

LSU COACH ED ORGERON PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT - Tennessee week

Coach Ed Orgeron Opening Statement...

COACH ORGERON: I was proud when the athletic department announced a 90 percent graduation rate (last week). That's phenomenal. Football had a 78 percent graduation rate, where the national average is 44 percent. Phenomenal. That's what it's all about, young men getting an education, getting a scholarship and getting education from LSU.

And I was just proud, proud to be the head coach of LSU and be able to go offer a scholarship to young men with that kind of success. I want to thank Joe Alleva for putting it in the places. I want to thank Kenneth Miles and Walt Holliday and the staff. They do a tremendous job. I just wanted to mention that.

On to Tennessee. Great place to play in the Neyland Stadium. I spent a year there, thought it was a wonderful time. We're going to expect a very tough contest from a very talented Tennessee team. I understand that there's an interim coach there. I don't understand what happened. I don't pay much attention to it.

I know they're going to be emotionally ready. I know Brady Hoke as a coach. I have a lot of respect for him. I know he'll have his team ready to go. But it's not going to be about them; it's going to be about us and how we prepare this week.

A little bit about Arkansas game. I thought it was a very first-class halftime for Veterans Day. I have a lot of friends, their daddies are deceased, who were at that game, veterans. And I know a lot of you had family there. I thought the halftime presentation for Veterans Day was awesome. So I thought it was a first-class event.

Proud of the team. Second year in a row we beat Arkansas after a loss to Alabama. Tough deal. And guys did a great job. Great mindset, great preparation. I was proud of them.

Some of the offensive positives, scoring opening drive second half set the tempo. It's what we talked about at halftime. Scoring 26 points in the second half. Obviously really big.

Great ball security. I think we are second in the nation in the least turnovers given, which is excellent by our staff. And we made big plays, especially the plays to DJ Chark. Excellent.

On defense we played physical. Started fast on defense. Great mindset. We won the third down. We had 67 percent of third down, 10 of 15. Forced the turnover to end the game. I know Dave wanted to end that game. He was pushing that defense. And he got it done.

We forced six punts, had two fourth down stops. And first down was critical for us, won 54 percent of the time. On special teams, we struggled in field goal kicking and extra point kicking, which is obvious. But our kickoff coverage was fantastic.

We accepted the challenge. We had six kickoffs with a 18.7-yard average. That first kickoff, we chose to kick there so they would be returning the kick into the sun and it worked. The guy bobbed a snap. Great job by our staff on deciding which way to kick.

Won the field position battle. Their drives started on the 21 yard line. For us it was the 32 yard line. And we had 0 penalties on special teams.

Overall we knew Arkansas was going to fight. Give credit to Coach Bielema and his football team, a school we all have respect for. But I was proud in the last two years we beat Arkansas. That was a good

win.

On to Tennessee. Offensively they're a spread. They're averaging about 300 yards a game, 20 points per game. Their tight end is one of the best players, Ethan Wolf, No. 82. Tight end hurt us against Arkansas, so we have to be ready for the tight end plays against this week.

Trey Smith, offensive linemen, is a top offensive linemen, probably a first- or second-round draft pick, we have a lot of respect for. We'll be watching him more, studying him all week.

Jarrett Guarantano, quarterback, we expect him to play, he's been injured, we expect him to play. Marquez Callaway made a big catch on the (indiscernible) route. Big wide receiver. And John Kelly, No. 4, he's a tough runner. He's explosive.

On defense, they have five returning starters. They're giving up 36 yards per game. They're a 4-3 defense. They're fast and physical. A lot of players on that defense I've tried to recruit. Nigel Warrior is one of the best players in the SEC. Good players there.

Special teams, they have a great punter in Trevor Daniels and a great kickoff returner, freshman, No. 3, Ty Chandler. We're going to work on us this week, tell-the-truth Monday.

I'm going to get after it, have a great mindset and lock in on to Tennessee to finish a great season, one at a time -- not a great season, a good season -- one game at a time.

These kids deserve a finish to a real good season. And we're going to work hard on that and Tennessee is our next opponent.

Q. Coach Hoke talked about this morning that he's going to tweak some things and he's closed practice to the media this week. How is it to prepare for maybe a game plan that might be changed a little bit?

COACH ORGERON: Can't change much, obviously. I've been there. Obviously they're going to tweak some things. He's going to put his spin on it. I know he's going to do a good job.

But every game you've got new plays, new formations. We're just going to have to adjust. We're not going to spend all week trying to figure it out, nothing like that. We're going to study what they do best. We're going to stop those plays.

The things that they tweak, we're going to have to make adjustments on the sideline.

Q. I guess you would know better than anyone how an interim coach can inspire a team, sometimes like at Florida it's not working. But how can you get ready for a team that could be playing a little more emotional, a little more inspired?

COACH ORGERON: They're going to play over their head. I know this guy. He was a defensive line coach. Inspiring guy. He'll get them fired up.

But we can't worry about that. Every team that plays LSU is fired up. I think anytime you go into Neyland Stadium with that crowd, go play a great team like Tennessee, you've got to expect their best. All they can do is give their best. We expect their best.

Q. This is going to be the first time a lot of your guys have been in Neyland Stadium. And it's a rowdy stadium. A lot of "Rocky Top" going on. How do you prepare them for that?

COACH ORGERON: We're going to play crowd noise. But I'll play "Rocky Top" -- we'll get tired of hearing "Rocky Top" all week.

Although, it was a good song and I enjoyed it while I was there. They do a great job. But we'll play crowd noise. I think we have a team that's maturing. The road games that we've won -- Florida, they played a lot of music there. Ole Miss played a lot of music there. So we're going to rely on our experiences. But this is going to be a different experience. We're going to have to go through it.

Q. You said after the game on Saturday that Arden was dealing with a few minor injuries. Do you expect him to practice this week?

COACH ORGERON: He's questionable. Arden will be questionable this week.

Q. Devin White is the SEC defensive player of the week third time this season. How does he impact the team as a leader both on and off the field?

COACH ORGERON: Devin, on Sunday morning, when I get there, he's one of the first players I see and he wants to know: Coach, how can I be a better leader? Tell me the things that we need to do.

After the Troy game, he was the first guy there. I met with the team. He leads by example. He's a great student. He's never on the list of missing class. But guys respect him by his play. And I can't say enough good things about Devin White. Although he's a sophomore, he's a great linebacker, one of the best linebackers I've been around.

Q. Be it this week or the end of this year or next year, whatever, do you think that the formula of ball security, run play defense is something that you're going to have to do consistently to win games on the road?

COACH ORGERON: No question. Here's the deal: Our ball security has been good on offense. We're not causing enough turnovers.

And that's something that we're going to address, something I talked to Dave about. And it's a mindset. And we have the athletes to do it. And I believe we're plus three right now, which is an improvement over last year. We were zero at the end of the year.

But when you get into the plus 12 and the plus 13 categories, that's when you win a lot of games. You're exactly right. Ball security is the key.

One of the formulas we have here, we can run the football. When you can run the football, play good special teams, play great defense, have great ball security, win games.

Q. Is DJ still showing you what you want to see on punt returns, or is there anything he needs to work on?

COACH ORGERON: It's not about him at all. There's a couple of things -- we tried a couple of blocks. In fact, we tried to block the first one, came about that close. But it doesn't matter.

We've got to do a good enough job of giving him some room to return. Obviously the first one, he bobbed it. And thank God that we got it. But we have utmost confidence in him.

We have to do a better job of holding our guy up at the line of scrimmage and getting guys out of his face to give him some room. We have a wall return, we have a middle return, but it's holding the guy up so he can catch the ball and get north and south. We haven't done that well in the last couple of weeks.

Q. What kind of example does Will Clapp set for this team as a player, with his character, on and on?

COACH ORGERON: Will is one of my favorite players. Favorite story -- because his dad was so tough. And we still show -- Pete still has film of Tommy Clapp, and the boys love it. They love it. And he was tough. And his son is the same way: Tough.

Every week he has a different injury. I don't think he misses a practice. He don't say a word. And he's a leader.

This week they played the 3-4 and we single blocked the nose tackle every down, with Will. He did a tremendous a job. He's a great player.

Q. Is K.J. any closer to rejoining the team?

COACH ORGERON: Very questionable this week.

Q. You made reference Saturday after the game, Derrius Guice liking to see those five- and six-yard runs he's had. You've mentioned that a few times throughout the season. Is that something that he's sort of bought into more or is there a different approach that you're seeing from him?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, I think it sends a message of physical football. When I watched LSU and I played against LSU, coached against LSU, they always had that physical mentality that, hey, man, we're coming after you, see if you can stop it.

And he's done that several times. And when he does that, I think it uplifts the team. One of my favorite runs since I've been coach here was Leonard's run against Ole Miss. And that hit he made on the safety on the sideline changed the whole course of the game.

Those runs, those tough runs send a signal that says it's going to be a physical football game.

Q. I know Austin Thomas spent a lot of time at Tennessee, recruiting for you. You got a couple of good Tennessee freshmen on the team. How important is that state when it comes to recruiting?

COACH ORGERON: Really important. There's a lot of players in Memphis. Obviously getting Jacob and JaCoby, two five stars out of Tennessee last year, two great men, was important for us. Austin Thomas got both of those guys. He knows Tennessee in and out.

There's a lot of guys on Tennessee we want now, 2019 that we are on. And then you know Knoxville is two hours from Atlanta. And we do a good job of recruiting Atlanta. So hopefully all those guys go to the game this week.

Q. I've been watching LSU football since 1931. And I thought the game you guys played against Louisville was as good overall football game I've ever seen an LSU team play. Played similarly in the second half against Arkansas. But there's a movement around to try to make football safer. You can make it safer but you can't make it safe. And there's a recommendation that kids don't play tackle football until they're 12 years old, which is about the age I started to play sandlot ball. But I noticed in the Pro Bowl they don't return kickoffs. And you didn't have any returns in your spring game. And you haven't returned a kickoff or touchdown but you had two punt returns, one against Chattanooga wasn't that big but the one against Auburn was huge. So my question is: Would you be in favor of eliminating kickoff returns?

COACH ORGERON: No. I have a four-letter word in front of that, then no. (Laughter) No. No. I love the physicality of football.

I want to say this to you, you know I understand the safety and stuff like that, and I'm all for it. But we grew up in the backyard playing football. Since we were four, five six years old, playing tackle football. And I thought it was good for us. Football is a great sport.

Q. Can you tell me a little bit about Tory Carter, the fullback? Speaking of kickoff return. I saw him lay some people out and everybody just seems to feed off his energy.

COACH ORGERON: He turned out to be a tremendous player for us. And on that kickoff, he put two

people on the ground as hard as he could. He's done a good job. And he's done it several times. He's tough. He's playing good football for us.

He's a tough, physical blocker. Can catch the ball. Young man out of south Georgia. I don't know if he had any Division I scholarships. We offered him a scholarship. I think he had one scholarship at Georgia Southern. He's a good football player for us right now. He loves the game. He's a throwback.

Q. Sticking with kickoffs, Cameron Gamble is probably the only specialist here who hasn't really been thrown back into a competition once he got the starting job so far. Where is your confidence in him, what has he shown you to instill that confidence?

COACH ORGERON: We worked hard in the off week on changing the steps and it worked. It worked. He did a good job of kicking the ball against Alabama and then he reverted back this week. He's been inconsistent. But for the most part he's done a good job. But I was proud of our kickoff unit. We made some changes in our personnel.

Ray Thornton was one. He did a good job. 44 was another one. And I think that we need to continue to work with Gamble and he continues to get better. I don't think we have any other options.

Q. Used to talk about when you ran the scout squad, you see Danny Etling and DJ Chark making their move. What were your memories of Russell Gage and how he moved his way to where he is now?

COACH ORGERON: Quiet. Come to work every day, just smile. Just do his work.

We're not going to announce MVPs or anything like that this time of year, but if you look at MVP, most valuable player on offense, special teams, it would be him and DJ Chark, the way they're playing, the contribution they're making.

Russell Gage is all over the special teams film. He's unbelievable. He's on kickoff team. He does all the things we want him to do. He does the dirty work, having a tremendous season. I'm so proud of him.

Q. You guys have been on the road so far a couple of times this season. Done pretty well so far. What have you learned game by game as you go on the road? Have you picked up any positives or earned something new?

COACH ORGERON: Well, this team is a young football team. I learned that after we lost heartbreaking loss there, we had to treat them different than the last team.

When we go on the road, we go to dinner. We go straight to team meetings. And we go to bed. We wake up the next day, keep them in meetings. This is a young team.

And I think we've gotten better. Our focus has been better. With an older team, sometimes you give them a break and go to a movie and have some fun. But this team couldn't handle it. It was different. Not that they couldn't handle it in the future. But I think that's one of the things we've done different on the road.

We play crowd noise. And obviously this affects the offense more. But we like to use the opposing stadium crowd noise as a motivation to us.

When you stand on the sideline and they're cheering and it's loud, we try to use that as an uplifting deal for us. So that's what we're going to do.

Q. When you took over at Southern Cal as interim coach, emotionally for you, what was different from you when you had been a head coach at Ole Miss, what was the difference?

COACH ORGERON: Obviously you get a second chance. It's like a temporary second chance. But there was a lot of things I wanted to change, and I did. I changed them. I looked at myself in the mirror and

said you gotta do it. One thing to say you're going to do it; but when you get it, you have to do it.

In the heat of the fire, you've got to remain the person you want to be. And we did that. The first thing I did at Southern Cal is I got a rope and got us all to pull on it and got on the same side.

I think that was the biggest thing: When teams aren't playing well, you've got to get them to play as a team. You've got to control the things inside that you can control.

Q. Hitting the deep ball on Saturday against Arkansas, two big ones to DJ, is that the most confidence you've seen Danny play this season?

COACH ORGERON: Yes. And I'm going to say, Danny before the game was hurt. And Jack came to me and said this is going to be tough today. And I said we believe in Danny and he's going to get it done.

The first half, it wasn't pretty. It was 7 to 7, went in at halftime, and I looked at Danny and said we believe in you. You're going to get it done. Let's go. He had a tremendous game.

We believe in Danny and the positives he brings to the football team. He's one of the toughest guys. He's a silent leader. He wants to win. And those deep balls to DJ, tremendous protection, tremendous throw by him, but tremendous route by DJ. DJ's footwork on both of those routes were outstanding.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.