



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 4 ■ #14/14 MISSISSIPPI STATE (3-1, 0-1 SEC) AT KENTUCKY (4-0, 2-0 SEC) ■ SEPT. 22, 2018 ■ KROGER FIELD

TEAM NOTABLES

- Senior defensive end Gerri Green and senior quarterback Nick Fitzgerald served as captain. MSU won the toss and elected to defer to the second half. It was the first coin toss MSU has won this season.

OFFENSE

- The Bulldogs have outscored opponents 94-16 in the first half this season.
- MSU's first scoring drive (15 plays, 80 yards, 8:17) was its longest of the season in terms of plays and time of possession. On third-and-13 at Kentucky's 26-yard line, Nick Fitzgerald connected with Stephen Guidry for a 24-yard gain. Fitzgerald found the end zone with his feet two plays later. State was 4 of 4 on third down during its first scoring drive.
- MSU had two plays of 20 or more yards against Kentucky to bring its season total to 32.

DEFENSE

- The Bulldogs had 5.0 tackles for loss in the first half and finished the game with 9.0. The last time MSU had less than 5.0 tackles for loss in a single game was on Oct. 14, 2017 against BYU.
- MSU has recorded an interception in six straight games dating back to last season.
- Over the last 17 games, Jeffery Simmons and Montez Sweat have combined for 42.0 tackles for loss.

PLAYER NOTABLES

QB NICK FITZGERALD

- Scored MSU's lone touchdown of the game with a 1-yard rush with 8:42 remaining in the first half. The touchdown was his 38th rushing score of his career.

WR OSIRUS MITCHELL

- Caught each of his first five targets for 59 yards. Three of those receptions were first downs.
- Ended the night with a career-high six receptions for 65 total yards.

DE MONTEZ SWEAT

- Collected six tackles, including 1.5 sacks, against the Wildcats
- Brought his career sack total to 15.0, which passes Keith Joseph (1989-92) for 10th all-time in MSU career history.

DT JEFFERY SIMMONS

- Collected six tackles, including 2.0 tackles for loss.
- Totaled 23.0 tackles for loss in his career, which ties Kevin Sluder (1996-99) for 10th all-time in MSU career history.

DT BRAXTON HOYETT

- Recorded three tackles, including a career-high 2.0 tackles for loss.

S BRIAN COLE

- Grabbed a tackle and recorded the first interception of his career with an athletic grab in the third quarter.

P TUCKER DAY

- Punted seven times, a career high, for a total of 265 yards to average 37.9 yards per punt.
- Booted a career-long punt of 59 yards against the Wildcats.

University of Kentucky

Kentucky-Mississippi State Postgame Quotes

Football

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University of Kentucky Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 22 2018

[Mark Stoops](#)

Kentucky - 28

Mississippi State - 7

MARK STOOPS: Like to start just by saying what a special night on all fronts, truly a great night. I want to start by thanking the Big Blue Nation. That is what I'm talking about when I say it takes all of us. They made a difference, the fans made a difference, the students made a difference. Greatly appreciate the support. The team -- I told you all along that I love this team, because of the way they prepare and go about their business. We talked all week, it was going to start again in the trenches, physical, the more physical team was going to win. We talked all week about winning your one-on-one matchups wherever they were going to be. And then situational football, two minute drives, third down, red zone, critical series. And that's what we did. Arguably one of the most complete games since I've been here in just appreciating the team's approach. And there's nothing cocky about this team, but they absolutely expected to play like this and that's the way they prepared and that's the way they're going about their business and that's what I love about this team. The last thing I would like to say is, I'm glad we played good for Marco and the Shemwell family. We're going to bring this game ball to them tomorrow for Marco and the Shemwell family and I'm so glad that we played well in honor of him and that family.

Q. I asked you Thursday if this was a chance to disprove all that talk in the off-season and you did that tonight. What did you think of that performance tonight?

MARK STOOPS: Without a doubt they played a very good football game. I didn't really have time to even look at all the total yardage and all that, all I know is we played good.

(Laughter.)

So I really appreciate the effort, I thought Coach House and the defensive coaches and of course Coach Gran and the offensive coaches, the coaches have done great job of preparing this team and the players just believe in each other and play hard and they have got a competitive edge about them and really executed and played very good. I'll be honest with you, we weren't, we were not overly complex tonight on defense, we had a great plan, but it was simple. They played, our players played and they made it good and played exceptionally hard and executed and did some really good things.

Q. You said earlier this week you would have to play with a lot of numbers against their rushing attack. It didn't feel like you needed to with Josh, how good was he tonight.

MARK STOOPS: He is a dominant football player. From watching the sideline, for me, I agree with you. I

was making sure we were being able to rush him as much we could because it seemed like he was unstoppable. But he did a really good job in coverage and he was so big and long he was disruptive in the pass game as well. He's a dynamic player and he was very hard to block tonight. He's a great football player. The great thing about him is he is so happy for the team. It's not -- he's going to get his and he's doing what he has to do, but it's about the team and having success and that's the way all these guys are.

Q. Talk about Benny.

MARK STOOPS: He was amazing as well. What did he have? I don't even know.

Q. Four touchdowns.

MARK STOOPS: Oh, that's it?

(Laughter.)

No, he just, he's Benny. He really is. He'll be the first one to credit the physicality of the offensive line but he has a determination about him and a toughness and vision. And he's Benny. He's done -- he doesn't surprise me because once again he's a dominant football player and he deserves the credit that he gets as well. I'm sorry, I cut somebody off back here.

Q. How much do you love when opposing teams come out and say Benny can't run on them?

MARK STOOPS: We shouldn't need that motivation, but Benny, he'll use anything to motivate him. And that's a good thing. He's always ready, that's the beautiful thing about Benny, he may get a little fired up -- and he's fun for you guys because he might get talking little bit, but that's okay, y'all need to get some sound bites as well, I realize that. But that's just Benny. He's going to play hard no matter what. He really is. I think his high school coach or whoever said that best, he would run over his mother and that's probably true, whoever gets in front of him he's going to run hard.

Q. Talk about the secondary with the redshirt freshman.

MARK STOOPS: It was a big play. [Davonte Robinson](#) got quality snaps tonight as well and Ty's ([Tyrell Ajian](#)) interception was big. He's played -- that's him. He has really good ball skills and so it was really good for him to get significant action and make a critical play for us.

Q. Did [Jordan Griffin](#) play today?

MARK STOOPS: No.

Q. Do you expect him back?

MARK STOOPS: I do.

Q. Talk about that catch by [C.J. Conrad](#).

MARK STOOPS: Great catch. Great play. Critical moment in the game and it was really nice to see him go up in traffic in a competitive situation and come down with the ball.

Q. Nick Fitzgerald was limited in the second half, I think he had about 145 yards in the first half between throwing and running, what was the key there, outside of maybe Josh disrupting him and keeping him in the pocket or whatnot?

MARK STOOPS: It was great team defense. We really did a nice job -- like I said, we weren't overly complex but we had some good things for him and our players did a nice job of disguising and were really on point with them looking and changing and they want to know what you're in a lot and our players really did a nice job of having confidence in their disguises and when to come down and when to get movements and then it comes down to just tackling and covering and -- but Coach House had a good plan and the guys executed and played exceptionally hard. When we had them in predictable pass -- again that's where the fans

make a big difference -- that's, you know, again, I just greatly appreciate it, but we need it like that. That's what we do. That's what we play in the SEC, that's the environment we're supposed to play in. And it makes a difference. Because when they're loud and the offensive line can't hear the snap count like that, it's very hard to block Josh. And that's where it makes a difference.

Q. You had another one of those situations late in the second right before the half where you guys were able to go up and did you think about last time at Mississippi State where that was sort of you said that was the turning point last season?

MARK STOOPS: Well, what about three minutes left? When we had to punt? Or when we scored? Yeah. But we had two situations there. We did punt on the one, but then I thought it was huge that our defense -- I believe we got a three and out -- but we got it back pretty quick there and then we went down and scored, if I'm not mistaken. But, yeah, that's huge, it's a big big deal. I would have rather done it with three minutes left, but it was good to still get it done.

Q. In the process of doing this thing over time what was it like tonight just watching your guys dominate the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball against maybe the one of more physical teams in the SEC this year?

MARK STOOPS: Yeah, without a doubt they are one of the more physical teams and I think that says a lot about our team and again our coaching staff and [Corey Edmond](#) and Coach [Mark Hill](#) and our strength staff and D-Mac ([Deonte Mack](#)) and Jon (Hall) and those guys, they work hard and they worked hard for years. That's what we're going to keep on doing. It's a credit for our players for buying in and doing the dirty work when nobody's watching and over time. That was one of my messages on Monday. I don't like getting into all these messages that I tell you about with the team or whatever, but I talked a lot about Monday and about some other things about you reap what you sew and sooner or later you're going to get paid and you're going to benefit from that. And you don't know when. It's later, then you don't know when that time is, but you got to keep on working and keep on doing it and eventually you're going to get paid many times over. So our team is working very hard and in a lot of ways when people don't see it.

Q. Comment on how much of an impact it's made that Mike (Edwards) and Josh (Allen) and Jordan (Jones) all decided to come back for this year and how that affects the team.

MARK STOOPS: I think it definitely affects the team in a positive way because those guys came back with a mission. Their leadership is paying off and it sets a great example for our young players as well to see what they're doing and what they're doing. Those guys have vested. You see them on the sideline and I mean, I love them, they're just a good group, but there's some things in there that I even had to chuckle at. I love it. It takes me back a little bit. I don't really want to get into it -- I'll tell you a little bit -- but [Darius West](#) is over there, he's just like, he's a maniac. I love it. I mean he's just like, he wanted to rip people's faces off on the sideline and I'm like, easy here, big dog, you know, but like I love that. And it's not in a bad way, it's like, it's like getting everybody to play at a high level. They're all like that.

Q. How gratifying is it for you personally to have a defense play like that against an offense that is really good.

MARK STOOPS: Oh, of course it's gratifying, but it's gratifying as a team that plays like that and it's physical -- when we, when they don't convert on fourth and four -- and that was basically the game -- and we convert on fourth and two. At the end at that point that was critical plays and that's situational football that I was talking about with the team as well. And so it's very gratifying to have the team be able to play physical like that and get tough yards. When everybody in the stadium knows you're going to run and you still run it for yards, that's a good thing. And the defense coming up with big stops all day. Is this right? Did they have 201 yards of total offense? Is that true? Is that the total?

Q. Mississippi State had 16 penalties against them and a number of them were unsportsmanlike against themselves you got to be happy with how your players responded and didn't retaliate because

that happens a lot at times.

MARK STOOPS: We were actively discussing that on the sideline because some of our guys were getting extremely frustrated and we hugged them and Bunchy was one of them and just kept on talking to them about that's the good, you got to have the good pride. And that's very hard for players sometimes when they're getting and I don't want to point -- I don't want to throw attacks at them about what was going on, but there's a point sometimes when you have to accept things for your team. It takes a stronger man and it takes a big person to swallow that bad pride and have good pride and do that for your team. There was many cases of that tonight.

Q. How Terry managed the game tonight, he had that one pick, but outside of that he really controlled the offense?

MARK STOOPS: I thought he did a really good job against a good defense. And we did some good things and Terry looked like he did some good things as well.

Q. (Question on [Dorian Baker's](#) catch late in the first half to set up a UK touchdown.)

MARK STOOPS: Yeah, that was a big catch. It was really good to see that from Dorian and Terry to get that down to him and Dorian to come down with it and huge play. At that point we were losing 7-0 I think that was the only one we scored before half. That was a really big play. Nice catch by Dorian, good throw, and that was a big point as well.

Q. You mentioned the 201 yards of defense. I think there was only 56 on the ground. What does that say?

MARK STOOPS: They were averaging 310, 311, something like that, so just a phenomenal job by our guys. And again, there was nothing -- it was a good plan, it was a good solid plan, but there wasn't any crazy mojo going on, the guys just played hard and did some really good things and played stout.

Q. Another strong second half. That's starting to be a trend with this team.

MARK STOOPS: Again, you just got to look at the team. You mentioned the strength and I think can coaches and the team and the work and that's this league. You better be able to man up and you better be physical and you better be able to play four quarters. And super proud of them. And guess what? We have another opportunity to prove it seven days from now. So again it's going to be the same thing and we got some business to attend to tonight, so we're only going to celebrate this one for about 16, not 24.

Q. The ends are going to be dreaming big dreams of playing in the championship game. Do you embrace those games?

MARK STOOPS: Now come on now, you know what I'm going to say. I embrace the next week. I'm going to sit in here next week, we don't play good, you're going to be butchering me. I mean, come on, I mean it is what it is. And all these doors, again, I mean this, that, everything, oh, home game now, this. I get tired of it. We're knocking the dang doors down one at a time. So we're going to knock a door down every seven days is what we're trying to do, because one of you will come up with something ... I don't want to hear anything about this running quarterback, I don't want to hear anything about teeing it up for a home game and not playing good. What other doors do you guys got?

Q. Two weeks ago you were able to knock it down at Florida. Do you think that freed it up for your players?

MARK STOOPS: I definitely do. You have to learn to win, you have to have confidence. I don't believe in false confidence, you know that, I said it for years, I don't believe in that. You better earn the respect by the work that you put in. You get confident with your preparation. And I have seen our team get confident, I have. I've seen a difference in practicing to get better instead of just putting them in a situation or trying to learn plays. Just taking it to another level. I do feel that.

Q. Are you coming out healthy?

MARK STOOPS: I think. So I think we're in pretty good shape.

Q. (Question regarding if Coach Stoops and the team have been in contact with the Shemwell family)

MARK STOOPS: I did. I'm going to be honest with you, I would like to keep that private. What we have done and all that because I, just out of respect for that family it's important for us, I'm glad we played well to bring them that ball, but what we have done and all that, I would rather, out of respect for them, just kind of keep that in-house. But thank you.

FastScripts Transcript by ASAP Sports**Mississippi State Coach Joe Moorhead***Opening Statement...*

"First and foremost, I'd like to give credit to Coach Stoops and his staff and his program. Very hard fought win and an excellent job this season, 4-0, 2-0 in the SEC. So you have to tip your cap to them. Very disappointed in our performance tonight and the first sum comes to me. Ultimately I'm responsible for the product put on the field. We talked all week about the things necessary for us to win this game and that was toughness, the second word was composure, third was effort and the fourth was precision and I thought we played hard and I thought we played physical. Obviously by the number of penalties, 16 and the number of pre-possession and post-possession, those aren't the type of things you can do to win games. Thought we did play hard and certainly in all three phases didn't execute with the precision we needed to be a team of Kentucky's caliber."

On the offense line not living up to standard of the first three games, how much was UK and how much was MSU...

"I think it was a combination of both. They do a real good job with their scheme. Obviously 41 ([Josh Allen](#)) is an excellent player. The nose and both tackles are big space eaters that allow the linebackers to move around so you know we've got to give ourselves a chance by staying on schedule and not getting behind the sticks and I think you saw a lot of that today with false start penalties and things that didn't put us in very manageable third down conversion distances. So I'd say it was a combination of both."

On excessive personal penalties ...

"It was a lack of composure. Certainly we corrected it from week two. We were on the right path last week but it was an emotional game. We talked in the preseason about showing out emotions without being emotional and we didn't do that today. Again, that's all on me and my responsibility. we'll get it fixed."

On getting off to a hot start ...

"Hopefully, it would've turned out very different, get a stop on defense, get the ball back, have a positive first down play then we get a post possession personal foul, that puts us at second and extra-long and get a completion on third down becomes a longer distance to get and those things kind of trickle throughout the game."

On vibe on the sideline when the team had a couple of chances to tie...

"I think the vibe was positive up until it hit 21-7, then 28-7. And certainly for us to operate our best offensively we need to run the ball successfully and we wouldn't necessarily be able to do that and struggle a little bit with protection. Had some drops, had some misfires, just a combination of things that leads to the outcome we saw today."

Mississippi State Student Athletes

#32 Brian Cole, S

On your interception being a highlight of the night...

"Like I always say, it's the 11 guys that are on the field. We run a big box route and that's what we run a lot. And honestly, what gave it away was the Kentucky sideline, that's what made me get my head up and turn around and look. God takes care of the rest."

On the feeling in the locker room postgame...

"We are moving on already. Tomorrow's a new day and we just have to keep working and pushing and getting better. We are looking forward to next week."

On if defense was more emotional this week...

"Yeah. We beat ourselves up a lot. Kentucky was making plays as well, but we were letting [the mistakes we were making] get the best of us."

#7 Nick Fitzgerald, QB

On what you are feeling postgame...

"It sucks. No one ever likes losing. I'll credit it to them, they came out and played. We really just came out here and beat ourselves. You're not going to win a game with 16 penalties for a 150 yards or whatever it is. I feel like we were constantly behind the sticks on offense. It was kind of an uphill battle and you're not going to win that way."

On how being behind the sticks affected what the offense did or the play calling perspective...

"I feel like we really didn't establish a running game, so we had to focus on passing. To give credit to them, they had one heck of a pass rush and a lot of pressure."

On the communication on the sideline...

"Honestly when it comes down to it, late movements just got them. I don't know if there's anything I could've said that would've fixed it. We have to fix it in practice and work on staying firm and not moving."

#94 Jeffery Simmons, DT

On the match up with Benny Snell Jr,...

"He's a great running back. I told my teammates he backed everything he said up. I think he had like four touchdowns himself, it doesn't get any better than that."

On how he feels postgame...

"We just got outplayed. We just feel like Kentucky wanted it more. We have to come back next week, make changes and move on from it."

#87 Osirus Mitchell, WR

On Kentucky's defense...

"They came out there ready. They were fast, aggressive, physical and very well prepared."

On looking forward to the next game...

"We need to stay focused and humble. We don't need to let all the hype about the coach get to our heads. Overall we just need to stay focused."

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