

Unheralded LSU assistant coach suddenly in forefront like his "special" teams

The Times - Shreveport, La.

Author: Glenn Guilbeau

Date: Sep 30, 2010

Start Page: n/a

Section: SPORTS

Text Word Count: 943

Document Text

BATON ROUGE - LSU assistant football coach Joe Robinson can count the number of media interviews he has done on half of one hand. It is about the same number as years he has been at LSU -- three.

"Wow, I can't believe all you guys want to talk about special teams," Robinson said after a practice this week. "It must be a slow week."

Actually, it is not that slow considering the cries by reporters and fans for backup quarterback Jarrett Lee to play in an effort to solve LSU's passing offense, which is 115th in nation out of 120 major colleges with 110 yards a game. Starting quarterback Jordan Jefferson is not in the top 100 nationally with 104.8 yards a game nor in efficiency with a 97.21 mark.

The Tigers' special teams are at the opposite end of the spectrum in the Southeastern Conference and national rankings:

LSU is No. 1 in the SEC and No. 2 in the nation in punt returns with 23.9 yards a return.

LSU is No. 1 in the SEC and No. 10 in the nation in kickoff return defense with 17.3 yards allowed.

LSU is No. 3 in the SEC and No. 17 in kickoff returns with 26.1 yards a return.

Individually, Patrick Peterson and Josh Jasper are bidding to be the best kick returner and kicker, respectively, in the nation:

Peterson is No. 1 in the SEC and No. 2 in the nation in punt returns with nine for 243 yards for a 28.1-yard average and two touchdowns (87 and 60 yards).

Jasper is No. 1 in the SEC and No. 5 in the nation with nine field goals in 10 attempts. He also leads the SEC in scoring by kickers with 38 points and is second in the league in overall scoring.

Peterson is No. 3 in the SEC and No. 15 nationally in kickoff returns with six for 190 yards for a 31.67 average. In the season opener against North Carolina, Peterson set the school record for kick returns with seven (four punts, three kickoffs) for 257 yards and missed breaking the SEC record by 10 yards.

"I'd say it's probably the best special teams I've ever had," said Robinson, a 1985 LSU graduate who did not play college football. The Abilene, Texas, native started his coaching career in 1986 at Catholic High of Pointe Coupee before moving on to Bastrop High as an assistant in 1988. He was a Louisiana Tech assistant coach from 1989-91 and then got hired at Southern Mississippi.

Robinson began specializing in the kick and return units in 1996 at USM and was special teams coordinator from 2002-2007 at Houston, Central Florida and Arizona before coming to LSU in 2008.

"I think his organization is what I saw," LSU coach Les Miles said. "I enjoyed how his teams played. He continues to bring out their best here. I think our guys have a real want to be special."

Mainly, what Robinson has this season at LSU is speed.

"I'll have to say I'm very blessed here," he said. "We're very fortunate that we have a lot of speed. I don't think I've ever seen a four-game run like this, and that's hard to talk about as a coach because we're really going to be playing some great teams coming up."

Then he knocked on wood. After Saturday's 2:30 p.m. CBS game against Tennessee (2-2, 0-1 SEC), No. 10 LSU (4-0, 2-0 SEC) travels to No. 7 Florida (4-0, 2-0 SEC) on Oct. 9 and to No. 11 Auburn (4-0, 2-0 SEC) on Oct. 23 before hosting No. 1 Alabama (4-0, 1-0 SEC) on Nov. 6.

"We're going to have to get better," he said.

As far as Peterson, who set the school kick return yardage record in one half against North Carolina with 244 yards on six punt and kickoff returns, and Jasper, who set a school record with five field goals against Mississippi State, Robinson said he has not coached any who are better.

"Patrick is so enthusiastic about special teams - returning kicks and playing on the coverage teams," he said. "Pat's also done a great job talking about and trying to motivate the special teams guys into being successful. He makes them look very good, and they know he can score if they do their job."

Robinson tries not to "over-coach" Jasper, who has missed only four of 32 field goal attempts in his career.

"I think everybody in the building wants to stay away from him the way he's been kicking," he said.

Many in the building also want to be on special teams, which in the past has usually been filled with walk-ons and players who do not have other roles. It has become cool at LSU with several starters like Peterson and strong safety Brandon Taylor on the coverage units as well as key backups such as defensive back Tyrann Mathieu, defensive end Barkevious Mingo, defensive back Ron Brooks and tailback Alfred Blue joining despite many other duties.

"A couple of guys have asked if they could replace me since I'm a starter, but I said no," Taylor said.

"It's the team everybody wants to be on because it's so much fun," Jasper said.

"Most places I've been we've had bigger guys on special teams," Robinson said. "But the fast players here are big, too and want to do the job. It's really amazing how many guys want to be a part of it. Some guys who have been injured want to be put back on it right away, and I've had to say, 'Hey, you haven't been cleared yet.'"

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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