

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Florida vs Michigan

Monday, December 3, 2018

Gary Stokan

Dan Mullen

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome all the media to part 2 of the 2018 Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl media teleconference. We're joined on the call by Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl president and CEO Gary Stokan, and of course Florida head coach Dan Mullen. We'll start with an opening comment from Gary. Go ahead.

GARY STOKAN: Dan, first off, let me congratulate you on Florida's first appearance in a New Year's Six bowl game in the CFP era. This team out of 107 years of Florida football could be only the 15th team to win 10 games, so certainly playing for a lot in the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl.

But it's my pleasure to officially welcome the 10th-ranked Florida Gators to Atlanta to compete in the 51st Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl to be played December 29th at noon in a sold-out Mercedes-Benz Stadium. We are honored to host this match-up of two top-10 teams and two of the biggest brands in college football in the country.

We look at our bowl as a reward for the players, and we use the theme "live, laugh and learn," and it's our mission to provide a best-in-class experience for the players, coaches and fans.

We've got a New Year's Six bowl week experience in store for you. We look forward to hosting you, Megan, your family and the Florida Gator family and all the fans in the capital of college football, Atlanta, Georgia.

DAN MULLEN: I want to thank Gary for the invite. We're really excited to be part of the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl. You know, I've known Gary for quite a while now, and you know, having never played in the bowl game before, I know I'm really excited for our first opportunity, for me personally to come to the game. I know for our players, it's an unbelievable honor. They've worked hard for the opportunity to play in a New Year's Six bowl and play in such a prestigious bowl as the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl. So we're really excited.

I know in all my involvement with the Chick-Fil-a Peach Bowl throughout the years and what they've done with



all the different outings, you know, I've been involved in their golf outing for many years, and everything they do is first class, and I know it's going to be a lot of fun. I think the bowl system is amazing, that it does reward young men for having a great season, for going out there and working and accomplishing things, and the bowl game is an unbelievable reward for them. For them to come to go play in such a prestigious bowl, to come to the city of Atlanta and experience something they've never experienced before is something special and a great honor for us at the University of Florida, to accept and come play a great game.

Q. What would you say characterizes Jim Harbaugh's football teams?

DAN MULLEN: Well, you watch, they're always an intense, physical football team. When I've gotten to see them play, they're not afraid to think outside the box. Their defense obviously comes at you from a lot of different angles. They pressure you in different ways, and then offensively obviously they're used to run power one, run, but they're very, very creative in what they do and give you a lot of different looks out there on the field.

Q. The other thing is just playing a program like Michigan, you guys have chalked up a couple wins against some big-name schools this year, but how big is that to be able to maybe get a win against a program from the Big Ten of this stature?

DAN MULLEN: Well, it's always -- you're talking about one of the great programs in college football history, and they've had a spectacular year, being a top-10 team almost the whole season, and they were one game away from being in the College Football Playoff this year.

You know, you look at that and look at everything they've accomplished and the quality of team, it should be a great competition, and obviously it would mean a lot to beat a team of that caliber.

Q. Dan, could you talk a little bit about this match-up from the standpoint of comparing what it would have been like if you had been matched up against UCF? There are some fans that certainly wanted to play UCF, and there are others that feel like they would rather play a Power Five school because there's more -- the perception is there's more to be

gained from that. Could you talk about the difference? Would you have liked to have had the opportunity to have played UCF?

DAN MULLEN: You know what, I'm just thrilled for the opportunity to be in a New Year's Six bowl. Whoever our opponent is, our focus is going to be to come out there and play with relentless effort in everything that we do. I think the opportunity to -- if you're going to a New Year's Six bowl, you're playing a high-caliber team, no matter who that is or what conference they come from, and that's the great challenge, and that's what's so fun about it as a competitor. You love playing whoever is going to come. I didn't really mind -- as long as we're playing in a New Year's Six bowl, I don't mind who the opponent is going to be. We're going to be excited to come out there and try to play as hard as we can.

Q. So is that a yes or a no?

DAN MULLEN: Of what? I don't -- I don't care who we're playing. I didn't really care. I'll be honest with you. Yeah. I mean, I'm just excited to be at a New Year's Six bowl and have the opportunity to play a great team. If they rolled out anybody, we would go ready to play. I don't care who it was; they could roll out Notre Dame, Clemson, Oklahoma, Alabama; we're going to show up ready to go play, and I'm -- whoever came, Texas, whoever else in the New Year's Six bowls this year, we would have had willing to play all of them. I probably wouldn't have wanted to play Georgia or LSU because we've already played both of those two. Anybody else I would have been excited to play.

Q. Have you seen any Michigan games yet? What do you know about their offense, and did you play any offenses this year that you would rate as similar to Michigan's?

DAN MULLEN: Boy, it's going to be hard because they are very diverse in what they do. I've played their quarterback before. Both of us were at different schools at the time. There's some familiarity with him. I know he's a great player, can extend plays. He's a great athlete, throws the ball exceptionally well, and then I've gotten to watch a little more of their defense than their offense.

When we got on the plane to head out recruiting yesterday morning, really didn't know who we were going to play, and as soon as we found that out, luckily I had about six different teams loaded into the laptop, and hit the Michigan button to start watching their defense. I've seen a little bit more of their defense, which I know is very aggressive and attacking, comes at you from a lot of different angles.

Q. I know Chauncey declared for the draft. Just to make sure I'm correct, is he playing in the game?

DAN MULLEN: Yeah, he said he's going to play in the game, and I think he's excited to play in the game and finish out his Florida career playing in a New Year's Six bowl and helping trying to get a 10-win season and finish on a top-10 team in his last season with the Gators. We expect him to be there. I've met with several of our other underclassmen, and in all the meetings I've had, I think everyone plans on playing in the game. You know, I think some of the guys are obviously -- we're having meetings and they're exploring options in their futures and what it might hold, and they're doing some research, which I think is the right way to handle things is gather as much information as you can and make a great decision.

I'm a big believer when it comes to the NFL Draft, if you're a first-rounder, you should leave and go on to the NFL. If you're not, you probably should stay and continue to develop and try to become a first-round draft pick.

Q. And you kind of touched on it, but what are your impressions of Shea Patterson, and what have you seen from him? You've watched a little bit of film, what do you see on him that's maybe different than when you were at Mississippi State?

DAN MULLEN: I haven't gotten to watch him at Michigan yet, but I got to watch him a lot when I was at Mississippi State, and when he was at Ole Miss, he was a guy that could really create on his own, and one of the things that makes him dangerous as a quarterback is obviously he can execute within the offense. He can run the offense and make the throws, make the plays, get the ball, make the checks, get the ball where he needs to get it to. But the thing that makes him a dangerous player is when he gets outside of the offense, when a play breaks down, his ability to improvise and extend plays makes him difficult to defend.

Q. I'm just curious whether you might call your former boss up at Ohio State and ask for some tips about playing against Michigan.

DAN MULLEN: Yeah, you know, I'm sure I'll touch base with him just to get a thought or two, you know, on -- they obviously had a great plan of attacking them, were able to put a lot of points on the board, so that's a game we'll look at closely and see how they were able to do it. But I know that's a big rivalry game, so those are hard to invest all the stock in because of all the emotion of those games.

Q. And also, can you just talk about the fine line between having a great time at a bowl game and obviously preparing for a tough game?

DAN MULLEN: Well, I know this of my bowl experience: If you don't win the game, it's not as good

a bowl experience. You know, the lasting memory of the bowl is the game. That's the final thing. Our 100 percent focus is on winning the game. Now, within that, I know the experience -- I'm a big believer in as we set the schedule for our guys to have a great time, to enjoy the experience both before we head to the bowl site and when we get to Atlanta to make sure that we can have a great time. But something we always remind our guys, when it's time to be locked in and focused, when we're involved in preparation, we need to be locked in and focused. When it's time to relax and have fun, we're going to relax and have a great time. It's the maturity of the team knowing how to separate those two things, and then the importance of winning the game because it is -- when you think back at the game, the first thing -- the whole bowl experience, the first thing you're going to think about is the game, and if you've won the game, that puts the whole experience starts with a smile on your face.

Q. What kind of momentum have you sensed on the recruiting trail?

DAN MULLEN: You know, I think things are headed in a positive direction. I think a lot of these young players out there have seen the direction the program is headed. When we got hired, there probably were a lot of questions about what direction the program was going to head in and what it's going to look like with a new coaching staff and how we're going to run the program. I think a lot of young players all around the country have seen that we're trying to get the Gator standard back and be a team that's going to compete for National Championships on a regular basis. I think they've seen steps in that direction in year one, so I think it's certainly been a positive response from our first season on the recruiting trail.

Q. You guys have been on a roll offensively the last few games. What do you credit that to, and then what kind of challenge -- I know Michigan took a step back against Ohio State but otherwise has given up like nothing pretty much, 250 a game maybe.

DAN MULLEN: You know, I think one of the things is our guys are a lot more comfortable in the offense now. As the year went on, comfortable in not just knowing the plays but knowing how to use the plays, how the plays are going to be, the opportunity to go make plays within the offense, and I think when you get that comfort, you start to see us put up bigger numbers. So I think just the confidence in what we're doing and how we're playing and they're picking it up and understanding the offense.

Obviously Michigan will be a huge challenge. Don Brown does a great job as a defensive coordinator. They're very, very aggressive. They do a great job

stopping the run, and then have great athletes in the secondary that can match up with all of your receivers and make great pressure on the quarterback. You see they can come at you at every level of the defense and have great players that can make plays at each level of the defense, and so we're going to have to get a great plan together, and our guys are going to have to execute at a high level to put points on the board.

Q. Dan, if you were to get a Peach Bowl win over Michigan, would this season -- would it be fair to say that it would far exceed your expectations if you were able to get a bowl win against Michigan and get to that 10th win?

DAN MULLEN: I would say this: I'd be happy with the season, I guess. My expectations for the program are really, really high, so obviously it would be a nice cap on what I would say was a successful season in a lot of ways, even though we did not win a championship. You know, and that's -- our goal is to compete not just compete for and win SEC East and then SEC Championships, conference championships, and then compete for the National Championship. But certainly a win in this game and a top-10 finish -- finishing in the top 10, you'd have to call that a pretty successful season.

Q. I'm just asking it in the context of this being your first year. I certainly would not ask that question if this was year three, four or five.

DAN MULLEN: I don't view it that way. I mean, I think there's -- for us, every year is independent, and even though it is the first year, I still have really high expectations for the team and the program. As a competitor, we want to win. You know, I think it would have been a good year for this team, but to be honest with you, on December the 30th, or December 29th is the last time that this team plays and a new team is born the next day, and that's a whole 'nother challenge for us, whether it's year one or year ten within the program. Every year holds its own unique challenge.

GARY STOKAN: Well, Dan, merry Christmas to you and the family. Good luck in your final exams, and we'll look forward to hosting you when you get up our way December 22nd.

DAN MULLEN: Yeah, can't wait to get up there. Looking forward to it, and we're really excited to be part of the game. Thank you so much for hosting us, and hopefully it's a great, exciting atmosphere for all the fans to come and enjoy a great college football game.