

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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## Auburn Tigers Luke Deal

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Our first Auburn Tiger is Luke Deal, and he's ready for your questions.

**Q. Luke, we talked earlier about the multiple tight end room and how to do multiple sets with multiple tight ends. One of the things I was interested in is that sometimes opposing defenses can tell a certain size and personnel is needed to run and another to pass. Do you feel like your tight end room is versatile enough that those defenses will not be able to tell if it's run or pass for you guys? You guys are hybrid and can do both?**

LUKE DEAL: Yes, sir, that's the goal. That's kind of what we worked on this off-season is everybody to, some of our weaker points, strengthen those, and some of our strengths, continue to build upon those. Yeah, we're very versatile, very deep. We're a very mature room.

I think that's going to be attainable for us to be a versatile offense and for us not to be a very easily picked off offense as well.

**Q. What do you think were some of the main strides you guys made in the spring? I know it was kind of interesting settling in with a new offense getting a bunch of pieces in there, but what are the biggest steps you think you guys took? And you as an offensive leader, what are you setting the table for to grow in fall camp?**

LUKE DEAL: The first thing, like you said, learning a new offense is always a challenge. I've learned a few now, and some guys, some younger guys don't really understand how to go about that, the best way to go about that.

So I think just learning the offense at a good pace, learning it and refining our new techniques and everything that goes with that. We've done that this summer, last spring, and also, like you said, off field. We've had a bunch of transfers, a bunch of recruits come in and join this team.



So being able to build relationships with those guys, get to know them, get to know their story, their why, that's been a huge part of our off-season program so far.

**Q. Luke, what can you say about newly arrived transfer quarterback Payton Thorne?**

LUKE DEAL: I think Payton is an incredible leader. He's a really good guy. I've gotten to know him on a personal level. I really like his leadership qualities that he brings. He's got that savvy quarterback demeanor that you look for in a quarterback. He's somebody that I think will help us. One way or another, he'll help us in our strides this year.

**Q. I think last year the game against Texas A&M, the atmosphere, though everybody was playing for Coach Williams, I think that was just a really cool moment. Wanted to hear your perspective about being a part of it.**

LUKE DEAL: Yes. That year had been very disappointing up until then. The way we wanted it to go, it did not. To just arrive there at that Tiger Walk, to see that many screaming fans in orange and blue was something that I mentioned to a couple of you already earlier, I still get chills thinking about it.

It's something that you don't get very many places. It's why I love this place. It's why I'm so blessed and honored to represent Auburn today and hopefully every day.

**Q. Just speaking with a couple of Auburn players so far this off-season, they seem really excited about Coach Freeze and kind of how he's brought a new energy to the locker room. From your perspective, what can you say about the way that either you guys are talking, what you guys are talking about, or how things are kind of -- if they're different now in that locker room.**

LUKE DEAL: Absolutely. I've mentioned this multiple times today, but we are very focused in the moment. We are very focused on the process and each day, day in and day out, getting better. We're not looking ahead or looking



behind. We are focused each day on that team meeting, that lift, that run, whatever it may be.

That's something that I think Coach Freeze has brought. It's something that us as leaders have kind of established, and I'm really excited about that. I think we're really getting some quality work in this summer and spring and just leading up to the season. I'm really excited.

**Q. It's been an interesting past two years at Auburn, ups and downs. Bryan Harsin and the Cadillac, a lot of off the field stuff. To have Hugh Freeze in the room now, is it a sigh of relief for you as a veteran on this team to kind of just focus on football?**

LUKE DEAL: Absolutely. When you can just focus on football and focus on leading your team, that's always a positive for me. As somebody who wants to be that pivotal leader on this team, that's something that I find great joy in, just knowing that we have a solid foundation, we have a very transparent team, a very open team, a very relationship driven team.

So that's something that's really been good for me.

**Q. You mentioned the Texas A&M game and Cadillac. How much do you think he saved this season to some extent, bringing positive energy? And how much of a carryover has that brought into this season?**

LUKE DEAL: People may not understand how pivotal that was for us. I would argue that this football program, this team, this university, this town has still built off of that moment, off of those games, off of that energy. That's what we're going to take into next season.

That kind of energy, that kind of unity is something that you build on hopefully for years to come. So it's been huge.

**Q. Luke, you mentioned all the different offenses you've been a part of. From a football standpoint, can you compare what you guys maybe were running last season to what you guys are trying to run right now? Just from a schematic standpoint, what are the things you've kind of noticed?**

LUKE DEAL: In football, it's such a copycat league, that there are so many overlapping qualities in each offense. Obviously we saw a lot more under center, huddle, pro style stuff out of Coach Harsin. You still get that kind of pro style out of Coach Freeze's offense and Coach Montgomery's offense, but obviously being able to spread people out, just being the most versatile team, that's huge for us.

We want to be in multiple, different formations, lined up in multiple, different spots, and just attack defenses where they least expect it.

**Q. So you've been around for a long time now. You played under Coach Malzahn, Coach Harsin, now Coach Freeze. Could you compare their leadership styles and how they go about leading that locker room.**

LUKE DEAL: Absolutely. I think all three of them are different people personally, but that's good I've gotten to know three of them personally. That's something that in college football getting to know people, getting to know their background -- like I said with our players, it's no different for coaches. They're people too.

Definitely three great leaders, three different leaders. Coach Malzahn always was a little quieter, but once you got to know him and once you understood what he stood for and how much he cared for you, then that was what it was and that was your relationship.

Same thing with Coach Harsin. Coach Harsin was more outgoing than people think. I give him props for that. I got to know him as well.

And same way with Coach Freeze. Coach Freeze is always a positive energy, a positive light in the meeting room, and that's something that's really refreshing for everybody. I've appreciated all three of those guys, learning under them.

**Q. I know that you guys are supposed to block out off the field things, but when you talk about atmosphere and electricity in the previous question, what does it mean to you and your teammates when you get wind that Auburn set a record for season tickets as far as selling out? I know that trickles down to you. Does that get you guys pretty fired up to play in the upcoming season?**

LUKE DEAL: Absolutely. And I'm a college football junkie. I always have been since I was a little ball boy for my dad's high school football team.

I love going to different away games. I love playing in the whiteout. I love playing in The Swamp. I love playing in Baton Rouge and doing all these different things. So whenever I see that the greatest atmosphere, in my opinion, in college football is going to be even better, that's music to my ears.

**Q. I just wanted to kind of talk more about Cadillac, just the energy he brought last season. How cool is it to have him as part of this team and help this offense**

## **grow now under Hugh Freeze?**

LUKE DEAL: You guys saw. He was used to having the spotlight on him as a player, and whenever you saw he had the spotlight on him as a coach, you saw that positive energy. You saw that just positive light, that positive outlook on everything in life. That was something that energized us. It motivated us. That's something that he brings every single day.

We've got a really good running back room, really, really good running back room. Not only a good group of players, but a good group of guys. That trickles down from his leadership for sure and how he looks at every day as an opportunity.

**Q. Just to piggy-back off of that, how important was it to keep Cadillac around you, knowing what he means to that university and what he meant to that football team last year?**

LUKE DEAL: Oh, yeah. People are going to be pretty upset if you get rid of Cadillac Williams. I know I would be. Coach Lac, he's an incredible man, incredible ambassador for the school, has been for a long time. People with orange and blue in their blood, they want to see him around forever. That was definitely important for our success.

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