

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

Thursday, December 28, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Penn State Nittany Lions**

**Anthony Poindexter**

**Adisa Isaac**

**Dvon Ellies**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Penn State's defense. With us we've got co-defensive coordinator, Anthony Poindexter, defensive end, Adisa Isaac, and defensive tackle, Dvon Ellies.

A couple of opening statements. Coach, start with you and just talk about how the bowl week experience has been so far being here in Atlanta.

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: It's been awesome. This is my fourth time being here, two times as a player, second time as a coach. Atlanta is always a great city to come, and the Peach Bowl has always been an awesome experience.

I'm happy that our guys got the chance to experience it.

THE MODERATOR: For the players, now that we're through all the bowl week events, talk about what was your favorite event of the week that you guys got to do, kind of the off-the-field stuff?

ADISA ISAAC: I would definitely say it was the Family Feud last night. Just kind of picking our guys' brains and what they think about certain topics.

It was fun to build that kind of bond in a bowl event like that. Yeah, I'd say the Family Feud one.

DVON ELLIES: Definitely, I have to agree with him. Given the opportunity to compete against Ole Miss early on is a great opportunity, and we really enjoyed ourselves. The guys really loved it. That was definitely the best part for me at least.

THE MODERATOR: I know some of you guys were there

at the event. It was epic. They really got into it. I've never seen teams standing on chairs before.

DVON ELLIES: And we got to see Coach Dex in the College Football Hall of Fame.

**Q. Adisa, we saw your NFL announcement last night. Can you explain the process that went into you making this decision and then choosing to announce last night, what kind of went into all that?**

ADISA ISAAC: Kind of just thoughts throughout this bowl prep with family and some coaches. Just getting last little thoughts out there of what I should do.

I thought it was best that I should go to the NFL, but after I play this last game with my teammates. I felt like that was important to me and important to this team. So that's something I decided to do.

I just felt like this was the right time. I felt like I've put in enough work throughout these past two years coming off of injury to put myself in a good position to make this kind of decision.

**Q. Coach Poindexter, obviously the week before last when talking about Manny Diaz, you said coming into this game, no one can call things quite like Manny Diaz. Everyone has their own uniqueness. I want to know, for Coach Tom Allen, does seeing how you guys run things in a bowl game this week, is that going to be a huge stepping stone for him this week to kind of come over and get the flow of things here?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I think it's good to see how we operated before he got here. I think Coach Allen will have to operate the way he wants to operate. Obviously he's bringing his style of defense to Penn State.

But Coach Allen is going to have his own flavor just like Coach Manny has his own flavor, just like I have mine. So it's going to be his.

**Q. Dex, what was kind of your reaction to Tom Allen getting hired as defensive coordinator? What are kind**



**of your thoughts overall on the system that he runs and what he brings to Penn State?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I was out at Purdue for four years, and obviously we faced Indiana every year as our rival game. So I was very familiar with Coach Allen and the style of defense he plays. It was always hard for even Coach Brohm to prepare for it.

So I'm excited that he's here. He's a good person, really good coach. Excited to get started with him.

**Q. This one's for Adisa or Dvon. Senior Day was against Rutgers, but there's always that Michigan State game and obviously this bowl game. Throughout bowl prep, have you guys had any time to kind of reflect on your Penn State careers and that this really is the last time you guys will be suiting up?**

DVON ELLIES: Yeah, actually. Coach Franklin's been big on reflection and just not taking these moments for granted. You know 20, 30 years down the road, you're going to look back, and you're going to look back at the moments with your teammates and you'll kind of wish you appreciated it more in the moment. That's what Coach Franklin says.

We truly took that to heart, especially this year with the season we had, with the guys that we've got. The brotherhood just felt so much stronger this year. I appreciate Coach Franklin for putting that into perspective for us, especially these last couple weeks.

ADISA ISAAC: Yeah, I definitely agree with that. Just over these last two years really, just building this chemistry, the defense especially, and building all these strong bonds and relationships that's going to last us well off from college. That's what it's all about, the relationships that you build.

Just being in the moment, I know we try to focus on what's next all the time, but look to your left and look to your right and give the guy next to you a hug. That's what we always do in the defensive meeting room. So kind of just taking time and just taking a breath of fresh air and just enjoying it.

**Q. Are there any unique challenges the Ole Miss offense presents that maybe you haven't seen in games this year before?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: The first challenge is the tempo. You see it sometimes, but we haven't really seen it on a consistent basis like throughout the game like they do.

I think the depth at receiver, the production at the receiver

spot that they have and the players that they have. They have three guys on the field that's all over 700 yards. I don't know if we have played a team with that kind of production, maybe Ohio State.

And they've got a really good running back corps. Obviously we've seen good running backs. But I think Coach Kiffin does a great job. He has his guys ready to play with the tempo and with their scheme. They can give you some challenges.

ADISA ISAAC: Yeah, I say definitely the tempo and the personnel. They know how to get their skill guys into space and make plays.

We kind of pride ourselves on stopping the run all year, and this is a team that has some good backs that run hard and some good receivers as well. So they're pretty balanced in that aspect. So we've just got to do a good job of locking that down.

DVON ELLIES: I also agree with the tempo. Obviously we just have to stay disciplined as a defense. They're trying to get a lot of plays off. That's a credit to their offense. And as long as you stay disciplined and play our ball, don't try to speed up to their pace, I think we should be good.

THE MODERATOR: For each of you guys, I know you've seen a lot of film on Ole Miss, tell us what Big Ten team does Ole Miss, are they equivalent to that you saw this year?

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: That's hard. Like I say, they've got a uniqueness. We really didn't face a Big Ten team that kind of operated like they did, that they do.

Like I say, I think their receiving corps is very similar to Ohio State. Obviously in the Big Ten, there's quite a few really good running backs in the Big Ten, and obviously we have two great ones on our team.

I just don't know if we've faced a team that consistently throughout a game tempo that way.

THE MODERATOR: Adisa, who does Ole Miss remind you of?

ADISA ISAAC: I agree. It's hard to pinpoint an exact team that kind of resembles them. I say they're just balanced, and I would keep saying the tempo, but that's a factor in the game. It's just the way they utilize their tools and kind of their scheme helps them be dominant on offense.

DVON ELLIES: Yeah, I'd have to agree. The diversity they have on offense is actually really like a special thing.

They got the size upfront. Of course, it's the SEC, and then you've got the skill positions. They're very talented there, and they know how to utilize them. They do a great job of that.

**Q. Guys, I know we talked about coming into this game, kind of the history and everything that's on the line, but it's easy to say it then. It's different now that you're here and you've been inside Mercedes Benz.**

Has the magnitude of this moment, the magnitude of this game, everything on the line, has that sunk in? Has there been that moment where you're like, okay, this is big?

DVON ELLIES: No. Well, not necessarily sunk in, but the way we operate, the way we prepare, it's no different than any other week. We have our meetings on Sundays. We have our practices on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and we attack it just the same.

Of course this is a bowl game, so it is a bigger game. But at the end of the day, we're treating it like any other game.

**Q. As great as this defense has been all year, is this kind of a fitting way to end it against an offensive challenge like this to see who's better, your defense, their offense?**

ADISA ISAAC: Yeah, definitely. I mean, we've been getting tested all year. It's just another test for us. We've just got to go out and do what we've been doing, keep the standard high, and just go out there and execute and have fun doing it.

DVON ELLIES: Yeah, we live to operate in moments like this. This is exciting for us.

**Q. Dex, we talked to K.J. Winston earlier this week, and he said it was kind of around this time last year during Rose Bowl prep that he felt things kind of click into place and that really carried over into the season.**

Where have you seen the biggest growth from him from this time last year to where he is now?

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I agree with him. This time last year, he basically was the fifth safety. He has a couple of backup roles. He was starting on special teams.

Obviously we had a situation that happened in the game with Jay Reed last year in the Rose Bowl early in the first half, which forced them him into action and meaningful minutes, but he was ready. We had played him quite a bit last year.

But this year coming in, he had -- not a different mindset, but he had the mindset where he wanted to come in, be the starter, contribute to the team, be a really great player. You just watch him work every week. You watch him practice. Then about week 6, you could see the light just turn on for him, and he just felt comfortable.

You try to allow a player to be himself, and I think sometimes as coaches, you can overcoach a kid, so I try to pull off of him and just let the game come to him and paint his own portrait of how he saw the game and do the jobs that we were asking him to do. I think about week 6 you could really see his confidence just soar.

Then down the back stretch, man, he just became a totally different animal.

**Q. So the question is does pineapple belong on pizza?**

DVON ELLIES: Yes. Yes, it does.

ADISA ISAAC: No.

**Q. Why not?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: Meat belongs on pizza. Pepperoni, sausage, bacon.

ADISA ISAAC: If you're going to eat the fruit, you might as well eat it first, let it go through your system, do what it do, and then get handed the pizza.

DVON ELLIES: I've been eating it my whole life. That sweet/savory combination is one for the ages.

**Q. Anthony, I'm wondering had you been to the College Football Hall of Fame here in Atlanta since you were enshrined?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: No, sir.

**Q. What feeling was that like for you last night? Is it pretty humbling?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: It was humbling. I had never been to the actual site. Obviously the induction ceremony was in Las Vegas. It was special because I got to go with our team. I don't know if they really thought I could play or not. I really don't tell them. So maybe now they'll think I can play a little bit.

No, it was a humbling experience, and then to get to share it with these guys made it that much more special.

THE MODERATOR: I think we all know you can play,

Coach.

**Q. Jaxson Dart is one of the top quarterbacks in the SEC, completing nearly 70 percent of his passes. What takeaways have you seen on film to prepare yourself against this top 25 passing attack?**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: We did face some really good quarterbacks this year that had some good passing attacks. Obviously they're unique in that style of how they play, but like they said earlier, we've just got to try to do what we've been doing all year, play the game in the style that we've been playing all year. Have fun with it.

Our best against their best. That's how we've been playing all season.

ADISA ISAAC: I say we just -- you know, he's a good quarterback, and their offense is electric, and it starts with the quarterback. He's the head of the snake. We've just got to contain him and try to limit the explosive plays that they do. The tempo is a factor, so they're trying to run a lot of plays.

So kind of just being set, being ready for him. Trying not to be caught off guard, give him anything easy. Make him earn everything.

DVON ELLIES: I believe it's going to start up front. The best way to get to the quarterback is through the offensive line, and we really respect Ole Miss' offensive line. So we're going to do our best as a defensive line to operate at a much higher level a lot faster to keep up with an explosive, quick offense.

THE MODERATOR: Which one of you guys is going to get to him first?

DVON ELLIES: The leader of TFLs and sacks in the Big Ten to my right. I got a lot of confidence in him.

**Q. Coach Dex, this question is for you. I would imagine that over the last couple of weeks you've had a lot going on, a lot on your plate with this kind of switch in role.**

My question to you is what did you say to yourself in the quiet moments, when you had a moment to yourself, to kind of keep yourself grounded?

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I've been in this role. Actually it happened to me the first year I was here. Obviously back at UConn from '14 to '17, I was a coordinator. As the coordinator, you don't do it all yourself anyway. We have a great staff. Obviously the guys in that room have been

awesome. Coach Smith has been awesome.

Then we have these players, man. They know our system. Like I said, we've been running this thing for two years. We've got a veteran group. They make it easy. You just try to keep things as routine and how we've been doing it all season.

Again, like I said early on, a couple of weeks ago, I'm not Coach Manny, but we know how we operate on a day-to-day basis and how we get our team prepared. It's just been like that for me for the last couple of weeks. We'll be ready to play on Saturday.

**Q. Adisa, Dvon just kind of touched on it with leading this team in sacks, TFLs, earning all Big Ten. What did that mean to you to have this kind of season in year 5, especially given the injury?**

And, Dvon, what did it mean to see Adisa have this kind of year knowing what he's been through and how long you've known him?

ADISA ISAAC: Man, just it feels like the blink of an eye, but I'm just trying to cherish the moments with my teammates. That's the main thing for me. I feel like, when you focus on just having fun with your brothers and just going in with a positive mindset, whether it's a workout, whether it's meetings, whatever it is, and just grind out with your brothers, I feel like it makes the success on the field much easier.

You don't really kind of think about getting it. It kind of just happens. And that's kind of the way you want it to happen, kind of naturally and organic. So I would say just credit to my teammates for real, just pushing me from, especially coming off of injury, just pushing me to get back to where I am now.

I couldn't have done it by myself. Nobody could. That's just a credit to them. It's really surreal. I can't really put into words just how everything panned out. I'm just blessed, and I'm just happy that I got to do it with this group of guys. I just want to finish it out strong.

DVON ELLIES: Honestly it's been tremendous to see him play. When you have a guy like Dis, a lot of guys who had the type of injury he had, they kind of look at football, and a lot of them just say, wow, I'll never be what I was before the injury.

I think after it happened, and even during the whole process, he took everything in stride, and he said to himself he's going to come back that much better. Obviously you've seen him play on film. You've seen how

he's operated in the last 12 weeks. It's just been really special.

We came in together, and he's just been that guy since day one.

**Q. You guys, obviously the word tempo came up a lot talking about Ole Miss' offense. We've seen them against LSU. Obviously they can win in a shootout. But we've also seen them succeed when they play slower.**

Coming into this game, is the strategy kind of disrupt their tempo, try to make them play slow? Or even if they play fast, you guys know you can force turnovers so you're okay with that?

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: Like I said, we're just going to go in and play our style of defense. Obviously we have said the word tempo, but we know we play a certain brand of football, and we've been playing it all year. We're just going to do what we've been doing, you know, fast, slow. We've just got to be prepared for it. Our kids know they've got to get their cleats set and get their cleats in the ground and execute.

It's been about execution for us all year -- execution, having fun, enjoying it, playing with each other. That's what we've done for 12 weeks, and we want to do it for one more week.

**Q. Judkins from Ole Miss is a special back. Coach Poindexter, you were a teammate of Tiki Barber. You guys have gone against some great backs here.**

Who would you compare Judkins to because he's fifth all time in the SEC through his sophomore year in yards gained. He seems to be a special back. Who would you compare him to?

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: We have a back on our team I think he's very similar to is Kaytron. He's got that kind of power, tackle breaker, speed through the hole. And even Nick, they're all bigger backs that run with power, got breakaway speed and good vision.

Luckily we face those guys each week in practice. Obviously the Big Ten has a lot of big backs like that. He's special, and we give him all the respect.

**Q. This question is for all three of you. Favorite Taylor Swift song.**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I'm out. Taylor Swift?

**Q. Nothing. Can you sing it? It could be multiple choice, Shake It Off, I Knew You Were Trouble, Anti-Hero.**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: I'm like Johnny Gill. I'm more '80s and '90s R&B.

DVON ELLIES: Genuine. That's more my speed.

**Q. Favorite Genuine song then.**

ANTHONY POINDEXTER: He doesn't even know.

THE MODERATOR: We gave it a shot.

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