the team camaraderie going. Kind of not forgetting what an accomplishment it is to be here. Obviously we're very focused and tuned in on this game. We're locked in for a good practice today and putting it all on the field on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, gentlemen. Okay. We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Coach Wilson, I'm just wondering how much different has your role in the game plan and things like that been or has it been different at all since obviously taking on the new job here in the last month?**

KEVIN WILSON: Coach was pretty -- with the calendar, like after the last game, it was a dead recruiting week until Friday. As coaches, we were kind of looking at potentially ahead, looking at what how we'd just played and kind of reviewing the year. Had a couple of light workouts with our guys just to kind of keep them in tune because we felt we could be playing in this game, and we knew that team was practicing that week. So we didn't want to go out after the season and have hard prep, just keep our guys sharp and on the edge.

And then we spin through the recruiting cycle. In my situation, I was gone a little bit, but we probably spent more time game planning as we wrapped up the recruiting cycle and everything went on. We had been through our game plan several times. Now we're in game week. I think this is about the third time that we're going through a lot of

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things, a lot of polishing.

Coach Day and Coach Smith with the workouts, but Coach Day was adamant about our preparation, being ahead and not be stressing and the last minute going through things. This is not bowl week. This is playoff week. But we're very much, I think, ahead. As the players would tell you with the game plan, what's going on, playing challenging team with a lot of great athletes and a lot of stress they bring in their structure. But we've worked really hard to be ahead and give our kids a chance to go out and be aggressive and play well Saturday night.

**Q. C.J. and Emeka and Kevin, indoor game, weather is not going to be a factor. How much do you think we'll see the ball in the air? Can you give us an idea? Do you see an opportunity there?**

C.J. STROUD: Yeah. It's definitely a good feeling knowing that you don't have to deal with weather coming from Columbus or the Big Ten where playing in the Midwest. We are majority of the time on the East Coast where weather is always a factor.

So whatever it takes to win, I feel like is what we're going to do. So if that's throwing the ball, if that's running it, if that's having to punt, whatever the case may be, we just want to win the game. So really just focused on that, just execute, execution in those type scenarios. And in the end, it's definitely a good thing to be playing in a really nice stadium. I think the atmosphere will be cool. So just really excited to play there.

**Q. Kevin, a lot of talk about Georgia's tight ends, Brock Bowers and Darnell Washington. How unique is that challenge of trying to stop two tight ends of that caliber?**

KEVIN WILSON: You hear Coach Knowles, and we're just all kind of spread offenses as the game has evolved. I think though the last five, eight ten years in college ball, if you don't have good tight end play, your quarterback is either going to have to throw a whole lot or run a whole lot. And I think the tight end position just stays takes a lot of stress.

And if you have two of them, you can balance up either side of the formation. You have can add width to one side of the formation and put them in tandem, let alone guys like they have, which we do too. Like the way Cade and Mitch and Gee has played. I think the quarterback is what makes it go. You can do what the line can block. The receivers -- the running backs making the dynamic plays. In our world, the tight end position connects the offense together, and I think both groups will be huge Saturday

night as both teams attack each other.

**Q. C.J., keep reading about how you were recruited by Georgia and Coach Smart had an in-home visit, et cetera. How did you regard them? How close was it? Were you high on the Bulldogs?**

C.J. STROUD: Yeah. I mean, I would agree. Recruitment with Georgia, I went on an official visit, and I did have an in-home visit with him and Coach McGee. I think it was one of the other coaches, too. But, yeah, it was -- they were very respectful. I enjoyed my time up there, met some of the players, and I think some of them still play for them now. So I have respect for them, and I think they have respect for me. I got to see them up at the Heisman with Stetson. Got to talk to Coach Smart a good bit. He's a good dude, definitely a good coach. Come around a full 360 to be playing with them now. So I'm excited to do that.

It was close, but I'm glad where I went, and I'll ride with that till I die. So, yeah, they were like second in my recruitment, but I feel I made the right decision coming to Ohio State.

**Q. C.J., I'm just curious, a coordinator change made by through the season. How have you and Coach Wilson gone about establishing being on the same page and where would you rank, kind of your conformability?**

C.J. STROUD: It's no change because Coach Wilson has been doing the same thing I've been doing since I've been in school. They always find a clean game plan for us. That's for the outside world to think that's confusing.

Coach Wilson has been there every time I ask for him or need him. There's no confusion. That's probably for you guys. We've been doing the same things we've been doing. But yeah, he does a great job. And I think he'll do a great job, and I tell him that. He has that aura of a head coach, so I'm excited for him to go up there and do his thing.

**Q. C.J., following up on your recruitment by Georgia, what vision did Coach Smart and all them pitch to you for the Georgia offense when they were recruiting you? And when you see their offense now, how different is it maybe than the one you kind of envision yourself playing at some point?**

C.J. STROUD: It was so long ago. Well, not that long ago. It was like three, four years ago. But they were more so on the side of passing a little more, being on the -- because I think I am dynamic when it comes to throwing the ball down the field, staying in the pocket, working things like

that.

And of course they knew getting Darnell who was in my class. And then they've always had great defense with Keeley and dudes they had back then. So they were really excited to have an offensive attack as well as really good defense. So that was kind of the pitch. And then Coach Cooley, who was the quarterback coach at the time loved how kind of my footwork was and how I could still extend plays and make plays on the run and do things like that. So that was kind of their pitch.

**Q. Coach Wilson, just wondering how much you knew of Jalen Carter before started turning to prepare for this game and now that you have, what are your impressions?**

KEVIN WILSON: Well, one, the impressions are they have a lot of tremendous players. Always have. I think it starts with their coaches, the way they recruit and the emphasis of defense and the passion. A lot of times when you put on tape, you see great players. A lot of times when you put on tape, you see scheme and structure. But sometimes when you put on the great teams, you feel the tape and you feel those guys on tape and you feel them on tape. You feel the plays he makes and the way he can impact and influence games.

We have our hands full. Not just them. Everyone. You turn full focus there because there's other dynamic guys one on one. It's going to be a fist fight with every play. We got our hands full. Just a lot of respect for their structure, the culture, the way they play and most importantly, you feel their defense. We're going to have to do our best to make sure they feel us as we play this game because it's not going to be a reactionary game. It's going to be an attack game both ways, two guys going at each other. A lot of respect for those guys.

**Q. Georgia's pass defense gave up a lot of yards to LSU in the SEC title game. You all have a lot of talent. Do you think you can take advantage of that?**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I'm very confident in the talent we do have on offense, and I feel like when it comes to us playing any team in the nation, I feel confident with our guys and our ability to sling the rocks.

So like C.J. said, we're going to do all it takes to win, whether that's running or passing, but we're definitely aware of the talent that we have and we're going to look to exploit it and make big plays whenever we can.

C.J. STROUD: We got to play Buckeye football. LSU do what LSU did. So I'm pretty sure they're not going to let us

drop back and do what we want to do. I'm pretty sure they've been watching film on us and make sure that's something they stop. They probably think -- well, I don't know what they think. That's part of it. LSU got to throw the ball against us really well, and we'll just go out there and do it.

I'm pretty sure they'll have a plan for that, and we'll have to be on our game just as much as they are. So that was good for LSU, but we gotta go play Buckeye football and make sure what happens on Saturday for us.

KEVIN WILSON: You look at those stats, but the result of the game was they won the game by 20. So that wasn't necessarily the formula to win the game and make plays in both phases, third down conversions, short yard conversion. You look at the history of championship football games, there's not a lot of 9 and 7, 13-10 ballgames. And we got two great defenses going at each other. There's play makers on the offense. And when you look at the big-time plays, you have to score points. We have to find ways to not only have yards passing and running. We gotta find a way to get the ball to the end zone if we want a chance to win this game.

**Q. Do you guys feel like you played a complete game this year or as close to as possible, and if not, what do you think has kept you from that?**

KEVIN WILSON: We've played well. I mean, a complete game, I think you're always chasing perfection which you never get. So you're chasing that. You're chasing the heart and the game's not a game of perfect. And playing your best is your ability to just overcome and keep swinging and swinging and swinging. So we've gotten there, but I think our best is in front of us.

And the way we've prepped, we're going to have a tremendous challenge. There's going to be some challenging ugly plays Saturday night, but to get the outcome, we're going to go at it. And to me, that'll be we played our best game this far down the stretch. Big games, we can play four quarters as hard as we can. Not trying to be perfect because it's not going to be, and it doesn't have to be, but it has to be all we got. That'll be the challenge Saturday night to say, okay, we played our best. The critic is the one in the arena. I think Saturday night, we can look at the arena when it's over and look at these men and say, hey, was that our best and was that what it takes to win this game?

**Q. Following up on that with Emeka and perhaps C.J. To hear your confidence to play your best football against Georgia, Emeka, when you think about yourself, and Marvin, your first seasons as starters all**

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**the way through, what do you think about when you reflect as playing with Marvin, yourself in the lineup, C.J. throwing you the ball, when you reflect on the season now that you're here, what do you think of first and what do you have left to show?**

EMEKA EGBUKA: I think it's all conclusive. We have to play a complete game like you guys were talking about, in terms of not just pass catching, but run blocking. You know, making sure there's little to no mistakes, getting our play calling and just being great leaders.

We always felt like zone six has been kind of one of the position groups on the team who has accepted up in big scenarios and made big plays. Not saying that anyone else can't do it, but sometimes we like to be the guys in those scenarios. So just make sure we're able to make those plays and we're all confident and the line being able to hold their blocks and the running backs doing their jobs and C.J. being a field general out there.

So what me and Marvin think, we're just continuing to stay locked in and making sure we have everything down pat, and we're going to give it our all on Saturday.

**Q. Coach Wilson, Georgia has gone with a community approach at running back this season, and you have had to utilize your depth as well. How much of that has been by design, how much by necessity due to injury and can you talk about Miyan Williams and how -- I understand he's had to deal with a leg injury, how he is for this game?**

KEVIN WILSON: Yeah. Most of it's been by originally by design, but then with the injuries that we've had a couple times with those guys, they've all practiced well. Miyan had a really good go yesterday, the most work he's had to date.

And as we build through this week, I think we'll see those guys playing and playing well, but I think you need more than one back. You need two, sometimes three to play through the season. You need to play through the big games at receiver. Emeka and Marvin got a lot of targets, a lot of notoriety. We will say we need five and six and every day stepping up and playing championship football.

There's not a starting 11 on our football team. We got 17, 18, 19 guys really contributing in all those key stops. The running back is a little bit like Georgia's. Like a lot of good teams, you're playing two or three. This year we've had to evolve due to some guys being in and out due to some minor injuries we've had. But going into this game, we are at full force. And those guys need to take care of the ball and run as hard as they can. We have to make some

tough and ugly yards on this game to keep us on schedule.

**Q. Kevin, for you personally, what's it been like to manage all the responsibilities you have coordinating the offense, the game plan for this game, your new job the last couple weeks? Is that tough to juggle as a coach? I know Jeff Hafley did it in '19, but what's it been like from your perspective?**

KEVIN WILSON: I'm not going to talk much about it because really the recruiting days we had with the guys recruiting, I was dealing with the new opportunity. When we weren't recruiting, it was back here -- I've been here since last Thursday. So now I'm pushing about 12 days directly with the team all the time.

And really what's different from years ago is when there's a coaching change, you have to recruit your team so everybody doesn't jump on the portal. So that was the issue was like just trying to keep the guys on board. But I'm very compartmentalized. These guys know this. When I'm in practice, it's all practice and it's full throttle. When we're in meetings, it's all meetings.

There's probably 70 percent of the time is spent on this bowl game and the extra time has been late at night, last night about 9:30. We started this morning at 7:00 and got rolling. About 9:30 last night, I actually got to a couple things revolving about next year's job. Everything is with these guys.

Coach Day's comment is I am in this position because of what these guys have done and the obligation. I said back in preseason, one of our goals was to get in this game and be a part of this. And we want to have success in this game. It's not been hard. It's been a lot of energy. And the total focus when it's been time to work would be so these guys have a chance to play well against a tremendous Georgia defense and we're ready to roll.

**Q. Emeka, just wondering from last year's experience, what did you take away from the Rose Bowl and now playing a bigger role in this offense, how do you take away from that experience?**

EMEKA EGBUKA: It was a little different because there wasn't much on the line I feel. I felt like it was a good game for me to get my feet wet and understand what it's like to play on this scale. But this year is definitely different. I'm feeling more locked in, feeling more focused.

And I'm realizing as the days go on, that it's going to take everything that we take like as a team. It's going to be a hard-fought game to the fourth quarter. I'm not -- you know, I don't know what the score is going to be. I can't

predict that, but I know that's going to take all three phases for us to be able to execute the way that we need to.

So that was kind of something that I carried on in the Rose Bowl. We were down at half. Had to come out at halftime and have a big second half. We were clicking on all cylinders, and there's going to be a moment in the Saturday's game where we're going to face adversity, and it's going to come down to how we handle that.

**Q. C.J., Emeka and Marvin both had over a thousand yards receiving this year. What's made them so successful and how do you show them against one of the best passing offenses in the country this year?**

C.J. STROUD: I definitely think their work ethic. Whenever I come into the facility, either they're there or they're coming. And they're coming with me or they're there by themselves and that kind of just shows you what type of work it's been. It's been like that since their freshman year. And I think that's what's been paying off is just the work they put in and really just how on you smart they are, like they pick up on offense really well.

When they first got in here, it wasn't like a slouch. Chris and Garrett, Emeka and Julian and Marvin with the twos that year, and they were just as good. Or you know what I'm saying? Better at times. I'm not saying they're better than Garrett and Chris, but they were playing really good football to be freshmen. And I think when you come in with that type of attitude, I am not just going to be here to learn. I am going to be here to dominate. That's when you learn and that's when you become a great football player.

So it hasn't been overnight. They've been good since their freshman year. They just didn't have the opportunity to really test the field last season. So definitely the work that they put in and how they came in with that type of dog mindset has definitely paid off to have success this year and continue to have success in the future.

**Q. You guys are underdogs in this game. Have you embraced the underdog role and do you understand the history of being an underdog for Ohio State in games like this, 2002, 2014?**

KEVIN WILSON: I don't know if we've talked as much about that. It's just the opportunity in front of us, Dom and responding and practicing and prepping. We just had a question about Marvin and Emeka and C.J. Those are hands down maybe two of the best practice players on our team. And the guys practice and prep. And so to me, I have a lot of respect for this. It's a prideful, prideful group, prideful program.

No matter what the underdog or spreads or all that stuff is, I guess, Dom, but I think our guys just take a lot of pride in chasing greatness. And I think the way we prepped and prepared, I just enjoy walking on the field with those guys and the way they go about their business to give ourselves guys a chance to have success. It's a great group to practice with.

C.J. STROUD: It's football. So you gotta go play football. I don't really think -- I haven't put no thought to it. I feel like we're still Ohio State. We're still the Buckeyes. Georgia is Georgia for a reason. So I mean, I definitely think -- I mean, even talking to some of other guys on our team, it's been respect. I don't want to say that I feel like the underdog. I don't feel like -- I do feel like they are counting us out. That's fine. We've been counted out plenty of times. I'm sure people have counted Emeka out in his life. People have counted out Coach Wilson. People have counted me out. This isn't new. I think this is the path that God wanted us on. And I'm just rocking with that. That means we're the underdog, I'm cool with it, and it's time to mask up and go play football.

EMEKA EGBUKA: You can look at the rankings and see that we're No. 4 and look in the past and see what the past No. 4 Ohio State team did. But at the end of the day, Georgia is a phenomenal team. They're 12 and 0. It's hard to go undefeated on a season. And they're the number one ranked team right now, but I can't speak for everyone, but for me personally, I don't feel like underdogs.

There's never been a time where I stepped on the field that I felt a severe disadvantage to a player across from me. So I haven't played Georgia yet, but I feel like with the confidence that we have as a team and our ability, like C.J. said, we've been counted out before. So it's not nothing new to us. So we're going to go out there and play football on Saturday like we know how to play football.

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