

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Thanks for joining us. Excited to get game week going, game week prep. Camp kind of came to end last week for us. I thought we had a really good football camp in terms of physicality, practice, and during the heat.

Really pleased with how hard our guys have worked and strained. It's not easy to be a football player in the fall because you don't get to do much but practice every day for three and four hours in the heat and school is not here, people aren't on campus, and all that has changed now.

Pleased with what our guys have done up to this point. We're certainly not completely ready for Oregon. We shouldn't be. We have other things to do to get ready. We've got a lot of situational football to get ready for.

I'm pleased with where we are, and it's time to lock in and finish up the prep we got started last week. Probably a little bit Wednesday, a little bit Thursday, and then all in Friday, Saturday, Sunday off, and then getting back to the grind for the players.

We know we got a really good program. Mario Cristobal is a good friend of mine and he's done a great job recruiting players to Oregon, and Dan has taken those guys, and watching what they did in the spring game, and knowing the intensity and the organization and the leadership that Dan has, they're going to be a hell of a team. They've got a lot of good football players on their team.

With that, I'll open it up.

**Q. Before you hired Dan as your defensive -- promoted Dan as your defensive coordinator, you mentioned he had some out-of-the-box things that impressed. As long as you were defensive coordinator I wonder what would be out of the box, because I can't imagine there weren't many things you hadn't seen before you promoted Dan. What are some of the things that make him such an effective coach and why you think Oregon sought him out to coach their program?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think first part of that is I had a great relationship with Dan when he worked at University of Alabama, and had a lot of respect for how he went about doing his job. He didn't try to be somebody he wasn't. He didn't try to impress people. He just worked and he grinded, and he really did a good job of just doing what you asked him to do.

Always thought he would be successful. He helped recruit while he was there, and when we had a job come open, it was -- I think Kevin Sherrer ended up leaving, and ended up being a no-brainer for us to bring Danny in because I knew the value he had, No. 1 knowledge, No. 2, of being around me. I was very comfortable with him.

And he had more experience. So I think when we had an opportunity to hire him as coordinator, I knew he was going to do a great job. Schumann was here at that time as well, and they were really neck in neck the whole time and both took on the responsibilities.

Dan would be the first to tell you he never would've had the success he had here if not for Glenn Schumann. That's what made the transition easier when Dan left. Felt comfortable Glenn would be able to take it over along with Will.

It's great when he have two guys that know the system and two guys that can share that responsibility.

**Q. Just wanted to ask, how has the depth at receiver affected preparation heading into the season opener, and have the freshmen impressed you enough to have you confident in them if their number is called?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, you know, I think a lot can be made about depth at any position. There is never enough depth. You ask me one fall camp. We've been here for seven of them. I can't sit here and tell you that we've had enough at any position because as a coach you concern yourself with reps, volume of reps, how do I get enough work, how does each player get enough work.

Receiver's no different that are O-line or D-line or



defensive backs. We got a certain number of guys. We got the same number of guys we've had pretty much every camp, so I don't know that there is a major concern for depth there.

It's more staying healthy. We've had guys dinged up in every camp I've ever been here, and to be honest with you, we look at it every year and every year it's about the same.

Same number of soft official tissues, hamstrings and things, and it's kind of been that way this year.

I'm comfortable with where our guys are. We've got some young guys that will probably have to play and help us in the two-deep. If you're going to do it at a position, the position to do it at a receiver because those guys tend to be able to have success at an early age.

**Q. Obviously been a lot of talk this off-season about how many defensive players you lost. From the defense you see today, where those guys in your mind and how good can they be?**

KIRBY SMART: Where are they right now? They're inexperienced, you know, and hopefully as talented as we think they are players. At some positions more talented than others, but they're in need of playing a game. I guess you could say that's experience, right?

So they're in need of experience, but more so than experience they need to play in a game. They need good things to happen and reaffirm their good habits, and some of them need maybe something adverse to happen and see how they respond.

I've never coached a defensive player that didn't give up a play or get beat. How are they going to respond to that in a game atmosphere? It happens every day in practice. How will they respond in a game atmosphere?

I don't know if we know that yet, and that's going to be the resiliency factor of where is this group, because I don't think you really know until you go out in the game and have to execute it in front of the fans and against a really good opponent.

**Q. With this Oregon team, obviously staff turnover from last year, I think they had like 11 transfers in. Just with that much that has changed from the 2021 season, what's the challenge like preparing for a team like that?**

KIRBY SMART: Some unknowns. You're just trying to gather information, trying to figure out where the pieces will be, where is this guy going to play, and who is going to play. That's for us to worry about as coaches.

For the players, we got to worry about what we got to do. If I execute my assignment, what does it matter who is across from me? I'm not getting into the details of where he was at last year. I don't care where he was t last year. I'm worried about what I got to do to execute.

We as coaches certainly like to know about personnel and the matchups, and the game within the game is to try and get a good matchup somewhere out there. Matchups are easier to find when you know the team inside and out like an SEC team we play every year.

It's pretty easy to try to figure out where your matchups are. It's probably a little tougher in this situation of not knowing your opponent, and even the tape you have of the opponent may not be exactly what they're doing. So that creates an interesting dynamic, but it's not for our players to concern themselves with.

**Q. Coach, what have you seen out of Stetson Bennett in this camp? Was it what you were looking for.**

KIRBY SMART: Consistency, leadership, the things that you want your quarterback to be in terms of confidence; coachable, and understanding how to use the offense to help you. I think any time you have a guy that's been in a meeting room for two and three years under the same system, it helps.

But the reps help more than just the meeting room experience. He's taken more reps with the ones. He's gotten more quality work against the best we got to offer. He gets to go against the best we got every day, and I think that has helped his growth.

Very pleased with what he's done and what he's been asked to do. We need him to play well. Need him to play well because he's a veteran player now.

**Q. You mentioned some unknowns, trying to find information. Dan is not announcing his starting quarterback. You're familiar with the guy that is favorite. How does that impact them not saying, this is our guy?**

KIRBY SMART: That really doesn't impact anything for us. I mean, I know who the quarterback is going to be. I'm not worried about that. Worried a lot more about how our guys play and what our guys do and how our guys execute.

You guys use that to write about and talk about, but regardless of which quarterback is in there, they're going to do what they do. Maybe he does one thing better than the other guy. At the end of the day, they may play both of

them.

It's never about the preparation for one specific quarterback as much as the preparation of your team to go play well.

**Q. When you're facing a guy that was on your staff for the last four years, what's the level like, strategic level, the familiarity you have with each other? Does that affect game planning? Do you try to change things up? And also just on a personal level, to see -- I guess it shows some success obviously of your program to now find a guy I'm sure your proud of to be a head coach now.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, on a personal level, I don't think the game what anything to do with that, and neither Dan nor I will be worried about each other during the game. It's not about that.

He's fighting to do the best job he can for his organization and his players, and I'm doing the same here. We have mutual respect for each other. Always will, always have. Just it's what competition is about. You love to go compete, and it's about our players getting a chance to compete against their players.

As far as the familiarities of the two systems, you know, they're probably is a little overlap there in terms of defense and they're watching our defense and we watch our defense to get ready for them.

They have got coaches on their staff from other places. We've gone out and looked at the history of their other defensive coach for ideas and things they've done at other places.

At the end of the day it's about how you execute. It's not about Xs and Os. It's about who has got the best players and do the best players play the best in the biggest moments.

**Q. Sedrick was talking about Mykel Williams, getting more comfortable learning from the older guys. One, how much have you seen him learning from those guys; and two, how far has he come in this fall camp?**

KIRBY SMART: It's continued to grow. I think since he got here he's been a nontraditional freshmen. He's never been really impacted by accolades, hype, even intimidation by being here in terms of drills and knowing what to do.

He's fit in really naturally. I think being from where he's from, Columbus, he got up here to so many practices it was just a very steady climb, and he's continued to do

climb. He's not had up and downs and lack of effort and tired and not understanding. He takes really good care of his body. He's very intelligent. He learns the system well and he plays really hard. Those are attributes that help true freshmen get on the field.

**Q. Just wondering about an injury update on guys like Andrew Paul, Tykee Smith, Kearis Jackson, Tate Ratledge, Earnest Greene, and D'Nylon Morrisette?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know if I can hit all those. Andrew had a tough situation in a scrimmage. Tore his ACL, which all guys know. He'll be undergoing surgery I think tomorrow or the next day it repair his ACL.

Tate has been back practicing, doing a great job.

Kearis been back practicing ever since the scrimmage.

D'Nylon has be been back practicing since the second scrimmage.

Have to remind me anybody else.

**Q. Tykee.**

KIRBY SMART: Tykee has practiced all camp, so he's continued to practice.

**Q. Can you talk about the competition at the nickel position as well as punter? Do you know who your guys are?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. Our guys are Brett and Noah, and our guys Tykee and Bullard at the star, along with Poole. So all these guys are doing a great job.

Probably play all those guys at punter. We'll make a decision closer to the game, but Brett is probably the leader in terms of punting. But really pleased with the work of all those guys, and expect them to -- we say you're a starter here when you start on special teams, so all those guys will of have a starting role.

**Q. Considering all the moving parts on the defensive line, you're going to be facing a team that may have the most experienced offensive line you will face this year. What does that challenge come Saturday?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think we face a really good offensive line day in and day out, and very experience in our own. That provides a lot of good competition.

I think they've got more returning starters, returning snaps than almost anybody in the country on their offensive line.



It's certainly a strength in terms of even what Mario's history is of recruiting offensive linemen.

He did a tremendous job putting together depth at that position, so it will be key that we play well, physical. You have to control the line of scrimmage and strike people to be a good football team. They know that. Dan knows that. There is nothing hidden about that.

Our defensive line has to stop the run and be able to control the quarterback, which depending on which quarterback it is, you got some really good athletes back there.

**Q. Sedrick called Zion one of the best leaders on this defense. Can you speak about what you've seen out of him this off-season in a leadership role?**

KIRBY SMART: Consistency. I mean, Zion is a guy that's been kind of a product of our environment, culture I might say. He's seen leaders before him. He certainly had a long way to go when he got here. He never shied away from work. He's been very consistent in his work. He's worked really hard to earn the opportunity he's gotten.

He would be the first to tell you there are things he can do better. He's not the guy that we played with last year, but he's a great leader. He makes up for what he may or may not have in complete talent with effort, toughness, all the things we think are quality leadership things, and he continues to do that.

**Q. How important is it for you guys to have success with your tight ends in this game, especially given the talent that Oregon has in the inside linebacker room?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know the relative question to the -- what does the tight end success have to do with their inside linebackers?

**Q. The matchup there between the two. How important is it to your tight ends?**

KIRBY SMART: Again, I don't know how much they'll be matched up on those guys. Those guys are inside and the tight ends are outside, so I don't usually look at it as a matchup between tight ends and inside backers.

It could be a matchup where when one is blocking one of them, one might be covering them, but might be a DB too. Are they going to play nickel, play regular? Those are all questions that will be answered the day of the game.

They have a tremendously talented inside linebacker room. Both two kids we recruited here and tried to get here, and

we had some pretty good inside linebackers when they decided to come. We felt strongly enough they were good enough to come here and play, so they're talented.

Our tight ends are really good football players. They are conscientious. They work hard. We need them to be successful regardless of who we play because they're good players, and good players got to play well.

I think it would be misleading to think there is like this kind of matchup where it's this guy against this guy. I don't foresee that.

**Q. Can you give us an update on the offensive guard? You said Tate Ratledge is back. Can you let us know where that stands, and have you picked your starting five on the offense for punt?**

KIRBY SMART: No. I don't think we'll know until this week gets up. You're coming off a day where he didn't do anything and they practiced Friday and Saturday with all of them sharing time with the ones. That's not going to change all year. I know that's all you want to know is who is going to start, but there is a group of guys there between Devin, Jared, Tate, and Truss that all roll through there. Micah gets reps, Dylan gets reps, and Warren Ericson is repped some at guard.

So it's not a matter of, okay, it's going to be these two guys. It's going to be the guys that play and practice the best, and right now we haven't made the decision of who's going to take the first snap so that everybody can talk about who took the first snap.

We are going to look and say, who is playing the best in the game and gives us the best opportunity.

**Q. I've got a nonstarter question I guess. Captains, how do you guys decide the captains? I know you had 18 different game captains; I think only four of them are back. And as far as the leadership council, has that been a consistent in terms of the process or have you done anything different in those two areas?**

KIRBY SMART: No. We pick game captains by week, and it usually has to do with who we think can affect the team or who maybe that week has to have the best leadership role.

Played South Carolina and Channing Tindall was the captain because he's from South Carolina and it would mean more to him being from that state.

There is no rhyme or reason. It usually has something to do with who do the coaching staff, strength staff, player

development staff think will impact that game the most.

But everybody is a leader every game. You got a right to say whatever you feel like saying.

It usually comes from -- for the first game -- off-season workouts and camp. Who had the camp and who was the guy that everybody could count on to be there on that day that's hundred degrees and you're practicing for the 15th time.

So we don't base it on a whole lot early. We base it on the fact that you're a good leader, and everybody has an opportunity to lead.

I don't remember the second part of the question.

**Q. Leadership council.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, leadership council really was -- we've done it every year we've been here. We didn't do it since the Cincinnati game. It's been more of -- our sessions have been the emphasis on spending time with each other and kind of all sharing in that responsibility and not making it like it's an isolated group.

I still rely on leaders to make some decisions. We have guys we kind of consider that, but it's not a designated leadership council.

**Q. You said before you like playing in this game, the Chick-fil-A kickoff game. Talk about why that is. Do you have an opportunity with the craziness going on in college football reconfiguration to visit whether you want to get Oregon on a future schedule and go out to Autzen Stadium?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I love playing in this game because No. 1, it's in Atlanta, and No.2 I like playing in it because they do an tremendous job. It's an unbelievable venue. Your hope is you're back in the stadium and you've got a chance to play in it once already when it comes to the SEC Championship game.

So that has a lot to do with it. Just in general, I think playing a big time opponent opening, whether that's home and home, neutral sites, I just think it fires up your fan base, it fires up your off-season workouts, and some people do it the second game of the year.

To me it's a great opportunity to go out and schedule opponents that get your fan base and your team excited to play. When we scheduled this one a while back we knew the kind of team Oregon was going to have, and we expect to have that same kind of team, so it makes for a great

matchup.

**Q. Couple more special teams questions. As far as consistency you're seeing at kicker right now, what have you seen there? And also Andrew Paul's injury, does that give you pause to use Kenny as much as a kickoff returner?**

KIRBY SMART: Not really. We have kind of had our kickoff return guys lined up all along, so hasn't included Kenny because Kenny was one of the primary backs, where last year he was sharing that load.

He's still a kickoff return weapon and a guy we can use when we need to. But the kicking has been -- Pod has a great job. Pod has been very consistent in terms of he comes to work every day, he has a routine he believes in. He and Zirk are battling for the kickoff spot. He's probably be the field goal guy barring anything happening between now and then.

Very pleased with Pod's focus and consistency. Really all the specialists. They have a unique group and kind of work on a different schedule than us, and I'm very pleased with where they are.

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