

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Excited for this group we've got coming in today. Really good group of signing class. I mean, I'm thrilled every year we get a new signing class, but this group has been special.

Every time we have a visit or we have them come see us and they meet with academics and they meet with player development and they meet with strength and conditioning and training room, everybody talks about what a great group of kids they are.

They are probably the highest incoming GPA in terms of academic success that we've ever had, which we found here over seven, eight years that that's the number one indicator to success is can they be successful in the classroom? This is as good a group as we've had.

It's across the country a really good group. We think we addressed a lot of needs at defensive back and receiver. Still have some guys left out there. We're having to do this early because of the stuff going on with our players here.

So I'm really fired up about this group. They are high character. The one thing in the coaching business you better value now more than ever is high character, tough, hard-nosed football players that are coming here with an understanding that they're committed to excellence in terms of classroom, competitiveness, toughness, loving football, and these guys understand that.

I mean, I really don't want anybody to be here that doesn't like practicing hard and doesn't like going to school, and those are the two prerequisites for playing at Georgia, and this group has figured that out.

I'm excited about them, and we'll try to talk briefly about the ones that we can and then move on.

Q. I think you can talk about all three inside linebackers that you guys signed: Raylen Wilson, Troy Bowles, C.J. Allen. What are you bringing in that class, and how much do you think the past success with the development of Nakobe, Quay, and Channing

last year sort of helped appeal to those guys?

KIRBY SMART: Well, a really talented group in terms of speed, athleticism. In the day and age that we are in right now where the guys are fast, athletic, have got to play in space, got to be able to strike and play with toughness, but also high character.

Those three guys bonded, got to be good friends, have connected. I think Schumann and the defensive staff have done a tremendous job kind of selling the brand, but these three guys all came out and did. Look what these two guys are currently doing. Look what the guys we've signed last year that are here and playing roles on special teams.

You'll develop here. You'll become better, and you'll have fun doing it. That group is tight. I think it kind of recruits itself when you talk about Nakobe, Quay, and Channing, what they've done. These guys, they want to emulate guys like that. They're really high-character kids. Really impressed with everything about those three guys.

Q. Kirby, I understand that you've got a look at several of these guys kind of already. They've already been able to join you for practice. What have you seen from those guys, and what's kind of the attitude been like? Has it been any timidity there, or has it just basically been these guys jump in and get going?

KIRBY SMART: They jump in and get them going. They certainly help us in terms of at this time of year you have injuries, you have guys out. We've had multiple guys that have been in and out of practice. It gives you depth.

It gives you the ability to go two-spot. It gives you the ability to get a better look. Let's be honest, some of these guys are really high athletes that are fast, that have twitch. They jump in.

There's parts they can't do, and there's parts they're learning on, but they will be so much further and better when the spring comes because of getting comfortable at practice, going out there and knowing where I go to after flex, what do I do next? I've been really excited for those guys that have practiced with us.



Q. With the tight ends, being able to bring in guys like Pearce and Lawson, what do they bring to what we've seen is already a talented group at tight end?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I don't know. I think we'll see that. We know what the experts say and what the stars say, but I don't think you really know what you have technically other than what they've done in camp.

Both those guys have been competitive. They've gone out and competed every chance they've had. Pearce was able to come back towards the end of the year and play some coming off of shoulder surgery. And then Lawson had a good year playing in a really tough division in Georgia High School football.

I'm excited about both of those guys. They're coming into a room that is extremely competitive, but they both fit that criteria themselves. So I'm excited to see what they can do for us.

Q. At cornerback three guys this class, strong at the top, and cornerback last year. You have second year guys starting. Is that just a case of get as many at that position and kind of figure it out when they get on campus?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I don't know. It depends how you define those guys. There is no such thing as a cornerback anymore in my mind. There is defensive backs that play everywhere.

Football is a matchup game. There's more empty than we've ever seen before. More spread than we've ever seen before. You've got to have slot corners. You've got to have outside corners. You have to have guys that can go inside and play. You have to have guys that can be gunners, guys that can tackle.

Just so many roles of a defensive back that it's not three corners. It's what can this guy play early? How can he help us? And you can't have enough.

I mean, very rarely do they come in and just jump right in and play as freshmen. They play. They just may not play the starting role. So it's a position that has to develop, has to grow. It's one that we have been short in that room. I mean, probably the last five years, four years we've been really short in our defensive back rooms. We're trying to manage those numbers. There and receiver are probably the two hardest spots to be at your quota on your 85.

It's a position that turns over a lot. It's a position that comes out early a lot. It's a position that goes in the portal

a lot. We're hoping to gain depth there.

Q. Coach, the speed you guys appeared that you were able to add at wide receiver, the three young men that you signed today, just what they're going to kind of bring to the program?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, excited about those guys. Speed, athleticism. Been here practicing with us. Each one is different. They all probably need -- they're going to have to hit the weight room and get stronger to be able to really do the things we want them to do, but you want to take a guy that has natural speed, the pass-catching ability, make you miss ability, run after the catch, vertical threats. We think we get that in those three guys.

Q. Given Nolan Smith and Robert Beal are both off to the NFL after this year, how do you feel outside linebacker's coach Chidera Uzo-Diribe went about recruiting and identifying guys that can come in and potentially help you? Obviously not just next year, but in the future beyond that at that outside linebacker position.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, excited about the group we've got there. I think we've got good depth. We're trying to get that room back to where it's been in the past.

You know, there was a time when there were three or four really high draft picks in that room. That's what you want in that skill set. That helps you on third down. Those body types help you on special teams.

The 6'2"-plus, the 240-plus is a position that can cover kicks, can cover return punts in terms of holding people up. So much value in that room, packages you can do on defense.

So when we've been at our best, we've had a lot of speed and athleticism in that room, and we're trying to get back to it. We hope these guys can do that and provide some defensive end help as well when it comes to playing 4-3 and having two guys out there.

Q. Kirby, Roderick Robinson was announced a few minutes ago. What struck you guys about his running ability and what he can bring to the table when he gets here?

KIRBY SMART: Size, speed, toughness. Really soft hands. He is your SEC-type back that can get hard yards, but is athletic enough to do some things in space.

Really, to be honest, I like the guy's character. I like the background he has. He has family from South Carolina.

He has family from Georgia. He has family from Birmingham. He is attached to the state. He has really good quality toughness. He is hard to tackle.

You know, football is still a game where you have to get people on the ground, and he is hard to get on the ground. He loves the game. He is very intelligent. So he excited us on tape, but even won us over more in person.

Q. Kirby, we saw reports, we saw Coach Narduzzi, Mack Brown talking about \$5 million offers for quarterbacks at North Carolina, and we're reading emoji attacks from Matt Rhule on Lanning. How crazy is it out there, and how much of an advantage do you have with the stability you have in your program? What could you tell us about the landscape right now?

KIRBY SMART: No clue, man. I'm working on Ohio State 24/7.

Q. On the Ohio State front, how are your preparations going at this point? It seems like almost every year in this little gap that there's a guy who hasn't played that much to this point that asserts himself during these practices. Have you had any development like that?

KIRBY SMART: Can't pinpoint anybody in particular. Our guys have worked really hard and had some good physical practices. Really want to keep it about these signees today, but that's why we're here to kind of honor them and celebrate them because we don't get a chance to do that in February, but we have a lot of work to do on Ohio State.

Q. You guys didn't sign a quarterback in this class. Did that make recruiting guys any different or harder because there wasn't sort of this quarterback leader figure in there? What kind of challenges going forward does not having a quarterback signee in this class possibly present to you guys?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's irrelevant in today's day and age. The portal is full of them. There's going to be multiple guys in every year. You want to do the best job you can to get the best quarterback you can.

When you have three quarterbacks, sometimes you don't have any. And when you have one quarterback, that's when you have a quarterback. We're very pleased with what we have in our quarterback room. We think we've got three quarterbacks that are going to be really good, so the concern wasn't about a quarterback.

And none of the skill players made it about that because they know what we've signed the last really three or four years. They know what we have the potential to sign in

'24.

So it's one of those deals that the quarterback position kind of sells it based on who your offensive coordinator is and how your offense does, and we've excelled in that.

Q. Curious what you think of the O-line room and future going forward. Obviously, this was Stacy's first cycle. You have had three different offensive line coaches the last four years. Does that have any affect in recruiting?

KIRBY SMART: I don't think so. I think when you look at us the past three or four years, I think we've had the second or third most O-linemen drafted, especially top round picks like we've been able to have with tackles going early and, you know, Ben Cleveland and a lot of the guys.

So the program sells itself in terms of development. You get to go against some of the best defensive linemen, three first round defensive linemen. You get to go against those guys.

We recruit as a staff, not as a position. I think Stacy has done a tremendous job this year. I think we've got some really talented, flexible guys that can go inside and out. That's always what you are looking for is to get length at tackle, but guys that can go in and play guard, and I think we were able to did that in this class, and really excited about the O-line class we have coming in.

Q. Kind of banking off that, what's so special about Monroe and Bo coming in?

KIRBY SMART: Length. They both have top ten wing spans of kids we've recruited here, and we've got some pretty long guys that have played here in the last seven, eight years.

Both those guys would be near top ten in terms of keeping people's hands off of them. Both of them, really good basketball players. Got great feet, athleticism.

You know, it's one of the hardest positions to play right away, so it's not like they're going to walk in here and just take over, but they've got kind of the mold you want in terms of length and athleticism and some guys that can go play with them.

Q. How would you define a successful signing day, and what position are you still hoping maybe to add to in February?

KIRBY SMART: A successful signing day is defined four years from now. I look backwards on that. I leave it to you

guys to rate them because I can't compare somebody else's to ours because I don't really look at somebody else's.

I only compare ours to what they do when they leave, not what they do when they arrive. How many of them graduate, how many wins they have, what kind of people they become. How they integrate into our culture is probably the best defining success quality. Hopefully they'll do that well.

We'll onboard them well. And I hate to say it, but there's probably not a lot of difference in all these kids being signed. The difference is what you do with them. People make it about who you sign, not what they become, and I'm a lot more interested in what they become.

Q. The nine guys that have come in and started practicing, I think it will be close to 14 early enrollees. When you are evaluating prospects, how important is getting them on campus early now? Is it something you guys really factor into what you are looking for?

KIRBY SMART: No. I mean, we've had really good players come in June, and we've had really good players come midyear. The trend is to come earlier.

I think last year -- I don't know what we ended with. 18 or 19. We may end up with 18 or 19 this year. I think last year we set a record for number of midyear enrollees. It's not because we put an emphasis on that. It's because the percentages are going up of kids that are doing that. They don't want to fall behind.

So there's this mass movement to come early, get started, get my degree on the way, get some 12, 15 hours towards my degree in a more simpler time, which is the spring. That's the trend.

I certainly like it because your roster turns over faster, so they're not really freshmen by midseason the next year. They're like sophomores, and you can flip your roster faster that way.

But it's not the be all, end all. There are some kids that are going to come in June for us that I think are really good players that because they went to a certain high school, they couldn't come in here.

Q. Saw where Samuel M'Pemba just became official. What's he going to be bringing to you?

KIRBY SMART: He is one of those outside backers that has great length, great toughness. He was a really good athlete growing up. Played competitive soccer. Traveled

all over.

As many as two years ago he was playing tight end. So he is very raw, has a high ceiling, but he has a lot to learn about the position. But he is a tremendous talent when it comes to athleticism. He is going to have to learn how to play the position as well because he has kind of played all over as a football player.

Q. What are the traits that stand out about A.J. Harris?

KIRBY SMART: Competitiveness. I mean, he loves football. Number one traits you look for now is how much do you love football, how much can you process information, because after you height, weight, jump, test everybody, it becomes what knowledge can you handle in between your ears? I think he is going to excel at that. He takes notes. He is very bright, and he wants it. He is hungry. That's a part that I can't coach into him.

Q. What is the process for these guys that are able to practice before they sign? Then, secondly, are you comfortable with this early signing day? Do you think this is here to stay?

KIRBY SMART: I don't understand the first question.

Q. The kids practicing without having signed the scholarship papers, what do they have to sign in order to practice before their official signing?

KIRBY SMART: They have to get in school. Once they're accepted, that trumps the signing. So when they receive aid, a room, board, they receive equipment from us, they have to be accepted into school to do that. Once they do that, it's not really about the signing for them. They still have to sign, but that's not what makes it binding for them.

So those guys did a lot of preparation and we did -- our staff, not me, did a lot of preparation to get them. Our administration and our organization, Ms. Rhonda, Ms. Christina, our president really worked hard to get these guys admitted to school so they could practice.

You have to jump through hoops to do that, but once you do that, they're yours. What was the second part?

Q. About the early signing day, if you liked this, and if you think this is here to stay?

KIRBY SMART: I don't even try anymore to analyze all the different things that go on. I just try to be good at it and good at managing it and not trying to -- it's not something I have a lot of control over, so when I don't have control over it, I think about something I do.



Q. This is sort of the first full recruiting class after the National Championship, and obviously you've been recruiting these guys for many years. Did that National Championship have really any impact on the recruits you went after or the guys that were interested in coming here, or is it still because of the way this program has been built for many years now that the actual National Title didn't have much of a recruiting impact?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know if you can measure that. I think it gets you in the conversation with more national guys, but there's nobody I look at this list and say we wouldn't have gotten had we not won it or we got them because we won it. I can't quantify that.

Q. You mentioned that it was a record amount of early enrollees last year. How important was it for them to be a part of that process and preparing for playoffs and being a part of the ceremony at Sanford Stadium to kind of develop that focus and what to attain here?

KIRBY SMART: I definitely think the practice helped them. It made them more comfortable in the spring. A lot of these guys that came midyear early last year and practiced with us were guys like Mykel, Jalon Walker. I can't remember the rest of them, but there were two guys that helped almost immediately.

I feel like some of the guys that are here now will be the same way. As far as the parade, I don't think it had any impact on them.

Q. I kind of wanted to wait until the end here, but I want to ask about Ladd and Warren, if they had been able to get back to practice and been able to do anything for you?

KIRBY SMART: I'm focused on these guys today, to be honest, these signees. So no update.

Q. Wanted to ask about another guy that just signed, Gabe Harris. Just what he brings to the table.

KIRBY SMART: He is an athletic outside backer. He and Sam played together down at IMG. I think both those kids have a great relationship with each other, great rapport.

We're down on depth in that room with Nolan and Beal leaving, so it's one of those deals where we have to add some depth, and we have to have guys that can play early for us at those positions.

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