

# Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: LSU vs Georgia

Sunday, November 27, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## LSU Tigers

## Brian Kelly

### Press Conference

CHUCK DUNLAP: We'll start with Coach Brian Kelly and the LSU Tigers.

Good afternoon, thanks for being with us. Congratulations on advancing to the SEC championship game. While we wait on questions, would you mind commenting on your team's season as you prepare to face Georgia in the SEC championship game next week.

BRIAN KELLY: Well, it's been certainly exciting. We've had certainly some bumps in the road, but we've had some great achievements in developing our program here in the first year.

Our football team has gotten better as the season has gone along. Certainly we've learned a lot about how to prepare the right way, how to take care of ourselves in this SEC West that week to week you have to bring your best. We found that out this weekend.

Proud of our accomplishment. Really excited about playing in the SEC championship game. Obviously the standard in terms of title games and being able to face the No. 1 team in the country, the defending national champs in Georgia. Kirby Smart and his staff, his players, it's a great challenge, but one that we're excited about.

We want to be able to represent the SEC West and certainly play to our standard. Look forward to doing that.

CHUCK DUNLAP: Questions, please.

#### **Q. How is Jayden's ankle feeling today? What is going to be the plan for Josh Williams this week?**

BRIAN KELLY: Jayden, we kept him in a boot for today. His exam was good today. We're pretty optimistic about his ability to practice on Tuesday.



It wasn't a high-ankle sprain. Those are the things that you concern yourself with because that's going to limit his mobility. He's going to need to have obviously all of his mobility and more. Early indications look pretty good. We'll have a better understanding tomorrow, but the report was good today. We'll take it from there.

Josh looked good. We're obviously very conservative with him in making sure that we got him at what we considered full 100%. He's the kind of runner that needs that. I think we feel all very good that he's going to be able to be part of the game plan this weekend.

**Q. Certainly a wild ride for you this season. Regardless of what happened in the Texas A&M game, you're here. I just wonder, thinking back, getting ready for the season, did you think this was a realistic goal or have you exceeded what you thought you might be able to do in year one?**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, we didn't have a board in our team room that said, SEC West championship. Our board was about a standard and getting to that standard, building better habits, how we thought, how we prepared. It was much more about a process than it was for any particular goals.

I'd be lying to tell you that that was one of them or wasn't one of them because it really wasn't even really part of our thought process. It was really about getting our guys to live to a standard that we have set within the program.

That's generally what most coaches are looking at in year one. You're not thinking about outcomes quite as much.

**Q. Having met Georgia two times in pretty recent times, '19 and '17, does that help or is that ancient history?**

BRIAN KELLY: Well, you know what you're going to get. Kirby is still the head coach. They're going to be disciplined. They're going to be physical. There's new coordinators. You know the kind of system you're going to get, the preparation, the discipline, all those things are



going to be part of Coach Smart's team. All those things are going to be the same.

But the personnel is different. The coordinators, the schemes are a little bit different. One thing they haven't lacked is in recruiting. They've got outstanding personnel, really good players that we'll have to prepare for.

**Q. John Emery having a bounce-back game, how important was it to see him get into the end zone a couple times, hold onto the football after last week?**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think he needed it. I think he needed it for himself. I think obviously he took it hard last week, the week before, in not taking care of the football. Coach Wilson does a great job of making sure that those guys understand how important it is.

It was great to see him come back this week, again, from his career-best three rushing touchdowns. A really nice way to respond from some adversity. That's what this game gives you the opportunity for. It was good to see it.

**Q. What did you see film-wise coming off of that Texas A&M game over the weekend, yesterday, excuse me?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think uncharacteristic. We've played with traits over talent all year. Some of those traits were not there as much. Playing smart, having a great attention to detail, some of the focus that's necessary, for some reason those things weren't in place. We have to play with those traits.

Yeah, we have talent. Our talent has to show, as well. The real success of this team has been the ability to rely on traits and talent. Some of those traits were not there for whatever reason.

Our players know it. They took it hard after the game. They care. They really want to make sure that something like this doesn't happen again.

We can get beat, but we don't want to be beat with not bringing our very best. Unfortunately it's one of those lessons to be learned in terms of how you need to prepare each and every week.

Again, I think our team understands that.

**Q. The Georgia tight end room, a lot has been made about Bowers and Washington. How lethal of a 1-2 punch is that?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think 'lethal' is a good word.

Darnell Washington is a large person, 6'7". I mean, there's nobody that really has a favorable matchup against him.

Then Bowers, he leads the team I believe in receptions. He's a Lombardi Award finalist. Coach Monken gets him involved in everything from handoff sweeps to I don't know if he's thrown the ball yet, but I'm sure he will. He's just a versatile player. He's a guy that can break games open.

As talented and as productive as a tandem that you'll see.

**Q. At whatever point that college football expands the Playoff, I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on how or if it will affect the various conference championships, the stakes, the excitement? Any thoughts on that?**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I'm not really that concerned about it. I think the conference championships still carry such a high regard in college football and how they're perceived. I think in particular the SEC championship game, I think of that as such a big game and celebrated, that I think that's always going to carry its place in college football.

**Q. Do you have a preference or point of view on when you should go to 12?**

BRIAN KELLY: I don't know that I have a particular date. I would like to see it expanded if they think that they can bring it all together. The more the better for me in terms of playoffs.

**Q. With Texas A&M, why were they more effective running the ball against you guys than the teams you've seen in the last month? Was it schemes or matchups?**

BRIAN KELLY: No, I don't think it was either one of those.

Again, part of a standard in terms of play is about doing your job. Obviously there are times when whatever the circumstances are, you're not as focused, your attention to detail is not where it needs to be.

Texas A&M played well. Their back Achane is an outstanding back. He's difficult to corral. He made some great runs.

But the traits that I mentioned that we bring with our team were not as prevalent for some reason. It's my job to make sure they bring them each and every week. Our margin is not great. We can't overcome not bringing our traits and talent.

I've never seen this scheme before, we're not aware this

back is outstanding, there was none of that. We didn't bring some of the traits that are necessary for us to be the kind of defense and the kind of offense that we want to be consistently from week to week.

**Q. Regard Harold Perkins Jr., how special of a talent is he for a first-year player?**

BRIAN KELLY: He's very, very talented. But, like I said, I mean, it's both: he's got to bring his traits and talent together. If he brings both of those, he is an elite and special player.

**Q. I believe Todd Monken was a DA at Grand Valley State when you were there. What do you remember about him from those days and the job he's done with Georgia's offense?**

BRIAN KELLY: I've known Todd for several years. I think it's going on close to 30 years.

Wherever he's been he's been successful. He's got a great offensive mind. He comes from a family that's been involved in football, the entire family. He just knows the game, whether he's been in college as a head coach in Southern Mississippi, working in the NFL. He knows the game. He relates well to his players. Outstanding play-caller.

I don't know of anything at the time I was with him at Grand Valley wore off on him. I think despite the time we were together, he's overcome all that (laughter).

Just great experience and does a great job.

**Q. I'm not sure how much of Georgia's offense you've watched to this point, but the job he's done with Stetson Bennett...**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, remarkable. He's poised. The confidence on film in terms of what he exudes is amazing. I think he's, like, 26-3 as a starter.

He's in full command of the offense, full command. That goes to his coaching, his teaching, his preparation obviously. It's apparent in watching him how confident he is as the quarterback.

**Q. In adverse situations like last night, you talked about finding leaders, but after the game, who were some of those guys that stepped up, provided leadership?**

BRIAN KELLY: Well, our locker room was very disappointed. They care. That's the first thing that you

want to see, that it hurts. They've invested so much.

I think there's more than just one or two guys. I think there is a core of players in that locker room that were visibly upset about the performance and certainly the outcome.

I don't know that I could single out one particular guy. I think our captains have been great all year. I think Mike Jones has been great. You could see he was out there representing our defense in the press conference. Guys like that that really understand the day-to-day and what we go through are generally the people that we put out front.

But there's more than just one. We have a lot of guys that understand our process. They were very disappointed. When they came in today for treatment, it was still the same feeling.

But now we've flushed it away and we got to get ready for the No. 1 team in the country.

**Q. When you look at this Georgia defense, what challenges does the defense bring in general?**

BRIAN KELLY: First of all, the scheme is outstanding. They mix it up, three down and four down. They do a really good job when they get you into third down, they're going to give you a variety of looks.

But obviously Beal and Carter, outstanding D-linemen. I think Dumas-Johnson is a Butkus Award finalist, an outstanding player. The back end is young and athletic, really good ball skills.

Coach Smart obviously has his hand on everything that happens in this program, but in particular on defense. You can see that. I'm familiar with their defensive structure having gone against them a few times. They continue to get better each and every week.

**Q. Cortez Hankton joined your staff from Georgia last year. What has been his biggest impact?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think first and foremost, in the passing game. He's intimately involved in what we do in the passing game. I think he's done a really good job with implementing that into what we do on a day-to-day basis, as well as developing relationships with our current players and in recruiting.

He's from the state of Louisiana. He's back home, so to speak. He's from New Orleans. He's going to be a great asset in our recruiting as we get underway certainly in earnest here over the next couple weeks.

**Q. Having some previous experience with the College Football Playoff as well as the ACC championship game, did that have more of a playoff feel in your experience?**

BRIAN KELLY: No, I don't know that it felt like a playoff. The Playoffs are so unique and different in the venues they're in. I think the championship felt different than a regular-season game, but it didn't feel like a playoff.

I think this SEC championship in Atlanta is going to feel maybe a little bit closer to that. But I think that's kind of what we're expecting.

Again, getting to an SEC championship game I think is going to have a different feel than maybe any other game that I've been in, so it will be exciting.

**Q. I haven't heard too much of an update on him, Maason Smith, the ACL tear, how is his progression?**

BRIAN KELLY: Thanks for asking. He's doing well. He's obviously focused on his academics and his rehabilitation. He's had no setbacks. We expect him to be ready for our off-season program and progressing into spring ball. We'll be excited to see him get back.

CHUCK DUNLAP: Thank you for your time today, coach.

BRIAN KELLY: Thank you.

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