



Weekly Press Conference Quotes
Head Coach Luke Fickell and Senior Quarterback Desmond Ridder
Nov. 30, 2021

Head Coach Luke Fickell

Opening statement

"This is everything that we've worked an entire year for and that's first and foremost. This is something that our guys have made an objective and we've got to make sure that we are not denied, nor distracted by all the different things, and there's a lot of things. Not just things with me, but with all of our guys. Obviously, Houston is a great football team. To me, as well balanced of a football team as we've played all year, offense, defense, and special teams. You guys can look at the stats and see that stuff, they're as complete a team as we've played all year and that's why it's going to be huge. This is another opportunity for our seniors. Not just our seniors, I always say our seniors, but for our entire program to play in front of an incredible crowd and student section with an opportunity to win a championship at home. Those things obviously don't come around all that often and to actually do it at home, obviously there aren't a whole lot of conferences that have that. We have got a challenge, an 11-1 Houston team that lost game one and has run off 11-straight. It's going to be an incredible challenge with a coach that I think has done as good a job all year as Dana Holgorsen (Houston FB Head Coach) has. I don't know where everybody had them picked and ranked to start the season, but what they have done this year, to watch them grow as a football team and program, is really impressive. We've got to make sure, no matter what, every one of our kids and every one of our coaches understands that this is what we've worked an entire year for and nothing, nothing, can keep us from doing what we need to do. That has a lot to do with not just playing on Saturday, but has more to do with the preparation it takes to win a championship."

On Houston's defensive aggressiveness

"Well, obviously the offensive guys have to do a great job of that. It's hard to simulate at times, when you're playing some of those offenses. Go back to Navy and it's hard to simulate the speed of how you do things and how they do things. It's similar for them defensively. It's hard sometimes to simulate the speed and the aggressiveness of what they do, especially with their guys up front. It's a challenge and we've seen it all year. Watching, not knowing that this is what it was going to get to. I don't know that the offensive guys get to see their defense that often because they don't watch those cross-over games, but I know, being in the defense a lot more, we are able to see a lot of their aggressiveness and see what they've done all year. It's a

challenge and we always talk about the other way around when you're facing a tempo team or facing UCF that throw the ball down field going mach speed or a Navy team that runs the option, well it's the same way on the other side. It's really difficult to prepare for something that you probably haven't seen as much all year... They'll throw a lot on our guys. We've got to get the looks and that scout crew has got to try and simulate the best they possibly can so our guys can feel what it's really like.

On keeping his head down from outside noise

"I don't say I do a lot of things very good, but one thing I like to think I do pretty well is keep my head down and not get into all the other stuff. I don't look at my phone, I don't read a whole bunch, so for me, I don't think it's as big a deal. But I know it's not about me, it's about the 18–22-year-olds, it's about our whole program. We obviously are aware of all the different things on everybody's plate, but we've got to have enough maturity, we've got to have enough respect for what it is we've all done, and especially what these seniors have done to not allow it to be a distraction to anything we do."

On one final time for his seniors to win a championship at home

"It's an awesome feeling. I'm so happy for those guys. When you had that last senior day, you say this is our last guaranteed opportunity. We always use those terms, kind of like what we say with seniors, "this is your last guaranteed opportunity to play college football." We all know there are probably more games, but when you play that last game, you are hoping maybe you would have another home game, but we always refer to it as our last guaranteed opportunity. This is our last opportunity for these guys to play in front of that home crowd, to play in front of that student section and in Nippert Stadium. I'm happy, I'm excited for them. Obviously, we love having it at home, but it means a little bit more. I know that just from what these guys have been through and where they were 5 years ago. It's another great opportunity.

On job rumors

"I don't know what there is to address. Like I said, for a guy that keeps his head down and very rarely answers his phone or anything like that, I don't talk to a whole of people. So, there is nothing, that's the crazy thing. It's all whatever is being said and different things. There is no speculation. Is the job open? I guess it is, but I wouldn't know if somebody didn't tell me. It's the same way I am with rankings, it's the same way I am with a lot of things with exception to recruiting... I understand, most importantly, all I care about is the guys that sit in these seats to be honest with you, that they know what's most important to all of us and make sure we've all got to find ways to make sure our minds are focused on the things we've got to do. I'm not the only guy with things rolling around in their head. We've got plenty of guys that have opportunities to go to the NFL. We've got plenty of guys that have opportunities to make decisions about coming back. We've got seniors, there's this covid year hanging over everybody's head, and they've got decisions to make. We've all got things, and what these guys have done a phenomenal job all year of is finding ways to not let that affect how we handle our business. And I mean that together, we haven't always been perfect. The things that we do in the locker room and on the football field, we rely a lot on the trust, respect and love we have for one another."

Senior Quarterback Desmond Ridder

On if anything changed for prepping for Championship game

"No, nothing changed for us. If we were having to change something, then we weren't doing something right in the first twelve weeks of the season, so we're preparing this game as we do any other game. We know it's a big game we've got on Saturday, against a great opponent, so we're just preparing like we would any other game and just knowing that our attention to detail needs to be that much better."

On how he is preparing to go against a good defense

"Yeah, their front four is where they go on their defense. It's backed up by good players behind him, but they don't pressure much as far as blitzes. They like to get after the quarterback with their front four. I think they lead the conference with 43 sacks, so we know our offensive linemen have a challenge in front of them. For me, it just means I have to get the ball out that much quicker, and when I do get the ball out, our playmakers need to make plays. You know, they don't do a lot in the back end to confuse us, as a quarterback or anyone else, but they just play ball. You know that's what we like to do. Once the ball goes down, we just play. I think if we can handle the front four, it's going to be a good game."

On how much do you see their defense coming after you?

"They play fly-around, attack the ball football. That's how we preach it here, that's all we preach here. There's a lot of similarities in the way they go about their games, the way they play their football. I think with their defense and our defense, it's really just about attacking the ball and how to get the ball out as quick as we can."

On how it feels to be 1 out of 33 seniors playing one more at Nippert

"Oh, it's definitely going to be a special moment. Our senior night was two weeks ago and that was our last guaranteed opportunity to play here in Nippert. We wanted to beat ECU and have another opportunity to play here, but to know that this is truly our last one, it's going to be a special moment for all of us to kind of take in pregame and take in right before the ball is kicked off. But once the ball is kicked off, it's football, how it is every other week. Then, hopefully, at the end, we'll be celebrating with everyone else in the stands."

On prepping the younger guys for the Championship game

"I'll just tell them, and it will really start today at practice, that everything that we do at practice has to be attention to detail, the finer things and points, where you might slack off on a play... We can't have that. Everything has to be 100% in everything that we do, and we know that the things we do today and the things we do tomorrow in our bulk of practices are going to show up on Saturday. So, like I said earlier, we haven't changed anything that we've done, we're not doing anything extra and we're going to keep it pushing until Saturday."

On when distractions happen, is it reassuring to see that Coach Fickell still continues to block them out?

“Oh yeah, Coach Fick does a great job of keeping the outside world and outside media, outside of this building and outside of this team. Once all of us step foot into Lindner (Richard E. Lindner Center), it’s all about business and it’s all about ball. Nothing really else matters. I think he does a great job of handling himself, and that kind of just filters down throughout the program, throughout the players and throughout the coaches. We’re just focused on the game on Saturday and that’s all his attention is on, so that’s all our attention is on.”