

Ryan Day, Kirby Smart Show Mutual Respect For Each Other's Programs



The competition will be fierce when the game kicks off on Dec. 31 between No. 4 Ohio State and No. 1 Georgia, but that doesn't mean things can't be friendly as the lead up to the contest continues over the next few weeks.

The teams' respective head coaches - Ryan Day in his fourth season for Ohio State and Kirby Smart in his eighth season for Georgia - were complementary of each other and the opposing team in an interview session on Dec. 4.

"Tremendous amount of respect for Kirby and his staff and team and what they've done here and really certainly winning last year and then going undefeated this season, playing at a high level," Day said. "Congrats on winning the SEC Championship."

Day said Ohio State has continually looked to the Georgia program during the offseason to see how the Bulldogs - who have a 47-5 record over the past four seasons with a national championship - conduct their business on the field.

"To say that we're knee deep in a game plan, I can't tell you that," Day said. "We watch them from afar, and they have very, very good players and a good scheme."

"Certainly on offense, (quarterback Stetson Bennett) does a great job in all areas. Got a lot of respect for the way he plays. Certainly they put a lot of stress on you with multiple tight ends and really good offensive line and skill players on the outside. Then on defense, excellent scheme and really good players across the board."

Smart returned the favor, and said he has a lot of respect for Day and Ohio State as a whole.

"What a tremendous job he has consistently done year in and year out with that program," Smart said. "Just a lot of respect for the way they play the game. We've watched them, studied them in years past (and in) offseasons, spoken to their staff members. Just always knew that an opportunity to play them would probably come along but not knowing when it would happen, and it came to fruition this year."

"Got a lot of respect for a lot of their players we recruited and tried to sign, and I've enjoyed watching them mature and play for him and become really good football players."

And while this is Day's first experience with Georgia, it isn't Smart's first experience with Ohio State. He was a defensive coordinator for Alabama in 2014 when the Buckeyes knocked off the Crimson Tide in the semifinals of the inaugural College Football Playoff.

"Long day. It was a long day, and it was physical. I think it was Ezekiel Elliott, right? He shredded what was a pretty talented Alabama defense," he said. "I just remember a lot of explosive plays back and forth. I can't remember all the particulars, but I know they were very talented and very physical and played with a very obvious purpose."