

Ohio State Seeks To Match Georgia's Physicality In Peach Bowl



Ever since Ohio State was labeled a “finesse team” by former Michigan offensive coordinator Josh Gattis following its loss at the hands of the Wolverines to conclude the 2021 regular season, the Buckeyes have spent the past year cultivating toughness within the program.

Ohio State’s efforts to shrug off the finesse label will be put to the ultimate test against No. 1 Georgia in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl on Saturday, with a trip to the College Football Playoff National Championship on the line. Bulldogs head coach Kirby Smart has built his program with physicality and toughness as core values since taking the reins at Georgia in 2015.

“Physicality is part of this game,” Smart said. “It’s a major part of every football game. When you look across the board and you do studies on these semifinals and final playoff games since the playoff started, physicality at the line of scrimmage has been really critical.

“You look across the board, teams that run the ball well tend to win these games,” he continued. “Also, red area, third down, and explosive plays are indicators, but the line of scrimmage play and physicality, but physicality can be a lot of different ways. It can be on the perimeter. It can be on special teams. It can be a lot of different ways of looking at it.”

The Bulldogs have personified physicality in their program for years, most notably with their “Bloody Tuesday” practices, in which Georgia goes good-on-good with little resistance from the coaching staff.

Ohio State has followed a similar blueprint this season, opting for more good-on-good work in practice while Day and his staff preached physicality and toughness on a regular basis. The Buckeyes also overhauled their defensive scheme, with the arrival of first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, placing a further emphasis on aggression.

Since the Buckeyes’ 45-23 loss to Michigan on Nov. 26, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said that attention to physicality has continued as the Peach Bowl matchup against Georgia continued to loom closer.

“(The loss) certainly gave us an injection of energy, excitement for sure, coming off of that weekend and into that week,” Day said. “The next week it was a range of emotions. It allowed us an opportunity to have great energy and great focus and edge during the month of preparation for sure.

"I'm really pleased with the way we've practiced, how our guys have gone at it. We've had really physical practices. When you have something taken away from you, it does give you a little bit more appreciation for what it is. We'll see how we play, but it has been a great month."

As the game is also expected to serve as an indictment of each team's conference, with the rivalry between the Big Ten and SEC still raging, both coaches recognized the value of physical play within the two leagues.

"It's football, and you have to play physically. When you're playing in the CFP, certainly it's going to be the most physical game you've played all season," Day said. "The SEC and the Big Ten coming together, for years, two of the most physical conferences there are out there."

"So it's everybody on the field. It's like you got the perimeter game out there. You've got special teams. You have the game in the trenches. You have to win your one-on-one battles. That's what this game is all about. It's about running around and hitting people. That's to be expected in a game like this."