



Team Selection Teleconference

No. 11 LSU vs. No. 8 UCF

December 2, 2018



SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for taking a few minutes out of your afternoon and joining us for the 2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl head coaches' teleconference. This is an exciting time for us at the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl in welcoming LSU and UCF to our game. This will be the first time that LSU will compete in the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl, in our 48th annual game, and the first time the Southeastern Conference will have a team represented in the Fiesta Bowl since 2000 when Tennessee was here.

LSU is 9-3, finished 5-3 in the Southeastern Conference, and finished the season ranked number 11 in the College Football Playoff ranking. We all know they had a huge win over number 5 Georgia during the season.

Coach O did participate in the Fiesta Bowl in the past. He was a position coach for Syracuse University in the 1997 Fiesta Bowl, which featured Syracuse and Kansas State, and he told me just a few minutes ago that his wife was pregnant with twin boys at the time of that game.

On that note, Coach, welcome back to the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl.

COACH ORGERON: Thank you. What an honor for our football team. The team deserves the very best reward at the end of the season that is possible. We feel that we got that in the Fiesta Bowl. What a prestigious bowl. What a prestigious matchup on New Year's Day, New Year's Day Six Bowl versus UCF. Coach Heupel has done a tremendous job. They have a 25-game winning streak. This will be a challenge for our football team. Great matchup.

Q. Just asking a little bit just about you guys getting into your first New Year's Six Bowl in this era. What does that mean for this program and to finally be selected in this game?

COACH ORGERON: Well, it is a reward for our young men that worked very hard. But we've had a good season, and these guys started off unknown throughout the season. Had some very big wins throughout the season. We jelled as a football team. It is a great reward for our football team. Very well-deserved. New Year's Day Six Bowl. Great step for the Tigers.

Q. Hello, Coach. What's your assessment of UCF as a brand in college football?

COACH ORGERON: Well, they made themselves their own name, 25-game winning streak. Obviously I've watched them. I know they play a great brand of football. Obviously been recruiting Florida all my life. Great athletes in the state of Florida. Those guys are tough, and they've done a tremendous job.

Q. You referenced a 25-game win streak. You know this game. How hard is it to do that?

COACH ORGERON: It is tough. It's unbelievable that they've got that done, especially through a coaching change. They must have a great culture out there. Guys believe in winning. They know how to practice. They know how to compete. They know how to win. They lost their starting quarterback. Then they bring in the



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second team quarterback and win their last game. What a tremendous show of courage. What a football team. I know Randy Shannon, defensive coordinator. I know what type of coaches these guys are. A tremendous football team.

Q. I heard someone reference it earlier on ESPN so I guess I just wanted to kind of ask you. Has Devin [White] or Greedy [Williams] or any of the other draft-eligible guys given you any indication they plan to skip the bowl game?

COACH ORGERON: No, we haven't had talks with all our players yet. Obviously, I will be speaking to most of them. I'm not through talking to most of them yet. But none of that has been resolved totally yet.

Q. Coach, Kristian Fulton, can he play in the bowl game?

COACH ORGERON: No, he won't. Kristian's going to receive an operation on his foot, on his ankle. And he's been operated already. He won't get to play. His status won't be known for spring ball yet. I need to check to see how he will recuperate from his operation.

Q. A lot of your fans have been ticked off since that Texas A&M game. I'm curious as a head coach, it is easy to say, "Okay, move on and move past it." Things happen like that. How do you deal with that emotionally, you know, after some things don't go your way, like they did in that game?

COACH ORGERON: You know, it's done with. That's over with. We're moving forward. We're in the Fiesta Bowl now. Our focus is going to be on UCF. We're not talking about that again. We said all we had to say. Now we're pressing on to UCF.

Q. Last year when UCF beat Auburn, there were some out there who questioned how motivated Auburn was to be in that game. I was wondering if you could just talk about your team's motivation of going into this one and this matchup.

COACH ORGERON: We're highly motivated. This is where our team wanted to go. When the possibilities of coming up to certain bowls came up, in fact, our team wanted to go to Fiesta Bowl.

And we have complete respect for UCF. We're going to be highly motivated. We're not happy the way the season ended the last game. Our guys are going to be ready to play.



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Q. Congratulations on your accomplishments. The earlier question about the guys and their opportunity to maybe decide their bowl fate. Every coach who's been in this game as long as you have, I'm sure you can see it from both sides. You want them to participate. You want them to be a part of your team. But you also understand their future and what they have at stake. How have you, I guess, reconciled that in the last couple of years, as this has become maybe more and more acceptable or respected?

COACH ORGERON: Last year, we had Derrius Guice. He played. High draft choice. I talked to Derrius about representing the state of Louisiana. He's done a great job about finishing strong.

And to me, this is about your team. This is about not an individual. It is one team, one heartbeat. So hopefully we can get all of our guys playing. I've talked to some guys. Haven't talked to every one of them yet. I'll probably have a final decision for most of the guys this week.

Q. If I could, just another one. The bowl preparations, how important are they to not only finish this year but really start the 2019 season?

COACH ORGERON: 15 great practices. I can remember being in Miami with Jimmy Johnson. Those are some of the best practices I've been with, about developing a football team, developing a championship football team. We have a lot of young guys that are going to need reps. We have some different things we want to do on offense. We can implement them during the 15 practices. We have got some things on defense we need to get better at.

This is going to be a tremendous bowl preparation not only to prepare for UCF but also have a couple of days just working on the LSU Tigers to get better.

Q. Coach, I'm curious to know, you've been around this game for a few years. Do you think the perception of the non-Power 5 conferences has changed in the last, I don't know, decade or five years or whatever?

COACH ORGERON: Sure.

Q. How do you see those teams' progression?

COACH ORGERON: Sure. With the 85 scholarship limit, you can see football has been equalized. You know, when I was at Syracuse, we used to go to Florida and get maybe the school -- the players that Florida, Florida State and Miami wouldn't get. Now UCF's getting them. South Florida's getting them, FAU, FIU, and it is a great conference. Those guys are staying home.



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We used to get great players from Florida that would come to Syracuse and be outstanding players. They're staying home now. So That gives them the respect around the country. And also a 25-game winning streak, you have to look at that.

Q. One more, if you don't mind. When do you think this non-Power 5 can break through? This is two straight undefeated years and they're not in the top four. Is that a gradual progress for a program like that?

COACH ORGERON: Yeah, you know, obviously that's not in my wheelhouse so I don't know. Obviously we respect them. Obviously I think they're one of the top teams in the country. They've proved it. They played Auburn last year and had a very good game against Auburn. We're going to need to be ready to play some very good football teams.

SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: Coach Heupel, thank you. Congratulations on a really tremendous 25-game winning streak, and I think most of us were watching yesterday, especially that second half that you had down there in your home stadium. Congratulations on a 12-0 season, 25 wins in a row over the last two seasons. And a number 8 spot in the final CFP rankings. Would you like to give an opening statement, Coach?

COACH HEUPEL: Yeah, just obviously we're really excited about the opportunity that our football team has earned. You know, playing in the Fiesta Bowl is a great honor. I have a tremendous amount of respect for LSU, their program and their football team this year, and excited about the opportunity to go play them.

Q. Coach O, I just wanted to ask, you've been here to the Fiesta Bowl. What can you tell LSU fans that haven't been out here just about making their first trip out here to the Fiesta Bowl.

COACH ORGERON: Well, first of all, I know they're going to be there. We have a tremendous following of LSU people. They're very proud of our football team. And, also, we have a big following in Southern California. Those guys have a Crawfish Bowl every year. They're going to be excited to be out there. It is a wonderful bowl. It's one of the top bowls I've ever been to. It's a beautiful place with a lot of things to do, great sunshine, great people, great eating, and I know there is some great partying that our Louisiana people would love to partake in. But we're going to need them. We're going to need them in a football game against a very tough UCF football team.



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Q. You talked this season about the makeup of this team and the grit of this team, for lack of a better word. Obviously, statistically maybe y'all don't have some of the best numbers in the country but you guys have won nine games against a very difficult schedule and despite some key injuries along the way and that sort of thing. What about this team has allowed you guys to have that kind of success to get to this point, to the New Year's Six Bowl?

COACH ORGERON: We're playing as a team, grit, everybody together. No simple stories. Plus 12 in the turnover ratio. A great field goal kicker. For the most part we've been excellent on special teams, played complementary football, field position football. When we needed offense, they showed up. I think our assistant coaching staff has done a tremendous job. There's great leadership on our football team. Overall team grit.

Q. Coach Heupel, I was wondering, what was the feeling in the room with the players when you guys got the announcement about going to the Fiesta Bowl today?

COACH HEUPEL: I was not in the room with the players here. Being in a championship game, we missed a week on the road recruiting. So early this morning I took off and have been on the road recruiting all day.

I know that our players -- in talking to a couple of people who are back there, our players are excited about the opportunity to go out to Phoenix and play in a great bowl game. I've coached in it before. The people treat you tremendously well. It is a great environment. And, obviously, we recognize that we're playing a great opponent in LSU and our players are excited about that.

Q. Was there any disappointment for not being mentioned as one of the teams in the Semifinals?

COACH HEUPEL: Yes, our football team was disappointed in not having the opportunity to go earn that on the football field. Absolutely. They knew that going into the meeting tonight. They had a feel that that was probably going to happen. There's great excitement about having the opportunity to go play in a very special and great bowl game and play a great opponent.

Q. Coach, kind of along the same thought lines last night, you and Danny [White] both felt your team deserved an opportunity. Now that that opportunity is not there, do you have any desire that the format changes in the future?

COACH HEUPEL: I don't have any control of whether the format will change. I think inevitably it will change. But, you know, now we just push forward and move on to our next opportunity.

Q. I know you haven't started looking into game planning or anything like that yet, of course. But how will you go about kind of game planning for a team that you've only seen one game out of their quarterback since [McKenzie] Milton's injury?



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COACH ORGERON: Obviously it's going to be tough. We looked at the last game really hard. Obviously they are going to put in new plays. They have 15 practices. But so will we. We want to tweak our offense a little bit and do some different things.

The first three days are going to be just against LSU, tweaking things we need to tweak. It's going to be like spring ball on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. And then the next week we'll start game planning. So we're going to go two weeks of game planning versus UCF and three days of like spring practice for ourselves.

Q. Kind of going off that as well, you know, Darriel Mack, what do you see in him, Ed? And did you get a chance to watch that game at all and what he might bring as a player?

COACH ORGERON: I watched a couple of plays. Obviously we were busy doing other things. I can't comment on it right now because I don't know enough.

Q. Josh, just a lot going on when McKenzie [Milton] went down. How confident were you in [Darriel] Mack, and what did you think about his performance Saturday?

COACH HEUPEL: He performed extremely well. Did some things early in the football game that he would like to have back but continued to have poise, great confidence in himself. Our coaching staff and players around him had confidence in him.

You know, since he's gotten this opportunity, early in the year against East Carolina, he's continued to prepare and practice with great urgency. He's continued to develop. Everyone in our program has a lot of confidence. I think you can see that in the way that we called the game last night. We were really aggressive and put the ball in his hands. And, obviously, he took the opportunity and ran with it and played extremely well.

Q. And what do you see in this defensive back group with LSU and how [Darriel] Mack might handle that?

COACH HEUPEL: I have not had an opportunity to watch them. Through the years having seen LSU -- I haven't been in that league -- in the SEC for a couple of years. They're going to be long and athletic. They're going to run really well. They're going to be powerful and explosive up front. They pose a lot of issues defensively.

Offensively they're going to have a bunch of skill guys that are big-time weapons and have the opportunity to make explosive plays when they get the ball in their hands. They're going to pose issues and things that we got to be able to handle in all three phases of the game.



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Q. You had a lot of experience at top-tier Oklahoma, top-tier program. What was your perception of the non-Power 5 conferences at that point? And moving forward, has that changed at all? And what do you think of them now? Obviously you're in one. But what do you think of it now?

COACH HEUPEL: When I looked at the AAC, I saw a group of universities and football programs that played really good football, that had great football players and had really good coaching. Believed that when I was on the outside looking in.

Now that I'm in the inside, I believe that just as strongly. I believe in the power of this conference, and I believe that top-tier teams in this league have an opportunity to go play with anybody any Saturday.

Q. What did you bring to the program this year? Any tweaks in the offense, or how did you manipulate the change from last year to this year?

COACH HEUPEL: Yeah, we are different than they were offensively a year ago. There are some things that carry over that are similar; there's some things that are different in what we do. I thought our kids bought into the changes wholeheartedly. They grew extremely quickly in what we were doing offensively. That's why we've been able to have the amount of success we've had offensively.

Q. As a follow-up to some of the Playoff questions, what more do you feel like this program needs to do to find itself in the discussion to be in the top four? Because it doesn't seem like the committee even really discussed it that much this year.

COACH HEUPEL: I'm not sitting in that room so I don't know what else this program needs to do. We're going to continue to compete at a high level and continue to go play football games and hopefully win a bunch of them.

Q. We've seen that Greedy [Williams] has announced he's going into the draft. He's posted that on Twitter. Just kind of wanted to know your thoughts about that and just what you -- just kind of what you wish for him.

COACH ORGERON: I wish him the best. Obviously if that's what he wants to do, we wish him and his family the best. I didn't know that was posted yet. We did have a meeting. We're going to have a final meeting. But if that's what him and his family want -- they told me he wasn't going to play and that he's going into the draft. We wish him the best.

I haven't met with all of my seniors yet. I was going to announce it at the end when I had a final meeting with everybody. We wish him the best. He's a tremendous young man.



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SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: We'll stick around for one or two more with Coach Heupel. Coach O, thank you very much for your time this afternoon. Good luck in your preparation, and we know we'll be in touch with you soon and see you out here in sunny Arizona.

COACH ORGERON: Hey, Josh, congratulations. What a great job with your team.

COACH HEUPEL: Ed, thank you. Appreciate it. Same to you.

Q. Josh, UCF has played out here once before. Do you sense that there's, from what you know of how that experience went, that the fans will be excited to come back out here again?

COACH HEUPEL: Absolutely. Since I've gotten here, fans, our alumni have talked about their experience out there. Felt like it was absolutely first class.

I've coached in the game. I know firsthand just the way the committee treats the players, the coaches, the entire athletic department is first class. The way the city embraces the game and the fans that are traveling in and the opportunities that they give them. They're inside the city. It's unique. It's one of if not the best bowl games out there in the entire country.

Q. Congratulations on your accomplishments this year. Just wanted to kind of get a feel for, you know, with a lot of the schools that we face, it could be a disappointment that they didn't make their ultimate goals. With the team that you've had and had so much success with, what is their motivation to continue in a bowl situation where maybe their ultimate goal wasn't achieved?

COACH HEUPEL: For our football team, we will push forward and we'll move on to this opportunity. It's unique. It's special. Again, we have an opportunity to go play a great football team and continue to put our stamp on our football program and continue to push our logo and brand across the entire country. So it's a great opportunity for us. Our players are excited about it, and we'll be ready to go play football.

Q. Having had success against Auburn last year, another SEC team, do you feel like the preparation was warranted? Could you speak to, I guess, what maybe you saw in that situation versus an SEC team that could prepare you for this situation?

COACH HEUPEL: Our kids are confident, and, obviously, we've got a lot of work to get prepared for this football game. But I think every game is different, every matchup is different because the personnel is so different. So when we get in to tape, we'll get to work on these guys, and we'll be ready to play when the time comes.

SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: Thank you, everybody, for joining us this afternoon. Coach, thanks for joining us, and the media. We look forward to working with you throughout the month here leading up to the game on



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January 1st. We invite you to visit fiestabowl.org for more information, and in the media room is the link to request credentials for the game. Also to follow our social media channels, @fiesta_bowl is our handle, and we'll be posting a lot of content and information there as well.

If there are any questions, please do reach out to us at the Fiesta Bowl office or either of the school's communication departments. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.