



# POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 2 • MISSISSIPPI STATE (2-0, 0-0 SEC) AT LOUISIANA TECH (1-1, 0-0 C-USA) • SEPT. 9, 2017 • JOE ALLET STADIUM

## TEAM NOTABLES

- Mississippi State won the coin toss and elected to defer until the second half.
- MSU improved to 9-4 against Louisiana Tech, while the Bulldogs are now 34-7 against non-conference opponents under Dan Mullen, including a 9-1 mark on the road.
- With tonight's victory, Dan Mullen is just two away from tying College Football Hall of Famer Allyn McKeen for second in MSU history; Mullen is 12 wins shy of tying Jackie Sherrill's school record mark.
- The 57 points scored by the Bulldogs was the most since MSU scored 62 against Northwestern State on Sept. 9, 2015. It's the most points in a road game since a 59-14 win against Memphis on Sept. 1, 2011.
- The Bulldogs made two blocks on special teams in the first half: one PAT and one punt attempt. It was the first blocked PAT for MSU since Dec. 26, 2016 against Miami (Ohio) and the first blocked punt since Oct. 17, 2015 against Louisiana Tech.
- State's 36 points in the first half were the third-most points in any half of the Mullen era. (37 Vandy 2014, Alcorn State 2013)
- MSU's had two Bulldogs (Aeris Williams, Nick Fitzgerald) rush for over 100 yards in a game for the first time since Nov. 26, 2016 against Ole Miss. This is the third time that both Williams and Fitzgerald both rushed for 100+ yards in the same game.
- One Bulldog made his first-career start: Safety Johnathan Abrams. He is the sixth first-time starter this season for MSU.

## PLAYER NOTABLES

- With three first-half passing touchdowns, Nick Fitzgerald brought his career total to 29 to pass Chris Relf (2008-11) for seventh all-time in MSU history.
- Fitzgerald added two rushing TDs against Tech to tie Dontae Walker (1999-02) for eighth all-time at MSU with 22 career rushing scores. Fitzgerald has rushed for at least one TD in his last five games.
- Nick Fitzgerald rushed for 111 yards, marking his seventh 100-yard rushing outing over his last nine games. He is now tied with Dak Prescott and Don Smith for MSU QB record with nine career 100-yard rushing games.
- Aeris Williams set a career-high with a 59-yard rush with 6:04 left in the first quarter, besting his previous high of 36 set against Ole Miss on Nov. 26, 2016.
- Williams racked up 107 yards on nine attempts to record just his third 100-yard rushing game. It's his first since Nov. 26, 2016 against Ole Miss.
- Jeffery Simmons blocked a PAT with 6:46 left in the first quarter, the first for MSU since Johnathan Calvin blocked a PAT attempt against Miami (Ohio) on Dec. 26, 2016 in the St. Petersburg Bowl.
- Simmons would later block a punt (1:46, 1Q) and recover it in the end zone for a TD, marking the first time MSU has returned a blocked punt for a TD since Sept. 12, 2009 at Auburn when Robert Elliot recorded a 10-yard block return.
- With 9:48 remaining in the third quarter, Simmons recovered a fumble and return it 90 yards for a score. It was the first returned fumble for a touchdown since Mark McLaurin returned a fumble 81 yards for a TD against Kentucky in Oct. 22, 2016. Simmons becomes the first MSU defensive player with two touchdowns in a single game since Johnathan Banks on Oct. 24, 2009 against Florida.
- Mark McLaurin made his third-career interception, his first since Nov. 4, 2016 against Texas A&M.
- Gerri Green forced his first-career fumble with 11:45 remaining in the second quarter, while Tre Brown recovered the ball on the play for his first-career fumble recovery. Green added a second forced fumble in the second half to become the first MSU player with two forced fumbles in a game since Dez Harris at LSU in 2016.
- Making just his second start, Dez Harris tallied the first sack of his career for a loss of two yards.
- Mark McLaurin led MSU and tied his career high with 10 tackles, which he first set against Auburn on Oct. 8, 2016.

# ***LTU POST-GAME NOTES***

- Louisiana Tech captains were Teddy Veal, Jarred Craft, Secdrick Cooper, Deldrick Canty and Jonathan Barnes.
- Announced attendance: 28,100. It is the second largest attendance in Joe Aillet Stadium history.
- With the 57-21 loss, LA Tech now trails the all-time series versus Mississippi State, 10-3.
- LA Tech is now 1-1 against Mississippi State in Ruston.
- Mississippi State won the coin toss and elected to defer to the second half.

## ***OFFENSE***

- Aside from the crazy 87-yard loss play, the Bulldogs gained 239 total yards on the ground.
- Ethan Reed and Jarred Craft each made their 16th straight start.
- Guard O'Shea Dugas made his 25th start as a Bulldog, the most on the team.
- Wide receiver DeJuawn Oliver made his first career start as a Bulldog.
- J'Mar Smith was 10-of-23 on the night for 140 yards.
- Westin Elliott saw his first career action as a Bulldog, completing three passes for 23 yards. The junior college transfer registered his first touchdown pass as well on a 9-yard completion.
- Boston Scott led LA Tech in rushing with 13 attempts for 96 yards (third most of his career). Through two games, he the senior is averaging 6.9 yards per carry.
- Jarred Craft led the team with 18 rushing attempts, going for 81 yards on the ground.
- Jaqwis Dancy posted career highs with seven rushes for 45 yards.
- Freshman Israel Tucker saw his first career action as a Bulldog, registering three rushing attempts for 25 yards.
- Kam McKnight scored his eighth career rushing touchdown (has only 17 total rushing attempts).
- Marcus Gaines had a game-high 104 receiving yards on three catches. It was his second career 100-yard receiving game.
- Marcus Gaines hauled in a 58-yard reception on the opening drive of the game which helped set up a field goal. It was the second longest reception of the senior's career.
- Freshman Cee Jay Powell caught his first pass as a Bulldog, ending the night with two catches.
- Freshman Zach Cousar saw his first career action as a Bulldog while also catching his first ever pass that went for a touchdown.
- Kam McKnight took a handoff out of the T-Formation and walked into the end zone for the touchdown, giving LA Tech a 9-0 lead with 6:46 left in the first quarter (extra point was blocked).
- With 15 seconds to go in the game, Westin Elliott connected with Zach Cousar for a 9-yard touchdown.

## ***DEFENSE***

- Jaylon Ferguson made his 16th consecutive start.
- Amik Robertson registered his first career interception which he returned 61 yards to the two-yard line. The Bulldogs scored two plays later.

- Amik Robertson also had four tackles, one for loss, and a pass break-up in just his second career game.
- Brandon Durman led the team with eight tackles which tied his career high.

### ***SPECIAL TEAMS***

- With two made field goals and one extra point, Jonathan Barnes became the all-time career scoring leader at LA Tech for kickers (361). He passed Matt Nelson (2009-12).
- Jonathan Barnes moved into fourth all-time in career FG attempts. After two attempts on the night, the senior now has 73 for his career.
- Jonathan Barnes connected on a 27-yard field goal on the Bulldogs opening drive of the game.
- Jonathan Barnes nailed a 45-yard field goal as time expired in the first half.
- Brady Farlow had seven punts for the Bulldogs, averaging 37.0 per punt with a long of 47.
- Special teams blocked two extra points on the night, one of which was returned for a safety by Amik Robertson.

## Mississippi State Head Coach Dan Mullen Quotes

DAN MULLEN: -- Offensively we've got to clean some things up. We've got to constantly execute cleaner throughout the course of a game, but I think overall we played well and get ready for league play next week.

Q. The impact a guy like Simmons can have not just on defense but making special teams plays like that?

DAN MULLEN: That was crazy, wasn't it? Safe punt, blocks the punt, scores, and, you know, he was going crazy. That was pretty exciting to see, you know what I mean? He's a guy that works his tail off. Not -- I know he's a very talented player, but don't mistake that for the fact of how hard he works every day at practice to be able to put himself in a position to make those plays.

Q. Can you explain the 80-something yard loss by --

DAN MULLEN: That's what I'm sayin' that's crazy stuff right there. Like our guys are saying, we might get top-10 play of the week, with Jeffrey with two touchdowns in the game, and then we're going to get top-10 worst play of the week. Was that like -- I'm like watchin' it and I'm like just pick it up. It was like -- honestly! (Laughter.) Looked worse than Liverpool did this morning (Away from mic.) Awful.

Q. Michael Story got thrown in at left guard today. What did you think of him?

DAN MULLEN: We'll see on film. Like I said, the offense at times, I thought, executed fairly well. We were able to run the ball fairly well today. What did we have? 327, you know, which is big. When you come on the road you want to be able to be -- you know, you come on the road in an environment -- they're ready for this game, a very explosive offense that we were going to play. A team that's picked to win their conference championship, and you want to be able to establish the run game. We were able to do that and play a bunch of different guys.

Q. Gerri Green had a huge game. What made him effective?

DAN MULLEN: Work ethic. He's another one. I mean, Gerri -- Gerri is poster child-type person, you know what I mean? Great student, leadership committee, everything you ask him to do he's going to do as hard as he possibly can. And, you know, that translates when you watch him play. The energy he plays the game with, the intensity he plays with is pretty special.

Q. The defense were down 9 -0, and they spearheaded a contrast from last year. What have you seen from that unit?

DAN MULLEN: I was pleased with the team. You're on the road. We have a young football team, and we drop down 9-0. Todd does a fantastic job. Everybody just calm down, you know what I mean? We're down 9-0 on a 2-yard drive and a long pass -- one play for a long pass play, so -- you know what I mean? But I was really pleased that -- he did a great job, our defensive coach calming guys down, and I'm pleased with the leadership on the team. The maturity they have. All of the sudden you're on the road and boy, I mean, you look -- atrocious start, and now we allow the crowd to get excited. Everybody just calmed down and did their job and everybody came out and started making plays.

Q. You had them rolling offensively. What made the run game so good tonight?

DAN MULLEN: We blocked 'em up front, you know what I mean? And that's -- that's what it did. Then you put on top -- I mean, to me, Aeris was running the ball hard, shoot, he only had 9 carries, huh?

Q. Wished he had more?

DAN MULLEN: Well, no, I thought he had some more, because, like I say, I thought he was running hard and physical, you know what I mean? It wasn't -- like you look at Fitz' number, sometimes, Fitz with 10 carries has three or four hard-nosed runs and a lot of runs to the outside and run out-of-bounds or on an option play, you know? And Aeris I thought was churning pretty well and helped -- you know, you expect Fitz to get the bigger runs, more than Aeris, but I thought we blocked and he made some good runs.

Q. What do you think of the targeting call on Cam Dantzler?

DAN MULLEN: Keep my mouth shut. I know this. There is a good chance our AD would have been thrown out of that game. If I know him? >> It's time to go!

DAN MULLEN: You can tell his maturity as an athletic director. He walked in and was calming me down, and I said would you have been thrown out if there was baseball, and he said probably a good chance of that happening, and I've seen his fire and his maturity to calm down. It is what it is.

Q. (Away from mic.) -- the rotation of running back. What have you seen from him?

DAN MULLEN: The same thing. Him and Kylin, both talented players. You love to get 'em on the field but you gotta see them -- you know, it's one of the hardest things, you know, because if

you're a fan you're looking at the film and see these guys running with the ball, but there's a lot of other things you have to do. Like Aeris played a bunch, had 9 carries. There's a lot of other things you have to do and they're still growing and maturing. And Greg is constantly staying with them and trying to accelerate those guys because they're talented backs. We just gotta make sure they can do all the other things when they're not carrying the ball, the right way.

Q. Help those guys mature in a week to play an LSU football team?

DAN MULLEN: They're an excellent football team -- a top-10 football team, you know what I mean? They've got a ridiculous amount of talent. So we gotta -- we gotta take another step forward this week and it's a great challenge for us to prepare harder, practice harder, play harder next Saturday.

## Louisiana Tech Head Coach Skip Holtz Quotes

Q: Coach, difficult night tonight, but you still went out and talked to the student body that stayed.

SKIP HOLTZ: How awesome is that? We come out here and absolutely turn the ball over, make some really foolish mistakes tonight and yet to see the students stayed, I was appreciative to them for staying and the support we've gotten from this crowd for this football team.

Like I said, it was a frustrating night for sure. We lost 122 yards into the total yards on the night. If we don't have minus 95 on a snap when we get down there. We get down there another time, turn the ball over, fumble, they score with it. We get outgained by 140 yards tonight and lose 120, 90-some of them on that play.

I thought our players competed. I was encouraged with the way we ran the ball, and I thought our offensive line did a really nice job in having two seniors like Jarred Craft and Boston Scott.

I thought they were excellent tonight. I hate the mistakes that we made. The things we did -- we shoot ourselves in the foot, which makes it very difficult to beat a very talented SEC team like Mississippi State with what they did. Just proud of the way our players competed, but certainly I've got to do a better job as a head coach, and we've got to do a better job protecting the football.

Q: I want to ask you a question about a play that happened early in the game, because I was in agreement with you. I thought one of the point of emphasis in college football this year was no leaping. It appeared to me they leaped over to block the extra point.

SKIP HOLTZ: Yeah, it was -- I thought the leap -- I didn't see it clear enough, but I thought that was more of a punt block. The one on the field goal, I thought they went through our center, and there is a heightened rule this year that we're not going to allow you to hit the center, and we're going to protect him. But it appeared when I watched it, the center was the one that got knocked back. It's pretty hard to block when you have your head between your legs, and you're throwing the ball back there for the snap.

They didn't see it that way. I thought the officials did a really good job tonight. I certainly can't sit here and blame the officials for what happened tonight.

Like I said, I thought we made mistakes. We have nobody to blame but ourselves for the amount of turnovers we had, and then just some of the mistakes we made. I thought our

defense competed. I thought we ran the ball, but we didn't played well on the perimeter in throwing and catching the ball.

Q: Final question, Coach. You opened up with an FCS opponent, and then you have an SEC opponent. So now you're looking at the Conference USA opener. So there are a lot of questions about your team, but it is conference play and this team will be ready.

SKIP HOLTZ: There are a lot of questions about this team. We talked about feast or famine, and I thought we saw some of the good tonight and saw some of the bad tonight. I keep talking about I don't know what to expect. I've got some seasoned, experienced players that I really feel good about, and I've got a lot of guys that have played in their second college football game tonight.

We've got to get some things cleaned up. We're going to play the Conference USA champions from a year ago. We had an opportunity to play them twice last year. We won at home, we lost up there. We've got to go on the road in this series. We've been two of the better teams in the league when you look at the win/loss records in Conference USA, but the home team has held serve.

We certainly have to use this as a learning experience. We've got to get better, and we've got to eliminate some of the mistakes to give ourselves a chance to win for some of the good things we're doing on both sides of the ball.