

Smart Praises Buckeyes Following Peach Bowl



After stunning Ohio State with a furious fourth-quarter comeback in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl on Saturday, Georgia head coach Kirby Smart shared a long hug with Buckeyes quarterback C.J. Stroud before celebrating with his team.

While Stroud gave the vaunted Bulldogs defense all it could handle, Smart understood just how close the Buckeyes were to knocking off the defending College Football Playoff national champions and said as much in his post-game press conference.

"I'll open with a lot of respect for Ohio State, Coach Day and his program. I saw C.J. Stroud out there, and my heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win the game, and they got a really good football team, so do we," Smart said. "We didn't play our best football game. A lot of that had to do with Ohio State."

The Buckeyes entered the fourth quarter with a 38-24 lead and much of the game's momentum after outscoring Georgia 10-0 in the third frame. However, the Bulldogs refused to go away without a fight, as quarterback Stetson Bennett helped Georgia rack up 187 yards in total offense in the fourth quarter — including a 76-yard touchdown strike to Arian Smith. Bennett also carried the Bulldogs on a go-ahead drive, completing passes of 15 and 35-yards before firing a 10-yard touchdown to Adonai Smith to give Georgia the 42-41 lead.

Although Stroud led Ohio State to the Georgia 32-yard line, the Buckeyes' efforts fell short after Noah Ruggles' game-winning 50-yard field goal attempt sailed wide left.

The Buckeyes collected 467 yards of total offense and scored the most points of any Georgia opponent during the Bulldogs' 16-game winning streak, however, the offensive output wasn't enough to secure the win.

"A lot of credit goes to (the Ohio State offense). We tried man. We tried zone. We mixed it up," Smart said. "They've got really good playmakers and they got a guy that could throw the ball to them and got a really offensive line, and they can score points."

As Ohio State and Georgia battled for the full 60 minutes on Saturday, Smart praised both the Buckeyes and his own team for the determination they showed with a spot in the national championship on the line.

“My heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win. That’s not my concern. My concern is the men in our locker room. We played well enough to win too, just well enough to win. We played really hard in the fourth quarter,” Smart said. “I would have liked to have seen a little cleaner game, and you’ve got to give them a lot of credit. They disrupted a lot of that. We didn’t have a lot of turnovers. We didn’t have self-inflicted wounds, and they didn’t either. Both teams played really well, and both defenses rose up and made stops. It was a very competitive, balanced game.”