

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Kirby Smart

G Game Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: It was a really competitive game, kind of a back-and-forth game, like it always is. We want it to be as much action, close, game coming down to the wire, not so much for you guys or the fans but for us. I don't think you get better in games that are lopsided, you get better in competitive action. We tried to make that happen as much as possible.

I thought our fan base was awesome, to come out especially with the inclement weather earlier, to be able to come out and support us and give us a great atmosphere. We've got a lot of good football players here today. We've got a lot of good football players leaving, too, and got a lot of good football players on the field. I was excited about that. Really pleased with some things in the kicking game, and we've got a long way to go before we get where we need to go. That's the objective.

I was really proud of the competitive nature the guys played with today.

### Q. How proud are you of Arik Gilbert?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Arik is a really tough, physical player that's done a good job. I'm more proud of the practices he had leading up to today than today. Today was a little bit icing on the cake. He got some good breaks. He had a ball that I think Stetson was throwing away that he ended up making a play on.

But he's not where he needs to be, either. There were two missed assignments where he didn't block a guy that in the run game could kill us. We get tackles for loss and we end up not blocking a guy. He didn't really have those kind of plays during the spring, but his conditioning level has got to continue to improve. He lost a lot of weight, but just what he's been through and overcome is such a great story, but he's not where he needs to be.

He'll be the first to tell you he's got to continue to grow, to get in shape, to change his body, and he can get an opportunity to help us. With the two other guys we've got coming back, it makes it a luxury of those guys being able

to make us a special football team.

### Q. How would you evaluate some of the guys on the defensive line?

KIRBY SMART: I think they've had good springs. I'd rather evaluate the spring than the spring game. It's hard to judge when you're out there and it's happening. We'll watch the tape. But I think Naz has done a lot to change his body. He's lost 10 to 15 pounds, he's changed his body fat percentage. Warren is a quick-twitch guy that can make some plays when he moves inside. He's gotten tougher. He's gotten more physical.

But certainly that's the area that we probably lose the most, there and linebacker, the depth we had there. Those guys are going to have to play meaningful minutes and become very dependable for us to go where we want to.

### Q. What did you make of the play of Stetson and the quarterbacks overall?

KIRBY SMART: I thought those guys did a good job. When you put them in a situation where it's pass-happy type environment, it changes the D-line's demeanor, so there's no real run game to slow guys down and everybody is pinning their ears back. You have two two-minute situations which are actually three-minute, but it was a three-minute two-minute and then another three-minute two-minute, and you're up tempo going, that makes sometimes for tougher passing situations.

But I really thought those guys made some plays. Standing back there with them, they stood in the pocket, made good decisions with the ball, made some vertical plays down the field, and our style is, hey, we're going to make shots. It really wasn't a shot-type day because it wasn't a play action type day, it was a drop-back pass type day.

Those guys executed well and made some plays. They really all three got so much better during the spring. Just the growth within the offense, you see so much promise in each one of them.

**Q. How would you assess the DBs, specifically Bullard, Starks and Lassiter?**

KIRBY SMART: Lassiter didn't get to play. He got a little bit sick last night and he didn't get to play, but he had a good spring. He got to work and play a lot for us. Bull is one of the toughest guys in the secondary. I think he dinged his shoulder a little bit. Don't have an update on him, but he came out right there at the end.

Those guys are really -- Chris Smith, Dan Jackson, Kelee, those guys are great competitors, Nyland Green. The thing about Daylen Everett, we learned in the spring he can tackle you. He's not afraid of contact. He's going to be a good football player. We've got to get better in the secondary to go where we're going to go, and we've got some guys coming, but we've got to get the guys that are here to go to here, and that's our job as coaches.

**Q. With the defense able to pin their ears back and rush the passer, what did you make of the play of the offensive line today?**

KIRBY SMART: Off and on. We had two or three missed assignments that were disappointing, things we wouldn't normally do. We didn't ask them to come out and just grind it and run the ball. We asked them to pass pro and play in a situation where guys know they're going to rush. I thought we passed off some twists nicely, and we've got some mobility in our quarterbacks. You saw both quarterbacks when things kind of broke down, they took off and made some plays with their legs.

A lot of times that's because the offensive line was able to finish just enough to get them out of the pocket.

**Q. What specifically about the second team (indiscernible). What did you see from those guys today?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I reserve judgment to watch the tape, but Blaske worked at center and right tackle all spring. He did a tremendous job. Picking up more and more tackle reps as the spring went on.

Ernest has come a long way, from getting here and having to lose 25 to 30 pounds, he did that before spring, and then once he got on the field, because of his conditioning level, he was able to handle the number of reps we gave him. He took almost every rep with the twos and the threes for all spring, and just think he's going to be a talented player that's extremely tough, does things the right way. We're very fortunate to have Ernest in the program.

**Q. Was this a typical practice for Oscar Delp in terms**

**of his mechanics?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know about typical. I thought he didn't get too caught up in the moment and played well. He like Arik has been thrown in the fire. Like they're out there going every play against guys who have played 20 and 30 games. I thought he had a decent scrimmage today. He caught the ball well. He ran after the catch well. We didn't ask him to block and do some things, and those are things that he's got to continue to work on.

To play in the SEC you've got to be able to do both. You can't just be a receiving tight end. That's what we saw last year with Brock and Darnell. They're so versatile they can do both.

**Q. There's going to be a lot of analysis (indiscernible) how important is today to you?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, it's important because it's an opportunity to measure things, to look at things and say, okay, what did we do well, what did we do poorly, but not statistically. Like I don't read into the statistics and say, okay, what was the completion percentage. It's a decision-making process. Did his eyes go to the right place, did he do right thing.

Same thing on defense; did I make the right call, did I play the right technique. You're grading effort and toughness on both positions. When you look at the quarterback, hard to grade effort and toughness when you're not getting touched. You're evaluating decision-making process, and a lot goes into that; can I get the signal, can I fix things, because every now and then you got a guy that doesn't know what to do out there and your job is to get him fixed because if you don't, it could cost you a big play. And we had several situations out there where I thought the quarterbacks went over and said, hey, you've got to do this. They helped the wide out, they helped the back out. There's so much more so being the quarterback at Georgia than just numbers.

**Q. (Indiscernible).**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I mean, it doesn't bother me. You can do whatever you want as far as the coaches. I want the players to play. All that's for entertainment purposes. For me it's about making the players go out there and play well. How did they handle the pregame, how did they handle the halftime, because everybody thinks it doesn't matter. It does matter because the next time they do it, it's going to be in Atlanta against Oregon.

So for me it's a dress rehearsal. It's like, see where their mind is. Does this kid respond well to anxiety because



there was some anxiety out there today. I'm a lot more into that than I am just goofing off with it, and they did that long pass coach, too, because they did that when I was here.

**Q. Last spring you named Jake Edey the starter. Is it fair to say with all of Stetson's experience and the MVP performances that he's going to be the starter next season?**

KIRBY SMART: You said it, so there you go. You just quoted. You said it. I don't have to say that. Our team knows Stetson is our quarterback; know what I mean? Stetson has done a tremendous job. Stetson has been an incredible leader, done what we've asked, and you know what, the other two guys have gotten a whole lot better, and I think if you asked them, they're really comfortable back there in the pulpit throwing the ball.

I saw it today with both of them. They both have really good arm talent and done a great job. Stetson knows where he stands on our team.

**Q. Last year during SEC Media Day you cited Henry David Thoreau and said that success comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it. Coming off of a National Championship run, what's the first thing listed on a schedule of a coach who's too busy to be looking for success?**

KIRBY SMART: First thing on the schedule after this? I've got to go meet with some recruits. Then I've got to go out to eat with some recruits and then I've got to go call some recruits and then I've got to grade the film.

There's a long list of things -- I've got to do the duty that lies nearest, and that's always going to be the case in this profession, what is the duty that lies nearest.

**Q. Have you gotten your ring yet, and what did you think seeing that group of seniors getting theirs?**

KIRBY SMART: It was really cool. I have not gotten my ring yet, but I was really proud of those guys. Getting to see them there today and the ovation they got means so much. Those guys have given so much to this program, and there's a lot of guys, there's five-year, six-year, three-year guys. It's a random group when it comes to the number of years served here. It's not like they're all one class. They all came in across really three years, and they've changed the culture, the work ethic, and there's a lot of guys before them that didn't get a ring that were out there today, too, that they were part of that same success. Some of that ring is theirs, and I think the guys that got the rings will be the first to admit that.

**Q. You said the honeymoon is over on the SEC Network the other day, but how much does the National Championship give you momentum and help you in this day and age where recruiting looks like it's a little different with the NIL landscape? Has it been a big boost?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know how you measure that. I really don't. It's hard to measure what is the amount of boost it gives you. I don't know. I think it puts you in conversation with a lot of kids, but you can only efficiently recruit so many kids. If it puts you in it with more, you'd better pick the right ones to be in it with and you'd better hone in on who you want because otherwise you're just like shooting a big spread shotgun out there just seeing what comes back to you.

You've got to narrow your focus, you've got to know what you want to go after, the right kind of kids, and I think that's -- win or lose the National Championship game, that doesn't change.

What we have to do in recruiting is what we have to do in recruiting. I'm certainly glad that we won it. I'm glad we won it for our fans, but I'm focused on forward. I'm looking like in there, not in the rear-view mirror. I'm looking out the windshield straight ahead.

**Q. If you had to pick now where you have on the offense one standout guy from today and one on defense? Quickly without looking at the tape.**

KIRBY SMART: Hard. Hard to do that. I've got to watch the tape, especially on defense. I think offensively you look at statistics and you say, who threw it and caught it or who caught the ball or who made plays, but that's a whole -- it's probably the offensive line across the front, and then defensively I thought we had a lot of batted balls which we didn't have hardly any all spring. We tried to emphasize that the three days. We had more batted balls.

We didn't give up as many explosives as we had in some scrimmages, so there's some promise there, but they also didn't play action us the same way they did in the scrimmage.

**Q. I know you were concerned about the depth at the wide receiver position. How would you assess (indiscernible).**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think we got better. Like we got younger players better. We still aren't where we need to be. Like I really feel good, Ladd and AD, they're SEC wide outs. They can compete at a high level.

But when you go past that, you've got Marcus who's done a tremendous job. Marcus is extremely smart and he can play all positions. We don't have like, okay, this guy has got a hamstring, who's going in. We don't have that. We've got to grow that. We've got to get Arian and Jackson, CJ, De'Nylon up to speed and days like today get them closer. But they're not there yet. We're not there yet. We have to continue to grow. You look at Arian has an elite trait and we try to use that elite trait as much as possible, but we're not where we need to be at wide out, and we've got some more guys coming, so we're going to get some guys to help out.

**Q. (Indiscernible).**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, all those guys will be fine. Dealing with ankle, knee, but they'll be back for summer.

**Q. You didn't have a lot of running of the ball today, but who did you like out of your running backs and (indiscernible)?**

KIRBY SMART: Catching the ball out of the backfield. We ask them to catch the ball out of that backfield and make plays. I thought Kenny caught a nice play on a wheel route, so did Kendall. Those guys -- in college football you become a weapon by how you receive the ball out of the backfield. They want to grow with that. They want to be able to showcase their talents catching the ball out of the backfield. That's what the NFL asks about. Can he catch the ball out of the backfield? Can he be a 3rd down back? Well, we like to grow NFL backs here, so to do that you've got to use them in the passing game, and I thought that Kenny, Kendall all those guys, Daijun, Clark did a nice job. We didn't always hit them efficiently. We missed some wide open backs, but I thought that those backs did a nice job.

**Q. With the transfer portal being what it is now, does this next phase of the schedule become even more intense when you factor in there's probably going to be more guys looking for spots?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know. I don't even think of this next phase as transfer portal phase, I think of it as get stronger, get bigger phase. Like we have to get better. We've got to physically get better, so we've got to lift in May, we've got to work out in May. We've got to get some guys academically in a good place.

The guys that want to be here, we're going to coach them. The guys that don't, then we're not going to chase after them. We can't. That's their determination.

We're trying to create a culture of I want to be here and

grow and get better. Like you come to Georgia, you get developed. If I'm not the guy, at least I'm developing to be the guy, and we've got a lot, a lot of examples of guys that stuck around and became really good players, and Channing Tindall is a great example of that. That's really my focus. It's really not on who's in it, who's not in it.

**Q. How has Jared Zirkel progressed?**

KIRBY SMART: I think he's gotten more confidence. I thought he kicked well the last two weeks of spring. Early on there was some butterflies. He'll be a stiff competition at kickoff because he and Pod are very similar hang distance, and I'm excited to see him continue to grow at field goals. He's shown more consistency in the last two weeks than he has since he's been here.

**Q. You said recently that this defense that's leaving had as much talent as anybody you've been around, and at the start of this year you were asked to compare this defense to the '11 group that you coached at Bama. I think the jury was out at that time. Do you have any thoughts or conclusions on that now that the draft is on us?**

KIRBY SMART: Other than I'm trying to replace all those guys. The last thing I'm thinking about is where they stack up against the '11 Bama defense. I've got issues -- duty that lies nearest, that's at the bottom. So I'm really trying to conclude where they stack in relation to those guys as much as I am replace those guys. It takes a full day's work by our defensive staff to replace what's leaving here, and we're trying as fast as we can because we have some talented players on defense, they just don't have experience, guys. You cannot put a price tag on experience. We don't is enough guys with experience, so what do you got to do? You've got to get them experience. You've got to go play in scrimmages, you've got to play in an environment like today, so our kids will grow from this. We're just very fortunate that we don't have a 15th practice, we have a 15th game. So I get to see how they react to giving up a play.

But I can't compare those two defenses.

**Q. You said spring is about building identity for the team. Do you feel like you have an idea of what this team's identity might be at this point?**

KIRBY SMART: We're creeping on it. There was some really good accountability in terms of holding each other accountable this spring that I was shocked by, that I was like, man, there's going to be a void in leadership, how can we create leadership opportunities, and from the day one they were pushing each other, they were cheering each

other on the sideline.

I'm like, man, it's almost like they wanted to emulate those other guys. I'm talking about from a leadership standpoint now. They can't emulate what some of those guys do on the field. They can emulate the standard, though, and I thought they really did that for 14 of the 15 practices. Man, I was like, dude, they had a great attitude, they worked really hard today and we made it tough, and they did it. We're going to have to have a little different personality. We're going to have some grit, some toughness because it won't just be talent. We were really talented last year, and not that we're not talented now, but we're going to have to win in different ways.

**Q. What are you looking forward to most this summer leading up to Oregon?**

KIRBY SMART: Seeing the players get better. Like I love the camps in the summer. I love the opportunity to work out our players. I love the opportunity to see our guys grow. So I'm looking forward to the progression.

Thanks.

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