

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

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Penn State Nittany Lions

Kaytron Allen

Theo Johnson

Caedan Wallace

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now we've got running back Kaytron Allen, tight end, Theo Johnson, and offensive lineman, Caedan Wallace. We'll continue with questions for the players.

Q. This question is for all three of you. Is there anyone that you look up to that you maybe model your game after?

KAYTRON ALLEN: I'd say Le'Veon Bell. I always look at his film, always watching his film on YouTube, looking at videos. That's what I say inspired me as a running back.

CAEDAN WALLACE: For me at least as a kid, Larry Allen was a major influence for me. And then more nowadays I look at a lot of Trent Williams tape and try to get as close to that guy as I can.

THEO JOHNSON: For me, I'd say George Kittle. I just think that he's a true tight end. We're in a day and age now where a lot of guys say they're a tight end, but they're kind of just a big receiver.

I really admire how he's able to play all three phases of the game as a tight end, and that's something I aspire to be as a tight end is a true tight end.

Q. This one's for Theo and Caedan. For both of you, your last game. What does it mean to you and what you're putting on the field for the Peach Bowl?

THEO JOHNSON: I've tried to make the most of every opportunity I've had at Penn State in every single game, so I'm going to try to do the same thing. Just make the most of all my opportunities and just kind of really soak it all in

because I know things will look a lot different for me a year from now. I'm just kind of looking forward to having one more ride with my guys.

CAEDAN WALLACE: Yeah, kind of going along with what Theo said, I've been grateful the whole year for every opportunity I get to hang out with my teammates, my coaches. This game will be no different. Just being grateful.

Q. James has talked a lot about having open lines of communication in terms of leading up to the bowl and going through the decision-making process. Can you kind of offer us some insight into what that looks like, what some of those conversations are like between you and James leading up to this?

THEO JOHNSON: For me it kind of started with speaking with Coach Howle. Me and him have a really good relationship, so we can have some candid conversations that I don't have to worry about going anywhere.

Then from there, I'll rely on Coach Franklin to kind of give me some feedback from what teams are saying and kind of his opinions and stuff like that.

Then really it just goes to conversations with my family and figuring out what I feel like is the best decision for me and then going back with Coach Franklin and having another conversation.

I'm blessed to have a really good relationship with Coach Howle and Coach Franklin, and we've had open dialogue and able to communicate kind of where I'm at and how I feel. So I'm very blessed to have a family atmosphere with this team and feel comfortable enough to have those conversations.

CAEDAN WALLACE: Yeah, I'm basically the exact same way. I had a conversation with my family, brought it to Coach Trautwein, brought it to Coach Franklin, and then basically did that cycle again, just conversating, yeah.

Q. We've heard a lot of simplicity equals speed the last month or so. What does that mean to each of you



guys at your individual positions, and how did Coach Howle and Coach Seider kind of make things simple enough for you to do -- I guess have a better feel for what you guys are accomplishing the last couple of games?

KAYTRON ALLEN: I guess that means just playing fast, that's all that means.

THEO JOHNSON: I think the big thing with simplicity equals speed is not having to think too much. If you're trying to think about too many things at once, you're not going to play as fast as you're capable of. It's really making the game plan a way that you don't have to think as much about presnap and post-snap. If it looks like this, you are going to do that. If it doesn't look like that, then you're going to do that rather than thinking about four different things and all these route adjustments and things that, if you get certain coverages, you have to do different things.

It was kind of making it simple so you can play as fast as you possibly can. I think that showed up on tape week in and week out.

CAEDAN WALLACE: These guys covered it pretty well, being able to focus on the game plan we have, which isn't a hard one, and getting after it. The best way to do it is speed.

Q. We've heard that you guys have -- at least from coaches' perspectives, they've been working with Coach Kotelnicki as he arrived on campus and started to work with the team. Have you guys had interactions with him where you are working out what the offense can look like in certain scenarios, and how has he been helpful there?

THEO JOHNSON: Right now we haven't gotten into too much of what things are going to look like from schematics really. He's kind of gone over his philosophy, and I think this time has really been for him to kind of get to know us and get a feel for how we do things here at Penn State and how we work and just the personnel that he's going to have to work with come in the springtime and in the winter.

That's kind of how pretty much most of those conversations have gone so far.

Q. Kaytron, this is an opportunity to get 15 extra practices as a springboard into next season. What are you looking to get out of these weeks of extra practice beyond game planning and beating Ole Miss? What do you want to get out of this personally?

KAYTRON ALLEN: I'm just trying to get better. Like I said, it's another opportunity to do what I love to do. So I just want to take advantage of it. Just trying to keep getting better each and every day throughout practice. It's all going to pay off on Saturday.

Q. Kaytron, you came to campus, you guys have had nothing but success, two double-digit win seasons, go Rose Bowl, Peach Bowl. Is this what you imagined when you signed up to play Penn State football? You've had a very successful career in just a short time.

KAYTRON ALLEN: Yeah, I could say that's what I signed up for. Any team I want to go on, I always want to win, help my team win. Any time I can do that, I'm very grateful, very thankful to do that.

Q. Theo, Tyler made a decision this year similar to the one you made last year in terms of coming back. What do you think that he can get out of being back for another year in his development? What do you think that means for this team as a whole?

THEO JOHNSON: I think Tyler coming back is huge, not only for his career, but for our team as a whole, for the morale of the team. I'm super excited for what he's going to be able to do next year. I think he's going to have a monster year.

I think the sky's the limit for him and what he's going to be able to accomplish personally, and I think for our offense, I think Coach K is going to have a lot of fun doing different things to work with Tyler and get him open and make plays for him.

So I think he made a really good decision, and I think he's going to have a really good year next year.

Q. This one's for all three of you guys. Kind of a two-part question. Number one, what has the Peach Bowl experience kind of been like for you so far being in Atlanta? And also being a Big Ten school, what are you guys taking from this as far as the matchup going in with Ole Miss? Does that give you any extra Juice going into the matchup?

CAEDAN WALLACE: I've been having a great time here at the Peach Bowl. I live about 30 minutes away. So being able to spend time with my family on the holidays has been awesome.

We love playing SEC opponents. We played Auburn these past two years. So being able to host Auburn and then play down here last year and play down here again is

going to be super fun for us. We love it.

THEO JOHNSON: I think my experience in Atlanta has been really cool. I come from kind of a smaller town in Canada, so visiting places like Atlanta and L.A. and stuff since I've been at Penn State has been really cool to kind of experience new things.

We're really looking forward to playing an SEC opponent. We talk a whole lot about how the Big Ten is and how Big Ten football is, and that's something we've kind of talked about this week that we're the Big Ten. A lot of people have a lot of stuff to say about the SEC, but we have a different brand of football in the Big Ten. We're looking forward to bringing it down here to the SEC.

KAYTRON ALLEN: It's been a great experience and a great opportunity because a lot of kids where I'm from, they don't get this opportunity to go to bowl games or even go to college or do things like this. So it's been a great experience and a great opportunity.

About the SEC, I mean, it's a great opportunity to play another team, you feel me, and just play the game, do what I love to do. So it's just a great experience.

Q. I have a very quick one for Caedan and then for Theo. What was the first thing you DoorDashed when you got here?

CAEDAN WALLACE: Thank you for this question, by the way. My first day I got here, I ordered a large plate of ox tails, and I ordered that two more times after that. Then when I got to the city, I ordered -- it's called Pelicana chicken, and it's really good. They sprinkle this stuff on it. It's banging. Thank you for having this.

Q. Did you get fish yet?

CAEDAN WALLACE: I'm going to do that on Friday night because it's a Friday night thing.

Q. Theo, for you, being able to leave a legacy at Penn State, I know that's something that's important to you. How do you want people to remember you at this school as you take the next step in your career?

THEO JOHNSON: That's something I've taken a lot of pride in and something I worked really hard for. The Penn State tight end tradition has been something that's been going on long before I got here. So coming in here as a young kid, I knew that it meant something to play tight end at Penn State. I've worked really hard to leave the tight end room better than I found it and kind of leave a legacy.

I kind of want to be remembered as a guy who worked really hard and worked his tail off and kind of gave everything to his organization and his team and his teammates and was kind of a selfless guy that just worked really hard. That's the legacy I want to leave here at Penn State.

Q. This question is for all three of you I asked your teammates, so I've got to ask you. Wawa or Sheetz?

KAYTRON ALLEN: Wawa.

THEO JOHNSON: I've only really ever had Sheetz, so I can only say Sheetz.

CAEDAN WALLACE: Wawa.

THE MODERATOR: I'm not keeping the official count, but I think Wawa is now in the lead.

Q. Caedan, similar to the question for Theo about leaving a legacy and leaving a mark on the program, for you, being a starter for four years and having some ups and downs, when you reflect on this journey, what really stands out to you? And how do you think you can pass that onto some of the younger guys in the room?

CAEDAN WALLACE: Honestly my message to the young guys this week has been about perseverance. So like you said, I've had my ups and downs, but being able to stay focused and grind and get better every day is what's really important for me and what's really important for the young guys we have on our squad.

So being able to pass down these lessons that I've been able to pick up over the years has been really awesome for me this past season and these past couple years to be able to instill that wisdom on guys.

Q. This is for everyone. Obviously you guys just got through the regular season where you're playing every week except for the bye week, and then now you have over a month off. Obviously it's nice to sort of recover and heal your body in that time, but how do you make sure that you're staying in rhythm and you're not getting rusty over the long break?

KAYTRON ALLEN: Just throughout practice trying to get better each and every day, 1 percent better, having something that I want to get better at practice. So just doing that.

THEO JOHNSON: I think the concept of not playing a game for a couple weeks and then playing a bowl game

has been going on for a long time. So the coaches know how to continue improvement even though we're not playing a game.

During practice, during the bowl prep, we do almost exclusively stuff against our defense, which usually it's more against a developmental squad during the season. So we're playing against the best defense every practice during bowl prep. So like getting rusty is really not an option when you're doing that.

CAEDAN WALLACE: Kind of like what Theo said, they have it down to a science. So we're working hard every day, keeping conditioned, and working out, but like keeping our technique in order. So yeah.

Q. Obviously a lot of people in this day and age of college football kind of expect players to opt-out because they figure injury hurts draft stock. Obviously last year Cliff really bumped his stock with his great Rose Bowl performance. Do you take that into this game and say I can really improve my stock and improve how people look at me in this game? What do you think it can show teams in the Peach Bowl? For Theo and Caedan obviously.

CAEDAN WALLACE: Obviously I haven't really weighed any of that stuff out. I just kind of wanted to play one last game with my guys, 2023.

THEO JOHNSON: I don't really know how much playing is going to really help me or hurt me. I think it's more about finishing what we started as a team and just being there for the guys.

I've been here for four years. I've kind of bled and cried and done a lot of things with this team. I just want one more opportunity with those guys, and that's why I'm playing in the game.

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