

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

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Pete Golding

Quick Quotes

Q. It was kind of right there in front of you, where you guys had to go from good to great. What was that night like?

PETE GOLDING: To be honest with you, that was the first time this season where on the sideline, I felt like, when you looked in a player's eyes, like he wasn't there. It was the first time I felt like the moment was too big.

Before that, that's what I even told Coach Kiff earlier in the season, like we're not more talented than a lot of teams, but we've got enough grit on defense and enough toughness on defense and enough want to on defense to where if we can take the ball away, we'll win a bunch of games.

That was the first game where we really didn't have it, and that was from snap one to the last snap. Part of it was the buildup to the game. A lot of these kids from a lot of different places, A, it's Georgia, No. 1 team in the country, the whole playoff talk that they're hearing the outside noise if you win the game. I think part of that is not having played in a lot of big games. I'm not saying Ole Miss, but the team that we have.

You look back from a preparation standpoint, what could we have done better? Then when you actually evaluate the tape and look at the point of attack and look at certain matchups and our guys, we were outmatched in certain places. When you've got to beat those guys to win this conference, you've got to get comparable guys.

That wasn't the only game for me eye opening obviously, but I think as a program, I think how big of a game it was at the time to not play your best game and really not even have a chance. I think that was kind of disappointing.

I think it definitely opened everybody's eyes, hey, let's reevaluate it and make sure we're doing this the right way.



In this league defensively, you've got to have a front seven, and I think that's where the focus was. You've got to have the ability to play man to man versus good people.

Q. Did that lead to some personnel decisions on guys you evaluated in the portal, not only to maybe get guys who played SEC level, Big Ten level football?

PETE GOLDING: Yeah. The unique thing is, when I took the job January 16th to 20th, the SEC portal was already closed. This is the first opportunity we've actually got to recruit the SEC since I've been here, and that's where most of my connections were. I recruited them at some point, whether we wanted them at Alabama or we didn't, we recruited them at some point. So there was an initial relationship there.

I think that was part of it. No different -- if I'd have got there in December of last year, it still would have been an SEC focus because that's where most of the best players tend to go to.

I don't think we focused on the conference as much as the player, but when you get a really good player in that conference that's walked into Georgia, that's walked into Bryant-Denny, that's been to a New Year's Six bowl game, that's had the expectations, had the media attention, it's a lot easier when you get them instead of getting them Miami of Ohio, nothing against all those, but even the way you travel and the media and Twitter and getting attacked and all the things that come with it, when you're in smaller places, it doesn't happen.

So trying to get them to focus on football, a new place, and school when they've got ten months to do it, it's a lot on them. I felt like that was Georgia, just became overwhelming, and it just so happened to be that night. I think, if we play them again, I don't think it's the same story. I'm not saying we're going to win the game, but it's going to be a completely different game.

Q. How would you characterize this defense since you've been here through the season and kind of leading up to the buy-in of these guys with JJ and Jared wanting to come back?

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

PETE GOLDING: The biggest thing is we didn't have a lot of these guys in the spring. As I'm looking, 8 of the 11 guys out there didn't go through spring ball. So I think it was a learning experience for both of us, me trying to figure out what pieces do we have?

Coaching D-II and 1-AA mid-major, you say what do we have? What do they do well? Let's put them in the best positions to do well. When you have a brand new roster and you haven't seen it, because you don't do spring and summer and you have no contact, and you get into fall camp, it takes a little time to see what you really have. So I think it was a learning experience for both of us.

I do think they started to have success at certain times, and when you put it on tape enough and all 11 guys are on the same page, here it is, this is who we are. Then the very next snap, look, this isn't it. This is who we're not. Then they start to see and start to add up, I think there's good buy-in.

This day and age, I still think you have to make it fun, which I think Coach Kiffin does an unbelievable job of. And then the football part of it, they want to be in a scheme that's pro ready. It's important to be around guys that have coached NFL guys. Not that it makes you a better coach, but from a connection standpoint, when GMs and scouts come in, I'm comparing DBs to first round DBs. Comparing D-line to first round D-line. Not that I'm better than anyone else, but the same guys, same questions.

Kids can increase their value by playing in the same system and have a more immediate impact.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports