



VRBO Citrus Bowl

December 31, 2018

Head coaches press conference

Kentucky head coach Mark Stoops and Penn State head coach James Franklin

THE MODERATOR: All right. We are now joined by Kentucky head coach Mark Stoops and Penn State head coach James Franklin. We'll start with an opening statement from each coach, Stoops first, then Franklin, and then we'll take questions.

MARK STOOPS: Thank you. Good morning. It's an honor to be here. It's going to be a real challenge playing Coach Franklin and Penn State, a storied program. We look forward to the opportunity. It's been a great week in Orlando, and we're anxious to get the game going here.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, very similar for us. You know, the bowl's been unbelievable. We had an opportunity last night to spend some time together as a staff. I do want to thank VRBO and the Citrus Bowl. They have been fantastic.

And the one thing I would say that me and coach were both talking about is, (this is) probably one of the few bowls that I've been a part of that is really doing something for this community the other 364 days. The commitment that they've made to this community is pretty impressive and kind of caught me off guard because I've never really heard that before. So that was impressive.

Our guys have had a great time. It's been a really good balance between events and practice. And I'm a huge Coach Stoops fan. When you get to be around other really good coaches that are in it for the right reasons and are doing it in a first class manner. When it's time to compete, obviously, you know, we're going to be going as hard as we possibly can for our organizations and our programs, but when it's time to be able to just talk ball and organizational structure and things like that, it's been great. We are honored and humbled to be a part of this game and to be competing against such a storied program like Kentucky and, obviously, you know, (I've) got a little history in the SEC as well. So I know what coach is competing against week in and week out.

Q. Coach Franklin, I'm curious about what the biggest difference you see in prepping for this Kentucky team versus when you were at Vanderbilt?

JAMES FRANKLIN: We kind of live in a society, and specifically when it comes to college football, that everybody wants a quick fix. It doesn't work like that. And, you know, Coach needed time to come in and get his philosophy in place and his program in place, and for all of us, that takes time — that takes a number of years. And that's what you see right now. You see a football program that has taken on his identity. They're tough. They're hard nosed. They play really hard. They play together. They've got really good schemes and offense, defense and special teams, and they've done a good job of going out and finding talent. And what I've been impressed by is finding talent in areas that probably Kentucky hasn't gone to in the past. Obviously, Coach's background in Ohio helps and makes a whole lot of sense. I'm not really happy that they got one specific guy out of New Jersey who should have been probably been playing at Penn State.

But that's kind of what I see. They have been creative. I was fortunate this summer — we both have been part of a leadership summit that we have been doing last couple years, and this past year was at Kentucky. So I got a chance to see their facilities, which are phenomenal. I got a chance to spend time around him and the administration and that was good. That's just what I see. I see a guy that has a very clear vision of how he wants to do things at the University of Kentucky and now he's been there long enough that that's in place. And that's why you see the success that they're having.



Q. Mark, you had hinted early on this year about how good your team would end up being and not all of us believed that. Could you give us an idea of what some of the indications were very early on that this would be a special team?

MARK STOOPS: Yeah. Sure. I think the big thing was we had some experience. We had some talent. You know, you could see that coming to fruition this year with the guys that have been around. Like James mentioned, they have been here three, four years. They played a lot of football. We have 16 seniors. Each of those seniors contributes. You know, that's a big indicator. I think how they work, the unity that this team has — those are a lot of things that people don't see, how hard they're working, last winter through winter conditioning. We had a great spring through the summer, the way guys were training. So those are things I felt very comfortable with. The leadership of this team, we had some talent. Sure, we had some holes to fill, but we felt good about our options and really the biggest thing is the attitude of this team. So that was good.

What James failed to mention is we spent some time in the offseason. I lost him for a couple of hours. He was in our staff room checking out some tape. He kind of saw this game coming, I think.

Q. James, we saw the seniors get carried off the field after practice yesterday from Trace to Torrence. What do you think that class's biggest contribution to your program was and how different is that class from previous classes?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I think they are very historic class in our program. (They'll) go down as one of the winningest classes in Big Ten era. I think it is important that you differentiate — when you look in Penn State's history, you know when we joined the Big Ten and before, because I think it's a different story. And this senior class, I think, is going to go down as one of the most successful senior classes in Big Ten era.

And I think you've got to look at it in perspective of when they came to Penn State in a very challenging time. And then I think a lot of those guys — obviously, there's a tremendous story. You've got a number of these guys that were committed to us at the previous institution, Vanderbilt, and were willing to follow us to Penn State. And I think — you know, we talk about that all the time. I know the recruiting rule book says you're supposed to commit to a school. But the reality is a lot of parents (and) a lot of kids commit to coaches and people that they trust. So to have this group really kind of come in and battle through some early challenges and being at 65 scholarships and those guys kind of never wavering have really kind of been the foundation that we've built this thing on the last few years. And those guys will forever hold a special place in my heart.

I got a really cool text last night from Trace McSorley's high school coach kind of looking back over this whole journey that we have been through together and, as you guys know, Trace's sister babysits our kids and there's just strong bonds. Amani's family and Koa Farmer from California and so on and so forth. Torrence Brown.

You know, it's funny, Coach, two years ago we had three players starting on our defense from Alabama. I don't know if that's ever happened. But, obviously, our ties and relationships from the previous school help with that. So, yeah, I think for us that's something we always do that last practice. We honor those guys and they get to choose who's going to carry them off the field and, you know, it's an exciting time. I know they're all going to go on and do wonderful things, but it's also sad. I'd like to have four more years with Trace McSorley if possible.

Coach, I don't know if you know any ways through the NCAA to get that done.

MARK STOOPS: I wish. I have a few also.



JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah, I actually was trying to do the opposite with that. I was following your running back and your outside linebacker on Twitter. I was sending them direct messages about maybe — yeah. But that didn't work. Yeah. They're playing.

MARK STOOPS: I heard about that. Uh huh. Yeah.

Q. Coach, do you mind if I ask you what your favorite part of the trip to Orlando has been?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I would say, for me, I like this time of year because at Penn State. Obviously, our guys have some pretty serious academic challenges and I like this time of year where you're able to really be football and football only. And I don't want that to be misinterpreted. I'm as big a believer as the college model and the student-athlete as there is out there, but I do like the times of year where you're able to just focus on football, especially back in Happy Valley and being able to do that — we don't get a whole lot of time at Penn State in our summer camp. We don't really get a whole lot of camp time where it's just football. Our guys are taking class pretty much throughout the entire camp. I like the time of year where our guys are able to focus just on football and kind of get a little bit of an idea of what it's like to be an NFL player from that perspective. And I think the other thing that I like as coach is we probably all struggle with the life-work balance, the time we get with our family and kids. But I also do understand that our job and our profession create a bunch of opportunities. My wife and kids are living their best life down here. They have been to Busch Gardens. They have been to Discovery Cove. They've done something every single day out having a heck of a time. So we're blessed and fortunate to be able to do this and provide these opportunities and experiences for our kids as well.

MARK STOOPS: Same thing. I think just spending time with our team without having to go to school and study hall and all those things. Just spending time with our players on the practice field, in meetings, and then enjoying Orlando, the beautiful sunshine and going to parks. This has been an incredible bowl. The people, the hospitality, the hosts — everybody's just been phenomenal. Our players have thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We have quite a few children on our coaching staff. We have a bunch of kids and they've all had a really good time and (are) enjoying themselves. So I think it's just that balance of working hard and practicing, but also having some fun and enjoying the moment.

Q. For Mark. I just want to get your impressions of Trace McSorley, what you've seen from him on film and what it's like for a head coach to have a three year starter who has been as successful as he is.

MARK STOOPS: You see a great football player but you see the characteristics. You see the toughness, the leadership. Everything runs through him. He wants the team on his back. And you know got to have great respect for a player like that. You could just see it with the way he plays with the attitude, the toughness, and makes plays across the board, so just an awful lot of respect for him.

Q. This is for both coaches, since you're both 9-3. What is the significance for a coach, team and program in getting to a ten win season?

MARK STOOPS: It's extremely important. Obviously, competing against Penn State, the history that they have, the storied program — that's very important to us and motivating for us. Playing Penn State and competing against Penn State, playing on New Year's Day, getting a tenth victory — it's very important. It hasn't happened very many times in the history of our program to so get 10, hit that milestone, is another motivating factor.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I think it's very important for a lot of different things. I think it's a benchmark. You probably have two different benchmarks for programs across the country. Some programs are benchmarked on going to bowl games and that's kind of the first level, and then I think the next level is 10 win seasons.



We have been fortunate the last two years to be able to get 10 or more wins. We got a chance to do that for the third time in a row. That's never happened at Penn State since joining the Big Ten. And I think at a place like Penn State, when you can start making some comments about things that have never happened in our history — and we've played a lot of good football at Penn State for a long time, so I think it's special.

So for us, you have the 10 win motivation. You have three "10 wins or more seasons in a row" motivation. You have sending these seniors out the right way and the legacy that they've left. And then the most important thing for us is just being 10 and playing well against a really, really good opponent. So it's a combination of all those things. And I think, as coaches, with 120 something players, they're all going to be motivated differently, so I think it's important you kind of talk about it from a lot of different perspectives. A freshman is going to be motivated different than a redshirt senior and so on.

Q. This is for James. Now that that you've had a chance to get a longer look at Josh Allen, what are your impressions of him and the Kentucky defense as a whole?

JAMES FRANKLIN: Yeah. I think, first of all, they've got a really good scheme. You know, the way they play their front, the outside linebackers — they've obviously put him in position to make plays. And he's got a lot of different skills.

I think it's pretty interesting. I've had some discussions with our players because we've got some players that are some undersized D-ends and I think sometimes they kind of have a discussion in their mind or they've got people in their ear telling them, 'Well, you're really more of a 3-4 outside linebacker.' Well, this guy is 260 pounds.

So I think the reality in a lot of ways, a really good 3-4 outside linebacker and 4-3 D-end, they're very similar. You know, obviously a 3-4 outside linebacker, they ask them to do a little bit more things. They scheme really well to put him in position to make plays, which is obviously what you need to do, and he's able to impact the game in a lot of different ways, whether it's sacks, whether it's tackles for loss, whether it's coverage. So it's impressive, it really is.

Obviously we're going to have to try to do things to try to limit his impact. That's really what we do in every game.

Lynn Bowden is another guy that concerns you. Obviously the running back Snell concerns you. I was actually out recruiting and I was in Snell's high school. There was an article and a picture on the wall that was autographed. Lynn Bowden we recruited, so I know all about Lynn. And Lynn sent me a message on Twitter this week: "Hey, Coach, it's going to be great to see you." And I'm, like, I hope you feel the same way after the game.

But what's impressive for them is kind of what we're all looking for — you want players at every level of the defense and on every unit that can hurt you. And that's what we try to do is try to identify who those guys are and then we challenge our players to say, 'Hey, you know, what are we going to do to make sure that Lynn Bowden doesn't impact the game and be what we call a game-wrecker?' Obviously, these guys are going to make plays in the game, but we've got to limit their impact as much as we possibly can through having an awareness of where they're at all the time on the field and then doing some things schemewise that we think puts them in challenging positions.

Q. Mark, this week it's been a balance between fun and getting the work in. How have your guys handled that and when do you want that switch flipped to where it's total focus on the game?

MARK STOOPS: You know, the nice thing about our team is we have a lot of seniors. We have very good leadership. So I felt good. I felt comfortable with the balance all week. I feel like the guys, when it's time to come in and lock in at meetings and go to practice, they've done a really good job. We have been very energized at practice.



And, again, that shouldn't be hard, to motivate our team at this point. Playing Penn State and playing for 10 victories, playing on January 1, you know, that's motivating enough. And so I felt good about the balance of our players. And we talked about it yesterday, about flipping that switch and getting locked in and getting ready to go. So, you know, it's still a challenge. Guys have quite a few people start rolling into town, and family and friends, for them, start coming around. And that's good. We want them to spend time with their families. But you get two, three days out from the game, it's time to start honing in and getting ready to go.

Q. Mark, you're sitting here today getting ready to play a January 1 bowl game. Your first presser, you were announcing you had a player and a coach battling cancer. I'm just curious the emotional roller coaster this season has been and how it's impacted the actual product on the field.

MARK STOOPS: I think that, in a way, did unify the team even more, make us really keep things in perspective. What Josh Paschal has gone through and Coach Schlarman, you know, it keeps things in perspective. This is still just a game. It's very important. It's a way of life for us. And so, obviously, we know, you know, how that is and how important and how many people we affect by our play. But when you start looking at things like that, it keeps things in perspective and our team has really rallied around those two.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Stoops, Coach Franklin, thank you for your time.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Can I say one thing really quickly?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

JAMES FRANKLIN: Last thing I would like to say is, when I was at Vanderbilt, we would play Kentucky in basketball or football and the Big Blue Nation would come and take over Nashville. It was pretty strong. I put a tweet out each week that says, "Kentucky. Kentucky. Kentucky. Kentucky. Kentucky," and I do that every week. I think sometimes when you play a new opponent, they don't really kind of understand that. I don't think, Coach, the Big Blue Nation liked that very much because they went hard on Twitter and there was a lot of kind of, I think, misinterpretation of what that's about. That's strictly a message to our team and our fan base that we're locked and loaded and completely focused on our next opponent. So if you could, Coach, if you could ask the Big Blue Nation to kind of leave me alone on Twitter because they have been brutal.

MARK STOOPS: Absolutely not. We need to be hostile and ready to go.

JAMES FRANKLIN: I thought I would try at least.

MARK STOOPS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Good luck tomorrow.