

**January 2, 2012**



Florida – 24  
Ohio State – 17

An interview with:

## **COACH FICKELL JOHN SIMON**

COACH FICKELL: I don't know if there's a whole lot opening-wise, I'll just answer your questions. Obviously, we didn't get the job done. I thought first half-wise, I thought we were establishing things up front both offensively and defensively. But the big plays is what kills us.

Special teams-wise is obviously the glaring thing. I know third down situations, defensively, we're doing a decent job, just weren't getting off the field. We needed four, they get five. They needed six, they got seven.

But it wasn't the big plays that were hurting us defensively, and that's kind of our -- that was what we thought we needed to do. Then we needed to get after the quarterback. Didn't do a good enough job of that.

We got a few turnovers defensively, but then again, the story of the game is going to be the big plays and most of them happened on special teams. I guess I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Coach and John, the senior class is obviously leaving with a loss in this bowl game, and some of them have had a very eventful year to say the least. Can you talk about their legacy to the program?**

COACH FICKELL: Well, what we think of their legacy and what you write about their legacy is two completely different things. So we'll let you guys go ahead and write what you think their legacy is.

But for us, we know that they've fought through and battled you this a lot of things. We've

seen how they handled it, and we've all learned a lot from it, whether we're a coach, whether we're a player.

But I don't think we need to speak hypothetically on legacies of those guys. We know what they mean to us, and how we feel about them.

JOHN SIMON: We've seen how they handled that adversity that they've been through, and just the great role models they've been throughout the year, handling what they've had to. Being a younger guy and seeing that, that makes you play twice as hard. I think we really came together as a team. So, you know, their legacy to us is going to be something great.

**Q. All week long we talked and heard about the speed of Florida. How much of a factor was it in this game?**

COACH FICKELL: I think that's still something that the media likes to speak about. I don't know if you truly believe that. Special teams-wise, obviously, the big plays. Speed factor wasn't a thing. Nobody touched him on the kickoff return, so I'm not sure it was just straight speed.

Sometimes those things are blown out of proportion. I think we've got a team that can run well enough. We need to get better in every aspect. But I think it's the big plays and tackling much more than it is speed.

**Q. It didn't look like Braxton felt comfortable in the pocket. But what did you see in terms of how they defended him and you guys in general?**

COACH FICKELL: When they weren't pressuring, I thought we gave him some time. But I don't think there was anybody open. I wouldn't speak completely until you really watch it. But there were some times back there when he had some time and just held it, and held it, and held it. And nothing came open for him. I think that takes a little bit of a coverage sack on him. But I wouldn't sit there and say it was back in the

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beginning of the year when they were blitzing and six guys were coming and things were happening really fast.

We've got to do a better job, obviously, at creating some things and making big plays.

**Q. From what you were hearing in your ears and stuff, what went wrong on the kickoff return and on the punt block? What were you told?**

COACH FICKELL: Kickoff return, we lose the edge. It comes down to one-on-one battles. There's -- that's what football's about. We didn't do a good enough job of winning the one-on-one battles. Ultimately you've got to get the guy down and give the defense a chance whether you get him 15 yards or give him 20 yards, that's the thing. They won the battles.

When somebody blocks you, there is not a whole lot you can do about it other than win. Obviously punt-wise, they did a good job, but they beat us again.

They came off the side and the guy said that was my man, and he got by me. It was not like it was something that we didn't welcome and expect at some times. But you've got to give them credit for bringing great pressure, and winning some one-on-one battles.

**Q. They couldn't block you in the first half. Can you talk about the kind of game you had? And how it finished? Did you feel like you guys got away from anything you did defensively in the second half from what you did in the first?**

JOHN SIMON: I think we pressured the quarterback pretty good the first half. We were getting there a little bit and you know we just didn't execute well in the second half and we weren't able to get there. They made adjustments in the second half, and it was just like of execution on our part.

**Q. Other than a couple of times, Braxton really wasn't able to break a pocket and make plays with his legs. Was he holding the ball too long before he decided to run? Did you see any constant there?**

COACH FICKELL: Again, we'd have to wait until we really, truly evaluate the film. You know, you've got to give them credit. They did a good job of keeping him in the pocket, not running by him on a lot of situations.

But, still, we've got to get some guys open. Guys got to have the opportunity to win some of those one-on-one battles. When they do, we've got to take a shot at them. You know, so without actually truly watching it to say that was anybody at fault, that's not what we do here. We're not pointing a finger or looking for any blame. We're just trying to figure out ways that we can move forward and get better.

I think you've got to evaluate it film-wise before you can really talk about it.

**Q. Can you talk about the blocked punt? Now it's 21-10, how much that changed your offense, because they had the 11-point lead?**

COACH FICKELL: That's huge. I think that's probably one of the bigger things all year that we haven't done a great job of putting our offense in some situations to do what they do well? Those things don't happen, and it's obviously a different time in the game.

But our offense is a lot more comfortable. I think they were maybe inflicting their will a little bit in the first where we weren't. Obviously we only had ten points. But I think some things were really starting to work with running the football.

You go down with 14 points, and obviously they can play you a lot different as well as some of the things you have to do are different.

**Q. Can you talk about Rainey and what he did? I mean, he was a stud today. Can you evaluate what he did and how much he changed the game between receptions and rushing and blocking the punt?**

COACH FICKELL: I didn't know that he was the actual guy that blocked the punt. But you know, he's a good football player. He's a very good football player. Some of the things that, you know, four and five yard gains where he makes a guy miss, and we've got a guy sitting there with a chance to tackle him for a gain, and he might only get four or five, but those are situations defensively. We've got to do a better job putting people in 2nd and ten situations.

To me, I don't remember a lot of the big plays that he made, but I think some of those little plays were, instead of being a zero yard gain, he gets four, I think, are the things that I'll remember initially off of what he did.

**Q. Luke, how do you feel right now, and how do you think your players feel right now? Is there any part of this that after a tough year on and off the field that you're ready to go on to the next thing?**

COACH FICKELL: You know, we are in constant evaluation. That's how you get better. Yeah, again, we'll move forward and get better from it, and we'll all grow from it.

But our guys feel bad. There is no doubt. This is the tough side of athletics in general. You work and prepare so hard for everything that you do, you know, and this feeling is not something that ever goes away. But I think that's a motivational thing. I told them afterwards in the locker room that this feeling should hurt.

When you remember that feeling, it makes you better. You're going to be in that situation some point in your life whether it's athletically or something else, and how you handle those situations are going to be a true side of a man.

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