

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Lane Kiffin

Press Conference



LANE KIFFIN: All right, thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate that. Really grateful and thankful to so many people that have supported this challenging week from all over the country, especially the Oxford and Ole Miss communities and church yesterday, and Pastor Fish afterwards coming over with myself and mom was really special.

It's just an amazing outpouring of support, stories from former players, former coaches, and especially former staff of people in the building and how many friends came out of that in the Buck's community and family.

In my opinion, it's not really the place or the time to go into a lot on this, that will be Saturday in Tampa. I'll just say one thing. I've talked before about being my hero. I had a high school neighborhood friend, middle school friend, and he said hero is not really the right term for him, it's superhero.

It's what he was to the people that he touched. He used this term, and now I'm using this term in description of him, because I feel like there is very few superheros and very few great ones that loved everyone and tried to help everyone they came in touch with forever. Whether you were big or small, wherever you were, he tried to help.

One person said, which I think is telling for those that of you don't know him, and I thought this was very descriptive. He said I met him in a gas station. Although he was a stranger to me, he made me feel like a friend. That was him.

So he never wanted anybody to have a bad day orb sad so this is me trying to do that. I appreciate everything and already been a lot of questions about it. I understand that. I'm appreciative of that. But as he would say, his first rule when you put on the chalkboard back in the day to all players and coaches was to show up. First rule of getting better is you got to show up. Show up and do your job. That's what I'm trying to do here.

So moving into the season, this is a really has been an exciting time at Ole Miss. Going back to the New Year's Six Bowl and the Peach Bowl and that win and so many players deciding to stay after that, to come back for another season, and then the addition, a lot of credit to those players and staff obviously, but those players, additions through the portal of other players and free agency, and it's set up for a chance to have a good team.

But there is a lot of work in that. There is plenty of noise out there that means nothing, and plenty of teams over the years in all sports have been ranked high and haven't played well and been ranked low and played really well. None of that means anything.

Just very appreciative to Coach Saban, who called the other day and stopped me and talked to me there. In respect to Coach Saban as terms, this is really, as he said, this is a rat poison situation here to have all this attention on our players, and it means nothing because it's all about the work that they put in, the process they do daily, they're working extremely hard this summer, and then we're going to have a lot of work to do in training camp.

Not just your typical, normal as always Xs and Os and development of that. They got to come together. As you look over time, look in professional sports, there are plenty of teams that were supposed to be good or added these great free agent teams and they came together, all these free agents, and don't play well together. In this sport especially with all three phases there is a lot of -- it's the ultimate team sport.

There is a ton of work to do on and off the field for us to perform well. So I think the schedule is very exciting. I just said in it the last interview, I am in this area probably not -- you wouldn't consider me a traditionalist. In the conferences, the divisions I am, but it is what it is, and there is some excitement in that. The fans get to go to places they're not used to and the players.

So we have a very challenging schedule, home and away, in very hard places to play, some of the hardest places in the country. So we're going to have a lot of work to do.



Q. You mentioned the team element. Can you talk about some of the team building that you've done and how you modified that with the number of transfers coming into your program?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I think in a way, you know, we've kind of had some examples to learn from. We've done what is considered out there well in the portal for a number of years now.

Two years ago I think we were 8-1 or something, playing Coach Saban and had the ball going down to score at home, and if we score in the red zone the last drive, we're going to 9-1, and then fall apart and don't play well.

I think lose the last four or five or something. Then last year go 11-2 and play well with a lot of portal heavy players.

So in that is what I've said for years now, which I think there is so much of that bonding and them coming together or else everybody would say just go get a top free agency see team in the NBA. That doesn't always work.

More than anything, that shows in the NBA and this is a sport that it takes a lot more players to play.

So I do think there is a good mixture of it. There is a lot of really good portal players, but you have so many players coming back which we didn't have two seasons ago that know our expectations, know how we want things down, and know what our culture is.

So that certainly helps. Three of them are here today that came back instead of going to the NFL and understand how we do things.

Q. I was wondering if I could get your thoughts on the rule change a couple weeks ago regarding accountable coaches on the field, opening the door for analysts to be more involved on the field, and adding Zach Arnet and Joe Judge to the staff?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that that's probably good. You know, everybody has the opportunity now, and I guess when I think of decisions to make, I usually look to the NFL because they been doing it for a long time; they have things nailed.

To me, usually in this free agency portal and things I've said about too many windows and not having real contracts and all that, the NFL has it figured out. So I think in this instance, there is an accountable coach there and there isn't somebody that can coach but then can't run the film or

can hold a card but can't really coach, can't have a headset.

So I think I would defer to that, that that's a good system in the NFL; now we have that in college. Obviously through the process there was some argument of well, smaller schools -- now the bigger schools will have bigger staffs and kind of raid smaller schools. I understand that from that perspective.

At the same time, too, they're getting opportunities now at the bigger schools where a lot of times they were coming anyway, and now they can do all the coaching responsibilities and further their career.

Q. Can you talk about Jaxon Dart? You've had a long history of developing quarterbacks at a high level. He performed well last year with only five interceptions and over 3300 yards. What kind of things in this off-season have you talked about for him to take the next level as a quarterback and jump into the top 2 or 3 in the conference?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, we're all trying to improve players obviously. I think with Jaxon, there is not as much to point to because he did finish the season really well and we've had him now for a while. A lot of times we got to go work on leadership things with someone and investing in their team and players.

In honor of this game coming out that everybody is so excited, including Knox, because there is a party tonight to play this game. Makes me think if they had a rating -- which maybe they do -- had a rating of leadership of a quarterback, he would be a 99, because he invests into the players so much.

So a lot of times you got to work on that with them; he has that nailed. So I think just continuing of his decision making, and then no matter how grounded you are, the spotlight and the pressure gets big of him maintaining what he did really well at the end the year, which is why we were so successful, which is taking care of the football and not forcing balls and making really good decisions.

Q. How much did last year's Georgia game impact the way you tried to attack the portal this year?

LANE KIFFIN: You know, I think that -- I guess I said it after the game, you know, we've got to recruit better. That was not a shot towards or players because I hate that. Well, the coach is saying...

We got to coach better, but we as coaches got to recruit better in our thinking and evaluations and so forth. One of

the big things was I just thought should happen in a few games over our time here, really with Alabama and Georgia, was there was a length and size issue.

You know, both Kirby and Coach Saban, you learn from Coach Saban there is an impact profile they recruit to of size. That's -- that's not easy to do everywhere. Everybody would love to have every player 6'5". I do think we address that and I do think in that game it was glaring.

Again, we got to perform really well, practice really well, and coach really well. But we're going to look better coming off the bus I guess. We'll have more length and size.

Q. You spoke earlier about the potential problem with the transfer portal depending on what you have. How important is it to you that you guys recruited at a high school level or junior college level, because both of those obviously in Mississippi are pretty strong?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I think it's really critical to have a really good balance. I think that for us, the way that we do it, that changes every year. I don't think the right way in the evolving college football landscape of recruiting and portal changes and windows and now multiple transfers, I think you can't be stuck and say we're not going to take any or this many percent of high school.

You'll get stuck, because you got to do just like you were in the free agency in the NFL. There are some areas you sign more and some areas you sign less; you lose some sometimes now; some guys come back and don't go to the NFL that maybe you thought were.

So we're all evolving in that. We're going to try to sign the best players, but we're also going to really look at who they are. I mean, you guys see it. Just study -- the answer isn't just be the best portal classes, because there are some really good high school signing classes and some really good portal classes, and they didn't have great seasons.

There is a lot to that too in the right makeup of the guys that you signed. So especially in the portal to me, I think you got to be really careful and really good job of evaluating who they are, why they left where they left, what do they want to do so that when you do hit some tough times they're the right type of players that are there to help themselves but to help the team also.

I think you've seen some programs where that hasn't been the case in the last two years.

Q. You added Chis Paul, Jr. out of the transfer portal at the linebacker spot. Talk about what you've seen

from him to this point and what you're expecting from him not just as a player, but as a leader as well for your defense?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I think that's -- now that we're like the NFL when it comes to free agency and all this, I think that was similar to what happens a lot in the NFL. You play against somebody and then they go -- they're up for free agency that year and they're a rival and so you feel like you know them well. Especially as an offensive head coach going against him, playing him. Then he got injured later in our game and able to run the ball a lot better when he was out.

So just seeing his impact, so when he became available in free agency, we already knew about him that way. Really glad to have him.

Q. You and Coach Sarkisian share a similar past. You were quarterbacks, coached at USC; coached under Nick Saban at Alabama. As Texas comes into the SEC, what challenges do they face? Like everyone is talking about are they real contenders, but from a coaching perspective so they have a real serious chance to go pretty high this season?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I mean, they were in the Final Four last year and a lot of players coming back and added -- continued to add great high school players and portal players.

So I think they're one the elite rosters in America. You know, Sark would know well the challenges, so it's not like he's coming with the team in the SEC with the coach that hasn't been, so I think he understands that.

That conference was competitive too, so he had tough games there and tough places to play on the road there. This is just -- it's just different. The SEC is really challenging. Study road records and study road records at night in the SEC and why do those percentages change.

They're really good players, but they're really hard places to play with electric atmospheres that are challenging to play in. So you just come in this conference you get that more.

Q. Chris Paul, what you saw from him in the spring, what role he might play for you? Part two, you've had four pretty wild games against Arkansas. Your thoughts on that rival we with Sam Pittman teams?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, that has been rivalry that continues with this change in division, so I guess for the next two seasons at least, which is exciting. As I said in that

previous interview, when they talked about no more divisions and obviously we understand why that was done, but there is some really cool rivalries that don't take place now, whether that's people changing conferences that don't take place, have taken place for a long time, but even within the conferences.

So as you alluded to that, that's exciting that they're still on there because there have been extremely competitive games, two very passionate fan bases, and I'm glad they're still on there from the standpoint of keeping some tradition of who we play.

Q. You commented on what the challenges would be for Texas coming to the SEC. Just wondering your thoughts personally about the Texas and Oklahoma both coming to the SEC and what you think that does for the league, if anything?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I think the commissioner has done an amazing job. That was in my notes to say, to thank him for how he continues to push our conference as the elite conference in college football. Then I got a little flustered as you can imagine there and forgot to say that.

So that's just really exciting. You talk about two of the top programs in the history of college football, and then as I look at things, too, like I said earlier, places that are really hard to play and then you get these night games filtered in and places get really hard to play with fan bases like Oklahoma and Texas.

That's really exciting for the conference, and continues to kind of elevate the super conference.

Q. Lane, obviously with Ole Miss you've done a good job getting a lot of rushing yards with the teams in the past couple years. How confident are you that you guys will be able to fill the void of Quinshon Judkins when you consider the guys you brought in from the portal and the guys on the roster at running back?

LANE KIFFIN: Quinshon is a great player, one of the best in all of college football. As we alluded to earlier, we're in an NFL world. You don't just go to the portal and get everybody and nobody comes and gets your guys.

It's free agency. So we wish him the best. That's very hard to replace. We have a number of guys we're excited about, some that have some health issues we're going to have to work through in training camp and even into the season.

We're just always going to try to find the best way to win. For those of you that covered our teams over the years or

even our offenses at places over the years, that can look very different year to year. Go back to Alabama, those three offenses looked very different.

So I don't know. We'll find out what that is and we'll always evolve as coaches to work our offense and systems around the players so that we perform the best to win the most games even if that doesn't look the same.

Q. You've used the term "rat poison" a lot in the last few weeks. Realistically in a time where your players and staff can see what's being said about them on social media, how do you realistically contain that in your program or the next month?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I don't know that you contain it, you just continue to talk about it. Kind of like in parenting. You just continue to hit on it and hope that it sticks.

On the plane ride down here with the three of them, just continue to remind them about that. You know, that doesn't mean anything. Nowadays it's harder as you mentioned because it's coming to their phones all day long, how great they are or you're in the ranked here and supposed to be ranked here as the receiver or any of that stuff.

Just continue to remind them. I get it. We're all humans. You read stuff you start to believe it when you see it enough. Just got to continue to remind them that really means nothing. Really doesn't.

Q. You and Texas excited to be here. Conference seems excited to have them. As the coach of a program that's really built up and gotten near the top, does this make your job that much tougher?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, I think that's fair. You know, it does make it more challenging if you bring in two, you know, national, traditional powers of Heismans and stadium size in tradition. Yeah, it makes our job more challenging, but I'm not a money, numbers guy. I'm sure there obviously was an impact there that makes all our programs better off financially.

So I say to our players all the time, no matter what it is in life, good or bad, there is an opposite to it. There is a cost and a benefit. There is a benefit and it's going to come with a cost. That is an example of that.

It's awesome in a lot of areas and harder to win when you add those two teams, so probably in the end it just makes us all better.

Q. Appreciate you being here. Hoping you could

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Speak to your defense and specifically your secondary, and what kind of value has Coach Neighbors brought to your coaching staff?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, Coach Neighbors has done a great job. Was familiar with him from -- he was at Alabama when I was on Coach Saban's staff, then brought him to FAU and then here. He does a great job. I'm excited about our defense because a lot more new parts on defense than offense.

Just excited to see them play together and how we're going to use them exactly. Because there is some really unique players we added in there.

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