

# Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Alabama

Sunday, November 30, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Georgia Bulldogs**

**Kirby Smart**

Press Conference



CHUCK DUNLAP: We'll begin with questions.

**Q. Kirby, just wanted to see if you had any further update on Drew?**

KIRBY SMART: No, no more update. We're still looking into things with him.

**Q. A couple days removed from Friday, how did you evaluate how Gunner played in that game against Georgia Tech?**

KIRBY SMART: He did some good things, made some good decisions. A couple times he had some pressure in his face where we probably missed some guys that were open. He's got to navigate the pocket a little better or just get rid of it, try to take a sack. I thought he forced the one ball for the interception. That's not like him.

He probably played better than I actually thought after the game. The ability of the offensive line, the run game, really helped set the tone for the first half. Second half wasn't as good. They did some different things to hurt us.

**Q. I know the first Alabama game was a long time ago. If I were to ask you maybe some of the biggest changes in your Georgia football team since you last met Alabama, where would you start?**

KIRBY SMART: Man, I don't know. Seems like ages ago.

Well, we improved in some areas. We've gone full circle in other areas. We've been dealing with different injuries now than we probably were then.

But the growth of Gunner would be one thing. He's played in more games. He's played in a lot of tough environments.

Defensively we've got guys a little more experienced. That's probably the biggest difference probably is that the guys that were young when we played them last time, they're a little more grown up now. They played more games. Their guys would be the same way.

CHUCK DUNLAP: Good afternoon, everyone. Hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving, enjoyed the last weekend of games in the SEC. Welcome to SEC Championship game week. We'll begin with Georgia and head coach Kirby Smart. Back in Atlanta, the Bulldogs are the visiting team.

Coach Smart, congratulations. Welcome back to Atlanta. If you wouldn't mind beginning with a few brief thoughts on the season and your team being back in the SEC Championship game.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, our guys are excited and honored to be one of the two teams to get to play in this game. It's something that all of these kids grew up watching, talking to the players that are from this area, they know the significance of it. So many guys have watched it growing up.

One of the most viewed games of the year every year. Couple years it's been more viewed than even the national championship game. I have a lot of respect for it.

Our guys earned the right to play in it by the way they led and competed in some really, really tough conference games throughout the year. It's a goal of ours each year to make this game.

We're excited. We're going to play a really talented Alabama football team. A lot of respect for Coach DeBoer and the job they've done. They've gone through a really tough season as well in terms of the teams they've played even through last night.

Both teams didn't back their way into this thing. They earned it. Should be a great game with a lot of talented players in a great venue. We're looking forward to it.



As the year goes on, you get more comfortable with who you are. You tweak some things. We've moved some things around and tried to make things better.

**Q. We talked about the calendar with early signing day. Of course the portal. Could there be a more challenging time to be changing head coaches than right now when you look at all you have on your plate? How demanding would that be?**

KIRBY SMART: I mean, if you're not playing a game, it's not that demanding. I think it's playing the game, everything we've got going on. You put this game and you put the Playoffs along with any conference championship, along with the signing class and the portal, that's really hard.

When you talk about someone coming in taking over a program, if all they're doing is managing the roster, they're probably ahead of the rest of us that are playing. You only have so many candles in the fire that you can burn. You can't do everything at once.

You know you have to be really careful and prioritize your time right now because there's a lot going on right now, including an SEC Championship.

I guess you're asking about schools that are hiring people. That wouldn't be this conversation because the schools that are playing in conference championships aren't doing that.

**Q. What did you make of how Malachi Toliver played in the second half of your game on Friday?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, like I said the other day, he did some good things. He's got to continue to work and improve on some others. Really glad he got to go in the Charlotte game, played as much as he did, got the experience, continue to grow and get better.

**Q. What have you seen out ever Cortez Smith this season? Is he able to help you this week?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, he's working. He worked last week. He'll continue to progress and get better. He's been banged up. He's been able to practice.

**Q. You always get asked about your feelings about Alabama due to your history there. You were asked Friday about your seniors' record against their top rivals. You mentioned that record didn't include everybody. I had to think you were thinking about Alabama. What do you think this game means for your guys, especially the seniors?**

KIRBY SMART: It's a chance to win an SEC Championship. That's a very rare thing. The history of Georgia, I don't know what that total number is, 14, 15? I think it's 15 or something. These opportunities are hard to come by.

The SEC we're talking about now was not the SEC we were talking about for the last, I don't know, almost a hundred years. It's a challenge to win that trophy. It's a mark of toughness, of battle scars. The team that wins it has been through a gauntlet and it has been tough. I think it's a great chance to win a championship.

**Q. You had a lot of good things to say last week about Haynes King, the toughness, dual-threat skills. Does Ty Simpson feel like the same kind of challenge again?**

KIRBY SMART: Oh, yeah. He's a very talented passer. Very intelligent. Great mobility. Athlete in the pocket. He made some huge plays in the last couple games with his legs. They've been in some really tight games like we have. Fourth quarter games he's made a lot of big-time plays with his leg. A little different than Haynes King, but similar.

**Q. Anybody else behind Cortez and Malachi you could give a look to at that position or just not enough time to do that?**

KIRBY SMART: We've had other guys snap during the year. During training camp, we always do multiple guys playing. We've had other guys repping there, Glover, Malachi. Micah has been in there and done some things. So has Glover.

We feel good about the guys that we have there that have played the most. It's not a position you want to be changing out a lot.

**Q. Whoever winds up playing is going to have to deal with Tim Keenan of Alabama. The challenge of that?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, he's really strong, stout, physical player. Does a great job. Always has. He's a force to be reckoned with. Really good football player.

I mean, regardless of who's there, Drew, whether it's him, Cortez, Malachi, whoever it is, we've got to block the people in front of us.

A lot of times on the offensive line, it's not a single block all the time. So there's guys that can help you there.

**Q. Curious if any chance that Kyron Jones or Talyn**

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**Taylor will be available for you guys this week?**

KIRBY SMART: Not sure yet. Still working through that. We haven't practiced, done anything since Friday.

**Q. Through your initial film study, what are the biggest differences between this Alabama team and the one you saw a couple months ago?**

KIRBY SMART: That's a hard question (smiling). I mean, I haven't had enough time to do film study. We've been working on them today, working on ourselves. That's one of those that I think I'd be better suited to answer that question when I get to watch more tape.

**Q. You mentioned the gauntlet both these teams have gone through already. Do you think both teams have done enough to earn a Playoff spot regardless of the SEC title game?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I certainly feel that way. It's not something I like to comment on and judge. The eyes of the beholder are people that have seen people across the country. I don't get into speculation, hypotheticals. I don't get to truly sit back and view that.

I don't know how someone that does view it can measure it when... It's hard to be objective on that and see the whole thing, the whole picture.

I certainly know the level of talent of this conference, the schedules that both these two teams played.

**Q. Something you mentioned a couple weeks ago about in the moving forward that the lack of experience, teams are not going to be as old as they have been on your roster. How have you dealt with that? This year in particular, how much have you seen your team grow throughout this year?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, you just have to be ready to play more young guys. You have to have a little more patience for anxiety mistakes. I mean, young guys don't always play with great conviction and without mistakes. There may be talent there. They have to get through those. The best way to get through them is to play through them.

I think the teams and staffs that do the best job, if they're a youth program, if they're going through high school ranks, they've got to do a good job getting those guys ready to play quicker. The team that does that, avoids injury, may have a competitive advantage to get those guys out there and get them experience earlier.

**Q. Did you get a chance to watch the Iron Bowl at all**

**last night?**

KIRBY SMART: Yes.

**Q. A thought or two on what you saw there in Auburn.**

KIRBY SMART: Good Iron Bowl. I mean, they've been that way. Extremely physical, extremely well-coached. Hard-fought rivalry game, which it's been that way for a long time.

**Q. Obviously Nate started out really well the other night. Was there any reason that he didn't get the ball as much in the second half? What makes him such a good guy to set the tone early in ball games?**

KIRBY SMART: No, other than there was no reason. I thought he did a good job both halves. I thought he ran really hard, really physical. A few times that the other guys' numbers were called. It was just rotation or third down.

He's done a good job. Sometimes you get to be the beneficiary of the good blocking, as well. Sometimes the other guys don't get the beneficiary of the good blocking. That's just the way it goes. Sometimes the plays fit. I think everybody makes it about the runner and not about the play call and how it was blocked. But certainly us being explosive or efficient in the run game is important to our offense.

**Q. The Texas A&M and Texas game. What was the reaction from the players, from you guys, an important opportunity for you guys?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, not a lot. I mean, I watch a lot of football games. I was tuned into a lot of high school games that night across our state when we got back to Athens. Obviously saw the score, knew we would be in the game, but didn't know who we would play.

Not a real huge reaction either way. Just felt like we would be playing in this game because one of those two things would probably happen, and it did.

**Q. You've made your feelings for the game clear. I want to ask you about the historical note. This is your fifth straight SEC Championship game appearance. Only Steve Spurrier accomplished that at Florida. Coach Saban didn't manage that. In terms of coaching achievements, things that you've done, what does that say to make five in a row and match Spurrier on this mark?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's a credit to having a really good administration, a really supportive athletic department and



some incredible players. We're very demanding of the players in our program. A lot of those guys that played in those five games are playing in the National Football League. They earned that right. They bought into what we preached and what we sold. It was important to them to get to that game. They achieved it through their hard work.

We've had really good coaching staffs here. I think the best thing you could say about our program over those years, the time we've been here, is consistency. We are going to be physical, we're going to be tough. We're a tough out. We play consistently. That's important. If you do that, then you give yourself a chance if you've got good players. And we've got good players.

**Q. Personally, mean anything extra to you?**

KIRBY SMART: As far as what? Making five in a row?

**Q. Yes.**

KIRBY SMART: No. I mean, if we didn't make it in some of those years, I mean, we still had successful seasons and played well. It's the goal that we want to achieve.

I don't look back on it personally and reflect about any of that because it's obviously in the moment we got to prepare for this game.

**Q. Daniel Harris announced he's going to be entering the transfer portal today. Is it fair to assume he won't be with you for the rest of the season?**

KIRBY SMART: You know as much as I know about that. I'm worried about the guys that are here with us, and they are going to be with us through Sunday right now.

**Q. Specifically on the defense, what are the biggest strides you think that unit has made compared to when you first played Alabama?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know. We're playing a little more together in terms of execution. We got more experienced players.

Biggest thing to me is we got young guys who have had to grow up while playing together. They're playing with a little more confidence. We call it the cumulative effect. We do a lot defensively actually throughout the year. The cumulative reps of hard things get easier. There's enough overlap between those offenses and carryover of our defenses that allows repetitions to mount up and help us.

Humility is a week away.

CHUCK DUNLAP: Coach, thank you for being with us. We look forward to seeing you in Atlanta later this week.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you, guys. Go Dawgs.

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