



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 13 • #23 MISSISSIPPI STATE (9-4, 4-4 SEC) VS. LOUISVILLE (8-5, 4-4 ACC) • DEC. 30, 2017 • EVERBANK FIELD

TEAM NOTABLES

- Louisville won the toss and elected to receive the opening kick. It is just the fourth time this season that MSU has not won the coin toss.
- MSU earned its third nine-win season in the past four years and just the ninth nine-win season in the 118-year history of the program.
- MSU's senior class earned its 34th victory, tying the 2015 and 1942 senior classes for the program record for wins.
- State is now 13-8 all-time in bowl games and have now won three consecutive bowl contests. The Bulldogs are 4-3 in bowl games played in Florida and improve to 2-1 in TaxSlayer (Gator) Bowl contests.
- In the first meeting between the two teams since 1976, MSU took the edge in the series at 3-2. The Bulldogs have won all five contests but had two wins vacated in 1975 and 1976.
- Keytaon Thompson earned his first career start to become the 14th first-time starter this season. MSU has had seven first-time starters on offense and seven on defense. Thompson is the first true freshman to start under center for MSU since Damian Williams on Nov. 28, 2013 in the Egg Bowl versus Ole Miss. He is the first true freshman quarterback to start a bowl game since Wesley Carroll in the 2007 Liberty Bowl.
- Mark McLaurin was named Most Valuable Player of the 2017 TaxSlayer Bowl.
- For the eighth time in MSU's 13 games, a Bulldog quarterback has rushed for over 100 yards. Both Thompson and Louisville's Lamar Jackson rushed for over 100 yards, marking just the fourth time this season that both quarterbacks have rushed for over 100 yards in an FBS contest.
- MSU defense recorded interceptions on back-to-back pass attempts from Lamar Jackson during the second quarter to snap his streak of 114 consecutive pass attempts without throwing a pick. MSU defense closed the game with four total interceptions, the most Jackson has thrown in a single game. His previous high of three was set against Kentucky on Nov. 26, 2016.
- Today's attendance was 41,310.

PLAYER NOTABLES

- In his first start under center, Keytaon Thompson racked up 274 total yards of offense with three rushing scores. Through the air, Thompson went 11-for-20 for 147 yards. On the ground, Thompson set an MSU bowl record with 27 rushing attempts, passing Anthony Dixon (vs. UCF in 2007 Liberty Bowl) and Walter Packer's (vs. North Carolina in 1974 Sun Bowl) previous record of 24. Thompson rushed for 147 yards, the fourth-most yards in MSU bowl history, with three scores. His three rushing scores tie Vick Ballard (vs. Michigan in 2011 Gator Bowl) and Dontae Walker (vs. Texas A&M in 2000 Independence Bowl) for the MSU bowl record. Thompson's 18 points scored also tie Ballard and Walker for the MSU bowl record.
- Aeris Williams added 88 yards on 12 touches to average a game-high 7.3 yards per carry. He closed the season with 1,107 yards rushing, which passes Keffer McGee (1995) for eighth in MSU single-season history.
- Jace Christmann closed the season going 42-of-42 in PAT attempts. His 42 PATs rank fifth in MSU single-season history, passing Scott Westerfield (2000).
- Logan Cooke closed his career with 6,250 yards punted, passing Jeff Walker (1996-99) for ninth in MSU history.
- Johnathan Abram set career highs in total tackles (9), sacks (1.5) and tackles for loss (2.0). Willie Gay, Jr. and Cameron Dantzler tied their career highs with four tackles. Montez Sweat set a career high with 2.0 tackles for loss.
- With 7:45 remaining in the first half, Mark McLaurin intercepted a pass, returning it 30 yards to the UL 20 to set up a Jace Christmann 23-yard field goal (3:24 2Q). The pick snapped Lamar Jackson's streak of 114-straight pass attempts without an interception. It also marks the second consecutive game that McLaurin has intercepted a pass.
- On Lamar Jackson's first pass attempt following McLaurin's first pick, Cameron Dantzler recorded his first-career interception, returning it 15 yards (2:59 2Q).
- Mark McLaurin added his second interception of the game with 14:20 remaining in the fourth quarter, returning it 12 yards to the UL 22 before snagging his third interception of the game with 2:22 remaining in the fourth quarter. His three picks are a MSU bowl record, surpassing Nickoe Whitley's two interceptions vs. Northwestern in the 2013 Gator Bowl. He is the first Bulldog to intercept three passes in a game since Richie Brown versus Texas A&M on Oct. 2, 2014. His six interceptions this season tie six other Bulldogs for the MSU single-season record. He is the first Bulldog to record six interceptions in a season since Corey Broomfield in 2009. McLaurin also led the team with 11 tackles, tying his career high.

TaxSlayer Bowl: Louisville vs Mississippi State

Saturday, December 30, 2017

Greg Knox

Mark McLaurin

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Mississippi State - 31, Louisville - 27

GREG KNOX: Been a tremendous week. Appreciate the experience from the TaxSlayer Bowl, the city of Jacksonville. Everything has been tremendous. They really put on a first class show, a first class operation. We thank you.

Today we talked about going out and playing four quarters. It took four quarters to win that ballgame. We knew what we were facing, Heisman Trophy winner, a guy that was capable of putting the team on his back and carrying them to victory.

But our defense, we talked about playing to their identity, fast, physical, tough. I thought we did that as a team. We were able to run the ball. Our quarterback, I take my hat off to him. A young freshman stepped in for his first start. He was phenomenal. He was phenomenal.

We talked to him about managing the game. I thought he did a great job of that.

Questions.

Q. Mark, the first few turnovers you got, the first couple, you weren't able to put any points on the board, when you finally scored, any sense of frustration that the defense was forcing mistakes but the offense wasn't getting points out of them?

MARK McLAURIN: No, sir. We knew we had to go and make a stop or two. We needed to create on offense. We kept executing. We just said we are going to keep giving them the ball. We believed.

Q. Mark, what was it about the game plan or the team that consistently got you in the right spot to make a touchdown?

MARK McLAURIN: Just the coaching, play calling. The D-line, the linebackers, coach and the DBs. Great play calling. We all did our jobs, made plays on offense.

Q. Was there anything you saw on film for Lamar that tipped you off on some of those passes?



MARK McLAURIN: We knew what they liked to do. Studied him for a long time. We just knew to play and react and have fun.

Q. Mark, I know this is a game you easily could have not cared that much about. What is it that made you so passionate about it?

MARK McLAURIN: Back in January we made a commitment, we told them this team was not the same as our last game. We had each other's backs. Looked each other in the eyes, said, We're going to do this. Coach Knox is around, we locked on and said we're going to come out with a win.

Q. Was it part of the plan coming in to get Keytaon that many design quarterback runs? How did y'all go about reaching that conclusion?

GREG KNOX: We knew that's what he did best. When we first started him, I gave him a game plan sheet. I had him mark the plays he felt comfortable with. He marked about 60 plays, then we narrowed it down from there as we went through the practice sessions. We knew going into the game he had to run the football. If you go back and you look at Mississippi State, all right, over the year, when Fitzgerald ran the ball for a hundred yards, we won the game. We knew he had to run the ball today. We had to put the ball in his hands.

We didn't care if he was a freshman. We didn't care if he was starting his first game, all right? We knew we could tee some things up for him to run the ball and he could have success.

Q. Coach, you have to be surprised by some of the zip he had on some of his passes. Then the last drive, a pretty big completion he made on third down. Did he even surprise you a little bit?

GREG KNOX: He did. He threw some nice passes. I thought our O-line did a great job of protecting him, giving him time to throw, he was able to sit in the pocket. Our receivers got open. They created separation. He did a great job delivering the ball.

Q. Coach, players and coaches were very emotional after the game. What made this win so emotional?

GREG KNOX: The last three, four weeks we've been together, it's been a tough time for everyone. A lot of emotions. You're talking about 120-something guys,

and everybody is hearing things differently. Coaches, I'm holding together the staff, holding together the team. So it's a lot of emotions involved.

Thank you.

Today I think that's what you saw on the field. It was a chance for everyone to just breathe a sigh of relief and say, Thank you, God, for this win.

Q. What about for you, I saw you get teary eyed.

GREG KNOX: I've been here nine years, all right? These guys, I've been in their homes, recruited them. We're all family. We're all family. As a family, we share that emotion.

Today, that was family out there that won that game. It was family showing a lot of emotion.

Q. Mark, walk me through the third interception. What happened on your half of the field?

MARK McLAURIN: Coach made a great play call at the end. D-line got great movement, especially on the quarterback. The corner ran a blitz. He got home. I seen the slant. I really didn't think he was going to throw it. I stepped up. Just seen it.

Q. Lamar had a lot of success running at times today. What did you see there? Who played him on scout team?

MARK McLAURIN: We had one of our redshirt guys, he jumped in as quarterback. He did a tremendous job these last three weeks. He helped us out. We give him all the credit for that.

Q. Greg, the swing in momentum right before halftime, what was your message to the team at halftime?

GREG KNOX: At halftime we talked about it's going to be a four-quarter game. Again, it was a big momentum swing. We had them pinned back. They were able to come out. They made a big play.

I talk to our kids all the time. They're going to make plays. They have guys on scholarship, too. They're going to make some plays. You just have to respond after that.

After coming out at halftime, we talked about playing four quarters. It's about playing four quarters, all right? We went out and we did that.

Q. Coach, I know you said you were completely committed to this team through this bowl game. Do you have any idea what's next for you in your career?

GREG KNOX: I have no idea. Right now it's just the focus of this team, enjoying this moment that we're in.

TaxSlayer Bowl: Louisville vs Mississippi State

Saturday, December 30, 2017

Bobby Petrino Lamar Jackson

Louisville Cardinals

Mississippi State - 31, Louisville - 27

BOBBY PETRINO: A tough loss for us. I'm very proud of our team, on how hard we competed, how hard we fought to get the win. We didn't have the greatest start we'd like in the first quarter. Defensively I think we got out of sync a little bit with our tempo. But we came back. Had a great score right before the half, took the lead, got ourselves in a position to win the game.

But we turned the ball over too much, didn't get touchdowns when we were down inside the 20 yard line. We needed to convert touchdowns. Missed a field goal, things that we don't usually have happen. You have to give them credit. They're a very good football team. They're a very physical team. Their defensive front was very physical. Their offensive front was very physical. But it was a great game. Our guys competed hard. They did a great job preparing for the game. Like I told them, they did a great job representing the University of Louisville, University of Louisville football, we'll be back to get back to work when we get a week break here, then we come back.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. What was Mississippi State doing to effectively limit the rushing attack?

BOBBY PETRINO: I mean, they're real physical up front. 94, their nose guard, is a really, really good player. Held us to point. We weren't able to get the same movement we normally get. They forced us to hand the ball off a bunch, limited the space we had to run the ball. In a game like that, you just got to keep going, keep working at it. We had some nice drives. Ended up with field goals, not touchdowns.

Q. Coach, what impressed you about the Mississippi State freshman quarterback in his first start of his career?

BOBBY PETRINO: Yeah, toughness. I thought he was very tough. They came in with a good game plan to run the ball well. Made yards after contact. We had some trouble tackling them. Thought we did a good job of slowing them down there in the second half.



But he's a very tough young man. Played very physical for them.

Q. What was the breakdown that led to four interceptions?

BOBBY PETRINO: Yeah, they're all different. Starts sometimes with protection. We didn't have the same type of protection that we had. Had a few errant throws that the ball sailed. Wasn't as accurate as normal. Had one go right through a guy's hands.

When you get turnovers like that, it's always the entire offense. It's not one guy. You need to have the protection, you need to be where you're supposed to be on the route, then we need to have an accurate throw and catch the ball.

But they certainly hurt us.

Q. Bobby, how much did the absence affect your execution today?

BOBBY PETRINO: I thought our guys did a really good job in practice, came out with a great attitude, worked hard on preparing for the game, came out and played extremely hard. I'm going to give the credit to the guys that played in the game, how hard they worked, how we stuck together, did a good job in the preparation.

Like I said, we were right in the ballgame. Had our chances to win it. It was a hard-fought game. We just didn't come out on top.

Q. Lamar, Coach Petrino addressed the interceptions, but what did you see from your end?

LAMAR JACKSON: That was just miscommunication by me. That is on me, nobody else.

BOBBY PETRINO: That's not true. We win together and lose together. Lamar is a great competitor. Obviously he's got big shoulders. But he worked extremely hard. He competed extremely hard. We're in a position to win the game because of how hard he ran the ball, the touchdowns he made.

It's all 11 guys. You got to have the right protections, got to give the quarterback space. When you get room and space, it's easy to throw the ball. When you're having to move, see things at the same time, it makes



it a lot harder.

Lamar usually throws the ball more accurate than a couple of them, but a couple of them were not his fault.

Q. Lamar, is this the last time we'll see you in a Cardinals uniform?

LAMAR JACKSON: I got to sit down with my coach and my family.

Q. You talked about how you win or lose as a team. When you see a player like Lamar, how hard is it to see the effort?

BOBBY PETRINO: You know, it's what football and sports and athletics are all about. You prepare really hard. You go out on the field. You compete extremely hard. You do everything you possibly can to win the game. We're humans. We make mistakes. Hopefully you don't make that many that you don't win.

Like I said, I really felt like the offense was competing extremely hard. Kept working at it. We were right in the game versus a very good football team. The defense came back in the second quarter, second half, got some great stops. Even the last drive, they were able to get a stop on the fourth down, get the ball back. We really believed we would take it and go score. Just didn't happen.

That's what college athletics and sports is all about. You have to deal with the lessons, the education. We always get educated. Just have to learn from it.

I can tell you this, though, this team prepared really well. They represented the university great in everything we did up here at the bowl game. I'm really proud of them. We had great leadership from within the team. Really hard to see some of them leave.

Reggie stood there and shook everybody's hand as they came in the locker room. They're some special guys.

Q. Did you expect Mississippi State to blitz that much? What did you do to try to counteract that?

BOBBY PETRINO: Yeah, I didn't think they blitzed as much as I was expecting. They mixed it up a little bit. But they started off, went pretty base. They added to it a little bit. They've been a situation blitz team. They continued to do that.

But they didn't really do anything that we didn't practice for or prepare for, including the fourth down, when Lamar got the fourth down conversion late in the game. You're sitting on the sideline thinking, Should I kick the field goal or go for it? We were right on the edge.

I didn't think we were protecting very well, so I chose to go for it. He made a great play getting us the first down, gave us an opportunity to go score.

Q. Bobby, your defense several times had to come back after turnovers, make big plays. They kept giving you a chance.

BOBBY PETRINO: They did. We had opportunities to win the game. I was proud of how they hung together, adjustments they made on the sideline, understanding what they were trying to do, what we had to do to stop it. They did a good job of blocking. They're a good football team. There's no question about that.

Q. Bobby, does Lamar have anything left to prove in college football and anything to gain by coming back?

BOBBY PETRINO: Yeah, I don't know. I'd love to see him come back, there's no question about that. I think what Lamar needs to do is sit down with his parents, really try to understand what would better develop me. There's been guys that come back for another year, play in the same system, and do great. I think a guy like Carson Palmer who came back, because he's in the same system, he really separates and excels, and does that.

He really needs to understand where his draft status is, what the finances are that go with that. Him and his mom, we'll get people around him to help him make the decision. But they just need to make an educated business decision. He's an unbelievable player, a great person.

Q. Lamar, earlier at the press conference you said you decided to play in this game because you felt you owed it to your teammates. What has it meant to be a part of this team this year?

LAMAR JACKSON: We faced some adversity at the beginning of the season. The way my team bounced back, I just owed it to them. Ain't nobody special. We're the same. It's a team game, not no single person.

BOBBY PETRINO: Thank you.