

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 15, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

## LSU Tigers

## Coach Brian Kelly

### Press Conference



**BRIAN KELLY:** Good morning, everyone. Six weeks we'll begin the 2024 football season. For me, 33 years and I'm still as excited as I was that first year that I was named the head football coach at Grand Valley State, when I clearly had no idea what I was getting into.

But as we go into the 2024 season at LSU, we'll be celebrating 100 years of Tiger football. We're excited about the things that we're going to be able to showcase this year. We feel like Tiger football has a great history and tradition. Our stadium has been refurbished to take advantage of the pageantry of Tiger Stadium. I think it's going to be an exciting football venue for everyone.

It's been a challenging season. A lot has gone on, as we know, with NIL and transfers, and the college football playoffs; it's certainly upon us now, and we're excited about that change that I think brings a new form of excitement in particular to our new conference.

I want to welcome Texas and Oklahoma into the SEC, making this, in my opinion, the premier college football conference in the country. Deep, and competitive, and certainly now an incredible challenge from top to bottom.

And so when we talk about playoffs, you're certainly going to be seasoned playing in this conference week in and week out.

I brought three of our players here today that I'm very proud of, and you'll get an opportunity to spend some time with them today. Garrett Nussmeier, who has waited for his opportunity to be our starting quarterback. His persistence, his patience, his leadership. I'm excited to watch him lead our football team in 2024.

Mason Taylor, our starting tight end since his freshman year when he caught the winning two point conversion against Alabama. Has only been one of the most consistent players for our football team, both on and off the field.

It's hard sometimes when you're surrounded with three first-round draft picks to kind of get the notoriety and publicity, and I thought it was only fitting to bring him here today and get his due recognition for the kind of football player he's been for us over the past two years. The expectations of him really being the kind of two-way player both as a blocker and pass receiver.

And then Harold Perkins who has been a mainstay for us as a playmaker on defense going into his third year. Excited to watch what he's able to bring both at the inside linebacker position. Blake Baker will be able to move him around. Really why I brought him is I want you to see the man outside the jersey. He's one of our top student-athletes. He's got an incredible personality. I think you're going to love getting a chance to meet Harold Perkins the man instead of talking about Harold Perkins the football player.

So those are the players you'll get a chance to meet today.

The 2024 football team at LSU is one that as we go into year three, has been built on accountability and trust, but it's been built knowing that we have to be able to play much more balanced football. We had obviously a record setting offense last year, but we didn't play to the standard that we needed to play at times defensively.

And certainly that will be the goal this year, to play the kind of offense and defense and special teams that complements each other. So the challenge this year for us going into the off-season was to make the kind of strides that bring our defense up to the standard necessary to play for a championship.

We feel like we've done that. Obviously we've got a little bit more work to do with our pre-season and our opener will certainly test us when we open up against USC in Las Vegas, a game we're certainly excited about.

So all of those things in 2024 have been exciting opportunities for our growth at LSU, and can't wait to get started.

**Q. Obviously you guys lose Brian Thomas, Jr. and Malik Nabers to the draft. How do you plan on replacing that productions?**

BRIAN KELLY: I don't think you look towards one player. I think when we look at our football team in its totality, there will be a number of players that we'll count on. Kyren Lacey, he will be certainly a player that we lean on. But I think at the wide receiver position, there is probably six to eight players that will get the opportunity to contribute and make an impact.

I think that's what I like about our receiving corps more than anything else, is the depth. I think we've got speed on the perimeter. Chris Hilton showed that in our bowl game against Wisconsin, his ability to track the ball down the field.

I think we've got the ability to play inside out at the slot receiver position. I think we've got great depth there.

We brought in CJ Daniels. I think he will help us. Zion will help us, transfer from Mississippi State. I think we brought in the right mix of players to give us the depth necessary inside and out to make up for that lost production.

**Q. You had immediate success in the SEC during your first season. What do you think was one of the biggest keys into parlaying your success at Notre Dame into immediate conference contention in year one?**

BRIAN KELLY: Clearly being the No. 1 offense in the country was not good enough. I think you have to have much more balance. So I the balance that we need is offensively and defensively we have got to be able to complement each other. We didn't do that last year.

What we're going to need is that complement on defense; going to have to play better defense this year. I think we've made the necessary strides in the off-season to continue on that growth.

So again, complementary football, offense and defense. I know that sounds like coach speak, but the numbers prove it out. You can't have the No. 1 offense in the country and not play the kind of defense necessary to get you to the next level.

Playing better defense quite frankly.

**Q. What of the sale pitch to Bo Davis? What does he bring as an on-field coach, a recruiter?**

BRIAN KELLY: The sales pitch was certainly his opportunity to rebuild the pride and tradition of LSU's

defensive line. There is a great and rich tradition of LSU football, and I think that that had something to do with it.

He wanted to be the architect of bringing that back. His ability to motivate, his ability to teach technique, he's demanding, never demeaning. He has an incredible experience with success. He's won national championships within the SEC, so players immediately identify with his success because it's real. That carries onto the recruiting trail. Somebody that has done it, been there. I think we're seeing that come to fruition early on in his tenure here at LSU.

**Q. You've had some big hits in the transfer portal, like Jayden. You've had some misses. This is your third recruiting class. What have you learned about the transfer portal since your first year when you had to take a bunch of guys to fill roster spots? What have you changed as far as philosophy and what have you learned?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think the transfer portal is what I always thought it would be, in that it can't be strictly need based. If you're in the transfer portal for need based -- in other words, your filling needs, you haven't done something right in the natural recruiting season.

Last year it was need based and that's never a good situation when it comes to the development of your football program. I think you need to use the transfer portal to top off the Tank so to speak, right? That you can add to a particular position and almost one that it's not needed, but becomes a luxury.

When you can get to that situation, I think that the transfer portal becomes an effective tool. If it's strictly need based, you're probably in for some rough seas.

**Q. You talked about the success coming into the SEC, having a balanced offense and defense. Texas, when you look at them you won't play them this season. What you look at what Sarkisian has done with that team do they have that balance on offense and defense to be a top contender in the SEC and possibly take the championship this season?**

BRIAN KELLY: I only watched them against Alabama because that was really the only game that from a recruiting -- not recruiting -- from an analysis standpoint that we had an opponent that I needed to watch them. In watching that game they had both offense and defense, the capabilities of competing for a championship.

Now, each year brings players coming and going. I don't know what their losses were. Haven't researched their

roster, but certainly if they lost some players, I know they lost some big players on the defensive line.

I think it's always about how you replace and so if you recruited well and you can step in, if they recruited well and they have guys to step in, Texas certainly has the ability to compete for an SEC championship.

**Q. Coach, what goes into placing somebody as positionally versatile as Harold Perkins, and how do you balance his long-term future in the NFL to makes the most sense for your team?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think first and foremost, you're looking at a player from his freshman year and what he can do before he is fully developed. So if you take him in his freshman year, and there are things that he can do to impact your team but he's not fully developed yet, then you find a position for him that can impact immediately, knowing full well he's not fully developed in all areas that allow him to play every down.

Harold might have been that as a freshman, where he was much more impactful as a pass rusher, somebody that was a situational player, and quite frankly maybe got a reputation as that. But that's not who he is. He's an every-down linebacker that can play inside and out and has the ability to run, can obviously rush the passer, and also tackle from sideline to sideline.

And that's the developmental process that I think coaches have to be able to see what can he do right now versus what can he do as he develops, and then ultimately, what is his position as he moves to the next level?

So I think you have to take all those things in consideration when you're evaluating your players.

**Q. Jayden and Garrett seem to be very different football players at the quarterback position. Curious if there is any common traits that all great quarterbacks might share and if you see any of those in Garrett?**

BRIAN KELLY: Oh, there is certainly common traits. I think the first one certainly, if we're talking outside of the skill factor, right, the ability to throw the football. If you talk about just from the neck up, the ability to certainly translate. In other words, take the offense, take the things that are taught in the classroom, and be able to translate those things to the field.

That was one of Jayden Daniel's best assets. You could watch it, talk about it, he could recite it. You could be in a meeting and you would walk out of that meeting and go, amazing. His recall, his ability to go through all the

progressions, his ability to know everything in terms of blitz protection, and then in a game he could do it.

That gift, that ability is what makes the great quarterbacks great, and Garrett has been able to do that as well. Now, he has to go do it in the games like Jayden did. But that's the first thing we look for, the ability to take it from the meetings, film study, walk-throughs, practice, and apply it to the games real time.

I believe Garrett will be able to do that as well. What.

**Q. What has the defense progression been from spring football to now under Blake Baker?**

BRIAN KELLY: Look, scheme aside, I think everybody has their flavor of what the scheme looks like. Blake certainly has an established comfort level in a particular scheme.

But it's relationships, it's getting players excited about stepping on the field. It's about players truly wanting to be part of those 11 guys running, hitting, being part of that unit.

Blake's ability to orchestrate that, bring that together, is what has been the piece that is really evident.

**Q. I know LSU expectations are always very high. You come in the first year after taking a team with 39 scholarship players, and I think it's fair to say you maybe exceeded some expectations. Builds up big expectations for last year and there was a perception that you didn't quite hit those expectations. In the real world in year three, how do you view the progression to get to now? Do you feel like the expectations were too high last year? Again, how does the build look in year three knowing where you came from?**

BRIAN KELLY: The easiest way for me to answer the question is that I don't deal in expectations. I deal within a process of how we do things on a day-to-day basis. I know that's not the answer you want, Ralph.

I mean, so we don't deal on a day-to-day basis with those expectations as much as are we doing the things necessary that allows us to stick with our process. Because we're not about the results as much as are we making progress towards our ultimate goals.

Our mission is certainly to win championships. I get how we get to that conclusion. We didn't win a championship. We're in year three, this is the most accountable that group has been. There is trust within the group.

This will be the deepest team that we've had. I don't know

what that's going to be relative to the expectations. All I can do is continue to work towards what our process is and then whatever the outcomes are going to be evaluated externally.

I don't control those. I control what our process is and how we go to work every day. I can tell you in year three, I've had really good success with getting our football team to be the most accountable, trusting team that I've had here at LSU.

That's usually been pretty good at my other stops.

**Q. Just want to get your thoughts on Oklahoma's addition to the SEC and Brent Venables job in his first year building that program?**

BRIAN KELLY: I think what I was really impressed with Coach Venables job was just the bounceback and the ability to overcome some adversity. Certainly as a first-time head coach, you know, having some adversity and really learning on the job and coming back and having an outstanding season this past season, I think they've got a great quarterback.

I just think they're another outstanding football team with a great history and tradition. I got the privilege of playing them few times when I was at Notre Dame, and it's a great atmosphere. I played them when I was at Cincinnati. So I think it's just a great tradition, great program, and I think coach has done a great job of really I think on the job really adjusting to being the head guy and I think he's done a terrific job.

**Q. Coach, you coached in Ireland with Notre Dame in 2012 and planned to go back in 2020. LSU is considering playing in the College Football Classic in Ireland. How important is it to expand the LSU brand outside the U.S., and what does it mean to you personally to play in Ireland?**

BRIAN KELLY: Well, as a Irish Catholic and somebody that loves to go to Ireland, not to just be at the Temple Bar, but to be in Ireland and the history and the culture of Ireland, I just think from our brand, we've done such a good job with the LSU brand throughout the country. I think the next step for us is international.

I've felt the travel there is so clean and easy. Ireland has been such a great destination for other football programs to go and play. Aviva, Cork stadium, both great venues to play in.

I just think it sets up so easy from my perspective for American football to go over there and be received first of

all, and then getting the matchup there. So I'm a huge proponent. I've been pushing our administration and hopefully we're able to see that come to fruition.

**Q. I know you talked about Harold's usage last year. What would you do differently if you had that decision back?**

BRIAN KELLY: We would have tied him down and made him eat more. You know, we had an issue relative to his weight gain and we didn't feel like that it really was his best position to be inside. I just felt like we were still in the developmental process with Harold. Like I said you'll see him today. Over 220 pounds and physically strong enough to handle the rigors of inside and out.

I just felt like we were needing to put him in the best position possible to succeed to now where he is physically in a position and he's matured, he now is able to be in more than one position.

**Q. You mentioned Garrett at the start, the patience. These not in great supply these days, especially with quarterbacks. What about him do you think allowed him to stick a round and wait his turn? He had such a good bowl game. How does that play into the season?**

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, that's a great question. Coming from a football family, you know, his dad being in the business, I think in many ways not chasing something that you didn't know about, where you knew where you were and you knew your opportunity was going to be coming, and you were going to get that opportunity at a place that you wanted to be.

I think being brought up in a football family and seeing the adverse effects if you're chasing something that you don't know I think helped him in his decision making process.

I think he saw that we are going to develop or quarterbacks at LSU and that we clearly have developed or quarterbacks and that he would continue to develop while he was in a back-up position.

So I think those played a huge role. And now he's got the keys to the car. I couldn't be more happy for him and for our football program that he's leading us.

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