

Capital One Orange Bowl: Georgia vs Florida State

Friday, December 29, 2023

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Coach Kirby Smart

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



multiple times, the Orange Bowl committee, the staff members, the people that host the hospitality room, the guys involved with our players, Eric Palms, the CEO, they do a tremendous job of making sure it's first class.

Everybody likes coming down here because of the weather, the beaches, and all the beautiful things you get. Our energy level is enthusiastic. They love the work. They love being down here. About 20 or 30 percent of our team was in the same location (indiscernible - audio cutting out) facilities, very comfortable, we knew where we were, we knew what we needed to do, and we got to work on that.

I have a lot of respect for Mike and his staff. We've learned more and more about them recently as they've returned to prominence and having grown up watching Florida State play, went to a lot of their games, so I have a lot of respect, and I think it's great for college football when Florida State is always in the conversation.

His staff has done a tremendous job. They recruit in our state, we recruit in their state. Have a lot of respect for them and looking forward to an outstanding game, an exciting game, to go play in Hard Rock.

Q. For both coaches, what is the solution to what's happening in college football, especially in the month of December, the way the schedule is? You guys have so many things on your plate pulling you all different directions with transfer portal, with recruiting high school, with bowl game preparations. Could each one of you talk about solutions for all of this?

MIKE NORVELL: I'll just jump off. I think it is challenging in the month of December. I think the NCAA has taken some positive strides in the sense of creating (indiscernible - audio cutting out) but it's great for the teams that are not playing in the championship game, and when you do play in a championship game, it pours gasoline on to all the issues of what you have to do and the experiences for, one, the student-athlete, but also the coaching staff.

For us, I'm sure very similar for Coach Smart's staff Sunday after the championship game where you're going to be and what that's going to look like. You have a short

MIKE NORVELL: First off, just want to stay thank you to the Orange Bowl. The Orange Bowl committee, the hospitality this week has been incredible. Just an incredible experience for our players, the opportunity to come to work, to enjoy the time together.

It's really been a special week, and just so grateful for everybody associated with the bowl. The way they've treated us, it's been a wonderful week.

This has been a special season. It's one that I'm proud of our team. I'm proud of the way they have worked throughout the course of the year, the adversity we've faced, the way they've responded to it, everything building up to finish undefeated conference champion was something that was truly special for us. Coming into this bowl game, have a tremendous opportunity, some guys that will be getting more work than what they've had the rest of the season.

This is their opportunity to get their shot, and to be able to do it against a wonderful team in Georgia that's so very well-coached, got great players, very talented, will be a great challenge for our team, but we're excited about the opportunity.

The guys have worked really hard. They've invested a lot, and it's been a special season on and off the field. Just so proud of our players and the way that they've represented the university and all of our players, past and present, by the way that they've played and continued to respond to all situations.

We're looking forward to tomorrow and the game that's ahead, but definitely proud of our guys for the work that they've invested.

KIRBY SMART: I would reiterate what Mike said. Every time I've ever come to the Orange Bowl and I've been here



meeting with the players and then we were on the road making home visits. Didn't get a chance to sit down and really spend that much time with our players once that was done because you're into the next part of what the calendar offers.

You get into bowl season, transfer portal, all those things, it's hard for the players. It's challenging for the coaches.

I think when you look at the time of the signing date, it really is a -- it forces a lot of decisions at a rapid pace. But I think as we continue to evaluate and look at it, we've got to be careful on all changes. We're quick to make changes, and sometimes it's not always -- even though coaches a lot of times will talk about the ripple effect of what will happen, I think we've really got to continue to evaluate that, and before we make these grand changes, be aware of the ripple effects to the calendar and really how it affects the student-athlete as well as just the benefit of programs and coaches and efficiently and effectively being able to do the job to the best of our ability.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't know that I have a perfect solution. I don't think anybody does. (Indiscernible - audio cutting out) kids will be graduating at less of a rate. Maybe that's not important. We've got to decide if they're student-athletes or not, because what we are seeing is decisions are being made less on student-athletes and on where they need to go and financial reasons with NIL and the portal mixed together.

There's a lot less decisions being made based on where school starts and you could push all this movement until January, but everybody's school starts at a different time. I don't think kids make their decision based on that. When school starts in January, guys got to decide where they're going.

Signing high school kids earlier and then going into the portal after signing the high school kids would certainly create a little less confusion instead of both going on simultaneous. You don't know what you have going in or out, and it's all happening at once.

I don't think anybody has a perfect solution, but certainly we're headed towards some tough times if it continues at this rate.

Q. Do you have a game status update for Brock? And if this is his last game, what was it like coaching in his legacy at the University of Georgia?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, his legacy is he's a tremendous athlete, great toughness, never seen a kid come back from a significant injury like that that fast.

Pretty remarkable the numbers he hit and what he was able to do as he came back. He kind of changed the culture of the work ethic around especially on our offense.

To see him go out there and compete and work like he did for the three years he has been pretty remarkable. I mean, he is a machine when it comes to practice. Doesn't get tired, works his tail off, and he set a standard that will be there for a long time.

He's affected Oscar Delp, he affected Darnell, he's affected the young tight ends, he's affected everybody on the offense in terms of how he practices.

Q. Kirby, it's been a few years, but can you reflect on your time at Florida State, what you learned from Coach Andrews and Coach Bowden and how that helped you in your career?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I was a defensive coordinator at Valdosta State, and decided to go be a graduate assistant, which people would say was a step down, but to be in a room with Mickey Andrews, Odell Haggins, Joe Kines, Jody Allen, Kevin Steele, a lot of really good minds in college football, it helped shape me.

To be sitting in a staff room with Coach Bowden for two years getting to see how he ran the team and commanded the respect of the team was really instrumental in my upbringing as a coach.

Two of the best years I had, I got a graduate degree from FSU and was able to be 45 minutes from my hometown and just a tremendous experience for me.

Q. How is Stacy doing, and who's sort of stepped up while he's been absent?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Stacy was a little sick before the Christmas break, and the break, I thought we had three or four days off and we thought he would bounce back, and then when he got ready to come back to work the 25th he was still struggling.

Ron had to check in. Feel like he's doing really well. He is moving around in the hospital now in Athens. I don't think he's going to make it down for the game. They don't want to move him right now, but he is up and moving and recovered.

His wife Trish said he's ornery as hell, so she's having to deal with him, but he's got a wonderful wife and two daughters, and I know he'll bounce back.



In his absence, Manrey. We put Manrey Saint-Amour on the field, and he's done a tremendous job. He's been an offensive line coach several places. He was over at Alabama for a while. He's a kid from North Gwinnett who grew up in a great football system, so he's jumped right in and done a great job.

Q. Coach Norvell, obviously a lot of veteran players are not going to be playing in this game. How has that translated into the younger players who are getting their first shot in some cases at major action? What has their attitude been towards having that opportunity for this game?

MIKE NORVELL: They're excited. There's been a great buzz around the program because you work for opportunity, and that's the greatest thing about football is you never know when this moment is going to show up, you never know when your number is going to be called but you've got to be prepared for it.

There's guys that are on this team that are going to make major contributions in this game that have been preparing for this for their entire life.

Now for the chance to go showcase who you are, to be able to do it in the Capital One Orange Bowl against Georgia who has been the standard of college football over the last three years, that's been the elite level, this is their chance.

Every player always wants more. Well, you work, you build, sometimes it might not be the instant gratification that you want, but you push yourself to put yourself in a position when that time comes that you are ready.

I've really just appreciated the way that our guys have worked. I think we tried to do a great job throughout the course of the season to continue to help the development of some of our younger players.

Some of those guys might not be on that front line throughout the course of the year, and to prepare you for times like this, and we faced adversity throughout the season and guys had to rise up and guys had to be inserted throughout our journey of working to win a conference championship, and they were ready.

I'm definitely looking forward to seeing them play here tomorrow.

Q. Mike, what have you seen out of Brock, and what are your expectations going into tomorrow and having him have the last couple weeks of going through camp and everything?

MIKE NORVELL: Brock is a remarkable young man and he's mature beyond his age. The way he approaches practice, the way he approaches the meeting room, his excitement and really just the charisma he brings to the guys that are around him, being his first start, being an ACC conference championship, there was a lot on it.

Really this is his first week going into a game week knowing that he was going to be the starter, because there was some uncertainty there even in the championship week and how practice reps kind of went.

I love his attitude. I love his approach. I think he's very talented. He's got all the characteristics you look for and what you want a quarterback to be. He learned some lessons in that first game, and now it's an opportunity to go and improve and help those guys around him to go play at the highest level that we possibly can.

He's got a great deal of energy and excitement for tomorrow. Like I told him, we just need him to go out there and be himself, and if he does that, continues to get better, continues to learn from the experiences that he's had, I've got great confidence in how he'll play.

Q. Mike, you talked so much to your players about controlling what you can control and not letting the other stuff affect them. This past month has been a lot of things that are out of your control, starting with the committee's decision, certainly the opt-outs and portal stuff, up to the lawsuit being filed last week. Has this tested your resolve more than maybe any other time in your career?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, I think so. When you sit there and you look at the challenges that present themselves -- we are in a wonderful place with a wonderful position. There's nothing to sit back and hold your head -- hang your head about.

This team, they went through an incredible season, and from where we were four years ago to where we are now, you've seen tremendous growth, tremendous belief, just a wonderful culture and team that we get to be a part of.

But the challenges have presented themselves. For us, we always talk about that response. We talk about the mindset of what you're going to bring to the things that you can't control, and ultimately it still provides opportunity, which provides choice.

That's where the thing we've continued to hit with our guys and continued to hammer through this journey is that whether you're a first year or whether you're in your last



year, this could be a defining moment for you, and so go make the most of it. Give it everything that you have. Try to block out all the outside noise and just continue to focus on your improvement and just being better than what you've been.

There's been some tough choices for guys to have to make. I support our players in their journey. There's been -- it was hard. A lot of them were hurt in decisions of things that they couldn't control, but ultimately I believe in where we're going to continue to build through the experiences, right, and then obviously just grateful for all our players that have poured into our program throughout this journey.

Q. Kirby, before this year I don't think a No. 1 team had ever dropped out of the top 4 on a final weekend, and there's obviously been a trend with a lot of players opting out, skipping the bowl game and the opportunity to play with their teammates one final time. I don't think Georgia has had any opt-outs. Can you talk about the decisions that the guys made to play with one another and what went into building that culture?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think the leaders of the team kind of spearheaded that. I stay out of it. I met with each player that was draft eligible, seniors that have draft grades, and just spoke with them very honest and talked to them, and they had to make the decision with their family members.

They want to go out on top. They don't want their last Georgia outing to be what was the SEC Championship. They put their minds to it, and it was a little bit of almost a contagious deal. One guy did it, another guy did it, and they wanted to play.

Certainly very proud of that, but I do think we're going to have more guys get more opportunities in this game than we normally would have had just because of injuries.

We've had significant injuries and a lot of guys who have not been able to practice during the bowl run just because of the injuries coming out of the SEC Championship.

I'm certainly proud of the guys that decided to, and they want to finish together. I think finishing is important. I don't think enough people talk about it and everybody says this is what you should do, this is what you should do. For kids that love football, they want to play football. This is the Orange Bowl. You've got an opportunity to go play in the Orange Bowl, and that's not given to everybody.

Q. Where did you guys end up practicing yesterday and what were you able to get in?

KIRBY SMART: Got a little bit in. I'm not going to get into the details of all that. Got a little bit of a walk done and just tried to get out in some fresh air to get out of that hotel.

It was rainy. It was wet and nasty all day and we did not want to stay cooped up in the hotel, so were able to move around a little bit and get out, and we'll do the same thing today.

It's going to be nice and cool I think, around 65, 66. The first day it was really warm for our guys, and we tried to crank the heat up in our indoor back home and got it up to like 75, 76, and it was warm, I guess it was on Wednesday here. Then -- or Tuesday here, and then we got the rain yesterday.

Q. Ja'Khi Douglas is listed as a running back on the depth chart. What does it say about his versatility to change positions for this game?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, Ja'Khi has been a great player for us and a great playmaker just throughout his years here at Florida State. He came in kind of in that dual role being able to play running back, being able to play -- split out and play receiver.

He's kind of transitioned more to receiver the last few years. He had a big game against Pitt when we really needed him when Keon and Johnny were both out, but coming into this year the running back position has kind of taken a little bit of a hit.

Unfortunately LT is not going to be able to play due to an injury that was had in the championship game, so we had to make some adjustments. Ja'Khi is so unselfish and he cares so much about this team. He does have a very versatile skill set in the things that he can do that allows him that flexibility.

That's one of the things we try to look for in recruiting, too, guys that can do it all, because you never know what opportunity might present itself and how we can showcase all the skills and talents that these guys have, and I think Ja'Khi is a wonderful example of that.

Q. Mike, is there still anger or is it more acceptance now? Everyone says you can control what you can control about the committee's decision. To that end, how difficult is it -- will it be and has it been for you to accept that you're just never going to know what might have been if Jordan hadn't gotten hurt or if the committee had given you a shot? How difficult is all that to accept?

MIKE NORVELL: Those are all things outside of our



control. But there will always be feelings about that, and I'll never get to say that that's not real because I'm going to always have feelings about that decision and the things that I've had to see the effect to our players.

There's guys that are not playing in this game that have played their last game as Florida State Seminoles and they gave everything that they had in it. I think that's some of the hurt that they experienced, that we experienced just from not getting the opportunity to go and to show that what we believed we had an opportunity to achieve.

But this has been a team of great resolve. This has been a team that has overcome adversity. I think when you sit there and you look, not a whole lot of people would have predicted or expected for us to go undefeated this year. You lose Jordan and have to play one of our biggest rivals, to go and have our backup quarterback go down and to go have to win a conference championship and the way that that was done, it was just from the response, and I think it showed the heart, showed the character of our team, and what we've built within this program.

We're still at the beginning of where we're going, and there are great days ahead here in front of this program, but it still doesn't get it back for the guys that are playing -- that they've played in their last year here at Florida State. That's what hurts.

Ultimately we're excited for our opportunity, and it does have to go back to controlling the things you can control. There's plenty of times in life -- and I've told this to our team and each of the players, there's going to be times in life where things don't go the right way or the way that you expected them to go or maybe even what you've earned, you don't always receive the reward for that, but you do control the response and what you do with it, where you go, and the attitude which you bring. That's what's going to define the identity of what you have.

I know we're going to go out tomorrow and we're going to fight with everything that we have to go put our best on that field. I'm excited we get to do it against a great opponent, a great staff that we get to compete against, and this is something that is going to continue to help push our program to ultimately where we're going to end up.

Q. Coach Smart, want to go back to your time at Valdosta State, maybe your favorite memory of being a Blazer but also how did your time in South Georgia, growing up in at Bainbridge, coaching at Valdosta State shape you into who you are today?

KIRBY STATE: My favorite memory would be beating answer central Ark.

MIKE NORVELL: I knew you were going to bring that up.

KIRBY SMART: No, I'm just kidding. I think we had a game there we were down a lot of points.

MIKE NORVELL: 31-7 first half and good halftime adjustments there.

KIRBY SMART: Were you playing then?

MIKE NORVELL: Yes.

KIRBY SMART: That's crazy, 31-7, and I'm like, I can't believe we came back and won this game. That was 2001 or maybe it was 2000.

I had a great time at Valdosta. It was a pleasure to work there. A lot of great staff members, a lot of good coaches come out of Valdosta State. It was not fun riding a bus to riding a bus to Arkadelphia 18 hours and then driving home and you got home Sunday and had to go straight into work because by the time you got home you had to start on the next game.

But I learned a lot of football, I learned a lot about coaching, I enjoyed my time there, and that impact was probably cut my teeth recruiting, because I knew the back channels and the roads down through South Georgia and I had grown up there and a lot of respect for my dad as a high school coach.

I got welcomed into a lot of schools and we signed a lot of really good players at Valdosta State from South Georgia.

Q. We know this time of year is very integral as far as getting the younger players more time to practice and develop. I'd like to hear each coach's philosophy or how you go about that.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, we try to get as many reps as we can for our young players. We've been fortunate to have I don't know how many mid-years are in there, 14, 15 guys that have come in, not to mention the guys who didn't play this year that were already on the team.

If we have enough people, we try to get ones twos and threes reps throughout this time. There's times we can't get all the threes in there because we are down a little bit, our other numbers and our health.

But I love watching those guys play. We try to balance out the reps because we feel like our ones have had a lot of reps throughout the year, so we'll do a lot more periods with more balance to get those guys almost an extra spring



practice.

I think it's had a great impact on our program for the last three years to get these extra practices, even the extra game after this one the last two years to kind of get those guys more prepared for next season.

MIKE NORVELL: Very similar. We tried to take the first five practices from the weekends after the championship week, during recruiting. We were practicing on those weekends and really kind of doing developmental practices. Allowed our older guys that had played a lot, they got the individual work. Got some speed on speed.

But really the focus was on those guys that didn't get as many reps throughout the year. And to help continue to build the fundamentals, the focus, continue to build upon the concepts of what we do, I thought it was really beneficial.

As decisions were made throughout bowl season, I thought those practices were huge for us with some of the guys that were in those developmental practices that are now going to get an opportunity to impact in this game.

It goes back to that statement, you never know when your number is going to be called, but you have to be ready for it, so make sure that the work through the process is preparing you for ultimately what you want to be and being ready when your number is called.

Q. Kirby, Georgia is a program that has a lot of rivals. Florida State historically, not really been one of those. The two teams haven't played very much. A lot of recruiting battles throughout the years. Being from Bainbridge you know the way fan bases sort of intermingle down there, both sides. With the expanded playoff coming up, the chance for more meetings in the future, could you see this Georgia-Florida State rivalry grow a little bit kind of reflecting what typically goes on between the two programs recruiting, maybe more battles on the field coming up in future years?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, that's already happened. They go into South Georgia more than they probably used to, and that's an area that we take a lot of pride in. So we bump heads down there, all throughout Jacksonville, Tallahassee. We've got kids playing from Tallahassee and kids playing from Atlanta.

That's definitely the case, and probably will continue to happen, especially with the playoff format that will kick in next year.

Q. Kirby, I want to ask you about Malaki Starks. Two-year starter, made a bunch of All-American teams. Where do you see his game as he begins his third season after this bowl in terms of areas where he can improve and get better?

KIRBY SMART: I think bigger, stronger in the weight room. He's dealt with some shoulder injuries and some dings. Going to be really important for him to maintain his weight and stay up.

He's a really good athlete. He's got the ability to play man-to-man. He could probably play corner if we asked him to because he's a track kid in high school that had great track numbers. Great ball skills. But he also has size, so we wanted to maintain that 200 pounds and continue to fill weak-side B-gap. He does a good job of that. He's a really good football player.

Q. When the dust settles and if Florida State is the only undefeated team remaining, should you and Florida State consider themselves national champions?

MIKE NORVELL: You know, I mean, I think that as things go on the field, you've got to control what you can control on the field. We were not presented the opportunity to go play in the College Football Playoff.

For that decision, we get a chance to go compete against Georgia to win the Orange Bowl. That would be an incredible feat for our football team, to be able to go 14-0 throughout the course of the season, throughout the things that we've had to face.

Right now that's the focus. Ultimately that's what's in front of us. That's all that we've talked about.

Q. Kirby, is there a status update on Amarius Mims and Damon Wilson?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Damon had a scope done, and he's with us, and he's out there. He's not practicing. Amarius is here and going to be with us today.

Q. Mike, there's been a lot of talk about the production, players that might not be available in this game. Have you seen any of the players who are going to be in expanded roles taking on more leadership, maybe guys who didn't have that opportunity during the regular season?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. Leadership is not about a speech. It's about what you do when you step on the field, what you're doing in the meeting rooms, how you're

approaching each and every day. There's plenty of people that want to talk, but if your actions don't follow that up, then nobody is really going to listen.

What I've been pleased with is just the way that the guys have approached the work that they've had, and now that they are getting more of an opportunity, to see them work, to encourage, to push, when you sit there and look at a lot of guys on our offensive line, guys that do have the experience and obviously are veterans within what we're doing, I think they've done a great job with it. You'll see some of those skill players -- you mentioned Ja'Khi -- a couple guys that are really pushing to elevate themselves and to be supportive of some of the guys maybe that don't have as much.

But I think the leadership has come through the work, and I think that's something that our guys all respect within each other. Cheyenne Brown there in the defensive backfield I think has really done a nice job of trying to elevate himself. Kalen DeLoach is one of our great players. He's done a wonderful job throughout this bowl season as he's playing his last game as a Seminole, and then a couple of those guys on that defensive front have really been impactful.

Q. Talking to Coach Hartly, he mentioned Carson has been just making next-level throws, a different type of bowl prep for him. When we spoke to him he talked about how he's not really interested in the activities going on this week, he wants to watch film, wants to go to practice. What have you seen from him since he announced his return and really in bowl prep?

KIRBY SMART: I would say more pressure lifted off of him. Instead of carrying that burden of that decision, he wanted to get that over and focus on the Orange Bowl and didn't want to have to answer questions about that down here. He wanted to be at his best. He wanted to lead his team. I thought that was a good decision.

In terms of his leadership, he's one of our better leaders. He does it in a different way than most people. He's very poised and calm. Very pleased with his leadership.

Q. Your players have been very honest about the pain they'll carry with them through their career, the rest of their lives for not being rewarded for that resume you've put together. Is there a plan in place to make sure that doesn't linger in a negative way for you in this program because they said they're going to carry it for a long time.

MIKE NORVELL: Go play the game. Go be the best you can possibly be in all things that are ahead of you. There's a lot of experiences that you're going to learn from in life,

and what you do with those experiences are going to dictate what your future is going to be.

We get an opportunity to play Georgia in the Orange Bowl, and this is an exciting game. It's a great opportunity. As we go through and get into the off-season and we get to continue to elevate this program to where it deserves to be.

Going undefeated up to this point, it's been a wonderful ride for our program, but we still haven't accomplished all that's in front of us. It's about the work. It's about the response. It's about the way that our guys will continue to improve.

A lot of our guys are going to take that step to the National Football League here in the near future. Will they still have the pain and the hurt from maybe choices that were made? Absolutely. But they can still focus on going to be the best they can be, and they will find situations in the future that this experience will help them manage through and to help them throughout the course of their lives if they take advantage of it.

Q. Coach Smart, I wanted to ask about a couple of guys who had dealt with injuries for a lot of the year in Ladd McConkey and Kendall Milton, and could have sat out this game but pretty much immediately decided they were going to play for sure. What has their leadership meant not only in the lead-up to this game but in the season as a whole?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, both those guys have been just stalwarts. It's not just this year. They led last year, the year before that. Kendall and Ladd are two of the most loyal Bulldogs that we'll ever have. They've played on special teams. They create toughness in the way they practice. They've both been through some injuries, and they've both bounced back from those. They never hesitated.

Kendall played his best football at the end of the year and really came on and had some really good games, and he wants to go out on top. It was important to him to come out and play in this game.

Then Ladd has battled injuries all year and hasn't been able to practice much, but he gives us what he's got, and we know that we can get him to game day healthy, that he's a really good player.

Q. Coach Norvell, can you talk about how Darrell Jackson has looked in practice?

MIKE NORVELL: That's a great example of somebody that unfortunately at the beginning of the year was denied



an opportunity to play this season due to the two-time transfer, which now apparently has changed.

It's a great example of control the things that you can control. Darrell has brought a smile to his face throughout the course of the season. He's worked his butt off to be in position. We knew once we got to the postseason that he would be eligible to play, and that's been our focus.

I've challenged him throughout the year, and he's done everything in his power, so he's excited about it. He's got plenty of game experience under his belt. But there's going to be some nerves, some emotion and probably some anxiety going into this one, and just getting out there and go and play the next snap.

But I'm definitely excited about seeing him get in there and make an impact on this game.

Q. Mike, I know in the ACC Championship game, that was sort of a whirlwind for Brock, and talking to Alex, it sounded like the game plan was don't make the big mistake that could cost us the game. If you knew then what you know now about how the committee was judging you, would you have approached that differently and tried for some style points? And given that you've had more time with him in this role, do you expect more of the offense to be on his shoulders in this one?

MIKE NORVELL: I think you win a conference championship game by 10 points, I think that's pretty stylish. Ultimately it was about winning the game. I thought our defense, we had a great plan, did a wonderful job. We knew we couldn't make the big mistake, couldn't give the extra possessions.

I thought Brock did a good job of managing that throughout the course of the game. But that was his first start. It was his first meaningful reps throughout a game in that type of situation, so he will be better from that.

As we jump into this one, this is the first week coming into a game week knowing that he's the starter and we're able to plan things accordingly to certain strengths that he has and get enough repetitions of the things that we expect to see and then also some of the things that might be unexpected that we see.

That's the fun of this week for us.

Definitely, like I said, Brock has got great confidence, great belief, great emotion in what he brings and how he works and just the people that are around him, how supportive they've been. We're definitely looking forward to seeing

him compete.

Q. Kirby, how much do you prepare for the unexpected in a situation like this versus you've got 13 games of tape on FSU that may or may not be particularly relevant to what you're doing right now?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's hard to prepare for the unexpected. That's what I've learned in coaching. You can't really prepare for it. You're better off spending your time blocking and tackling and getting better at fundamentals, and that's what we try to do and adjust to what we get and try to prepare for what we've seen and use all the tape we can to have different options, different looks, try to use a lot of time between the games.

Our last game, their last game, same day, and then you go all the way forward, and there's a lot of things that can change and go on in kids' heads.

For us, it's been about fundamentals and just trying to be better at blocking and tackling, because that's what you see in bowl games, people don't tackle well, people don't block well.

Q. It seems both you guys have players that are in the portal but are participating in this football game. I'm curious how you go about coaching a player who on the surface appears to have a -- to be in and out?

KIRBY SMART: We don't really have anybody -- who are you talking about, the kicker? He's not in the portal. He's not in the portal at all. Just because somebody posts that doesn't mean they're going to be in the portal. They have to go into the portal, which he's not.

But the kicker Zirkel, I think he's fourth or fifth year. He came to be and said I would like to see -- he's probably not going to go kick anywhere. Just wanted to see if he would get any interest and he had been there and got beaten out as the kicker. He said he wanted to stay and kick in the game, so we allowed him to do it.

MIKE NORVELL: We've had some guys who have graduated Florida State and looking at maybe different opportunities and maybe more expanded role for their future.

The portal, although you sit there and you can see it both ways, there's some things, there's some challenges of what it provides to all things with college athletics, but there are some great parts of it with opportunity for guys.

Some guys came to me and expressed interest of trying to find maybe better situations for them, and they've done

everything that we've asked them to do throughout this journey that they've been on.

Some of them might return to Florida State, some might not, but to have an opportunity to go and compete and be with this team to finish out what they started, I'm grateful for.

Q. Kirby, how much momentum into an off-season could a bowl win provide?

KIRBY SMART: Well, back in the day of recruiting in January, it was much more. Your signing class is done. Everything is almost through. School starts next week or January 6 or 7th for us, so it's like, it can provide momentum in terms of going out and recruit the junior class.

It can provide momentum in going out to the portal class. But it's probably not as much as it used to be when people signed in February. The earlier signing date provides momentum coming out of your championship games more so than the bowl games.

Q. Kirby, talking about the amount of talent that you've been able to pick up from the Columbus area, how crucial has that been to your recruiting process?

KIRBY SMART: Well, it's a very fertile area. They've always had great football players out of Columbus. Dell McGee plays there himself; does a tremendous job recruiting that area. We've had kids from both sides of the state line. It's always been a great football area. They've had great football. It's really close to Auburn, so they've got footprint over there, too. It's close to Tallahassee, so I think everybody goes in there to recruit really good football players.

We enjoy getting kids out of there. They come from really good programs, and they've got great toughness.

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