

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: As we get moving forward for Georgia/Florida, our guys took Friday, Saturday, Sunday off and getting ready to go back to work today. Got another exciting matchup with these guys in Jacksonville.

Got a lot of respect for Billy. I've known him for a long time. One of the most intelligent coaches I've been around in terms of preparation and understanding what it takes to run a program, an organization. I think he does a fabulous job.

I know a lot of guys on his staff. Got a lot of respect for him. And being a high school coach's son in this state, we grew up very similar.

So it's on to the Gators and we kind of started on them last week at the end of the week. And looking forward to a good week of practice.

Q. Kirby, just talking about Billy, the time you guys spent together on the staff at Alabama, just what did he bring to that staff and what has stood out to him as his head coaching career even going back to when he was at U of Lafayette?

KIRBY SMART: Like I said, he's very thorough. He's an extremely hard worker. Great husband and father. But he's a good leader of men. And I knew from the first time he got to Alabama, I don't know what year it was, but whatever year he got there, he was going to be really good because he paid attention to detail. He took a lot of notes. He was just really smart. You knew he was there to learn.

And I think he capitalized on his time he spent there to look at football from a different perspective maybe from what he looked at previously. And he was really successful at ULL. Which is a great school, great location, a lot of good football players. But they won a lot of football games with him there.

Q. Kirby, you told us last week Smael was able to get back to practice a little bit. I wanted to see what his status was. And then what were -- you know, what

were you guys able to do with AD and Jalen and Kendall as that week went on?

KIRBY SMART: Smael was able to practice towards the end of the week. Did a good job. Didn't see him, really, yesterday in terms of doing anything. So Smael looked good towards the end of last week.

Jalen and AD, like I said last week, weren't really practicing with us. Trying to get back. We're hopeful to get those guys back. But still don't know. And Kendall was able to practice noncontact on -- I guess it was Thursday, the last practice we had. So we're expecting him to be able to go today.

Q. Kirby, from an offensive standpoint, specifically last week, what were some of the things y'all really looked at and honed in on as far as maybe getting back to the form that y'all showed earlier in the year?

KIRBY SMART: Just situational football. I mean, the things you work on the off-week are, No. 1, opponents. No. 2, a lot of work. Probably 90 percent of our work was good on good against each other; situational football, third down, two minute, red area, second and ten, third down, team run. I mean, there's no area in three practices that we didn't work on.

Q. A little bit more on the injuries. Just the effect of Jalen not being out there. Obviously, we know he's an exceptional player. And his injury, obviously, he had the knee right after he had the ankle. Is the knee the issue 100 percent at this point? And kind of on that note as well, AD, I never really saw what happened to him in that game. But it didn't seem like it was so bad but obviously it's lingered.

KIRBY SMART: AD is a high ankle sprain. And high ankle sprains when you talk to everybody across the NFL and across college football, it's hard to pinpoint a measurement. The first thing you look for is do they need to do the repair? They do the tightrope and things like Arian did. His was not that kind of injury. But it is lingering. It's a pain in the butt. So he's battling to come back and doing everything we ask.

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In terms of Jalen, it's the knee right now. It's the MCL. But the degree of that, severity of that just depends on conditioning level, how fast he can get back. He's working to get back and we're hopeful to get both of them back.

Q. Yeah, I was going to ask about Jalen, as well, in terms of what aspect of his game is most missing from the defense when you don't have a guy like him out there to be a difference maker. Where do you see that when you watch film and watch your defense perform?

KIRBY SMART: I don't understand what you're asking. What do we miss about him?

Q. Yeah.

KIRBY SMART: He's a really good football player. I mean, he's -- y'all have seen the plays he's made over his time here. He has not been healthy since the very first play of the season. The very first play of the season against Oregon is when the ankle injury occurred.

Now, he continued to play through that ankle injury. Some of that I think was on adrenaline. But I think the ankle bothered him from that point forward and then, you know, he injured the knee. And the knee's kind of bothered him since then.

It's not a combination of. Because he feels really good about his ankle right now. It's more so to do with his knee. It just so happened that right when he got back from ankle, he got the knee.

And, you know, he's a phenomenal player. I think you can look at the history there and see. And how does it affect you? You know, it affects your depth more than anything.

But it's not like he's a one trick pony. I mean, he's like a -- he can really pass rush good, he can play the run, he's disruptive. So he's not a -- you know, just affects just our pass rusher. No, it affects everything because he's a really phenomenal player and you'd like to have him out there.

Q. I think Chris made his starting debut against Florida a couple years ago after Richie's accident. And just seeing him up here talking today, I think he was the only Georgia guy that made a couple of these mid-season All-American teams. Can you put in perspective what kind of program guy Chris Smith's become, you know, since that opportunity came up for him a couple years ago and how he's grown?

KIRBY SMART: Well, first off, he was a really good prospect in high school. He played corner, he played

safety. He could do it all. He came here. We flirted with him at corner and safety. He kind of played wherever we needed him to play. And he's done that ever since coming here.

He's taken reps for two to three years at corner, he's taken the safety, he's played nickel star. I mean, he's one of these versatile DBs that can kind of do it all because he understands leverages. He knows where his help is.

He's an instinctive football player. And we're lucky to have him and really proud of the way he's -- you know, he didn't have success right away. He's one of the guys that truly became a better football player through development, practice habits, learning the system.

And he had some good players in front of him when he first got here. And he's been able to work his way into a good football player.

Q. Kirby, there's analytics, I won't bore you with it, say that basically this offense has been better with AD on the field than not. Have y'all found that and what makes him the difference maker, even if he isn't the one being targeted?

KIRBY SMART: Well, AD is a really good wideout. He has twitch. He has explosive quickness. When you watch just across the country and you watch all these teams plays, there's -- you know, there's dynamic receivers.

I think AD is a dynamic receiver. He's hard to cover one-on-one. I mean, I get to see him, you know, every day at practice when he's been healthy. And you know when you got a guy that can -- that can go compete, do some things. He's got toughness, he's got quicks.

But to say it's been substantially different with him in or out, I don't know what the analytics say. And, you know, it's hard to figure that. Because so much of that is based on what personnel grouping we're in, how the defense is playing us. You know, are they off, are they soft, are they cover two, are they split safety, are they middle field closed.

There's a lot of thinking that go into that. So I know that we're a better football team with AD healthy, 100 percent. But we're trying to get him back as fast as we can.

Q. Kirby, getting ready to face Anthony Richardson, just how much development have you seen from him getting ready for this game, particularly compared to last year when he was thrown in the mix?

KIRBY SMART: No, he's grown a lot. And he's gotten

considerably better to me during this season. Like, from the start of the season, game one, you watch every game in sequence and you say, Man, this guy is growing and getting better.

And they don't just limit things for him. Like, they put a lot of shift motion, they put a lot of things on top of him to handle and he manages those well.

The toughest thing dealing with Anthony Richardson is how you affect him. Because you got to be careful. Some of the runs he's had have been better than backs have across the country. And he's had 60 and 70-yard runs.

And he can take off at any point in time and you don't know who's going to have him or who can get him down. He's got elite arm talent in terms of strength. They clean things up for him on a lot of reads. And he does a really nice job.

So I give them a lot of credit -- Billy a lot of credit for the development, what he's done from the start of the season to now in being successful both with his legs and his arm.

Q. Coach, you're obviously very familiar with Brenton Cox and they've got some big guys on the interior, as well. What's your initial thoughts on the Florida defensive front?

KIRBY SMART: Extremely disruptive. You know, the size and girth in the middle is what you want in the SEC, to control run games and control the A and B gaps. And then they still got the edge guys with Brenton, being probably the most disruptive guy that we've played in terms of just violence, striking, knock-back, setting edges, affecting the quarterback. He's a game-breaker at that.

Q. Coach, I think I have some idea of what you think or care about rankings. But, you know, they obviously don't matter until next week when the college football rankings come out. But how much have you been able to keep up with, you know, teams in your rearview mirror like Oregon and South Carolina who haven't lost since you played them? Is that at all validating for you guys? Because I'm sure at the time you knew you played well, but you can't be 100 percent sure who's got what until this point. Is there anything validating about what you're seeing from those teams since you got past them?

KIRBY SMART: You answered the question initially. I haven't been paying attention to it. I mean, I really haven't. Our focus has been on the next opponent since Thursday of last week. And not to not answer your question, but I just don't concern myself with it.

Q. Coach, I guess your halftime talk last year, we all got to hear a little bit of it. I guess I'd ask you how you pick and choose. And from being an assistant versus a head coach, because I know you can't do it every game or every practice, but how do you know when and how much of it is, I don't know if "calculated" is the right word, or is it just all gut when you deliver message to your teams?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think it's just how you feel like where your team is. You know, what space they're in in terms of confidence level, focus, attention to detail.

And a lot of times, it comes better when it comes from the players and the leaders within the team. Which the best teams have guys capable of communicating to each other and they listen to each other much more than they listen to me.

So I don't -- you know, I don't calculate it, figure out when I'm going to do. If it's -- if the appropriate time is there and I think we need it, then certainly we do it.

Q. Kirby, you guys put out a video last week of a post-practice treat for your players. I wanted to ask you about why you guys wanted to do that and what you like better, funnel cakes or ice cream?

KIRBY SMART: I had to go speak to the superintendents of Georgia, which they were in town. So I never got to see it. I bolted off right after practice. So I didn't get to partake.

But I was glad the players were able to get a treat, you know, for a off-week. We got some guys that need to gain weight, so I figure that's a good way to do it.

Q. Kirby, do you have any plans to do anything with recruits this coming week? Do you have any -- I mean, I know it's kind of weird that you can host them but not host them. Do you have anything set up for the recruits, maybe, that could be coming to this game? Do you have any tickets set aside for them?

KIRBY SMART: We're allowed to use tickets, but we can't host them. We can't do anything. So I never understood -- I never understand -- what would we do with them? We can't legally see them. We can't talk to them, we can't host them. Visit with them. We can say, There's a ticket at the gate. Enjoy the game. So that's, really, all we can do. We'll do that. We'll have some kids go to the game.