



POSTGAME NOTES

GAME 11 ■ #21 MISSISSIPPI STATE (7-4, 3-4 SEC) VS. ARKANSAS (2-9, 0-7 SEC) ■ NOV. 17, 2018 ■ DAVIS WADE STADIUM

TEAM NOTABLES

- Senior defensive end Gerri Green and senior quarterback Nick Fitzgerald served as captains. Arkansas won the toss and elected to defer to the second half.
- Senior safety Mark McLaurin wore No. 99 during Saturday's contest in memory of the late Keith Joseph Jr.
- Senior defensive tackle Grant Harris earned the first start of his career in Saturday's contest.
- Senior offensive lineman Marlon Reese made his first career appearance as a Bulldog.
- Mississippi State's senior class has now won 31 total games, which is now tied for the sixth-most wins by a senior class in program history.
- Attendance for Saturday's contest was 57,772.

OFFENSE

- MSU has out-scored opponents 165-68 in the first half this season.
- State rushed for 287 yards on the ground Saturday, marking the seventh time this season MSU has eclipsed the 200-yard rushing mark. MSU has rushed for 200 or more yards as a team 24 times since the start of the 2016 season, and it has eclipsed 250 rushing yards in 17 of its last 31 games.
- With 475 yards of total offense, Mississippi State has logged 400+ yards of total offense six times this season.
- The Bulldogs are now 7-0 this season when logging 300+ yards of offense and 6-0 when the Bulldogs score 24+ points.
- State had three plays of 20 or more yards against Arkansas to bring its season total to 58.

DEFENSE

- MSU held its opponents to less than 14 points for the eighth time this season.
- Holding the Razorbacks to 69 yards on the ground, MSU has kept opponents under 100 yards rushing in five games this season. It has won all five of those contests.
- MSU totaled 12 tackles for loss to bring its season total to 85, which is now just 13 TFL away from the program's single-season record. MSU has recorded at least seven TFL in eight games this season
- With Johnathan Abram's forced fumble and recovery during the second quarter, Mississippi State's defense has recorded at least one turnover in 14-straight games.
- State has recorded an interception in 10 of its 11 games this season with C.J. Morgan's third-quarter interception.

PLAYER NOTABLES

QB NICK FITZGERALD

- Accounted for 212 yards of total offense and five touchdowns - four passing and one rushing. It was the 19th time in his career that he has thrown for multiple touchdowns. All four touchdowns were caught by different receivers.
- Has been responsible for 96 total touchdowns over his MSU career, which ranks second in program history and eighth in SEC history.
- It is just the third time in his career that he has thrown for at least four touchdowns in the game and the second time this season he has completed the feat.
- Rushed for a 2-yard touchdown with 10:28 in the second quarter to record the 43rd rushing touchdown of his career, giving him sole possession of first place in MSU history for career rushing scores. The mark also ties Auburn's Bo Jackson for seventh place in SEC history.
- Just the third quarterback in SEC history to have completed three seasons of 10+ passing and 10+ rushing touchdowns, joining Tim Tebow and Dak Prescott.

RB AERIS WILLIAMS

- Closed the game with 104 yards on the ground for the eighth 100-yard rushing game of his career.
- His career yardage now stands at 2,471, which ranks ninth all-time in MSU history.

RB NICK GIBSON

- Rushed for an 8-yard touchdown with 5:20 remaining in the second quarter to push MSU's lead to 17-0. The score was his first of the season and just the second of his career. His first collegiate touchdown came on Oct. 28, 2017, at Texas A&M.

TE JUSTIN JOHNSON

- Targeted three times and caught all three passes for a career-high 59 yards, including a 34-yard touchdown reception with 8:42 remaining in the third quarter. It was his fifth catch this season of 25+ yards.

WR AUSTIN WILLIAMS

- Targeted twice, reeling in both for fourth-quarter touchdowns (19 yards and 33 yards) and a career-high 52 yards.

WR KEITH MIXON

- Caught a 4-yard touchdown pass with 7:41 remaining in the third quarter for his first touchdown of the season. It was his first touchdown since Sept. 16, 2017, versus LSU.

S JOHNATHAN ABRAM

- Turned in a career performance on Senior Day with a team-leading and career-high 12 tackles, including seven solo stops.
- Added 3.5 tackles for loss, a career high, and matched his career best with 1.5 sacks. Abram also forced a fumble and recorded two quarterback hurries.
- First MSU player to record 10+ tackles and 3.5 tackles for loss since All-American Benardrick McKinney had a game-high 12 tackles to go along with a career-best 3.5 tackles for loss against UAB on Sept. 6, 2014.

LB ERROLL THOMPSON

- Turned in his second double-digit tackling performance of the season with 10, adding a career-high 2.5 tackles for loss.

CB JAMAL PETERS

- Set a career high with eight tackles, including five solo stops.

C.J. MORGAN

- Making just the second start of his career, collected a career-high four tackles and his second interception of the season.

S CHRIS RAYFORD

- During the third quarter, forced a fumble after a muffed snap on an Arkansas punt attempt and recovered it at the 4-yard line to set up an MSU touchdown on the following offensive play.



MISSISSIPPI STATE FOOTBALL

POSTGAME QUOTES

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Joe Moorhead | Head Coach

Opening Statement

JM: First and foremost, we would like to thank all of our veterans and people who have served in the armed forces. Today was a special day for them and certainly our great fans with the crowd we had throughout the entire season at home, going 6-1. We're really appreciative of everything the people in the armed forces do for us and of our fans for making this one of, if not the best environment in all of college football. I thought the kids responded well. I thought we played a complete game and executed at a high level in all three phases. We talked about creating explosive plays and converting on third down offensively. We were able to do that. We talked about stopping the run and making them one-dimensional, eliminating explosive plays on the defensive end and playing great in the red zone, and we were able to check that box. When I talked about making a game-changing play on special teams and creating positive field position for the offense, we were able to do that on our punt coverage teams. I'm excited about the win, and most importantly, for the senior class and their final game in Davis Wade Stadium. I know there were a lot of emotions. For them to cap it off with a performance like this against an SEC team, I couldn't be happier for those guys and everything they've done for me personally this year in the transition, and certainly over their four to five years here at Mississippi State. Hats off to them.

Q: Did Nick coming off the field for an injury and then going back in to throw the pass for the touchdown embody his toughness?

JM: "That was absolutely representative of Nick's [Fitzgerald] competitiveness and style of play. He's going to play 100 percent, 100 percent of the time. It's not cliché—he has a Bulldog spirit and Bulldog toughness to him. I think that shows up every single game that he's between the white lines."

Q: What kind of impact did Johnathan Abram have on the defensive end?

JM: "First, I don't think you have to have a 'C' on your chest to be a captain or a leader. Johnathan [Abram] isn't a captain or on the leadership council, but he's one of the best leaders on our football team—by example and emotionally. I think he wears his emotions on his sleeves in a very good way. I don't know if there's a guy on our team that enjoys the process more than him. He loves practice as much as he loves games, and what you see on Saturday is what you see during the week. For him to come out this year and build off what he's done in the past, moving to the STAR position where he really hadn't played, speaks volume of his football IQ acumen and his competitiveness. Certainly, he's been very productive all year."

Q: Can we get an update on Kylin Hill, and how would you characterize Aeris Williams' performance today?

JM: "Kylin [Hill] continues to be day-to-day with a lower body. I don't think we rushed him back at any point, but we want to make sure next time he comes back that he's 100-percent healthy and ready to go. I don't want to say we're being conservative, but we want to make sure next time he comes back, he's back. Aeris [Williams] had 104 yards. He ran the ball hard. He ran behind his pads. He, Nick, and [Dontavian Lee] got in there. I thought they did a great job. They ran for almost 300 yards. Aeris is a proven commodity and productive player at this level. When we said 'next man in,' he responded with his opportunity this week."

Q: What makes Aeris Williams such a good between-the-tackles runner?

JM: "One, his physicality and his strength. I'd say, two, his patience particularly with inside zone schemes in allowing the blocks to develop and then reading them. Once he makes a decision to hit it, he gets downhill very quickly. He falls forward all of the time. He's not a guy that one hit is going to bring him down, his physicality, toughness and patience obviously."

Q: Going back to when Nick [Fitzgerald] was shaken up, what was the reasoning behind letting him re-enter the game?

JM: He came off the field and it wasn't an injury. He had something in his eye. There were 13 minutes left to go in the fourth quarter. We were going to let him finish off that drive. We had planned to get [Keytaon Thompson] in the next drive, so we wanted to let him finish it off.

Q: How much did the running backs being involved help the passing game?

JM: I think when we are operating at our highest level offensively, it is built off the run. When we run the ball successfully, generally speaking, it forces people to commit numbers to the box, by support or by pressure, and that gives you one-on-ones on the outside. When we have been playing well offensively and teams commit people to stop the run, we have been able to take advantage of the opportunities on the outside.

Q: Did Nick's good day passing come from the running game was doing or was he just in a rhythm?

JM: I think he was in a rhythm. A lot of the stuff that we did in terms of the read game was inside zone and then a screen off of it. Most of the other stuff was true play action or drop-back pass stuff. He did a good job directing the protection to pick up pressures and he threw the ball well down the field, particularly in the second half. I thought it was a pretty complete game for him.

Q: What caused so much diversity among the receiving core?

JM: It may be a product of what the opposition was doing. [It was what] Arkansas was doing defensively. We kind of had the game plan where you go into it, when you are running the ball, two things happen: when you are reading it, the quarterback is going to pull or it is going to be handed off to the running back. Some of those are predetermined runs to the running back, but in terms of the pass game, a lot of our stuff is predicated on the coverage as to where the ball goes. I think we made a concerted effort this week in game plan to make there were opportunities for the Z, H, Y and X to make plays and I think our tight ends contributed pretty well today.

Q: When do you start looking at the game plan for next week?

JM: [We start] Tomorrow morning. In terms of football days we don't have a "Football Sunday." Tomorrow we will come in as a staff at 7 a.m., watch this game and then immediately get onto Ole Miss game plan. We will do that throughout the day. Then we will have a team meeting with the kids. Then they will have the film graded for them to watch on their own to allow us to formulate our game plan. Monday will be a "Tuesday." Tuesday will be a "Wednesday." Then, Wednesday will be a combination of "Thursday/Friday." [The week] Definitely gets thrown in the microwave [with the short week].

Q: In your coaching experience have you had those kinds of short turnarounds?

JM: Oh goodness yes. I was in the Mid-American Conference for four years. You have heard the term MAction. This is definitely MAction. There were [games] where we would play Saturday and have a quick turnaround and play on a Thursday or a Wednesday. I can remember one my last year [at Akron] we played on a Saturday, had a bye then didn't play until the following Thursday. We had a 20 day stretch between games. I have been on both ends of it. At [Connecticut] we played in the Big East and had some Thursday or Friday games, as well.

Q: Your defense has given up three touchdowns in seven SEC games, does this defense, even with all of its accomplishments, still surprise you?

JM: I think a couple of things. Coach [Bob] Shoop and his staff do an excellent job putting a game plan in place. It allows our kids to play fast play, play with confidence and play with physicality. The way these kids practice it's something to watch. It is something to watch. You turn on film during the week and it looks like a game. They are going 100 percent, 100 percent of the time. As a staff, philosophically, we always talk about practice habits becoming game realities. What they do during the week shows up on the field on Saturday. They have done an unbelievable job the entire season.

Johnathan Abram | S | Sr.

Q: What was it like growing up playing with a group like Jamal Peters and Leo Lewis?

JA: That was a major reason and part of why I came back and chose Mississippi State. Coming out of junior college, I had a choice to go pretty much anywhere, but when I was at Georgia as a freshman, that was one of the things that meant the most to me. When we played against Georgia Tech, it didn't mean that much to me. When we played against Auburn, it didn't mean that much to me because I wasn't from there. But, coming out and playing with all my friends on Senior Day at home is one of the best feelings ever.

Q: What's it going to mean to make a play against Ole Miss then?

JA: It's going to mean a lot. They came out and handled business last year, they got the Egg Bowl. We have to go up there and do what we have to do to get the trophy back.

Q: What have you liked these last two weeks about playing that STAR position?

JA: It just shows a little bit of my utility and that I can play pretty much everywhere. I get a chance to be around the ball more so that's why I did it.

Q: Joe [Moorhead] mentioned that you might not be a captain, but he considers you a captain for the most part because of your leadership ability. How do you approach that regard?

JA: Part of being a captain requires four years. Nick [Fitzgerald] and Gerri [Green] deserve that, I can't take that from them. I just utilize my role because I know a lot of guys follow me and look up to me, so I try to be the best role model I can be for all of the guys, young and old.

Nick Fitzgerald | QB | Sr.

Q: Did today live up to any dreams or expectations you might have had for senior Day?

NF: It definitely wasn't something I was trying to think about. I just tried to kind of put it out of my mind and let [those feelings] happen as late as it possibly could. Five years is a really long time. I've learned a lot, definitely been shaped by these coaches and the support staff around here into the young man that I am proud to be today. I couldn't be happier with the choice I made coming here and all five years being here.

Q: How special was it for you and Aeris [Williams] to have big games today?

NF: It was huge. I think that three or four years ago, when I got into my first game, we both had our first-ever touchdowns in a college game together in the same game. Since then we've kind of been a solid duo in that backfield. To have a day like this, including another senior, to go out there and have fun playing and put up huge numbers in front of the home crowd for the last time is awesome.

Q: How quickly can you flush this one and look ahead to Thanksgiving night?

NF: Tomorrow morning. I'll enjoy it tonight, spend time with my family. Tomorrow morning, wake up and start thinking about the next game. It's a quick turnaround on Thursday, got to workout, got to watch this film and got to get better.

Q: What was it about Arkansas defense that allowed you to have a big game today?

NF: Starting out, obviously I didn't start out very hot throwing the ball in the first half. I settled myself down and came out the second half [and had success]. They run a very simplistic defense in the first year there. They haven't gotten to really install any of the quirky things about it, so you see a lot of man, single-pressures and a lot of cover four. That is something that our offense is designed to attack and we went out there and executed. Definitely had a lot of time to throw the ball and huge gaps to run in.

Justin Jackson | TE | Sr.

Q: With all the seniors making plays, what did it mean for you to get into the end zone?

JJ: It meant a lot. It's been a long season. An unpredictable season. It felt good to get back in the end zone.

Q: How much did the run game open things up in the passing game?

JJ: We knew what to expect when we came out there. It opened up well, it didn't open up as we thought it would, but it opened up a few times and we took advantage of it.

Q: What do you take away from being able to score a touchdown on Senior Day?

JJ: That was my first touchdown in Davis Wade [Stadium] and it's my last game at Davis Wade [Stadium]. It meant a lot to me. Of course, it's a very emotional day, with it being my last game here and Senior Day. I blinked and [Senior Day] is here now. I enjoyed it and I'm glad I got to take advantage of this opportunity.

Q: What was it like to see Nick go out the way he did today?

JJ: It was good. I've been around Nick for so long. I've seen him progress, take hits and take adversity like to the head and it's been really good and emotional for me to watch him grow and I can grow with him.

Q: What was it like finding out that you had a starting position?

CM: Coach let me know the week before the game that I was going to get the starting job. That is something that I have been anticipating all year long. I worked hard, stayed true and trusted the process and I knew that my time was going to come if I just worked hard. When Coach gave me the starting job, I just went out there and did what I had to do.

Q: What has [Johnathan Abram] meant to your development as a safety, as a guy that has played in the SEC before he got here and been through the ringer?

CM: I look at John as a big brother, on and off the field. John is always on us making sure that we're focusing on the little things. Stuff like getting to class on time, going to study hall on time, making sure we're hydrated. John has been an awesome mentor, an awesome big brother and an awesome teammate. Even when the score was 45-6, John was still on the field making sure we're not lackadaisical and making sure that we're taking every rep, playing 100 percent. He's coaching me up on the field even as the game is over.

Q: Can you describe the moment when you made the interception?

CM: Yes, I can. It was a call that we had practiced all week, a fairly new call. I just executed, I saw the ball in the air. I watched the film and I knew it was coming based on the formation the offense had given us. I saw the ball in the air and just attacked it. I wanted to run it back of course, but I was tired and it was a long drive. I told myself, "just go down and celebrate the interception".

Q: How special has the last two weeks been for you to get this much playing time?

CM: It's extremely special. I'm extremely grateful for Coach Shoop giving me a chance and showing that he trusts me. Obviously, for the past two years I haven't gotten as much playing time, so it can be very discouraging. But, you go through something like this over the time you've watched great players come in front of you. You just need to stay true to the process, wait your turn, work hard and when your number is called, just be ready.

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Mississippi State Postgame Quotes

Chad Morris | Head Coach

Opening Statement

CM: This is completely unacceptable—unacceptable in all areas. Unacceptable coaching, unacceptable playing, unacceptable effort. It's not what we're about. It's not what this program is going to be built on. It's absolutely not accepted. We are going to find out. We're in a big gut-check time right now. With that, I'll open up for questions.

Q: How can you describe what went on?

CM: I think you look at, obviously, we had some opportunities, and we were unable to execute. I think that's the biggest thing, just a lack of execution. [We had] drops. We had guys open, and we couldn't get it. We had a touchdown call, we get it called back. We got guys running open, and getting knocked back. Lack of execution.

Q: Was [Cole] Kelley ill yesterday?

CM: That's right. He was sick, yesterday. Stomach.

Q: What did you see on the pick play that they called as pass interference?

CM: I haven't seen it. My view was obstructed. I just saw what was on the jumbotron.

Q: What did you think of [Nick] Fitzgerald's performance?

CM: I think I've said all week long that he's a quality football player, without a doubt. This is about the Arkansas Razorbacks, and the unacceptable effort in all areas of this program. That's what this is about. Yes, he's a great football player, he has a lot of records and won a lot of games. This is about the Arkansas Razorbacks.

Q: Would you have seen this performance coming based on practice this week?

CM: Absolutely not. Not one time. We had really good workouts. Our energy level has been high. Our attitude has been great.

Q: How do you address this going into the last week?

CM: We'll find out. It's a gut check. That's what it is. It's going to take a special person to come back in here tomorrow and put their best foot forward. If you don't have that, it's ok, but don't show back up. From coaching, to playing, to equipment, to [trainers] -- it's everything.

Q: What went into coach [John] Chavis coming down?

CM: We made the decision for him to come down [at halftime]. More so, defensively, for them to see the urgency in his eyes and his voice.

Q: You had a wide-open pass for [De'Vion] Warren, is that what you're talking about with missed plays?

CM: You have to make plays at any level. You have to execute. You get a call, you practice the call and you continue to rep it [all week]. I don't think [Warren] said 'Hey, I'm going to drop this ball'. Without a doubt, he didn't say that, but you have to execute. We're just not executing.

Q: What did you see from the line of scrimmage today?

CM: I thought we had some good things at times. Again, you get put in some long-yardage situations. Again, you get some things. I knew they were really good, talented upfront. Only [291] yards of offense, so not a whole lot.

Q: Is this the most frustrated or upset you've been after a game?

CM: I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed in the fact of the steps we've been taking in this program. It's just been unacceptable in all areas.

Q: What did you see in their ability to run the ball, outside of Fitzgerald?

CM: It was completely unacceptable.

Dre Greenlaw | LB | Sr.

Q: What did you think about the way Nick Fitzgerald operated today?

DG: He did some really good things. He's a good quarterback. He made some good passes and used his legs well, like he always does. They've got a great team. They did a lot of things, and we couldn't stop them.

Q: As a senior leader, what message do you have for your teammates?

DG: Like I said, you've got to figure out why you play this game. I play this game because I love football. I've loved football my whole life. Every Christmas, I asked for the same thing, a football. Football is just a part of me. I don't play because I try to win a bowl game or get to a bowl game. Obviously, you want the perks of those things, but at the same time, I play because I love the game of football. I love to put those pads on and run around with a football in my hand. I just hope everybody else has that same mentality and same process. I hope everybody has the mentality that we are out here to play football and get better for the love of the game.

Ty Storey | Jr. | QB

Q: Did you see these results happening, getting out of hand in the second half?

TS: No, I don't think anybody did. We have great coaches, we just have to put it together. That should never happen.

Q: In your opinion what happened in that third quarter, once the ball got rolling in their favor? It seemed like you guys couldn't do anything right.

TS: We can't let that happen. I know football sometimes rolls like that, but we have to step up and make sure stuff like that doesn't happen.

Q: Mississippi State's defense, what did they present to you guys today? Obviously, they were really getting off the ball.

TS: They brought a lot of stuff at us. We knew that they were a blitz-heavy team, we knew they had a lot of packages. We were ready for a lot of their stuff, but there was also some stuff they game planned up, it was good stuff.

Armon Watts | DL | Sr.

Q: You have a game left in your career here, other guys just one game left this season. How do you wipe this nasty taste out of your mouth and get ready for this last game and try to put forward a little something more positive for you guys to go out on?

AW: You have to control what you can control. For this team to get where they want to be, they have to play hard. For me, I have to go out how I want to be remembered and finish this season how I started it and just keep going.

Q: Do you think you guys played hard today? Do you think the team gave it all they had today, the coach wasn't so sure, what did the players think?

AW: I can't speak for any of the other players. I was just focused on the man that were in front of me and defeating him the whole game. I'm going to be looking at film to see what happened

Q: How disappointing was the effort?

AW: It was disappointing. The scoreboard [doesn't] lie. Film [doesn't] lie. We have to win one-on-one matchups and we failed to do that sometimes in the game.

De'Vion Warren | WR | SO.

Q: What was Coach Morris' message to the team?

DW: He was very disappointed in our actions and our body language. He told us it would be a gut-check tomorrow and we'd see who would really be man enough to be able to come in tomorrow after this, move on and put our best foot forward.