



Allstate Sugar Bowl Ohio State Offensive Coordinator Press Conference December 28, 2020



OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: Yeah, good to see everybody. Happy holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Years. Again, we've kind of been in a mode here of kind of at the same time line of preparation. So, yeah, we've got a good model of how we've been preparing here the last couple, three weeks.

It's kind of a different bowl scenario this year. You're here with your practice site, routine, not as much time in between, not the recruiting piece in between, none of the award shows and all that stuff. It's a little bit more like a championship week.

Clemson is used to playing in the ACC championship, like we've had the good fortune to do in the Big Ten. So like a preparation. We've had some good work. It's going to be a tremendous challenge. They do a great job on defense as always.

Prepping well so far. Looking forward to finishing the week and having the best showing we can have here Friday night down there in New Orleans.

Q. I'm wondering if at any point over the last couple of years, you've noticed it becoming more difficult to do kind of "check with me" stuff at the line of scrimmage and having to either huddle or play at a really fast tempo to give the offense more of an advantage? Especially against this team, you check, they check, you check, they check. It seems like you could get yourself into a little pickle there, if you got into that kind of rhythm.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: I think since we've been here, Bill -- I remember the first year we did this, years ago. 20 years ago at Northwestern, after that year, everybody thought we were smart and they started asking questions: What do you want to run on this play? A two-three technique or this play to a one? If we can't block the three or you can't block the one, we're going to lose. Every play needs to have a single hire, two-deep answering the pass and a guy for protection.

Since we've been over here, with what Coach [Urban] Meyer had going in place and what Ryan [Day] and I started with, a lot of plays sometimes have a lot of answers. So if you're trying to find the perfect play, you need to -- I always used to use the word "reasonably sound." You're not going to be perfectly sound, but you've got to be reasonably sound.

Clemson does a great job creating negative plays. I think they're second in the nation in sacks, second in nation in yardage loss, tackles for loss. You have got to do plays where you don't give up the negatives. You're reasonably clean. You're protecting the quarterback.

You can always get cute. You can always have the -- I guess the tall glass would be to O.D. But the end of the game, it's going to come down to blocking. It's going to come down to tackling. It's going to come down to ball security. It's going to come down to short yardage and scoring situations.



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Like I said for the last year, every day somebody is kicking somebody's butt. Whether it be in the media world, you guys are writing great articles or not. Whether it be coaches recruiting great guys or not. Practicing well or not, winning games. Every day you're going to go out and kick some tail. And we can get cute with signals and scheme. But at the end of the day, somebody's got to play well. They do a tremendous job of scheme. They do a tremendous job of playing hard, playing physical, and kicking butt. That's why they're a great defense every year. That's Coach [Brent] Venables.

Q. You mentioned they're a team that gets a lot of pressures. It seems like Justin [Fields] may be in a couple of these games. Teams have been able to make him a little bit uncomfortable with blitzing. Are there things you guys can do as coaches to help him be more comfortable in those situations?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: That's a great question. I do think the really great teams can, one, create pressure and, as you create pressure, not give up big plays. So your ability to make your protections work, your ability to make your identifications work, your ability to make your offensive line or tailbacks work to figure out who's coming. And then, also, by the way, the coverage is changing. So the quarterback is feeling people moving around him.

So the best way for -- one, you practice well. And Coach [Ryan] Day and Coach [Corey] Dennis do a great job with their meetings of prep. But that quarterback looks great when everybody is functioning around him really well.

And this is going to be a stressful game because of all the stress that Clemson brings with their different looks, different formations, different fronts, coverages, pressures, twists, blitzes.

But bottom line, they make you work. Every play is a fistfight in the passing game from a protection standpoint, whether it be one-on-one rush or twisted pressures.

And in every play for Justin is a fight because the pictures are changing and your ability to process and get to the right read and distribute the ball on time, on target, as there's a lot of moving parts.

So he's a tremendous player. His quarterback rating is still one of the all-time highs in the history of the game. So I think he'll do well. But he will do better, as all quarterbacks do, when the surrounding parts do their job to help him.

Q. A little bit more on Justin [Fields]. First three games of the year, he's 11 touchdowns, no picks, 87% or 88% completion. Almost playing perfect. Then the last three games, I think it's four touchdowns, five picks. We know you guys got in that rhythm where you had a canceled game, then you play, then a canceled game, then you play. Ryan [Day] was out. Corey [Dennis] was out. Chris Olave is out. How much did that affect Justin and the whole offense? And where do you see Justin right now in his preparation to try to play his best game Friday?



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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: I think he's been preparing and practicing really well. I think he gets -- with Coach Day and his background, I think some strong guidance and direction on how to prepare and how to practice study.

And then we work really hard. I don't know how many times you guys get a chance to see us at practice, but I basically run the scout defense. And we're doing it because I'm trying to give them the looks the best we can, so you're getting a game look. And that's hard because your young players and scout team players aren't quite as talented as what you're going to go against on the field, but you're really working hard just to create those looks.

I know in the one game Coach Day was out, we did put up some pretty good numbers. Even the last couple of games, I think we put up 500 yards. So we're running it well. It's nice the other parts are picking it up.

It will be difficult to run like we ran the last few games against Clemson. But I think the balance has made us a complete deal. Maybe those numbers initially were almost too high, unrealistically high. I don't know if anybody's completed 87% for the year.

But, again, if he's been off a little bit, as much as anything, maybe as a player sometimes, you can try. Maybe you can have a choice you might want back. But at the end of the day, we as a unit play more complete. His talent, his greatness, his play-making ability takes off and I think we're okay.

Q. I asked Garrett [Wilson] this. Chris Olave, I would imagine, as much as anybody on this team, wants to play in this game, especially after missing the Northwestern game. What's your sense of him? And just how different is this offense with him in it?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: Well, I think there's a comfort factor with the timing and the time that we're Justin and him have had together. Whether you call that a security blanket, I don't know if I would say that, but I think there's a lot of confidence. He tracks deep balls unbelievably well and has great spatial awareness.

I think there's a lot of confidence that I think, you know, Justin knows in time if he's going to him. Between him and Garrett, particularly as years went long, those guys had a great chance, if he could get it to someone on target, to make a play for him.

He's a tremendous player. It's good to have him back practicing. He's looking well. We'll see how the week keeps going. He's one of the best deep-ball threats, not because he's fast. I think his baseball background, playing center field. His ability to track deep balls has been very impressive through the years. He's one of our veteran players. He's a great player.

I know he took last year personal, maybe a little bit more personal than he should have. But I think that's what competitors do. He's looking forward to continuing preparation and going out Friday night and seeing how the game unfolds for him and the opportunities he has.



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Q. Wyatt [Davis] has made All-American today. I just wanted to ask what he's meant to that front for y'all.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: He's very, very tough, physical, stout, playing hard. Has a bit of an old-school nastiness to him. Both he and Josh Myers in there, kind of side by side.

Made a commitment to come back. A lot of guys were opting for this. He opted to come back and be a Buckeye and help his teammates and give us a chance to maybe play for conference championship and now have a chance to play in the final four here.

He did that because he's not only a great player, but he's a great teammate. You guys don't see a lot of this, but as hard as he plays, as physical as he plays, as tough as he is, sometimes the best thing he does when he brings the juice and talks to our team, he carries a lot of clout. He has a lot of heart, a lot of conviction. Not only does he talk that talk but he walks the walk. He's a tremendous player and his accolades are well deserving. And proud of him and glad we get to go to war with him this week.

That's going to be a great battle for the linebackers that Clemson has and their toughness and physicality with Wyatt [Davis]. Those are some tremendous one-on-one matchups. I was just watching some tape of last year's game. Their linebackers had a couple of plays where they almost congratulated each other. The other opponent, JK [Dobbins] and the one linebacker locked up one time. You can see them appreciating and respecting each other, how tough they play. So that's going to be exciting watching Wyatt and our inside guys against those great linebackers that Brent [Venables] has.

Q. I wanted to ask you about that. I mean, you guys have played these guys before. You're familiar -- you've had success moving the ball on these guys last year. How much does that help just the demeanor, plus adding the fact that the way you guys have run the ball the last two weeks, the last two games especially, how much does that help the confidence, the demeanor, of this offense heading into this game?

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: I think -- I don't know if -- I mean, I think sometimes it can be talked -- I don't know how many times I think our players are not somewhat confident going into the games. I think there's a lot of self-assuredness our guys have, the way we work, the talent they have, the competition we create in practice going against each other, et cetera.

Having played against them -- I guess, if things come back or you can physically put on plays and see a blitz they're doing this year, Hey, they did that blitz last year. Not that it's going to happen again, but you can see the players you're going against. You can see yourself competing against those players.

But at the same time, what you've got is ultimate respect, because you've got as consistent a program in college



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football this decade. And it shows up every week. Having worked with Coach [Brent] Venables for nine years, I know the way he coaches, the way he teaches, the way he leads those guys, the way his kids play, the way their defense plays. So you've got your hands full. So it's nice to have a lot of confidence, and it's nice that we moved the ball last year. But the key thing is not moving the ball, it's getting points.

In this day and age of college football, you're not going to win championships kicking field goals. You're not going to win championships scoring 17, 21 points. You got to get in the end zone. We had some success, but we've got to find more success against him because it was not good enough last year.

Q. Just wanted to reflect on how you got there. Obviously, you were available in 2016. But just the circumstances after that playoff game. If Clemson doesn't beat Ohio State and shut them out, Urban [Meyer] doesn't retool the offensive staff, and here you guys are.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR WILSON: Yeah. I'm just very fortunate, very grateful. Not wishing bad, ill luck or ill will on anyone, but the opportunity was allowed to be here.

I've had the opportunity to have coached at Oklahoma and Ohio State now for, what, 13 years. I think in the last 50 years, I think Ohio State is number one and Oklahoma is number two in wins in the last 50 years. Those are the two most winning teams.

I've also had the opportunity to be at Northwestern and win a Big Ten championship. Had a chance to spend six years in Indiana to build a program that's still doing pretty well. Those are actually the two programs with the most losses. So I've seen the two spectrums of where it is.

But I'm grateful with the opportunities and jobs and the people we have, that Coach Meyer gave me and my family an opportunity to be here. And with that to work with Ryan [Day] and Coach Doug [Calland], Coach [Tony] Alford and now Coach [Brian] Hartline, the guys we've got.

Really most important than anything else is just go out there and practice and have a little fun with Josh Myers and Wyatt Davis and [Jeremy] Ruckert and Luke [Farrell] a little bit and have a good old-fashioned -- get a little pass pro down there and make sure the defensive linemen know you're there and just have a little fun coaching ball.

So very, very grateful to be here and excited to finish this season and, if we're lucky, have the opportunity to keep doing this for years to come.