

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl

Tuesday, December 31, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Gary Stokan

Press Conference



**PLAYOFF
QUARTERFINAL**



GARY STOKAN: Good to see you guys today. We had an occurrence yesterday that is important to us not only as a country, but in Atlanta and Georgia, so I'd like to take a second if you guys would join me in a moment of silence for President Carter and his family, please. Thank you.

Life is precious even at 100 years old. First off, let me begin by just expressing a latitude of gratitude to you, the media, for being here and covering us.

We treat the media as our third team in all of our planning, and tonight you'll see some great southern hospitality at the Third Spot, so please take advantage to go to the media party. It's going to be a nice night. We got beautiful weather out. So enjoy that.

Also want to thank Chick-fil-A, our title partner. They're the longest sponsor in college football history. They've been a great partner for us. We've grown together. So I can't thank them enough.

Also my staff who have done a wonderful job. We have the best staff in the bowl business. So I want to compliment them. The CFP, there's been a lot of planning going on this year between the CFP and our staff and the our New Year's Six bowls' staff, and so I want to compliment the CFP for all the planning that has gone into putting this first playoff in college football history.

And then lastly Percy Vaughn, who's back visiting with the coaches, our chairman. It's his second time he's served as chairman, and I want to thank him for his leadership and appreciate him.

Interesting enough, Atlanta, we're going to host basically within a calendar year all three of the major CFP events. This year the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl will host the quarterfinal. January 20th, we'll host the National Championship game of the CFP. And then January 9th next year, we'll host the CFP semifinal at the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl. Kind of interesting basically almost in a calendar year to host all three major CFP events.

Along with the SEC championship, the Celebration Bowl, which is the HBCU National Championship game, the Aflac Kickoff Games and the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl and hosting the national champion for the second time, there's no doubt that Atlanta certainly is the capital of college football.

Four of our games, the SEC championship, the Aflac Kickoff Game, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl and National Championship game will be four of the six largest conventions in the city of Atlanta, which is the fourth largest convention town in the United States. That's how important college football is to the city of Atlanta.

We'll host four games with top 15 teams, and next year, we'll kickoff our Aflac Kickoff Games with No. 7 ranked Tennessee this year versus No. 21 this year, Syracuse, in the preliminary Orange Bowl with both Tennessee and Syracuse on Saturday, August 30th. And then the Beaver Bowl on

August 31st, Sunday, we'll host South Carolina, which finished No. 13 this year versus Virginia Tech.

So basically within a 24-hour period, we'll do two games in our Aflac Kickoff Games, and then as I mentioned earlier, the semifinal at the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl.

Talk a little bit about this year, we hosted our southern company Peach Bowl challenge with coaches like Kirby Smart, Dan Lanning, Shane Beamer, Steve Spurrier, Urban Meyer, Tommy Tuberville. We take retired coaches and partner them up with existing coaches, current coaches, in a scramble golf format. And Urban Meyer from Florida and Mike Norvell of Florida State, an interesting pairing, won it this year over a four-hole playoff over Houston Nutt and Shane Beamer. But we were able to donate \$320,000 to the coaches' foundations in that event.

Our kickoff game, we raised \$420,000 to our Peach Bowl Legacy Fund at the Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorder Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta hosting the SEC champ, No. 1, Georgia at the time versus Clemson, the ACC champ, No. 13. We had an all-time record of 78,827 in attendance.

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It was our 17th sellout of 21 kickoff games, which we've basically changed the face of college football on the front side of the season by creating this kickoff game format where now teams play each other in big intersectional games.

Our Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl obviously we're here today with No. 5, Texas, and No. 4, Arizona State, the big 12 champ and Texas with a first round win over ACC champ Clemson.

Arizona State, second time they're here. The first time was 1970 in a game where they were No. 8 and beat North Carolina 48 to 26. It rained in the first quarter, sleeted in the second quarter, snowed in the third quarter and iced in the fourth quarter. And those of you who believe in climate change, today it'll be 65 degrees. And we promised 72 degrees in Mercedes Benz Stadium. So we don't have to worry about the weather.

This will be our 24th sellout in 26 years in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl. And this year we'll donate \$100,000 in an endowed scholarship to the University of Texas as well as \$100,000 to Arizona State University and an endowed scholarship for playing in our game. \$50,000 of that to each school comes from Peach Bowl and \$50,000 from Chick-fil-A.

So we appreciate their partnership. That's part of our John Louis Legacy of Courage Scholarships, which goes to Title 1 kids in Atlanta and Georgia. We now have 35 universities and 9.5 million dollars in endowed scholarships throughout the country, and these kids, Title 1 kids are underprivileged kids, they don't have the money to go to college. No one in their family has ever gone to college. And so to give them the opportunity to get a scholarship, get a degree, and go back into their community and change that community is our goal.

That'll lead me to charity. You know, we're the ninth oldest bowl game founded in 1968, but the first bowl game founded for charity. And so it's very, very important to us. We want to use college football to have a positive impact on our community and the communities of our universities and coaches and conferences.

As I said earlier, we've donated 65 million dollars since 2002 to various charities. This year we'll donate over two million dollars, which is the 18th straight year we've donated over a million dollars to charity. We're using college football for the greater good.

We're the most charitable bowl organization out of all 47 bowls, and this year we were able to donate \$800,000 to

our Peach Bowl Legacy Fund at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, and we're now at 23 million dollars that we've donated to the Children's Healthcare Cancer, Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorder Center, and that's to find cures to eradicate childhood cancer.

We now have 14 trials from neuroblastoma to leukemia in five hospitals and four different states. Some of these trials are moving to their second phase. Our goal is to get them in the end zone and get something FDA approved that'll save a kid for a life, for a month, a lifetime and find cures to eradicate childhood cancer.

We mentioned our endowed scholarships, this year we also donated \$500,000 to Red Cross for the devastation of the communities in the southeast by Hurricane Milton and Helene. We also partnered with CFP in our Extra Yard For Teachers Program this year in donating \$100,000, which they matched to on going to eight elementary schools throughout Atlanta to take their old libraries and bring them up-to-date to make them STEM type of libraries, very media oriented where we've been able to put computers and elevate the experience for those kids in those elementary schools in Title 1 schools.

And lastly we've given \$100,000 to Lions Lighthouse, which founded us to be at a charitable bowl game to go into elementary schools for vision screening. A lot of these elementary schools in Atlanta public school system, these kids don't have insurance, and a lot of kids don't know whether they need glasses or not.

And so being able to go in, do vision screening, have an optometrist there to actually fit them for glasses, we found that 20 percent of the kids that we test have needed glasses. And it changes the whole self-fulfilling prophecy of these kids being able to go in and get these glasses. Now they're sitting in the front of the class. Now they're getting As because before they couldn't see. They'd sit in the back. They wouldn't pay attention, wouldn't do their school work. So, again, we're changing our communities.

And lastly, I'll finish with, and I appreciate your time here, in 2014 we assumed management and operation of the Dodd Trophy, which is presented by PNC Bank. The Dodd Trophy is named for legendary Georgia Tech Coach Bobby Dodd and was established in 1976. We're going to be in our 50th year next year.

And it's to honor the football coach whose program represents the three pillars of success. One is leadership. One is scholarship. And one is integrity. So yeah, you've gotta be good on the field with a winning record, but what you do off the field with academics, with your student-athletes as well as what you do in the community



and the impact you have.

This year's recipient led his student-athletes to a perfect one thousand academic progress rate which is tied for the highest mark in the FBS. His university was also one of seven institutions to win the AFCA 2024 Academic Achievement Award. In the community, he was honored at the beginning of the season by being the only head coach named to the 2024 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team for all his philanthropic work.

On the football field, this year's winner led his team to a 12 and one record so far this season in the CFP quarter finals and five victories over opponents ranked in the AP at the time of the game. He owns a 31 and 9 record overall, including 12 wins over ranked opponents which are more than any other head coach in program history during his first three seasons.

On behalf of PNC Bank, Peach Bowl, Inc., and the Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year Foundation, we're humbly proud to honor Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman as the recipient of the 2024 Dodd Trophy presented by PNC.

I'll finish expressing my attitude of gratitude to all of you for being here and covering us. We don't take this lightly. We've come a long way in the Peach Bowl, and hopefully you've felt southern hospitality. You'll feel it tonight at our media party. But we appreciate you being here.

And lastly I'll express to you based on how we started, enjoy the journey. Enjoy this day. Enjoy who you're with. Enjoy the game. Life is precious. So thank you.

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