

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Nashville, Tennessee, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks

Kai Kroeger

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now we have Kai Kroeger. He is ready for questions.

Q. Your punting is awesome, but we've also seen you drop some dimes on fake punts. How far down on the quarterback depth chart are you?

KAI KROEGER: I think it's a very unofficial number. I think it would be like, what, six probably right now, five or six. But I'm definitely ready if they need somebody.

Q. (Question about the offensive coordinator.)

KAI KROEGER: I think it's honestly how much time he puts into it, how much he cares about it. I've been around a lot of people that have pushed special teams to the side, whether it was high school or my first year in college, maybe it wasn't as much of a focus.

But with Coach Lembo and Coach Beamer, they make sure it's a focus. And you've been able to see it impact games as much as it has. It gives us a lot of confidence that we know our coaches care that much.

We also see how much he does. He's in the building probably more than anybody almost. He's scheming up something, asking us what we think about something. So we love that.

Q. What is it like? You said they've shown that it's important, special teams. I guess it also says the fact that you're here representing South Carolina is representing the school as a punter.

KAI KROEGER: Yeah, it's honestly breathtaking. I'm so grateful to be here. The fact that Coach Beamer viewed me as somebody that is a leader of this team means the world to me.

I just try to carry that with myself every day, that guys will listen to me. This will be my fourth year. I've seen what

not to do, I've seen what to do. I try to give my input whenever I can.

Q. Last year you beat Texas A&M for the first time ever. What was that like? How are you looking forward to playing that one again?

KAI KROEGER: We had confidence going into the game. The opening kickoff, Xavier returns it for a touchdown. From that moment on, we're full steam ahead.

I didn't realize that we hadn't beaten them since their entrance in the league. After hearing that, it's kind of, like, wow. It's really a big deal. They've beaten us pretty bad in the past. It's nice to get back at them. That's another game where special teams is a big deal.

Q. Speaking on games where special teams is a big deal, your performance in that Clemson game was unreal. Talk us through what that was like. You get on a heater in a game like that. Confidence flowing?

KAI KROEGER: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of like you almost just want to give it the MJ shrug. So many things just go your way. Obviously I can do my part to control the distance as much as I can, try to hit backspin and such. It kind of just seemed like every punt would go exactly where we wanted it, have the right balance. There were a few that were maybe like stingers. I need to get those up more.

Definitely an unbelievable game.

Q. We've talked to Coach Lembo about it, but as a specialist, how have things changed with the players, the perception of wanting to be in the special teams meeting room compared to when you were a freshman?

KAI KROEGER: It's honestly done a complete 180. I look back at my freshman year. There were guys turning their shoulder to special teams or not wanting to be on units. Now Coach Lembo can't stop guys coming into his office, asking if they can be on punt, kickoff return. That gives us confidence as specialists, knowing it's the guy blocking for



me, covering Mitch's kicks, they want to be there 100%, not somebody giving half effort.

Q. Are there any other punters or kickers, specialists, that you're close to around college football?

KAI KROEGER: I'd say we all generally know each other from high school camps. So I know the Mizzou kicker Harrison Mevis, where we went through the ranking camps and stuff together. We're pretty close. A lot of casual friends I'd say where you talk to them before and after the game.

I don't talk to too many people unless, like I said, it's at a game or camp because we're across the country.

Q. The SEC recently changed their rules on rushing the punter where if the punter is at least five yards away from where they were standing at the start of the play, there won't be any penalty called. How do you feel about this rule? Do you feel it's dangerous, or do you think it's better or worse for the sport?

KAI KROEGER: This is my first time hearing about it. I had no idea that was put into play.

The instance we're talking about between Kentucky and Missouri, it happens once every few seasons maybe. But it's severe. I remember it happened to a Buffalo punter a few years ago who I knew.

I think obviously as a punter I'm trying to look at what we can do to make it safer for us because we are defenseless. We do have pads on, but I'm not the same athlete as pretty much everybody on the football field. Even though I try to be sometimes (smiling).

Yeah, I think I definitely have to look more into it to kind of learn more about it. But as long as there's still something in play protecting us, then it should be okay, because there are freak instances that happen like that where a punter has to try to make a play because the snap went over his head. I can see where they're coming from from that point.

Q. Anything really stands out, a game you feel like you'll remember for a long time from last season?

KAI KROEGER: You can probably pick a handful of games. Definitely the Clemson game, we won by one point, which I feel like that did a justice almost, but also the rivalry. It's like pure hatred almost.

I came from a place where there was rivalries, but it wasn't that serious, so I didn't really understand it. You come here and you do not talk to anybody that wears orange.

That game was unbelievable, especially being able to contribute the way I did was awesome. So that game I'm not going to forget forever, for sure.

Q. As a team, what do you feel like contributed to your success overall last year? What do you feel like needs to happen to keep that trend going this year?

KAI KROEGER: I think it starts with Coach Beamer and kind of attitude and accountability that he brings to the team. Once you have guys that are bought in, it's the little things that you wouldn't think of: showing up on time, parking where they're supposed to, cleaning up their locker. That stuff has gotten better every single year. We've done better every single year. It's the little things I've noticed. People being vocal, leaders. Keeps everyone in check, focused on the main goal.

Q. Last year DK said that he won Media Day as far as the outfit. You're holding it down for the specialists as well. How would you compare yourself to Spencer and Tonka?

KAI KROEGER: I feel like I might have the edge a little bit. I try to spice it up as much as I can. Pink colors, my guy Brent Skinner hooked me up pretty good.

I think I can let everyone do the talking, but I think I might be up at the top.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

KAI KROEGER: Thank you.

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