



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 5 • #24/24 MISSISSIPPI STATE (3-2, 1-2 SEC) AT #13/15 AUBURN (4-1, 2-0 SEC) • SEPT. 30, 2017 • JORDAN-HARE STADIUM

TEAM NOTABLES

- Mississippi State won the toss and elected to defer until the second half. MSU has won the toss in three of five contests this season.
- State fell to 62-27-2 in the all-time series against the Tigers.
- MSU has now rushed 221 consecutive times without a fumble and remains the lone team in the SEC without a fumble this season.
- For the second time this season, at least eight different receivers recorded a catch as Nick Fitzgerald tallied 157 yards through the air. MSU first had 8+ different receivers recorded a catch in a game in the season-opener against Charleston Southern (11).
- With Brandon Bryant's career-high 11 tackles, MSU has tallied back-to-back games with at least one defender with 10+ tackles. (Dez Harris - 11 at UGA).
- Tonight's attendance was 86,901.

PLAYER NOTABLES

- With 10:29 remaining in the first quarter, Jeffery Simmons sacked Auburn QB Jarrett Stidham to force his first fumble of the season and the third of his career. Montez Sweat recovered the ball for the first fumble recovery of his career.
- Jace Christmann put MSU on the board with a 40-yard FG with 6:41 remaining in the first quarter. Since taking over the place kicking job against LSU, Christmann is 5-for-5 in FG attempts.
- Nick Fitzgerald connected with Justin Johnson for a 5-yard TD reception with 0:59 remaining in the second quarter to cut Auburn's lead to 21-10. The score was the second of Johnson's career and his first TD since Sept. 5, 2015 against Southern Miss. Johnson set a career high with three receptions in the game.
- Tre Brown forced his first fumble as a Bulldog with 1:07 remaining in the third quarter. Gerri Green recovered the ball for his first fumble recovery of the season and the second of his career.
- Brandon Bryant led the defense with a career-high 11 tackles
- Jamel Couch tied his career high with two receptions for a career-best 60 yards receiving. He reeled in a career-long 30-yard pass against Auburn.

Auburn Head Coach Gus Malzahn

Opening statement...

"I'm very proud of our team. It was our first SEC home game against a good Mississippi State club. Our defense played great again, I believe we had two interceptions and four fourth-down stops. We answered the bell time and time again. Offensively, I thought we played well. The last two games when we had shots, we scored some points and we had some shots this week. I thought that was a big factor. Our quarterback was very efficient again. I thought that was really something. Our crowd was unbelievable. I think (Mississippi State) had seven false starts, and I've said this before, but I think we have the best home field advantage in college football. They were loud and a big part of our success tonight. I'm proud of our team, and it's a good step in the right direction."

On the efficiency of Jarrett Stidham...

"I think you see him every week getting more and more comfortable. We're protecting him. The guys are making plays, and our receivers are growing up. They're making plays down the field, and I think that is all starting to come together. He's starting to get more comfortable with Chip (Lindsey), and Chip is starting to get more comfortable with him. The last two or three weeks in a row have been very efficient."

On Mississippi State quarterback Nick Fitzgerald...

"He's like a running back back there, and he scares you to death. He throws the ball well, too. You have to stop him first in the run game because if he starts to get going in the run game, it's scary. I thought our defense did a very good job containing him and keeping him from those big runs. We were physical up front, and I think we're physical up front on both sides."

On the secondary...

"Our secondary was unbelievable today, they were all over them. We were very good at man-coverage and keeping them down. They got some receivers that are really good too, so I thought our secondary did an incredible job tonight."

On Will Hastings...

"Will is a guy that showed flashes last year and in the spring really took the next step forward. He's a dynamic route runner. When he gets space on people, he's really tough to handle. He did a super job."

On Jeff Holland...

"He's really raised his level. He's taking his game to the next level. He did that in the spring and it's carried over here in games. He's a weapon and I think he caused a couple of those false starts along with the noise when he widened out. He's such a good edge speed rusher. He's playing the run well too. He's just really raising his game."

On how Auburn is the only team in the FBS who hasn't allowed more than 14 points...

"We had a good defense last year and we had a lot of those guys come back this year. You could tell in the spring that it was different. They had a different attitude. They know Coach Steele's

defense inside and out. They're playing with that edge. I wasn't aware of that, but that's a great stat. Hopefully we can keep building up on that."

On Chip Lindsey...

"You can see the progression. You can see Jarrett get more comfortable and you can see the balance. I think we had a better balance tonight as far as 244 rushing yards and 267 passing. The balance, we talked about that, and that's what Chip brings us. We had some vertical shots."

On Kerryon Johnson...

"Kerryon is playing with a band on his leg. The fact that he's not 100 percent says a lot about him. We put (Kamryn) Pettway in there, and he's not quite at 100 percent, either. I was proud of Kerryon and the job that he did."

On Eli Stove...

"Around halftime we realized our guys were tired and we knew we had to get the ball to the perimeter. Eli had the big one right there that really opened things up. The thing about perimeter runs is that if you get one big one, it can pretty much loosen things up for the whole team. Getting the ball near the sidelines was the goal and Eli was able to about take it to the house."

On last year's performance vs. this year's performance...

"Two weeks in a row we've played really good football (in all three phases) and I'd like to think we're gaining some momentum. We still made some mistakes and we need to work on our third down completions. If we can keep improving a little bit each week we have a chance at being a great football team."

On Aidan Marshall...

"In the past two weeks Aidan has certainly proved himself. He won the competition, putting in that extra effort at practice, and that's why we figured we'd give him a chance. Sometimes we worry about putting our new guys in, but he did a good job and I was impressed."

On Tre' Williams and Kam Martin...

"Tre' being a little banged up we wanted to keep him on the sidelines, we knew if there was an emergency we would have put him in, and we were fortunate to be able to rest him another week. As far as that goes, same thing goes with Kam, he was a little bit banged up from last week."

On Javaris Davis...

"Javaris is an impact player for us. After having him out last week he played extremely well, and then to be able to make that impact on the pick-six was nice to see. He is one of our top defensive backs on the field so it was good having him back."

On Malik Willis moving up in the offense...

"After a 70-yard touchdown run, Malik is one play away from playing and being our starting quarterback. He needs to prepare like he is a starter. That play he made he kind of looked like a Nick Marshall move, and as far as keeping the ball in his hands, no one knows he has it until he breaks free. He does have a unique ability."

Jarrett Stidham, So. QB

On how big it was to get two back to back good games...

"The first two or three games we weren't all there. But the last two weeks we've put together a full game on all three phases."

On the explosive plays...

"I think anytime you can get those plays it sets the tone and that's what we tried to do, execute the game plan."

On the big play from their own 1-yard line...

"I think it kind of speaks to the confidence we have. I think it's just a testament of our hard work and dedication."

On his efficient passing...

"I kind of hang my hat on that. That's something I take pride in. I don't just want to throw it up in double or triple coverage. That's one of my goals every week is to have a perfect completion game."

Eli Stove, So. WR

On the 57 Yard reception...

"On the coverage, I didn't think I was going to get the ball. Still ran my route. When he threw it, I just had to focus in and get it in my hand. It was a good throw. He made the right read."

On Stidham's performance the pass three weeks...

"He's confident and taking everything serious, of course. He's doing a great job."

Darius James, Sr. OL

On the play of a new-look offensive line tonight...

"We think we did very well. Our two-deep can play anywhere in the country. We feel like we have a lot of depth. Our coaches put the best five on the field and we just go with whatever he goes with."

On finding out the starting five...

"The Tuesday practice, one of our hardest working days, just so we know what is going on and he broke it to Prince Tega. Prince took it well and Prince is a competitor. He wants to get better and it's not going to do anything but make us better."

On Austin Golson's ability...

"He's a versatile dude. He's probably our best offensive lineman, either him or Braden (Smith). He's played a lot of football in his days and his college career. He's played a lot of spots and he's done a lot of different things. I feel like he can be plugged in wherever he needs to be plugged in and wherever coach needs him."

On his injury vs. Mercer...

"It was scary because I've never been really injured like that in a middle of a game. After I got through that, it was nothing."

Will Hastings, Jr. WR

On his size helping him...

"A lot of people back home think you look like you're 13, so no one really gives you a chance. So I definitely think that helps out size-wise. They don't really think I'm a threat, and then I can be."

On Auburn's offensive balance...

"It was really good. I thought we ran the ball well and I thought we threw the ball great, everything was caught. I thought it was a great game."

On Auburn's defense...

"They're amazing. Like I said last week, the defense is real and I think everyone sees it. They get us the ball back and now we're producing for them and getting points for them."

On Jarrett Stidham...

"For offense, it all starts with the quarterback. So if he feels comfortable, then we're going to get rolling."

On what's going through his head when a wide open ball is in the air...

"Just make sure that I catch it and look it in the tuck. Because if you take your eyes from it, you drop it. And that's what Coach tells us all the time."

On the move he made to get open...

"It's almost the same thing I did against Missouri. I just looked out like I was doing a seven-cut and hit it back in. We've been working on it all week."

Kyle Davis, So. WR

On what the difference has been in the last two weeks...

"Everybody executed, and when we had the opportunity to make plays, we did."

On if he's seen a difference in Jarrett...

"Jarrett's always had the confidence. I just think he's more comfortable after getting game reps"

On what it's like on his confidence when the offense is rolling...

"It's all about everybody doing their job. Coach is always preaching to do your job and to trust the person next to you, the lineman, quarterback, and running back. We were executing at such a high level because everyone was doing their job."

Tray Matthews, Sr. DB

On the secondary's game tonight...

"I think we played extremely well tonight. The corners were locked down. To be honest with you, I think we had just one bad snap communication-wise where they got a deep play down the middle, but that was pretty much it. We were solid."

On Carlton Davis...

"Carlton was locked down today. I was telling him during the game, 'Man, you're looking like your old self again,' and he's feeling like that again, so that's big for us."

On having Javaris Davis back...

"It's a blessing because that's the speed demon. He's a fire missile out there. He's the fastest on the team. It's a great advantage for our defense."

On areas where the defense can improve...

"It's always things we can correct and get better on. It was one play that they went deep on and it was miscommunication because of different reads. We can definitely get better on those things."

Javaris Davis, So. DB

On his Pick 6...

"We were in a zone coverage and I saw the dude that I ride on the zone. I just tried to make a play on the ball. I saw green grass and just tried to get into the end zone."

On young players contributing...

"It's great because we're building for the future, and coach tries to put freshmen in there so that we can always get better for the future. We have to continue to grow and work hard."

Deshaun Davis, Jr. LB

On defense not giving up 14 points all season...

"Our edge. Coach Steele always stresses flying to the ball and playing with great effort. Tackling and being physical and I think if you can do those two things then you're bound to have a good defense. We don't like guys to cross the goal line. We don't like guys to get yards. We play with a great edge and great fire and that has us where we are now."

On making Nick Fitzgerald throw more than usual...

"If you can't run you become one-dimensional, and you have to throw the ball. Our offense helped us out a lot by putting up points, and they had to come out of the run. You're not going to run the ball when you're down 28-10 in the third quarter. Fitzgerald is a great quarterback, and our coaches put us in a great position to make plays on him."

MSU Head Coach Dan Mullen

On the lack of competitiveness...

"If I would've known that we had close to the same rushing yards as them at the beginning of the fourth quarter, I would've said it was a three-point game and we're going to try to win it at the end. The big plays really hurt today on the defensive side of the ball. There were some missed opportunities on the offensive side. Last week I don't think we played well. I'm anxious to see the film this week to see if we played better than last week, but just missed some plays. If that's the case then we'll take a look and try to get that fixed. If we played worse than that'll just be disappointing that we didn't get better."

On the younger guys...

"With two starters out, it gives the younger guys some opportunities to make some plays. We do have to play better and make plays. The opportunities are there, we just have to make plays."

Nick Fitzgerald, Jr., QB

On message to team for bye-week...

"I don't think it's time to panic. I don't think we need to press. I don't think we need to be frustrated. We just need to come out and focus on ourselves. When practicing, we really need to focus on a lot of individual drills, work on some techniques so they know what will get them through game weeks, and get some younger guys some reps."

On keeping newcomers on course...

"I think it just comes from leadership within the guys on our team and kind of just calm people down and take control. I have a meeting with the team and other coaches probably tomorrow to just talk it all out; talk about where we are and talk about what's left to go. Just try to let everything out."

Jeffery Simmons, So., DL

On Auburn's offense...

"I mean, it wasn't dangerous. We screwed up the communication. We took away what they do best - run. They were throwing the ball and we just have to do better, especially up front, and get better with converting the pass. We, defensive linemen, have to play runs, get to the passer and the quarterback. Half of that was kind of us, up front, and we just have to get to the quarterback."

On touchdown callback...

"It was a momentum killer. I guess the referee made a good call on it. We have to move on from that. A call is just a call. We just have to move on from it."

On team focus during bye-week...

"Communication; that's what kills us, especially as a defense. Everybody has to be on the same page. Everybody has to talk even defense. We have to communicate with each other. We have to communicate with the secondary. Like I said, just communication."

