

CFP Semifinal

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

Georgia vs Ohio State

Wednesday, December 28, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Todd Monken

Stetson Bennett

Sedrick Van Pran

Press Conference



thing probably was talking to Andrew Young last night. He had a lot of things to say about the civil rights movement and different things like that. And as a guy who enjoys history, it was really good to kind of be around that.

THE MODERATOR: Awesome. Appreciate that. We'll go right into questions.

Q. Coach, I'm just curious, we can all see Brock's extremely versatile, but could you talk to the mental bandwidth it requires to know that many different positions and play that many different positions in your offense?

TODD MONKEN: Well, we've had this conversation since I've been here about Brock, and what kind of worker he is, attention to detail, mental toughness that he has. And he's really developed in a lot of areas. And it's a credit to him. It's a credit to his upbringing, his family. And like I said, there's a lot of things you can do with him. He's outstanding with the ball in his hands. He's got an elite catch radius, ability to compete to go get the football. And so, again, he's meant a lot to us in terms of this year in terms of having an AD out and his ability to make plays.

Q. Stetson, when you look at this Ohio State defense, what stands out to you about it and just what that defense does really well and how you guys will have to counteract it?

STETSON BENNETT: First of all, they have really good players and they execute their system. They try to cause havoc. They can come from a lot of different places. They do their assignment, and in order for us to be successful, we have to do ours. And that's trusting Sed, whenever he's making the calls and talking to him. But at the end of the day, they've got a really good football team. We've got a really good football team, and it's going to come down to who executes better on Saturday.

Q. What has allowed the offensive line to develop and

THE MODERATOR: Continuing with Georgia, with their offense. We're joined by offensive coordinator, Todd Monken, quarterback Stetson Bennett, and center, Sedrick Van Pran.

Start with a couple of opening statements. Coach, just talking about preparation for this, a game of this magnitude, a semifinal game, does that affect preparation, and how has that been going for you?

TODD MONKEN: I would think what affects preparation probably the most is just the time in between when we played last. I don't know how many days that's been, but you're never really used to having almost a full month off from the last time you played, guys finishing up finals, getting them going again, then you have a break for Christmas, which was well-deserved by our players and then getting them going again. But we're excited to get back after it. We've had really good three weeks of preparation and a great start to this week.

THE MODERATOR: For the players, you guys have had an opportunity to do a lot of things while you've been in town for bowl week, go to a lot of events and activities. What's the highlight of the week each of you so far been?

STETSON BENNETT: I think the highlight so far was when we were playing Family Feud, and I think we won that one. It was short lived. I think Ohio State won the next game. I can't remember, but it was pretty exciting when we got that victory.

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: I think for me the most exciting



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really seem like play some of its best football over the last month, month and a half of the season?

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: I think really what has helped our development throughout the season has been Coach Searels. He's really done a great job of preparing more than five guys. He's done a tremendous job of getting guys like Amarius, Jared Wilson. I know I'm forgetting some guys. But honestly all those guys, he's done a tremendous job of making sure we can put a lot of guys in and still have very similar production. So I want to give all the credit to Coach Searels in preparing us.

TODD MONKEN: First of all, it's having good players. You gotta have good players. If you have good players that work their butts off every day, have elite attention to detail, they're going to continue to get better. And I think we have to remember that Broderick hadn't played a lot of football until this year. Sed was a one-year starter. Tate was out all last year. Amarius Mims hadn't played a lot of football. Xavier Truss was not a starter before. Devin Willock had not played a lot of football.

So I think if you've got the right guys that have talent that are elite in terms of attention to detail and try to play physical every week, they're going to continue to improve.

Q. Stetson, what has Todd Monken meant to you personally and how has he helped develop you and support you?

STETSON BENNETT: You know, a ton. I feel like before he got here, I didn't really understand football. It's weird, even in 2020, didn't really know what was going on. You know, I guess I knew what play was called. Other than that, you know, I mean, I don't really know how to describe it. But it's just the countless meetings. Maybe I'm a slow learner, but finally it did start clicking whenever he would tell me the same thing for the 20th time and look at me like I was, you know, like why do you not do what I just tell you to do? I'm your coach.

And so just repetitive, just doing that. I think honestly, the most important thing that he's done is just stay consistent, you know. Be there, because we do have a lot of knuckleheads who need time and reps and all that stuff to learn. So sometimes he's not very patient, but he's very consistent, and we hear the same thing every single day. And eventually you're going to start doing things right if you hear that every day.

Q. Stetson, this time last year we were asking you a ton of questions about your flip phone. Have you taken any steps this year, cellphone or otherwise, to block out the noise?

STETSON BENNETT: No. Not -- not so drastic as that, no.

Q. And just a quick followup, if I could. Coach Smart has talked about it before, your desire to prove people wrong, right, and the chip on your shoulder. Does that stay there even with a Heisman invite and a national championship ring and an SEC championship, and if so, how do you keep that as a motivating factor for you?

STETSON BENNETT: I mean, it's never been a chip on my shoulder or prove people wrong. It's hard to describe, but I don't think of it that way, right? Because, I don't know, but I just want to be the best I can be, and if I'm not, then I start to, you know, be like, I don't know, I don't like it. And I love football, and I want to play football. Heisman ceremony was very -- that was a huge honor. That's not why I play, you know. So that's not going to change the way I play. We've got a game to win, and gotta prepare like it. Otherwise we won't.

Q. Sedrick, being the center and kind of the quarterback of the offensive line, a lot of large responsibility falls on your plate. When you study this Ohio State defensive front, is there one player in particular that you kind of enjoy watching or just keeps coming up and reoccurring?

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: One thing that comes up a lot on film is that all of them do their job extremely well. They play really well together in the system, and of course, guys flash. The media gives a lot of guys attention, but one thing I see about this defensive front 7 is really that they all do their jobs collectively together. Nobody is a blinking light. Nobody is trying to be this big guy. Everybody is collectively working together, and that's huge. That's why they're so good and why what they're doing is working. So really what I've seen on film is that they all just really do a good job together like working for one common goal.

Q. Stetson, in every great Hollywood script, the hero overcomes a low point or some adversity. For you, what was it and who did you lean on to get through it?

STETSON BENNETT: Just in my life? I mean, there's a lot of ups and downs, you know, when I wasn't playing. And when I was playing, I didn't play well enough and then I wasn't playing again, and you know, all those things.

As far as leaned on, I didn't really -- you know, I talked to those -- to people who made me feel good, but then at the end of the day, I realized that, yeah, this makes me feel good, but if I want something to change, then I gotta stop

leaning on anybody. I gotta go do something to change it. And so I think that's what happened at the end of the day.

Q. The Ohio State players who were in here before y'all were asked what advantages they think they might have against the offense, and they said, we have advantages across the board. And I want to see if y'all wanted to respond to that.

TODD MONKEN: Well, I mean, they should have confidence. They have a good football team. I'm not going to sit here and say that we think in terms of this X, Y and Z. We have advantages. We have a good football team. Our tape proves that. Their tape proves it. So at the end of the day, we got good football players. They got good football players.

At this point, it's going to come down to execution. It's going to come down to our preparation that leads up to this, and it's not going to come down to whether we think we have advantages or we don't think we have advantages because at the end of the day, both teams have good players. It's going to come down to doing the little things well in execution.

THE MODERATOR: Stetson, do you see any advantages that they have?

STETSON BENNETT: That Ohio State has? Yeah, certainly. Yeah. I don't really want to get into the particulars right now, but obviously they were undefeated until the last game of the season. It's hard to do that. And we were, too, last year until we lost to Alabama, and then we ended up winning it all. So we certainly are not taking Ohio State lightly. Like they said, they've got advantages all over the board. So we're going to have to go play football.

THE MODERATOR: Sedrick?

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: I think the biggest thing I would like to just focus on is like Coach Monken said, we both have good players on each side, and it really is going to come down to execution. I really have a lot of respect for Ohio State, their program and everything that they stand for, but also I have a lot of pride in Georgia football. So we just really look forward to continuing to prepare and just go out there and compete.

Q. Question for both Stetson and Sedrick. I'm just curious, a unique relationship between quarterback and center. Maybe speak about how one has lessened the burden or maybe the workload on Saturdays between the other and how the relationship has developed.

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: Honestly, I don't think it's less by either. I think it's more of a trust that each guy will get the job done. And, also, a connection in knowing that if he tells me something or I tell him something, there's no ego. It's no -- it's nothing against you personally. It's all for the benefit of the team.

And I think understanding that, that genuinely the time that we've spent outside of football, it comes into play, and I really enjoy playing next to this guy right next to me. So at the end of the day, we both just try to make sure we get our job done and trusting each other for the team.

STETSON BENNETT: Yeah, like you just kind of find that mold where you're not -- it happens smoothly, and I don't think we've -- we may have dropped two snaps.

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: The whole time.

STETSON BENNETT: Yeah, in practice. And it just it works, and like Sed said, nothing is personal. Nothing -- like if he makes a right call, then he makes the right call, and it does not matter. Sed's done a great job of growing and learning and becoming a smarter football player and a better football player. So I can lean on him more, I can trust him more, and I can just say little things, and then he responds, and I know what that means, right? It just comes little shorthand, easy speak. But that comes with time, and -- why are you laughing? I don't know. It's been a pleasure and an honor playing behind him.

Q. Coach Monken, how have you seen your offense grow and develop over the course of the season to now put you guys in the position you're in today?

TODD MONKEN: I don't -- you know, we went through last year, we lost George, and it forces you to adapt, and then you lose AD early in the year, and you're forced to adapt, and luckily we've got other good players. Probably the most constant we've had is these two guys right here because the epicenter of what you do is your center and your quarterback. They make it go. They're the ones that communicate upfront.

So those two guys have been the reason we've been where we're at along with everybody else and the continued improvement of the O line, the consistency there. But it's hard for me to pinpoint, because in my mind, averages just make you feel good. At the end of the year, what's going to matter most Saturday is that we score, we don't turn it over. It won't matter what we've done really up to this point other than our execution, how we practice this week and be able to put it on the field Saturday night.

Q. Todd, when your all's, for lack of a better term, benched Stetson after the Jacksonville game a couple years ago, what was his sort of journey like that you saw in that almost ten months before he really took back over?

TODD MONKEN: Well, it's a complete credit to him, and really nothing to do with me. All we did was try to bury him for the couple of years he was here, and all he did was continue to fight and compete and had every reason to say, you know what, I'm gone in today's day and age in the portal and guys leaving. He didn't do that. He wanted to be a Georgia Bulldog, wanted to be the quarterback for the Georgia Bulldogs.

You know, I think that we've come out the other side probably better collectively. He's very prideful, and we wouldn't be where we're at without him. And collectively we've improved. I've done a better job of coaching him. He's done a better job of accepting that part of it. He always had talent, always had ability. We talked about it last year getting ready for Michigan. You know, there was a back and forth about Stetson and J.T., and all I said was just look at the film. Just look at the film and the plays he's made. And even this year, look at the plays that he's made to get us where we're at. And sometimes you don't always make the right decision. You know, we're human, too, in terms of who we play. And then you gotta reverse course and say you know what, we're wrong, this is the guy.

Q. Stetson, it's not like you guys play any small games. They're all in front of 75, 80 or 100,000 on national TV, but some of your biggest games have come on the biggest stages, playoffs last year, the opener, SEC championship. What is it about the biggest stages that brings out often the best in you?

STETSON BENNETT: I don't know. I think I -- I don't know. I understand the importance of it may be. I don't know. And, again, if there's no choice, it's easy. Right? I mean, if you don't give yourself another choice than to play well or win, then you don't have another option and you don't waste any time looking for that option. You spend all your time looking to win. So that's kind of how I think about it.

Q. Todd, to follow up again on Stetson, he's often self-critical, but when he says that when he started with you that he was a guy who didn't understand football, what would you say about that, and where would you say he's made the most growth?

TODD MONKEN: Well, I think he's overplaying that way, way, way too much because I'm sitting here. The reality is Stetson is a very, very football-smart player. Maybe I had

one too many verys. But Stetson is a very smart player. He loves football. I mean, he sits in there, studies it, will be in there late. He wants to know everything about what we're doing, how to do it better. He's one of the rarer guys at this level that you can be quarterback controlled, and he can run it. He can get us in and out of plays. He can see it. Has a fantastic football mind.

So to say that, like I said, that's unfair to himself. It's unfair to his preparation and what he's done. You know, I do think there's a point in a player's progression where maybe -- and this is a guess. We've never talked about that. Okay, Stetson comes in, he leaves, comes back, what vision does he have of himself, you know, that, sure, he'd love to be the starter at Georgia. But deep down is he really thinking like, okay, I'm going to be the starter at Georgia.

I think once you get a chance to play in meaningful games and you realize like I always believed I could play, because we played Arkansas my first year here, and thank God he came in the game and rescued our ass, because he played his rear end off and right there, maybe to him and us, we're like this guy's a really good football player.

So I think there's a little too much he's putting on that about me and the fact that maybe it's a combination of two things of like, okay, man, I can do this, and how do I maximize my measurable skill set. How do I get better, this that I've worked on gets better. And then for us, how do we try to find ways to maximize what he does well to give us the best chance to win.

Q. Todd, how was Michigan able to create so many explosive plays and now this sort of chess match comes where you think Ohio State's defense will react this way so we have to do this, et cetera?

TODD MONKEN: Oh, you know, a couple of the plays at the end of the game came when they were trying to stop the run. So it's kind of hard. The game was kind of at the point where they had to get a stop and they had a couple of long runs, but early in the game. They went zero and missed a tackle on hitch route. They were a second away from getting a sack, and they missed a tackle and he went the distance. And they had defenders run into each other one time on a wheel route. They caught him in a cloud coverage and hit across the field raised route.

So they were able to take advantage of, you know, I guess you call sometimes a miss cue by the defense or some play action, but again, the game is really simple. I mean, it's really, you know, how do we be explosive, how do we not turn it over. How do we get third downs. Do we score touchdowns in the red zone and how do we not lose our

place and put you behind the chains. And they did those things.

They were able to be explosive. They didn't turn it over. They held Ohio State at times. So it gave them a chance to continue to plug ahead. So like any -- they're no different than any other team you play, is if you're not able to be explosive, you're going to have a hard time scoring. It just worked out in that game that Michigan hit some plays that gave them a chance to be explosive. And that's in games we've had success against unless we've been significantly better if you don't find ways to be explosive, you're going to have a hard time scoring points.

Q. Ohio State has a lot of depth upfront at the defensive line. They have a lot of talent on the edge. What do you see from their edge rushers on film that stands out?

TODD MONKEN: Well, they're long and rangy. And I think the one thing they're twitchy inside. I know you're talking about their outside guys. They create issues with their looks. So you have to be careful and not chase ghosts, but you have to be prepared because they're not afraid to pressure you. As these guys said earlier, from the field, from the boundary, different players pressuring you. So you have to be dialed in to what looks they're giving you, but definitely their edge guys can create issues.

Again, like any team that we've played in the past that have had really good players upfront, the best way to be able to negate that is to be able to run the football, be able to get the ball out of your hands, be able to protect, chip when you can. And if we're able to do that and not be in long yard situations or get behind, then it doesn't eliminate really good players, but it limits their ability to affect the game.

That happened last year against Michigan. We got ahead early. We were able to run the football. We got it out of our hands. Against LSU with their edge guys, that's the key to it. Otherwise those guys can really disrupt the game.

Q. Coach Monken, a lot has been made of these Georgia practices over the past few years, but the bottom line is that there's a work ethic and player empowerment that is kind of unrivaled across the college football landscape. In a week like this where emotions can be heightened, what sense of comfort do you take as a coaching staff knowing these players are going to come out and be accountable for each other in that practice setting?

TODD MONKEN: Well, I think the biggest comfort you take is watching your guys work. You know, we can only

go by what we see. You recruit good players. You have a structure and a system. And then you go to work. And like I tell the offensive staff, you know, I can't call plays that I don't see during the week work. I mean, that's a rarity.

So the looks that we get by the scout group and our execution gives you confidence to call it. And the exact same thing is true with your players is anybody that says, well, I'm not really a practice player doesn't play. That makes no sense to me, because I can only go by in our staff by what you do every day and how you work and gain the trust of your teammates and the coaches as to when you put him on the field.

And when that occurs, then you have a lot of faith of what the product will look like, because you've seen it every day and the work they've put in, because when you have talent and they play their rear ends off and they work and have attention to detail, the game is just a byproduct of that.

Q. Coach, and I guess you can answer this too, Sed, being an offensive lineman. When they have edge rushers like that that are so prone to get on field and get after the quarterback, I guess how much does a play action impact that and maybe how do you attack that in the run game, take advantage of it rather?

SEDRICK VAN PRAN: So when you kind of look at it, they really do have some amazing edge rushers. Those guys really get after it, super athletic, different things like that. And as far as like the run game, you really just have to focus on what's the staple of what we believe in. One of the things that we believe in here is running the ball.

So no matter how athletic or no matter how gifted or God gifted somebody may be, you have to do everything in your might to fight to stand on what you believe in. And as the offensive line here at Georgia, we genuinely believe on being tough guys, and doing everything we can to help this football team win. So despite everything that they may possess, you have to give everything you have for this team, because it is everything, everything that we play for, everything that we work for. So despite their God-given talent, we have to go out there and give our all.

TODD MONKEN: Yeah, I mean they got good players. We got good players, they got good players. Let's go. You know, I mean it is what it is. We've played teams that have good players. They've played teams that have good players, and it comes down to, you know, how we prepare and the plan that we put together for our guys to give them the best chance to be successful. And like I said, they've got good players.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll end it there. Thank

you, gentlemen.

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