

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Yeah, looking forward to getting another home game. Our second time to play at home against a really quality opponent in Kent State.

You know, we did some offseason study on these guys. And they've got a really unique offense. And, actually, a really unique defense as well. They do a tremendous job.

Sean Lewis has done a great job with these guys in terms of coaching them up and getting these guys to play hard.

They've played a really tough schedule in the teams they've played. And looking forward to an opportunity to play these guys.

Q. Hey, Coach, going back to Kent State. In 1988 when you played against them, what do you remember about that game? Because I think you had a two-point conversion when you tossed it to Marcus Stroud. Can you talk about that play when you played them back then?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I didn't even realize we played them when I was here. I do remember that game. I think I dropped a snap. So it's probably a good idea that I got to throw it to a guy that was 6'7 and 320 pounds. And he was hard to miss, if that was in fact the game it happened on. But don't remember much about that game then. It was a long time ago.

Q. Yeah, Kirby, you mentioned a little bit about perimeter blocking the other day is a key to a lot of the plays Brock on the perimeter. How much was a focus for the tight ends and the receivers perimeter blocking and how much does that make your offense going a little bit on the outside?

KIRBY SMART: It's always been a focus. It's not like this year it's new. It's been a big focus for us. We try to start practice that way every day with some form of fit-up drill, some form of contact drill for skilled players in terms of ball protection.

So it's part of our DNA. It's important that you're selfless and willing to block. And it's not him, it's what football is now. You know, football has evolved to where there's two or three and sometimes four things that are given to a quarterback on a play. And two of those four usually involve the perimeter with perimeter blocking.

So if you don't do it well, you have no chance. And if you do do it well, then you have a chance to get some easier yards.

Q. Yeah, hey, Kirby, just wanted to ask you about Oscar Delp. He catches his first touchdown catch. How big was that for him getting him involved in the offense and up to speed going forward now?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think it's a good confidence boost. But he's done well in our offense the entire camp. He practiced well, had a good spring. He's competing out there. He's learning how to be a complete tight end, both in-line blocker, outside blocker, how to adjust to things when things don't happen the way you quite expect them to.

There's just a certain number of reps and things you have to go through in order to improve. You just happened to see one play where he got the fruits of his labors. But there's a lot of labors in there that you don't get to see. But he's done a good job in working at it and putting his nose down and grinding to become a better player.

Q. Coach, can you talk about what you've seen from Carson Beck? Obviously, he's been able to get in the games these last three games and his statistics look impeccable.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Carson's done a good job. He's playing with a lot of confidence. He understands our system. He's another year in being in the system. And you remember, there's a point in time where he probably had more reps than Stetson did in terms of volume of work because he took a lot of reps as the two when Stetson took some as the three.

So he's got a lot of work. He's intelligent. He understands



what the defense is doing. He understands his protections. He knows where to go with the ball. He's accurate. So he's done a nice job with the opportunity he's gotten.

Q. Kirby, with Brock Bowers, from your perspective, what does it look like with Todd trying to find creative ways to, you know, get the ball in his hands before we see it on Saturdays? What does that look like during a game week?

KIRBY SMART: Well, it's probably a question better served for -- I assume you're talking about Monken, not Hartley.

Well, I think the entire offensive staff takes on that burden. And, you know, he delegates a lot of presentations just like we do on defense. And each coach has their area of expertise, whether that be third down, red area, goal line, short yardage, perimeter. I mean, there's just a lot of facets that go into it.

And each guy has to come up with a play. And you can imagine each guy in his presentation is trying to get the ball to a playmaker in a few different ways. We've got a few of those guys that you got to get touches to.

But he's certainly one that I think certainly everyone tries to find ways to get creative. And you have to move him around because people know he's going to be a target.

Q. Kirby, you mentioned last week that the game's changed, that quarterbacks aren't just sitting back there for you to take runs at. Expanding on that: Obviously, you'd rather have a sack. But how much have you and you think defenses, in general, kind of changed your approach to put emphasis on pressure, considering how hard it is to sack mobile quarterbacks and guys throwing quick passes?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know that we've put any emphasis on it. I mean, it's the evolution of the game. And every quarterback's different. I mean, there's quarterbacks that scramble to run, quarterbacks that scramble to throw.

What you do behind your pressure is very important. Because there's -- you know, if a quarterback's scrambling to run, you better have somebody behind the pressure that can get him down.

If he's scrambling to pass, you better have more that can cover and hope that he does that, that he tries to throw the ball. I think everyone is different. And in every offensive system we play each week, they take a different approach.

Some are not going to let you hit their quarterback. At the

cost of grounding, at the cost of incompletions, at the cost of the quarterback possibly making a mistake and throwing a pick.

Our job is to be disruptive and pressure the quarterback, affect the quarterback. But that doesn't always equal sack the quarterback, which is, you know, obvious this year, that that's been tough to do.

But I think a lot of people are looking at us defensively the first two games. Especially, they have to look at last year to determine what they're going to do this year. And, you know, looking at that last year, you're saying, I'm not going to get sacked, I'm not going to get hit. And they're trying to protect them by what they do.

Q. Yeah, Kirby, Darris Smith made the trip. It looks like he was working with the safeties and stars in pre-games. What have you seen from him in terms of his skill set and how much have y'all been giving him a look at as stars as a place he can potentially fill in?

KIRBY SMART: Well, he's really a Sam linebacker as an outside linebacker that also plays in space some. In today's day and age, you're seeing every personnel grouping utilized. And we want to have the luxury of having a person with more size, be able to play when people go 12 open and people open up sets.

So it's really more of a development decision for him. It's not a position change. He played Jack in the game. He played outside linebacker in the game. We're developing a guy that has the skill set to run fast, to learn how to play multiple positions. Which is what we told him when we recruited him.

Q. Kirby, I wanted to ask you about Jalen Carter and AD, kind of what their status is going into this week.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Jalen is dealing with a lingering ankle issue. He's, really, had it since the Oregon game. And he's trying to get well. Trying to get him healthy. Hopefully he'll be full go this week. He was close last week, but didn't end up having to play a lot of snaps.

And then AD, we're hopeful to get him back this week. Again, it's one of those deals last week we thought we might get him back. We're hopeful to get him back this week.

Q. Kirby, kind of a unique situation with Kent State. They've already played two top 25 ranked teams. Just in those games, anything in particular that stood out particular what they did on offense?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, they've got a really good football team. They've got a quarterback that I didn't know a lot about who is, No. 1, a tremendous athlete. No. 2, he makes a lot of people miss. He's dynamic with the ball in his hand. He's made some wild throws.

I mean, you're going to hear about this guy. He's had some 60, 70-yard passes that are incredible. They've got some really good wideouts. They're a talented team.

And you go and watch them on defense, they do enough different defensively that it can create issues for you because it's not what you see every day. It's a little more new-aged defense, which people are playing to affect teams that are on the perimeter more, second level, fitters able to disguise a little more.

So I know you guys don't ever listen to anything we say in here, but this is a really good football team and they have played two really good football teams. And you watch the first half of the Oklahoma game, you have no question how good they are.

And they, really, played Washington well outside of a couple of drives. Washington scored on them. But outside of that, they went toe to toe with Washington.

Q. Coach, got to ask about William Poole. I know he didn't travel the other day. Do you have an update on him, whether or not he might not play the rest of the year?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, William Poole is not going to be with us for the remainder of the season. He's dealing with a personal matter and he's going to focus on that and his wealth and well-being. So he will not be with us for the rest of the year, unfortunately.

Q. Kirby, I know it's only three games in, but, obviously, a lot of people have seen the scores you've put up and the numbers you've put up already -- you know, comparisons to last year. After losing so many guys, is it farfetched to say that this team, by the end of the year, could be as good or better than last year's squad?

KIRBY SMART: I don't do comparisons. I've said that repeatedly. You can't compare anybody to last year's. Because last year's team, 15 of them are in the NFL. It's one of those things that this team has a long way to go.

The worst thing that can happen to this team is to start believe what people say about them. And the toughest job we've got this week is trying to explain to everybody that Kent State's a really good football team.

And I know you think I just sit up here and say that, but you turn the tape on, they've got a really, really good football team. And it's not so much about Kent State, it's really about, Does our team want to grow? And this is a week we need to have growth.

We've got to get better in a lot of stops. And you guys don't get to see it from our prospective and the fans don't get to see it in our prospective in terms of what we see on tape and how many mistakes we make, and how many guys we need to get better. And we're certainly going to need them to get better this week.

Q. Kirby, what's the key to maximize when you have a clutch on the players that come in pretty talented in terms of the consensus of them and to get the connection that they talk about that's key for them to kind of, you know, be really good? I mean, from your perspective as a coach, what do you do to maximize that?

KIRBY SMART: To maximize what?

Q. (No microphone.)

KIRBY SMART: Practice really hard. Discipline. Toughness. You know, connection. Composure. I mean, all the things we talk about in this organization, they have to permeate it. Whether we win or lose, we go out there to practice today. We can't treat today any different whether we lost or won the last game.

And that has to come from -- everybody in the organization has to relay that message. And the players are the ones that got to buy into it. And to be honest with you, that's the culture the players created around here.

That, Hey, to be at Georgia, it's tough. To be at Georgia, you got to practice hard. To be at Georgia, you got to earn it. And as long as they believe in doing that, then, you know, we've got enough talent that we're going to have a good opportunity when we go out on the field on Saturday. But they got to believe in that culture.

Q. Continuing with kind of roster update. Is Arik Gilbert going to be good to go this week? And completely different question. But we're going to talk to Ladd later, but what is it that makes him -- it seems like we've asked this a lot. But is there something in particular that makes him as successful as he is, you know, not necessarily having a lot of the other measurables that you'd expect from an SEC skilled player?

KIRBY SMART: I'll start with the Arik question. He's going to be day-to-day throughout the week.

And then Ladd has been an incredible team person. I mean, this guy embodies what you talk about when you talk about team. Because he blocks so hard, he blocks to so physical. He blocks bigger than he actually is.

You watch the tape closely, he goes in and cracks on safeties and hits people and he goes and does what you ask. And then he gets the ball in his hands and he makes people miss.

It's really the same thing he did in high school. It's not any different. If you actually watch the tape, he did that at high school. If you watch his combine workouts where he went and competed against highly rated guys, he did the same thing there.

So it's not a surprise that he's had success because it usually carries over if you're successful and you do things right in high school, and you run fast, you're going to have an opportunity to be successful in college. And that's the one thing I don't think people give Ladd enough credit for, is his toughness and his speed.

Q. Kirby, on the -- with William Poole's absence, how does the secondary, next man up, depth chart thing change? Does anybody get moved up on?

KIRBY SMART: Nope. We've kind of been chugging along. I mean, to be honest, we've Tykee at star and Bullard at star.

The entire fall camp, Poole played some there in the third down situations against Oregon. But he was working more at corner. But we've got the guys we've got, and we got to get the guys we've got better to go where we want to go.

Q. Another update, Kirby, just on Nyland Green?

KIRBY SMART: Got a hamstring and we're hopeful to get him back soon.

Q. Yeah, what have you seen so far out of Amarius Mimms this season, especially with him getting that earlier playing time during the game and what improvements he's been able to make so far?

KIRBY SMART: I think he's got more confidence going into the game in more meaningful moments. You know, he's extremely athletic and talented and we really stressed to him how much he can improve in terms of his run game and his pass game and his knowledge of the game.

And the only way you get better at that point is to go play. And he's gotten to play quite a bit in the last three games. So we want him to continue to do that.

And, really, the conditioning level of these games outside of the heat has allowed us to play three guys and stay fresh at the position.

Q. Julian Humphrey and Daylen Everette are two of the corners that come out when the twos come out for your squad. What have you seen out of them so far and what will it take for them to earn more playing time?

KIRBY SMART: Experience, confidence, executing in big moments. They both have gotten a little bit of playing time but both of them can improve from when they've gone in the game. They've got to do a good job of performing better when they get out there.

Q. Kirby, it looks like College Game Day had some footage of you guys -- not you, but people with the program hooking up an AC system for the locker room in Columbia. Was that beneficial, having the new kickoff? Did you find it to be helpful?

KIRBY SMART: I found it to be cooler. That was -- I mean, we try to send our guys early at halftime because it was cooler in there than it was on the field. So we sent the offense in to cool off a little bit.

Q. Kirby, you've had a few more months to kind of watch how recruiting is playing out with this new NIL situation. What are your current thoughts on recruiting with the new -- I don't want to say limited, but the new landscape, if you would?

KIRBY SMART: Hard to say. We haven't had a really full body of work. I guess you can say you had a full body of work last year, but it's changed so much this class from last class, it's already been different.

You know, I felt like it was, you know, 20/30 percent of the conversation last year and it's certainly higher than that now. But I can't judge it or assess it. Because, you know, until you're through December, you don't know anything. And you'll find out more as it goes along.

Q. Yeah, Kirby, you mentioned Ladd kind of embracing that blocking mindset. Is that hard to instill in a receiver room when everyone's focused on catches and everything? Or is that kind of the deal, coming to Georgia, you got to block hard on the outside?

KIRBY SMART: Blocking's not just for Georgia. Every receiver coach in America will tell you it's pretty important, you know, when you don't have the ball, you have to be willing to block.

I think you hear me talk about it more. But it's not -- every good team, you know, that wants to have explosive teams, it doesn't matter what the play is, somebody has to block somebody. So that happens to include receivers.

There's no great receiving core out there that never blocks, right? So you got to do a good job of that, whether it's a receiver screen, your buddy, your quarterback, it's there. Ladd has no problem embracing that. Ladd's a team player.

I mean, I don't -- we haven't had any receivers here that don't embrace blocking. They like catching the ball, but you got to embrace that if you want to be a good football player. If you want to play in the National Football League, you got to block.

Q. Kirby, what goes into knowing when to pull a starting quarterback in any football game? How do you -- is it a predetermined feel, a gut feel, is it you, is it Monken, the staff?

KIRBY SMART: You got to win the football game. So the No. 1 thing is what do we got to do to win the football thing? The No. 2 thing is what do we got to do to stay healthy, what do we got to do to keep confidence and keep rhythm in our offense?

And there's a lot of things that go into that in terms of experience of the two. So there's no perfect way to answer that question. Because every game is going to be different based on who we play the next week, how did we play that game, where are we, who's playing around them, what other linemen are in? So there's not an exact answer to that question.

Q. Kind of going back along the recruiting questions: Is recruiting a quarterback different than any of the other positions on the field, being that you're pretty much going to play one guy versus defensive linemen, secondary, all those other positions you have rotation, but quarterback there's not as much rotation there? So do you recruit them differently?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know if you recruit them differently. You do the same plan of attack. You probably sell it differently. There's not a lot of quarterbacks out there that don't think they can come in and play.

So you're not selling come here and sit on the bench.

You're selling an opportunity to develop. And I think we have a proven track record Monken has, our offense has of developing quarterbacks of giving guys an opportunity to play in a system that they can watch play on Sundays is pretty important.

You know, there's developmental positions in recruiting. Offensive linemen are probably the least played position as a true freshman, right along with quarterbacks. So a lot of those positions are developmental positions and you have to grow and get better. And I think that's part of recruiting, is telling them the truth when it comes to that.