

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Lane Kiffin

Press Conference



LANE KIFFIN: All right, thank you, Commissioner. Honored to be here. I don't take this for granted. There are only 16 of these spots that we get to hold and come up here, so a lot of appreciation for that.

Commissioner has been phenomenal. Just mentioned going into the sixth year, and he's been great to us. Keith Carter and Chancellor Boyce hiring us five and a half years ago, and the Ole Miss fans and Oxford and how, as he mentioned, a lot of personal things there and how awesome it's been.

It's really been an amazing five years personally and professionally there in Oxford and I reflect on that like life, with so many good things of gains and losses. With my daughter Landry being there and now Knox and Layla living there really is amazing. He mentioned, kind of broke it all down, my brother and his four kids living there. You know, it's really amazing.

And then with some losses there of now losing both parents in the last year has been very challenging. You know, just thinking on the way over here about my mother and how grateful I am to her, and it reminds me of coaches' wives, and to all coaches' wives in all levels how you really are the glue that holds everything together in these families with coaches like my dad that worked so much and the mom is doing everything at home.

So just really grateful to both my parents for that. Feel like they spent a lot of years and spent a lot of time taking us to a certain level. So what you're now experiencing that, which is strange of losing both parents, that you're really the highest on the family tree now of what's left, and what that means about -- they go next door and I don't think they leave you. They go next door and allow you to go to the next level.

So just coming off couple days with family and with Chris' kids, you know, whether that was dancing with my nieces at Morgan Wallen or yesterday out on the boat and seeing

all the cousins playing with each other and how proud my parents would be of that.

So just really cool to see things through a different lens now. Awesome that there are so many Kiffins in Oxford to experience everything together.

You know, where I think of our program, where we are, and last four seasons there since COVID, three of those four seasons with top 12 finishes. I believe in the last 55 years of Ole Miss there has been four top 12 finishes.

So three of those to be in the last four years, one in the previous 51 years, says a lot about what we've been able to do through the staff, through the players, through everybody involved, especially the leadership above me.

Over that time, the third most SEC wins of all 16 SEC teams. That helps us tremendously. When we got there at Ole Miss, we had to sell to recruits, hey, when you come here this is what's it's going to look like. We're going to win. We are going to have first round picks. We are going to have the most players drafted in school history. We're going to win 11 games in a season, win 21 in the last two seasons.

So now that we've done that, we've seen the impact, whether that's transfers coming in or high school kids that have been able to see that. Especially with Mississippi kids to stay home knowing they can achieve and get all these things that maybe previously they needed to look to leave for.

The 2025 team, I think we have a lot of really good players coming back. Added a lot through the portal. It's been a very competitive offseason. I think that the groundwork of these last players over the last few years, what they laid, what they taught the players, has been very beneficial.

Like we say in recruiting, you know, you get what you see with us. There is no fluff in recruiting. We don't put on a show and then all of a sudden they get there and it's a different thing.

I think that's really helped us over time for us not to have



many kids that are playing leave and go into the portal and for other kids to come to us because they know that.

And a lot of that is to our culture and staff. So to be able to keep our entire staff from last year was very critical. That's not been the case a lot of times in our years at Ole Miss. We had to replace a lot of really good coaches. I think we've done a good job of putting together this roster, working within this cap.

If you go back to retention of last year's players and the portal guys December, January, we went into that operating under this cap because we were told the settlement was most likely going to get approved and how that would work.

We get a lot of questions like, what's it like now? We've been operating -- we have -- under these cap guidelines of what was coming and what it was going look like. I think we've done a really good job of that.

Obviously means you can't sign as many players as you would like at times because you have a budget. So we're obviously hopeful that will be rewarded by doing that. I think it's obvious people aren't staying within that cap, so I think the whole thing will be, what does that look like? That's what we don't know. What does it look like when you don't and what are the punishments for that? Do you win and that comes later?

So that's remained to be seen, but already got the questions about the cap, what that's like having to do that. We've been doing that for a while, operating on that.

Very excited about this schedule coming up. We play nine games in Mississippi so that's awesome for our fans basically to have nine home games. It's amazing. For Oxford to have that for the businesses there is great.

So be a very competitive schedule and a lot of work to do with all the new players in the meantime. So just appreciative to be here. Thanks for you guys coming out. With that, questions?

Q. Thank you for highlighting your family. Football brings friends and family together. Want to talk about friends. Wanted to ask if you would help us enhance and highlight the rivalry between your two close friends, Sarkisian and Smart. Who do you think is going to take this field next year? Sarkisian had a chance over Georgia, how can we look at it through your eyes?

LANE KIFFIN: I think those are the two premier programs and premier coaches in college football, so I think though

do an amazing job. Having both of them, being with both of them at Alabama and seeing how they've used that, and then being with Sarkisian at USC as well as how he's used Pete Carroll things and implemented there, I think they both do an amazing job and really in those SEC meetings you're always listening to the coaches and their in putt.

I feel like both these guys really run their program truly as a CEO and know everything that's going on. They're very creative in their ideas and how to navigate through this world we're in now, so I think they're both really good friends and really good people; phenomenal coaches.

Q. You guys had some big wins last season and still came up just short of the College Football Playoff. What is it to you that makes playing in the SEC a lot more difficult or more than other conferences?

LANE KIFFIN: Flying over here I read the Commissioner this morning and things that he said. I thought there was something in there interesting. We talk about nine games versus eight games. People say, well this conference plays nine and this plays eight.

Well, I don't think there is anybody that would trade their nine games and want to come play our eight games you play down here and the places you play down here. You guys that have covered the SEC for a while, you can have teams not having a really good year for them but you got to go play at their place down here. It's just different.

So scheduling here in this conference and what you do week to week. And then the NFL draft shows that. Those are the players you're playing against. It's so balanced throughout the conference that every week you got to really show up. It's really like the NFL.

I don't feel like that is the case in these other conferences, or a really good conference that's similar to us that's top heavy but doesn't have the middle and the bottom the way we do.

Q. At this point of the year what's your personal focal point you're emphasizing the most along with the expectations for your players and staff members?

LANE KIFFIN: I just think that we basically restart each of these last few years because the turnover is so much in college football, which I wish it wasn't that way and it shouldn't be. You should be able to build within your program a lot of returning players. It's just the way the system is now; hopefully that gets fixed.

I don't think that's really good for anybody. Not good for the kids to switch schools every year. Just makes us



restart and not expect that they know anything because they're coming from all these different places.

Q. You mentioned that Ole Miss had three ten-win scenes in the last four years. What core elements of your culture have driven to that level of consistency would you say?

LANE KIFFIN: I think we've had really good players over that time; really good schematic coaches that have helped that. I think those usually are the key factors there of playing really well. This last season we led the SEC in scoring offense and defense. That's really unique to do.

I think that to me shows how good that team was. We played 13 games; won ten of them double digits. Not one of those games was really close.

And then we went 0-3 in one-score games. That does to me show how far we've come as a program to be able to have games like the Georgia game or going to South Carolina and have a game like that.

Q. When did you get over getting left out of the playoff?

LANE KIFFIN: That wasn't that difficult. I mean, I tend to do better with things when they're done. You can't do anything to change them.

So it was what it was. I just think you're not going to go back over that too much, but just in general, and there has been a lot of talk about that since, I just think the system -- and it's not because of us, you know. I just think the system doesn't take into the scheduling properly.

Then you look at these other sports, basketball, baseball, you see teams that go on to win that weren't in the top because they played a really hard schedule and you lose some games. Like the basket goes in or out; in the end doesn't mean you're a dramatically different in that team. Just like you lose a game in overtime on the road.

Or the NFL. Got the Super Bowl and here is the five seed in the Super Bowl. So I just think that it doesn't account to that. Being a coach and understanding what teams take to go into certain places to play and have to get up every week versus other people's schedule, it's very different.

Q. Last year your ground game wasn't usually what you have done with your offensive system. Is there going to be any improvement on the way you guys develop the system? Or just talk to me and give me your take on what's going to happen.

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, our ground game was definitely disappointing. That has been something we have done really well over our time for a long period time is run the football. You know, we weren't able to do that at times that were critical in these losses. All of these three losses we're ahead; two of them we're ahead the entire game basically.

Just need to kind of in four minute close games out. That's where we've been really good at that. I think that was year before maybe we were 4-0 in one-score games I think, and then we go 0-3.

So we've signed some different lineman, running back room is a lot different, and so hopefully be better.

Q. You mentioned the current cap in college sports. You've spoken about a salary cap before. Now that revenue sharing is underway, do you think college football should and can have a hard salary cap?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that's what we attempted. Doesn't seem like that's working very well.

So yeah, I mean, stating the obvious. That was the intention of what was going on because there were so many complaints when NIL started about, okay, everybody has different advantages, and different payrolls. Saw those a couple years ago.

I was up here at one of these joking about a luxury tax based on A&M's spending or whatever it was. So that was supposed to be being fix, and now it's not.

Again, we've tried to follow the guidelines because that's what we were told we needed to do. I'm not saying they're wrong for doing it; I'm not calling anybody out. If the system isn't solid enough to prevent that, then we really don't have a system.

So you're not operating on a salary cap, so...

Q. Seems like in past weeks you've had a few (regarding tagging.) Curious what the message or thought is behind some of those posts were?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, someone said that coming in here to me. I like Coach Fries, so I think they think that was something to do with like I was fishing, it was golfing. It really wasn't that.

I have a thing with him going back a few years ago when he posted a picture in response to me of like some two pound bass or something like that. So I kind of always posted bigger-fish pictures back towards him. Had nothing to do with his golf game, which sounds like he's doing



amazing at that.

That's great for him.

Q. Lane --

LANE KIFFIN: And I was fishing yesterday in the dead period, by the way.

Q. Lane, over the past three years people got to know a lot about Jaxson Dart on and off the field. You've got Austin Simmons, year one as a starting quarterback, and what do you think people should know about Austin on and off the field?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, they're very different. I mean, if you look at how they throw right-hand, left-hand, that would basically be about everything about them, like everything is that different.

That's okay. He's just got -- Austin has to make sure he doesn't have to try to be Jaxson. Jaxson wasn't Jaxson the third year of Jaxson until he was a third year.

He'll be fine. He's got elite talent. Does a great job. He's maturing. Did a great job when he came in in the Georgia game. We're excited about it.

Q. Early this season you played Tulane, one of the tougher teams out there. What do you remember about your last matchup with them? A close game in 2023. Do you think scheduling out of conference games is more beneficial or detrimental to your team?

LANE KIFFIN: I think Tulane has great players. They play really hard, like a lot of Louisiana kids. The new staff has done a really good job. We had a hard game down there with the previous staff.

So I think that it'll be a really big challenge for us.

Q. I think six or more SEC teams get new quarterbacks. Do you think there is a chance to level the field a little bit and make it more competitive in the league?

LANE KIFFIN: I think it was really level last year, so I think that in general my guess would be you're going to be leveled out for a while. Like the way that, whatever you want to call it, the as supposed cap works in some ways and some people following it.

So now some teams go out and go way above the cap, way above what you would think they would do if they were monitoring their cap on a specific player. I think because

of that now you're seeing more one-offs where the player, five-star player that traditionally would go to these couple schools now goes to this other school.

It's kind of like something is up, right? Getting more money obviously. So I think it's going to level out a little bit if this is the direction it's going to where you're going to see not all the players stacked up at the top at a couple schools.

Q. To bounce off the couple questions for coming off a historic season not only for the Rebels but quarterback Jaxson Dart, do you feel like there is an extreme amount of pressure on Austin Simmons to fill those shoes?

LANE KIFFIN: I think there is. We try to work with him on that and that he has to be himself and not worry about that.

I think with that, whenever you follow somebody that's had a lot of success and the most wins in the history of school, most yards, touchdowns, basically everything, that puts a lot of pressure on you.

We have to help him with that. Got to coach and play really well around him. That's the biggest part of helping him with that.

Q. You lost a lot of players, both offensive and defensive starters, multiple wide receivers, quarterback as well. As a coach, how do you adjust what you lost, I mean, saying it lightly, just a few players?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, we lost a lot of really good players. Most players drafted in the history of the school. So we've replaced them with a lot of new players, and that's kind of the world we got live in now with the portal and how it works and how many kids go to a place for a year and leave, so not as many kids are being developed to take on those roles.

I think that problem has probably happened a lot around the country and will continue to happen. Just is what it is.

Q. You being an offensive guy, you know you got awesome guys in in the back getting in that secondary. In today's college football environment, what would you consider numbers-wise, like proper depth on the back ends. In your opinion, what would be a proper punishment for people that go over the cap?

LANE KIFFIN: First thing about the secondary, yeah, we got a lot of new players back there. Pete Golding does a great job with that. We had the same problem two years ago.

We'll just find the best ways to put them in the best positions to make plays. I don't have the answer for the punishment on the cap because it's not even -- I can't even say that because it's like here is the cap, but then here is these other contracts and are those going to get passed, what if you go I've on those in that system with Deloitte.

I don't think we even know. Is it even going to happen? We've got states passing laws where it looks like you can't enforce it. What are you going to have? The NFL, hey, these divisions you have a cap, but the NFC Central you don't have a cap, or teams manage Florida, you don't have a cap.

So I don't know that.

Q. Wanted to ask about your time in Oxford. Where do you think you've grown the most in Oxford?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, it's been an awesome time. Not to kind of dig too much into it, but even this weekend with family and stuff and just losing our parents, you know, and you just can't -- you got no idea what's going to happen. I was talking to our kids about that.

Okay, for instance, I was in Alabama. Played at Ole Miss and one summer went and visited my brother at this neighborhood in Oxford. I was saying to his wife. Ten years ago or something like that, what if I was going tell you you were going to go to all these jobs and I was going to be the head coach of Ole Miss and you're going to be here and the kids will be here and then Layla, Knox, and Landry are going to be here.

There is no way. But then our parents will be gone. It's just been an amazing experience. I just have -- I'm not saying this because I'm the head coach. I don't give you coach-speak. The people of Oxford, when you lose your parents and you see how they are and how they helped take care of them towards the end or how much they really cared about them, it just opened my eyes to a totally different way.

Basically went to Oxford, had this view. Then I got kids there so I had a different view as a parents there. Then how awesome it is to raise your kids there and go to college and high school around these families.

Then you see year parents at the end and lose your parents. (Zoom froze.)

I owe so much to Oxford and the people there. It's just been awesome.