



**2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl  
Head Coach Press Conference**  
No. 11 LSU vs. No. 8 UCF  
December 31, 2018



**MODERATOR:** Good morning, everybody. Good morning. Happy new year. Happy New Year's Eve to everybody. We've had a long week here at the 2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl. It is almost kickoff time.

We have one more event with our two esteemed head coaches. I wanted to introduce the Mayor of Glendale. Mayor Jerry Weiers will have a few gifts to our two head coaches. Mayor?

**MAYOR WEIERS:** Good morning, everyone. Good morning, coaches. We wanted to surprise you. Rather than having that sunny hot weather that you're both accustomed to, we wanted something a little bit different here, so we got you some real football weather for tomorrow's game. Welcome to Arizona.

Specifically, welcome to my city, Glendale. We're really proud that you're here. I want to wish both of you success tomorrow. I'm sure it will be a great game. Thanks so much for being here.

We have a couple of baskets for you. They're from world famous Cerreta's chocolates. I don't know if you want to hold them until the game's over or snack on them tonight, but there's incredible candy in there made right in Glendale. It is a family-run business. We brought you both a couple of baskets. We would like to give you both baskets, take a quick picture, and then we'll be out of here. Thank you. Good luck tomorrow.

**COACH HEUPEL:** Thank you.

**COACH ORGERON:** Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** All right. Before we get to the two gentlemen to my left, just a quick reminder about today's schedule. At 9:30 over at Phoenix Children's Hospital, Coach Orgeron and his wife, Kelly, are going to be delivering hope gift baskets to children patients at Phoenix Children's Hospital, in case you wanted to go over to that.

At 10:00 a.m. at Arizona Helping Hands, the UCF family, including family and mothers and fathers of the student-athletes on the UCF football team, will be volunteering at Arizona Helping Hands.

Then at 1:30 p.m. at the Phoenix Zoo, there will be an orangutan that will predict the winner of tomorrow's game. So these two gentlemen, their teams have nothing to do with tomorrow, it is all up to the orangutan at the Phoenix Zoo. We have two T-shirts, and the orangutan will pick the winner based on which T-shirt it interacts with first.

First we're going to turn it over to the man to my immediate left, Coach Orgeron, of the LSU Tigers, the visiting team in tomorrow's game, bringing in a record of 9-3.

Coach, why don't you go ahead and give us a quick opening statement this morning.



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**COACH ORGERON:** First of all, I want to thank the Fiesta Bowl again for a great week for our families and our team. It is one of the best bowls we've attended.

I want to congratulate Coach Heupel for a tremendous job. What a great football team he has. I love watching them play. I love the way he coaches. Interacting with our coaches. Their team has been first class. I want to wish them the best of luck. This is going to be a big challenge. This is a great event for the LSU Tigers and a great finish to an outstanding season.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you, Coach.

One quick fast fact: LSU is 8-0 in games after a loss under Coach Orgeron. The last time they lost back-to-back games was November of 2015.

As I introduce Coach Heupel, one fast fact. We all know about UCF's 25-game winning streak. So I looked it up real quick. The last time UCF lost a game, we had a different president sitting in the White House.

With that introduction, Coach Heupel, welcome to the Valley, and the stage is yours.

**COACH HEUPEL:** Thank you.

I just want to again thank everyone from PlayStation and the Fiesta Bowl for hosting us. Our football family is truly grateful for the opportunity that you guys are giving us this week. Our team has enjoyed the festivities. As we've gotten closer to kickoff, we're certainly looking forward to tomorrow afternoon, playing a great opponent in LSU, and looking forward to going out and competing.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you, Coach.

At this point, we'll open it up for questions. We ask that you please raise your hand. We do have mic runners on either side.

**Q. Good morning, guys. This is a question for both of y'all to answer in succession. Throughout the week, kind of a final answer moment. Start with you, Coach O.**

**I know you've been watching a lot of film lately, at least for UCF. When you watch that video, what jumps off the screen for you? What do you see?**

**COACH ORGERON:** The speed in which they run the offense and the execution. No one has really stopped them yet. They wear teams out. They make a lot of plays in the fourth quarter. The execution that [Coach Dave] Aranda's defense uses, he uses a 4-3, cover one guy. They do a great job of pressing and rerouting, and they play great fundamental ball and they tackle. These guys play position minutes.



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**Q. Coach Heupel, same thing to you, except switch. You've obviously watched a lot of tape lately for LSU. When you watch them, what jumps off the screen to you?**

**COACH HEUPEL:** I think the way they play three phases of the game together: offense, defense, special teams. I think, offensively and defensively, when you look at them, besides the schemes, it's their size, their mass up front on both sides of the line of scrimmage. Athletically, on the defensive line as well, their ability to get after the quarterback on third-down situations. I just think their length and athleticism in the skill positions are special and unique.

**Q. Josh, for a guy who played in junior college, guys doubted you every step of the way, what has the season meant and what has it meant to be capping an undefeated season for you personally?**

**COACH HEUPEL:** It's just the next opportunity for us to go out and compete as a football team. I don't ever look too far in front. I definitely don't look behind. We just go out, compete, and play as hard as we possibly can. We're looking forward to this opportunity. Our players have enjoyed their time out here. We've had a mantra of playing the next game. We're only as good as our next performance. We're looking forward to the opportunity of this one to give ourselves a chance to go 1-0 one more time.

**Q. This question is for both of the coaches. Football comes down to execution. I'm wondering, how far does desire and hunger carry a football team, especially on a stage like this?**

**Coach O, if you could start.**

**COACH ORGERON:** I think it has been a remarkable football team this year, the character and the leadership and the want to. When you play the schedule that we played, you come down to some tough games and it comes down to grit. You're behind in the fourth quarter, you have to find a way to win. I think the grit, the leadership, the character is going to be a big key in winning the game tomorrow for both teams.

**COACH HEUPEL:** I think this game is all about the intangibles. You need talent, absolutely. Championship football teams, you know, in games like this, I think it comes down to your ability to handle adversity, to focus on the things that matter, which come from leadership from within the locker room. Championship seasons are special because of the character that you have inside of your locker room.

**Q. Josh, you look back a lot of times, but when you look back at the season, what has made it sort of special to you and what stood out with this group of players?**

**COACH HEUPEL:** I think the thing that I'll look back on this season, being in year one of our program together, the thing that I will look back on and remember is, one, the love, the brotherhood that exists inside of our locker room. They truly care about one another. And I think the ability of our



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staff and players to merge and to form a family in a short amount of time. Time and energy that we put in January and February leading into spring ball and getting real relationships with our players, I think, was extremely important. So that would be the biggest takeaway for me from this season.

**Q. Coach O, you said last year the preparation for the Notre Dame game, you felt like you guys didn't do your best. What did you learn from that experience and how has the preparation this time around compared?**

**COACH ORGERON:** It has been different. It started with me. Attention to details from the first practice, demanding, doing things right on a daily basis at practice, having great practice, having team dinners, making them game like, having curfew, demanding everybody is in for curfew. We've had 100% attendance at every curfew. Everybody's been early to meetings. The awareness levels of the competition it's going to take to win this football game. This is going to be a battle, just like we've had many battles this year. We're going to have to play our best football game. I think we've had our best practices, but we'll see tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, have you ever been in a position before where you're so thin at one position, cornerback, going into this game?**

**COACH ORGERON:** You know, I was thinking about that orangutan because maybe give him a couple of snaps tomorrow morning. Maybe we could use him in a couple of positions there.

But, you know, those guys are going to have to perform. And the high rate of speed that these guys are going to run plays, we're going to have to alternate our guys. So there will be some guys who haven't played before that are going to have to step up. We have a saying, "We put 11 men on the field and we fight like Tigers. It doesn't matter who's under that helmet; they have to perform just like the other team has to perform." So it's going to be a test for some of our guys.

**Q. Coach O, obviously, UCF is going with Darriel Mack at quarterback. I'm just wondering what you think of him and what you've seen on film from D.J. Mack.**

**COACH ORGERON:** Outstanding runner. He looks like a vet coming in. He didn't blink, led his team to wins just like they know how to win. I'm sure that he has been taking snaps all season and been prepared. And it looks like, when he got in there, they had a plan for him. He's big and he's physical and he's hard to tackle. It's kind of like playing a wildcat formation in every play. I think the guy is an excellent player.

**Q. For UCF, winning a game like this continues to help with their national respect and their brand as a whole on a national stage. For your program, what does a win in a game like this mean going forward?**



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**COACH ORGERON:** First of all, we've felt like we've had an excellent season. Going into the season, nobody knew about what we had, and there was a lot of predictions here and there. We blocked out the noise.

We're very disappointed in the outcome of our last game, and there were some factors there that we couldn't control. And we don't like losing. Nobody does. We've got a chip on our shoulder. We're going to play hard.

There were some things in our last game that we could have controlled that we didn't control. We plan on doing that tomorrow.

So winning ten games, winning a bowl, the Fiesta Bowl, our first New Year's Day Six Bowl, will say a lot about our program, taking the next step. It helps in recruiting, it helps in the spring, it kind of makes the next seven months some good months and positive notes predicting for the next year.

I've been on both sides. This is my third year. When we beat Louisville, a pretty good football team, we had a good spring and a good recruiting year. Last year we lost a tough loss to Notre Dame on the last play, and it wasn't a good spring.

So we know the outcome of winning this game, what it predicts for the future.

**Q. Ed, you've talked about what it would mean for this kind of win for your program. It seems like throughout this week your team has been pretty relaxed. How did you guys approach it as just from a mental standpoint?**

**COACH ORGERON:** We wanted them to be relaxed. We wanted them to focus in on the task at hand when we needed to. But this is also a bowl. This is a reward for them. This is the first time our guys have come out to Arizona. So whether they went hiking or whether they did something that they haven't done before, I'm glad that they did it. They've been in a good mood. I like them to be relaxed.

But, tomorrow, they understand it's going to be an intense game for 60 minutes. It's going to be an early game. We're going to have an early-morning meeting tomorrow morning to get them up, get them going. It's going to be a challenge, but I think they're ready for it.

**Q. It seems like both sets of players have had a great time out here. Do you guys worry, if there's playoff expansion, that it would sort of take away from the bowl experience for players?**

**COACH ORGERON:** You know, that's out of my wheelhouse, man. I don't know. If they have a playoff expansion, they actually go in it, we're going to go. I'll tell you that. We're going to go with a smile, I promise you that. If they don't, we're going to try our butts to get into that thing if that's where things are going.



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I'll say this to you: The magnitude of this bowl for us has been huge. The approach we have taken, this is a first-class bowl. We're fortunate to be in this bowl. It is a reward for a great season. You can't get in a New Year's Day Six Bowl without having a great season and without having a great football team. This is a prestigious bowl. We're taking it like it is. This would be a prestigious win for our football team.

**COACH HEUPEL:** I think inevitably the playoff is going to expand. I think that's just the way that it's headed. At the same time, for our players, we absolutely love this experience. We've had a great time here in the Valley. And it's a unique opportunity for players to get outside of their region -- I'm just talking bowl games in general -- to get outside of where they're from and experience something completely different outside of their normal culture.

**Q. Even though the Texas A&M game was so long ago, how much does that game serve as a motivation heading into this one?**

**COACH ORGERON:** It's a big motivation for us. If you're a competitor, there's a motivation to go out on the field and do it again. It's like riding a bike. You get knocked off the bike, you want to get back on and you want to ride it. So that's just the way we approach it.

And this is a game that we want to play well. This is about LSU. And I'm sure coach says the same thing about his team. We can't control the other opponent. It's never going to be about them; it's about the LSU Tigers. We have to control what we can control to do the things that we can do well. They're going to do their best. You don't get to this bowl without having a great football team on both sides.

This is going to be a big challenge for us, one of our biggest challenges all year.

**Q. We know the playoff champion is going to be unbeaten this year. I'm wondering if UCF can find a way to beat LSU tomorrow. Will the Knights be compelled to declare themselves national champions this year?**

**COACH HEUPEL:** That's way out of my wheelhouse and way out of what we're thinking about. That's the reality of it. We're playing a great opponent. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Coach and what he's been able to do there at LSU, the season that they've had. I understand, watching the tape, the type of opponent we're playing. We're going to go out and compete for 60 minutes and have fun doing it.

**Q. Coach Heupel, do you have a gauge and a sense of how your team is mentally prepared for this game at this point? How have they practiced up to this point?**



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**COACH HEUPEL:** They've practiced well. This is a reward for them. They've spent eight months getting to this -- or, really, 12 months getting to this point, I guess, at this point, and fighting, battling throughout the regular season and then a conference championship game to get here.

Early in the week they've had unique experiences, things that they've never had the opportunity to do. As we've gotten closer to the game time -- and, really, up to week two, when it's time for football, they've focused in. They've dialed into the preparation. They'll be ready to kick off tomorrow at 11:00.