

Louisiana State University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 20, 2017

Ed Orgeron

COACH ORGERON: Very proud of our team. Going to Neyland Stadium getting a victory. Tremendous mindset. I really liked our practices all week. But I want to give Tennessee credit, Brady Hoke and those coaches. I know it must have been a tough week for them.

I thought their players played tremendous. They fought. Obviously we said we'll have to block out the noise. There will be circumstances, there will be weather. And, boy, was there. And I'm telling you coming out of the second half, I thought I was down in the Bayou for a hurricane or something.

But our guys -- fired up our guys and we played well and we just came back with a big team win. That was a big victory for us.

Some of the things we did well on offense, ball security again especially in that weather. I think we're tied for first in the country with ball security, tremendous job by offense. Two-minute drives. We finished the game strong and we had no penalties.

On defense, to start our defensive line may have had their best game of the year. Ed Alexander, I rarely single someone out, but a young guy that really had a good game. Dominant play on the defensive line at nose tackle.

They had 1.1 yards per carry, 38 yards rushing, 63 percent third down. We forced four punts and we had three four-down stops. And those four down stops, there's a technique that Pete Jenkins teaches called the two-knee run. And it's something that he's used. We've all learned from him.

But we submarine underneath the guys and our linebackers do a good job -- we call it Superman and run over the top. Thought it was a great job by our defense of teaching that technique and it's worked for us.

Our special teams we had a good night. Kickoff coverage, four tackles inside the 20. We watched the first kickoff in the second half and you can't see the ball



on the film. Tennessee couldn't see the ball, neither could our guys. But Tennessee fell on it. But I thought it set the tempo for the drive.

Average start for Tennessee was 17-yard line. Our punt team, obviously the two turnovers were the difference in the game. We allowed them zero return yards, and we had a 50-yard net punting, downed two punts inside the 15, excellent job. Penalty-free.

There was a lot of things we have to improve. I know our guys will do that.

Moving on to this week. Senior Night. 20 seniors. Some of them are graduated and most of them are on track to graduate. I'm proud of those guys. I've been with them for three years. They've meant a lot to this program. They chose LSU. Tremendous guys, tremendous leaders. And it will be a tremendous night for them.

About Texas A&M, very strong team as we all know. Explosive on offense. Very talented on defense.

This is going to be a tremendous challenge for us. And they played us pretty tight last year. Made some big plays on us last year in the second half. So there's a lot of things that we have to get done this week.

We're going to focus hard, focus on fixing the things we need to fix and expect a very tough battle against Texas A&M. I know it's going to be a great night Saturday night. Tremendous crowd, tremendous Tiger Walk. Can't wait to see it.

A little bit about Texas A&M. They're plus-seven in the turnover ratio. One thing I like to say that we're plus-five right now. We're very proud of that, we worked hard. We were at zero last year.

And on offense, I know Noel Mazzone very well. He's had a tremendous career. He's a good coach and a good man. They're averaging 400 yards per game, 168 rushing, 230 passing, 32 points per game. They make big plays. Very explosive.

They have some tremendous receivers. Christian Kirk, No. 3, is a dynamic playmaker. He's great after the catch. One of the top players in the SEC. Trayveon

Williams, I was just talking to Tommie Robinson. He was at Texas and wanted to recruit him, A very good back, very tough and he's very fast.

Nick Starkel, believe it or not, Nick Starkel, grew up with my kids, Parker and Cody, playing football in Mandeville and been to my house several times as a young man. So proud to see him grow up. And he's a tremendous quarterback. Proud for him and his family.

Another wide receiver, Damian Ratley, No. 4. On defense, they've given up 370 yards per game, 27 points per game. But they have forced 19 turnovers, nine fumble recoveries and 10 interceptions. Very talented, as we know.

Tyrel Dodson, linebacker. Armani Watts, strong safety. Zaycoven Henderson, defensive tackle. Very disruptive. Great at the point of attack. On special teams they're very good. Net punting 43.1 yards per punt and third in the nation. Punt return, second in the nation. Punt rush blocked three kicks. A big challenge ahead of us.

Q. I think A&M leads the SEC in sacks. What have you seen from their pass rush, and what challenge do they present to your O line?

COACH ORGERON: They've always done a good job of rushing, ever since I grew up watching A&M. They do a great job with technique, there's a lot of blitz. It's going to be protection first, just like playing against Alabama. We've got to protect our quarterback.

Q. You coached in the defensive line. I want to ask about a couple of your seniors and their unique relationship, Christian LaCouture and Greg Gilmore. Watching those guys over the years and the way they've played this year.

COACH ORGERON: Both of them are playing their best football no question. Pete Jenkins has done a great job with them. Obviously I've worked with those guys.

Christian, we had to go at a home visit, had to re-recruit him. He was leaving last year. So glad he stayed and things have worked out. He's played 2 technique, played 3 technique. Had him at nose and now he's playing end. He's doing a tremendous job.

He's a great leader, (indiscernible), means a lot to us. I count on those guys. I talk to them about most things that's going on in the team and they helped me with leadership.

I'm so proud to see Greg. Greg came in as a highly recruited player. I remember going to North Carolina from USC, went up the old country road back there.

Great people. And then Greg didn't come to USC so I came to LSU so I could coach him. I tease him about that all the time. He's become a tremendous player, tremendous leader. We're happy for those guys.

Q. With so much racial tension in the country and whatnot, what is it about sports and about football that unites different people from different backgrounds to work towards a common goal?

COACH ORGERON: Just for me, man, I played football all my life. And this has just been great. One team, one heartbeat. And that's what's tremendous about sports.

Q. Over the last almost two years for you, what has Etling meant to your football team? And two, do you think winning these last three games help you a little or a lot especially in recruiting in regards to the early signing period?

COACH ORGERON: Good question. Danny's meant -- when you would say Danny Etling to me, the first word that comes to my mind is trust. I trust him. Toughness. Giving us the best shot a player possibly can out there. And I'm happy for him.

Yes, these games mean a lot in recruiting. December 20th is the signing date. We make calls on Sunday night. We call it the power hour, and obviously when you play well the response is a lot better. And I do believe that finishing strong is going to help us finish with a good recruiting class.

Q. Have you talked to Donte about how his penalty -- is there going to be any consequence for that?

COACH ORGERON: I had a meeting with him. Yeah. By the way, only had one penalty in the game. Tremendous. But he and I had a conversation today. Coach, I lost my emotions, I apologize. We talk about the things to correct. But that's fine.

Q. He's good to go for Saturday?

COACH ORGERON: Uh-huh.

Q. I don't know that there's a way to quantify this, but seems like maybe the early signing period is having an effect on some coaching decisions. We've seen a couple in the SEC, Jim Mora today. Just an opinion, do you feel the early signing period will impact coaching decisions?

COACH ORGERON: We were just talking about it outside. I think there's going to be a sense of urgency to get the coaches in place more than ever now. And I think it's smart, obviously.

Recruiting is the lifeblood of any program, especially when you go in there your first year. Their starting five guys are going to be on your football team. You better

have the time to recruit them and evaluate them and make sure that they fit your system.

So, yeah, I can see a sense of urgency there, and I think it's the right thing to do.

Q. Update on Key and a question about Key and Guise, two juniors who will be playing their last game in the Tiger Stadium and kind of the arc their season took to come back and finish on a high?

COACH ORGERON: First of all, they haven't told me. They haven't talked about it. So I'm going to assume they're going to go out just like everybody else. But they haven't told me.

Let's talk about Arden. Arden went through -- I'm very proud of him. As you know, I recruited Arden. I'm close to him. I'm close to his parents. So Arden is like family to me, like all the guys. But he had some personal problems that went -- we gave him some help, got it fixed and I was proud of him.

Then he comes back and he's about ready to go and then he has to get a shoulder operation.

He says, Coach, I am going to get that shoulder fixed, I'm going to come back. And his momma guaranteed me we're going to have a great season for the LSU Tigers.

And other people would think, well, I don't know, he's getting that shoulder operated, he's going in -- and that was not the case. That was not his family. That was not his mindset.

I think Arden felt that he could play in the heavier weight. It wasn't the right thing and so he lost weight. And now he's playing some of his best football. So I'm proud of him.

LSU has given him the tools to go out and be successful for life on and off the field. With Derrius, as you guys know, and the girls are here, Derrius is always around my office.

And he's a member of our family, he's an energetic guy. And he just wants to be loved, just like everybody else. And he's a different guy off the field than he is on the field. In the scrimmage, he jumped over somebody and he hurt his knee.

And his knee was hurt and he did not -- he wasn't full speed until Ole Miss. He's been playing fantastic ball ever since.

Derrius and Arden are two ascending players. And if they do go out, they're going to be -- they're going to make a difference on somebody else's team in the

NFL, just like our guys that went out this year.

You see Gottschalk doing well. You see Jamal doing well. And I'm proud of those guys.

Q. After the game you had said Corey Raymond was a little disappointed in the defensive backs. You said they need to play better. Can you expand on that there, what was so disappointing about their play?

COACH ORGERON: I go back to the Mississippi game where we thought that we played a very strong quarterback and one of the best receiving corps we played. Those guys played excellent. We shut them down. Played good. We went into this game, obviously it was raining and it was cold and it was wet, but we had some coverages that we busted. We had some one-on-ones that we didn't play very well. But we had a stupid penalty, and Donte knows that.

So there were some things that occurred that were uncharacteristic of our defensive backfield, and those things are going to get fixed this week. They need to get fixed. Texas A&M has some great receivers.

I know Corey. Corey bleeds purple and gold. If I was the defensive line coach and my group played that way I would be upset.

So I think you're going to see a fired-up Corey Raymond this week, and a defensive backfield that's going to be working hard on the things that they messed up.

Q. You've been on a lot of teams obviously. Where do Derrius and Darrel compare to the 1-2 combinations you've seen in your career?

COACH ORGERON: Very good. I can't tell you how much Darrell has meant to our football team as far as a leader, as far as a guy that can catch the ball in the backfield. Last year, when Leonard couldn't play, obviously we're going to miss Leonard. But we had Derrius. This year when Derrius couldn't play, we had Darrell. And although they're two different players, at times Darrell was just as effective.

So he brought a lot to our team. That's the way -- you can't run a running back in this league every down. It's just not going to happen. You have to have two good backs and he provided that to our team.

Q. In your estimation, why has LSU had so much success against A&M these last five years, the only team in the west that A&M hasn't beaten?

COACH ORGERON: I can only speak for the two years I've been here. Our guys get fired up to play against them, obviously. We have a lot of -- Houston is a big

area for us in recruiting. We have a lot of guys on our team from Houston, a lot of our guys are from Texas. A rivalry game. A lot of respect for players on that team and their coaches. Obviously we know a lot of the coaches. They know us.

I think our guys want to do really well in this game. It's a national game. It's a highlighted game. But we also know that we've watched Texas A&M. This is an explosive football team. And we have our work cut out for us.

Q. Similar to Corey being fired up, Dave, last year after this game, was really upset. Does that carry over year to year? You're a defensive guy. Do you remember those things?

COACH ORGERON: I don't think his truck has left the office since Sunday morning. But he knows. -- Dave is realistic. He knows how good they are. He knows where their strengths are. And he's going to do a good job this week of defending them.

Q. Like you said, you're going up against a tough opponent this week. But you've got 20 seniors playing in their final game in Tiger Stadium. It's always a magical experience. Former players always talk about how they love getting to play. Do you think those seniors are going to help use that emotion playing in their final game to help hopefully get the W this week?

COACH ORGERON: There will be a lot of emotion. And these guys will be fired up to win for their teammates, and our teammates are going to be fired up to play to win for them.

So I think that there's a factor there. But after the first play, that all goes away. It's about alignment, technique and execution. Just the emotion won't get it. Now, emotion with all that, with execution, will get it.

So we have to put the emotion and the execution together and play for 60 minutes. I watched the film again this morning. I think it was 54-33 and they were on the goal line fixing to score. So we understand what type of game this is.

Q. End of September things were not good at 3-2. What did you do to keep things, everything together, the won five out of the last six, and how important is it to finish it off this week?

COACH ORGERON: Thank you for saying that. We had to look at ourselves. We're 3-2. We're not playing very well. You had LSU, and frankly embarrassed.

And that's what brings out the best of you in a coach and a player. And I thank the leadership, thank the guys for their leadership, the way we practiced.

Thank God that the field goal kicker missed the extra point at Florida. But that Florida game gave us a lot of confidence to say, listen, this is what we need to do. We set the blueprint and set the blueprint against Auburn when we're down 20 points, and we just kept on building on the blueprint. And we had some young guys and they understood, hey, this is how you gotta go to meetings, this is how you have to practice, this is how you have to finish and how you've got to play.

I think we have to learn how to win, and we've done that.

Q. (Inaudible)?

COACH ORGERON: It's everything. It's everything. Everything that we built, everything that we have done. It's all in on the line this game. And we want to finish with nine wins. We want to go to a good bowl. These guys deserve that. Texas A&M is the next step, and it's a very good opponent.

Q. Ed Paris is kind of included in that 20 seniors, but do you expect him to actually use that medical?

COACH ORGERON: I think he's coming back. I think he's going to have a medical redshirt, I think he's coming back.

Q. John Chavis hasn't been here in three years, but he still recruited some of these guys. Is it going to be more emotional, you think, for those guys or anything?

COACH ORGERON: No.

Q. What is your history with John at all?

COACH ORGERON: None.

Q. What did you see when you watched the film on K'Lavon and Tyler and some of those guys that filled in on Saturday?

A. K'Lavon did well. And so did Ray Thornton. There were some mistakes, some gap responsibility stuff. I was really pleased with Ray Thornton. I thought he ran well, graded well.

I think he graded 82 percent in his run grade, which is very good for him. I was proud of him. I thought Tyler played very well. There were some different schemes that they had to take them to the sideline, made some adjustments, he did. He's a very smart young man, happy for him.

Q. What adjustments have you had to make with the early signing period and how many do you expect to find and will they all be JC guys?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, well, first of all, this is a difficult week is that you are preparing for your last

game. You've got a very tough opponent coming in at Texas A&M. And on Sunday you've got nine coaches or ten coaches going on the road recruiting.

So we organize time with Tommie Robinson and Sharon helped us organize the week. We gave our guys the week. So we're going out there, recruiting, and we know it is a crunch. There's three times we can go in the homes.

So there's only one time I can go in the home. So I've got to strategically place myself to where I can be in the home, also junior recruiting. We've got official business coming in. And then how many guys are going to sign on December 20th? Obviously we're pushing for all our guys that are committed to sign on December 20th.

I don't know that number yet. I don't know how many commitments we have right now, 17, 18, but hopefully they'll all sign.

Q. This young offensive line, the up-and-down season they had, they're going to face the SEC leader in sacks this week. What are the keys to that matchup for y'all?

COACH ORGERON: First of all, they go against a pretty good line every day of practice. And we have, like, blitz drills. We have one-on-one pass rush. We try to simulate the things they do with our best players.

That's going to be key. The key is going to be protection, the protection we use, how many people we use in protection, and find out their best rusher and do something with it.

I don't think that we can let their best rusher be single-blocked all game. Obviously we've done that to Texas A&M before and had success. So I'm sure our back is going to have a good game plan.

Q. Talking about kickers again, you said after the game you decided already that you were going to go with Jack Gonsoulin this week, do you still feel that way, or do you let it play out this week?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, Jack is going to be our kicker.

Q. What do you expect this week at practice with Arden and Donnie?

COACH ORGERON: Questionable. I don't know yet if they're going to practice tomorrow yet. I don't know that yet. Maybe. I just talked to the trainer this morning. We're going to have to see how they progress today and tomorrow.

Q. Speaking on injuries, how is Danny's hand?

COACH ORGERON: He's fine. He's all right. A little bruise on it. He's good.

Q. K.J. was walking better. Do you think he'll --

COACH ORGERON: Questionable. Very questionable.

Q. Christian Kirk, the punt returner for A&M, how important is it going to be to defend him?

COACH ORGERON: Our punters have done a tremendous job. Of course Tommie Robinson coached our punt team. Coach Mack overseeing it. Our coverage is going to be good, but we'll be challenged this week. There's going to be leverage. Not punting the ball right at him.

If you throw a good hit or strike, he's going to hit a home run. Can't punt the ball right at him. Gotta strategically place the ball where he's going to have to run to get it, give time for your coverage to get down there. So we have to have a good game plan against him. I actually recruited that young man when I was on the West Coast. Tremendous young man. Tremendous player.

Q. How will the Thanksgiving holiday affect your preparation for this game?

COACH ORGERON: It's a fine line there. As a coach, you want to be receptive to all your employees, obviously. All the players and all their families, I want them to spend time with their families, but I don't want that to be a distraction. So we're going to go as planned Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, nothing is going to change.

Wednesday night we're going to have a team dinner. Sharon is going to have the menu. I'll tell you a funny story. We had baked chicken on there and Coach Jenkins goes: Think we can give them fried chicken? I think Coach Pete wanted fried chicken.

Got a nice dinner on Wednesday night and then Thursday morning we're going to meet at 9.00 a.m. We're going to practice at 11.00 a.m. and we'll be done by 1:00 p.m. Most of the players will go home with their families; and obviously the players that are from out of state, we'll set them up with some families on the team.

Q. Give them fried chicken?

COACH ORGERON: They got fried chicken. Fried chicken makes them happy, they get it.

Q. There might be a lot of coaching turnover in the SEC. Five, six, seven guys losing their jobs or potentially are leaving. How much of an advantage I guess is that for you with the early period being when all this is going on?

COACH ORGERON: In recruiting, I only talk about LSU. Some other coaches might use that as an advantage. I don't spend time on that. I just spend the time, the positives of LSU and what we have to offer, and don't worry about other schools, to be honest with you.

Q. Texas A&M has four comeback wins in the second half, all in tight games. What is your team going to do to keep up the endurance in the second half?

COACH ORGERON: Finish. Gotta finish. Gotta play strong. I thought Steve Ensminger did a tremendous job last year of game planning against their defense. Scored 54 points. We're going to have to score some points. They're going to score some points. This is going to be a war.

I talk to the team, it's a 60-minute game. I'm going to show them the second half of last year. And really they beat us in the second half. We came out strong, obviously. We got to start fast and finish strong.