

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Ole Miss vs Penn State

Sunday, December 3, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Gary Stokan
James Franklin
Lane Kiffin

Coaches Press Conference



Kiffin, who we know well. They've been in our bowl before, James at Maryland, where he beat Tennessee in 2003, and also Lane was here with Alabama in 2016 as well as with Tennessee in 2009.

So it's good to rally back with both James and Lane. Look forward to hosting you and your families, your players, your coaching staff, your administration, and your great fans.

With that, on behalf of our board, our staff, who are the best in the business, we want to welcome you to Atlanta, the capital of college football, for the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. Thanks, Matt.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take our opening statement from Coach Kiffin.

LANE KIFFIN: Thanks, guys. Gary, thanks for having me. We couldn't be more excited to be part of this unbelievable matchup and play a great university and program like Penn State and Coach Franklin and all the success that he's had there and the great players and be close to home for us to where a lot of our fans will go to a great stadium and view a great matchup.

Obviously a lot of stuff going on with playoff announcements and the bowl games and recruiting visits at the same time. So kind of in a whirlwind of things, but we couldn't be more excited about this bowl game and this matchup and coming to Atlanta.

THE MODERATOR: Now an opening comment from Coach Franklin.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Gary, great to see you again. We couldn't be more excited to play in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. Had a great experience last time I was here. Obviously a ton of respect for Ole Miss, from my time in the SEC, and then obviously for Lane.

Me and Lane have known each other for a long time. Obviously I've followed his career from afar. We have a lot of friends in common as well. It's been great to watch those guys play when I've had the opportunity this year as well. He's always played an exciting brand of football.

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome everyone to the Selection Sunday press conference for the 2023 Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. Today we'll be joined by our two head coaches and Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl CEO Gary Stokan. After opening statements, we'll move to questions from the media.

At this time, we'll welcome head coach Lane Kiffin of the 11th ranked Ole Miss Rebels and head coach James Franklin of the 10th ranked Nittany Lions and Gary Stokan, CEO and President of the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl.

Gary, with that, we'll start with some opening comments from you please.

GARY STOKAN: Thanks, Matt. Just want to welcome everybody to the 56th Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl. We're the ninth oldest bowl game in the country, but the first game founded for charity. That's in our DNA. We take great pride in that. We're the most charitable bowl organization in the country out of all 44 bowls, where we've given over \$62 million to charity.

We're also famous for our southern hospitality and for both teams' experience. Out of all 44 bowls last year, the bowl season ranked the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl as the No. 1 student-athlete experience bowl in the country. It's very important to us to play great hosts to both teams, the players, the coaches, administration, and fans.

They say styles make great fights, and we've got a great fight with one of the top offenses in the country and the top total defense in the country. A top ten quarterback and a top ten running back against the No. 1 total defense in the country. We've got SEC versus Big Ten.

I just want to congratulate both Coach Franklin and Coach

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When you talk about two programs with such a strong brand and reputation and history, like Penn State and Ole Miss, also pretty cool that Penn State has never played in the Peach Bowl, which is something that's unusual in 2023. There's not too many things you can say that's never happened, especially for a program like Penn State.

Should be a great experience for our players, should be a great experience for our fans. Obviously the matchup between the Big Ten and the SEC, two of the most respected conferences in all of college football.

Gary, we appreciate this opportunity. Lane, great year, congratulations, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

THE MODERATOR: We'll just go ahead and jump into Q&A from the media.

Q. For James and Lane, on a similar subject, same subject I suppose, but James announced the hiring of Andy Kotelnicki a couple days ago. What will the preparation on offense and the approach on offense look like from your staff from that vantage point between now and this matchup? And, lane, preparing for a team that dismissed their offensive coordinator after ten matchups, as you get the film for this and get into it, how much do you take into account what has happened the last two weeks versus what happened in those first ten weeks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Obviously without getting into a whole lot of strategy -- with Lane actually on this call, that wouldn't make a whole lot of sense. Obviously we made a change, and we have co-coordinators, and they did a great job for the last two games of the year.

We got Andy here. Andy will be here more just taking everything in, getting a feel for how we operate the culture, very similar to when we hired Manny, be able to be here, be around our players, be able to sit in all meetings, be able to see strengths and weaknesses so that literally the day the bowl game ends, he can jump in with both feet and get going.

We'll keep things structured the way they have been for the last two games of the season.

LANE KIFFIN: I'm glad James went first there because I didn't know much about the situation. I was hoping James would answer so I would have my answer to that. It seems like we need to prepare a lot for the next two weeks.

We know that they have great players led by a great head coach. Obviously made a difficult decision and one that

was in the best interests of their program, and they've done a really good job the last couple of weeks.

We'll go to work on this and be excited to get some bowl practices before we get to the great city of Atlanta and play an awesome matchup game.

JAMES FRANKLIN: If any of the Ole Miss reporters could ask Lane some questions that could give me some understanding what's going on in his program too, that would be helpful.

Q. This is for both coaches. Lane, first of all, how much do you know about Penn State's personnel? How much did you see of them just watching TV? Same thing for you, James. How much do you know of Mississippi's personnel, and how much did you see them this year just by happenstance?

LANE KIFFIN: I don't know a lot. I don't really -- I kind of say this all the time. I think you guys think that we watch more football on Saturdays than we do. When we don't play teams with common opponents and we don't watch their film for breakdown purposes, I don't really get to watch much football. So I don't get to see great teams like Penn State in other conferences play.

I got an early report from my personnel people that phenomenal players, great starters on defense. I was hoping Coach Franklin was going to announce they're opting out. That would help us with that too. So that's all I know.

JAMES FRANKLIN: For us, really a similar response. Sometimes when you're sitting around the hotel, you get a chance to watch a few games or maybe just a few highlights. We do have some guys that we both recruited that are either on our team or their team that we're familiar with, specifically their tailback we've got a ton of respect for. We recruited him out of high school.

Yeah, besides that, coaches don't really kind of make decisions or come up with a feel based off seeing highlights on TV or watching a game kind of on TV in the afternoon while you're sitting around a hotel. It's very different than the coaches film that we study. So not a whole lot at this point.

Obviously been able to see a little bit. Lane's done a great job in not only recruiting but developing and also scheme. It's going to be a challenge, and we recognize that.

Literally just getting started. Probably like Lane, I'm sitting in an FBO right now, just landed. Haven't had a whole bunch of time to do a whole lot more than that.

Q. Lane, are you expecting any opt-outs? Have you heard of any opt-outs? Are you kind of expecting your full go there?

LANE KIFFIN: I have not heard of any. I would expect that we don't have any of we're kind of not in one of those years where we really have some first rounders that are coming out that are concerned of injuries and so forth. So I would not anticipate that happening with us.

Q. James, if you could just give us the rundown of sort of the logistics. When are you leaving to go down there? What your practice schedule looks like. What are you going to be doing for the next couple weeks?

JAMES FRANKLIN: As you know, our ops guys have already got this all mapped out. We've already sent it out to the players and the parents and things like that. I'm sitting in FBO, just got off the plane. I don't have those things in front of me right now.

We'll be trying to balance recruiting as well as these bowl practices that we have right now that are more kind of like spring ball practices, program development practices, while we take the time to come up with a game plan and get into the specifics of Ole Miss, but we're not ready to do that yet.

Then we obviously have finals week as well. So we're kind of still in that recruiting/information gathering period on Ole Miss, but we will get a little bit of work in too.

Q. Wanted to ask about opt-outs again. What is your kind of role in that decision-making? Obviously it's up to them and their families, but is there something that maybe you can see, or are these conversations that you're actively having with these guys? Does that change for you, James and Lane, too?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Obviously you hope that the relationships that are there, that you've had over a number of years with these players and their parents, that they'll use you in part of that process, but the challenge in college football when we change the rules and allow agents to be talking to these players their entire college career, that's the challenge, right? They're getting information, and it's not always accurate information, from every direction.

We just try to create an open communication line, try to give guys as much valuable information as possible. Really from that point on, at the end of the day, we want our guys to make great, educated decisions, based on all the information that's out there.

LANE KIFFIN: I kind of mentioned before, I don't think that

-- no disrespect to our guys just from grades coming back and in conversations with our players in general, I don't think that we have guys really in that conversation, of that first round type of grade or projection to potentially opt out. I don't think that will be an issue for us this year.

Q. Lane, I know you guys weren't necessarily sure if you were going to get that New Year's Six berth this year. Did you guys have a watch party? How did you guys find out? What was the player reaction when you guys got the news?

LANE KIFFIN: We did not have a watch party. We were actually just here working, recruiting. We had an official visit weekend here. I was really in recruiting meetings.

This would probably surprise you guys, I found out on the TV like all you guys did. Obviously excited about that. Mentioned before what a great matchup it is and what a great stadium to play in in the city. So very excited but probably not what you thought. We were just continuing to work and had a lot of official visitors here and a lot of meetings to do.

Q. Just what you can say about the balance of preparing for this New Year's Six bowl as well as the transfer portal opening, the opportunities of players going in and out, and typical recruiting, how the world you live in right now is kind of like an autobahn, so to speak.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think that's the challenge, right? You've got to, number one, take care of your current players and make sure that they are developing and finishing strong academically and giving yourself the best chance to be 1-0 this week or for this game.

But at the same time, you'd better be bringing in players, whether it's from high school or from the transfer portal, that are going to allow you to keep growing and developing as a program and as an organization for the future.

It's the constant battle of those two things, and that's why you see college football staffs have gotten bigger because literally you're trying to do both at the same time constantly. Obviously this time of year, right before signing period and the transfer portal opening, it magnifies it even more so.

LANE KIFFIN: I think, like Coach mentioned, it's a big challenge trying to manage all that at the same time. It's always been recruiting and bowl game, but now portal doesn't just mean the guys you see going in the portal, it means your own guys and managing that. You're basically managing your current roster, and you're trying to manage your projected roster for next year at the same time.

There are a lot of challenges to it. That's the world we live in now, and a calendar that's not very ideal or set up very well. But we have to maximize the situation that the calendar puts us in.

Q. This one's for Lane. Lane, it's your second New Year's Six bowl appearance in three years. I'm just curious, a year from now, this position would be in the College Football Playoff as well. How much have you seen that kind of success so recently of such a high caliber, how much have you seen it pay dividends on the recruiting trail in the landscape of college football?

LANE KIFFIN: I think it does matter. As I said, we're in all day today and after this announcement in recruiting meetings with kids and families. That's pretty neat to say, two of the last three years, to be in New Year's Six bowls.

Obviously we have a goal to do better this time around and finish off and have the first 11-win season in the history of the school. Any time your players are having success on the field and doing well helps you in recruiting.

Q. In the first playoff news of the day, obviously there was great impact for SEC current and future teams and the Big Ten as well. I wanted to ask of both coaches the reaction to some dramatic developments in some very difficult circumstances and kind of the four-team playoff.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Could we get Lane to open up with some of these first so I can see how he answers it?

I guess the first thing I'd say, it's like anything else, right? It depends on your lens. If you're a Big Ten guy, you have that lens. If you're an SEC supporter, you have that lens. I think the reality is we had an opportunity to go to 12 teams this year, and it would have solved a lot of issues for a number of people right now.

You can make the argument for any number of teams. The reality is, when we go to 12 teams, there's going to be arguments for 13, 14, 15, no different than basketball deals with. But I do feel like there was an solution before the season started that would have helped with this a lot.

There's always going to be some tough decisions that are going to have to be made, and there's always going to be some hurt feelings. I've been through it myself. We won the Big Ten Championship, and another team from the Big Ten went to the playoffs. These are tough decisions. These are challenging situations we're in. I understand the argument and the discussion of all of it.

I'm going to leave my specific opinions to myself.

LANE KIFFIN: I think, like James said, obviously a lot to do with your lenses. I actually, in our recruiting conversations with our official visiting kids today, just kind of asked their opinion, who do you think? What four teams should go in? You got to hear people from different areas have different answers.

At the end of the day, there's really easy arguments for everybody. If that's your team or if that's your conference. They had very hard decisions to make.

I do feel for Florida State and their players for doing everything they were asked to do and not making it. That was really obviously the first time that's ever happened. To be undefeated and for that to happen, I did feel for them. And Coach Norvell because they had an amazing season and overcame a lot to do what they did.

Q. Last one from me, Lane. Earlier this week, your tight ends coach announced his move to Eastern Carolina. Do you envision him coaching this upcoming bowl game, and I guess what do you kind of look for in your next coach for next year?

LANE KIFFIN: I do think he will. We've had discussed about that. Very excited for JDB getting that job and being able to call an offense and take the next step in his progression in his coaching career. He did a great job here. We're really happy for him in trying to work out with them how he can do both jobs and still coach for us in the game.

So like always, we'll have a tireless effort to find our players the best coach that we can. We've had a lot of turnover here over our four years now here, and we'll just continue to do the best that we can for our players.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we are at our time limit, gentlemen. Gary, any final comment from you about the incredible matchup that we get to host here in Atlanta?

GARY STOKAN: Congratulations to both Lane and to James. Just great jobs this year. To lose to No. 1, No. 4, No. 6, and No. 7 just goes to show how quality of programs that both Penn State and Ole Miss have.

We're looking forward to the navy blue on the field and a light blue or a bright red on the green of Mercedes Benz Stadium on December 30th.

Thanks so much, guys. We appreciate your taking the time. We know how busy you are. Appreciate you serving the media this way. We look forward to serving you and

your staffs when you get here to Atlanta.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Gary, appreciate it.

GARY STOKAN: Thank you.

LANE KIFFIN: Yes, thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We're looking forward to hosting the Rebels and the Nittany Lions in Atlanta.

To the media on the call, we'll have the transcripts and video sent out, and a lot more information gearing up for the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl will be headed your way. That will do it. Thanks very much, everyone.

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