

CFP Semifinal Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Georgia vs Ohio State

Friday, December 30, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Gary Stokan

CEO, President Peach Bowl, Inc.

Coach Ryan Day

Ohio State Buckeyes

Coach Kirby Smart

Georgia Bulldogs

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: With that, as is our tradition, we're going to welcome Gary Stokan, CEO, and President of Peach Bowl, Inc., for our annual state of the bowl address.

GARY STOKAN: Wow, my parents are in the crowd. Thanks, Matt. I appreciate it.

First off, let me welcome everybody from the national media, from the Ohio media, and obviously the Georgia media. Great to have you guys here.

We hope you appreciate what Matt and his team has done. We try and treat you as the third team. We joke about it. We have two teams, Ohio State and Georgia here, but you're the third team. And every decision we make, we try and keep you on that same level, whether it's hospitality, the facilities we have. I think the Westin's worked out well. This is our first year here.

Again, welcome to everybody. Also want to welcome Gene Smith, Ryan Day, Josh Brooks, and Kirby Smart. Compliments to both Josh and Gene as well as Ryan and Kirby. The players this year have been outstanding. You can tell why these teams are successful. The character that they exhibit when you see the kids and you say hello, they look you in the eye. We haven't had any problems this week. So I really want to compliment them.

Also want to welcome Bill Hancock and thank Bill for the opportunity nine years ago to have the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl join the CFP, and we held the first game in the CFP



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back in 2014 with TCU and Ole Miss.

Welcome to Bob Schuler, our chairman of the board, and also to Joe Saracino, and Andrew Cathy of Chick-Fil-A. Chick-Fil-A now is the longest title sponsor in bowl history. So 26 years of being a partner of ours, and we've grown together in a successful partnership, I think. It's probably the most interesting and probably successful sports marketing business story that can be told, and I've been in sports for 44 years.

But I want to thank all of you and express our attitude of gratitude. I'm very competitive, for those of you who know me. It's one of the reasons why we're standing where we are right now. I told my board back in 1998 when they started the BCS, my job was to get us in the BCS. And I failed, but we came around, brought the College Football Hall of Fame here, started the kickoff game format, and wound up in the CFP in 2014. So we finally got there.

A little history. We're the ninth oldest bowl game in the country. We're the first charitable bowl game ever created. The Lions LightHouse created us back in 1968. This is our 55th bowl game. Georgia is here for the seventh time, which is a record, the most ever. Clemson and Georgia have been here the most. This is Ohio State's first time to play in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl.

This is the eighth year of the College Football Hall of Fame, which we brought here to Atlanta, put \$13 million in it to build it, sustain it. We're awfully proud of the College Football Hall of Fame. And if you haven't been there, we please invite you. You'll really enjoy the experience if you're a college football fan.

This is the 13th year of our Chick-Fil-A kickoff game and the ninth year, as I mentioned earlier, in the CFP. Ironically enough, we've hosted, I think we're the only bowl that has hosted all four semifinalists this year. We hosted TCU in '14, Michigan in '19, Georgia in '20 and '22, and Ohio State this year in '22. We've hosted all five Power 5

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conferences as well as the American.

This year we called it our record season. Last year was our comeback season out of COVID. This year is our record season. We've had three games and five of the six teams that have been in those games have all been ranked in the top 11. We had No. 3 Georgia against Oregon, No. 11 in our Chick-Fil-A kickoff game on Saturday, on Monday we had Clemson No. 4 against Georgia Tech, and in our Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl, No. 1 Georgia against No. 4 Ohio State.

Cumulatively we've had 200,000 fans that have gone to those three games. I don't know of any other city that has that kind of attendance. We'll create 85 to \$100 million of economic impact through those three games. In the fourth largest convention town in the United States, Atlanta, Georgia, two of the top five conventions on an annual basis are Chick-Fil-A kickoff game and Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl.

You add the SEC Championship to that, and three of the top five conventions in Atlanta on an annual basis are college football. That's how important college football is to the city of Atlanta.

As I mentioned, we're the most charitable bowl organization in the country by far. We've given \$61 million back to charity since 2002. This year alone, we'll give \$6.1 million to charity. Some of that has gone to children's healthcare, 22 million of that to eradicate childhood cancer.

We have created the Peach Bowl Legacy Fund, and right now we have 12 trials that are actively taking place with 31 children in those trials to find a cure, find a treatment from everything from neuroblastoma to leukemia to give the kid another day, give the kid another year, give the kid a lifetime. So that's awfully important to us. Those patients are in five different hospitals around the country.

By 2025, the plan is to have 100 patients and ten hospitals involved in that process. It's difficult when you're talking about childhood cancer, all these trials have to be tested in animals, then tested in adults, because of the toxicity levels. And then finally you can test them in children.

We also are going to give \$100,000 to both Ohio State and to Georgia in an endowed scholarship for playing in this game. \$50,000 from us, \$50,000 from Chick-Fil-A. That adds up to \$8.5 million now that we have in endowed scholarships in the John Lewis Legacy of Courage Scholarship Program, which is at 34 universities. And \$300,000 this year went from those endowed scholarships to 33 Title One students. Title One students are kids from underprivileged cities that don't have the opportunity to pay for college. So those go to kids from Atlanta. If there's no

kid from Atlanta that applies for those schools, then it moves on to the rest of Georgia. So we're humbly proud of that.

A lot of these kids, this is the first kid in their family that has the opportunity to go to college. So we're changing kids' lives and families' lives generationally.

We also are proud to announce today that we're giving \$100,000 and Extra Yard For Teachers through the CFP is matching that to give \$200,000 to Atlanta Public School system for their special education teacher program. So we appreciate CFP's partnership in that process. Extra Yard For Teachers does a fantastic job impacting teachers and kids throughout the country.

We also place \$150,000 into academic coaches, and every one of the Atlanta public inner city high schools, and they work with the kids to get their ACTs up, their SAT scores up, as well as their GPA so they can graduate, get their scores up so they have the opportunity to go to college, and then they can apply for those scholarships.

The last thing, we do commit \$250,000 to Lions LightHouse and Lions Club International. They founded us, and we're very happy to give back to them. They do eye screening with elementary school kids, where these kids don't have insurance, eye insurance, and we just tested an elementary school in Atlanta inner city. There were 50 kids, and 28 of the kids needed to see an optometrist. So we go on and get them glasses. They all of a sudden turn into a different kid because they can see better.

So what's the future hold for us? 2024, we'll start the season with Georgia versus Clemson. We'll host the CFP quarterfinals in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. And at the end of that season, Atlanta will host the National Championship Game of the CFP and be the only city that's hosted twice in the first 12-year contract of the CFP.

In 2025, we'll host South Carolina versus Virginia Tech and Tennessee versus South Carolina in our two kickoff games. Then at the end of that season, we'll host the CFP semifinal at the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl again.

So you can see why with the Hall of Fame, the SEC Championship, the Celebration Bowl, which is the HBCU national championship game, why a lot of people call Atlanta the capital of college football.

In closing, this is my 25th year as CEO and President of Peach Bowl, Inc. I remember back in 1998, we hosted Georgia, who was unranked, playing Virginia, and we were called a third-tier bowl game. So it's very rewarding, and I



want to congratulate our staff, which is the best in the business, the best volunteers in the bowl business, the best board. We have the best venue, the best city and state to do this, the best title partner, and the best fans who consistently sell us out. We now have sold 22 of 25 games for sellouts.

So hosting the No. 1 in the country Georgia 25 years later from that 1998, when we were called a third-tier bowl game is awfully rewarding to all of us.

With that, I'll wish you a happy new year and hope that all of you enjoy the journey. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we're going to welcome our head coaches. Joining us now is Ohio State Buckeyes head coach, Ryan Day, and Georgia Bulldogs head coach, Kirby Smart.

We'll start with opening statements with you first, Coach Day. Give us your overall experience. How has bowl week been for you, and how does it compare to other bowl trips you've had in the past?

RYAN DAY: It's been great week for our guys. Got down here Christmas night and had a great week. I think everything has been very convenient for our players, staying at the Omni, and making the quick trip over to Mercedes Benz Stadium right around the corner.

A lot of times when you're at a bowl trip, you spend a lot of time on buses moving around. Didn't happen this week. We were able to kind of get in and out of places very fast. Our guys have enjoyed their time here in Atlanta, but had a great week of practice and certainly looking forward to this game.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Smart, same for yours, your bowl week experience.

KIRBY SMART: Tremendous honor to be in this bowl game. I've been part of this bowl game multiple times as a player and coach. I think Gary Stokan and his staff do a tremendous job, first class in every phase of it. Our players have enjoyed Atlanta, a lot of them from this area. Very convenient, like Ryan said. I could remember bowl games where it's 30-minute rides, 20-minute rides from location to location. You never deal with that here. So the efficiency of things has been tremendous.

I think the players have enjoyed some of the events they get to go to. I think that's key from an experience standpoint and get their mind off the game some as well, especially early in the week.

We've had a good week of practice and excited and ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coaches. Let's get into some questions.

Q. It goes to both coaches. The term physicality gets brought up a lot when Big Ten and SEC teams play each other. What does that term mean to you, and what does it mean to the success and the winning of this football game?

KIRBY SMART: I think physicality is part of this game. It's a major part of every football game. When you look across the board and you do studies on these semifinals and final playoff games since the playoff started, physicality at the line of scrimmage has been really critical.

You look across the board, teams that run the ball well tend to win these games. Also, red area, third down, and explosive plays are indicators, but the line of scrimmage play and physicality, but physicality can be a lot of different ways. It can be on the perimeter. It can be on special teams. It can be a lot of different ways of looking at it.

I've got a lot of respect for both conferences because, when you play in a bowl game, you get to watch the other conference all the way through. You get to see all these teams they play, and you have a lot of respect for the conference that you're playing. They have great physicality in that conference, always have, and we respect that.

RYAN DAY: I agree with everything Kirby said. That's the way the game is played. It's football, and you have to play physical. When you're playing in the CFP, certainly it's going to be the most physical game you've played all season. The SEC and the Big Ten coming together, like you said, for years, two of the most physical conferences there are out there.

So it's everybody on the field. It's like you got the perimeter game out there. You've got special teams. You have the game in the trenches. You have to win your one-on-one battles. That's what this game is all about. It's about running around hitting people. That's to be expected in a game like this.

Q. Kind of related to that, you used the term violent a couple times yesterday, which struck me. I get the sense that your team takes that personally, the idea that you feel like you've got to prove that physicality, that violence. Can you just kind of address that?

RYAN DAY: Again, playing in the CFP, you're going to be playing football at the highest level, and this is going to be

an unbelievable environment and electric atmosphere and playing in Mercedes Benz. Again, playing in the CFP, it's going to be that type of atmosphere.

Our guys know that and understand that, and that's what you're going to get in a game like this. So our guys have been practicing that way and preparing that way so that we can play our best football. But we know that that's the type of game it's going to be.

Q. Ryan, I know that you don't necessarily consume a lot of Ohio State media, but did you make an exception for Paris' story, and what did you think of it?

RYAN DAY: Paris Johnson is just a tremendous young man. I did read his letter. I think that's why we get into coaching. I think in today's day and age, there's a lot of things that happen. There's a lot that goes into it, but to spend time recruiting Paris during that, like he said in his letter, Urban started recruiting him. Then I came in and kind of took it over.

Paris and his mom went on that whole journey to go see a lot of different schools, but ended up back at Ohio State. Then to see his growth and what he's done on the field, off the field and has impacted Ohio State has been tremendous.

That's the reason you get into coaching is to have an impact on young people, and winning just allows you the opportunity to do that more and more.

Proud of him. I thought it was well-written.

Q. This question goes for both coaches. These two programs have a lot of history, and they are often in the same circles, recruit the same caliber of players annually in the top five, but haven't matched up in awhile. What does it mean to both of you to finally be able to step in between the lines and have these programs face off against each other?

KIRBY SMART: I'm excited for our kids and our opportunity. The two brands of both programs speak for themselves. I think everybody in the country knows the kind of football they've played and we've played here recently. It's really about them. It's not about us as coaches. It's about the opportunity for the players to go out and play in what's going to be an incredible environment, and that's what you choose to go to Ohio State or Georgia for is to play in games like this. So I'm excited and happy for them.

RYAN DAY: And I have so much respect for what Kirby's done and what he's built. Winning the National

Championship last year and certainly his team has played unbelievably this season.

When you look at the beginning of the year, you say to yourself where are we going to see ourselves in December, and this is the exact situation we saw ourselves in. We knew that Georgia would be right here, and they do an unbelievable job of recruiting and coaching and playing. So here we are.

Q. For both coaches beginning with you, Coach Day, what concerns you the most with the Georgia defense? On the other side, Coach Smart, what concerns you the most with Ohio State's offense?

RYAN DAY: Any time you get to this level of football, you're going to be playing against complete teams. Georgia's defense is complete. They have really good players in the back end, very, very talented, highly recruited, and been developed at a high level with tremendous scheme.

Then when you go into the front, athletic linebacker who can run sideline to sideline and their front is powerful. So you see the statistics. You see the way they played all year. So they're a complete defense.

When you get to this level of the CFP, that's what you're going to get, and that's the biggest challenge. So we have to execute at a high level.

Q. To both coaches, could you talk about the standards and expectations of your respective programs and how you've adjusted to the pressure that's involved with that task?

KIRBY SMART: There's always been pressure, so I don't know that there's an adjustment to pressure. There's just as much pressure from year 1 to year 7. The expectations don't change. We embrace that.

The standards that are created are created through the players that play there, and we've had a really good leadership kind of over the last six, seven years, and they've created a standard for the younger players to emulate, and that's going on now.

I talk every day to our guys about, if you're a freshman or sophomore, find the guy you think works hardest and does it the right way and emulate him, and this success will continue. There's no entitlement, and you work really hard at what you do. But the standard doesn't change. Players change. Each year maybe your identity changes, but the standard doesn't change.

Q. Ryan, could you speak to that?

RYAN DAY: Yeah, same thing. The expectations at Ohio State and Georgia are the highest level, and we embrace that. Our players embrace that. That's why you come to Ohio State is to be in situations like this and play in games like this and go compete for a National Championship.

We talk about that in recruiting. We identify those who look to achieve that and want to be elite. Then like Kirby said, in your team, you build that culture of passing down a legacy to the younger guys so that that continues, and that's been going on here for a long time at Ohio State.

Q. Kirby, we saw you and your players doing yoga at the end of practice yesterday. Is that part of your typical game week, and what do you see as a benefit of it?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. We've done that every Thursday the entire season, and we didn't want to change that tradition. The players have embraced it. We've cut practice on Thursday throughout the year to go down in our GPS numbers.

So Caroline Ward, her husband is one of our team physicians, she does the yoga. The players really like it. It makes them feel better, a little more refreshed. So I think it's important from a recovery standpoint.

Q. Ryan, we saw Miyan back at practice yesterday. He wasn't feeling well earlier in the week. How does he look? How is he feeling the day before the game?

RYAN DAY: Yeah, back to practice yesterday, so he'll be ready to go.

Q. Kirby, we keep talking about how some of your guys have been here before. What have you seen from the guys that have kind of been through this playoff run? And maybe you've noticed leadership characteristics you've seen from them this week.

KIRBY SMART: The guys that came into this season as leaders that have played quite a bit, they've been that way throughout. I don't know that it's been any different from the 28 days since our last game. They certainly have a lot of experience.

I don't know that there's an Ohio State player or Georgia player right now that doesn't have experience that's played in 12 or 13 games. The season is your experience.

Coming into the season against Oregon, I would have said we're an inexperienced team, but we have experience now

and so do they. So you draw on those experiences in playing your interconference rivals, and both teams have done that.

Q. Ryan, I know you're focused on your game, but there's two Big Ten teams playing in semifinals. That idea, what have you seen from the Big Ten in your time as a head coach in terms of the overall level of play, and what do you think it means for the Big Ten to have both Ohio State and Michigan in semifinals this year?

RYAN DAY: I think it's very important for the conference to have two teams in the CFP, and I think the level of play in the Big Ten has improved over my time as the head coach.

Week in and week out, you have to bring it, and the challenge is that you play nine conference games in the Big Ten. There's very good coaches, very good players. They're a very physical conference. So you have to be able to sustain throughout November because of the nine conference games, and for some teams, they play a nonconference. That's really ten conference games that you play.

With the physicality of the conference, I think, it's deserving to have two teams in the CFP.

Q. You guys are obviously strangers on the field, but you bump heads all the time on the recruiting trail. C.J. Stroud, most notably, Damon Wilson as of late. What have you learned about your opponent on the trail, and what's something that you admire or have taken from them?

KIRBY SMART: That's a tough question. When you're recruiting against someone, you don't take much from them in terms of style of play or anything else. Respect would be the number one thing that I have for people that we recruit against and play against.

You mentioned C.J. Stroud, what a tremendous young man. I was so upset in my assistant when I had to fly all the way out to California to go out there. I was like are you sure we're going to have a chance? It wasn't my favorite travel trip when you have to go all the way to Cali, but it was worth it when you got to sit down with that young man and his mom. He was very impressive.

He returned that trip to come back and see us. Usually when you get him on your campus, that means you have a shot. I certainly enjoyed getting to know him and the relationship with him because of the young man he is.

But as far as what you learned about the other team and other programs we're recruiting, I don't think there's a lot

there.

RYAN DAY: I would just say I think Kirby and his staff do a great job of working at it. I think, when you have such great players in the state of Georgia, the easy thing to do would be just to assume you're going to get those guys. They don't do that. They work really hard at it. They grind at it. No stone's unturned.

So when you're recruiting against Georgia, you've got to bring it, and they do a great job of that.

Q. For many high school students playing football at a college level is a dream opportunity. What advice would you give to upcoming recruits looking to be recruited by a big program?

KIRBY SMART: Play hard, get seen. It's important that you understand what it takes to play at this level. I wouldn't kid you and tell you that it's going to be all intangibles because there's a physical nature of these two teams that some high school student-athletes aren't blessed with. They can do everything right, and they may never play at Georgia or Ohio State, but they can play somewhere.

There's enough football out there that everybody has an opportunity if they present themselves the right way and they work hard enough and persist. Nobody thought Stetson Bennett would be where he is today when he was coming out of high school.

RYAN DAY: Agreed. I think in the recruiting process, sometimes we call it Disneyland recruiting, like everything's going to be great when you go to school. The truth is there's twists and turns along the way, and everybody has their own journey.

A big part of going through the process of college is working through adversity in tough times. So I think a big part of going through the process is choosing the school that's going to develop you at a high level in all areas of your life.

Certainly there's the football part of it, and that's a big part of the experience, but there's a lot more to it than that. In today's day and age, there's a lot of new changes and things going on, but to focus on the things that matter, I think is critical.

Q. What have you been able to see from Ladd and Warren McClendon this week, and how beneficial have these last four weeks been for Amarius Mims and AD Mitchell?

KIRBY SMART: They've been great for those two guys.

Amarius has gotten to play a ton this year. He's been a rotational player. If you remember, Jamaree had the situation some last year at the end of the year and even in the championship game where he had to move positions and play with some injuries and do some things to help us out. We're still hopeful to get Ladd and Warren back.

Q. You are neck and neck in recruiting C.J. Stroud. What attributes did you see in him, and what does he share with Stetson Bennett?

KIRBY SMART: He's a tremendous leader, and I think, when you play that position, you'd better be a leader. He was very quiet then, very humble, but very talented. He has great vision down the field, and he has great athleticism to take off and run. That's something he and Stetson both share.

They had two different kind of paths. C.J. was highly recruited. C.J. got to play relatively early in his career, and they both had success. I have a lot of respect for the way that both of them treat their teammates and make it more about their teammates than themselves.

Q. For both coaches, you guys have had to deal with injuries throughout the season, next man up mentality. How does that change when you're at this point playing in the College Football Playoff when you need guys to step in for those guys who may be out for these games?

RYAN DAY: I don't think it changes. When you're into this part of the season, you certainly have a month to get some guys healed up, but that's college football. You can't pick up somebody on waivers. You've got to develop young players and bring them along.

This time has been great because bowl practice is very similar to spring practice where you can get young players a lot of reps and a lot of good-on-good work. So you continually use this time, the spring practice, the preseason, to build your depth so that, when you need to fill a guy or fill a spot, you can do that.

This time of year, there's always those opportunities for players to do that, so it doesn't change.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't think it changes.

Q. I'd like for both of you guys to address this. You're both leaders in your profession. You've had teams get to the College Football Playoffs several times and stuff. What is the fair, do you think, remuneration that players should be looking at maybe down in the future for playing in these games, sharing in basically the

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wealth, whatever you want to call it, a bonus. I would think you'd probably both be for it. What do you think would be a fair number?

KIRBY SMART: I don't think you can put a number on that. I don't think it's fair for me to sit here and assess that number without studies and values. I think the NIL opportunities our players have gotten have been tremendous for them in terms of creating a lot of opportunity for themselves and a chance to help their families.

I think the CFP does a tremendous job, who gives a really handsome check to the families to travel to these locations that are tremendously hard to get to. You're talking about two-night minimums, and you're talking about New Year's Eve, and those are things that I know when I was a player, the parents weren't afforded.

So it's come quite a ways, but to put a number on that, I'd be remiss to try to answer that right now.

RYAN DAY: Same thing. To try to wrap my mind around how much that is or what that should be. I mean, I do think there should be something for them for sure. I do think what they're doing now is great, but I know moving down the road, there should be more. It's just how could I possibly say a number? I would be speaking ignorantly.

Q. This is for both coaches. What does the eve of the semifinal game look for both teams? Besides the walk throughs, what are you doing together to get ready for the game?

RYAN DAY: We'll keep our routine the same. We tried to keep this week like a game week and less like a bowl week.

Like you said, we have our walk throughs. We have our meetings. We have our night together on Friday. We call it best Fridays in football. It will be a long day, getting ready for this game and 8:00 kickoff.

So we try to do the best we can at keeping the routine the same, and that's meetings, walkthrough over at the stadium, and we come together for dinner, movies, watch some football, and then get to bed.

KIRBY SMART: Very similar. We keep the same routine. We keep it home and treat it like a road game in terms of we would be arriving today. We want them to have a mindset of they arrived today. That's one of the hardest things psychologically to prepare your team for from being in the same place for six, seven days, sometimes in the same room.

So psychologically, we try to do some things to help with that, and then we treat it like we arrived. We go do a walkthrough. We do a movie and prepare for a big day tomorrow.

Q. Coach Smart, what is your biggest concern with the Ohio State offense? And is this the best offense your defense will face to date?

KIRBY SMART: That's hard to answer that in terms of is it the best that we faced to date because we haven't faced them. When you look at them on tape, you certainly see the talent. It kind of oozes off the tape, especially the wideout, quarterback position. Two really good protectors. They've got talented players across the board.

A tight end, who I have a lot of respect for, I think is one of the best tight ends we've faced all year. They've got a guy that can distribute the ball and get it to them. So it's a very, very talented team.

When you talk about concerns, it's a trite expression, but it's the same concerns every game we play. How are we going to play? What are we going to do in terms of execution, playing the ball in the air. There's going to be one-on-one matchups all over the field. You've got to win those one-on-one matchups.

When you're playing Ohio State, you've got to be disruptive. You've got to affect the quarterback some kind of way. Because, if you don't, he's very accurate. He's a very accurate passer who knows where he's going with the ball. When you give them free access with a quarterback like that, they can wear you out.

But most games come down to the same thing, turnovers, explosive, red area, third downs. That's what the greatest indicators are of winning.

Q. Kirby, last year I asked you and Nick Saban this question at the championship game. Coach Day, if you could answer. In the NIL transfer portal area, about this model, the disadvantages that you have preparing for a game while maybe other teams are working the portal or recruiting more aggressively, do you think this is a sustainable model, what you're dealing with now with the transfer window as well as the NIL dealings that are taking place for both coaches?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's sustainable. I don't think there's any question is it sustainable? There's nobody that's going to weep and cry for the teams that are playing in the playoff because they're playing in the playoff. There's nobody that

feels sorry for us. We get advertisement galore on ESPN. We get opportunities like this. Our kids get to play in front of the largest viewership.

The value you get in that in terms of recruiting or transfer portal, if that's what you choose to do, then you get plenty of time to do that. Everybody has time demands that plays in bowl games. And if you're not playing in a bowl game, you've probably got other problems that you're concerned with too.

The model is what it is. I think we can all complain about it and say there's things I wish were different, but it is what it is. I don't have the answer or solution that says what's better.

RYAN DAY: Agree with everything Kirby said. The best recruiting is winning. So I think that's one of the best things about being in this situation is you get all the exposure for recruits and their families to see you come to Georgia, you come to Ohio State to go play in the CFP. Well, here we are.

I think, when you make decisions on changing things or moving things, the ripple effects don't get recognized for at least a couple years down the road. So early signing day, portal, NIL, all these types of things, you don't see them shake out for a couple years down the road. So I always caution about changing again and keep continually making all these changes because it just disrupts how things are being done.

So, as we move forward, we have to make sure we're really smart about the decisions that are made and the changes that we make.

Q. For Ryan and then for Kirby as well, when you have multiple weeks to prepare a game plan in a situation like this, what are the similarities and differences to when you're preparing a game plan in a week's time during the season in terms of getting with your staff and building what you want to do on game day?

RYAN DAY: For the bowl structure that we use, we spend the first part of the bowl month working on fundamentals and just good-on-good and really don't dive into the game plan until we start to get a little bit closer towards the game and then try to treat it like a game week.

You obviously have more time to look at your opponent and get organized and look at the things that they do, but then you can also get to the point where you can overdo it. It gets similar to the first game of the season, but at the end of the day, it's going to come down to fundamentals and who's going to play hard, who's going to execute at the

highest level.

We try not to start the game planning too early because then you start to get too much involved with the scouts, and you don't get good-on-good work because it will come down to fundamentals.

KIRBY SMART: Very similar to Ryan. A lot of it hinges on where Christmas falls and where your bowl game falls or your playoff game in that situation because you're going to have a time there that you'd like to get a little break.

I think the psychology of the players after 13 games, 14 weeks, you've got to be careful. They've got to want to play, and I think it's assumed that kids just want to play in bowl games or CFP, and you can wear kids down. They're not professional athletes. They have more burdens on them in terms of academic requirements, and they're younger.

So we try to do a good job of filling breaks in with hard work and sell them on the plan from day one and tell them how those 28 days are going to look and then try to go do it better than the other team does it.

Q. Kirby, this is for you. When you think about how Stetson has grown and developed within your program, what's the biggest thing that you reflect on and what you're most proud of?

KIRBY SMART: I'm most proud of the fact that he was persistent and he stayed the course and didn't jump ship when he was two or when he was three. He stayed the course and stayed with us. I'm very grateful for that persistence and resiliency he showed and his belief in himself that he showed.

I don't think any of those qualities had to do with myself or Coach Monken or anybody else involved with him. They were traits in himself that he loved Georgia and he wanted to prove that he could play at Georgia, and he created his own story by doing that.

Q. Coach, another Stetson question. How has his practices been in the days and weeks leading up to this game? As his head coach, what kind of comfort level does it give you knowing he's been through so much in his career?

KIRBY SMART: He's been very consistent in his practices. You worry sometimes when guys go off to events and award shows, the walk-on award, the Heisman finalist, and doing all those things, but they don't affect the guys 25 years old probably the same way they do a kid that's 18 or 19.

He's very grounded in what he does. He's got a great work ethic. I think the quarterback position is easily the most critical factor in a game because the way offenses are now, they put so much decision-making on the quarterback presnap, post snap. I mean, everything is on the quarterback.

So both these teams got really experienced, really proven guys who make good decisions. So when you have that, you're right more than you're wrong, and that creates -- usually creates scoring. I'm very grateful and thankful that we have a guy like Stetson who's played in games.

Q. If you had beaten Michigan, you knew you would be in the playoff. The fact that you had to go through those days of uncertainty and misery and all that stuff, how much do you think that will help you in this game that you had that scare and maybe more gratefulness that you're here?

RYAN DAY: I think at the time, it certainly gave us an injection of energy, excitement for sure, coming off of that weekend and into that week. The next week it was a range of emotions.

It allowed us an opportunity to have great energy and great focus and edge during the month of preparation for sure. So we'll see. We'll see tomorrow night. We'll see where we're at.

I'm really pleased with the way we've practiced, how our guys have gone at it. We've had really physical practices. When you have something taken away from you, it does give you a little bit more appreciation for what it is. We'll see how we play, but it has been a great month.

Q. Ryan, for you, in the days and the weeks since the last game of the season, you and some of your players have referred to the amount of pressure that you felt in that final game and the way it may have affected the performance in that game. I'm wondering the message you've had to your players to avoid the word pressure and to try to get them to play loose and to their most natural athletic ability in the biggest game they'll play.

RYAN DAY: I just think you go back to your training. You can't focus on things like that. What it comes down to is just playing hard in practice and then going back on your training once you get out there and playing physical with your teammates.

There's going to be good plays. There's going to be bad plays, but just going out there and looking up at the scoreboard at the end of the game.

That's what we're going to do in the game. We're going to play as hard as we possibly can. There will be ups. There will be downs and twists and turns in this game, but play as hard as we can. You can't worry about things like that in a game like this.

Q. Coach Day, how is practicing at Mercedes Benz Stadium this week allowed you and your team to get accustomed to the venue?

RYAN DAY: It's a great stadium. It's a great venue, beautiful stadium. Being there for the week is -- what you try to do is you try to make it your own. You say, okay, this is the Woody right here. This is where we come out, and we run out of the Woody every day.

You try to make it a game week. You try to make it a home as much as possible. You're practicing indoors for the whole month and then you go there, just throwing and catching, the punts, things like that, the contrast against the ceiling. So it takes a couple days.

But other than that, it will be a lot different with a packed house tomorrow night.

Q. To both coaches, this could be your final appeal to recruits in terms of what your guys are able to do on the field. What are you looking to send them in terms of a message of why they should come to your school?

KIRBY SMART: I don't really think of it as the recruiting appeal. I think of it as a service to the kids who are with us. The guys that are with us and have given so much, and I look at guys across the board, whether it's Sedrick Van Pran or all these leaders, Kenny McIntosh who waited his turn behind all these phenomenal backs. I look at it as an opportunity to go out and play well for them.

Most of the recruiting for this season is done. I know you're always looking to the next year. What those kids see in one game, there will be a small window. I do think it's important that we do this for the guys on our team, not necessarily for the recruits.

RYAN DAY: I would say recruiting never ends, but this game is about these players.

Q. Ryan, you talked about ending the season the way you did, getting to now. Anything that you learned about this team through that process or any individuals that sort of reveal themselves as being different or having a new leadership quality that helped you push to this point?

RYAN DAY: I think you know who the leaders are and you know who the guys are that we turn to, and I think those guys have done a great job. They've had a voice.

I won't point one or two guys out because we've got a great group of guys. Again, at this point, there's not much more to talk about. We've had a great month. The guys have done a really great job. So now it's time to go play the game.

Q. Coach Smart, when you look at the Ohio State wide receivers, what do you see from Marvin Harrison, Jr., and the talent and depth of that group?

KIRBY SMART: Elite ball skills, play making ability. Those guys grew up under a system of wideouts that were just tremendous. You look at it and say, if I get to play behind some of guys they've had, you know the training they've had, you know who they've been able to watch.

Across the board, they've got size, physicality, ball skills, vertical speed, all the qualities you want in wideouts. They recruit wideouts at a high level, and you see why when you see the guys they're playing with now.

Q. Kirby, after you guys won the National Championship last year, did you reach out to any other coaches, maybe even in different sports, who had won a championship and asked them their approach to the following season, like how they approached it, that type of thing?

KIRBY SMART: No. We have a couple in-house sports psychologists that we talked about how the mighty fall and some business structures, the Blockbuster model, and some different models where ego got the best of organizations in the business world to corporate world, but didn't reach out to many coaches.

I had experiences at Alabama, and I knew the kind of year it would be. It's always a little tougher to bring everybody back to home base. It was much easier for us this year because we had so many players leave, and we had a hungrier young team.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up there.

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