



Head Coach Luke Fickell
Tuesday Press Conference Quotes
Sept. 13, 2021

Opening Statement

"First and foremost, wrapping up last week, I think I may have forgotten in the press conference, my mind was a little bit off kilter with some of the injuries and things that were going on, but you don't play a game like that without incredible preparation last week. I talked about the triple option, it's always unique, but that crew in practice that gave us a triple-option look needs to be rewarded. We will and we do, but those guys need to be mentioned. I won't go by name, but I'll just mention that Will Adams, a backup safety for us, ran the offense as the quarterback, unselfish, and did unbelievable job. We played the way we did because of the preparation that those guys gave us and it's not just on one side, because it's unique to on the other side, you don't get to go ones on ones and twos on twos like we normally do on a week because it's so different. We had to challenge those other guys, the look team on defense to give the offense as much as they possibly could. That is where I feel as good as anything coming out of week two, where the unselfishness is and where these guys' mindsets are about what preparation looks like. It always nice to get back to home and play in front of the home crowd. It has been a while so that was awesome, the student section and everything. It was a great day and then feels a lot better to win. You roll back in on Sunday with one mindset in a rivalry week. I have said it since the day I got here, and I will say it today and I say it every day in the meeting, end practice with it, rivalry is about respect. There is no greater respect that I have got for this rivalry. The team will understand that, the team will know that, and we will prepare that way. To me, that's the key to what it is. There are a lot of guys on our team that probably don't know a whole lot about the rivalry. We talked about it in fall camp, we spend a little bit of time making sure we go through it and talking about it. It is in our book. More than anything that when they walked in the door here on Sunday, as we wrapped up Saturday's game first and foremost the most important thing that they understood was what rivalry is all about and what this rivalry means to us in our program. We pay a lot of respect to that. Not just the way we play, but the way we prepare and the way we go about this entire week."

On the series against Miami being tied and if the team knows the importance

"59-59-7? Believe me, the team knows. They knew that when we went over it in fall camp that we haven't held the lead since 1915 and that is 59-59-7 all time. There are a lot of guys that we have got that are from different areas that don't know a lot about it. Our job is to make sure that we teach them about it from the get-go, most importantly, make sure that they respect

what it is that they are part of. They definitely know that and they definitely know we haven't had a lead since 1915."

On playing in Cincinnati as the designated road team

"I don't really look at the difference on who's on the road and who's home, and the only difference I know is we aren't allowed to have our recruits there. We had reached out to ask said "Let's try to do as best we can to get as many people in the stadium as possible" and why don't you allow some of our recruits to have the opportunity to come, but I think we were denied on that. We were denied the last time we played so I don't quite understand why they have back-to-back home games on the road that we're obviously playing on. It was their home game last time. We are playing in Paycor stadium, but again it's their home game. Ours is in the next time we play in (Paycor Stadium). I don't quite understand that. Maybe we could call the former AD and ask him how you sign that that they get to home games. From the neutral site, how they get the two home games, they obviously did a little bit better job I think in the contract negotiations. But I don't know that it's a bigger deal who wears what uniforms. Neither one of us are truly at our own stadium. But for me more than anything, I just want it to be an environment, whether it's their fans or our fans that is exciting, and that's what we want is more than anything."

On the past, present and future of the Miami rivalry

"I'm a big traditionalist, and I love rivalries. I think that's what makes college football, and I think that's the uniqueness of it. There's all different kinds, and over time, things change and programs move and grow and do things in different ways. But I think that, for me, I would love to continue the traditions that still are really important to me. A few years ago, I was asked when they when they kind of went to the 1-1-1 where they were going to play at a neutral site. I was asked, "Hey, is there something we would ever think about getting out of this?" I don't know why we would; this is history. This is this is a big part of it, or close in proximity, whatever the other things that people think you should do, I think the uniqueness of making sure our young men understand about our program and in the history of our program, it gives us a great avenue into doing that. It reminds me every year, based on what I'm doing about respect to the rivalry to really kind of show and study a little bit more of the history and to give that to those guys. So, if I got a choice, we would continue this rivalry as long as we possibly can."

On Ivan Pace, Jr. playing his former team and how players prepare for that

"We have kind of gone through this in the past obviously, last year with Michael Young (playing Notre Dame). So, we've had a little bit of history of some of these guys going back to their former schools. It starts early in the week. It's just making sure we sit down with guys and understand. When you walk in this program, you are part of this program. I told those guys, "You are a UC Bearcat" so I know that there are places that you've been before, but you don't want to be referred to as a guy that came from someplace else. Ben Bryant is a UC Bearcat. Ivan Pace Jr. is a UC Bearcat. We went through that with Jerome Ford last year and all he wanted at some point in time was not to be considered an Alabama transfer. 'I'm a UC Bearcat.' I don't put a whole lot of stock in those things, but I understand the emotions. That is an emotional game in particular and just like I did last year with Michael Young, earlier in the week, talking to him about it, I'll do the same thing with Ivan (Pace, Jr.) and anybody else that comes into some of those situations where they've either been someplace, or they've got a different connection to those things."

On Ivan Pace Jr.'s development from his first fall camp to the start of the season

"I'm surprised maybe just in how well he's picked things up. He's had to work on his attention to detail. I think that's where he's done a really good job. And last week was a challenge just because we play things a little bit different. And we're very disciplined in how we play some of the triple option. And I think that it was a really, really good thing for him, but I think the uniqueness of all of our guys are challenged and no matter what you got, you got Lenny Taylor, who's in his fifth year, Josh Whyte, who's in his fifth year. That was one of the things even with some of our offensive linemen where we've had to find new ways to challenge these guys and that's what I have been impressed with Ivan is his ability to be challenged. He's got some natural instincts, but you got to keep challenging these guys to grow. That is where I think that in the structure of things and how well he's done in the place that he's made, it's been in the structure of how we've done them, and how we've asked him to do them. That's been impressive."

On Ben Bryant and Evan Prater's skillsets at the QB position

"We knew we were lucky. The dynamics is the most difficult thing on those guys, not on us as coaches. I mean, we can compartmentalize, but you've got a heart too. You don't know what those human emotions are really like, and you don't always know exactly what you do have. I think that's why it was really good that Evan (Prater) got in this past week, and I have said it over and over again, he had the opportunity to go play, not handcuffed, to be able to kind of get out there and then have his opportunity to have the whole playbook at his hands, and it makes him feel really good and it makes us feel really good. It gives us a lot of other options as we continue to move forward. The tough thing is always the human element and keeping those guys engaged and really excited about what they're doing. You got to rely upon their maturity and their ability to put the team first and understand that, throughout this year, there's going to be some opportunities, we don't know when they are we don't know how it's going to happen, but we're going to need both, so we are very fortunate, but we are more fortunate to have the maturity in that room that has been able to handle it. I don't know that you can do it if you don't, because it's such a unique position that is talked about so often that if you don't have that maturity and that true belief in the bigger picture, I don't know that you can."

On Deshawn Pace's performance from Week One to Week Two

"I think he would be the first one to tell you that, as he come back in here on Sunday, one of the first things we asked you to do was humble yourself and that wasn't just for him. That wasn't just for me, that was for everybody. I think that the same thing, going back to when you see when you when you start to develop maturity-wise, sometimes as a coach, you don't even have to do some of the things. They see what they see and think he did a really good job. I think it's a unique game plan when you're playing the triple option. But it's very disciplined and very specific. And I think that's where maybe in Week One, he may struggled a little bit with the specifics and the discipline as you as you just want to make plays. So, it was really good to get back to some of the fundamentals and the basics. He played really, really well. He did a lot of really, really good things and a lot of instinctual things as well."

On early season penalties and wanting to play clean ball

"It's hard to say they kill you. I think that they definitely put a dagger in the side, but it's all a part of it. We have to do better with the pre-snap stuff. I think that even if you look at week one, just like last year, the numbers of yardage wasn't as killer because they were pre-snap penalties, but they are sores. If they don't get better than at some point in time, you really have to ask yourself what you are doing. Last week, we had some of the ones that were a little bit bigger, like 15-yard penalties, but a lot of those are the aggressive ones, so I don't want to lose sight of saying we got to eliminate all penalties like I have told you in the past. We have to eliminate the stupid ones. The ones that are pre-snap, the ones that sometimes people don't think affects you because it is only 1st-and-15 or only 2nd-and-12. Those are the

ones that continue to nag at you and that is where we got to do a better job. The roughing the punter, no, we never want to rough the punter, but we want to be aggressive, and we will learn from that. The other 15-yard penalty on (Josh) Whyte; I still don't understand what the penalty was and I will get some clarity on that. Those are the ones that show up in the stat book and are really, really big penalties that we weren't able to overcome on that drive. We all know that has been an Achilles heel of ours and we have to do a better job playing cleaner."

On keeping tabs of Miami (OH) players due to nature of transfer portal and proximity

"We don't watch other players, per se. Obviously you notice really good football players on film, but I think in today's day and age for us in the way we go about things we don't scout the transfer portal. We will look throughout the year and basically make a board to say, "Okay, what do we think if we are going to take anybody in that category" or "What are the positions that we would be looking for?" and then we would specifically go back through our matrix to find those types of things, but we are not watching teams we play and trying to take notes, now that's not what we do. We have always known about Ivan (Pace, Jr.), don't get me wrong. I watched him play in state championship game his senior year, having his brother and knowing the family, those kind of things. When the season is said and done, we will evaluate our team and try to find the right mix if we are going to kind of add something there, but we are still looking more at the high school guys during the season."

On recruiting college players during the season

"There's no idea that you are watching some guys. Now, we will have a recruiting meeting every week to make sure on our board where the spots where we think we could have that gaps that we are going to need to fill. If it's at a certain position, then we will make sure at the end of the year that we are ready to start looking around to see, okay, "What's are those spots that we would be willing to play somebody in one of those rooms."

On his playing experience influencing his traditional views on rivalry games

"There is no doubt. I will say to the guys today, it doesn't matter where you are from. If you love and if you have studied or watch college football, everybody has had some rivalry. You've probably had some rivalry in high school. You don't have to know the history of this rival, and you could walk in the door and not have a clue of what it was. JQ Hardaway is from Alabama. I mean, sure, he knows the iron bowl a lot more, I will refer to not any other rivalry, but I will reference rivalries in general and what makes them so special. That's where we want to be. I want to be able to teach, I want to be able to have these guys grow. First and foremost, it's about respect. As they are here longer, they'll know much more. Every freshman will hear 59-59-7 and that we haven't had the lead since 1915. That doesn't mean they understand, or they know the history of Miami (OH) and us, but as their time through the years here, they will know first and foremost, whatever rivalry, it's about respect, and then they will know a lot more about it. That's where I think the traditionalist in me wants that because it helps me to teach and helps grow our kids to understand the significant things about college football in general."

On the significance of having a lot of players, the 1A and 1B guys, get live reps at the Kennesaw Game

"It is good. Those guys work so hard. I think it's good for us as coaches to see them in live action, but it's better for them. I think just to really get out there and see that there are opportunities all the time and you never know when your opportunity will be called on. I look at some guys that maybe didn't rep anything on the triple option, then all of a sudden have to go in the game. Everybody that goes in the game wants to play well, "Why don't I know what I'm doing?" That's not an excuse, their parents aren't going to accept excuses and their coaches aren't. It bodes well in the long run down it for guys to understand how they still need to pay attention to what it is we're doing and how we do it. I think more

than anything, it's just the attitude and the human element of things within your program. Those guys never get an opportunity to go on the field. It adds up by the end of the year. The more opportunities they have to go on the field, the better they feel about what it is that they're doing, and those things add up as well."

On how Ryan Coe bounced back in Kennesaw State game

"I think more than anything it goes back to the confidence. It wasn't just PATs, it was kickoffs as well. Him getting more into that groove, I think is really a big thing. It is a growing process. I know that he did what he did at Delaware, and there's obviously a difference here. I think that his confidence level and our confidence level in him is where you want to continue to grow. If you are going to play for best ball at the end of the year, it going to have to continue to grow."

On the defensive line play against Kennesaw State versus the expectation for every week

"It's different, but what you learned and what you recognize from the Kennesaw State game is the discipline that you need to play with it. We will play Navy later in the year with some more triple option. I've tried to find the positives on having them playing a triple option team. I think the discipline that we want to play with is where it helps in the long run, and we ask those guys to do things specifically. Each week, we change up a little bit of what we ask those guys to do, sometimes how they're going to play blocks and how they're going to play their five techniques. I think it just goes along with the process of them understanding that when we have discipline look at what happens and then get out of our comfort level, we can see what happened a little bit more last year. So, all those things go a long way, but also just getting them on the field like to get the Ryan Mullaney he's on the field to get a lot of reps, makes us feel better about him playing, week in and week out. Noah Potter the same way was just guys that you didn't know as much about."

On how Fickell recaps not only the UC game but other college football games on Saturday

"Well, it's probably about the hour and a half that I go home that may allow myself to just go ahead and relax a little bit, watch a little bit of a game that's on. When I come in on Sunday, I really kind of rely upon a lot of other people. So, they could give me the lessons of the week that I did not see. I saw maybe two games or highlights for 15 minutes. What are the lessons of the week so that I can learn from them, and we can also use them with our team. That is how for me, I try to look to recap some of the things I don't want to completely live under the rock because you can't learn. I think that it is important to find ways to keep up with the world but also to find ways to grow. I don't know that there were a ton of lessons this past week, I know that the Buffalo, Holy Cross was the one we showed on Sunday to our guys. The last play the game on, obviously on a Hail Mary. There are other lessons with preparations and the will to play in the want to play that maybe showed out in some of those upsets over the weekend that are all things that I need to be aware of and our team needs to be aware."

On being back on the side lines with Coach Coombs

"It's good, I try to say it all the time, the routines of what we do not change a whole lot. The face have changed, but for me as the head coach you don't always have some of those guys that, you had a different relationship with. For me to have some of that gives you some human elements to things that you're not just kind of isolated and, being a head coach too often. I know for me, it goes a long way and I appreciate that. I love the energy and things like that, but it's deeper than those kinds of things."