

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Mississippi State Bulldogs

Isaac Smith

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Isaac Smith from Mississippi State.

Q. It was Coach Lebby's first year as a head coach in his career. Have you noticed any differences in him this offseason, any growth, any development from Coach?

ISAAC SMITH: Leb comes in every day with the same energy, the same vibes. He's always fun to be around and just comes with a lot of energy.

If I'd say anything, he's been more locked on us being better than what we were last year.

Q. SEC changed a little bit yesterday. Some of the rivalries aren't getting to be played like they were. What did you miss last year about teams that you faced earlier in your career?

ISAAC SMITH: I loved playing against LSU and just the energy that they brought when they played. It was always scrappy. That was fun.

Kentucky as well. We had to play Kentucky, I think, 14 years in a row before last season. That was always a fun rivalry. But I miss playing those guys a lot.

Q. What about the Egg Bowl? How big is that in Mississippi? You're a Mississippi native.

ISAAC SMITH: It's awesome, just playing those guys year in and year out. You know what you're going to get that week. You know what you're going to get that game. It's going to be scrappy.

So a lot of respect for those guys. But at the same time, neither one of us like each other.

Q. Wanted to ask about the changing landscape of college sports, with revenue sharing starting and NIL,

of course, a few years now and transfer portal and all that. In your experience, as a student-athlete yourself, how do you feel like all of this, with the money and everything, could potentially change recruiting going forward, especially for a team that's continuing to build, like Mississippi State?

ISAAC SMITH: I feel like it just takes kids getting to go see these places. I try to tell all the recruits that come that money is going to be there. At the end of the day, you're still playing football.

I feel like now it's like a job. You can get cut. You can lose money, whatever. But at the end of the day, you're still playing football.

Q. What would you like to see from the defense this year that will lead to improvement?

ISAAC SMITH: I would just say execution. We had a lot of missed execution last year. Coach Hutzler preaches it day in and day out. We lacked execution the whole season, really -- missed tackles, missed assignments. And, quite frankly, that's why we lost a lot of games. I think we were last in about everything.

So having 10 sacks, you can't win that way. So we've got some guys out of the portal that's come in and is ready to work and compete. And I think we're going to surprise a lot of people this year defensively.

Q. Going back to your recruiting, you had taken a visit at A&M. What were your impressions there at College Station, at Texas A&M?

ISAAC SMITH: I loved College Station. That was one of my top five schools. I liked Coach Fisher that was there at the time.

And at the end of the day I felt home in Starkville. There's no distractions in Starkville, small town, real pretty community, the people are awesome. I fell in love with it. And I'm still in love with it, and will forever always be in love with it.

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Q. If you had a message to State fans ahead of the season what would it be?

ISAAC SMITH: We've been working our tail off all summer long. We had a great spring. The new guys we've got, they've been working real hard.

The offense, they look really, really well. The defense, we did a lot of things to fix what we had last year, and it's going to be a fun season.

Q. Jeff Lebby was talking about earlier that despite the struggles that the defense had last year, that they see the vision and specifically shout it out you, said, Isaac Smith sees the vision and what we're trying to accomplish on our defense. What are you seeing on the defense that maybe some people are overlooking?

ISAAC SMITH: Last year, I feel like a lot of the criticism got put on our coaches. But I always tell, like the guys, the coaches can't go out there and play for us. It's up to us to go execute and make the plays. That's what we didn't do last year.

Defensively, if we can go out there, get stops this year, I have all the faith in the world that Blake is going to go get the ball to guys like Brenen, Anthony Evans. And Leb's going to call the plays to get the ball in the end zone.

Maybe this year we'll be on the other side of things instead of going home sad and mad that we lost close games that we should have been winning.

Q. Blake was in here earlier. He talked about being more comfortable and working on his leadership this offseason. What have you noticed as far as Blake being more of a leader? Where is the leadership on the team coming from?

ISAAC SMITH: Blake has been a lot more vocal. I feel like this has been his second year here, he's starting to understand that Mississippi State culture and what it used to be like in Starkville and what it can be in Starkville again.

We've got a lot of guys that lead that's been at Mississippi State for two or three years now, that understand the purpose behind everything that Coach Lebby is doing and the strength staff, and what all the coaches are preaching, as well as we've got players that lead by example, that don't like to talk but they come, they work hard each and every day. And those young guys get to see that. It's, okay, maybe they don't talk but they show it by work.

Just having different types of leaders on the team, it goes a long way.

Q. With a game against Southern Miss, it's not the same as the Egg Bowl at the end of the season. But to you, I guess, what do you make of having another in-state game and being able to start off the season that way?

ISAAC SMITH: It will be fun. It will be a bunch of Mississippi fans throughout the whole state. If they like Mississippi State or Ole Miss, that game is going to be packed at the Rock. It's going to be fun. It's going to be a hot game. I think it's a 3:30 kick in Hattiesburg.

It's going to be really fun down there, especially seeing a bunch of guys that you played in high school. So it will be fun.

Q. One of your new teammates Malick Sylla, what is he like as a teammate and what do you feel like he's going to bring to this team?

ISAAC SMITH: That was a great addition we added to our edge group. I feel like he's going to be one of the guys that can come in and get after the quarterback and help us get more than ten sacks this year. His work ethic is really, really good, and he's been around great players at A&M. And now he's going to come here and show everybody what he can do.

Q. As much as you can go into it, is there anything different from the defense schematically that maybe you think we could see? And also, Mississippi State having been around there, has a very different mentality, as kind of an underdog with something to prove but has been on top several times historically, what does it mean to play for Mississippi State and how do you describe how it might be different from other places?

ISAAC SMITH: Schematically, Coach Hutzler does a great job day in and day out of doing things to help us, if it's changing calls so where we understand it or to where certain players understand it, he does a great job being a DC and being a leader there. And it's going to be a good season. I think it will be a lot similar, but there's not much there to that.

Then Starkville, Mississippi State, we're blue-collar. That's what I love about it. Really got it at the (indiscernible). I love that. That's really the whole state of Mississippi. I love the fact that Mississippi State has always been about that. Just working hard and going to prove something that maybe people don't think that you can do.

Q. Brenen was in here earlier. He mentioned he's a

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small-town guy and that's one of the things that attracted him to Starkville. Does it take a certain kind of personality and the right kind of attitude to embrace the city of Starkville and playing for Mississippi State?

ISAAC SMITH: The people there are so welcoming. But when it comes to football, you're going to have to be ready to get dirty, down, have some fun, playing some football, you've got to really love the game.

I would say it's not a place for everybody because it's not these big cities and big towns. It's a small, pretty place that is just awesome to be at. There's no distractions in Starkville. It's strictly football and school, and just having fun and playing ball.

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