

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Georgia Bulldogs Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference

KIRBY SMART: According to Claude Felton, I'm not allowed to go over 10 minutes. After Eli's filibuster yesterday, I have decided to set an alarm that will not let me go over.

Love you, Eli. That was directed right at you.

I want to thank Greg Sankey, number one. His leadership is incredible. I don't think you guys understand how good a job and how I always feel like I'm being redundant because I say the same thing every year, but this year I also wants to give kudos to the staff in Birmingham that does so much for the rest of us.

So many of them go unmentioned, but the SEC staff does an incredible job of educating us on a lot of issues and helps us out with that, so appreciate that, Greg, and all of your leadership.

Then I want to thank you guys. I also want to issue you the greatest challenge that has ever been issued to the media group here. I thank you for what you do, but your challenge today is to get more than three sentences out of Brock Bowers, which we have not been able to do in three years.

If you can get him to talk, it'll be a great challenge for you and see if you can get it done.

19 of my 25 years coaching has been served in the SEC footprint. I think that's pretty cool when you can go 24 of 30 when you include the five years that I played at Georgia. But 19 of the 25 years has been in that footprint.

I'm very comfortable in that footprint. I enjoy the SEC footprint. Listening to Commissioner Sankey yesterday talk about all the accolades of this conference, I mean, I love it. I love going to see -- our conference dominant. All the spring sports that we compete in seem so dominant. I love and embrace SEC athletics.



I want to give a quick thanks to all our fan bases. The SEC is just different. When you think about the fan bases in our conference they make it what it is. They allow us to recruit to the largest attendance in the country, and it makes our job much easier when you're in the best conference there is in the country.

This off-season, how have I spent this off-season? I think when you think about that, first thing I think about is July, because the only time we have anything off as coaches is end of June and July.

My family and I went on a family vacation there for about a week in July, and then I got to enjoy what my mother started about 13 years ago and she's so proud of. She calls it Julymas. Julymas is Christmas in July.

Because we have bowl games as coaches we don't get to kind of celebrate Christmas as a family, so we bring my brother's family, my sister's family, my parents, eight grandchildren all under one roof for three to four days, and my parents absolutely love it. I don't know that my wife always does, but my family really enjoys it, and we get to have a good time.

I also got to spend five days in the SEC footprint in Mississippi. Travel baseball dad, which is fun and exhilarating, and my wife wants to go to Italy and the Amalfi Coast, and instead we spent it in Mississippi for five days in Southaven. I enjoyed every minute of that, and getting to be a travel baseball dad is something I enjoy.

Our staff, our team, our university, our entire Dawg Nation went through one of the highest of highs in January, which was to win back to back CFP Championships, which had never been done.

We then endured the loss of two dear family members, Devin Willock and Chandler LeCroy. We love them and we miss them.

So many people have stepped up for our players within our organization during this time of need. One of the toughest things I've ever been through as a coach was to experience that.



But some of the leadership that really helped us, we have a rising star in our athletic department in Reese Griffin. She's been there for me, our players, and so many others during these tough times. She's our senior deputy director of athletics and the sport facilitator for football.

Thomas Settles, our team chaplain. What an incredible asset he has been for both our players, our coaches, and people in our organization.

A tragedy can either divide or unite us. I'm proud of our players. It has definitely brought them closer together and united our team and our family.

A while back I was sent something I thought was pretty unique, and I was actually at my desk the other day combing through some things, and it literally hit me right between the eyes as I looked at it. It's a Post-it note that was posted. I had gotten this probably a couple years ago and it was posted behind my seat at my desk.

I think anyone can tell you the benefits of great leaders. Anybody can tell you what it looks like. They can tell you what leadership can do for you. They can tell you how to develop leadership. There's tons of books written on great leaders and leadership.

But you won't see, and what you will never see, is people talk about the costs of leadership and costs associated with leadership I should say. If we truly want to be honest and up front about leadership, you can't ignore the costs of leadership.

Great leaders are willing to accept those costs. I want to share quickly three of those things. Three of the costs that are plastered on my desk right behind it that kind of caught me between the eyes last week.

Number one, you will have to make hard decisions that negatively affect people you care about.

Number two, you will be disliked despite your best attempts to do the best for the most.

Number three, you will be misunderstood and won't always have the opportunity to defend yourself.

Those are three costs that come from being a great leader. The reason I share those, these three costs, are exactly what the three players we brought from UGA represent.

They don't fear those costs. That's the reason we decided to bring them. They accept those costs, and they embrace those costs, and it's not hard for them to see the benefit of

those costs as leaders of our team.

I want to talk real quick about those guys. Brock Bowers, junior tight end from Napa, California. We all know about his phenomenal athleticism. He's got a 3.45 GPA in finance. I remind him constantly that's 5.05 right behind where I was as a finance major at Georgia.

It's the only thing I've been able to beat Brock at. But Brock is unique. He's easily, easily the quietest, hardest worker I've ever been around, and it's such a joy to bring him today to see him squirm on that plane and be uncomfortable and thinking about having to talk to you guys. I'm so excited to see his growth he gets from visiting with you guys and getting to enjoy it.

I wanted to share a quick story on Brock that I think epitomizes who he is. So our off-season conditioning program, we have these things called boxes. As part of our program we do running in boxes. You've got to run down one side of the field and then you jog across the end zone, and then you've got to run, sprint the other side.

So one day -- I don't think these tight ends would claim for this to be true -- but one day our younger tight ends had decided that they were going to finally get Brock. They were going to beat Brock on the boxes.

So they took turns, which you're not supposed to do, running as fast as possible down the straight away, the 100 yards you run down the straight away, and they were going to eventually beat Brock. Because while one of them was sprinting, one of the others would be resting and they had to try to beat Brock.

Well, not only did Brock win every one of those races, he beat every single one of them turn by turn by turn while they rested and waited up, and they just couldn't beat the old vet. It just shows his work ethic and how hard he competes at everything he does, and does it with silence.

Next guy I'll bring up is Kamari Lassiter. Kamari Lassiter is a junior corner for us who I have tremendous respect for. He's a 2.7 GPA sports management major. I'll say this about both Kamari and Brock Bowers, they are what we call COVID babies. They came in during the COVID class.

And I shared this earlier. I think it's very unique to our place. We signed 20 high school players the COVID year; 17 of those 20 are still in our program. That's hard to find anywhere in the country.

They didn't get to go on visits. They didn't get to go on official visits. These guys are the core leadership group of our team, that 17 of 20, which would be a junior class if

they weren't redshirted.

But Kamari is part of that class, too. Kamari has got a great personality. He loves competition. He's fierce. He's a great tackler. This guy must have sent us 800 videos of himself during COVID because he wanted to prove he was worthy of a Georgia scholarship, and he earned that.

Something else I'll share on Kamari that I think is unique. I sat in his skull session because I move around when we have these meetings, and he was talking about his why. It really kind of hit me in the heart, man. It hit me right in the gut when he talked about his mom, Miss Kammie, and how much she sacrificed so he could go to the best high school, private school, and get the best education.

How many jobs she worked, how she slept on the couch at his auntie's house. An incredible job that Kamari did explaining this, making himself vulnerable to the rest of our team and our players. Just love Kamari and everything he stands for and how he practices and how he leads our team.

Then the last guy would be Sedrick Van Pran, senior center New Orleans. He is an art and design major, and he wanted me to emphasize that to you guys. That's extremely unique. He's very talented. Ask him to draw something; he can do it. 3.26 GPA. He decided to return for his senior season because he wants to be the best at his position and he loves his school.

At the end of the day, this guy loves Georgia.

Quick story on Sed I've never told anybody. We were at SoFi having the first practice for TCU. I was frustrated. I was on the mic. We weren't practicing well. We had a little bit of maybe jet lag.

I felt like we weren't practicing good and I said on the mic, you're practicing like you don't want to be here. Nobody here is practicing like they want to be here, and then after practice, of course I had forgotten I said it an hour earlier.

I walked by and Sedrick tapped me on the shoulder and said, Coach Smart, you really hurt my feelings when you said that I didn't want to practice and didn't want to be here, and I thought, this dude is serious and he remembers everything you say and it matters to him.

He cares about this team a lot and it means a lot to him, and he's one of the best leaders I've ever been around.

Before I wrap this up, I do want to speak briefly on dealing with the threat of complacency. Everybody here has talked about is the emphasis on three-peat, is the emphasis on

what are you going to do next, how are you going to top that, how do you top an undefeated season.

The threat for us is complacency. The first thing you have to do is acknowledge that it's a threat. Like if you acknowledge the complacency is a threat, it's the first step towards stomping it out. So we look for two things when we look for people to join our organization. I'm not talking about players, I'm talking about anybody in our organization. Do they love football and do they embrace being part of something bigger than themselves. Are they selfless.

We want to find people who love football and embrace a selfless role. Those two qualities, loving football and embracing being selfless, are not dependent on outcomes. They're not dependent on win or loss, did I get a sack, did I touch the ball. That's not what we're looking for, guys that are dependent on outcomes.

We want guys that think independent of outcomes. So when you see complacency take over it's when a team's enthusiasm and ego start worrying about outcomes.

That's not what we do at Georgia. That's not what we bring into our place. That's not what we bring into the culture we want to have. We want selfless people who love football, and that's what we build around.

This off-season we've done the same thing we did the last two years. We've tried to change it up. This year we studied the New Zealand All-Blacks, most successful sports team in the history of really teams, over 100 years they've had the highest winning percentage. So we took a deep dive. We took a six weeks. We took a title and a mantra from them and studied those things for six weeks because we don't want complacency. They've done it better than anybody else, and we use that.

One of their big mantras is better never rests. We believe that. Those are strong words now when you think about it. Think deep on it. Better never rests.

Our kids understand it. Our kids have learned it. What drives us for this season is intrinsic motivation. We're not going to be controlled by outside narratives and what people say and who's going to be the quarterback.

The intrinsic motivation comes from within and what we decide to do. This team, the 2023 team, is still defining itself. We don't know where that goes. That happens over the course of the rest of the summer and fall camp, but I like where it's at. I love the buy-in. I love the fact these guys being around each other and they love competing and they love football, so that's important to me.



A couple points before I go to Q & A I want to hit real quick. Every full-time coach on this year's staff -- listen to me carefully -- every full-time coach on this year's staff was on last year's staff. Tell me the last time a National Championship team can say that.

The same strength and conditioning coach, Scott Sinclair; the same player development coach, Jonas Jennings; and the same athletic trainer, Ron Courson, has been at our place for eight consecutive years, the entire time I've been there.

We have 26 UGA grads on our staff. Retention for us is the key to sustaining success. Again, retention is the key to sustaining success.

We can't do that without a supportive administration, and we sure as hell can't do that without a great culture of people wanting to be part of our program and pouring into our kids.

With that, I'll open it up for Q & A for you guys.

I did go over.

Q. Speaking of a guy that's been in your program since the beginning, you were with Coach Saban so long. I know he worked with you there. Talk about the development of Glenn Schumann and what he's meant to your program defensively and what he's helped you accomplish thus far.

KIRBY SMART: First off, Glenn Schumann is an incredible man and person. He's a graduate of Alabama. He came there on the Bear Bryant Scholarship. His dad played football at Alabama. He is the son of a football coach. He is extremely bright, extremely passionate. I rely heavily on Glenn for input on practice schedules, defensive design, thinking outside the box.

There's not a time when I think of who can I ask on my staff that understands what we want and what we need, Glenn Schumann is that guy. He's very talented.

Glenn Schumann will be the first to admit he came to the University of Georgia without ever getting an on-the-field coaching position, and I was very confident in his role to do that. What has he done with that? He has produced one of the most productive inside linebacker rooms in the country, and he's one of the people that really believes in growth being a part of his process, and he continues to grow to this day.

Q. Number one recruiting class, back to back Natties,

more kinds in the league in your first seven years than any my coach in the modern college ball era. That being said, with all those accomplishments is there anything you improve on as a coach? And also, before you answer, I don't know who this guy is, but he told me y'all are going 7-5 before she handed me the mic.

KIRBY SMART: So going back to the original question of you want to know what we can do better or what I can do better, well, there's a lot of things we can do better. We can play much better pass defense late in the season. We can grow as a team and continue to get better on our special teams assets. It's like a constant improvement for us, right. Better never rests. We firmly believe that.

We've done a lot of studies this off-season at things we can do better and things we can improve on. Our kids understand that, that we don't want to be just a football factory. We want to produce people that are quality citizens, that do a great job in the community, and I'm constantly evolving as a coach. And I've talked about it several times here today, that I think the best thing I've done is allow coaches to do their job. Take a step back and say, you know what, maybe it's not better that I sit in this meeting and tell somebody what I think they should do. It's probably better that I let them do it and just oversee it and spend more time with the players so that I know Kamari Lassiter's why, I know Brock Bowers' why, I know Sedrick's why. I can probably get more out of them by spending more time with them as players.

Q. You talked a lot about complacency after winning back-to-back National Championships. You obviously did the same thing at Alabama as defensive coordinator in 2012 and 2013. What lessons are you maybe taking from that part of your career and maybe what lessons are you taking from Saban in battling that complacency?

KIRBY SMART: I can't even remember that far back. I'll be honest with you. I don't remember that next season or anything that carried over from that season because you're not thinking about the last season.

I think sometimes as media you guys want to make it about, well, what are you going to learn, how are you going to combat this. All we're thinking about is the next 24 hours. Like how can we get better in the next 24 hours. I'm not sitting here thinking of some motivating factor.

People are like, what are you going to tell your team this year? You going to tell them people are going to say you're going to be 7-5?

No. I've never said that anybody thought our team was going to be 7-5. We expect to be good at University of Georgia. We want sustained success. So we have to do that by winning every day. That's not going to change whether we win it or not this year.

Q. You touched on the tragedy obviously that hit your program there, but you've had a number of traffic-related incidents since then. Are you disappointed that your players don't seem to have gotten a message from that?

KIRBY SMART: I'm disappointed anytime we have traffic incidents. It's very evident when you look at it, we've had traffic citations and incidents throughout the history of being at the University of Georgia. We actually don't have more now than we've had in the past.

What concerns me most is the safety of our players, and when you drive at high speeds it's unsafe. We don't want that to happen.

We're going to do all we can to take that out and make sure that's eradicated.

But I'm also smart enough to understand and know that 18- to 20-year olds is when this happens. It's when it happened to me as a student-athlete. That's when speeding happens. What we want to do is take that out and make it safe and not have high speeds. As long as they don't get a speeding ticket, it should not be a super speeder.

Q. You mentioned retention was the key to y'all's success. What's the secret there for you? How are you getting everyone to stay at Georgia with you?

KIRBY SMART: Well, everybody doesn't stay at Georgia. We have all kinds of analysts and turnover in other spots, but making sure people enjoy their work environment. Like I want to come to work each day. A lot of the motivation to come to work and enjoy it is that you enjoy your time with your family.

I'm always trying to find an innovative way, and I've had people outsource this, like come in and tell me how we can use our time more efficiently, and therefore our coaches get to be with their families and enjoy their families, so that when they are here they're more passionate about their work and they want to stay.

The college calendar, the coaching calendar, it's one of the toughest things out there. Go ask an NFL coach. They'll tell you. They'll laugh and say, it's crazy what you guys do. Well, I want to make it enjoyable for our coaches so that

they feel good and they want to stay and they can bring their family to every event we have and let their kids run around and enjoy it. That's important to me because I want my kids around, as well.

The retention part is letting them do their job and making their job more enjoyable.

Q. The Classic City Collective is one of seven collectives that plans to introduce a revenue sharing model. What are your thoughts on potential revenue sharing in the future?

KIRBY SMART: I'm not an expert on revenue sharing. I do know that our class at City Collective has been on the cutting edge of sharing information, trying to get best practices, trying to find a better way.

I've been a big proponent of like why can't -- just like we talk across different programs to figure out the best way to run a defense or do an offensive play or study, let's figure out the best practices of this so we can get some uniformity among them and try to grow it that way.

That may not answer your question because I'm not an expert on revenue sharing or the way it would be set up.

Q. You were talking about the retention rate. That 85 percent of those COVID babies sticking around, how hard is that in any given recruiting cycle to get that kind of hit rate?

KIRBY SMART: It's only that hard if you don't recruit the right people. I'm proud of the fact that 17 of 20 guys are still in our organization from a COVID year in which we didn't get to host an official visit.

They didn't get to go and do unofficial visits, and we've retained those guys because we've invested in them as freshmen. We've invested in them as sophomores. They've seen kind of return on investment for older players that stuck around.

They watched a Quay Walker not start sophomore year but start his junior year, and then go a first-round pick his senior year. So they've seen a lot of evidence of the success, but they've also seen the buy-in of the leadership.

I challenge anybody to dig up that COVID class, and that's been a really good -- and you know what we evaluated that class on? Love of the game and being selfless. Like that's not hard. It's hard to find, but it's not hard to evaluate.

Q. In the wake of the hazing reports out of Northwestern, do you or have you addressed the topic

of hazing with your team, or do you -- how do you handle maybe the idea of team bonding within your locker room?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, that's in our checklist. I think every coach would say at the beginning of the year you have a certain checklist you go through, and what's happened uniquely is that most of your roster is turning over in January.

So a couple years ago when we had 18 or 19 mid-years we began doing an August session of this is our new team, these are our new players, these are our team rules, and here's the policies we go by. And then we have to do in January now; whereas in the past ten years ago, eight years ago we never did this in January, but our team is turning over in January, so we do twice a year.

We do education, we go through, and I lead that session because it's important to me that they hear it from me, and our entire staff is in there and our entire players are in there.

That's one of the things we talk about each other, not so much hazing as it is welcoming the freshmen.

I remember being a freshman and having to carry people's trays and getting your head shaved when I was a freshman back in 1994. I just thought that was so dramatic.

But now those freshmen, the guys we sign, they have to play. So when you create this separation of they have to do this and they have to do that, they're not ready to play. They're like a different team.

So we do more of a brotherhood. Take this guy in. He's at your position. Can you go out and teach him and walk him through, embrace those guys and make sure they understand that hazing will not be tolerated, and if it is, they need to let us know.

Q. I wanted to ask about recruiting. How much have you seen recruiting change throughout your tenure as a head coach, and what needs to improve, if anything, in terms of recruiting?

KIRBY SMART: When you say what needs to improve in terms of recruiting, I don't -- recruiting has always been recruiting. It's changed because the rules and parameters have changed. We moved up a signing date, moved it to December, which then made us all do official visits in June.

I've seen this whole transformation from a recruit in 1994 that went on an official visit in late January to you would never even bring a guy in on a visit in January because

they are almost all already enrolled.

The cycle has flipped in terms of that.

But when you talk about improving recruiting, I think so much used to be built on your facility and how can you show them how you can develop them, the education, what's your major going to be. Like what do you want to do, life after football.

So much has now become towards directed towards NIL, and I think that's some of Commissioner Sankey's frustration of trying to make that at least somewhat uniform so that we're not operating under different rules state to state.

Q. You guys have run as many multiple tight end sets as anyone over the last couple years with Darnell Washington moving on is that something that you guys will continue because it's in your philosophy, or with the personnel changes, do you think we will see less of those multiple tight end sets?

KIRBY SMART: Very simple answer to that question: We're going to play the 11 best players that give us the opportunity to be successful. If that's seven wide outs, if that's two running backs, if that's four running backs or two tight ends or 13 personnel, we can go through all the numbers.

Every offensive coach will tell you and every head coach will tell you we're going to get the best 11 players on the field. Last year Darnell Washington and Brock Bowers were two of our best football players. That is probably yet to be determined this season.

Q. Earlier you alluded to being the only program to win consecutive national titles in the College Football Playoff era. Since 1936 at the Division I level, no team has won three straight since Minnesota in 1936; 12 teams have attempted to duplicate that but have come up short, including one you were part of in 2013 with Alabama. If Georgia is indeed the last team standing this year, what would that mean and represent for you personally and also for the Georgia program?

KIRBY SMART: It would be a lot of hard work that had been acknowledged. I think we're a long way from that, so to make that assumption or that theory relevant, we would have to get to that point in time. But I can assure you if we get to that point, I'm going to be worrying about the next day's work more than I am the achievement.

Q. I was curious if you talked to your team about history, if you're a history major in college football,



and talk about trying to do something that hasn't been done since the 1930s and the relevance of all that.

KIRBY SMART: We have not addressed that with them. We've certainly looked at some three-peat scenarios of teams like the Bulls and different sports teams that they might actually know about.

No offense to the Minnesota 1935 team, but I don't know if it's going to resonate with my audience.

We're going to try to -- and I don't care about the three-peat, the two Pete or the one Pete. I care about complacency. If the focus is on that and the outcomes, I think the rest will take care of itself in terms of allowing our guys to focus on being the best they can be.

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