

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 15, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

**Texas Longhorns**

**Michael Taaffe**

Press Conference



I think the one thing that I respected about him is he would look like an average Joe if you were walking across the halls, besides that he looked exactly like his uncles and his granddad. But he's such a down-to-earth guy.

How he leads is he gets the respect of the locker room. It's not always the rah rah guy. You can be a leader so many different ways. But how he leads is he makes a personal relationship with every guy in the locker room and tries to get respect from them.

That's leading by example. That's leading with intention by sitting with different people at lunch. That's going out of his way to show people, hey, it's nice and it's good to go thank people for holding the doors or thank people for cleaning up our locker room.

So he leads by example, and he tries to set a standard for the guys, which is really cool.

**Q. What's the most common question you get about him? I'm sure you get a ton of them.**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: That's a great question. The most common question I get about Arch is -- oh, man, that's a good question. It's usually more generic, like, how is Arch looking? Is Arch the real deal? That's probably the biggest question I get: Is Arch Manning the real deal? My answer to that always is, just let his film do all the talking.

**Q. What's the most complicated pass offense you played against within those two conferences and then through your career, because you were in the playoffs last year against the eventual national champion Ohio State?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: Every offense that I've gone against has given me some type of trouble, some type of misdirection, some type of scheme. That's a respect to our defense because they do stuff on film that's different than what they've shown. So I think that's a respect to our defense because we give them something that they've clearly never seen.

But probably the hardest offense that I've gone against is

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Michael Taaffe.

**Q. What's the biggest challenge for the Texas secondary this year, and what are the differences you noticed between the two leagues?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: The first answer, how are we going to handle success? So we obviously had a lot of success. We had the Thorpe Award winner in our back end. We had a second-round draft pick in our back end. And we had a couple of guys returning. So, how are we going to handle success?

And are we going to be complacent with that success or are we going to raise the bar and raise the standard? What I'm always trying to do is I'm trying to raise the standard and understand that there's a bar and we've got to reset that every single year to keep chasing greatness because at the end of the day, if you want your name to be remembered, you've got to keep going and keep doing more.

The leagues, the second question is it's different, right? It's a lot different. There's different speeds. There's different atmospheres. There's different weather. But I know in the SEC, what I can tell you about the SEC is you have to be physically prepared every single game. Your body has to be prepared every single game. There's no game where you can take it lightly.

**Q. Sark has said a few times this offseason how Arch has taken on more leadership responsibilities. He's taken that role by the horns, so to speak. How have you seen that? Is there an example where you came away maybe impressed of where he's making those strides?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: Arch is obviously one of my best friends. I was his host when he was a recruit here on his OV. Ever since then, we hit it off.

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

Washington. When Michael Penix was there, Rome Odunze was there, Ja'Lynn Polk was there -- Kalen DeBoer, Coach DeBoer was the head coach there. That was probably the game that was toughest for me.

**Q. What did playing in the A&M-Texas game mean for you last year? And where did that interception you had in that game rank among your favorite football moments?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: Top moment, hands down. I was telling my friends the other month, I think that was the coolest moment of my life. It's up there for moments of life.

But I think it's so important to know that we had 13 years of no Texas-versus-Texas A&M rivalry. And then all of a sudden we get it back, and it's in College Station, it's at Kyle Field. And people argue that that's the best atmosphere in all of college football.

To believe that it wasn't rockin' you would be a fool, because that place was -- I saw five fields when they were running out of the tunnel. It was shaking. It was loud. It was crazy.

And it's so good for the great state of Texas, so good for college football, because in Austin there's no pro team. We are the pro team. The Texas Longhorns are the professional team. And in College Station, obviously the same.

It's a rich tradition of just Texas fans going back and forth, and it's so fun for us as competitors.

**Q. Piggybacking off of that, you said "the best moment of your life," how much are you looking forward to this year that game being in Austin?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: For sure, because I know that they got a taste of being able to scream for their fans. So the proud and few, the brave Longhorns that went to that stadium, I don't know how they did it. But I'm happy for them that they get to get a sea of burnt orange this next time that we go around.

It's such a fun game. It brings out so much competitive nature out of you, brings out so much rich tradition and history and rivalry. That's what college football is all about, the rivalry games like Texas versus Texas A&M.

And Marcel Reed, heck of a player. The guy they've got on offense, heck of a player, I'm excited.

**Q. Do you mind explaining a little bit about your tie?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: For sure. My tie, the Texas floods happened this past week. And Camp Mystic is a girls church camp that was impacted pretty seriously. So all these initials are all the victims at Camp Mystic that lost their lives in the tragic flooding this past weekend.

It's all the daughters, the 8-year-old girls that passed away in the cabins and their two counselors who gave their lives being heroes trying to save those daughters and those girls, and then the camp director who went back into the floods to try to save those girls' lives.

I wanted to remember those victims because they deserve a light like this. What they did, they should be heroes, they should be remembered.

**Q. You mentioned your relationship with Arch and a lot has been made about your friendship with Cade, growing up in high school and stuff. Those are two of the top Heisman favorites going into the season. I'm not asking you to make a pick, if you had a vote, but what do you make about their cases for that award this year? What are they going to have to do to maybe put one over the top of the other?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: Obviously this quarterback class is so talented this year. All the quarterbacks in the SEC are really talented alone, but bringing in guys like Klub, Cade Klubnik, makes this roster, this class of quarterbacks so unique, so competitive, a lot of juice.

But the similarities that Arch and Cade have is they know how to take over a team. And they know that the team embodies their personality. So both of them walk on the field, it's, like, all right, it's game time, every time they step on the field.

That's why I respect both of those guys because they have that sense of competitiveness that's, like, all right, nobody can stop me. It's really inspiring.

**Q. You played against Ohio State last year and Jeremiah Smith. What were your impressions of him, and how does he rank, maybe, in the athletes you've competed against?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: I can't even rank him yet because I've got to play him again. But he, man, what he does on that football field, it doesn't seem like a real human's doing that, because he's just so unique. He's inspirational in all the talent, and he still is only 19 years old.

So it's going to be really fun going against him because he's a freak of nature. I've watched a lot of his routes, almost all of them, dang near, from last year, and seeing



how he gets in and out of breaks, seeing how he runs full speed, seeing how he stacks DBs, and obviously the best thing about him, one of his attributes, is going up and getting the football. You can put three DBs on him, but if you get it up in the air, he's going to go get it, which is really cool.

**Q. When did you know Colin Simmons was going to be special, and what is one eye-popping moment for you, you're kind of like, wow?**

MICHAEL TAAFFE: The second that he stepped on campus, I knew Colin Simmons would be the guy. He's one of the guys coming in that he's a three-year-and-out, first-round type of guy. I don't want to put too much pressure on him, but I know that's the expectation for himself.

One of the plays, he wears this long towel in practice, it's like a shower towel. I'm like, what is this guy doing?

All of a sudden he runs up with the 1s, one of the first weeks he's out here, and said, hut. A second later, he's getting back to the quarterback and he's giving our left and right tackles a heck of a day.

It's definitely easier to play DB playing man coverage when you've got him going after the quarterback.

It shocked my eye. It was like, is it that sweaty outside right now. Like, why is he wearing that towel?

But then I watched him and he got after the quarterback. I was like, you can do whatever you want as long as you're getting to the quarterback like that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports