

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Alabama

Saturday, December 6, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Kirby Smart

Daylen Everette

Gunner Stockton

Postgame Press Conference

Georgia 28, Alabama 7

THE MODERATOR: Now joined by Coach Kirby Smart and Daylen Everette, Gunner Stockton.

Coach.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, start with thanking the SEC and the leadership in this conference. They do an incredible job with this event. It's so well run. Both fan bases passionate. One of the greatest championship games you can play in. I have respect for that.

Our administration, Josh Brooks, Jere Morehead, do an incredible job supporting these players, helping them out. All the credit goes to the players who have had a very long, tough, hard season. The kids in our program buy into hard. I appreciate their toughness in the way they do things. That pays off in the long run.

To win back-to-back SEC championships, it's every kid in this footprint's dream, and an honor to be at Georgia and to be the head coach here and win games like this.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the players.

Q. Gunner, can you talk about the tone that Cole Speer set with that blocked punt.

GUNNER STOCKTON: He's one of my best friends, one of my roommates. Just seeing all the hard work he's put into this program, seeing it pay off, it was definitely special.

Q. Daylen, how big was JaCorey Thomas today?



DAYLEN EVERETTE: JaCorey went out there and just did his thing. I was proud of him. You saw what he did on that sack. They just turned everybody up. Everybody on the field and on the sidelines.

Just proud about how he played.

Q. Gunner, the season is not over for you guys, but when you look at this team, what has stood out the most?

GUNNER STOCKTON: I think the fact that we never quit. I think we've shown that in every game. I think that's one of the best parts about our team, is we never quit.

Q. Daylen, you were super physical defensively tonight. Kirby talked about how much the SEC Championship game matters to this program. Did winning this game in particular, do you think that made a difference in the way you played today?

DAYLEN EVERETTE: I wouldn't say that. We try to go out every game and play Georgia football. This was just a game on a big stage. I feel like we executed and did everything the right way.

Q. Daylen, what do you attribute the fast defensive start to this time?

DAYLEN EVERETTE: Say that one more time.

Q. What do you attribute the fast start to?

GUNNER STOCKTON: She's saying we didn't give up a touchdown like we did every other game (laughter).

DAYLEN EVERETTE: Fast start, it's always great to start a game out with a three-and-out. Get the offense on the field as early as possible. We did that, I feel like that set a tone for the game.

Q. Gunner, the center spot, Malachi today. Just about the job he did.



GUNNER STOCKTON: He was awesome. I mean, Malachi is a fighter. Attacked practice the way that Drew did. Drew is a good role model for him. Did a great job. Took snaps in the walk-through in our suits. I took my jacket off, he did, too. We're always preparing, doing everything. He did a great job.

Q. Daylen, you held Alabama to negative three yards. How much did y'all talk about eliminating that aspect of their game? How much did that help the rest of the defense?

DAYLEN EVERETTE: I think that helped a lot. We just tried to make it one-dimensional. That's one thing we emphasized coming into this season, we got to do better stopping the run on defense, so...

Q. Gunner, Zachariah had a big punt return. His first SEC Championship game. What has he meant to this team this year?

GUNNER STOCKTON: Yeah, Zach, I mean, everybody knows he's a great player. He's an even better teammate. Just the way he always gets his touches in, always congratulating people. That's probably one of the best things he does, besides being a great football player.

Q. Daylen, you were the MVP last year. How cool is it to see Gunner win it? Gunner, how does it feel to win it this year?

DAYLEN EVERETTE: It's a great feeling to see him get that. Proud of him for everything he's done this year. Probably one of the toughest kids on the team. Toughest kid I know. Take all the hits, pop right back up. I'm proud of him.

Q. Daylen, it looked like Rasean Dinkins' first career start this week. Talk about his performance, what it means to step in like that in a game like this.

DAYLEN EVERETTE: He had an opportunity to step up. I feel like he handled that the right way. Didn't really go out there and make it bigger than what it was. He just went out there and played ball.

I'm proud of him for how he stepped up.

Q. Gunner, Nate had a few yards after contact today. What does his physicality do for this offense?

GUNNER STOCKTON: Yeah, he definitely runs the ball hard. He's trying to get every inch for the team. He puts his body on the line. That's who Nate is, he'll do everything for the G.

Q. Gunner, you and other players spoke earlier in the week that you were very familiar with the Georgia-Alabama history. You said something along the lines it is what it is. How tired were you hearing about it? What does that part of it mean tonight?

GUNNER STOCKTON: Yeah, I think that's just part of the history of two great teams going at it. I'm glad we kept to the same thing, just approached this week like it was a big game. Didn't make it bigger than it was. Just took advantage of it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll release Daylen and Gunner. Congratulations, gentlemen.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Smart.

Q. Could you talk about what a huge momentum change the blocked punt was. Then talk a little bit about how special the journey is that the kid who blocked it had.

KIRBY SMART: Just unbelievable kid. I mean, he sacrificed so much for this program. Gets me emotional thinking about it because we had a team meeting on Friday, and we spoke to the team. I spoke to the team. And Drew picked five players. It was a very moving talk. He had coaches come down and talk about the five seniors.

He had Micah Morris. Well, actually he had Daylen Everette talked about by his coach. Donte came and talked about him. Dillon Bell and Cole Speer, Coach Coley came and talked about him. And then Oscar Delp was actually the fourth. So it was four players.

He put on the screen how many days they had been at Georgia. He put on the screen how many days potentially they had left. They had 1%. I think they had been there 1,200 days at Georgia because they're all fourth- and fifth-year players.

Basically Coach Coley talked about Cole Speer's sacrifices. He got to be a really competitive receiver in the spring. He was playing really good, then got an injury in the spring game. It set him back. He never flinched, never complained. He just does what he's asked to do. He's extremely fast and physical.

Think about those players that Drew talked about and had their coaches come talk about. Dillon Bell scores a touchdown tonight. Huge in the game. Daylen Everette gets an interception. Huge in the game. Cole Speer blocks the punt. Oscar played well also.



Before he finished, he said, Stand up if you've beaten Alabama in a game. None of 'em stood up. So it was a very moving piece.

Micah and Cash were there for the national championship game, but they didn't play. I thought it hit right in between the eyes of doing it for the seniors. So many of them have been through heartbreaking losses that they wanted to do it.

Kirk Benedict had a great rush plan, came after the punt, got a huge block there.

Q. The level of physicality and aggression that your defense played with tonight, how proud are you of them to see that? How big of a difference do you think that made tonight?

KIRBY SMART: It was a huge difference. It was the domination on that side of the ball. A lot of it came with a chip on their shoulder from the last one. It came with a chip on their shoulder from improving.

We told them after that game there wasn't a lack of execution in that game at home. They outplayed us. They out-executed us. They probably out-coached us. We weren't going to let that happen again in terms of the way we played.

They're getting better. Young kids are growing up. There's a lot of naysayers out there for Schumann and his staff. They never flinched. They kept getting better, kept growing the players. They played really well tonight.

Q. Talk about Rasean Dinkins stepping in today, how much of a challenge it is against that offense.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, a lot of motion, a lot of adjustments. Dink has been practicing really well. If you go back, we got him a series against Charlotte. We considered getting him series against Georgia Tech. Joenel was playing. Joenel is dealing with a wrist. He practiced all week. Joenel practiced and was good to go.

We were like, Look, if Joenel is going to have this glove on, maybe we should give Dink a series or two. Dink went one series, another series. Things were going our way.

He's a good football player. He's got some safety characteristics from his high school. He reminds me a little bit of Bullard. He's got a potential to be able to move to safety and play. He's got a really good skill set.

He is the greatest kid. I'm so hard on him at practice at

times, he gets quiet. I appreciate the way he takes hard coaching because it has not affected him. It paid off tonight.

Q. The talk all week was about Malachi. What did you see from him during the week in prep for this? How do you feel like he held up?

KIRBY SMART: The biggest thing is getting the snap there. That's 50% of the battle. Get the snap there and get it accurate. That was my concern.

I knew he would play well, hard, physical. He did that. I think the way we practice and what he went through last year prepared him for this year. He was prepared for this game because of everything he's been through.

That kid had an injury, an ankle injury, then he was out for another two, three weeks with an injury. I mean, the kid's been through it. He stepped up tonight, played well in Drew's absence. I'm proud of him.

Q. How has this team been able to survive and thrive when guys have gone down, young guys stepping up?

KIRBY SMART: Toughness. Strength program. Look, guys, both those teams tonight were beat up. You guys need to do a deep dive and deep study. I'm going to jump on a soapbox now because I'm going to take your question and run with it.

I'm going to give you a hypothetical. That was the ninth game of our SEC schedule. Just imagine that was the ninth game of the season for everybody in the SEC. Everybody played another SEC game. I'm not saying it was on this week. I'm saying it was on a previous week.

That's eight more losses, right? 16 teams. Eight more losses in our league. So one team, two teams. Let's say this last weekend was Oklahoma and Ole Miss, whoever hadn't played yet. They played and they got losses. Then they're going to go to the SEC Championship and play another game.

Those two teams were beat up tonight. That was the ninth game of the year. We're looking at next year having another game.

I mean, the coaches in our league are concerned about it, very concerned about it. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't speak my piece and say it's concerning.

If that game affects Alabama... I don't know if it will or not, I have no say so in it. I sat in those shoes many times where that game cost you an opportunity.



Hypothetically every team just played another game in their ninth game. There's eight more losses. Who just dropped out? Then there's another game, SEC Championship.

It was tough, physical out there tonight. They were wounded. We were wounded. Noah Thomas tried to go. He had back spasms. He wasn't able to go. We were without multiple guys. Zion, he was just beat up.

Q. Back to Cole Speer. In this era of people leaving quickly when they're not getting playing time, how rare are guys like him going to be? How much did you enjoy seeing him produce that moment?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I mean, I almost teared up in the locker room afterwards. We called him up to the top. That's going to be gone, guys. That's going to be gone. I mean, Cole, we recruited Cole. Cole is on scholarship. Different than Dan Jackson and Cash Jones. Those stories...

We're going to get 105 now, I support. I'm glad. Everybody will chase 105 four and five stars. The stories of that kid, you got to be a bold coach to say I'm going to take this kid who loves the University of Georgia, do anything, sacrifice.

London Humphreys had one of the best blocks I've ever seen on touchdown runs. He sacrifices every week for our team by blocking. He might get a catch, might get two. Man, he doesn't care. He does it for his team.

That's why I coach. You look guys at Kansas State. Guys walking away from it. That's lost in our game as we move further and further away from it.

Cash Jones has played so well for us this year. Cole Speer. Those guys are incredible role players for us.

Q. Coming into this week, everyone has talked about the third down conversions last game for Alabama. How do you explain the difference tonight?

KIRBY SMART: I explain it by a great game plan by Coach Schumann. He studies a lot of tape, has confidence in his plan. The defensive staff got those guys to believe and played hard. They had a little chip on their shoulder. They wanted another shot.

We executed better, affected the quarterback more. He played almost out of his mind the last time we played him. A lot of the calls were the same. Calls wasn't different. The execution was a little better. The rush was a little better.

Q. You've been talking all year about how you've got a lot of youth on your team. Have they matured beyond what you expected at this point or about at the level you would expect?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, probably about the level we expect. I mean, we wanted to speed it up early because we got some talented young guys coming along. We really had these injuries at receiver that set us back. We've been forced into playing the young guys.

Getting Tallyn back was huge. CJ is growing up. Landon Roldan is going to be a good player. Thomas Blackshear going to be a player. Tyler Williams. We have this core group of young receivers I'm excited about.

Then Dink and (indiscernible). We have these young O-linemen. Elijah Griffin. We have freshmen that I now think of as sophomores. They came in the spring. They've literally been here a full year, but it feels like they're sophomores.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks for your time.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you.

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