

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: I think the first thing I'll address and talk about a little bit is the expectations we have here at Georgia for our student-athletes. Certainly we haven't met some of those requirements, and we want our student-athletes to meet those, and we take those things very seriously. The standards that have been created here for a long time, that doesn't change, and we want our players to live up to those.

The mistakes they make, we treat them like we do our kids. We discipline them. We try to prevent them. We try to educate them. We try to do all we can to help our student-athletes in a positive way.

It's been a tough go with the death of Chandler and Devin. As you guys know, it was a tragic accident. Our players have been through a lot. You know, when you talk about the health and the mental health that some of our guys have needed since the accident, it's been a really tough go of it for them.

I feel like our players are starting to be able to acknowledge and they understand that when you make mistakes, the decisions that are costly can cost you your life. That's not to be taken lightly. I think our guys understand that, and continue to educate them, and we'll continue to do all we can as a university to make sure they behave and do that in a proper way.

I am very strongly in belief that we have a great group of young men on our football team. We have a great culture on our football team. We've had our highest GPA we've ever had. In the fall we have the most kids doing a lot of the community outreach.

It is really positive. So there's a lot of good there that comes out of our kids that probably doesn't get noticed as well, especially with the things that have happened here recently.

A couple of statements about spring practice, and then I'll open this up for questions. We have several guys that are out for spring. We always talk about this at the beginning.

Dan Jackson is still out. Marvin Jones had shoulder surgery. Josh Miller came in with a shoulder surgery. Andrew Paul is still out with an ACL, and Jalon Walker is out with a shoulder surgery.

So we have five guys that are out for the spring. Probably less than we've had in recent years, and I'm looking forward to a lot of competition and battles across the line in terms of positions. We have a lot of positions up for grabs.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. After the recent arrests for racing, what have you done from your position to try to send a message about racing and speeding to kind of reinforce, which I assume you've been talking about for months and years?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, to be honest with you, I have never been a part of a program where that was something you had to repeatedly address. As I said in the past, we had a session this summer where we brought in Athens-Clarke County Police and UGA Police and addressed a lot of these issues with our team, actually, in a team meeting setting and played some video of things that were going on in Atlanta with drag racing and things, things that just concern you.

We do that with drugs and alcohol. We do that with domestic violence. We try to have education programs, but education is not enough. You have to do a great job of making sure your players understand the risk and dangers that are out there. With vehicles especially nowadays that go really fast, you've got to be extremely careful.

We try to educate and make sure our players understand those risks, but the ongoing part of that is to continue to educate them and let them know. You know, that's a programming piece for us we do in the fall and then we could in the spring. The two times where we're really down for football we spend a lot of time educating our players of the dangers they can get into, and that's one that we'll continue to do, and we treat it very seriously.

Q. That's with the players. You said on ESPN that no

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policy changes were needed in the wake of the crash. I'm curious as to what the actual policy is regarding the access to vehicles, and how is it communicated within football that you can have this car or not?

KIRBY SMART: Well, first thing I want to clarify is it's no policy or lack thereof policy caused this accident. Policies are constantly under review and trying to find things to do better, but no policy or lack thereof, and we found no reason to change anything we have.

Our workers in our department have an ability to drive a vehicle or not drive a vehicle that's rented, and those student workers and the two young ladies had permission to drive those vehicles. And they were driving them when they should not have been driving them, and that policy was broken.

It's to be understood that you cannot take a vehicle when you are not doing your duties, and they were not participating in their duties at that time.

Q. These issues that have come up -- and you mentioned that some of the players have not met their responsibilities, basically. Do you feel that you have exercised proper control, proper supervision and oversight of the program, or has this situation gotten out of hand for you?

KIRBY SMART: Absolutely, we've got complete control of our program and our kids in our program. Do kids make mistakes? Yes, young student-athletes make mistakes. They do. It happens all across the country. It happens here.

There's no lack of control for our program. I think our kids across the board will tell you that we have an incredible culture here. We have a connective tissue that brings our team together. Our guys do make mistakes. That's historically probably going to happen when you are 18- to 22-year-olds. Our job as coaches is to prevent that from happening. That starts with me, and you do it by how you educate your players and how you discipline your players. We'll continue do that at a high standard.

Q. You mentioned education just with street racing that you haven't really come across this in your coaching career. Outside of education, recognizing that Jalen had shown previous incidences of street racing, a pattern potentially, others players have conducted street racing, what more can you do outside of education? You mentioned some repercussions. Yet, what penalties have these players faced? Have you looked to change some of that?

KIRBY SMART: First, that's a really big question, a really broad-based question. Any time we have discipline with our players when it comes to law enforcement, we discipline our players. That's very commonplace.

In the case of Jalen, he is not on our team currently, so that's a hard question to answer when you talk about the discipline that's in place for what just occurred, and really that's an ongoing investigation in which he hasn't been tried for.

Very similarly with Jamon, with Pop. He still has a day in court for those charges that are still charges right now. He has to handle those in court. Will they be disciplined? Pop absolutely will be disciplined.

Do I have to define what that discipline is right now? No, I don't have to define what that discipline is, but I can assure you that the education piece is there and the discipline is there. Our team is a very disciplined team. They're going to do what they're supposed to do when they're supposed to do it. And when they don't, they'll face the repercussions from that, and that will be the case in all these situations that we're talking about now.

I do think it's a piece that needs to be educated and talked about further, and I'm very proud of the fact that we brought in speakers in to educate our players of what's going on across the country at a time in the summer when that was kind of imminent, and we were seeing across Atlanta there were some things going on.

I think they see those same things, and a lot of times they want to mimic those. They'll see those events in drag racing and street racing, and you always want to monitor that.

As far as monitoring speeding, that's a little more difficult because that doesn't come direct. I don't know when our kids get a speeding ticket. I have no way of knowing. I know when our kids get arrested, but I don't have a way of policing speeding unless I'm aware of it.

Q. Kirby, are there any changes to the structure of your organization that you are going to make or policies that you think can help with off-field behavior?

KIRBY SMART: Again, it's following the protocol that we have in terms of discipline and structure. I don't think we have any kind of problem with that.

I mean, we've had players that have faced suspensions. We lost a player last year midyear that was disciplined and kicked off the team. We've lost players in the past for behavioral issues. That will continue to stand up and stand

tried and true.

I think it's important if you are going to play at the University of Georgia, you represent the University of Georgia the right way. But I also think these are young men that are going to make mistakes, and I'm a big believer in education, helping them to become better. It's not just does the discipline fit the behavior?

Can you change the behavior, because that's what we're really charged with, right? Growing young men into adults, making sure they graduate, making sure they become better people, and we have to find better ways for our organization to continue to do that to help them. That's what we want to do. We want to help these young men become better people.

You know, I got a text from Jonathan Ledbetter. He talked to me a long time about what it did for his life and how much it changed his life. Malik Herring, another guy. I mean, when you see the positive effect of guys growing from mistakes they've made, those are things you want to try to help them with.

Q. Kirby, just, I guess, and it's the most obvious about the football team, the quarterbacks and how you plan to manage that. Will they be live during the spring drills, and how do you anticipate breaking these guys down in terms of reps?

KIRBY SMART: Well, we think we have three really good quarterbacks, and I'm really excited about all three of those guys to grow and get better. We will never -- well, I won't say never. That's not right. We will not be live. We have not been live with our quarterbacks in the seven years I've been here. So we will not be live with them unless we decide we need to. I do look forward to seeing Carson and Brock getting a lot of that action. They'll both rep with the ones.

As far as how much, that will play itself out over the course of spring. Gunner has come a long way. I'm excited to see what those guys can do. They've been excited about meeting and doing things with Coach Bobo and the offensive staff. I'm excited to see those guys go practice and compete.

Q. Kirby, mentioning Coach Bobo, what gave you the confidence as far as promoting him to offensive coordinator, and what kind of changes, specifically like with verbiage, will the players have to deal with with him being elevated?

KIRBY SMART: There won't be much change in verbiage. If anything, there will be some additions, maybe some

slight wrinkles, but we feel like the verbiage for the kids works great.

He is comfortable with the verbiage. He was in it last year with Coach Monken. Really our entire offensive staff -- you have to remember when Coach Monken got here, some of that verbiage remained the same too, so it wasn't like it was a total transformation of language.

And you've got to think about a guy like maybe Dell McGhee or Hartley who have been here pre-Monken and now they're here post-Monken. There's a lot of carry-over because B-Mac, Stacy, and Todd have all been in a room with Mike.

The decision was the continuity we have on offense. We want to keep that going. I have a lot of confidence in Mike with the job he has done with offenses in the past.

Q. Kirby, on Carson and Brock, what do you see as each of their strengths? It seems the general belief is Beck has the stronger arm, Brock might be a little more athletic. Is that true?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's hard to say who has a stronger arm. I think those two guys would argue about who has a stronger arm because I don't honestly know who has a stronger arm just from what we've seen in the past. You have to see those guys play in game action.

I think they both have really good pocket presence. Brock is a really good athlete. Brock has added about 14 or 15 pounds of muscle. He wanted to get back to 215 out of his 203, 204 playing range. And Carson has lost a little weight from 220, so they're right at the same size.

It's hard to say the differences in those two. I don't think people give Carson enough credit for being a good athlete. He was a really good baseball player. He has great movement skills. He is not going to run as fast as Stetson.

I think Brock is a good athlete. He can see the field. Carson has probably played a little more, but both those guys are good. I wouldn't count Gunner Stockton out of this thing because this kid is talented, smart. I got to see him on the scout team the entire year and really saw him grow.

I mean, when Monken left, I asked him about where he thought our quarterback room was. He was very adamant that we have three really talented, young quarterbacks, and Mike inheriting that room certainly feels that way, too. I'm excited about those guys.

Q. Kirby, with the two offensive tackles headed off to

the NFL, one, where is Ernest Greene at in his return from injury? And, two, what are you excited about looking at that room and those guys that are competing for those positions?

KIRBY SMART: Ernest is in a good spot. Thank goodness Ron had the foresight to have the surgery. I think it was October 10th maybe or -- sometime in October he had the surgery in the thought that we would get him back for spring.

His conditioning level may not be exactly where we need it to be, but he has been working out with the team. He has been doing offseason workouts with the team. He has been able to do all the stuff we require him to do, so he will go out there and compete.

Amarius Mims will be out there. Blaske will be out there. Monroe Freeling will be out there, Chad Lindberg. We'll have a lot of guys competing at tackle, but we have a pretty high bar for what the standard is at offensive tackle at Georgia. Those two guys last year played really well and we'll have a good competition this year.

Q. When did you know that you were going to promote Mike if and when Todd got an NFL job? And in what ways do you think Mike has adapted, evolved, changed since he was last Georgia's offensive coordinator?

KIRBY SMART: When did I know that I would -- I didn't think about it during the season. It never crossed my mind. I guess, you know, you always know you can lose a coach, but I was focused on the season. So I never thought, well, if Monken leaves. That didn't cross my mind until probably around the national championship game.

You start thinking, okay, we're the only team playing. We're playing for the national championship. All my attention and focus is there. Immediately after the game your thought is, okay, if I lose this guy, who am I hiring?

I was very comfortable at that point that if we lost Todd and he decided to go back to the NFL because that's the only thing I felt like he would leave for, that I would go with Mike because I felt really comfortable, his leadership in the room.

I asked Monken his opinion leaving, what he thought, and I thought it was important to keep that dynamic in the room set because we weren't losing multiple coaches. I think Mike has grown a lot since he went out to Colorado State from the time that he spent here.

I went against him at South Carolina. I went against him at Auburn, which gave me ultimate confidence that he would

get this job done. We played them with probably the most talented defense that I've been a part of, and they were on a 16-play drive there at Auburn against us in the opening drive of the game. Just have got a lot of confidence in his leadership skills and what he will be able to do offensively.

Q. I know Jalon Walker doesn't exclusively play outside linebacker, but with him and Marvin Jones both out for spring practice, where does that leave you guys at that position, and how important will it be to get those young players behind them some reps and get them up to speed?

KIRBY SMART: It's probably the youngest position on the roster. I think we have five players in their first spring or their first year. So the three midyears, CJ. I guess I'm counting -- I'm counting those five guys, and that isn't even counting Marvin. So there are six guys within that one-year span. That's a really young position. Chaz is kind of like the old vet there now.

We'll see how it goes. Those young guys have looked good in workouts. When you talk about how our guys run around and how they move, there's a really good group of guys, but we'll need a lot of reps and work there to replace the Nolans and the Beals who have been there forever.

Q. Coach, another quarterback question. I hope this doesn't come up as a hypothetical, but do you hope to see enough from all three of those guys that in the spring you will have an idea maybe kind of where things stand, or do you think this competition will last well into fall practice?

KIRBY SMART: That's definitely a hypothetical, Anthony. What would I like? I would like having a guy that started for a year or two years being your quarterback. We don't have that, so we have a competition. So we have to figure out who is going to perform the best in that competition, and that comes through scrimmages.

You know, we have I think three Saturday scrimmages, including G-day. That will go a long way to telling where they are, but that never is the total story, right? We have two spring practices before we play our first game, 26 or 28 practices in fall camp that will tell a lot more.

Q. Kirby, with the three transfer guys you guys brought in, what stood out about Rara, Dominic, and Smoke? And what do you feel like they bring to this program?

KIRBY SMART: I think their experience. I think when you talk about Dom and Rara, they're guys that have competed in our league. They've caught a lot of passes in our

league. They've been very productive in our league, and it was a position that we were losing several players at. We needed to be able to help our quarterbacks. Your quarterbacks need some weapons to throw to, and those guys do that.

Then with Deyon, he is a guy that I've known a long time. Since ninth grade he has been coming up here to camp. We've known a lot about him, and we're looking forward to seeing him. He'll compete in the secondary. We have a lot of open spots.

Q. You sort of just touched on it a second ago, but Rara is going today, and the rest of the spring? I want to confirm that.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, so Rara has been cleared with the recent changes in his deal to participate with the team. He still has some ongoing things with campus that has to be cleared, but he is going to be cleared to be able to practice with us right now, yeah.

Q. Can you tell us a little bit about Austin Blaske and Monroe Freeling. We don't see them as much, don't know as much about them. You mentioned those as two possible guys that can take over the tackle spot. Can you tell us more about them?

KIRBY SMART: Monroe, we've only had him for, I guess, maybe eight weeks or whatever it is, six weeks. He didn't come in early during bowl practice and practice with us, but he has really done well in workouts.

He is extremely flexible. He is tough. He can run. He has great length. He has added some weight. But we haven't seen the guy play football, so I can't go and say what he can and can't do.

Austin Blaske has played a lot of football. He worked at tackle. He worked while Warren McClendon was out there for a while. He got a lot of reps at tackle. He competes at tackle. He is really athletic. He can flip over and play at center. I've seen him and know he is a very viable candidate to compete for one of those starting jobs.

Q. Yeah, Coach, wanted to get a preview of your pro day tomorrow, and we had the 12 guys at the combine. Who are some of the other guys that we may want to keep our eye on tomorrow, and what are some of the NFL scouts asking you about the current group?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know that I can answer the exact question of who we have that's working out that didn't go to the combine. That list will be pretty long.

We've actually got a couple of guys that are left in the portal that are going to come back and work out and compete. I think Ameer Speed is coming back. A couple of other guys that are going to come back. I think Kolby Wyatt is coming back. I think Matt Landers may come back to help Stetson with the throwing and do the throwing sessions. We don't have enough receivers.

I'll be able to probably answer those questions better tomorrow when we move to pro day.

Q. I know you said Andrew Paul is out. Where is he at in his return?

KIRBY SMART: In Ron's words, he would compare it to probably where Chubb was that first spring we got here. If you remember, Chubb got hurt in that Tennessee game. Andrews was a little bit earlier than that.

I think August the last scrimmage maybe or second to last scrimmage he got injured. So he is not cleared, but he is on track. He is going to do individual drills. He is going to be able to go out and do all the competition outside of the 11-on-11. Won't be able to do 11-on-11 tackle drills, but we feel good about where he is going to be for fall camp and what he is going to be able to do.

I'll say this for Ron and his staff. This is the least number of guys we have out for medical reasons going into a spring that we've had in a while, and we also have 21 either midyears or the three portal guys that will be out there, not all of them practicing, but available to practice. It definitely increases our depth.

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