

CFP Semifinal

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

Georgia vs Ohio State

Tuesday, December 27, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Will Muschamp

Chris Smith

Smael Mondon, Jr.

Chaz Chambliss

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right. Getting us cranked back up. We're now joined by the Georgia defense. We've got co defensive coordinator Will Muschamp, safety, Chris Smith; linebacker, Smile Mondon and linebacker, Chaz Chambliss.

Coach, we'll start with you. Just a quick opening statement on transitioning here to Atlanta and bowl prep and how it is going so far.

WILL MUSCHAMP: We had a really good practice, a week in Athens. I thought our guys worked extremely hard, came back yesterday, had another good practice. And we're excited to get started again today. Appreciate the Peach Bowl and obviously the College Football Playoff and what they do for college football, and we're excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Chris, just talk about your transition and how the bowl week experience has been so far. I know it's only been one day, but how are you guys settling in?

CHRIS SMITH: It's been a great transition so far. I'm from Atlanta, so it's great to be able to get back home. We had a good event last night with the team, a lot of great camaraderie and a good competition, and we'll have many more with the week coming.

SMILE MONDON, JR.: Like Chris said, it was a smooth transition. I'm not necessarily from Atlanta, but I'm from a



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little bit down the road, Paulding County. So it was good to be back home, close to home.

CHAZ CHAMBLISS: Smooth transition. Everything was great. And same with Smile, around the same area, too.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go right into questions.

Q. Will, wondering about the dynamic between you and Glenn. Can you give us a picture, when you're conducting meetings, are you both up there? Do you trade back and forth? Obviously you've run your own show for a long time. So how does that dynamic work?

WILL MUSCHAMP: It's been outstanding. Glenn has done a phenomenal job this year, does a great job relating with our players, sending the message through our head football coach to our players. The expectation doesn't change, and I'm really proud of these guys sitting with me today and how they've approached this season of what we perceived to have lost last year, the guys we lost on our defense and how these guys have handled this year.

Glenn has done an outstanding job. He's a really good football coach. We take turns as far as the installation process is concerned, but there is a lot of voices in the defensive room, starting with Coach Smart and myself, and we have an outstanding defensive staff. So it's not anybody running a one-man show. It's a lot of people involved in what we're trying to do, and obviously the expectation we understand on defense at Georgia to be elite. That's what our goal is at all times, and we understand that, and you leave your egos on the shelf and understand what you've gotta do and what your role is in the organization to be successful.

Q. Coach, when you look at guys like Smile and Jamon as well, just how key are the inside linebackers to what y'all do in terms of defensive scheme and what allows you all to be so good on that side of the ball?

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WILL MUSCHAMP: Well, those guys have had a phenomenal year. Both Smile and Jamon, taking the role that they've taken, again, from last year. In our defense there's a lot of communication involved. Obviously Chris can sound board that as well, but a lot is communicated up front based on formation recognition. A lot of this is happening in a tempo setting where it's very fast, there's a lot of things going on. And these two young men have done a phenomenal job of getting us in the right spots defensively, because we have a lot of things that we check based on formation and things. And these guys do a great job of communicating those things to our defense along with Chris, and Malaki and some of the other guys.

Q. Coach, it's been a crazy last few years to say the least. When you took the analyst job here, did you envision that you would be standing where you are now 15 to 18 months later as the co DC?

WILL MUSCHAMP: No. Whether you're the head coach or the coordinator or position coach or an analyst, do the best job in the job you have in your role in the organization, and Coach Smart does a great job of identifying what your job is, and this is your job description, and do it at a high level and let the chips fall where they may. And for some unfortunate circumstances, I ended up being on the field last year, and do the best job you can with the job you have.

Q. Coach, and for the players, what's the most impressive part of C.J.'s game?

WILL MUSCHAMP: Wow, I mean I think he's an elite passer. That's the first thing that jumps out. He can make all the throws. He puts the balls in catchable areas where a lot of just don't have that talent to do that, a lot of people don't have that talent to do that. And he certainly can. I think it was Michigan State two years ago he takes a zone read 70 yards for a touchdown against Northwestern. This past year, with 5:30 left to go in the game, designed quarterback run out the back side. So he has legs and athleticism to evade in the rush and create off-rhythm plays which is obviously very difficult to defend, but the number one thing that jumps off the film is his ability to throw the football.

CHRIS SMITH: I would say he's an elite passer, very poised with his game, and you can tell they run everything through him. Like I say, like Coach say, he got legs. He can pretty much do it all. He's a Heisman finalist, and that just says enough for the kind of player he is.

SMILE MONDON: Pretty much agreeing on what Chris and Coach Muschamp said. Elite passer, with really good

ball placement. He puts the ball where his receivers can have a chance to make a play. So that's hard to defend.

CHAZ CHAMBLISS: Just a great player overall. The offense goes through him. He's a great passer, and he can show his legs when he wants to.

Q. Two-parter here. First for Chaz. Being thrust into the lineup with Nolan going down, do you feel like you're playing more confident as the season progresses. And, Chris, you had a very similar situation where Richard went down in 2020. Is there any advice you give to younger players in how to catch up really quickly?

CHAZ CHAMBLISS: Yeah, obviously with more playing, the more confidence you have the more snaps you have under your belt, the better you feel when you go out on the field. Experience is invaluable when you go out there, and just try and take advantage of every snap.

CHRIS SMITH: It's crazy you ask that, because I have this conversation a lot, just telling players how you make sure you need to be ready when your name is called with the situation and how I was able to get on the field. I just made sure I was ready and prepared, just doing everything I can in practice and building that connection with my teammates and my coaches. It just really paid off when it was time for me to be able to step up, and I just kind of try to preach that to the younger guys, like just make sure you're ready when your time come.

Q. Coach Muschamp, getting Jalen Carter back healthy obviously was a huge -- been a huge part of the defense's success. Just kind of talk about what that has meant and what his presence has allowed the rest of the defense to do.

WILL MUSCHAMP: Well, he's somebody you gotta account for every snap. He can change the game certainly inside. He's a very disruptive guy in the run game and in the pass game. So that's something that's -- a guy that's very disruptive. And you gotta account for him every snap, and sometimes it's hard to help in protection for an inside player. It's much easier to chip on the edges and be able to have some protection. You can turn the protection. We're very aware of that, that we've gotta create situations where Jalen is one-on-ones, and that's what we try and do as much as we can.

Q. For some guys in interviews this year talk about bloody Tuesday. Can you tell me what that is? And it sounds like it would be a culture-building kind of thing.

WILL MUSCHAMP: It's today.

CHRIS SMITH: Yeah. It's today. It's basically our hardest day in practice. That's when we get after it the hardest, and we feel like that's what this program is built on, bloody Tuesday.

Q. Chris, Ohio State has the two 1,000-yard receivers. Are there any comparables to any other wide receivers tandems in the SEC you faced to those two guys?

CHRIS SMITH: I would probably compare them to actually the last game we played, LSU had a lot of great receivers as well as Ohio State, and they all bring different things to the game as wide receivers, but they're all special talents at the end of the day and something that we have to be able to account for and focus on.

Q. Coach Muschamp and Chris Smith, if you could speak about the guy to your left there in the age of the transfer portal. He's a guy that stuck it out, and now he's an All American and an NFL prospect. And, Chris, if you could weigh in. Down the road at Hapeville Charter to sitting there where you are today.

WILL MUSCHAMP: That was great practice fields at Hapeville Charter you had. I'm a huge Chris Smith fan. And I agree. I like how you phrased the question of the age of the transfer portal. Here's a guy that doesn't really hit the field till his fourth year, or third year, and then going into his fourth year, and has played -- in my two years at Georgia, has played phenomenal, has played outstanding football. Extremely bright, extremely intelligent, very competitive, great leader. A guy that's really affected people around him in a very positive way. Physical player. I mean, all the intangible attributes, you can't -- I wouldn't stop. We'd be here for a while. And what he has meant for our program and what he's brought to the University of Georgia, and his last two years have been pretty amazing how he's played.

CHRIS SMITH: Yeah, I would just say it's been a long journey for sure. Like you say, in the age of the transfer portal, you got a lot of people in your ear saying you're second string here or you can go somewhere else and start, but I just stuck it out and just built that connection with my teammates and my brothers and just continued to work. And all I can say is hard work pays off at the end of the day.

Q. Coach, kind of operational question. Last year I think Coach Schumann was in the box. This year both of you guys are on the field as co defensive coordinators. What goes into the decision of who's in the box, what's in the box, who's on the field, why are we on the field?

WILL MUSCHAMP: What's best for our football team. There's a lot of things that go on from the standpoint of offensive personnel on the field, who's identifying those things. Being on the field, a luxury we have is Coach Smart, a guy that's been defensively as good as anyone in the country for a long time. So you've got those eyes on the field. Myself, Coach Schumann, Tray Scott, and then Chidera does a great job in the box as far as relaying the information. And that's kind of -- to be honest with you, going in the first ballgame, we didn't know how it was going to go. And it's gone well for us. We've had good information. The bottom line is us making the proper adjustments immediately and being able to get those information by series so we can make sure our players understand the information and how an offense maybe is attacking us or something they may be doing different we hadn't prepared for and making sure we're getting that information as quickly as possible. And that's the big part of that, and we're able to do a good job, and Chidera has done a nice job in the box of being able to get that information, along with everybody on every play has something they're watching. It's not just watching the game and watching the ball. You got something you're looking at and making sure that we make the corrections when they occur.

Q. Chris, LSU had some success passing the ball in the SEC championship. Just as a secondary what have you all kind of been focusing on this month to get ready for this passing attack for Ohio State?

CHRIS SMITH: We've just been focusing on our technique and fundamentals. It's been when a month that we've had to be able to practice and get prepared for this game, and just locking in on a game plan. That game is in the past. We know we didn't perform our best and we can perform better, and that's what we want to do for this game on Saturday.

Q. Chris and Smile, part of the week obviously is the extra activities you guys are going to be partaking in. Two parts, is it a distraction, a welcome distraction, something needed with the magnitude of the game awaiting you this weekend? And I noticed that one of the events is basketball. Only five guys can shoot. Who's the one guy taking the last second shot?

CHRIS SMITH: Well, first of all, I would say it's not a distraction. It's kind of the opposite. It kind of brings you more of a connection with your teammates and being able to spend that time and having fun activities you aren't usually be able to do. We played like Family Feud last night, and that was really fun, like a lot more fun than I thought it would be. And on who's that last shot, I'm going

with Malaki Starks. He's one of the best basketball players I've seen.

SMILE MONDON: I feel like it's only a distraction if you let it be. If you go about it the right way, it's just going to be fun, connecting with your teammates. As far as the last shot, though, I'm staying in the linebacker room, I'm going with Trezmen. Gonna let Trezmen or Sorey take that last shot.

Q. Are you thankful that he's not going with you in the linebacker room?

CHAZ CHAMBLISS: We're kind of different in the linebacker rooms, inside and outside. We're separate rooms.

THE MODERATOR: Am I to understand that neither one of you guys want to take the last shot?

CHRIS SMITH: I'll shoot it if I have to. Somebody pick me, I'll take it.

Q. Will, I guess last time we talked to you, Malaki Starks hadn't done what he's done this year. Just from a former safety yourself, what has allowed him to come in and be so successful his first season playing in your all's defense?

WILL MUSCHAMP: Well, he's very coachable. Obviously, God has blessed him with a lot of ability. He's a guy that at Jefferson High School played both sides of the ball, was an option quarterback, so he only really played defensive back about half the time. So there were a lot of firsts for him last spring when he came mid year. Made tremendous strides from day one of spring ball through the summer, going into training camp. But being very coachable, very bright, very humble young man, always eager to get better, to improve.

Always striving to get better, always understanding he's got room to grow as a player. And Larry and Tisha, his parents, great family, great young man and has had some really bright moments this fall. He really has done a nice job. But I think as much as anything, you go back to being very coachable and understanding things he's gotta improved on every day, and obviously God's blessed him with some ability.

Q. Coach, how advantageous is it I guess for Georgia to be able to stop teams from running the football without dedicating a lot of bodies to the box, kind of allowing them four downs and those two backers, to handle their business and allowing your really good safeties to kind of control the passing lanes?

WILL MUSCHAMP: Well, if you're able to play more split

safety and be able to cloud the coverage a little bit for the quarterback, it certainly helps. And if you're able to do that with Jalon and Oz and Zlo and those guys do a great job of controlling the line of scrimmage. And we're able to do that, that certainly is advantageous for you. To be able to rush the passer with four guys rushing, that's -- gives you really good shot defensively. And that's key for that, and that's something that controlling the running game's been good. We gotta continue to find ways to affect the quarterback.

Q. I'll ask, Coach Muschamp, last game out for Ohio State, their only loss of the year. Is there anything that you see on tape that Michigan did that you guys will try and do? Is there a blueprint there? Is there anything to that?

WILL MUSCHAMP: No. We do what we do. But Ohio State is up and down the field the first half, and Michigan got off the field on third down and they had a couple of turnovers.

THE MODERATOR: While they're thinking about it, I've got one for you guys. This is your third game in this stadium this season, which is really unusual. Curious if you think is there really an advantage to you? Is there a greater comfort level for that? Do you feel you have an advantage in any way?

CHRIS SMITH: I wouldn't say it's an advantage. I feel like both teams are going to be locked into the match. And we're not going to be worried about the outside. We're going to be worried about what we gotta do on the field. So I don't think it's no advantage.

SMILE MONDON: Yeah, like Chris said, I don't necessarily think it's an advantage.

CHAZ CHAMBLISS: I don't think it's an advantage at all. Playing-wise, both teams are going to play hard. It's a one-game season right now, so it's all or nothing.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, any thoughts?

WILL MUSCHAMP: Matters who plays the best in those 60 minutes.

Q. Coach Muschamp, can you take us back to January 1st, '93 and the Citrus Bowl the only time Georgia has played Ohio State. What do you remember from that game?

WILL MUSCHAMP: It was a good win for the Dawgs. We had a pre not game, but I guess a luncheon, and Herbstreit got up and threw a pass across the room, I knew we had a

shot to win. (Laughs). Make sure he knows I said that.

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