

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: I guess I'll open with that note. First and foremost, excited about Mike White, his addition to our athletic department. Don't know him personally. Looking forward to getting to meet him today. Excited about his large family moving to Athens and getting to be a part of a special university. So I'm happy to have him.

I'm excited about spring practice. This is actually my favorite time of year, believe it or not. I like the fact that you have one practice and you have a day off to teach, and then you have another practice and you have another day off to teach. It slows things down for the players.

So if you enjoy coaching football and the relationships you get to have with the players, this is the best time of year because you literally get to sit in a meeting room, teach, go at a much slower pace.

We've obviously got a lot of holes to fit and a lot of young players on this roster that are excited about filling those roles. We've had probably six weeks of pretty intense workouts. I think our strength staff has done a tremendous job.

As is the case in all businesses really when you look at it, when you have success, sometimes you have change and people get opportunities. So we've got two new strengths coaches, four new position coaches, several new quality control people, so a lot of new faces.

One thing that you benefit from is you get a lot of different ideas and knowledge from those people. So the additions we made to our staff have been tremendous. They are bright. Some of them bright young coaches; some of them very experienced coaches.

But all of them fit our culture and criteria, and that probably excites me most. The players have got to know these guys in really a short amount of time. It's been a quick turnaround relative to the amount of time we've had.

I'm excited about where our team is heading, where our guys are going, the roles that have been embraced. We

have continued with our skull sessions and our player develop in terms of character and leadership.

A lot of holes. There is a lot of questions to be answered from our team for guys leaving. I'm excited to see what this group can do, and take on the personality of their team. Some of that is already started.

So couple injuries of guys that will be out. We traditionally have -- I think the years we've been here we've had six or seven guys out every spring, mostly with post-season surgeries. This year we had a little more with our incoming freshmen.

So we've had nineteen incoming freshmen, but some of these guys are out for the spring as well. Of the returning guys, most of you guys know Brock is out for the spring with a shoulder surgery. Rian Davis will be able to do some things, but he's been out since fall, about mid-season.

Smael Mondon is out with a labral repair, very similar to what Nakobe had last year.

Tykee is still doing his ACL. He's back running, moving around, but he's right where he should be but not going to go through spring.

And then Darnell Washington will be out as well for spring. He's got a lower leg extremity that's going to keep him out. All those guys are promising they'll have good returns.

Then our mid-years, our nineteen mid-years, I think we have five guys that required surgeries, which we knew these guys would require surgery. The positive is we'll have them back for fall camp. But Bear had a labral repair. Jacob Hood had ankle surgery. C.J. Madden had a labral repair. Griffin Scroggs, shoulder surgery. And then C.J. Smith is coming off some meniscus repair, but he's able to do some things.

So that's not abnormal for us to have some guys out and injured. Gives an opportunity for some other guys, hopefully the mid-year kids will be ready to rock and roll for summer and summer workouts where the NCAA has



granted us more time to spend with them and put our defense and offense and special teams in place.

So with that, I'll open it up.

**Q. Can you talk about what the status of Arik Gilbert in terms of -- I see he's on the roster -- where he'll fit in and his prospects going forward?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Arik has done a great job kind of integrating back to the team. He's been here for a while now. He's done the work we've asked of him. He's doing well academically.

You know, I think there is this perception, and it affects college football athletes more than anybody else because they're younger, that the -- this recruiting stigma follows someone, and these expectations follow kids.

I look across and follow guys that maybe we signed here or somewhere else and they carry this really heavy burden of expectation. We don't place that burden on anybody. I think sometimes they put it on themselves. I think sometimes social media does it. Sometimes media in general does it.

But for whatever reason, Arik is a guy that's carried a lot of that burden with him in terms of expectation. Our expectation of Arik is to be the best person he can be first and foremost, and hopefully be the best player he can be.

He's had a really good off-season. He continues to work. But that doesn't put an expectation that this guy is going to go out there and set the world on fire. He's trying to figure out where he fits in and he's working really hard. He's done everything we've asked.

He's fortunate he's going to get a lot of reps because of the two guys we have out. So he's going to get a lot of reps. Ryland Goede is going to get a lot of reps, Brett Seither is going to get a lot of reps, Delp.

So we've got guys that are going to take reps in those roles at tight end. I think sometimes the expectation is so great it can affect them psychologically.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

KIRBY SMART: Well, when we came back and went to work for those six weeks, that's -- we've put that to the side. We're not communicating, talking about that. That's something they'll be able to have the rest of their life. We always talk about it here. We've talked about it since we won the SEC. You don't defend a title.

You guys want it to be that way, but that's not what we do. We start fresh just like we did when we lost to Texas in a bowl game. We start completely new. That's so hard for the media to grasp.

It's not hard for us because we go into a different part of the program, off-season conditioning program. What's different about the off-season conditioning program than it has been in the past? Not a whole lot. We're doing the same things we do to build up to the point we went to last year.

We certainly have different faces and different people in places. I think they're right where they need to be. They're not way behind schedule, not way ahead of schedule. We have holes to fill just like we do every year.

Probably just more this year than in years past based on guys leaving and the departure. We also have more mid-years here to fill some of those roles. We're certainly not deep enough at several positions, but I'm not here cry about it. I'm here to solve it and figure it out and get the best guys.

That's what you do as a coach, right? You coach the players. So that movement for us has been long past. I think that will be the play and the talk of the media for last year, but not us. We're really worried about creating an identity for this team.

We're in the identity phase. Spring practice is let's figure who are we? Let's figure out who we are by how we practice. I think we'll see that over the next 15 practices.

**Q. Are you able to say who is going to call defensive plays? And the second part, you brought back a lot of guys, coaches that were here before. Was there any thinking in that, or is it just these were the best available guys for those jobs?**

KIRBY SMART: No, we went through an interview process at every position. We interviewed multiple people at each and every position, think about what's the best overall for our program, for our culture we built here, take input from the coaches on the staff been here a long time, Dell McGee, Glenn Schumann. These guys have been part are our program. Tray Scott. They are the culture. We want people that want to be here and want to be part of that.

It's very demanding what's required of college coaches. You've seen guys move on to the NFL, seen guys step out, you've seen guys go onto other places, but it's not going to ever change at the University of Georgia. The standard of excellence that you want to have in recruiting and spending time with your players, and these four people meet that

criteria.

They're also people I trust and some I've known, some I have not known. But the ones that we didn't know we did a lot of research on and felt like they were best for the job.

As far as the defensive play calling, I think that's a way overblown, big deal to you guys; not a big deal to us. We know what we're doing in-house and that's the focus.

**Q. You talk about the spring and how valuable it is, especially for the early enrollees. How much value do they get in coming in and the impact, not even for this season, but two or three years down the road?**

KIRBY SMART: Yes, it's more important for their degree, right? They get an extra semester of classes. They get 15 hours towards their graduation. That is the most important thing to me is that.

For five of them it's about getting the best rehab you can possibly get in the country, maybe the world, as opposed to sitting in Atlanta and having a surgery and not having the rehab facilities that maybe your high school has, you're getting that here.

To get those guys and the care they need so they don't reinjure, don't have setbacks, we get to have them right here underneath or tutelage and our care. There is no value you can put on that.

There are other kids, six or seven other kids that aren't here. I don't think they're in a deficit either because they're able to get on Zoom, sit in on meetings, get playbooks. Those guys begin to learn, too, so that when they get here over the summer we can integrate them as well.

I think the nineteen guys here now are going to benefit from reps because there is a lot of reps available for those nineteen mid-years.

**Q. I guess following up, wanted to ask about Coach Uzo-Diribe, very young guy. Seems like he relates really well to the players on the team. What have you seen had terms of the dynamic he's had in the outside linebacker room?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Chidera gives us great energy, enthusiasm, played the position, easy to recruit outside backers and defensive ends at University of Georgia because we've produced a lot of them. It's also easy to recruit to him because he played the position with tremendous success, had a stint in the NFL. He has got a really good track record, high character, very enthusiastic, and we've seen the impact on our players

with what he's done.

**Q. (Indiscernible) He talked about how intense of a coach you are, and I think you said something to the effect of maybe too intense. I wondered, from season to season you always look to improve and change things. Will you do things any differently? What are some of the changes? And then the players at the combine brought up the microphone, you can't hide from the microphone. Is that always going to be a staple for you to carry the microphone and coach up guys throughout the course of practice? Do you think you'll delegate some of that eventually?**

KIRBY SMART: I think it's a personality that your team takes on. I think each one of those guys would tell you that it's easy to talk about and laugh about because they probably had an experience in their career where things got demanded upon them through that microphone that maybe impacted them, maybe made them better, maybe challenged them.

But I also think every team is different. I actually was probably less on the microphone last year than ever before because it didn't require it on a day-to-day basis. When Nakobe Dean and Quay Walker are holding you accountable, why do I need to?

There is an individual team part that like, okay, what is the identity of each team? What does it take on? What do they need more of, less of?

So I can't foresee the future and I don't know what this team is going to need, but if they need TLC then we'll give them TLC. If they don't and they need to be pushed, we'll try to do that. That's part of being a coach.

I can't answer what that looks like because I don't think every team is the same. I think every team is extremely different because the personality of that team is usually made up of the players.

**Q. Even though your focus is looking ahead, can you reflect on the pride factor you have when you guys that were leaving have headlines at the NFL combine, they'll be on display again tomorrow? Can you also address the specific challenge of replacing the guys on the defensive front, which maybe have really stood out in these combine situations?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, we saw this coming two, three years ago. We even had the fear that we might have been replacing those guys last year had they not decided to stay.

So that's been a preparation deal for us. We're always looking two, three years ahead sometimes, and, you know, where you maybe have a deficit or you're not as good or maybe better at certain positions.

That's a focus we take on each and every year, so that will be a challenge for us. Lost a lot of good defensive players, some really good wideouts, so it's on to the next. You got to create your identity through who you have, and that's what you do as a coach.

You know, you do the best job you can with it and try and get the most out of them. Certainly proud of those guys. Coming over here to this meeting I ran into a bunch of them and they're getting to see new parts of our building they had not seen, and it's great to see them. Really happy for them.

So many of those guys worked their tail off. They didn't get there through some easy deal. They worked really hard, and that's what our players now have to understand. It doesn't come easy.

**Q. Coach, (indiscernible) what kind of continued growth have you not seen from him in the off-season? As far as those other three guys behind him right now, what are you looking for from them?**

KIRBY SMART: Looking to develop each and everyone. I think all four of those guys are in different spots. You can go all the way from Gunner just getting here to Stetson being 23, 24 years old and having seen a lot of football.

So they're in different spots, all four guys. The biggest challenge for us for the spring is to get reps and develop, because we don't have the depth at the skill positions, receiver and defensive back and even tight end, to be able to do some of the things we liked to practice-wise.

So we're trying to be innovative, creative in the way we practice, because quarterback development is critical. So if you have quarterbacks that aren't able to get reps, how do they get better? So I'm big on challenging our staff to be creative in the ways we rep those guys, who goes with what groups, how many reps a week you get, what percentages.

We want to see these guys get better. It's easy when you have three groups of offensive linemen. They all get work. But you might have four quarterbacks, and it's hard to get those guys enough work. Wanting to see those guys improve. They can't all play, so it's a matter of growing them to get them in a position to where they can be successful.

**Q. Another quick injury update. Trezden Marshall, Tate Ratledge, Arian Smith, all three of them had their season cut short. What's the status coming into the spring?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, they're all running, moving, doing things. Arian has been able to take some reps. He will he'll be practicing with us some. Not 100%, but he'll be able to practice with us practice.

Tate is coming off the foot injury. He's not going to be able to take reps in the spring, but he's weight bearing, running, doing some activity there and able to take walk-through reps.

So I take him in a kind of mode of he's not out for the entire spring. He's just not going to be going live with. The progress has been great for both these guys.

Trezden is doing running, cutting. Got a knee brace on. He'll be able to take some reps, but not 100%.

**Q. Question about quarterbacks was 15 minutes in. That's the longest we took to get to quarterbacks.**

KIRBY SMART: Hey, ya'll turned a new leaf.

**Q. You had experience at Alabama coming off National Championships, but 41 years is a different animal. Is there something you want to do, you have to do with this team to make sure that there is a clean break and a new start, or do you not want a clean break, new start mentality?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, let's be clear: We won a National Championship because we had really good players who played well together, right?

So usually the team that wins the National Championship is a unified group. I can go through the last couple years. There is like this really great group of special players at LSU; they won a National Championship.

Really good group, special leaders at Alabama; they won a National Championship. We had a really good group.

So we're trying to like develop our team to emulate what is your identity. Is it going to be supreme talent with great character, great leadership? Is the leadership and character going to outweigh the talent?

We're trying to figure out the team's identity completely independent of the previous years.

There is -- when you look out there, there is not as much

experience. There is good football players on this roster, but we got to get those guys in position to be successful. Our job as coaches is to grow them.

I'm going to repeat: I am not worried about living in the past. That's our job, is to make sure these kids grasp what they do is in front of them. The wind blows a lot harder at the top, but we been up there.

So it's not like we been at the tip-top but it's been blowing pretty good where we were, so we got to do a good job continuing to develop our guys and get them ready to play.

**Q. You mentioned Glenn Schumann being an important part of the culture here. Entering his seventh season, how have you seen him grow as a position coach and taking on more responsibilities as a co-defensive coordinator?**

KIRBY SMART: He's always trying to grow and get better. He's never satisfied. I think a lot of times you can get complacent, it sets in on all of us, this is what we do. We don't want to be complacent. That's just not what I believe in. We're always trying to find a different way to do it better.

I think Glenn epitomizes that. He's constantly on Zoom with the NFL guys; he talks to high school coaches; he's a sponge. Doesn't think he knows it all. Always trying to find a better way to do it, to reinvent himself as a coach.

I think his players play really hard. They have a passion and energy for him that they want to be successful. I mean, to do what he's done with those three guys coming out this year is really pretty special. No. 1, he helped recruit them, identify them, and then he helped mold them into good players.

So there is a pedigree there that he's able to recruit to.

**Q. Question about a preferred walk-on that you all signed on National Signing Day, Cedric Brundage. What did you like out of him, you and Coach McGee, so late in the process? (No microphone.)**

KIRBY SMART: Well, he lives in a rural area. Not a lot of foot traffic I call it going through there. You wouldn't say that's a heavily recruited school. Doesn't get a lot of the traffic. He is a guy we thought was a really good football player.

We've had a lot of success here in our walk on program. You can look throughout the history, the last six years we've had guys earn scholarships left and right, and he's got the talent to do that. He's a really good football player, and we felt like he could help our roster.

We're a little bit thinner at running back than we've been in the past too, so we're hoping he can help us there.

**Q. (Regarding Zion Logue.)**

KIRBY SMART: Those are big shoes to fill. We don't do comparisons. We let you guys stick to the comparisons. You know, I think they comparisons can be bad for people when they try to compare. I think what's good about Zion is he's a great leader, a great kid. He is the perfect example of a guy that has matured and he's grown.

He used to have academic problems freshman year, wouldn't go to this, wouldn't -- and now for the last year he's not on lists, he handles his weight, he practices really hard, he's hit a strength, a little bit extra strength in the weight room that's going to help make him a better player.

We got high expectations for him. He's going to take on a larger role, but his role may not be the same as what those guys was.

**Q. Data on the skull sessions now. How tough of a sell was that for you as a concept to bring that in to what you do day-to-day in your position groups? Were you surprised by how much impact that had on the results?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, we don't do it day-to-day. That would be probably overkill. We space it out. Different times of the year it's one time a week; sometimes it's two times a week; sometimes it's no times a week based on where we are in our program.

But it wasn't a hard sell for me because I felt like we needed a change. I felt like we had had several years of repeated results and wanted to bring some new ideas and energy in. We tried it twist those this year some to change it up because we are kind of a different team.

I certainly am pleased with the results, and that's why we're continuing to do it. I think it's important for our players to hear messages from their coaches, and then also from each other. It allows them to stand up in front of each other and talk.

I think it had a direct impact on the guys that went to the combine because, not just their workouts, their workouts were great, but the way they talk and carried themselves, they got a lot of practice doing that here. I think that was big for them.

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