

Louisiana State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 9, 2017

Ed Orgeron

COACH ORGERON: Welcome everybody. First of all, I'd like to send our thoughts and prayers to the family of Y.A. Tittle, great player, even better man who was loved by LSU. LSU Hall of Fame, Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame. Pro football Hall of Fame. One of the toughest guys to play the quarterback position. He'll be sorely missed.

Looking forward to getting back in Tiger Stadium and see Death Valley come alive on Saturday. I just can't wait. Can't wait to see the 2007 champion football team, seeing the Gold Game, seeing our fans, 102,500 cranked up ready to go at 2:30. CBS TV, what a great day it's going to be.

Going over the game. From Florida, some team positives. First of all, I was proud of our team, proud of our coaching staff, came together in adverse conditions. Got on the plane with one thing in mind was to win. And they did it. Great team win.

On offense, nine of 16 on third down; ball security, zero turnovers; never blinked, next man up.

At one time three true freshmen and one redshirt freshmen in the offensive line in the Swamp going down the field. Proud of those guys, proud of the team, never blinked.

And you can see the enthusiasm on the sideline. You could see us cheering for each other the way, the Tigers ought to play. Great energy and passion. Clock management, excellent job on the last two drives.

We finished the first half with a scoring drive and started the second half with a scoring drive. Thought it was a tremendous job by offense.

On defense, we felt like we had focus and attention to detail in our meetings all week. You could just feel it. It was a different vibe going on.

We played physical football. We played with good effort and as Dave Aranda says we played with grit, and there was some grit on our football team.



You could hear the guys on the sideline: We're going to stop them. We will not be denied. Leadership came through. Very proud of the team.

Special teams -- the first kickoff, the tackle 17-yard line on opening kickoff set the tempo. Two punts downed inside the 15-yard line. Great field position. Excellent kick coverage on both the punt team, minus one-yard return averaging in kickoff, 17 return average.

Things on offense we want to improve: Missed assignments, eliminate the two presnap penalties.

On defense, tackling, perimeter run fits, eye discipline and pass defense. These are all things that we can fix.

Special teams, we can't kick the ball out of bounds. Although John has been kicking the ball very well, that was not the time to kick a ball -- there's never a time to do it but that was not the time to do it.

On to Auburn. Auburn's 4-1, 3-0 in the SEC East. Very good football team. Very physical football team. They want to run the football. This is going to be a challenge for the LSU Tigers, but we're going to be ready for it.

Offense, spread offense led by Gus Malzahn. Seven returning starters, averaging 450 yards a game. Almost 36 points per game. Top players are Stidham, the new quarterback, Kerryon Johnson, who is a very physical running back, 6-foot, 225, has over 500 yards and 12 TDs already.

Ryan Davis, junior wide receiver, leading receiver, 31 catches, 250 yards. Their right guard, Braden Smith, is one of the best guards we faced last year. He has the respect of our defensive line. He's doing it again this year. I think the guy's one of the best linemen in America.

On defense, I know Kevin very well. He's a good friend of mine. I'm happy to see Kevin doing a great job at Auburn. He has the No. 13 total defense in the NCAA and he's coaching very hard. And we all know Kevin is a good man and a great recruiter, and, like I said, he's a good friend of mine.

Seven returning starters from 2016. He's only given up

287 yards per game, 111 on the ground. Only allowing 13 points per game, which is sixth in the nation, very stingy defense.

They have forced five fumbles and four interceptions. Top players on defense, Deshaun Davis, No. 57, middle linebacker, has 29 tackles. Tray Matthews, safety, has 24 tackles. Derrick Brown, a guy I tried to recruit, a mountain of a man, is going to be a first-round draft pick, very disruptive -- 21 tackles, two and a half sacks, five and a half tackles for loss.

Very solid on special teams.

Any questions?

Q. I think Christian LaCouture played every snap last week. Just a little bit about him and how he played. And what does it do for you when you get Frank back this week?

COACH ORGERON: Christian is playing his best ball right now. Last two games he's had two sacks apiece and playing very hard.

And obviously having Frank back is going to be able to have a rotation with those three defensive ends. Going give him some relief. Christian has been an utmost leader for us, a great citizen. We're glad he's an LSU Tiger, and he's playing his best ball right now.

Q. What kind of role do you envision for Frank now that he's back? And how did those freshmen tackles play on the offensive line?

COACH ORGERON: Frank is going to be in the rotation, obviously just like Arden -- it's going to take a while to get him back in game shape. Practicing most days with us, and we'll see how he does in the game. But we're going to consider him as a rotating starter, see how he practices this week and expect him to have a good game.

Frank has played good against Auburn in the past. I think he'll be hungry and ready to go.

I think the freshmen tackles under the circumstances did very well. Obviously they made mistakes. But one thing I talked to Jeff about and one thing I said at the beginning: They can handle the physicality of the SEC and it wasn't that they got overpowered. They can handle their one-on-ones.

It's more or less alignment assignment. When things are moving fast, they may make a couple of mistakes, which is, you can understand for a freshman.

Q. You being a Louisiana native, I'm sure you've heard LSU fans say we don't like these day games

at home. What can you say about energizing the fan base and creating the atmosphere you need to win a game like this?

COACH ORGERON: We're going to need them. And there's a lot of things that we don't like that we have to do in life. So hopefully they can get up a little earlier put a little something in their coffee to make them come up and let's go.

Q. I know you sent in plays every week to the conference for review. If you could address two of them in particular. One was the penalty, the offsetting penalty with Russell Gage. The other was when the Florida back stepped out of bounds several steps and continued on.

COACH ORGERON: Those are two, and obviously I can't comment on my personal feelings about them and our staff's personal feelings, but those are two things that we have sent into the conference.

We haven't got an answer back, but I'll give it back to you on Thursday.

Q. The three offensive linemen, just the latest of having to play freshmen early. As coaches, do you have to kind of reset your mentality and just: We are going to have some bumps and bruises or some hiccups along the road with these guys but we have to play them and get them up to go?

COACH ORGERON: We have to stay positive. It's the next-man-up theory. We don't say, hey, you, freshman, you are going in there. Obviously we have a saying that we put 11 men on the field and we fight like the LSU Tigers, and that's what we're going to do.

And we don't make excuses for them. Jeff is hard on them on defense. We don't say, you're a freshman, you made a mistake. But we have a little bit more patience.

And there's a lot of things that they didn't see. You can't show a guy everything that they're going to do. They're going to do new things.

And when they do new things, they may not be able to react to it at first, but I think our offense, you could see, by halftime, coming into that second half drive, I thought our offense did a tremendous job of halftime adjustments, especially with those young guys.

Very proud of the offense, the way they managed the game, the way Matt called the game. I thought it was an overall good game plan.

Q. You guys teach Russell Gage how to hurdle like that, hurdle players?

COACH ORGERON: You know what, I guess he saw a couple of, a lot of players do it in practice, wanted to do

it.

Q. How has he done? He seems to be playing really good ball?

COACH ORGERON: Fantastic. He played fantastic. I didn't mean to cut you short. I get to watch the special teams film by myself with the special teams coach. And his name always comes up.

And he's doing a tremendous job. He had an excellent game. All-around leadership. The things he's saying in the locker room, the things he's doing at practice and showing on the field. He played great on special teams and good on offense.

Q. You expect to start those three true freshmen on the line this week?

COACH ORGERON: We don't know yet. We don't know yet. We have a couple of tackles that are questionable. Toby is questionable and K.J. is questionable. But if we have to start them, we have to start them.

Q. Guice did what he could on Saturday and did some good things, but it's pretty obvious he's not 100 percent. Where is he right now? Will we ever see this year, is it something that's a nagging injury that's going to stick with him? Or we don't know?

COACH ORGERON: It is a nagging injury. In order to play full speed, especially against an SEC team like Florida, you have to practice full speed.

And he's been in practice, but he's been limited. I do believe that one of the last runs -- and I'm going to show him this -- one of the last runs, in the last drive, where he ran up right in the middle, and he showed grit and he showed toughness and he showed LSU football, broke a couple of tackles, was a sign that he can do it. And I think it gave him confidence and it gave our whole team confidence.

So hopefully we can see more of that. Is he hurting? Yes. Is he limited right now? Yes. But he is getting better.

Q. It's a lot easier always to clean up things after a victory than a defeat. But looking at the third quarter, the way Florida ran the football in the third quarter, what do you have to clean up there going into this Auburn game?

COACH ORGERON: We made an extensive -- those are things that we can fix. We made an extensive research on the tackles that we're missing. Open field tackles. Chest-up tackles. Angle tackles.

I don't know if Dave slept last night, to be honest with you. We came back in this morning. He had a

breakdown of every tackle that each position had missed, how he missed it and had a film on it, and how we're going to fix it.

I think that's the biggest thing, that we're missing tackles, especially in the open field. Are we missing some fits?

There were some new plays, especially in the wildcat formation that they gave us, it took a little time to adjust to. But all the things we did wrong against Florida are very fixable.

Q. For you personally, and for the team, how different is today from a week ago today?

COACH ORGERON: You want me to tell you the truth or sugarcoat it? (Laughter). It's tell-the-truth Monday? It's a lot different.

We finally slept at night. It's a testament that we believed in each other last week. Nobody blinked. I think the staff came together more last week than any week. The team came together.

The leadership evolved. Through adversity, we became stronger. We felt that going into the game. Our guys say: We are not getting on this plane unless we win the game.

That was new. That was a great mindset. The meetings, the intensity, the detail all week, when your back's against the wall, the way our guys responded.

But for me, I need to lead this team better. And although we had success, it's tell-the-truth Monday, we have to deal with this thing, and we have to put it to bed coming on 5:00, because we've got a very tough opponent coming. So we have another challenge ahead.

Q. To paraphrase something you said earlier in the year, you talked about the need for Danny to show that he could win a big game. Does this fit in that billing, and what did you see from him, even though he missed a couple of throws, just the toughness he showed running the ball, those sorts of things?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, it was a big game. It's not the big game. And he's on his way. Hopefully he can put two of them back to back. But Danny is a leader. I think Danny got hurt the first play, never told anybody.

Ran the ball like he did, never got out. So he's very tough. He's a team player. There's a lot of things he could have did better. There's a lot of routes that were open that we didn't hit.

There was a lot of plays that we could have maybe made some better decisions at the line of scrimmage, but the one thing he did was win the game, which is very important.

Q. Rashard is so essential to your run defense. What's his status? I know he got banged up late and came back in. Is he doing okay?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, he was actually better, according to the trainer, yesterday than he was last week. A little sore, but we'll see as the week goes on. Probably be limited during the week.

But having him out there and having his presence and his toughness and his leadership means the world to our defense. And I know having Frank back this week is going to give a boost to our defense.

Q. Similar theme we're hitting on here, but third string safety, Monroe stepping in there. How do you feel about that, and where are you guys looking this week?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, well, he's going to have to continue to get better. That's where we're at right now. And we did move JaCoby back. And maybe JaCoby can get more snaps this week. And if Corey feels that he can go in the game, we may put him in.

But that's where we're at. John is limited. He struggled. It's hard not to wear a gold shirt all week and not tackle and go in the game and tackle full speed. That's what you're seeing.

Q. Donte has been playing a lot more nickel. Early in the year you said we were waiting to see if one of those outside guys, Kevin or Greedy, could allow him to play inside. Can you just talk about Donte taking over the nickel spot?

COACH ORGERON: I thought Donte played his best game. He was all over the place. He played aggressive. He played physical. He was in the office today smiling, couldn't wait for this week. I thought Kevin Toliver played his best game. Not a great game but his best game so far this year.

As we know, Greedy is very solid. That's a combination that we can use. It gives us more experience on the field. It gives time for Kary Vincent to grow in both the nickel and corner position. Doesn't put as much pressure on him.

As you know, when you're playing these teams, that nickel position has got to play the run and the pass and gotta know where to fit in the run, gotta know where to fit in the pass, and gotta know when to blitz and when not to blitz, make the chest, flip the formation. There's a lot of things that nickel needs to do. And a more

experienced player can do that.

Q. The team has improved with penalties. How do we keep the trend going this week?

COACH ORGERON: We keep on focusing on the positive and harping on it. To them, they're going to go over every penalty. The guys are going to run for penalties. It's a significant amount. We still run for penalties.

We have referees that call every penalty on Tuesday, Wednesday, we're going to keep on harping on that.

Every Friday, and one of our goals in each specific position group, is have no penalties. On Saturday, before we go out there, we tell them: No penalties.

So I think they're listening to us. They're buying in. And we're more of a disciplined football team than we were at the beginning.

I do believe that they see where the penalties hurt us in prior games and that selfishness hurts the football team. I think those things are factors.

Q. Kevin Steele and you, hired on the same day about three years ago. What do you remember about that day? Did you all have communication? I know he flew in here. And then the next morning you drove in. Could you walk us through that day, that few hours there?

COACH ORGERON: I knew Kevin in recruiting. I remember one night we were at -- I was at a Tallahassee Jamboree in the spring. And one of my deals was I was not going to -- I was going to be the last recruiter to walk off the field.

And it was midnight. And he wouldn't walk off the field. Neither would I. And the sprinklers came on. I said, "Man, let's go." He goes, "Yeah, let's go."

So we've known each other. It's a common bond, meeting each other on the road, recruiting, and we had a fantastic relationship here. I mean, just sharing a lot of thoughts.

He let me run the front, obviously. And I thought he was a tremendous man to work for, tremendous recruiter. Great team guy, brought a lot to our staff.

He still talks to me every week. Still calls me, still texts me. Obviously not this week. But especially last week, I think he tried to call me three times, with some very encouraging words. I appreciate that.

Q. Do you think the way you won Saturday is the blueprint as to how you have to win games this

season?

COACH ORGERON: I think it's very close to it. And I'm going to say this to you: It was -- we gave it all we had. All week. It was every ounce of energy, every person in the building gave it. And that's what it takes. And our mindset was of that.

And we finally galvanized as a team. I don't think before we were playing as a team. I think we galvanized as a staff. I think that was important.

We had better practices. And, again, it came down to one point. Let's face it. The kicker missed an extra point. You know what I'm saying? That's what happened.

We're in the SEC. It's very physical. When we were up 17-3, I wish we could have kept that lead and kept sustaining. But we let them get back in with some drives, stopped ourselves with some drives.

But I believe that every game is going to have to be: We win as a football team, not one unit or the other.

Q. Devin White has been a monster for you guys. You say he's the first one there in on Sundays. But what does he do on the field that's so important for you?

COACH ORGERON: Practice. Meeting with Dave. Watching film on his own. I think one of Devin's biggest things is keying and recognition, understanding his formation and plays. Although he's not perfect. There's been some times that he's missed some fits.

But his ability to maybe take the wrong step or take the wrong key, but he has speed. And when he gets there, he's so physical that he's becoming a good linebacker for us.

Q. The stats haven't really been there for Arden Key. When you go back and watch film, are you seeing effort?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah. It was better this week. He had his best practice last week. Now, I think he's down to 255 as opposed to 270. And we were watching film from the first game he played to this game, you can tell the weight's going down.

On that screen, he missed a tackle right there, but that was a great recognition on him. His pass rush needs to get better. It's not where it needs to be. But he's trying his butt off now. The guy is a team player. He wants to do well. He had a best week of practice.

Q. After watching the film, did you think Derrick Dillon was targeting? And also you've had three guys this year now --

COACH ORGERON: Yeah he hit him in the head. Derrick Dillon doesn't have a mean bone in his body. He would not do anything that was selfish or nondisciplined. It was just a bad hit. He did hit him in the head.

He was hustling, wanted to make a play for his teammate. At the beginning of the game, we're all fired up. But you gotta lower your head; you have to hit him right here. Can't target right there. I don't think he meant on purpose to do it, but he did do it.

Q. Connor Culp had a pretty long field goal at the end of the Chattanooga game and made this one this weekend. Is he starting to instill confidence as the kicker?

COACH ORGERON: I'm glad he made it. (Laughter).

Q. Does he not -- (laughter). How does he practice? Does he make it in practice?

COACH ORGERON: He really did. And Jack has, too. They're both two, young, great kids. I love them to death. I mess with them all the time; they know that. But we gotta get better. Just gotta get better.

Q. With the success you had with the extra meetings last week, do you change your regular schedule of meetings for the rest of the season or are you back to where you were?

COACH ORGERON: No, we'll do what we did last week.

Q. Coordinator and AD and coach meeting, too?

COACH ORGERON: No, I don't think we're having that. (Laughter).

Q. What was the difference with the defense between the third quarter and the fourth quarter? Really the back-to-back drives, seemed like it shut down after that.

COACH ORGERON: I really feel, when they missed that extra point, that was it. We clicked: We can win this game.

They don't score, they won't win. I think that was our battle cry. And we had a great pass rush. We had some sacks. We got them deep in their territory. That punt was outstanding.

I just think their grit and their will to win, they were on the sideline: We are going to stop them. We will not lose this game.

Now, that's something for the head coach to say, which I'll always say, or the assistant to say when you have 10, 11 guys doing that and believing that and believing in each other, that's the difference.

