

# Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs LSU

Friday December 6, 2019



## Ed Orgeron LSU Tigers

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by the head coach of the SEC Western Division Champion LSU Tigers, Coach Ed Orgeron. Again, we'll ask Coach to make an opening statement.

ED ORGERON: What a great event. This is the standard of performance that you must achieve when you come to LSU. Obviously, it's a big game. A lot of respect for Kirby. I think he's an outstanding coach. He has an outstanding football team. This is going to be a big challenge for our team tomorrow, but we're ready to go. It will be a great atmosphere for the LSU Tigers.

**Q. Coach, I was thinking last time LSU was in Atlanta, it was SEC Media Day 2018. You were picked fifth in the West, a lot of 6-6 predictions. Since then you've been 22-3 and two great seasons, this one a really good season. Just speak of what you accomplished since then and proving your doubters wrong.**

ED ORGERON: Again, it's not about me. It's about being at LSU. It's about getting the right pieces together, continue to recruit well, get great coaches. I think I have the best assistant coaching staff that I've been around. We wanted to go to the spread, but you know what, we got the right quarterback in Joe Burrow, then Joe Brady comes along, and everything fell into place.

**Q. Coach, how do you guys particularly plan on stopping the three-four defense that Georgia runs?**

ED ORGERON: Well, obviously, we've got to play offense, and we've got to win the line of scrimmage on both sides of the football. They're very athletic. They get 11 hats to the football. Just like other games, we're going to have to figure out what they're doing. Sometimes they do what we've seen on film, sometimes they do something completely new. As coaches, we'll figure it out, and it's going to be a great battle.

**Q. Coach, you said this year that Clyde Edwards-Helaire is probably as good a running back as any in the country, and I think Joe Burrow said it Monday on the teleconference too. What makes him such a special back?**

ED ORGERON: His heart. When Clyde walks in the room, Clyde is 6'4", 270. I think that's just the air about himself, his confidence. I do believe he's gotten better as the year's gone by. He's able to catch the ball out of the backfield. He's an all-purpose back. He can make you miss, run around you, very fast. I just think his heart and his courage says a lot about the young man.

**Q. Ed, what is similar or different about this Georgia defense and some of the other elite groups you guys have played against this year?**

ED ORGERON: Great defensive line. First of all, a great coach. Kirby is a great defensive coach. They play very solid fundamental football. They're hard to run the football because their guys get so fast to the football. They break tackles in space, and they put tremendous pressure on the passer. We're going to have to protect Joe to get the ball downfield.

**Q. So as you look at D'Andre Swift and his talents that he possesses, are they things that are similar to Edwards-Helaire?**

ED ORGERON: I think they're generally similar. He runs the outside zone about as good as anybody in the country. The guy is obviously fast. I do believe that their scheme is different, so he probably has the same talents, the same skills, but their scheme is a little bit different than ours. He's a more downhill runner. He'll start to run downhill, put his foot in the grass and run over you or run around you. So I think the scheme makes him a little different player, but honestly, I think they possess similar skills.

**Q. Coach, Georgia plays a neutral site game every year with Florida. Are we reading too much into it that that gives them the advantage?**

ED ORGERON: No, I don't believe so. I do believe we'll have a great crowd. I do believe our guys are treating this as an away game. I believe we have crowd noise all week. I think, when you see tomorrow, it will be electric on both sides. I talked to Commissioner Sankey, and he told me it's the loudest game he's ever been in because there's always cheering on both sides. So I think it's great.

**Q. Coach, what does it mean for you to be here in Atlanta representing your home state of Louisiana?**

ED ORGERON: I love it. I grew up watching LSU. When I got hired, I said I knew this was the standard,

and we wanted to get there. It took us three years to get here. I do believe that you can see the process down the road. There was a couple of good decisions, a couple of decisions that wasn't so good, but thankfully they gave me the time to get it right, and I feel like we're on the right track right now.

Hopefully, this is just the beginning. Obviously, we have a great quarterback in Joe Burrow. We have to find a great quarterback for the future. I do believe I have the right coaching staff in place. I think most of the pieces are in place to have a successful run.

**Q. I hope I don't misquote you from a few years ago, when you knew you weren't going to get the job at USC, you told your wife, it's the worst day of my life. Now that you know where you're at in your career, could you even have imagined this was possible being on that plane?**

ED ORGERON: I'm glad you mentioned it. She did, she said God has a better plan, and I looked at her and said, it had better be good, and she was right.

(Laughter).

Everything happened for a reason. I'm thankful for the interim job I got at USC. It made me a better coach. I'm thankful for the chance of the interim job at LSU. I got a chance to prove that I could be the head coach at LSU. Now everything had to fall in the right place. I know I wasn't the first choice or maybe the second choice, but it doesn't matter how you get here in life. It matters, when you're here, do something with it.

**Q. How is your team's preparation impacted by the fact that you don't fully know how healthy D'Andre Swift is going to be for this game with a shoulder injury?**

ED ORGERON: Just like other great players we play, I'm assuming that this guy is a great competitor, and I'm assuming that he's going to play. We haven't even blinked. Obviously, we're looking at second team back, the third team back. They've got about five tailbacks there that could be first round draft choices. They've done a tremendous job of recruiting. So we've prepared for everything, but I'm almost sure he's going to play, and he's going to play well.

**Q. Ed, this pass heavy offense, how much of it was a reaction to the talent you all recruited, and how much of it was this is the direction that college football is going?**

ED ORGERON: Combination, combination of both. Obviously, we have three great receivers, in my opinion, and even more than that, some younger guys. But it all started with getting Joe Burrow, getting that quarterback who can run the spread office. Steve

Ensminger has been phenomenal. I think he's the unsung hero of the whole deal. He was open to going to the spread offense, open to hiring a young guy in Joe Brady. We have a lot of respect for Joe. We did some research on him. And everything has just fallen into place.

It took a lot of guys working together. Put your ego aside, and let's do what's best for LSU, and it got done.

**Q. Georgia's top wide receiver George Pickens is out for the first half this Saturday. Do you think that has an effect on you all? Is that a relief for you all missing a key asset on their offense?**

ED ORGERON: First of all, I recruited George, and I know his mama. I'm so glad that he's such a great player. I really liked him. I thought he'd be an outstanding player. Obviously, Georgia has had No. 1 recruiting classes. They have guys behind them. You know, we use the term next man up. Put 11 men on the field, and we fight like Tigers. I'm sure they're going to have the same plan.

**Q. You guys practiced early yesterday, got here yesterday. How have you prepared them mentally for this moment so far?**

ED ORGERON: I believe it's working out well. We did as much work as we could do over in Baton Rouge. Usually we travel on Friday, but I had to be here today, and I was not going to let the team travel today and me not be with them. So one team, one heartbeat. We travel together.

Our guys got to the hotel last night, and we had a tremendous meal. We had smothered pork chops, fried chicken, collard greens. The guys loved it. Just like one big family eating together. They went to bed at 11:00 and didn't have to wake up until noon today. So I'm sure they rested.

We're going to have the same routine we have in Baton Rouge. We're going to have a heartbeat meeting at 3:00. We're going to have our meetings, do our walk-through at Mercedes Benz Stadium, and have our meetings tonight.

**Q. This is the third year in a row Georgia has been here. How much of an advantage is it for them, and what does it say about Kirby Smart's program?**

ED ORGERON: I have a lot of respect for Kirby. I recruited against him. I've known him for a long time. I enjoyed watching him play. He was a tough football player. When we do go to coaches meetings, he's very cordial to me. We talk, we laugh, we joke.

So he's done a tremendous job. Georgia is a great program and a great state to recruit. It's indicative of

his coaching and recruiting, his third time being here.

Is it going to be an advantage? I'm sure it's going to give them some confidence, but you know what, as a football team, it's never about the other team. It's always going to be about playing to LSU standard of performance regardless of where we play and who we play.

**Q. Coach, I'm sure you know fans have talked more about beating Alabama than winning an SEC Championship in previous years, but now that your team has done that, beaten Auburn and Florida in these tough games, how much do you sense they're ready to finish the job in terms of winning this conference?**

ED ORGERON: This team is focused. This team has goals. We never talked about anything else. Obviously, beating Alabama was huge, going undefeated 12-0, but to win the SEC Championship is a goal of this football team. They're very focused. They've worked very hard for this.

**Q. This game has long been a showcase for the conference of Heisman contenders. How have you been helping Joe work through any of the individual pressure he might be feeling given all the buzz around him?**

ED ORGERON: Joe and I are very close. I don't have to say much to Joe. I want to give you an example. Derek Ponamsky, who does a tremendous job for us, told me last night that Joe's mama and daddy was calling him, and he wouldn't answer the phone. I wanted to know what's going on. Well, Joe's phone broke, and the mom and dad said, we're going to get you one. He said, I don't need a phone. I got a game to play this week. So that goes to show you the focus and the leadership of that young man and what he's done.

So I think he's fine. He wants to win. That's his biggest attribute.

**Q. Coach, I spoke to Jacoby Stevens earlier in the week about you kind of being a players' coach. How important is it to you as a head coach to instill an energy level to your football team?**

ED ORGERON: Well, you know, I think everybody has their strengths and weaknesses. I coach from within, the staff. I don't coach from above. It's never going to be about me. I want to give them all the energy I have, and I'm an energetic coach. So I think that in recruiting I develop relationships with these young men, and we talk about things in my office that we're going to get done, and we follow through.

Let me say something about Jacoby. He's an outstanding young man. He's an outstanding football

player, and I'm very proud of his leadership.

**Q. It takes elite recruiting to get to this game. When you look across Georgia's roster, is there one area -- I know you're a defensive line guy and you see Georgia's O-line, is there one area that just jumps out at you that says there's where all the players are at?**

ED ORGERON: The offensive line. There's five guys that are going to play in the NFL. Thomas is going to be -- I was talking to a scout the other day. Thomas is going to be a top five pick. Those guys are big, and they're huge, and they're road raiders, and they're very athletic, and they're very well coached.

So the line of scrimmage in the SEC is different than other conferences. I think that's where you start. Now you add the speed, you add the intelligence, and you add the tenacity they have on defense, it makes them a great team.

**Q. Ed, when you look at Georgia, just the overall physicality, just what kind of jumps out at you? Kind of where do they stack up this year?**

ED ORGERON: This is the most physical team we've played. I think this is the most complete team on both line of scrimmages, on offensive line and defensive line. They like to hit. They play fast. Their running back hits the hole to make you miss. Quarterback makes some great decisions. But it all starts with their defense. They're only giving up ten points per game. They're very stingy.

**Q. Coach, you're a defensive coach. Obviously, there's always a sentiment that a great defense will beat a great offense, or pitching, a pitcher can beat great hitting. Is that oversimplifying it? And how do you -- a lot of people are going to look at it as Georgia's defense versus your offense.**

ED ORGERON: I look at it opposite. We've got to play great on defense. We've got to play great on defense to win. I feel like the offense is going to do well. Now, how many points are they going to score on the play? I don't know. I don't know that, against a great defense. We have to stop their offense in order to win the football game.

**Q. Kirby talked about the offense you guys have. It's not exactly complicated schematically, it's just the chess pieces you have. How would you evaluate the chess pieces you have on offense?**

ED ORGERON: I feel like it all starts with the offensive line. Like I said before, Lloyd Cushenberry has been the leader there. James Cregg has been the MVP. We've played with second team tackles, first team tackles, and guys rotating in and out. They're going to have to protect. This is a good blitzing team. This is a

good four-man rush team. So I think that's where it starts.

When you look at Joe Brady and Steve Ensminger, the plays that they call, getting them in the right defenses against the right coverages, and then the playmaking ability of our skill players, receivers and running backs are some of the best in the country.

**Q. Kind of a followup. Being from Louisiana, how much of an advantage is it for you in recruiting when you go into homes there in Louisiana where there's a lot of talent and you can kind of relate?**

ED ORGERON: I think it's a huge advantage. I enjoy recruiting in Louisiana. I'm going to be in 18 to 22 homes next week, so that means about 18 to 22 gumboes. It's going to be great. It's kind of a party when I get there. It's kind of a festivity. I have to go recruit and talk to the mom and dad and bring everybody. When I go now, it's the aunts and uncles and grandmas. We have a party. We eat. We laugh. We joke together. It's just like being a part of a big family.

**Q. You're talking about, over the course of the season, about moving to the spread and felt it was the way to go. It was a gamble. Is there ever times where you might -- because you're changing the culture of your offense. Was there ever a time when you were wondering if this was going to work?**

ED ORGERON: You know, after the spring, I felt good about where we were going, and Steve and I and Joe have always had constant communication about what we want to run, how we want it to look like. I'll tell you this now, Joe Brady has brought a lot of confidence, and his ability to install this spread offense with Steve Ensminger. We don't have any 12 personnel. We don't have a fullback, 21 personnel. In some ways, it was hard to let go.

The thing I didn't want to let go was the physicality of LSU. I still wanted to run the football and be physical, and they've done that. So I can't complain about anything the offense has done. I think those guys have been phenomenal.

**Q. Coach, Kirby was talking about the leadership quality that Jake Fromm has. He shoulders a lot of blame, and yet he can still give out credit. It's kind of selfless leadership, selfless servanthip type deal. Can you compare and contrast? Because it sounds a lot like Joe Burrow.**

ED ORGERON: Let me give you an example. We had some recruits in spring, on the spring visit. I don't recall what day it was. It was a Saturday. They asked me, they said, Coach, can the recruits go watch the players practice? They're not practicing today. Oh, yes, they are. They had a player only practice on Saturday

morning in the spring, and he had many of those practices, along with other leaders on the team. These guys are very committed.

Joe is a solid leader. Joe won't scream. Joe won't holler. He does things by example. If things are not right, he'll step up and challenge guys. He's a fierce competitor. He is very focused. He's mature ahead of his years. He brings a lot to our football team.

**Q. Coach, you talked about the offensive line a lot. With Lloyd Cushenberry being right there in the middle, do you think, if the offensive line protects Joe and opens up some running lanes for Clyde, do you think that's the key to victory?**

ED ORGERON: No question. LSU has to block their front, and their linebackers are very fast. We can't have negative plays, sacks, fumbles, things like that, and those guys are very capable of doing that. We're plus 6 in the turnover ratio. We want to be plus 3 every game. That's going to be a big game for us taking care of the football and getting the football back to our offense.