

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Athens, Georgia, USA

## Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



COACH SMART: I'm excited to get started for game week prep. We actually did some work on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, but mainly Friday and Saturday on ourselves and our opponent UT Martin. I heard what they did for Coach Dooley and the Dooley Memorial Intersection. Sounds like it's a great event.

I certainly have a lot of appreciation for Coach and his family and what they've meant to this community. They have meant a lot to me personally as well. I'm glad they were able to do that.

For today, to UT Martin, we move on got a lot of respect for them. Coach Simpson and his staff have done a tremendous job when you talk about conference champs, which they've been.

A lot of their stats within their conference look very similar to ours in terms of being balanced, really good on offense and on defense. And we've played teams from that conference, and I know a lot of coaches in that conference.

One of our coaches, Tray Scott, got his start there, his first job by Coach Simpson and worked -- he knows their offensive coordinator really well. And they've done a tremendous job with their program building it from the ground up. They've got a great foundation laid.

We're excited to have them come in. Hoping for good weather. Excited for our guys to go play somebody else. They've worked tremendously hard this camp. We probably have had one of the toughest camps since I've been here mainly because of the heat. The heat was so different the last, I guess, three weeks. You can't avoid it. It's been tough. Our guys have pushed through it.

Now we've got to set a standard for how we practice in season, and that starts today because you don't inherit that from previous teams.

**Q. On the running backs, what has Daijun Edwards been dealing with? And how have he and Kendall Milton -- and have you been looking at Dillon Bell at**

**running back?**

COACH SMART: We're looking at everybody at running back. We'll try to find the best way possible to get the ball in the hands of the playmakers.

But to answer your question specifically, Daijun was dealing with an MCL. He had one last year, but he's actually doing great. I think he's going to be able to practice and do everything today. So we feel good about Daijun's status.

It happened in the second scrimmage. I don't know what that date was. But would have been, I guess, a week ago Saturday, and he's bounced back pretty good from that. He looks good.

Kendall, he's been dealing with a hamstring most of, almost all of camp. He feels 80, 90 percent. And we're hopeful to get him back today as well in terms of practicing and taking reps.

The volume they do we have to be careful of because they haven't been in the heat as much as the other guys in the last week. But we feel good about those. I feel good about Andrew Paul. Roderick Robinson has had a good camp. Cash has had a good camp. Really got a bunch of guys who have repped and done some good things there.

But, Dillon, we need Dillon at wideout. We need Dillon on sperm teams. He's had a good camp in terms of being wide receiver. He played it some in high school. It's something he's done before.

But the way offenses are nowadays you can get your touches a lot of ways. And we've got a lot of plays that involve perimeter blocking, direct runs, perimeter runs. As a defensive coach, every offensive play has three plays on it. It could be a direct run with this and this. In those ways you can get a lot of people touches. So that would be the plan.

But I feel good about the backs we have. I'll feel a lot better if Daijun and Kendall are 100 percent, but we'll see where they are today.

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**Q. You talked about kind of preparing for UT Martin, of course. Obviously their starting quarterback got named recently in Kinkead Dent. I think he's only got about nine passes combined over his college career. Most of his film is holding kicks. How do you prepare for a guy like that with limited film?**

COACH SMART: You don't prepare for the guy, you prepare for the offense. When we go play somebody, we don't prepare for the guy. We might try to find something out about him in terms of what did he do in high school, what does he excel at, what does he struggle with? Is he a guy that doesn't read coverages as well? Is he a runner, not a runner? There's all kinds of things we try to find out.

But they have an offensive system, and they'll cater to that offensive system to fit to his skill set. We go off of what they've done in the past and we'll do a little bit of research on him as well.

**Q. Could you speak about UT Martin schematically and if there's any similarities to anybody you might face down the road, maybe in conference? And if so, do you use that as an opportunity to, maybe not necessarily experiment, but maybe put something on tape that you might try later on down the road?**

COACH SMART: We look at them schematically, and we try to figure out who they are, what they've done. You watch all their games. You worry about yourself. You try to improve the things you do yourself.

I think it's really important, the first game of the year, we always look back at things that gave us problems because that's probably what they're looking at.

And you want to research and say, all right, what have they done well, what have they done poorly, what have we done well and what have we done poorly, because we're going to see some of that.

They are a well-coached, very good scheme team. Offensively, they're like everybody you play. There's nobody that's really different anymore. It's more of the same. You don't see a triple option.

It's like, okay, what do they do offensively? They're very similar to everybody else. They've got the ability to throw the ball on the perimeter. They throw RPOs. They run the ball well. They have plays, they don't block anybody in the interior and it doesn't matter because the ball goes on the perimeter. So they do a good job of that.

Defensively they're similar to us. They can go three down,

four down. They primarily go out of an odd look and a three-down look, and we get to look at that a lot because we do it defensively. So we share ideas in terms of schematics when you watch us and them and when you watch their conference you see some similarities there.

**Q. Can you tell us a little bit about Len'Neth Whitehead and maybe if we can expect to see him? And what's the status on Ladd McConkey?**

COACH SMART: Ladd is doing great. We had to shut him down for a little bit. He had a little bit of a back injury. He's fine. He's dealt with it before. He's had it last year.

He practiced Saturday and was good and expected to be out there today. So he should be fine.

In terms of Len'Neth, he's dealt with a little bit of a knee injury during camp. It was bothering him, but he's battled back from that. He's trying to learn our offensive system still and pick up on things and kind of find his fit and where he fits in this running back group.

And he's done a good job giving us a great look and continue to work and get opportunities. There are certainly a lot of opportunities at the running back position for guys to get carries and show us what they can do.

**Q. Just updates on Kamari, David Daniel and Smael?**

COACH SMART: Those guys look good, been practicing. David Daniels had a little bit of turf toe. He came back out Saturday, was able to run, hit some high speeds. He'll be practicing with us. Kamari and Smael have been practicing for the last couple of weeks.

**Q. How much does Carson stand to benefit by having a guy like Sedrick be his center in front of him and playing behind someone who has so much game experience and has already seen so much?**

COACH SMART: What are the benefits of that? I would say familiarity. I mean, he knows that Sedrick's been there. But it's probably overrated because Carson understands fronts, coverages, pressures. He can ID protections. He can point runs. He can do a lot of different things.

So he doesn't have to rely on Sedrick like maybe a new quarterback would, because I don't see Carson that way. He understands it. He gets it. He's had a ton of reps. I think the fact that he's got somebody who's played in big moments, somebody who has snapped the ball in tough environments is comforting. But as far as what Sedrick provides for Carson is probably reassurance.

**Q. I want to talk about the secondary room. You've got four guys competing to either start alongside Kamari or in place of him if he can't go this weekend. How do those four guys looked? Has any of them stood out to maybe earn one of those starting spots?**

COACH SMART: Are you asking about the safety and the star position or what are you specifically asking?

**Q. Cornerbacks.**

COACH SMART: We've got a group of cornerbacks. Kamari has been going a little over a week in practicing and taking reps. He's been in a black jersey some, but that's more precautionary. We know he can hit and tackle. He's a really physical tackler. He's been able to tackle in individual drills. He's been great.

The other guys have all competed there and had really good competition between Nyland and A.J. and Humphrey and Julian and Daylen. They've all taken reps and gotten work there. I don't know that we're ready to say anybody has stood out beyond somebody else.

And we'll have practices this week that are game speed, game like. We make the determination this week or determination in the game. But staying healthy and all those guys have done a good job.

**Q. Asking about the safeties and stars, what do you like about how the defense is playing, with Javon at safety and Tykee at star? And how -- will that change the defense having those guys play the role without Chris here?**

COACH SMART: Not a lot of difference. I mean, we're running the defense we run. Those guys are competing. We're trying to build depth. We're trying to get experience for Javon.

It's a different transition when you go backwards than when you go forwards in a defense. He's going backwards. But he's going somewhere he's played before. That transition has been great.

How are we playing right now? I can't tell you that because we haven't played anybody. So we've got to play to find out where we are and see where we need growth at. But, number one, staying healthy at those two positions and building depth for if we're not are the key.

**Q. Have you come to a decision yet on kicker duties, extra points, kickoffs and that sort of thing?**

COACH SMART: Haven't come to the conclusion what we'll do there. Obviously the punting duties are sealed up, but the kickoff and field goal kicking duties will be decided probably shortly.

**Q. With the way the schedule presents itself, having these first two weeks before conference play starts, how many of these position battles might extend on into maybe the South Carolina week and give you an opportunity to really truly evaluate game reps?**

COACH SMART: Well, unfortunately, here it's never decided. It changes the week of. I mean, outside of a few positions I don't care who you are. If you don't go out there and practice good you're not going to play. So position battles here will go on throughout the year.

I think what you're kind of directing it towards is you're playing what would be considered, somebody would say is a lesser opponent. I certainly don't look at it that way. We don't look at it that way, or don't look it as a luxury to be able to do this or that.

We want to go out get great rhythm and start fast and dominate and play well. We want to play our best each and every game and grow from that.

As far as the opportunities for guys to start and play they get that opportunity every day. We're going to go out there today and do best on best and see who plays. And the guy that plays better is going to be the guy that gets to play regardless whether they start the first or second game.

**Q. At tight end what's the latest on Lawson's prognosis? And what have you seen the last couple of weeks as far as depth at that position?**

COACH SMART: Lawson ended up getting the tight-rope surgery, and we don't know when to expect him back. He's already out of a boot and walking with pressure on it, which is great news. And he's out at walk-throughs, meetings, very attentive.

He's going to help us special teams wise. But in the time that he's been gone, Oscar, Pearce have both picked up the load and done a great job. We've had some other guys audition and move around at that position.

But it's a position that if you have the luxury of depth at receiver, you don't have to play as much 12. If you've got 12 personnel, you better have two viable backups that can play there. And we certainly have worked towards that. We'll continue to see where it goes.

But Pearce has done a nice job. And with Lawson's injury,



he's gotten more opportunities.

**Q. Obviously it's year eight. You're older. Your kids are older. The demands of the job have not slowed down. In fact, they've probably cranked up a little bit. Can you give us an idea how you're managing all that, and maybe an update kind of on your family, kids? They're teenagers now, getting to be teenagers. And how do you feel you're doing a pretty decent job of balancing that?**

COACH SMART: Yeah, that part has actually become easier. The demands of the job have increased, but so has the retention of my staff, which has allowed me to afford people the opportunities to lead the team, lead their unit, delegate more duties, which in turn allows me to be a better husband and father, which is probably the primary goal of what I want to do as a man.

And I certainly have had more time in the last two to three years with my family than I have previous. That has a lot to do with maturing as a coach and having a staff that allows you to do that, a support staff, with former head coaches on our staff between Will, Bobo, Monken being here at the time. You've got guys like Dell who's been here forever. Schumann, they understand what you want and demand.

And allowing those guys opportunities to lead the team, lead certain areas of the team, it affords me the opportunity to be a better husband and father.

**Q. We've seen you in a leadership position in college football being on this rules committee. Obviously comfortable with the turf being a veteran coach. The Big Ten's moving to this availability report every week. I know LSU is doing that. You're pretty transparent with us as well. Would you be in favor of an SEC weekly availability report? And do you think that will help in the efforts to maybe curb some of the gambling issues?**

COACH SMART: I'm for whatever helps curb the gambling issues. I think it's a major issue in all of sports, with the states now taking on more and more gambling; the tax revenues that states are able to get; the pressure that they put on student-athletes sometimes trying to get information, which I have no proof that happens, but it certainly scares you.

As a coach, you worry about pitfalls and where your kids can make mistakes. That's an area that's hard to police for us as coaches, because outside of this building, what they come in contact with, what information they may or may not share is scary.

But as far as uniform injury policy, I would have no issue with that. I always defer to Sankey and the leadership of our conference because he does such a good job of seeing it from 10,000 feet and not from the view of just one coach.

Again, I don't have a whole lot to hide. If you want to ask me about it, I will tell you. I can never say sometimes whether they're going to play in the game or not because I don't know, I don't know right up until the game sometimes because we're trying to make every player available we can and we don't know the most accurate information. If there was a standard reporting procedure that was more uniform, it would probably make it better, but you're not going to make the people go away that still want to go dig, find and ask questions and try to find a competitive advantage.

**Q. I know you like to stay in the moment and the day and not looking too far down the road, but --**

COACH SMART: That's correct.

**Q. -- I think I've got that right.**

COACH SMART: But you're going to ask anyway.

**Q. Is there any way you use the prospect of having a chance to win three straight national titles, not done in the poll era, can you use that without getting out of the moment but at least give the guys that kind of carrot to shoot for, and is there some sort of motivational way you can use the chance to do something that's never been done?**

COACH SMART: Absolutely not. I just don't think you can make it about that because the minute you do that, you open yourself to distractions, added pressure. What if it doesn't happen? What are you playing for? It's just so many things that I just don't believe philosophically in doing that because what the previous two teams did has no bearing on this team. Has no bearing.

Our focus is UT Martin and, really, us. And that's going to be true of whoever we play is we have to remain focused on us and we have to, like I said, set a standard of the way this team is going to practice in a game week. That's kind of like being where your feet are. Because you don't inherit practice habits. You don't inherit standards, you set them. And they change year to year and you've got to kind of acknowledge them. So that's where our focus is.

I know it's so hard for people to believe that we're not talking about the other, but we've got a lot of work to be done before we start talking about that.

**Q. I've heard you talk about reinventing yourself to be better than you were last year. How is your program doing that this year?**

COACH SMART: I think you do it based on who you have. I think offensively, defensively, special teams, we're looking at things to change that are going to make us better. We're looking at different ways we walk through. We're looking at a different practice format today than it was last year on this Monday. We're looking at what this team needs relative to where we are. This is not the same team we had two years ago or last year. So what do they need? And that's how you reinvent yourself to be better, and we're looking at that every day.

**Q. In the offseason, specifically fall camp, where have you seen the offensive line grow and what are maybe some weaknesses you've seen out of them?**

COACH SMART: Not weakness. The fear is reading what you all say about them, or believing that what Warren Brinson says about Amarius Mims is going to be the gospel.

You have to earn that. You have to go out and earn what you get and do it on tape. Just getting told you're this or that doesn't make you that.

I can show you countless examples on tape where that hasn't been true. I can also show you countless examples where it has been, and you're only as good as your last practice. That's what this offensive line will worry about. Depth is a concern. How many guys can we play and how do we avoid injury and stay healthy. And some of that comes with luck.

**Q. We'll use your words, not ours, what excites you about this team?**

COACH SMART: Excites me about this team is the maturity level. The approach they've taken to their work. So we had an offseason workout program and a spring practice, which I was very pleased with. We had summer workouts, which I was very pleased with. We had camp that -- it wasn't our very best camp, but we also had a lot tougher circumstances than we've ever had in camp.

I can say that we've had better practices but we've never had 110 degree heat either. I'm very excited about every day you go to work with this group, they're fun to be around because they actually listen to what you say and they try to do it like you say it. And that's important.

I mean, who you are intangibly is really important. They've

done a great job with that. Now still have to transition to the field and to games.

**Q. Did you watch any games this weekend to see how the new clock rule is working out with the clock not stopping on first downs, and just give us your overall take on that?**

COACH SMART: A lot of talk, texts going around. We worked on Saturday. I didn't really get to see games. We practiced and worked. But we talked to some analytics people that had it from 65 to 69 offensive snaps or 69 to 65, meaning it was three, four lower.

People factored Navy game in against Notre Dame. Navy is very different. We'll see more as the year goes on. We all thought it would be less, thought it would be three to five less on average the first weekend. I think it was right around that. That's not including some special teams plays that might have gone down there as well. But I don't think we'll know until we get into conference play.

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