

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 14, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

TJ Dottery

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by TJ Dottery.

Q. Obviously you're going to be a leader on this team this year. Coming off such a strong season last year, what are you most excited for leading this Ole Miss defense?

TJ DOTTERY: Like you said, being a leader, being able to set the standard, showing the team that there's no drop-off, showing everybody else there's no drop-off, and just being excited to bring the land shark defense to the full effect.

Q. Looking forward to this season, a lot of changes like there are in college football every year now. Transfer portal, Ole Miss has been a great team taking advantage of that. What does it take in a year like this, especially where on both sides of the ball so many people have left because they've gotten drafted, not because they've transferred but because they've been recognized for their talents at the NFL level, what does it take to keep that same high expectation to make a college playoff with a team like this with new teams?

TJ DOTTERY: Guys like me, Austin and Cayden Lee, who were here last year and years before that who know the standard in and out, Ole Miss and how to be an Ole Miss football player. Guys like us, being able to take the next step and be a leader on and off the field for new guys, young guys, I think that's the biggest key to keep that component and keep the standard of how it is.

Q. Being here, we're connected to the College Football Hall of Fame, literally just a building over, I was talking to someone earlier, and they were saying Coach Kiffin is on track to maybe be in here one day, not just walking around, but enshrined. What makes him the right leader for this Rebels team in your eyes, a guy who sets that standard that you just talked about?

TJ DOTTERY: Him being himself every day. I think Kiffin never tries to be anyone else or anything for the media or

anybody. I think him being himself is huge for us because he shows that him being himself is perfect and just good enough and him setting an example for us every day.

Q. Along those lines, as a player, what are some of your reactions when you see Lane having fun on social media, kind of showing that different side of him? And how does that compare to what you see in the locker room or in the clubhouse?

TJ DOTTERY: I laugh because, I mean, like I said, I think he's somewhat of a, majority the same person. When he's making those type of funny comments or things on social media, he's the type to do the same thing in practice.

He'll pull us aside and do it. He's not outspoken to do it just in front of the team, but he pulls you aside and cracks a joke with you every now and then. It's just funny. I laugh.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TJ DOTTERY: With a player, anytime he sees a player or something, he always makes jokes with the player. He talks to me or interacts with another player. He's just funny like that, he's a funny guy.

Q. Coming from such a successful high school program like Catholic, how much do you think that helped you in where you are today?

TJ DOTTERY: I think it was huge. I think that maturing coming into college, being able to know somewhat the standard of, not the program, but how to be a person, how to be a human, how to be a young man, I think that transitioned well into college knowing how to step into this role.

Q. You look at last season a couple plays, maybe Kentucky and LSU game, if they go a different way than you guys want to go. Does that underscore, when coaches tell you, you never know when a key play is going to happen, so you have to go all out every play?

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

TJ DOTTERY: Definitely. I think the coaches, they preach that. It's huge, three controversial plays and maybe each game could flip the score and maybe turn those into Ws. But I think that was just a key example and lesson for us.

I just try to reiterate that to the new guys, young guys, that every play matters and the small details matter. I just try to reiterate that to everybody else.

Q. What have you learned from Pete Golding as a defensive coordinator?

TJ DOTTERY: He's really intelligent. Like, he's really intelligent. You know -- well, you don't know, but if you were to see our schemes and the type of things we run, you'd think we'd be running a lot. But he simplified it so where so many coverages are somewhat the same or have some details that are the same to where all our coverages and scheme, it may seem like a lot but he simplifies it.

Just his intelligence of the game, him being able to teach that. A lot of coaches can have all these schemes and not be able to teach to it the players. But him being able to put it from the board to the players' minds, it's huge.

Q. Playing in practice, getting a chance so far leading up to the season, what's it been like going up against Simmons if you've had that opportunity?

TJ DOTTERY: It's been good. It's been good. It's been awesome. Just watching him develop and grow, just seeing him take steps, even from the spring to now in the summer, watching him take a huge step, leadership and just ability.

I think him being comfortable, like I'm watching him get more comfortable day in, day out. And the throws he's making are miraculous, so just watching that is awesome.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TJ DOTTERY: Awesome. He'd be a great opponent to go against. I'm glad I get to play against him and make him better in practice.

Q. How about as a younger guy, you saw him against Georgia, right away first touchdown. How does he make you guys as a defense better?

TJ DOTTERY: His ability. Like you said, his ability like that was just a flash of his ability. Even though him being a young guy, him not having, like, major experience, his ability has been great, and that challenges the defense with the throws he makes, like let alone him having to be a leader or just being older, like the throws he's making out

there is just crazy. That's probably one of the biggest ways he's challenging us.

Q. With the expanded College Football Playoff last year, came in 13 overall in national rankings, one spot away. What's your mindset heading into this year? Want to make it into the top 12, but knowing that you were literally on the doorstep, maybe a chip on your shoulder. How do you describe what your mindset is even with the changes on the roster you talked about?

TJ DOTTERY: Sure. Chip on my shoulder, especially being here last year. But with new guys on the roster, being able to focus on this year, take it one week at a time, but it's been good and the chip's on our shoulder. It's been a huge chip on our shoulder. All the guys are hungry, new guys and the young guys, everybody's hungry, that's been good.

Q. With Austin and Jackson, how would you kind of compare their games? As a linebacker you get a good viewpoint of what they're doing in practice. How would you compare and contrast their individual games?

TJ DOTTERY: Comparing, I think their game's similar, like their comfortability, the way they're able to sit in the pocket and watch routes develop and plays develop, not feel rushed to get the ball out or make a mistake. I think his comfortability is getting and that's where he's getting it from Dart. Dart was really comfortable back there, a mature leader. I think that's where it's coming from.

Q. Are you familiar with the quarterback that transferred from Ferris State, he arrived in the springtime, did he end up coming down here?

TJ DOTTERY: Yes.

Q. Tell us about him. He must have been great to make the jump from Division II to Division I.

TJ DOTTERY: He has great talent as well. I think him coming in, he's been awesome just being able to learn. I think his ability to come in and learn the offense has been great, and him getting more comfortable with the receivers and O linemen, just the team's doing awesome. It's been good.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports