

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 15, 2024
Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Ole Miss Rebels Jaxson Dart

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Jaxson Dart.

JAXSON DART: Super excited to be here. Great experience for all of us, and I'm excited for this season. I think that we have a really talented roster and look forward to continuing to build our team and be ready for this year.

Q. What makes Lane Kiffin offense so much fun and what do you have to do to compete against the top echelon teams? You had a tremendous season last year but the top echelon teams you couldn't beat.

JAXSON DART: I think Coach Kiffin has the best offensive mind in college football. His ability to adjust mid-game, being able to adjust on the fly, is unlike anything I've ever seen before. He's just super gifted that way.

At the same time, he's somebody who can really form and mold an offense based on his personnel. He doesn't run the same offense every year. He bases it off his personnel and being able to put his team in the best position to succeed. I've grown and learned so much from him. Grateful that I've been able to play for him.

From a team standpoint, I mentioned it in my opening, we bring in a lot of talent through the transfer portal and able to retain a lot of guys, but talent doesn't make a team. So we've got to continue to grow together and develop our culture.

Q. Last year, in that quarterback battle, this year, pretty much the clear-cut number one in camp, I saw you meet a group of a lot of people who want to speak with you, Heisman voting stuff. And Kiffin talks about the rat poison. Talk about coming from a year ago, now you're the guy, the expectation on your shoulders, how it was different for you mentally coming into this season.

JAXSON DART: Quite honestly, from that perspective, I didn't feel like my job was in doubt or anything like that.

From last season, I always felt like I was the guy the moment I stepped on campus here. I've always been somebody who's always chased after a goal and dream and it's something I've set out after since I was a little kid.

From that standpoint of me competing against somebody or not, I feel like I'm always competing against myself. But Coach Kiffin does a great job of being able to create those environments and create those atmospheres and really helps you develop from one year to the next.

Q. Texas and Oklahoma are entering the SEC. I want to talk to you about the rivalries. Can you talk about the Egg Bowl and the rivalry some of the Texas, OU fans that think they have the biggest rivalry in the country?

JAXSON DART: I think the Egg Bowl is the least talked about rivalry in college football but is the most intense rivalry in college football. The whole state is completely divided over it and it's super personal. It's a very personal game.

You could go from winning every game in the season and losing that one and then in some ways you feel like the season is a fail.

But it's a great atmosphere, great environment to play in. Obviously I'm from Utah, so I didn't grow up really understanding it, but I've been on both sides of it. Let's just say it's way easier going throughout an offseason with winning it.

I love it. I love being a part of it.

Q. You used the word "growth" a couple of times. How do you feel or what area have you grown the most in the last year, year and a half? And Brian Kelly mentioned the LSU Ole Miss game last year as a turning point for them kind of understanding where they needed to improve defensively. How did that outcome maybe springboard you guys in a positive direction?

JAXSON DART: I think growth just kind of naturally



happens when you're in a system for consecutive seasons, but at the same time I feel like I've grown a ton in just like my leadership qualities and being able to make those relationships with my teammates so that they can trust me in high intense moments, you could say.

But I think the biggest thing for me through my growth has been leadership and being able to kind of bring along the guys, set a standard and expectation.

From the LSU game, that was probably one of my favorite college football games I've ever played in. Like an old-school shootout. Not a lot of defense being played that game. But it was a lot of fun and I think it definitely spring-boarded us throughout the season giving us a ton of confidence and knowing that regardless if we're down two scores in the fourth quarter, to never stress and that we can pull it out in the end.

Q. Jaxson, you're one of several veteran quarterbacks that are going on now multiple years in this league, but there's also a lot of new guys at the quarterback position. Any advice for those guys just in terms of what it takes to excel at that position in this league?

JAXSON DART: The term "veteran" is weird to me because I feel like I'm still pretty young in college football. I just turned 21. But at the same time I understand it.

I think the biggest thing I've learned through college football is that you truly have to live in the moment. There's so much movement nowadays, and coaches could be gone any second. With the transfer portal you can see a teammate one day and the next day he's gone.

Just trying to get as much as you can and take in every moment and take advantage of it. It's a lot of fun and a lot of people, I think, mistake that you always gotta be intense. You do, but at the same time it's a lot of fun. If you don't have a lot of fun playing this game it's going to be kind of miserable. I wish I did kind of appreciate and have more fun early in college football, but I'm super grateful for it.

Q. You said you're a big Star Wars fan. You've got the eye-black modeled after Anakin Skywalker. My question is what Star Wars character do you feel like most resembles Lane Kiffin? What's the closest comp?

JAXSON DART: Yoda, easily. His wisdom, knowledge. Coach Kiffin has been through a lot throughout his coaching career. Youngest head coach to ever coach in the NFL during his time there. I feel he's coached at the high level at every level and he's been somebody that I've learned a lot from and has shed a lot of his wisdom off to

me.

Q. Curious for you, what so far have you seen about Chris Pooh Paul that really sticks out to you?

JAXSON DART: He's super strong, super physical player. I think he's somebody that wants to embrace that role for a defense. Just his toughness and physicality. At the same time, I thought that he's learned this defense at an incredibly fast pace. It's hard coming into a defense and not having any experience in it and excelling at it. I thought he's done a great job in that department.

Then just the way he's attacked this offseason to take on that role to be one of the best linebackers in the country.

Q. With all the new players coming in, with how Lane and you always talk about the transfer portal and recruits, people being on this team, has had a lot of additions this year. With that leadership that you talk about, what do you think it will take this year, when you have so many guys coming in from other schools or other mindsets and get them into the Ole Miss way? And you mentioned the Egg Bowl. Have you had any thoughts about it not being on Thanksgiving anymore?

JAXSON DART: I feel like I was really involved in recruiting. Almost felt like I was part of the recruiting department this offseason just helping bringing in guys. But I thought our coaches did a tremendous job making sure that everybody fit the mold of our program and our culture.

I feel like the transfer portal recruiting is a lot easier than high school recruiting because they want to understand the more business side of things and also understand, like, what's my role going to be and how am I going to be used and how are you guys going to use me in this way and this way.

There's not as many things that come along with it. But I thought the biggest thing they did was choose the right guys and choose the right people to be part of this program which made their transition a lot easier, and then just from players standpoint, of us embracing them and trying to get them to buy in as quickly as possible.

For the Egg Bowl, I'm totally cool with it being back another day, gives me another day to recover. Quick turnaround like that on Thanksgiving games came fast and then when you get done with a pretty physical game the week before, it's pretty hard to get ready for that turnaround. I'm totally okay with it moving back a day.

Q. What do you think about the new EA Sports



quarterback rating? Do you feel like you have something to prove? Just your views on that.

JAXSON DART: That's a great question. I think my biggest concern is how they made my face on the game. I don't know what picture that they used. I don't think it looks anything like me at all. I do not have a mullet. And I can't really grow facial hair that much. I don't know where they got the face from. I don't know what picture they used but hopefully they can change that. From a rating standpoint, I know they can change it throughout the season. So I'm looking forward to having a good year.

Q. With what you know about Oklahoma from your time in the portal, what advice would you give them about playing in Oxford?

JAXSON DART: To be honest, when it came down to the portal, it was Ole Miss and Oklahoma for me, when I had to make the decision. I have great respect for Coach Venables. I think he's going to do a tremendous job there with his transition into the SEC. Oklahoma has always been an elite program. They've always played at the highest, and they've been very successful. So I think that they'll do a really good job of transitioning into this year.

I'm just happy that we're able to get OU and Texas in, because I feel like that even proves more why SEC is the very best conference in college football. I'm excited to play against the best and it will be fun when we get to play them in Oxford and have that game kickoff.

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