

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Well, open with a tradition and history of that game is pretty incredible. I think when every when you talk about one of the oldest rivalries in college football, it's always been a game that I know as a player I looked forward to playing in.

It's been some tremendous games between the two teams, and our guys are looking forward to getting to play at home in front of a raucous crowd, great atmosphere. I'm expecting our fans to turn out and give us an electric atmosphere to play in against a good Auburn football team.

**Q. Coach, have you found out anymore about Jalen Carter's knee, and do you expect that play will get reviewed that his knee was injured on by the SEC office considering it looked like a textbook illegal chop block?**

KIRBY SMART: I talked to the official during the play. He felt comfortable about what the play was. We talked about it before the game. They have a lot of backside cuts. Auburn, a lot of teams use the same methods. I'm hopeful that we can keep our players safe, do what is within the limits of the game and the rules, but that's not for me to decide.

Jalen is going to be a week or two. Not sure, it's MCL like expected. We don't know how long it's going to be, but doesn't look good for this week.

**Q. Looking at Auburn, seemed like they were able to generate offense with Robby Ashford, their quarterback, allowing him to be creative when they have been able to make big plays. What stands out to you about Robby and what he's been able to do at quarterback?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, that's a young man we recruited and came over and visited us several times. He is a tremendous athlete. Coach B-Mac had him at Oregon when he was there and talked about how phenomenal an athlete he is. He worked out with the receivers and athletes. Didn't even work out with the quarterbacks during

a lot of their conditioning program.

You see it on tape. He is really special in terms of twitch, being elusive. His best plays sometimes are plays that end up being broken plays. The guy can take off and really hurt you, beat with you his arm, especially on scrambles. They had a huge play last week off a scramble play.

So being disciplined in your rush lanes, being disciplined in your coverage responsibilities when a quarterback scrambles will probably happen more often this week than most weeks because of the athlete he is.

**Q. Coach, being five games in and got some guys banged up, how do you go about helping guys get their legs back under them, but at the same time, keep your practice intensity and tempo up like you want it to be?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, that's the off-season. We lift, run, work out, we train all summer for this stretch run. I thought our guys were in really good shape in the fourth quarter.

The conditioning is different than the physicality, right? There is bumps and bruises from contact and then there is conditioning. You certainly hope your team has the right conditioning level because you don't fix that in-season.

You got to have a good conditioning level to play in the fourth quarter, which I think we have. The physicality part you can tone down how much you hit, but you do that at the cost of not being as physical as you want to be.

**Q. On the physicality front, after watching the tape, what do you think about how the run game did on Saturday? And you mentioned after the game you went to some gap plays in the second half. Is that something you think you discovered something? Is that something you could go to more going forward and have success in the run game?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, we run gap plays in every game. If you look at the game you see that we have -- I mean, every team does. Nobody plays football anymore with just one run. There is a lot of multiple runs in there. You can



have so many runs that you can't run them all, right?

The idea is to have the right ones and execute them well. The tape showed when what we talked about the other tied. We didn't play really well up front. They had a lot of momentum.

We got to do a better job preparing our guys, but we also got to do a better job in-game of making good decisions and putting ourselves in a situation to be successful or more successful at least.

**Q. Following up on the Jalen play and then a different topic, do you think it was a chop block on that play? And then want to ask about Robert Beal; came on last season with a lot of sacks at the end. I don't think he has any this year. What are you seeing in terms of his ability to get to the quarterback?**

KIRBY SMART: Robert has done a great job. He has one of the best plays in a game the other night on a goal line play where they almost scored. We ended holding them to a field goal. He is playing really physical, playing more snaps.

He had more opportunities last year. Again, sacks are a number that statistics look at, but we don't sit there and say -- you don't get a lot of opportunities. We haven't had a lot of third down and longs. Had more last week than in the past maybe where you get an opportunity to do that.

That's just the way it's gone this year. Very pleased with how Robert is playing, how he is practicing. He is playing more snaps now than he did last year in terms of at this time, because his opportunities came much later.

Doesn't really matter what I think about the block. What does it really matter? Matters what the official and the review thinks.

**Q. You noticed he did not dress, but Eric traveled to Missouri with you guys. What was the thinking behind that and how is he doing?**

KIRBY SMART: The thinking is to keep him with us. We are trying to develop him and bring him along. It's important he's with us in meetings, walk-throughs, being there with the team, being part of the success. He's got a great rapport with the players. That's why he was there.

**Q. We talked after the game Saturday just about the second half and the way you guys finished. Just generally when it comes to SEC football, what does it take for a team consistently week after week to be able to finish a second half strong?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, takes number one being in shape, physically in shape, mentally strong. Takes consistency and performance. You have to perform under great pressure repeatedly. It's really more about playing on the road and having a demeanor about you that you understand regardless of where you're playing in our league. The road games are really hard.

I don't think that's ever going to change. You got to be prepared for that. Momentum is a very powerful thing. We didn't have that for a long time in that game.

**Q. The way the last couple weeks have gone, how do you balance maybe we're going to ramp this up and shake out of this if you've been in a funk, or just tell the guys, hey, calm down, we are very good, we're doing the right things and things are coming along? How do you balance those two things?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't look at it that way at all. I look at from day to day. I worry about what we're doing today. Just like I'm going to worry about what we do tomorrow, tomorrow.

I don't look at it as a hitting slump or some kind of funk or anything like that. A lot of that is predicated off what the other team does and what we do. Very different teams we faced between Kent State in three down, Missouri and the way they played us. Just different things.

So I just don't really look at it that way.

**Q. What did you make the Dominick Blaylock's performance Saturday, and getting make integrated in the offense with Arian Smith and AD Mitchell. What can that do for this passing offense having those three guys back out there?**

KIRBY SMART: They're all different. Dom has been there the whole season. I don't think it's an integration factor. He's been really clutch, and what he does he does really well. There are package plays for Dom and he does a nice job. His plays he made the other night were really clutch.

A lot of the receivers made some. Marcus Rosemy had some clutch plays and Arian had the one catch. Getting him back and getting him some confidence is great, but we have to have some depth at that position and some guys make some plays at those positions.

**Q. AD specifically on his availability this week. Obviously took him, but I don't think he played. Overall the wide receivers and Stetson, the passing game seemed a little bit off and then you go back and**

**look and there was a lot of pressure in that game. I guess things weren't getting delivered on time and maybe a little bit bigger hurry than usual. Can you assess the pass game coming out that?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think it was a different kind of game. There was a lot of opportunities for one or ones, and you got to win some of those opportunities. I think if you're in third and long all game you're not running the ball, you're not managing the sticks real well, it puts you behind it.

AD is hopeful again. He was close to being able to go we thought last week. We took him with the intention of seeing if he could go. Pre-game thought he looked pretty good, but didn't feel comfortable putting him out there. We are hopeful he's able to this week, and we don't know until we get out there and get closer to the game.

He is much closer this week than he was last week. Getting Arian back helped with that. All the reps the freshman got helped. Got to continue to get those guys better.

**Q. You faced Tank Bigsby a couple times; you recruited him. What sort of problems does he present in the run game for Auburn?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, run game and pass game. He's explosive. He is a great guy out of the backfield to catch the ball. He catches screens well. He is vertical on his run game. He is tough. Yards after contact. He's one of those backs, that like the good ones, they get better with their carries.

He's extremely physical and runs with a low pad level, and is one of these particular SEC backs that you better bring your lunch pail when you come to tackle them.

**Q. Curious how you'd gauge the maturity of the team. I guess the way the team started it kind of quieted a lot of the talk about it being young, particularly on defense. Are we maybe seeing some of that youth still present?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think anxiety would be one of the things that you worry about with a young team in really the first real road environment, because the South Carolina game played out so different. We started really fast. I guess we were up 14-nothing, 21-nothing pretty quick. The crowd really never got into the game. Took them out of the game. We didn't do that the other night.

So some of those youthful anxiety guys playing in that kind of atmosphere for the first time, we're a team -- last year's

team, they would've played in that a bunch of times. There is a lot of youth there, but to be honest with you, it was a great opportunity to see what we're about.

I don't know if you could find any greater adversity than be down ten points to in the fourth quarter. Resiliency all those things, but we got to make sure we do a good job building on that and start faster and better.

**Q. At almost the halfway point of the year, as far as the offensive line goes, do you feel like you're trying to approach a point where you want to trim up the offensive line and get five best guys? What have you seen from that unit as a whole?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't look at it as a trim up. Why would you trip up your offensive line? If you have guys that play quality football and go against good players every day in practice, I think they earned the right to get an opportunity, right? Who plays at receiver? Do we play three guys? Not last time I checked. Tight end, Brock and Darnell rolled in with 11 personnel.

You earn the right by how you play. If those guys continue to earn the right and play well, they'll probably play. It has a lot to do with conditioning and stamina. You got guys coming off injuries out there, guys that hadn't played a lot of football, and some guys have.

We want to play the best five, but if that's not clear, we feel guys that can play winning football should play. I'm very pleased with that part of it. Can we do some better things in the run game to help them? Absolutely. Can they do a better job in the run game? Absolutely. But it's not totally on the offensive line. It never is. It's a team sport. Everybody wants to point the finger at them. They're not to blame for anything. We all got to improve.

**Q. Now that you've had a chance to review the Missouri tape, there were some struggles with the offensive line, or maybe not depending on how you looked at it. Was it more of a scheme or execution issue? Second question, can you tell us about your inside linebackers, Dumas-Johnson and Smael Mondon, their health and availability?**

KIRBY SMART: First one, Smael got an ankle sprain, but we think he'll be fine. He came back in and finished out the game.

Pop seems good. Seems fine. I don't think there is anything there. I'll find out today, but nothing that I'm aware of.

On the offensive line, it's not a lack of execution or

scheme. They didn't play anything different. It's physicality, winning up front, and more than that, giving them an opportunity to be successful. Sometimes that falls on me as a coach, on us as coaches, not just them.

So it's not a lack of execution. Sometimes you get whipped. Sometimes we got whipped and sometimes we didn't. And when you didn't, you got to capitalize. There is still some big runs in there and then we fumbled the ball on a big run. We had big runs in the fourth quarter. The offensive line you could say didn't allow them to get the ball back.

So that was a very big positive, when they had every guy on their team in the box and we blocked them and got first downs. So there is a lot of the positives, and we'll draw on the ability to come back from that.

**Q. It looked like Tykee got a lot of those reps at the start. I don't know who else might have got in the game, but how do you think your star position performed in this last game? And Javon Bullard, what is his status?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, expecting to get Javon back this week. Tykee did a good job and he will continue to play star like he has in the previous games. Did a nice job practicing last week. Got a lot of confidence in Tykee. Gives us some depth at that position. They complement each other really well, and hope that both of them can help us.

**Q. Wisconsin and Colorado fired their coaches yesterday, October 2nd. As one of the more prominent coaches in the game, what do you make of the trend of programs or schools pulling the plug so early in the season on coaches?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's unfortunate. It's become much more the nature of the beast for our profession with the salaries and television contracts and the amount of money people make. The expectations go up and administration makes decisions much quicker, and that's their right to do it.

It's not necessarily the best thing for our profession, but it comes with the territory. I don't think any of those coaches would tell you that they that they didn't understand that getting into it, but they would also tell you they didn't get into it for the amount of money they make either.

For a lot of us it's not about the money. It's about the opportunity to be around young people, coach them, pull them in the right direction. We all know what's at stake with these administrations and with the nature of beast in

college football right now.

**Q. I don't know how big a deal it was, but Jalen and some guys jawing with some Missouri guys before the game and there was some stuff after the game, is there anything to those things?**

KIRBY SMART: All I worry about is our guy's behavior, and we don't want to represent that at all. I think we have done a really good job here at Georgia of representing our university the right way. We play with our helmets and we don't talk to the other team.

Disappointed in any player that would talk to somebody on the other team, and we don't condone it. It's something we need to get fixed. Some teams you play do that more than others, and some teams are from the same line of thinking as yourself in terms of not talking after plays and not talking before games.

I'm not saying that Missouri is. I am saying I'm worried about how our guys behave, and that's not what we want.

**Q. Obviously his athletic ability plays into this, but with Malaki Starks and the plays he has been able to make so far in his career, what about his mental, in-between-the-ears ability has allowed him to do that for this team?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, his mental in between his ears gets him lined up, makes the checks, and helps him make decisions. I think his athleticism gives him confidence to be able to make plays.

I don't know exactly what you're asking there. His mental intuition is what gets him on the field. His athleticism is what separates him from maybe the other players.

**Q. Auburn's defense is coming off a really strong game statistically. What stands out about their defense as a whole?**

KIRBY SMART: They're fast, physical, playing really hard. Two elite edge guys. Some athletic linebackers. They played really, really hard. I mean, just call it what it is. They scratch off and play with confidence. They're flying around.

I mean, I know almost every single player on that defense and they're good football players.

**Q. We saw a lot more -- maybe not more -- but saw Darnell Washington with the ball a lot in his hands. Can you talk about his development since maybe the first game?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, since he got here he's matured so much. He's taken ownership in his role on the team. He's a great ball-in-the-air guy. He is exceptional blocker. He has taken on his role in terms of displacement and movement on the perimeter, run game blocking, play-action, vertical passing.

He's really just a better football player because he's bought into being in shape, bought into playing with toughness, he has bought into the team, and he has helped himself tremendously in terms of our team, helping us being a guy that can go get balls. Especially if you're struggling outside, this guy can go make plays on the ball in the air.

I thought he showed that and probably had his best game of his career on Saturday night when we needed him most.

**Q. Lewis Cine suffered a season-ending injury yesterday in London. Have you got to reach out to any of his friends or family or him and see how he's doing?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I reached out to him yesterday. I did not hear back. I think he was going to go into surgery and was staying back behind the team.

Sickening to see, and a guy that I felt like I was so close to, certainly hurt me to see that. You don't wish that upon anybody. Some of those injuries are part of the game, but just so sad. Such a great kid. He'll bounce back from it.

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