

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Alabama

Thursday, December 4, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Today we are joined by the head coach of the Georgia Bulldogs, ranked No. 3 in the country, 11-1, 7-1 in the SEC.

We'll take an opening statement from Coach Smart, then take your questions.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you, guys. I personally want to thank the SEC for such a great, tremendous event. It's been an awesome opportunity for us to participate in this game many times. It's not something that we take lightly. It's one of the best venues and most-viewed games of every entire football season.

I think the caliber of the two teams this year is indicative of what it is every year. You have two great programs that both played really tough in-conference schedules and will battle for an SEC Championship in Atlanta on Saturday.

Our guys are excited. We're honored to be there. Got tremendous respect for Alabama, Coach DeBoer, the job he's done, the gauntlet his players went through in terms of the games they had to play, them earning their right to play, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Smart.

If you have a question...

Q. Signing day yesterday. What did you think of the class you were able to bring in, how that helped meet your needs?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, really excited about that group. It was kind of anticlimactic, like it normally is nowadays, on signing day.

Our prep was focused on Alabama. It's a tough day



organizationally because you got a lot going on at the same time. But very, very pleased. Excited about the guys we've got.

I always look at it as you look in reverse, and you look back three years from now, you really value that class then. Nowadays, more of these kids have to be ready to play. I look at our practice yesterday, our practice the day before, and the number of true freshmen that are in the two deep is probably higher than it's ever been in my 10 years here. I have a feeling that's here to stay.

That's saying those guys we signed yesterday would be factors in our depth chart next year. They got to be ready to play faster because you just don't have as many people.

Q. Two of the last three years you've had a quarterback prospect flip away. How has that impacted maybe how you have gone about trying to recruit quarterbacks?

KIRBY SMART: I don't think it changes at all. It's part of the process. I mean, that's not completely abnormal for kids to change their mind.

We've known for both kids a long time that there's a possibility of that. I mean, it's a commitment. It's not a signee. You know that. You have plans in place. We talked all along multiple years. It's not like it's surprising.

I don't think it changes how you recruit. I think you still recruit the same way you recruit. You just make sure you have a plan in place if it happens.

Q. Obviously in this game last year Gunner was forced into play. He got some reps during the year. You look at Ryan Pugh and Ryan Montgomery. If they were forced into something similar, how have they leaned on Gunner, having the experience that he had last year?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't know that they've leaned on Gunner. Gunner is doing his own prep, right? Gunner does a great job preparing for each game. He prepared last year so when his number was called, he was ready to



go perform.

Those guys are their own individual selves. They sit in the same room with Gunner. They listen, learn, take notes. We don't get a lot of action, but we get enough action with them should they have to go in, they have to be prepared.

The quarterback coaches do a tremendous job of putting those guys on the board, asking them questions. They get reps. They don't get as many reps as Gunner. I think that would be the case all across the country, how well are those guys prepared. You never know when your number's going to get called.

Q. A lot of the young guys in your two deep had to play. They're about a year into your program. What do you see out of that group of the freshmen, the young players? What are you looking at when you see them developmentally?

KIRBY SMART: Growth. I think it's really important. We played a clip from a former coach who talked about guys not being prepared and maybe not preparing the right way when their numbers were called. I would never want to feel that way. I don't want any regret.

You learn through real experiences. These kids, whether they're freshmen or sophomores, they're in a long season. They're in a longer season than they've ever been in. They've been in physical practices more than they ever have been. They've had a higher expectation put on them in terms of meeting and volume of knowledge than they've ever been in.

We've challenged 'em. Now it's time to reap some of the rewards from guys having to step up and play from different guys being injured, different guys being out. You just don't know when your number is going to be called. That's why we try so hard to two-spot things, two-spot walks, grow kids, challenge kids, put them in an environment where they have to respond because we just don't know who that might be.

Q. I know Drew Bobo is listed as out for Saturday. Do you expect he will miss the rest of the season? What is he dealing with injury-wise?

KIRBY SMART: I would be speculating. Still don't know, determined what we're going to do with the injury he has. Until we determine that, I would rather not comment on it.

Q. How do you feel about your center position heading into this game? What have you seen this week?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, we've got a lot of guys that have worked at that position throughout the year. Drew has been dealing with an injury the past three to four weeks prior to this week. We had the good fortune of getting a lot of reps for Cortez and Malachi and Donnie Glover, all those guys. They've been getting reps at center for probably three to four weeks. All got reps during camp.

Malachi and Cortez have gotten some invaluable reps down with us in terms of scout reps, which I love. They get to go against really big, physical people and practice against us. They've kind of rotated down and back each week and gotten better.

I'm excited to see them have an opportunity to play.

Q. Have you decided on a starter yet for the center starter?

KIRBY SMART: Again, that's not something that we're prepared to disclose right now. I think those guys are working. They're getting better. Good thing is we got three of 'em that are very capable.

Q. How effective has Chauncey Bowens looked in practice this week?

KIRBY SMART: Chauncey has been like he has the last couple weeks. So he's been doing good.

Q. Just wanted your thoughts on what JaCorey has done down the backstretch of this season, stepping in for Kyron?

KIRBY SMART: JaCorey is a veteran guy in our program, defense. Four years. He's been a really good special teams player. He's played a lot of snaps. He's played dime, nickel, safety, free safety, strong safety. He's one of the guys that's played four spots for us and done a tremendous job. Continues to grow and get better.

Q. I wanted to ask about Bo Walker. He might have been in a car accident this week. Can you give any update on him?

KIRBY SMART: Bo is not going to be with us. He was required to have a surgery. He'll be out for this game.

Q. When you look at Ellis Robinson and Demello Jones, how have those guys progressed since the last game?

KIRBY SMART: I think those guys have progressed well since they arrived. Again, they both hit the weight room last year, got bigger, stronger, understanding our system,



playing well, learning from Daylen. Donte has done a great job with them. Those guys are good football players. They love football. They're instinctive. They challenge people. They cover our wideouts every day in practice which I think is a huge benefit for them in their growth.

Q. Obviously Zayden Walker has played a lot more the second half of the season. What have you seen out of him? Seems like he can do a lot of things for your defense. What is the expectation for him?

KIRBY SMART: He's grown up a lot. He's still developing in terms of his growth in our defense. He came from a high school that he was required to play a lot of different positions. He didn't get always to play inside linebacker. So it's a position that he's growing at.

He's got a lot to learn. He's growing. He gets reps on the scout team each day. He works really hard. He's going to be a good football player.

He's been a good rusher. He's been a good third down guy for us. He's been a good special teams player for us. He's gaining more confidence. I think as he gains more confidence, he'll be able to contribute even more.

Q. Comment on what advantage, if at all, it is for players coming to the SEC Championship game having that experience. How is it different coming back a second or third time?

KIRBY SMART: In terms of the experience for the players?

Q. Yes, sir.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think playing in the venue is a big experience key. I think having been in there with even the freshmen last week, but the guys that played last year, I always think experience is a weapon. So is talent. So is preparedness. All those things will be a factor in the game.

But our kids have played in this game quite a bit. They enjoy it. It's really a credit, a reward, to a season that was extremely tough. A lot of really tough games in the fourth quarter for both teams.

This is what it is. It's a chance to win a championship.

Q. Historically for you, what is the advantage and disadvantage of playing a team a second time in a championship game as opposed to a team you've seen for the first time?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know. There's no real advantages

and no real disadvantages. Both teams have the same tape. Both teams have a common thread that we played each other. It's not a huge advantage one way or the other I don't feel like.

I think sometimes coaches overdo it, overthink it. I just think it boils down to who blocks, who tackles, who prepares the best, who mentally prepares it is best, who handles it the best.

I think we're both dealing with different injuries, so there will be a lot of next-man-up mentality in this game. A lot of times that plays a role in it. Maybe it wasn't the same matchup the last time, it's a different matchup this time. Where that highlights or helps or changes for each time, who knows. We'll find out.

Q. You mentioned both teams dealing with injuries. With the league going to nine conference games, are you worried that might become a bigger factor in future conference games?

KIRBY SMART: It could. It certainly could. It's speculation. I think any coach will tell you that the nine-game season is going to be more wear and tear in terms of our conference, for sure. If rosters are tightening, which they are tightening, teams are going to have fewer guys next year than they do this year due to guys aging out, DSAs removing themselves, portal stuff. It's going to become harder and harder to have the depth you need. Maybe whoever does that best is at a competitive advantage as well.

Q. Sticking on the injury front, LT Overton was ruled out for Alabama last night. How does it change going against the Alabama defense without him available?

KIRBY SMART: Well, first off, I don't know anything about what's going on with him in terms of injury. I have a lot of respect for him. We recruited him out of high school. He's a Georgia kid. His dad was there at 'Bama while I was there. Known him for a long time and have tremendous respect for him as a player and competitor.

I wish him nothing but the best with everything he's got going on in his family that way, as well.

For us, it will just be next man up. That's what you do as coaches, you try to prepare for who's going to be there. Again, it's not something that we know how they're going to change things because he's not there. They got other good players. They've got depth, just like we do.

Q. Is there any update on how Talyn Taylor was doing in practice, and any update on how or Ethan Barbour



is progressing from his injury?

KIRBY SMART: Just able to do more. He's able to run. He's off the scooter. He's moving around. He did some indie, really light work in terms of getting back out there with the tight ends. It's still a slow process for him. It was a significant injury.

He's been in great spirits. Really proud of the way that kid has handled things. He's been attentive. He's such a good energy guy and great team guy the way he's around the team and around walk-throughs and into things. He wants to get out there and do it, very eager to do it and get back and learn. I appreciate the way Ethan has approached that.

In terms of talent, he's done a good job. He did a good job last week. He's trying to get back in the flow of things. That's important that you get back in the flow of things. It's not like you can click your heels together and magically be back. He has to do that from a stamina standpoint, a contact standpoint, from a confidence standpoint. That's something that he's working towards. He's done a great job of pushing and helping in practice and hopefully going to be ready to do some things.

Q. What would your message to the Selection Committee be regarding the overall strength of schedule and the depth of the SEC when considering the CFP field?

KIRBY SMART: I don't feel like I'm prepared, I wouldn't say I'm qualified to speak on that. When they changed what they talked about last year, and it was more of a strength of schedule metric to be measured, to be honest with you, I don't know that we've seen that measure come out in their rankings.

I focus so hard on what we control. What we control is how we play, how we prepare. It makes for a very, very tough job and a tough selection. It seems like we keep going through this each year. We maybe have another year of it this year.

Q. You've participated in this game multiple times. What does playing in this game mean to you? What has it meant to you in your career?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think it's been a great honor to play in it, first. I mean, to win SEC Championships are one of the hardest things to do. You look how elusive they've been, how few programs have been able to win them across the SEC.

That's a credit to getting to the game. It's even a bigger

credit to win the game. It's usually an indicator of a quality of team you have if you advance to the Playoffs and get to play, back in the four-team model or this model, in terms of the talent level of our conference, the number of teams that have gotten in.

Q. There was obviously comments made by Vanderbilt coach Clark Lea about them potentially wanting to play another game to showcase their worth to the College Football Playoff Committee. Is that something that you could see down the line of other teams wanting to play an extra game to showcase their skills, or do you see that potentially happening more?

KIRBY SMART: Not sure. Probably depends on what seat you sit in, right? Everybody on the outside looking in wants another game (smiling). People would argue you had plenty of games. Everybody on the inside looking out will say, I'm good, I'll stay right where I'm at, I'm okay, I played well enough.

I think it's been talked about. It's one of those things that was tossed around early last year about the possibility of playing within your conference or cross-conference, to have some play-in games, which is nothing more than an extension of the Playoffs, and you would play in from that perspective.

But we'll still debate about who's in those play-in games, who would have the right to play in those games to advance and move on.

But there was speculation about that early on. I think there's coaches that think that's a better model because it gives their fan base something to hope for and wish for outside of the 12. Everybody's trying to get a piece of the 12. It's very elusive, it's very hard.

If it gives more people an opportunity, that's good for some. There will be those that probably would have made it in another year that might lose that wish they didn't have that opportunity.

Q. How would you assess the mental aspect of this game with both programs, considering the history that's happened between both programs in this game?

KIRBY SMART: I don't think these kids pay much attention to any kind of history 'cause, I mean, their roster is almost as new as ours. I think both of us are averaging 33%, 34% new guys. We did play them last year in a classic game. We played them this year in a classic game. Multiple years in this game.

I think it's pretty clear that each and every game has a



history and life of its own. You play the game that season with the guys you have and the mindset of the guys you have.

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I don't think these other games will have any effect on this one.

Q. Nate Frazier, he had the fumble in the Alabama game. Since then he's become a different kind of player. What have you seen from him since that contest?

KIRBY SMART: I've seen it before that contest. I don't think you measure someone by one play or one mishap. I certainly don't measure him by that.

He runs with great toughness, competitive fibers. He just competes. I love the way the guy practices every day, how much it means to him.

I mean, he's had good games and good plays since then. He has had some that he wishes he had back. So does every good player.

I don't measure it from that moment to this moment. I look at it as a total season and what a tremendous job Nate has done.

Q. With what's on the line this week, how much does this feel like a Playoff game?

KIRBY SMART: Every game's a Playoff game because for us, every game to this point would have probably taken us out of the SEC Championship game or out of the Playoffs.

I mean, your back's against the wall every week in this conference. It's not new to either team. So it's the next one. You can't make it bigger than it is. It's a big moment. It's the chance for an SEC Championship.

Around our place they put numbers up in the banners in the hallways for when you win SEC Championships. That's significant to me. These kids, these players, they want an opportunity to win this conference. They mostly grew up around this conference. They know how hard it is to achieve an SEC Championship.

We want to be at our best. We got an elite opponent to go against to do it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Smart, thank you for your time this afternoon. We'll see you on Saturday.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you.

