

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Dallas, Texas, USA

**Auburn Tigers**

**Payton Thorne**

Press Conference



**Q. You had a really good year at Michigan State with 27 touchdown passes. Now you're getting these young receivers in the transfer from Penn State. Do you anticipate having a better year?**

PAYTON THORNE: No question. I think the work that we put in this offseason reflects that, and my confidence comes from the preparation that we've put in. I think it's been a really good offseason.

Like you said, we've got some new weapons. KeAndre from Penn State just got here in the summer, so getting to know him. It's been great so far. I'm excited for what we have to come.

**Q. Coach really resonated that he has a lot of confidence in you this season. I know you also have a lot of confidence now in your game. How does that feel going into the season knowing that you have the coach's assurance there with the new guys coming in and key pivotal guys you have? How will that benefit you this season?**

PAYTON THORNE: It's huge. Honestly, at the quarterback position having -- your coach having your back is huge, to be honest with you. To hear those things from Coach Freeze is awesome. I feel like me and him are really on the same page right now. We're working to really see eye-to-eye on everything with the offense, and that comes with watching film. That comes with being on the field and asking questions.

I think that we're really in a good place right now, and it's going to continue to get better, and I'm really excited to see what it's like working directly with him this offseason -- or this season coming up.

**Q. One of the guys that fans are really excited to see is Cam Coleman and being one of your offensive weapons. What are you excited to see from him, and talk to me about what he will bring to this team.**

PAYTON THORNE: He brings a lot. He brings speed. He brings a great ability to jump, and those are just his physical abilities.

He's a great guy, honestly. He's been awesome. Really selfless guy. He's funny, and he works hard. That's the most important thing.

Having a young guy come in like that who is a big prospect, sometimes you don't know what kind of personality you're going to get, but he works like he hasn't done anything yet, which I guess technically he hasn't at this level. He's been great so far, and it's going to make a lot of plays for us this year, and Auburn is going to love him.

He gives the ability to spread the field, both horizontally and vertically. Teams are going to have to respect that, and I can't wait to be on the field with him.

**Q. What have you taken from last season and focused on developing for this upcoming season?**

PAYTON THORNE: Yeah, it's a new offense this year, so first off, obviously you have to get the playbook down, you have to get the terminology down. The terminology is different. Once you get those things down, then you self-scout yourself.

I spent a good chunk of time watching my own film, going back and watching my previous years. Not just last year, but my years before too and picking up on some things. I've changed a couple of things with my feet.

I always am trying to be as good as you can mechanically and as efficient as you can in the pocket, and then accurate. You throw the ball. The best quarterbacks are accurate. It's not the guy who can throw it the farthest. It's not the guy who can run the fastest. It's the guy who gets the ball out on time and accurately that is a successful quarterback in college and in the NFL.

So for me it's just focusing on mastering our offense, but also when you play quarterback, you can't just know what



everybody is doing on your side of the ball. You need to know what the defense is doing, too, or what they're trying to accomplish. So learning this is where my eye is going to be on this guy, and he is going to affect if I throw it to this guy or this guy. In presnap you want to narrow it down to two coverages at most and then you want to ideally narrow it down to three receivers that you are going to throw the ball to. That's how you play quickly, efficiently, and get the ball out of your hand.

**Q. You joined the team after spring practice last year. We've seen a lot of quarterbacks who have a better year two than year one, especially when they get a full offseason working with the team. Has it felt more like your team working as the starting quarterback all offseason, and could that have an impact on how you play this fall?**

PAYTON THORNE: Yeah, no doubt. Like you said, having a full year is a huge difference. Last year getting here in the middle of summer, obviously that's not ideal going into a new offense, a new team, a new atmosphere.

Everything was different last year, so figuring that out in three months before the season started is not exactly easy. I'm coming from where I'm at, and I know the basic things around me. I'm all settled into my own house. All that stuff is nice. Kind of know all my teammates, got to know the coaches.

Now we have a set plan, a full offseason, like you said, a spring ball, summer. You're just familiar with everything. So, yeah, there's no doubt there's going to be more confidence that comes with that. I think that good things are coming because of that.

**Q. The schedule, a lot of home games in the beginning. Have you seen the clips from this week and everybody is talking about playing at Jordan-Hare? How do you match those two together, home games, and how tough it is for your opponent?**

PAYTON THORNE: I haven't seen too many clips, so I guess --

**Q. (Off microphone).**

PAYTON THORNE: There's no doubt it's tough to play at our place. I've stood on the sidelines, and you hear it on third down. You hear it on third down in the second quarter. It's not like they wait till the fourth quarter to get going. I know our place is hard to play. Our fans are outstanding. So happy to get to play at a place that your fans care so much about it.

They understand they play an important role in the game. So they've been great. It's a tough place to play. It's not easy. I've heard that it's a long road to get in. I guess there's a unique route to get to the stadium, as the visiting opponent. All that stuff plays into it. Also the stories you hear about it, it plays a mental game with somebody when they hear what they do about it.

Our fans are the real deal. They love Auburn. They love Auburn football, and they love showing up on Saturday and giving everything they got just like we do.

**Q. Now having one year of SEC play under your belt transitioning from the Big Ten to the SEC, what has been the biggest transition, and how have you been able to improve your game?**

PAYTON THORNE: I don't know. I don't know necessarily the biggest transition quarterback-wise. I always tell people I felt like I played in the second best division in football in the Big Ten East and SEC West is the best. Now there are no more divisions. I guess that doesn't matter anymore.

Early in my career playing against Ohio State, playing against Michigan, playing against Penn State at those places and when they played against us, that was big-time football. Those are storied programs as well just like down here there are a number of storied programs down here with great tradition and great stadiums and great atmospheres.

So it wasn't like it was brand new to me. It wasn't like I just showed up and I had never played in a big game before. For me, I guess my biggest difference was practice, playing against our DBs last year at practice. My previous school, our receivers had a pretty good go at practice sometimes, just to be honest with you. When I got down here, playing against two draft pick corners, it's like every day at practice that's great competition.

So that was a lot of fun, and I feel like I got better every day at practice.

**Q. Coach Freeze said that he feels more comfortable going into this upcoming season, and you touched on that with yourself as well. Have you noticed any differences with Coach Freeze in the way that he is approaching his second season out on the plains?**

PAYTON THORNE: I would say so. I wasn't here in the spring, so I guess I don't have a comparison from spring to spring. In the offseason he's been around a little bit more. I think obviously he is more involved in the offense, and this is a big difference in that standpoint.

Then, also, as a first year head coach I'm sure a lot of people talk about how you're kind of almost like a politician as a head coach. You have to go and talk to the donors and talk to all these different people that you probably don't even want to talk to, honestly. You want to coach football.

He's been able to do that now, having been a year or two. I know he still has to do a lot of those things that a head coach has to do, but being able to meet with him a lot more this year. I've been able to sit and talk with him, seen him outside a bit more. I know he's excited about being a lot more involved in the actual football because I know he likes to coach football.

**Q. There's a lot of interest in the freshmen receivers coming in, but Auburn has also added several veteran receivers from the portal. KeAndre, Robert, your old buddy Sam. How are you gelling with your new core of receivers?**

PAYTON THORNE: It's been outstanding so far. It's been a lot of fun. You got a lot of good personalities. We have plenty of laughs, and you have different personalities. You got Rob, who I think they call him "Unc." He's the older guy. I think he might still be younger than me, so I let them take it out on him and not say anything to me.

But he's been great. I'd say he's probably the leader of that room. He has a lot of experience. Like you say, you have KeAndre who has played a lot of games, a lot of big games as well at Penn State, and he's a good guy, too, who likes to work.

It's easy when you have a bunch of guys that like the work and like to go out and throw. So many times you get done with the throwing session, and you sit there and talk for 30 minutes when you have nothing else to do and you are all sitting there on the bench and cleats off and whatnot and maybe in the tubs. It's been really good.

You have a young guy like Cam. I think he might be 17 still. Maybe just turned 18 or something like that. He's a young one, obviously. He's been great. He's a character. It's been good getting to know him and all those guys.

So things are going well, and I would say we're gelling really good as well. Sam as well. I live with Sam. It's pretty easy to get to know him, and I've already known him for five years. That's no problem getting to gel with him.

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