



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 7 • MISSISSIPPI STATE (5-2, 2-2 SEC) VS. KENTUCKY (5-2, 2-2) • OCT. 21, 2017 • DAVIS WADE STADIUM

TEAM NOTABLES

- Mississippi State won the toss and elected to defer. MSU has won the toss in five of seven contests this season.
- Dan Mullen earned his 66th victory of his career as head coach of the Bulldogs, surpassing College Football Hall of Famer Allyn McKeen for the second-most wins in school history; he is now nine wins shy from tying Jackie Sherrill's school-record mark.
- With the victory, MSU took the edge in the all-time series history with a 23-22 mark against Kentucky. State has now won eight of the last nine meetings against the Wildcats. MSU is now also 15-6 against the SEC East under Mullen, including an 8-2 mark at Davis Wade Stadium. MSU has won its last six home games against the SEC East.
- State improved to 55-21-3 all-time in Homecoming contests. During the Mullen era, MSU is 8-1 in Homecoming games.
- This season, MSU is 4-0 at Davis Wade Stadium and have outscored opponents 166-24. All four home wins have been by at least 25 points. MSU has won six of its last seven home contests. This is the first 4-0 start at home for MSU since the 2014 season.
- For the seventh time this season, MSU has not lost a fumble on an offensive possession.
- With 7:13 remaining in the second quarter, Kentucky tied the contest up at 7-7. MSU would go on to score 38 unanswered points en route to a 45-7 victory.
- MSU's quarterback duo of Nick Fitzgerald and Keytaon Thompson combined for 16 carries to rack up a total of 180 yards and four rushing scores.
- MSU women's basketball preseason All-American Victoria Vivians of Forest and Anthony Daniels of Brookhaven were named Homecoming Queen and King.
- Today's attendance was 58,963.
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PLAYER NOTABLES

- Nick Fitzgerald racked up 115 yards on the ground over 12 carries for two rushing scores, including a 3-yard touchdown on State's opening drive for the first points of the game (7:43; 1Q). He brings his career total to 28 rushing scores to surpass Michael Davis (1991-94) for fourth all-time at MSU. It was his 11th-career game of 100 or more rushing yards, which moves him into fifth in school history in 100-yard rushing outings.
- With 2,063 yards rushing over his career, Nick Fitzgerald becomes the sixth quarterback in SEC history to rush for over 2,000 yards.
- Fitzgerald also connected with Jordan Thomas for a 10-yard touchdown pass with 7:07 in the third quarter to give State a 24-7 lead. It was Fitzgerald's 35th career passing touchdown, jumping Wayne Madkin (1998-01) for fourth outright in school history. It was the second TD catch of the season for Thomas and the first since Louisiana Tech (9/9/16).
- Jordan Thomas closed the game with three catches and a touchdown for a career-high 28 yards. Jesse Jackson also reeled in three passes for a career-best 24 yards.
- With 7:13 remaining in the first half, Donald Gray returned his second kick return of the season for 32 yards. Both of his kick returns have been carries of 30 or more yards. He averages 42.0 yards per kick return.
- Jace Christmann regained a 10-7 MSU lead as he connected on a 31-yard FG with 3:14 remaining in the first half to improve to a perfect 6-for-6 in FG attempts for the season.
- In just his second game returning from injury, Gabe Myles reeled in a season-best four passes for a season-high 30 yards.
- Defensively against the Wildcats, safety Mark McLaurin forced his first-career fumble and led the team with a career-high 11 tackles. Erroll Thompson (8) and Montez Sweat (7) also set career highs for total tackles against the Wildcats, while Sweat added a career-high 2.5 tackles for loss.
- Braxton Hoyett combined with Dez Harris for his career-first sack. Hoyett added his first-career interception with 1:02 remaining in the third quarter, returning the ball two yards to the UK38 to set up a MSU scoring drive.
- Following Hoyett's interception, Keytaon Thompson punched in the score with a 9-yard rushing touchdown with 12:20 remaining in the fourth for the first rushing score of his career. Thompson added a career-long, 40-yard rush for his second TD of the night. He closed the game with a career-high 65 yards rushing on four touches.
- With 10:29 remaining in the fourth quarter, Gerri Green returned his first interception of the season 84 yards for a score and his first pick six of his career. It was the first interception returned for a touchdown since Cedric Jiles returned a 74-yard interception for a score against Ole Miss on Nov. 26, 2016. It was Green's first INT since Nov. 30, 2015 against NC State in the Belk Bowl.



HEAD COACH DAN MULLEN QUOTES

October 21, 2017

Kentucky vs. Mississippi State

Opening Statement

“I am really pleased at how our guys came out there. I thought we had a really good week at practice. I challenged them to come out there and play their best game with some great intensity for four quarters and come out there and play hard. I thought we came out pretty solid in the first half, but I really challenged them to take it to another level in the second half, and I think they did that. Our guys really cranked it up at half time and did the things they needed to do to win a game. They put together a huge drive to start the second half, manage the game and they did a good job of controlling the line of scrimmage. That was an excellent team we just played in Kentucky. You watch them on film. The plays they have, the scheme what they have. They have really good players, and I know Mark does a good job. We talk about the home-field advantage and our fans really gave us a home field advantage. I thought it was a great atmosphere and that is a big factor. Obviously, being able to play home in the SEC gives us a big edge, and I think that really helped today.”

On the challenge on the defensive backs ...

“There were some times they took some shots and it was one on one and 50-50 balls. We won the 50-50 balls today and that is a big deal in a game. You are going to look back on it, both sides. I think offensively we won 50-50 balls today, and I think that is a huge deal in the course of a game. Willie Gay played right before half time. On the third-and-one they took a shot down the field. That really changes the game and gives us momentum to go down and score. Also knowing we get the ball back at the start of the second half was a big play.”

On the overall team performance and this win...

“I thought it was a really solid day in all three phases against a really good team. We were able to take them out of what makes them feel comfortable and put pressure on them. Getting the lead in the first part, you have two teams that like to run the ball, run play action and control the pace of the game. I think that first drive helped us to get up early and helped us be the pace setters of the game on our side.”

On how he think Nick played today...

“I thought he did a really good job. He made some great plays. I think he missed a couple. I told him it was one of those six-to-12 inch days. He had great reads, great checks, got us into the right plays. He managed the game. On a couple of throws we were about six to 12 inches off. In fact, you could take that ball and move it about six to 12 inches in a different direction and he probably would've have a couple more touchdown passes. I think that is the consistency and performance that he continues to improve on, but I was pleased with his decision and play making all day. I think with a lot of players, just managing the game and getting us into the right plays and the right checks, knowing how to use the clock and how to manage the game against the defense. When to take a shot down the field, when to check it down, those are things that goes unnoticed and that he doesn't get credit for that I think I really see him improving in.”



HEAD COACH MARK STOOPS QUOTES

October 21, 2017

Kentucky vs. Mississippi State

Opening Statement

“Not a very good effort. There isn’t a whole lot, I will be very quick in my opening statement. Definitely not acceptable. We didn’t play winning football. I didn’t coach well enough, and they took care of business from the beginning of the game to the end. They were the more physical team. Generally when you’re that much more physical than your opponent, you win the game. That was the case tonight. I give them credit, they really played well. They are a very well-coached football team. They are very physical and they have an outstanding quarterback. It was a great effort by them. Not good enough by us. We have to get back to work.”

On his message to the team...

“Not acceptable. Not okay. They flat out beat us. They out coached us. You accept it. There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide in this business. There is nowhere for them to run and hide. They whooped us, that is the way it is. You have to accept it. We all have to look in the mirror and look at ourselves. We have to look at every aspect of our situation in the mirror and see where we can get better. We have to give Mississippi State credit for beating our tails. That is the way it is. We have to go back to work on Monday and they better be ready to strap it on and go to work.”

On typical success coming off a bye week...

“It is not always the case. For us coming off a bye week we didn’t play to our standards, sometimes that happens. It isn’t acceptable. You know you are going into a tough environment. I really feel like the game got away from us with three minutes left in the half. We battle back and fight to get to 10-7. We knew we were hanging on and it was time to get out of that half. It was imperative that we got a first down coming out with under three. We got it to second and short and then I believe third and short. We went for a shot. We had a play we worked that was super aggressive. We thought we would give it a shot and go for the home run. The game flipped right there. They are a physical bunch. That many more plays, and it was very reminiscent of the last time we were here when the game got away from us at the end of the first half. I was very conscious of it. I tried very hard to not let that happen, but it did. The game got away from us very quickly. More snaps, more effort, and more opportunity for them to drive down and score. The game got away from us right there.”

On halftime adjustments ...

“Well Mississippi State got ahead, they got aggressive and put a lot of pressure on us. We weren’t winning some one-on-ones. They did a nice job of mixing up their pressures and got after us. We knew that going in that they don’t give up a lot of first downs. They lead the country in giving up the fewest amount of first downs.”



MISSISSIPPI STATE PLAYER QUOTES

October 21, 2017

Kentucky vs. Mississippi State

QB – Nick Fitzgerald – Jr.

On the first play to run...

“They asked me, like on Wednesday, what do you want to run as your first play and I told them that play. They were like, ‘If you do not complete that pass, I swear.’ So, it was kind of a joke the whole week about what play we was going to open up with. We ended up going with it by completing a great catch by Gabe Myles and that kind of got things started. Offensive line moved people. We were able to move the ball pretty good today.”

On Aeris Williams duo...

“We do a lot of drills at practice to make sure we keep it high and tight at all times. Anytime that we have the ball during stretches, we making sure we have a good ball security while we’re going through all that. We do a couple of drills. Fumble drills. Things like that. We making sure when we’re going down that we keep the ball tucked and secure. Ultimately, it’s staying focused and making sure that you finish every run.”

On today’s win...

“It’s huge. Anytime you can play in front of your home crowd, for Homecoming, against an SEC opponent and get a big win like that is spectacular. It’s great. Now we just have to turn our view ahead into our away game.”

DL – Braxton Hoyett – Jr.

On third quarter interception...

“I saw it in the air, I don’t know if Tre Brown – he was in front of me – I don’t know if he tipped it or not, but I saw it, I tipped it up in the air and I caught it. I really wanted to be like [Gerri Green] and take it to the house, but somebody hit me as soon as I grabbed it. But it was an amazing play.”

On play of the defensive line...

“We just go out with the mentality at practice that we have to get better every day, and get better each and every week, and play to our highest standard.”

“I feel like as a whole we’re all playing well, I feel like we’re rushing the quarterback better than the first couple of weeks so that’s good.”

LB – Gerri Green – Jr.

On fourth quarter pick-six...

“It was a tip. I think [Jeffery Simmons] tipped it, then I caught it, then ran as fast as I could. It was my first-career touchdown. I’ll remember that for a long time.”

On running more blitzes in the second half...

“We didn’t want to relax. Just keep going and did not take our foot off the gas, showing no signs of relaxing and just trying to play safer play. We just wanted to get at the quarterback and create turnovers.”

On getting the win against an SEC opponent...

“It was a big one, coming out of the bye week last week against BYU, getting our first SEC game, just continue to start this second half of the season off in the right way.”

DB – Dez Harris – Sr.

On the win...

“It was a good win. We practiced hard all week and came out prepared and ready to go. We executed and got a win.”

On the defense’s focus against Kentucky...

“With any offense, you focus on one thing, stopping the run. I think we did a pretty good job out of that, and whenever we stop the run we had pretty good pass rushing. We were able to force two picks.”

On getting in on multiple sacks...

“I felt great just to be able to play around my teammates, to be able to play with the D-line that we have. They are going to wreak havoc every night, and to be able to get a sack and half a sack is a blessing.”



KENTUCKY PLAYER QUOTES

October 21, 2017

Kentucky vs. Mississippi State

QB – Stephen Johnson – Sr.

On today's performance...

"I did not see this coming at all. We did not execute today, and we played poorly on all sides of the ball."

On coming up one to two yards short...

"It is quite frustrating because we practiced this all week. At practice it would work out, but come game time, I was a little short on my throws. That is something I have to go back and work on."

On how to bounce back from this game...

"We have to come back to work on Monday. We cannot take a step back and be like the old Kentucky, we have to be like the new Kentucky and continue fighting through games. There is no time to sulk."

On what Mississippi State was doing well on defense...

"They disguised their coverages very well. A lot of times we ran into a play where we thought they were going to be doing something else. They were also very physical, more physical than we were being the entire game."

LB – Josh Allen – Jr.

On how frustrating a loss like this is...

"You could clearly tell after the game that we were hurt. We did not put out all of our effort, and we did not execute. Now we prepare for next week. This cannot be the game that causes us to lose the entire season. This is only one game."

On how to make sure this one loss does not turn into two...

"We just have to forget about it in a sense to learn from our mistakes. When Monday comes, it is time for Tennessee; there is no more Mississippi State. We lost, but we have to move on to the next game."

On how difficult it was to take down Nick Fitzgerald...

"He is the first quarterback that we have faced that is of his size. We have to tackle and we missed several of those tackles. I personally missed the opportunity for a sack. He is a good player and I commend him for that."