

# TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Duke vs Ole Miss

Friday, January 3, 2025  
Jacksonville, Florida, USA  
TIAA Bank Field

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Jaxson Dart**

**Jordan Watkins**

Press Conference



those guys in the off-season, to go out and then not play in the last game, I think that would be almost a disappointment not to just the fan base but to us as players and how we are as people, as well.

I know like Jaxson, Jaxson is not a quitter, neither am I, and I think we have a lot of guys like that on the team who aren't quitters. We're a group of brothers, and I think you really seen that because having pretty much all of our starters out there tonight was huge, and I think that goes to show the culture, and well, and the brotherhood that we've built here at Ole Miss.

JAXSON DART: Yeah, no doubt. I think you have a lot of pride when you play this game. You have a lot of pride that you carry over when you wear this jersey. Everything that Oxford has, we feel like Oxford has given more to us than we could give to them. You've heard Coach Kiffin say that, but we feel that way, too, being transfers.

And yeah, I think for pretty much everybody, it wasn't like we had to convince anybody to play. Everybody was on the same page.

You grow up as a little kid, and you want to play college football. When you're a kid, you never think about sitting out of a game. That was never a thought.

**Q. Jordan, you've talked about the connection you have on the field. What is y'all's relationship and what's made it so special over these years?**

JORDAN WATKINS: Man, it's crazy that you really say that, him being a West Coast kid and then me being just a kid from Kentucky, who knew that we'd get along so well.

But I think just really the first time that we've really met each other, I think we really connected, and it's just been going uphill since then. We hang out all the time outside of the facility, whether it's going to eat lunch or whether it's just playing pool or playing ping-pong, whatever it is. I can definitely call this guy one of my best friends and one of my brothers. Anything that I need from him, I know that he'll pick up, and I'll do the same for him.

Ole Miss 52, Duke 20

**Q. (On the last pass of the game.)**

JORDAN WATKINS: We'll take the blame for that one. Me and Jaxson just got a good connection, and sometimes no matter what it is we're going to compete, and whether it's a minute 30 left on the clock or whether it's the first play of the game, it doesn't matter. We're always trying to win, and we got a good look, and we checked the play.

JAXSON DART: We told each other if we're going to be out there, we're going to play football, and they pressed him.

**Q. Jaxson, you ran the ball 10 or 11 times and I only saw you slide on the last one. First play of the game you take Alex Howard head on. Were you just determined to play the only way you know how in this game?**

JAXSON DART: Yeah, I told my teammates, told my coaches, told my mom before the game that I'm going to leave everything I have on that field. I played the game the way that I play it, and I don't really look into the future of whatever. I'm just there for the moment and I'm going to compete.

**Q. Both of you guys are elder statesmen on this team, and Lane referred to you guys as an old-school football team when across the landscape guys are opting out, y'all opted into this game, and you said multiple times it was a no-doubter. Why was it a no-doubter and what does it mean to ride out on top?**

JORDAN WATKINS: I think we put so much time and effort in the off-season. Even just bringing in guys like Walter Nolan and Princely and spending all that time with

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

It's been awesome to be able to play the last three seasons with him at quarterback, and I think that me and his relationship is just a lifetime deal.

**Q. You both are guys that transferred in and stayed multiple years. There's several of you guys in the program. I know this season you didn't quite get to where you wanted to go, but what do you think your legacy will be for this program moving forward?**

JAXSON DART: I think we definitely left it off in a better place than what we came in. I think from the outside, you look at numbers, we don't even think of that stuff, but they're there, too.

But I think that from our experience in Oxford, the growth, just the environment, the culture itself of bringing people together, it's like a dream playing football at Ole Miss. You can go anywhere and everybody is going to know your name. Everybody is going to support you. Everybody is going to have your back, and that's just special. You don't get that everywhere, especially where I'm from. I didn't experience that at all at my old school, and then coming here, it's just a family. The state of Mississippi is special.

JORDAN WATKINS: Yeah, piggybacking off of that, Oxford is just an unbelievable town, man. I think you really just do it for the fans. This fan base in the past has been let down several times, and then just being able to go out there and just wear Ole Miss across your chest just for them, for the little kids in the community, you go out to eat or go out to lunch or something like that and you've got little kids that's there just smiling ear to ear just to be able to see you. They might not even -- they might be too shy to come up to you and talk to you but they might be smiling ear to ear because they get to see your face. Like he said, you don't get that everywhere.

I was a hometown hero at my last school, and I'd walk into the mall or something like that and people not even know who I am. It's not like that in Oxford. It's special.

**Q. You guys have won 10 games the last two years. That's only happened 10 times in Ole Miss history. What does that sort of history mean to you guys?**

JAXSON DART: Yeah, this program is on the rise. They're going to continue to get better, and I think it's just a place where people really want to play and be a part of. There's a lot of excitement and momentum going for it, and like I said, I think it's going to continue to improve and continue to be one of the best programs in the country.

JORDAN WATKINS: Yeah, I think Coach Kiffin is a hell of a coach, and I think he does everything in his power to

make Ole Miss a good football program, and he has, he's done that. I think over the years to come, guys will want to come here just because, like you said, 10 wins in the last two seasons, I think that draws guys' attention.

Like I said, he's a great coach, and he has a way with players. I think Ole Miss will be on the rise for many, many years.

**Q. Real quick, that 51-yard pass when you were fading to your left, Jaxson, Lane said that was a pretty special throw. From each of you guys' vantage point, can you take us through that play?**

JORDAN WATKINS: Yeah, with this guy you've always got to stay alive no matter what because he's always looking down the field, and I know he runs the ball a lot, but he's always looking downfield to his receivers, and he trusts his guys all the time. I think pretty much made eye contact, and I seen him pat the ball and I knew he was going to throw it, so I knew it was going to be an across-the-field field, so I just had to run and run under it and go get it.

JAXSON DART: Yeah, post-snap I knew that he was going to be there. I kind of got flushed out of the pocket, and he continued to work with me. Just thought I'd put it out and see what happened, and he made a great play for me.

**Q. Jaxson, for you specifically, you were one of the first guys if not the first to come out after the State game and say I want to finish this, I want to finish what we started. I don't know if you were the head man of recruiting people to come back and play in the final game, but what was that recruitment process like, getting guys to opt in to finish in the bowl game?**

JAXSON DART: I didn't feel like I had to recruit anybody. I felt like we were all on the same page. Like I said, getting an opportunity to play football again that you love, why would you not take that opportunity.

I think when you go into something, you always want to make sure that you have no regrets about it, and I decided it was an early opportunity to go in the game, to win 10 games this year. We felt like we got snubbed from the playoff, and when we saw who we were playing, this was the same team that took SMU to overtime. I think we all just wanted to make a statement that we should have been in there.

**Q. Jaxson, what does it mean right now to know that you're completing your Ole Miss career with the Gator Bowl all-time single-game total yardage record? 80**

**years of Gator Bowl football and you have that record now.**

JAXSON DART: Yeah, that's pretty cool. I didn't know that. Just blessed to have the players around me that I do. These are the best teammates in the country and the best coaching staff who always put us in position to go execute and make big plays, and I feel like we were in rhythm all night tonight. Yeah, it was just a lot of fun, and this was a great event. It was an awesome bowl game, and we had a great time.

Just really appreciative of the opportunity.

**Q. Did you think 400 yards might be in reach before the game?**

JAXSON DART: You don't really think of that stuff before the game. You just want to go out there and win. I think that's what it all comes down to.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports