



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 3 ■ #16/16 MISSISSIPPI STATE (3-0, 0-0 SEC) VS. LOUISIANA (1-1, 0-0 SBC) ■ SEPT. 15, 2018 ■ DAVIS WADE STADIUM

TEAM NOTABLES

- MSU moved to 4-1 all-time against Louisiana and 29-4-2 all-time against current Sun Belt Conference squads. The Bulldogs have now won seven of their last eight meetings against SBC opponents.
- With tonight's victory, Joe Moorhead joined Jackie Sherrill (1991) and College Football Hall of Famer Allyn McKeen (1939) as the only coaches in Mississippi State history to go 3-0 to open their debut season.
- Senior defensive end Gerri Green and senior quarterback Nick Fitzgerald served as MSU's captains. Louisiana won the coin toss and elected to receive.
- Louisiana converted a 38-yard field goal attempt on the game-opening drive to take a 3-0 lead. It was the first time MSU had trailed this season.
- Four Bulldogs made their MSU debut: QB Rip Kirk, RB Robert Rivers, OL Kwatirivous Johnson and OL Tommy Champion.
- Tonight's attendance was 56,505.

OFFENSE

- MSU scored a touchdown on each of its first seven possessions.
- State has outscored opponents in the first half 87-9 this season.
- MSU allowed its first sack of the year in the second quarter.
- State scored more than 40 points for the ninth time since the start of the 2016 season and improved to 8-1 in those games.
- Eight different players made a play that gained 20+ yards from scrimmage.
- MSU had 11 plays of 20 or more yards against Louisiana to bring its season total to 30.
- The Bulldogs eclipsed the 200-yard rushing mark for the fifth consecutive game and the ninth time in the last 11 games dating back to last season.
- Both Nick Fitzgerald and Aeris Williams rushed for over 100 yards, marking the sixth time in their MSU careers the duo has rushed for 100 yards in the same game. It is the second straight week MSU has had two 100-yard rushers in a game.
- For the third consecutive game, the Bulldogs generated more than 500 yards of total offense. It is the 24th time to do so since the start of the 2014 season, a mark that leads the SEC during that span. MSU is 21-3 in those games.
- MSU closed the game with 607 yards of total offense, which ranks as the sixth-highest offensive total in single-game history. Two of MSU's top six single-game marks for total offense highs have come this season.

DEFENSE

- Over the first three games, MSU's defense has recorded 10 sacks and a total of 33 tackles for loss.
- The Bulldog defense has recorded an interception in back-to-back games.

PLAYER NOTABLES

QB NICK FITZGERALD

- Collected his second straight 100-yard rushing performance with 107 yards and four touchdowns on the ground, marking the 13th time in his career that he has rushed for multiple scores in a game. Added 243 yards through the air with two touchdowns.
- This was the first time in Fitzgerald's career that he's rushed for 100+ yards in each of his first two games played in a season.
- Finished with six total touchdowns on the night (four rushing, two passing) for the second time in his career.
- His four rushing touchdowns matched his career high, which was set against Arkansas on Nov. 19, 2016.
- Joined Peyton Barber and Tre Mason as the only SEC players in the last 20 seasons with multiple games of four touchdowns rushing.
- Rushed for over 100 yards in seven of his last nine contests.
- Surpassed Michael Davis (1991-94) for fourth place in MSU history in career rushing yards with 2,752.
- Brought his career total for career passing touchdowns to 43, which passed Tyler Russell (2010-13) for second all-time in MSU history.
- Has thrown at least two touchdown passes in eight of the last 14 games he has played dating back to the 2017 season.

RB AERIS WILLIAMS

- Recorded his first rushing touchdown of the season, punching in a ball from three yards out with 9:35 remaining in the first half.
- Scored either a touchdown rushing or receiving in five of the last six games he has played dating back to last season, totaling six during that span (five rushing/one receiving).
- Closed the game with 101 yards rushing on 11 carries to record the sixth 100-yard rushing game of his career.

WR AUSTIN WILLIAMS

- Caught a career-long pass of 25 yards during the opening drive to help set up MSU's first touchdown of the game.

WR DEDDRICK THOMAS

- Collected two passes for a career high of 53 yards, including reeling in a career-long pass of 44 yards during MSU's second offensive drive of the game.

WR STEPHEN GUIDRY

- Reeled in a career-best three receptions to set a career high with 57 yards receiving.
- Caught a 39-yard touchdown pass with 18 seconds remaining in the first half for the first score of his career.

WR MALIK DEAR

- Returned to the field for the first time since the 2016 season after suffering a torn ACL in March of 2017.
- Caught a 12-yard pass in the fourth quarter.

TE BRAD CUMBEST

- Caught the first pass of his collegiate career for 21 yards.

CB CAM DANTZLER

- Set a career high with seven tackles, including six solo stops.

S JOHNATHAN ABRAM

- Playing in the second half, recorded the first interception of his career.

LB TIM WASHINGTON

- Led the defense with a career-high nine tackles, including a career-high 1.0 tackles for loss.



MISSISSIPPI STATE FOOTBALL

POSTGAME QUOTES

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Mississippi State Postgame Quotes

Joe Moorhead | Mississippi State Head Coach

Opening Statement

JM: First and foremost, I think it was tremendous that we got to honor Alex Wilcox tonight for everything she meant to this university, this athletic department and to her team. We were proud to be a part of that, and I think our kids did a great job throughout the week with that. I think some of the things we challenged the team to do coming out of last week, we addressed. Obviously, Louisiana came out and had a nice drive right down the field for a field goal. I thought after that we responded pretty well. I think we dictated the tempo of the game in all three phases with our physicality and our execution. I think we took another positive step forward to where we want to be, but by no means are we there yet. There is plenty of room to grow. I liked how hard we played tonight, our plan of execution and how we had less substitution errors and penalties. I think we are getting better and better every week.

Q: Do you have any health updates on Jamal Peters and Kylin Hill?

JM: They're both dinged up. They are both lower body injuries. We will take a look at it tomorrow.

Q: Can you talk about the execution on third down?

JM: They call third down the money down. On top of explosive play margin and turnover margin, the next two areas we are very aware of in terms of our execution and how it determines the outcome of games are third-down [conversion] percentage and defense in the red zone. I thought they had a couple of good reads and good throws into tight windows in longer yardage [situations]. We had some receivers getting pretty good separation against man coverage. Eight of eleven is pretty good on third down.

Q: What was done in practice to make Nick [Fitzgerald] better down field?

JM: To be honest, there wasn't a tremendous amount of variation from what we normally do. We watched film last week and saw what we could have done better, particularly some of those overthrows. I was confident in Nick knocking the rust off from his first start in our system that he was going to improve coming out for game two. Nick took all of the corrections from last week and practiced to correct it. I thought he came out today, as we expected, and took a positive step forward. It was definitely a step in the right direction.

Q: How impressed were you by Aeris Williams' performance?

JM: I was very excited. He came back and had a very good week of practice. He did all of the right things from the standpoint off the field. He earned his carries, earned his time and Kylin got a little bit dinged up. Between those two, it's a formidable one-two punch. They both have different styles and skillsets. Aeris is a guy we are able to utilize a little more on third-down protections. He's got a lot of experience doing that. I was happy and it was something we talked about in fall camp. [It] was individual collective-response to prosperity and adversity. Aeris was hit with it a little bit last week and was challenged to respond the right way, and he did.

Q: How was the conversation with Aeris and how do you think he responded?

JM: Very well. We brought him into the office on Sunday and talked to him and let him know what our expectation level was of him, particularly for a senior with experience. He's got great practice habits and we said let's put this behind us and you are going to do a great job this week. He's a good kid. Kids make mistakes sometimes and kids need to be held accountable for their habits and he did a great job responding.

Q: How much of running [the ball] early in the game was flow of the offense and how much of that was planned?

JM: I would say it was flow. The design of the run-pass option, who gets the ball is based on what the defender does with the reads. Had they done something else, it could have been handed off, but in these instances the read told [Fitzgerald] to keep it.

Q: Can you talk about some of the guys who stepped up on defense tonight due to injuries?

JM: Those safeties went in and did a good job. We were two and a half, almost three deep at defensive line and Coach [Bob] Shoop does a great job of putting a plan together to maximize players' strengths and minimize weaknesses, and certainly Coach [Brian] Baker with 19 years of NFL experience. On top of the talent we have, the way he coaches these guys is first and foremost as a mentor. He challenges them to be their best, and we have a unit that was challenged and played with the effort and precision that they do. We always talk about next man in. If somebody goes down, the person replacing him has to do as good of a job.

Q: How important was it to have all three of those things going your way, heading in to conference play next week? (penalties, Nick [Fitzgerald] passing, third-down conversion rate)

JM: [It is] Definitely the way in which we want to be headed. Certainly eleven penalties was too much. Offensively, we operate at our highest level when we are able to run the ball successfully and complete passes at a higher percentage, but never at the expense of explosive plays and protecting the football. I'm not sure what it was specifically, but I would venture to guess that we hit our number of explosive plays that we were looking for, and we did that within the construct of not turning the ball over and operating efficiently. We knocked our penalties down too, so that was definitely a step in the right direction.

Q: What can you guys improve on defensively?

JM: At this point, I think that it would be nitpicking a little bit, but that's good if we are looking for small things to correct. To me, that is a very positive part of what we are doing to get better every week. The opening drive had a bunch of formations with different tempos and they had that thing ripping and running. Coach Avery does a great job offensively. [Watching] His success with Arizona State, we knew that they were going to do some things that were pretty challenging, but we have to do a great job of gap integrity. Some of those deep balls, I thought a couple got completed early and then [we] contested a bunch [of deep balls] in the second half. Some of those things we will review on film tomorrow and get better off of it.

Q: What is different about Nick [Fitzgerald] when he is completing long passes and he is not?

JM: I think it forces a defense to defend both the run and the pass with equal respect to both parts. I think on first and second down, a big part of what we do is run and play-action pass and for us to be able to distort the coverage and get the looks we want to push the ball down field, we have to take advantage of those explosive plays. These guys mentioned a little bit earlier, you know a quarterback needs to complete drop back passes on third down to extend drives, or you know in the instance where you fall behind and you need to throw the ball. So, I think Nick's development as a passer is going to be critical because every game is not going to be like the past three. There's going to be a time where we're going to need to battle back and throw the ball around. I think every week as it continues to improve, it will help us move forward.

Q: Is your team where you want them to be as they head in to conference play and play an undefeated conference opponent?

JM: I'd say I'm pleased with where we are at, but definitely not satisfied. I think we're going to look at the film tomorrow and see a ton of things to correct and that's a good thing because if you're not moving forward, you're falling. I have not watched one snap of Kentucky yet. We will come in tomorrow and watch the game with all three phases and correct it with the kids. We will go out and have a walk-through practice and introduce Kentucky and I'll take a look at them tomorrow night.

Cameron Dantzler | CB | So.

Q: How did you feel when they took the interception away from you?

CD: I felt like I really was down, but I thought it was my interception. We both made a good play on the ball. I feel like I really was down, but it does not really matter who got the interception because we got a good stop on defense. It gave our offense back the ball.

Q: What did it take for you guys to settle in after that first drive?

CD: I felt like at first that I just had to get comfortable with them because we knew that was going to do a lot of jet motion and throw a lot of bubbles [screens] because of our defensive line. We felt like we had to come in after that first drive and just get better as the game went on.

Q: Did you feel like you had to wrestle for that interception?

CD: I felt like I had it. I felt like as I was coming down and rolling over that he just snatched it out of my hand. So, I feel like it was my fault. That it is something that I should work on with possessing the ball, coming down with it and making sure that I have it.

Q: When Jamal [Peters] goes down, do you as corners get together and talk about who needs to step up?

CD: Yes, as soon as he [Jamal] went down, I felt like I had to step up and be a leader to the corners. I was telling Tyler Williams and most of them that they need to step up because they are going to need you all this game and for however long we need you all so you need to step up.

Nick Fitzgerald | QB | Sr.

Q: How important was establishing the run game early?

NF: It was huge. With an offensive line like ours, we know we are capable of converting those third downs. It just took us a little while to get the run game going. We converted a couple of third-and-long's and were able to keep those drives going. Those drives [all] ended up in touchdowns. We kept our poise and stuck to our game plan.

Q: What was different from last week to this week?

NF: The game plan was pretty similar. As for the throws, it was all about chilling out and getting rid of all the adrenaline from the first game. I was over-throwing my receivers last week, so the focus was on bringing the ball down a little bit and connecting with my receivers.

Q: How good did it feel to have Aeris [Williams] have a bounce-back game?

NF: It was huge. He's a senior, a leader, a hard worker, and a great guy. Anytime you can have eleven carries for 100-plus yards you know you've had a great night. He deserves it. He works very hard.

Q: Did you and Keith Mixon have any conversations relating to the similar injuries you both suffered last season?

NF: We were in the training room together all the time. We pushed each other through. There is a lot of monotony in rehabbing an ankle. We both attacked it, and I think we are both back doing what we love and making some plays.

Braxton Hoyett | DT | Sr.

Q: What was the third down plan today?

BH: It was simple. We knew they [Louisiana] had some dynamic quarterbacks that could run around and scramble a little bit especially on third downs. The game plan was just to contain them the pocket and push the pocket and get them out of there.

Q: How important was it that you were able to hold them to a field goal on the opening drive?

BH: It was very important. We did not let what they [Louisiana] were doing get to us. They were honestly trying to take the defensive line out of the game completely with perimeter passes and screens. The coaches on the sidelines were like just focus, just run to the ball, just give effort and just make the plays when they come.

Q: How big were those fourth-down stops?

BH: Huge, I mean it's huge. Third down stops are huge, but a fourth down stop, I mean that is even better. You feel like that is when you really have got to draw the line. You give it all you got to stop them so they don't keep the ball.

Keith Mixon | WR | Jr.

Q: How much fun is this offense?

KM: It's really fun playing for Coach Moorhead. He tries very hard to spread the ball around and get [the wide receivers] the ball more. Coach Moorhead loves outside receivers that go deep, [because] it opens things up for the short game.

Q: Did you think when you were still battling your injury that this kind of game would be possible for you?

KM: I'm just blessed. I had an injury [that] I wasn't supposed to come back from and I worked my tail off trying to get back. God blessed me with this opportunity. I'll never take another snap for granted again.

Q: What are your thoughts on this team's offensive performance tonight?

KM: When you have a guy like [Nick Fitzgerald] at quarterback, most teams already fear [that]. Once the receivers start getting open, it's like pitch and catch. We have a very dangerous offense.

Q: Are you enjoying playing on special teams?

KM: I'm loving it. This is my first time really playing on punt return. I think I get better every time I go out there. Catching the ball and making guys miss; I'm really having fun with it.

Tim Washington | LB | Jr.

Q: You led the team in tackles tonight, how does that feel?

TW: It feels great, I did not know. It is a great achievement, and I thank God for that. I appreciate coach for giving me that opportunity to go out and show my talent.

Q: Do you feel like this team is ready to jump into conference play?

TW: Yes, we are a complete team. We have each other's backs, and we care about each other so we are playing as one right now.

Aeris Williams | RB | Sr.

Q: What's is your relationship like with Kylin [Hill]? Have you shared anything with him over the past few weeks?

AR: Iron sharpens iron. Kylin is like my little brother. We've had that kind of relationship since he got [to Mississippi State].

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Louisiana Postgame Quotes

Billy Napier | Head Coach

Q: What allowed Nick Fitzgerald to be as effective as he was?

BN: First of all, a lot of credit to Mississippi State, to their coaching staff, to Coach Moorhead and the quality of football team they do have. Certainly, they play and execute at a high level on both sides of the ball and on special teams. I think we hung in there during the first half. We played well on first and second downs. We had some issues on third down getting off the field. We were aggressive on offense. We went for it on fourth down three times but went zero for three. I think when we go back and look at it on the tape, we were in position and could have made some plays there. It's going to be a great opportunity for us as a football team to review the tape and really look at where the game went south. I really believe if we do our job a little bit better, we could have had more success.

Q: How has Fitzgerald impressed you and improved as a passer?

BN: Fitzgerald impressed me tonight in terms of the improvements he has made as a passer. I think we could have affected the quarterback a little bit more. We didn't rush or pressure the quarterback. He was able to take his time and distribute the ball well. They did a good job overall of executing in the passing game.

Q: Why wasn't your team's able to execute on third and fourth downs conversions?

BN: When we go back and watch the tape, I think we will see if we threw the ball a little more accurately we could have made the plays. We were in position, but balls were under-thrown and dropped. We had a good play calls, and we put our players in position. I feel good about that.

Q: Did your team play with a "nothing to lose" mentality?

BN: We played as if we knew we needed to score in certain areas. You have to observe the game and know [what] you have to do. We had good plays in our pocket. We gave ourselves chances. We had multiple fourth-and-two plays. We were in a good position.

Jacques Boudreaux | LB | Jr.

Q: You guys knew that Nick Fitzgerald was going to be out of the pocket but despite that, what made his as difficult to deal with as he was?

JB: I think going in we had a great game plan going in to it. Everybody was in the right gaps, but I don't know if that's as much of a credit to them as it is to us. There were plays where we had the perfect play call. Sometimes, we were out of gaps. We let him crease us up the middle and do what he does best which is run the the football.

Q: Did the weather factor in on you guys? Temperature? Humidity? Especially later on in the game..

JB: I wouldn't say that. We practice in those type of conditions everyday. It's humid, we live in South Louisiana. We have that humidity all the time. I think it was just credit to us that we didn't go out there and execute as well as we could have liked. That's what happened, and that's how it went.

Q: What do you guys do at this point to just kind of flush it from your mind and get the focus on Sun Belt play?

JB: I think any time you go up against a top 25 team in the country, and you play them in their house, it's a good eye opener to see what we have to do and what we have to work with. I don't think that we necessarily had an extremely bad day. I think that there were just times where we failed to execute exactly how we wanted to. Obviously, we're going to go to practice tomorrow. We're going to focus on the next team, and we know what we have to do in conference. I think that's a big deal. In this game, it really is going to put our team to see how far we can grow. We shouldn't regress, we should progress if anything. I feel like our team is going to do the right thing. We're going to come to practice tomorrow and have a good positive day.

Q: Any bright spots you can take away from today?

JB: I don't think at any time our defense, or our team as a whole quit. I think that we played until the clock hit double zero in the fourth quarter. There's no doubt about that. Of course, there are always bright spots with sacks and big runs and everything. As a team, I just think that we just did a poor job of executing.

Q: Andre, you guys were obviously effective throwing, what adjustments did they make that made it difficult for you later on?

AN: Yeah, like you said, I think we started off good. We started how we wanted to and played fast. I think it was just self-inflicted wounds that we can control and fix throughout the whole week. That's really what it was.

Q: How much did you start to feel the pressure, was it a little bit deeper in the game?

AN: Yeah, like I said, a lot of it was self-inflicted wounds. There are things we could have picked up and things I could have checked, I definitely felt the pressure but at the same time our line was doing a good job for the most part.

Q: Did you guys concede trying to run it into their gut? Did you think it was going to be a tough go because of how their defense is designed, and how it just how the game spread it out?

AN: I think it's an SEC team, and they had a lot of good players up front. We also have good players and it's a good tu check to play better next week. We see where we can be and how good we can be.

Q: What do you guys do to kind of flush this one and with the importance of it being a Sun Belt game coming up?

AN: I think we just have to go back on the tape and review all the mistakes that we had. It was a lot of mental errors that we had, and we can only go up from here.