

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

Thursday, December 28, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Penn State Nittany Lions

Curtis Jacobs

Daequan Hardy

Keaton Ellis

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue. We've got linebacker, Curtis Jacobs, cornerback, Daequan Hardy, and safety, Keaton Ellis.

I'll ask you the same question I asked the other guys. Now that we're through all of the bowl week events, talk about what was your favorite events of the week?

DAEQUAN HARDY: I'd say my favorite event was the Family Feud. Just going out there and just competing against Ole Miss, and it was just build up the intensity going into the game. So that was my favorite event.

KEATON ELLIS: I would say for me, going along with Dae Dae, the College Football Hall of Fame was a great experience and seeing the history and players that I grew up watching. It was a really cool experience to kind of see that.

Obviously seeing Coach Dex in there as well was pretty cool.

CURTIS JACOBS: Yeah, I'd got to say the trivia too. It was really fun.

THE MODERATOR: You guys got into it last night.

Q. I asked the other guys this question, but senior night was before the season ended obviously, and then you guys had the game against Michigan State and then this game coming up. So it really wasn't the last time you guys would play.

But now this game is going to be the last time you guys suit up for Penn State, and I asked them, and I'm going to ask



you guys the same thing. Have you guys had any time to reflect? I know the last couple weeks have been busy, but have you guys had any time to reflect on your Penn State careers?

KEATON ELLIS: I think for me kind of the business we're in is we're always really reflecting. We're always looking back on what we've done and what we can do better. It's always going to be bittersweet when you leave out, especially at Penn State, because there's a lot of guys that I'm going to miss being around and miss playing with.

I kind of had that understanding that it was going to come to an end eventually. So just proud of what I've and what we've accomplished.

DAEQUAN HARDY: Going off Keaton, it's definitely a bittersweet moment playing your last game here. But at the same time, I've just got to go out there and just give it my all and then reflect on it later.

CURTIS JACOBS: I think I spent a lot of time reflecting these past couple weeks, just thinking about relationships that have been made, places I've been because of this that I otherwise wouldn't have been. And it's just about being thankful. I'm really thankful for the opportunities I was given, and I'm just continuing to try to be grateful.

Q. This is for all three of you guys. This might be the best offense you've faced all season long. Is this kind of a fitting way for the No. 1 defense in the country to go out against a challenge like this?

DAEQUAN HARDY: Yeah, definitely. They're really good at running the ball and throwing the ball. So it's another opportunity for us to go show out that we are the No. 1 defense. Even though we lost a couple guys, we've got some guys filling in some big roles, and they're up for the challenge.

KEATON ELLIS: We're just excited for another opportunity and another challenge that we're ready to face and we're excited to face. We're just ready to get to the game and show everybody what it means to be a No. 1 defense.



CURTIS JACOBS: Obviously this is a big-time team. They won't be taken lightly, so we just have to come out and play our ball, and I feel like we can get it done.

Q. This one's for all three of you. You all three were here when Brent Pry left and Manny came in originally. I'm just curious, what's that process like to get to know a new defensive coordinator personally and then to really understand his system and get comfortable with it?

CURTIS JACOBS: I think I've kind of been blessed with that opportunity because I'm in the room with those guys every day. So I feel like just being able to get to know them as a person first, how they think, why they do things. I think that's one of the most important parts.

It kind of gets you to get an understanding of what's going to be called, what you need to do, and how you need to approach yourself as a player. So I feel like just being able to be in the room with those guys has been really good for me.

I can't really speak on these two guys' experience, but I feel like that's one of the things that's helped me a lot.

DAEQUAN HARDY: For me, it takes a little bit of time to fully be comfortable around a new coach and just to understand what he's thinking. Just moving forward and like his play calling and everything. So I feel like the transition from Coach Pry to Diaz was kind of smooth, kind of got us all together in the first season and kind of really got us going, so really good time.

KEATON ELLIS: Kind of like what Dae Dae said and what Curtis said too, we're not always in the room with them. We have our own position coaches. So the relationship takes a little longer to build and kind of understand who that person is, and like he said, play calling and who he is as a person.

But we've been very fortunate to have great coaches since we've been here and just trying to -- for me, it's like what can I take from each coach that's been through here?

Q. Daequan, last time we spoke, you said that you didn't feel like your last season was the best work and that you really made the jump this year into what you could be. Looking to go into the NFL draft, how do you look to cement your, not just your season, but your Penn State legacy on Saturday?

DAEQUAN HARDY: I just feel like just go out there and play a complete game as a cornerback, a nickel, as a returner. Just go out there and cap off the season I had

and give my all out on the field.

Q. This is more of an Xs and Os question, but their tempo is one of the best defenses against your guys' ability to switch in players and change your lineup a bit. How much time have you spent preparing to not get substitutions, and how much have you guys talked about what that will look like on Saturday?

CURTIS JACOBS: Obviously that's a part of the game plan. You've got to be ready for anybody to bring out tempo at any moment. I feel like that's something we worked at since I've been in college. So I'm excited for that opportunity.

KEATON ELLIS: Just to add to that, we work every situation you can imagine at all times -- spring ball, during camp, in season. So we're more than prepared for whatever any team throws at us regardless of what it is.

Q. Ole Miss has got a trio of receivers in Harris, Watkins, and Wade that are pretty special. They've gotten over 700 yards this year. You guys are in the back seven of pass protection, what do you glean from the film study of what makes those three a really good unit?

DAEQUAN HARDY: I would just say those are some great receivers. The quarterback, he can throw the ball well, and those guys can make plays. So we've just got to contain them on the perimeter, try to limit the explosive plays, and I feel like we'll be good out there.

CURTIS JACOBS: I've seen their receivers. I think they have a really good passing attack, along with a really good running attack. I think they have, in my opinion, one of the top backs in the country. When you see a balanced attack like that, you really just have to play sound defense, be where you're supposed to be. So I feel that's the most important part for us.

KEATON ELLIS: It's hard to find three receivers with yards like that, and they do a great job of getting them the ball. To have that run/pass, it goes hand in hand. For us defensively, we've just got to challenge in coverage and pressure, and I think we'll like the result.

Q. You guys had a lot happen this season to get to this moment, but is there any moment you look back on from this year that you're like, yeah, that was my favorite moment?

KEATON ELLIS: I would say for me there was obviously a lot of moments that were amazing. We played in a lot of big games. I would say, as far as like emotionally and just

like all that combined, I would probably say just senior night and just running out of the tunnel to my parents, to my mom almost in tears, and kind of just like a whirlwind of emotions.

It was really a truly amazing experience to kind of just see how proud of me they were and to kind of reflect on all I've done here at Penn State.

DAEQUAN HARDY: For me, I would say my favorite moment is when I got back and I played in the Illinois game. I was happy to be out there with my brothers. I got an interception in that game, and it kind of kick started the season for me. So that was my favorite moment.

CURTIS JACOBS: I've got to say senior night as well. Just being able to spend some extra time on the field after the game walking around. I probably stayed out there for like 30-35 minutes just walking around, taking it in.

It's just I cherish it because it just reflects a lot of great times, even the bad times. You've got to be grateful that you went through it.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously you guys have been doing a lot of film study this week, and you guys are each from different positional groupings. Where do each of you see your advantages positionally against Ole Miss?

KEATON ELLIS: I would say it's going to be a really great matchup. I think both teams are going to have to bring their best. We match up really well with them, and I'm excited just to get out there and get to the game really.

CURTIS JACOBS: All I've been hearing all week is Penn State defense versus Ole Miss offense. So I feel like, when that's been hyped up so much, you've got to pretty much give the people what they want. At this point, it's just about preparation and making sure we're as prepared as possible.

THE MODERATOR: I've heard one or two things about that too.

DAEQUAN HARDY: Just going off what they said, we kind of match up well against their offense. So it's going to be a good game. I feel like our defensive line is going to get after them. So you'll see that.

Q. I posed this question the last session. I asked the guys, hey, who does Judkins compare to from Ole Miss? And Coach Poindexter right away went to Kaytron Allen.

Through your film study, do you agree with that

assessment, and how do you anticipate the matchup against Judkins, who's been a monster the first two years at Ole Miss?

CURTIS JACOBS: I would say he's a really good back. I think our defense is probably one of the most prepared run defenses in the country because we have Nick Singleton and Fatman. Just being able to have those guys and work with them every day, I think there's no challenge we can't handle.

Q. I know you guys, you hear all the time about SEC-Big Ten kind of thing. You played Arkansas. You've played Auburn twice. Now you're playing Ole Miss.

Do you see differences in styles of play or in just physical types when you actually get on the field and play teams from other conferences like the SEC?

KEATON ELLIS: I would say every team isn't the same, and they all have obviously different schemes and different personnel. So we're not really looking at it as like a total -- at least we don't. At least I don't look at it as like, oh, SEC.

I look at it as Ole Miss, and we're going to prepare for Ole Miss like we prepare for Northwestern or whoever the team is we're playing.

For us, it's another team, and we're just excited, and we've had a great week of practice thus far and preparation. So we're excited to get to the game.

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