



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 13 ■ #18 MISSISSIPPI STATE (8-5, 4-4 SEC) VS. #25 IOWA (9-4, 5-4 BIG TEN) ■ JAN. 1, 2019 ■ RAYMOND JAMES STADIUM

TEAM NOTABLES

- Senior defensive end Gerri Green and senior Nick Fitzgerald served as captains. Iowa won the toss and elected to defer.
- Mississippi State's senior class end its career with 32 career victories. They are the 10th MSU senior class to reach the 30-win mark. The 2018 senior class ranks fifth in program history for most wins.
- MSU is now 13-9 all-time in bowl contests. State is now 4-4 in games played in the state of Florida.
- Today's attendance was 40,518.

OFFENSE

- MSU has outscored opponents 191-88 in the first half this season. MSU closed the season allowing just 33 points in the first quarter, which is the fewest in a season since allowing 27 in 2000.
- Nick Fitzgerald's fumble (7:00; 2Q) was the first fumble lost on offense for Mississippi State this season.

DEFENSE

- MSU totaled seven tackles for loss to bring its season total to 103, breaking the previous school record of 98 set back in 2015. MSU has recorded at least seven TFL in 10 games this season.
- Iowa's 75-yard touchdown (7:55; 2Q) was the first play of 50+ yards the Mississippi State's defense has allowed this season.
- With Willie Gay's interception (12:38; 3Q) marks the 12th game this season that MSU has recorded an interception. Mississippi State's defense has recorded at least one turnover in 16-straight games.
- Holding Iowa to -15 yards on the ground, MSU has kept opponents under 100 yards rushing in seven games this season. It is the first time since 2000 (vs. Florida, -78) that MSU has held an opponent to 0 yards or fewer rushing.

PLAYER NOTABLES

QB NICK FITZGERALD

- Rushed for over 100 yards for the 21st time in his career, closing the game with 103 yards on 20 carries and a score. He added 152 yards through the air with a touchdowns.
- Now just the second player in MSU history to be responsible for 100+ touchdowns in a career, joining Dak Prescott. His 101 touchdowns responsible for ties Peyton Manning and Chris Leak for sixth in SEC history.
- In 45 career games, Fitzgerald has recorded a run of 20+ yards in 26 contests.
- Playing his final game in Maroon and White, Fitzgerald closes his career ranked first in MSU history in rushing touchdowns (46), second in career rushing yards (3,607), career touchdowns responsible for (101), career total offense (9,814) and passing touchdowns (55) and third in career passing yards (6,207).
- He ends his historic career as the SEC leader in career quarterback rushing yards, tied for third in SEC history in career rushing touchdowns with Kevin Faulk and Benny Snell, tied for sixth in SEC history in touchdowns responsible for with Peyton Manning and Chris Leake

K JACE CHRISTMANN

- Connected on 44, 42 and 20-yard field goals to match his career high. The three field goals were the second most made by an MSU kicker in the school's bowl history and was the most by a Bulldog in a bowl game since Evan Sobiesk vs. Georgia Tech (2014 Orange).
- Ends the season with 24 made field goals over his career, which ties Chris Gardner (1989-1992) and Brent Smith (2002-03) for 10th in MSU career history.
- Finished the season with 41 PATs, which is good for sixth in single-season history.

P TUCKER DAY

- Tied an Outback Bowl record with a career-long 70 yard punt during the final minute of the third quarter. It was the longest punt by a Bulldog since Devon Bell booted a 70-yard punt at South Alabama in 2014.

DT JEFFERY SIMMONS

- Recorded four tackles, including one sack and 2.5 tackles for loss. Closes his career with 30.2 tackles for loss, which ranks sixth in MSU career history.

LB WILLIE GAY JR.

- Recorded his second interception of the season on Iowa's first drive of the second half, returning it 46 yards for the longest return of his career.

Outback Bowl: Mississippi State vs Iowa

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Joe Moorhead

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Iowa 27 - Mississippi State 22

CHAIRMAN TODD TIMMERMAN: Like to introduce to you Coach Moorhead. Thank you for bringing the team here. We have enjoyed having you in the Tampa Bay area this week. You all have been fantastic. If you'd like to say a few words.

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Certainly very appreciative of the Outback Bowl, Mr. McVay and the committee extending the opportunity for us to be here.

It was a tremendous week for us and our players and our families, one of the best Bowl schedules and setups we've been around in terms of time for preparation and time for activities and things for our players to do. So certainly thank you for that opportunity and it was awesome for our guys.

For today, certainly want to extend congratulations to Coach Ferentz, his staff and his program, very hard-fought game against an excellent opponent.

And you know, from our perspective there was too many things and too many missed opportunities throughout the course of the game that we didn't capitalize on, too many penalties; and I believe it was eight for us, and second time this year that the opposition didn't have one called on them. But that that didn't have a factor on the game. Can't turn the ball over. Can't give up explosive plays. Got to score touchdowns and can't have penalties take plays off the board.

So certainly it's my responsibility to get those things corrected and they are right moving forward. Very appreciative of our seniors who decided to play in this game, and Jeffery Simmons who declared for the draft and a credit to them for today and their entire season, everything that they have done for Mississippi State throughout their careers.

Kids fought their tail off, and ultimately we didn't do a good enough job of coaching them and putting them in position to be successful. Certainly when the opportunities were there for us to make plays during the whistles and between whistles, we certainly didn't do enough to earn the right to win.



Q. You talk about missed opportunities. The two field goals instead of touchdowns at the beginning?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Certainly that's something, the holding penalty that took the scoring position away right before the half, and then a couple times down in there, having to settle for three instead of seven, in a tight game like this when you're chasing points, that makes a bunch of difference, particularly down there at the end of the game.

Q. You had first and goal at the one and three straight running plays. Is that what you wanted?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Well, they are bringing seven to eight people on the blitz and there's not many things that you can dial up to kind of free someone up and get an extra guy. So quarterback run is part of the plan that we had in anticipating the defense that we saw; and actually he had an option whether to run, hand it off, or run it or throw it on all those ones, and the read all dictated that he ran it.

They had all the interior gaps, plus people off the edge, plus another guy on top of that. So there's only so many things you can do running the ball to have an opportunity down there.

Q. The ball bouncing off Guidry's hands in the end zone, did he say anything about getting the ball? Did he come back with any explanation?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I was communicating with the guys up top about the series, but certainly that's not the only reason, you know, he made some big plays throughout the game, but you can point back to a bunch of things throughout the course of the game that could have changed or dictated the outcome. That was a huge momentum swing there. You don't score a touchdown and you get three on the board and you're up there; instead of that, you're taking points off the board for you, and I believe they scored a field goal on that drive. It was definitely a momentum shift.

Q. And missed opportunities, seems like every penalty came --

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: At an inopportune time?

Q. A number of them.

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I think more than anything, a cumulative effect. Had the long run called back for the offensive face mask. You had first and goal at the one called back for a hold.

So a lot of them not just were negative yardage, but yards from a result of what the play was and a lot of those were positive.

Q. Down on the sideline, did Kylin Hill actually lose consciousness --

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: No, not that I saw. He went through protocol. He was checked out by our trainers, so he was cleared to go back in.

Q. What did you see on the long pass play?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Little communication issue on the back end relative to what coverage we were in.

Q. Did Iowa do anything different than you expected?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: There were some tweaks. I don't think anything major on either side of the ball but certainly when you have this much time to game plan, there's not going to be wholesale changes. But there are going to be things you bring into the game plan that are a little bit different than what you've done throughout the year, but I would say for the most part it was pretty steady.

Q. Is that a help or a hindrance, having that much time (to prepare for the game)?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I think it's a help, just for a developmental standpoint where you get your young guys work early on in preparation, and you get -- move ahead and get no opponent preparation. I think it's good to get all those extra practices, one for development and two for preparation.

Q. Finishing your first year 8-5, how do you feel about that? Is that about what you thought?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I would have felt if it was 9-4 after today. But you look at all the games we lost to quality opponents, we had opportunities in all of them and didn't come out on top for different reasons.

But ultimately, we won't be satisfied until we're 14-0. We finished the regular season 8-4, won the Egg Bowl, had an opportunity to win our ninth game in a Bowl game and we weren't able to finish it off.

Q. They had trouble running for almost the entire game. What was the game plan?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I think he did a very good job. In our preparation, you know, kind of having,

you know, an idea how we wanted to attack them, trying to get a numbers advantage at point of attack and certainly our guys executed it, and having very good players up front at the second level.

Q. What did you think of the job of Tucker Day did today?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Something we had talked about all year and looking for him to improve on is kicking. I thought he came out today and probably had his best performance so far.

Q. How were inspired you by the way you used Keytaon (Thompson) today at wide out and running back and things like that?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: It's just a package. A lot of that two-quarterback stuff is predicated on what the defense does and kind of their, you know, the stack nature of some of the stuff where it gives you an opportunity to put a package together that you know will have an opportunity to be successful, and we've got some mileage. Had an opportunity on the one that Nick threw him in the first half, could have split for a touchdown. I thought that was something that gave us an advantage of what they do schematically.

Q. Losing (Maurice) Smitherman that early in the game, how does that impact the secondary?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: On a day we're rotating a lot of people and for now who has had a productive year, certainly hurts from a depth standpoint and rotation standpoint.

Q. A common theme in a lot of the losses this year, how concerning is it that you had over a month and they the penalties still reared their ugly head today?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Any time you have that number of penalties, I think it is a concern. I don't think it necessarily had much to do with the amount of time that we had to prepare.

You look at the situations and not many of them were pre-snap penalties that we saw there in Kentucky that were off-sides and things of that nature, you know, pass interferes, offensive face mask, a couple holds, those are things that are happening during the course of play and none of which are acceptable but are kind of a little bit different than some of the multiple-penalty things that we saw early in the year that were pre- or post-snap. The ones you don't like are the celebration ones and things like that, and there was only one of those.

Q. How challenging was it to block (A.J.) Epenesa, especially off the edge?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: For three years now

or two or however long, seems like forever, that guy, you know, he does an unbelievable job. He has a great array of pass rush moves. He can beat you with speed. He can beat you with power. He has a good counter underneath. The Nelsons and No. 42, they have a very good defensive line.

Q. Where do you expect the most progress between year one and year two?

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I think you want to see overall progression, maybe not necessarily pick one area. We'll go back when the season ends and watch all the cuts on three phases and do a self-scout of things we do well and what we need to improve on, and how much of that is changed based on how much of our personnel is returning.

Ultimately at the end of the day, you want to make sure you're putting a plan together that's going to increase your win total on a yearly basis.

Q. What did you tell your guys going into the half? Clearly you guys came out with a lot more energy in the second half.

HEAD COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think we cleaned up some of the penalty stuff. A lot of the reason was a lot of self-inflicted issues in terms of, you know, the celebration penalty that extended a drive that allowed them to score, some of the fundamental and technique withholds and stuff like that.

So we need to get back to our brand of football and executing and playing with a little better precision and especially the special teams with the interception, being able to build points off of that helped.

Appreciate it.