

# CFP Semifinal

## Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl:

### Georgia vs Ohio State

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Georgia Bulldogs**

**Kirby Smart**

**Stetson Bennett**

**Javon Bullard**

Postgame Press Conference

Georgia - 42, Ohio State - 41

THE MODERATOR: Coach, start with an opening statement, and we'll go right into questions.

KIRBY SMART: I'll open with a lot of respect for Ohio State, Coach Day and his program. I saw C.J. Stroud out there, and my heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win the game, and they got a really good football team, so do we.

Our guys are extremely resilient. We talked at halftime about some games that we have been in this year that we've been behind in, including the Missouri game. I had no doubt that our team would come out fighting. We didn't play our best football game. A lot of that had to do with Ohio State. I have a lot of respect for them and a lot of these players that are on this podium with me and the guys in the locker room. If we want any chance at winning a national championship, we have to play a lot better football than we played tonight. We've got to keep the resiliency and composure along with us.

**Q. Coach, there was a lot of rotation especially defensively with guys like Trezmen Marshall, Rian Davis, Marvin Jones all stepping into play roles. A, was that a thing to adjust to Ohio State's tempo and how would you rate those players that came in and played roles that maybe didn't play a lot this season?**

KIRBY SMART: We wanted to play a lot of players. When you get this late in the season, guys get winded. It is an up tempo game. We say, if you're good enough and you



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practice hard enough, you should play.

We felt like against LSU, we got some guys that got winded in the game. We wanted to play Trezmen and Rian and Marvin had to play. We had Chaz go down with an injury, had Darnell go down with an injury. At one point, we had our third and fourth string guys on special teams that hadn't played all year. We're at the point in a long season where it's accumulating, and you're having to play a lot of guys who maybe haven't played.

**Q. Kirby, can you kind of walk us through what you saw to call that timeout on that fake punt, kind of walk us through that moment?**

KIRBY SMART: They just were not in their traditional formation. A lot of teams carry that speed break. They come up the line quick. Everybody's lined up tight. And we've seen it in the SEC. A lot of teams carry it, and you try to practice it, but it's another thing when they actually do it and execute it.

So it was one of those gut reactions that I didn't think that we had it lined up properly to stop it, so we called timeout.

**Q. Kirby, can you say what you said to Stetson coming off the field there at the end of the first half?**

Stetson, on that last drive, some of your teammates talked about how everybody said stuff in the huddle before the last touchdown drive, if you can recall what was said and what was said also?

KIRBY SMART: Coming off the field in the second half, it was really simple. We had to make a decision whether we wanted to go after it and go try to score. We didn't have much time left, but we did have timeouts.

At the time, I felt like every possession was valuable, and I wanted to be aggressive. We called a play. They batted a ball. We called another play. He was in the pocket for

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awhile and threw the ball a little high over the middle and put us at risk.

I told him, if we're going to trust you to do this in two minute, you've got to make good decisions. If it's not there, take off and run. They almost got an interception, which could have been really costly. We just talked about the two-minute drive. That's really it.

STETSON BENNETT: As far as the huddle, I don't really remember, recall words, but just looking at everybody and saying, all right, hey, we haven't played our best, and we haven't done our jobs to the best of our ability, but we're here now. It's in our hands now. Defense stood up whenever we needed them to. Where else would you rather be? Having the ball with two minutes left, and if you score a touchdown, you win the game.

I looked around, and there was just a whole bunch of just determined, strong stares from all the dudes. It gave me confidence, and everybody else had confidence when we went down the field.

**Q. Kirby and Javon, against that Ohio State offense, they were clicking. Javon, I guess I'll start with you. The resiliency you guys have shown all year, when a team's clicking like that, connecting like that, how do you stay in that, stay that resilient? Where's the mindset at?**

I guess I would ask Kirby, what are you trying to do on defense when you're trying to get a guy like Stroud out of rhythm when he's hitting like that?

JAVON BULLARD: We give a lot of credit to Ohio State. Those guys made plays when they needed to make plays. We knew coming into the game, it wouldn't be perfect. You come into a game like this, college playoff, we know you are going to give up some plays, they are going to make some plays, we're going to make some plays. You can't get too high up and can't get too low.

Like I said, we had to rely on the connection we built through the off-season and the resiliency. I couldn't be more proud of the team.

KIRBY SMART: A lot of credit goes to them. We tried man. We tried zone. We mixed it up. The most disappointing was the series before the half. They earned it most of the time, and we had some big stops. We had some big momentum stops in the first half and then had some big momentum stops in the second half.

But the one before the half is probably the one where we had seized a little momentum there, and they went to the

half with the momentum after that. That was probably the most disappointing thing we had. They've got a really good play makers and they got a guy that could throw the ball to them and got a really offensive line, and they can score points.

At halftime, I told our guys, we have way more rushing yards than they do. When you look at college football playoff games, the team that rushes the ball better almost wins 95 percent of the time. That wasn't the case. We had four missed sacks, and they had one sack. If you miss four sacks and they get one sack, and you have a turnover, there's going to be some tough times there.

**Q. Stetson, you said you wanted the ball in your hands obviously to win the game, but there was still time left. So you couldn't control that last play. What was it like watching, and did it seem like forever by the time the ball was snapped and eventually kicked?**

STETSON BENNETT: Yeah, trust them. We talked about -- we had a little powwow on the sideline in the fourth quarter. It wasn't going good. They were beating us. We had sucked on offense, and it was just, hey, play by play, do your job. It doesn't matter what happens on the other side of the ball or another position, do your job.

So we had done our job, and then we trusted the defense. Then at that point, it was up to, I guess, the kicker.

**Q. Question for Kirby and a question for Javon. For Javon, if you could go through the play where you broke up the pass for Harrison in the end zone.**

For Kirby, did you get word on the headset about the formation in the punt, or did you see that yourself on the sideline?

JAVON BULLARD: It was really just C.J. scrambled. He made a play with his feet and threw the ball up in the air. I seen Marvin's hands going for the ball and just tried to make a play when I could.

KIRBY SMART: For me, I saw them lined up, and there's a line that's a special teams line, but I was on the defensive line because we had just come off of a defensive stop. So saw the formation, and apparently they were saying something on special teams line, but I wasn't on that line. I was on the defensive line and was prepared to call a timeout, which I don't like doing because it costs you possessions when you do that. You've got to be prepared and not burn them.

**Q. Stetson, two sequences, that fourth down pass to Bowers, I think you came off the field thinking you**

**guys were short and you were able to come back and get the field goal. I'm curious what all that was like. The second, what was the design of the pass play to Arian that allowed him to get so up and down field?**

STETSON BENNETT: I thought the whole stadium thought we didn't get it, and then they reviewed it. Brock was pretty dumbfounded because he was like I think I got it. I was like I thought you did too because the route you were catching at five yards, and it was fourth and six, and people don't stop him for a yard, but I didn't know. We came out, and freaking, I threw a lateral anyways. (Laughter)

Stupid. Then Arian, that one was just run fast, and he did, and he made the dude fall. Dude can do things that people can't do. He can run like people can't run, and he can go get the ball, and I was just -- once I saw him, I think the whole sideline was standing up and saying he's open. So I just tried to put it on him and let him do the rest.

**Q. Stetson, have you ever played in a game like that at any level?**

STETSON BENNETT: No, probably not. That game was -- that was a good game. I'm looking at these stats right here, and they're pretty much dead even across the board. No, that was special.

**Q. Two questions. Kirby, first, speaking on Arian, the track speed that he has, I know he's 10.1 in the 100, and just the importance of having that speed there.**

Then Stetson, talking about the other day you sitting with your mom at Christmas break, talking about can you imagine being here? What's the next conversation going to be after a game like this?

STETSON BENNETT: I think I was saying that -- I mean, I don't know. I think we'll probably hug. We're here now. It's not -- you know, we've been here for awhile.

Now we've got to take care of business. We've got to prepare. We've got nine days or whatever to play a really good TCU team. So we've got to prepare our butts off.

We didn't play our best game, starting with me. Coach Smart said in the locker room, we had two three and outs to start the second half. Like that doesn't happen, and that falls on me, and that falls on our offense. We've got to fix that. So we're going to go to work.

**Q. Kirby, what's it like to win like this at the end compared to like winning the Rose Bowl at the end?**

Stetson, do you remember the Rose Bowl? You didn't play obviously, but you had a lot to do with the scout team. What, you got a lot of props for that?

KIRBY SMART: It is amazing anytime you win. I think emotionally it takes a lot more out of you as compared to maybe the Michigan game was last year in terms of the game being over in the fourth quarter. This was an emotional roller coaster. It was a back-and-forth game. It was a who's going to blink. Two really good teams fighting.

Sounds like they had a similar game back and forth. So it will be two good teams playing for it next week.

**Q. Stetson, can you contrast how you felt in the two-minute drill to end the first half and then the two-minute drill to end the game?**

STETSON BENNETT: Yeah, we practice that in the -- which I couldn't say I executed, but we practiced it a lot, where it's two minute in the half, two minute in the game. We need it, we don't need it, or we need it and we would like to have it. I can't put the ball in jeopardy like that before the half because we don't have to have it.

Then at the end of the game, I don't know, it kind of frees you up. You've got to. Otherwise, we're going to lose. So I don't know.

**Q. So much of the story surrounding this wide receiver room has just been injuries this year. Tonight you see A.D. make a play, Arian, Dom early in the game, Kearis late there. How big is it for that room, for them to have the ability to showcase they can actually go out there and make those plays now that they're on the field?**

KIRBY SMART: I thought B-Mac did a good job selling to our team. We had several coaches stand up and speak on Friday, and he talked about the personal respect level that he has for the attention their receivers are getting, and they certainly deserve that. They're really good, really talented.

But we've got some good wideouts too, and they have a chip on their shoulder, and they want to make plays. They have a quarterback that can get them the ball. A lot of those guys have been able to come back. It's really been my committee when you look at it. You see Arian, A.D., Ladd, all those guys making plays for us in the passing game. Marcus has made big plays.

**Q. Coach, I want to congratulate you on an excellent game, even though you guys probably didn't play as well. The question I have, but how is Washington doing? I know he's a big part of the offense and helps**

**Brock out in the passing game and even in the running game also. Can we expect him to be in the next one?**

KIRBY SMART: Hard to tell right now. It's an ankle sprain. I don't know if it's high or low. He tried to go back and couldn't go back on it. We'll have to evaluate and see.

The good news is he's got more than a normal week. I know he'll do everything he can to get back. He's headed out west towards where he's from. It will be important to him to try to get back.

**Q. Stetson, you talked a second ago about how you worked on those last second, last minute drives a lot. How much does that help you kind of slow your heart rate down because you've done it before? You might not be successful in practice all the time, but how much does it help you relax and know what to do?**

STETSON BENNETT: It's the same thing with everything. The more you do it, the more comfortable you get. We rep a lot of two minutes. We know what calls we're going to do. We've got players who study the game plan.

So it's less so confidence in what I can do. I know that they're going to be where they're going to be and they're going to win their matchups. So all I've got to do is give them the ball. So I'd say that slows my heart rate down. Yeah, definitely the reps.

**Q. Kirby, football is crazy, but sometimes you win games you shouldn't, and you lose games you shouldn't as well. Where did this one fall for you, just in terms of you look up there at the end, your expression was priceless?**

KIRBY SMART: Really, I know you don't believe it, my heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win. That's not my concern. My concern is the men in our locker room. We played well enough to win too, just well enough to win. We played really hard in the fourth quarter.

I would have liked to have seen a little cleaner game, and you've got to give them a lot of credit. They disrupted a lot of that. We didn't have a lot of turnovers. We didn't have self-inflicted wounds, and they didn't either. Both teams played really well, and both defenses rose up and made stops. It was a very competitive, balanced game. There weren't a lot of big plays in the kicking game, like you might expect. But I was just proud for our guys.

**Q. Stetson, you make it look easy. Does it feel routine at this point? You've done it so many times now. Can you just talk about the mindset and the way you**

**operate in these clutch situations? You've done it again and again and again.**

STETSON BENNETT: No, I probably can't comment on that. I don't know. I just try to do my job. Got to go back and look at the tape and see what we could clean up because it felt like there was a 30-minute period there where I just played bad football.

So we've got to fix that. But as to the rest, I don't know about that.

**Q. Coach Smart, congratulations on a hard fought win. How long do you give yourself to enjoy this before turning the page and focusing on the next one?**

KIRBY SMART: We've got to start tomorrow. We've got a short window. Can't start when we get back home. We've got to sleep.

We'll get started tomorrow and jump back on. Luckily, we caught the late game, but we caught the late game an hour from home. I remember sitting at this point 2018, 2017, I don't remember what year it was, but we had a long flight. We had a short week, a seven day week with a flight from Pasadena.

We've got a little more time. I think it's important to get healed. Our players have had a long season and a long week of practice this week. I want them to get away, remember what they're fighting for, and come back rejuvenated and ready to go because this is what you do it for.

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