

Three Matchups That Could Determine The Peach Bowl



Stars are set to take the field on both sides of the ball when No. 4 Ohio State and No. 1 Georgia lock up on Saturday in the Peach Bowl, and sparks are sure to fly when two of the county's best teams match up in the semifinals of the College Football Playoff with a chance at a national championship on the line.

Battles will take place in the trenches, in the secondary and everywhere in between, but there are a handful of matchups that stand out among the rest as the Buckeyes and Bulldogs approach the end of a long layoff since either team last took the field.

"It's a great matchup," Georgia head coach Kirby Smart said. "You look across the board, there's a lot of great matchups in this game."

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look at the three biggest matchups that will go a long way in determine who comes out on top in the Peach Bowl.

OSU WR Marvin Harrison Jr. vs. UGA CB Kelee Ringo

With running back TreVeyon Henderson out and Miyan Williams recovering from a stomach bug, it's a legitimate question how effective (or even available) Ohio State's running backs might be against Georgia. This could leave the Buckeyes as a mostly one-dimensional offense, but if an offense is forced to pass the ball, there are few targets one would rather throw to than Marvin Harrison Jr.

Harrison leads the Buckeyes this season with 72 receptions for 1,157 yards and 12 touchdowns, and if his last bowl performance - three touchdowns against Utah in the Rose Bowl - is any indication, he could be primed for an impressive outing.

"Talent, a lot of talent, well coached," Smart said when asked about Harrison. "They come from a room that has a pedigree - everybody knows Ohio State puts out tons of wide receivers. And those guys have followed in the footsteps of some really great players. So you know they watched those really talented guys work and perform, and they are just as good as those guys. It's as good a group as I've seen."

Harrison will likely draw Georgia cornerback Keele Ringo, who has led the Bulldog secondary this season. Ringo had a mostly positive season but he was picked on in Georgia's 50-30 win over LSU in the SEC Championship Game, allowing five receptions for 71 yards.

“We all know Kelee is a good player, good corner, top corner in the class,” Georgia linebacker Jamon Dumas-Johnson said. “Just get his confidence back, (have) his teammates rally around him. Just got to go back to work and lock in.”

Other than his lapse against the Tigers, Ringo has mostly been able to keep top receivers in check this season, but Harrison provides a different level of challenge. Ohio State has other receivers that can step up if Harrison is kept in check by Ringo, but Harrison will be looking to take advantage, and a path to an Ohio State victory is likely due in part to a big day by the sophomore wideout.

Georgia TE Brock Bowers vs. OSU’s Defense

On the other side of the ball, the biggest factor for Georgia’s offense – outside of quarterback Stetson Bennett, who was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy along with Ohio State’s C.J. Stroud – will be tight end Brock Bowers.

Bowers entered the season projected as one of the nation’s top tight ends and has fully lived up to the billing. He’s hauled in 52 receptions for 726 yards and six touchdowns while adding three scores on the ground, including a 75-yard touchdown run on a jet sweep. Simply put, he does a little bit of everything for Georgia’s offense.

“I think they’re really versatile, and the way they can bring them out of the back field and do different route combinations really makes it difficult to defend and gives you a bunch of different looks, and they got three good ones, too,” Ohio State defensive end Jack Sawyer said. “So they’re always rotating and bringing another guy in here and there. So I think it poses a good challenge, and I think we’re up for it.”

Stopping Bowers – who averages 14 yards per reception – will likely take an effort at all three levels. The majority of his receptions come within 10 yards of the line of scrimmage, so Ohio State’s defensive line and linebackers will have to work in tandem to keep him in check. If Bowers does break past the first two levels – and he certainly has the ability to do so, accruing 400 yards after the catch this season – the secondary will have to step up and limit the damage.

This doesn’t even begin to mention his ability as a blocker, which is just one more factor for Ohio State to consider when attempting to scheme for the winner of the Mackey Award. A big day for Bowers could spell a long night for Ohio State.

Georgia DT Jalen Carter vs. OSU’s Interior O-Line

While Harrison and Bowers provide the star power, Carter checks in as perhaps the most talented player that will take the field on Saturday.

Carter has accounted for 29 tackles – seven for loss – this season to go with three sacks, two pass breakups and two forced fumbles in just 11 games, missing some time due to an ankle injury, though Carter confirmed earlier this week that he is 100 percent entering Saturday.

“Very good player,” Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. “Disrupts the game, and their entire frontage is really good and so is their back end. They really don’t have any weaknesses on defense. They’re very, very good, and you can see why they’re ranked one of the best in the country.”

"They do a good job, and he is very good as well," he continued. "Our guys know what the challenge is, and that's why we've been prepared for it so hard."

Projected as one of the top picks in the upcoming NFL Draft, Carter is "a force to be reckoned with," according to Smart, and fills the role of a wrecking ball on Georgia's defense. Creating havoc in the interior, the bulk of the responsibility will be left to guard Matthew Jones and Donovan Jackson, as well as center Luke Wypler.

"I would say he's very good," Jackson said. "On the film, he's a very strong run stopper. When he gets a pass rush, he can be very agile and you don't know if you're going to get speed to power or you're gonna get a little wiggle out of him. It's going to be a very tough test for not only me, but the entire offensive line."

Carter can not only make an impact on his own, but he opens up opportunities for Georgia's other defenders - of which there's no lack of rotation - to take control. If Carter is allowed to flourish and get to Stroud - or open lanes to Stroud for others - Ohio State's offense could find itself behind schedule and struggling to get the ball down the field.