

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Onto Ball State for us. I think they've got a really good football team. I don't know coach Mike Neu well, but going to get to meet him. Got a lot of respect for their conference. We played Kent State out of this conference last year, and the MAC has done an incredible job of creating a good football environment and some really good football teams.

So we got to put last game to bed this morning, which we don't usually get to do on Monday. With no school we were able to jump ahead. This afternoon we'll jump straight into Ball State and get these guys going and get prepared for them.

**Q. When you went back and had a chance to watch the tape, how did you feel like the offensive line played, particularly in the first half? Seemed like they got things picked up in the second.**

KIRBY SMART: Probably less on them and more on us. You know, the team did a good job -- TN Martin did a good job changing some things up.

We had some plans to handle some things a different way and they did a couple things to hurt us. Probably hurt our offensive line more than our offensive line didn't play well. We probably got to do a better job helping them out, in-game adjustments and things like that.

I did think they did play better in the second half. They pass protected well throughout the game, really the first half and the second half. We didn't run the ball particularly well in the first half and that probably led to some of the issues we had.

**Q. I know this is a real general question, but what are the biggest improvements you want to see your team make from last week to this week?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't even know how to -- I mean, a lot. There is so many things we can get better at, and every coach in the country is saying that you get better -- from game one to game two is the biggest jump you make.

Is if that's the case, then there is a lot of areas to improve in. Certainly turnovers on defense, pursuit angles. We got cut back on several times. Offensively ability to be explosive in the run game. Convert on third downs.

There is a lot of things.

Special teams, I didn't think -- we didn't dominate the game in any way on special teams like we're capable of. I can't pinpoint one area.

**Q. You guys faced Ball State last year when he was at Kent State, Marquez Cooper. Just what do you remember about how he played in that game and his skillset?**

KIRBY SMART: Really physical. Downhill, power runner, good back. I mean, our guys were talking about him just this morning of how powerful he was and how ironic it is you're playing against him again at a different school in the same conference.

We got a lot of respect for him.

**Q. Everybody talks about offense finding a rhythm. What about defense? How does a defense find rhythm. What does that mean in terms of if they're not where you want them to be from the jump?**

KIRBY SMART: I think rhythm is a weird thing on defense. I don't know that -- rhythm to me is three and out, three and out, three and out, three and out. That's not realistic. Like that's not going to happen in today's day and age. People have ability to get first down, they're so explosive. There are so many different ways to run offense. You can go really fast. You can play on the perimeter. You can trick people. You can go right at people. There are just lots of options.

Offenses are so much more elaborate now that than have ever been, so defining rhythm for a defense is not necessarily easy. I mean, rhythm to me is havoc related. Like when we would be in our best rhythm was when we would be creating the most havoc. Tackles for a loss,



PBUs, interceptions, sacks.

We didn't hit our havoc goal the other day. We played decent on defense, but you can't hit your havoc goal if they get the ball out in 2.1 seconds. It's hard to do that. You got to bat balls. You got to force turnovers, and we didn't do those.

**Q. Saw EJ Lightsey wasn't dressed out. Is he injured?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, he's dealing with an injury. Golly, my mind just went blank. I can't remember what EJ's dealing with exactly, but he's had some shoulder pain, some back pain from a high school injury, and he's been fighting that. We're hopeful to get him back.

**Q. Regarding your walk-ons, do you have a coach or staffer that oversees them? Is there anything different for them in the program versus a scholarship guy? Do they have to sit in the back of the room for team meetings or anything like that?**

KIRBY SMART: No. I hold walk-ons in the highest regard, and as we recruit them we explain to them that they would not be treated any differently. They will be treated just the same and afforded the same opportunities.

I think if you asked the walk-ons that question, and we had a kid stand up in one of our connection meetings and I thought he did a tremendous job, explain to everybody what's it's like being on a walk-on.

He might tell you that's different. You don't get the first shot. You have to really earn it. Truly earn it. You have to go out there and work and be part of the scout team and just outwork people. We've had some guys do that.

We showed Prather Hudson examples all the time. First year I was here he was busting long runs repeatedly on our defense and he earned his way to a scholarship, and really good player.

We have a lot of opportunities for that. So when it comes to team meetings you sit by your class, not by your hierarchy in the locker room. I hold walk-ons in high regard. It's very personal to me that they get treated just like everyone else.

I can't say that they'd all say that, but I certainly try to do that.

**Q. You mentioned Saturday night when we got a chance to talk to you wanting to double up right there before the half for the two-minute drill. After the big play to Dom, what went into the decision to run the ball**

**with no timeouts right there?**

KIRBY SMART: Bad deal, man, bad deal. To be honest with you, just a missed cue, not knowing how close it was to the goal line, and probably be making a decision too fast. We spend a lot of time on those moments like that and I take a lot of pride in those moments.

Should never happen. Should never happen. But making a decision really fast sometimes you don't make the right decision. We had enough time. We actually got the ball snapped without losing any time on the clock, but the decision was thinking it was probably closer than it was and it cost us at least one play.

**Q. When did you become aware that Jarvis Jones got arrested Friday night, and what's your reaction? Will there be any internal repercussions?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, internal discipline. It's a personnel matter and I really can't comment further on it.

**Q. Ladd and Daijun don't play, you've discussed their injury before. What's the plan with them in terms of getting them up to speed and in a place where they can contribute and see the field possibly?**

KIRBY SMART: You're asking about the injury or where they are?

**Q. Yeah, where they are.**

KIRBY SMART: Daijun, we think he could have played in that game. He practiced. He warmed up. He did everything leading up to the game. He had this injury before. I can't remember if it was Vanderbilt or maybe Florida during the off week last year. Very similar injury.

We feel good about him. I haven't seen him practice today so I don't know that. But I feel pretty about about Daijun. Felt like he could have gone last week.

Ladd, he's day-to-day. Thought he might be able to go last week and he wasn't. It was really a game-time decision. Didn't feel good on Friday, so we held him on Saturday. He's running today, but he's dealing with some back pain that's been lingering for him.

**Q. Ask you a little more about Carson. After going back and looking at the tape, was nerves a problem, first year start and all that?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't understand. I mean, I don't understand you guys sometimes. I thought Carson played -- I thought just like I did when I looked at it -- I came in



there and talked to y'all Saturday night. I thought Carson played really well, composed.

I'm trying to think of the throws that you were just awful our erratic and I didn't see that. The one third down he admittedly threw the ball a little bit behind Dom thinking Dom was sitting down and Dom broke in, which Dom was correct and he missed him on that throw.

Outside of that there will be incompletions in games. There will be looks that maybe they fool you with, you didn't see in the scouting report. But his run check game, his carrying out his fakes, his decision in the pocket, him throwing the ball away, I thought the guy for a first start, played really well.

**Q. Two questions: One about what did you see in Mekhai Mews that made you go after him? Does he or Dan Jackson -- or have you awarded any of the walk-ons scholarships recently?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't get into -- I'm not big into the talking about the scholarships and doing that. We have multiple guys who have got them. Outside of the one time I think Notre Dame locker room we awarded Rod and learned a valuable lesson in that, that I don't think that's always worth the publicity that you get.

I think sometimes you can do more damage than good with guys that may feel like they deserve one. We keep that internal, and if it gets out, it gets out.

Dan and Mews have been tremendous. There is another 20 walk-ons that go out and practice so hard every day that you don't get to see because maybe they don't have quite the ability or not quite as far up the depth chart.

So I really respect all these guys. It's a credit to Mews, who came in here and wanted an opportunity to compete, and he earned it. We saw him in high school and he was high on our preferred walk-on list and he earned it. He came out and really competed and did a great job.

I think everybody on the team will tell you he's earned what he has gotten with the way he practices.

**Q. You touched on Carson's run checks. Curious how much freedom does a quarterback have and how has Carson, when you're at the line and you maybe see eight in the box but you have a run play call, how much freedom does quarterback have then to change the play or direction?**

KIRBY SMART: There are perimeters you give them. There are runs that have checks, runs that have checks

from run to run. There are checks that have checks from run to pass. There are certain looks you're allowed check the pass.

Every week we package those, but not every play has those. There are sometimes you're going to sit back, as you can do and we can do as coaches, second guess and say, he should have thrown that ball because it had an option to throw.

Then there is the check to a throw, which completely is different than a run pass option. So it's complicated and elaborate, but he did what was coached to do and did exactly the things we wanted him to do. They got two outside, we're checking this. Okay, they got this, we're doing this.

He followed those, and he's already done that. He did that all last year under Coach Monken. He did it in practice because he had to be ready to play.

If they got this ready we can't do this play. We got to go over here and do this play. Not every play has that. Some plays are fast ball. Some plays are are speed break. Every play has its own identity.

He's very bright and understands it, and we're lucky we can do some of the things we can do because he's like Stetson in that way that he's been in the system long enough to handle the volume.

**Q. You had high praise for CJ Allen after the game. Now that you've had a closer look with film, how do you feel he did in terms of understanding the defense of being at the right place at the right time?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, the praise I have for CJ Allen is his ability to handle information and play within our defensive scheme at the signal caller position. That position, you go comb the country you're not going to see a ton of freshman linebackers out there playing making the calls. That is impressive.

As far as how he played, I think he had some jitters. I think he was nervous. A lot of our guys were. Anxiety there. You got to go out and play in your first college game. I can't imagine going straight from high school to being out there and playing, and he got afforded that opportunity and he played okay, but he's really bright.

**Q. I know you're not big into the fanfare obviously, Brian Kelly last night made a reference to Georgia. Wondered had you heard about it, and what was your reaction is when he said we thought we were the two-time national champion Georgia Bulldogs in**

**reference to maybe thinking they could roll their helmet out in the second half. What does it say when you're program is getting those kind of remarks from your peers, where peers like Coach Kelly is putting you guys on a bit of a pedestal there?**

KIRBY SMART: Says you're one week away from humility. All it says is how are we going to practice today.

**Q. With time to look back at the film, what did you make of Earnest's first start?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's interesting, I was talking to him going out there. In my mind I see him like this. Man, he's been out there all spring, competed, played. He is in his second or third year and you forget that that was his first game in I guess two years from high school, and he has not had to play -- he didn't even get to play -- you think about the guys that got to play last year in the games we had the lead. He never got that.

Now, my expectation is that he plays to the level of a starter, and he flashes at time to be sudden, quick, do everything right, and then he had a couple plays where he didn't.

I'm like, you know what? That's no different than CJ Allen, no different than Dillon Bell was last year. He's going to go through those WTF moments I call them. It's inevitable. He had a couple, but he also had a couple really, really good players. I'm excited about what he can do if he continues to grow and get better. He can't have those moments.

**Q. I know you mentioned that Kendall is still pushing through injury. Where is he in terms of how he responded to playing Saturday? What does it say about him that he did want to push through?**

KIRBY SMART: Kendall is dying to get out there. The guy has a great heart, great soul. He loves this program, he'll give anything for this program, and it kills him not to be out there. He has not been able to practice most of camp due to his injury.

We're dealing a little bit now with, all right, how does he stay warm and able to do it. When he's used to playing, right, he plays in a rotation at running back, but he played on all the special teams. Now he's not doing that. When he's not in on offense, he sits over there, gets cold, got to stay warm, goes in at halftime, leg tightens up, and doesn't have what I call the camp stamina.

He didn't really go through camp. He worked out, ran, did what he had to do, but he could not get himself in playing

shape just by camp. So we're really battling that now to get him back right. I think he said himself, if you asked him, I'm running 92%. That's what he quoted it as. I don't think his stamina is at 92%. I think when he is 100% conditioned he's at 92%, and we're trying to fight that to get him back.

It's a delicate line, right? Do you bring him back and try to play him and get him in shape, or sit on the shelf and you don't get carries. That action he got the other day was like scrimmage one and scrimmage two, because he didn't get to play in those.

**Q. Coach, Saturday night you mentioned jitters. We don't even have to talk about the quarterback position, but the offense as a whole, how much of the responsibility relies on the coordinator to settle his players in that moment, and how do you go about doing that?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't think you can say it's up to a coordinator to settle the players. You certainly can call it conservatively to try to figure out where we are, where are the guys are. You got two backs that have never played, never carried a ball. You got a quarterback that's never started. You got two starting receivers I know of out, one that's played a lot, and Meeks is out. So there is a lot of the new pieces of puzzle.

I have high expectations for all these guys, but there is a little anxiety there and a little bit of let's figure out where we are. When you take the gloves off and say, all right, let Carson go play, then he goes and he plays well. Those guys did, too. Thing about CJ Smith and Rara and Dom for the plays they made, and it's different for Rara and Dom. I can't explain it, because they made plays in our league but they haven't made them here.

**Q. Will Marcus Rosemy be available this week to play?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Marcus is going to be available to play. The number one thing we miss is leadership. The guy is incredible as a leader, and he stands up, admits when he made a mistake, and he is one of the toughest, most competitive -- like the practice today for him will be look the Super Bowl, and every day is like that for him.

He sets an example in that room that I think embodies our receiver room. I haven't been around a receiver room that actually cares as much about blocking as these guys do, and they do that because their leader has that personality.

**Q. We saw Smael Mondon get in maybe one snap, run somebody down, and then...**

KIRBY SMART: Did he only played one?

**Q. Only one I remember. How close is he to being back fully?**

KIRBY SMART: He's close. We felt like in some sub situations he would be able to play. I thought he -- I didn't chart it so I don't know, but I know the play you're talking about over on our sideline. That's the only one I remember. But he feels good, feels healthy.

It's another one of those deals can he get in shape by running and playing without wearing his legs out and staying pressure. He looks good out there and we expect him to be able to play. He was cleared to go this week and it was one of those we were going to be safe as we could.

**Q. With the outside linebackers being such a young room, how did you evaluate the play of those guys last week?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, we didn't get to see a whole lot. In the run game I thought they did a good job. Chaz had several good closes, several good plays, setting edges.

The things that hurt us in terms of quarterback run was not always on them. We got hurt on quarterback runs several times. It was couple times linebacker, one time the safety. It was different things.

I don't think -- we didn't really get a chance to drop back pass and say, can you get home in 3.5 seconds. 50% of sacks happen after four seconds. I don't know if they had a pass that lasted over four seconds.

So it's just the same song, different year of if the ball is going to get out quick, what are your answers and how can we grow those guys. We need growth in that room because there is this big level race. Like all the guys kind of in the same spot and no one has done that, and we need somebody to step up in there.

**Q. I'm assuming you watched the Kentucky-Ball State game. Seemed like Ball State played them pretty tough, especially in the first half. Score didn't tell the whole story. Initial thoughts you have on them and the problems they present?**

KIRBY SMART: Very impressed on both sides of the ball. You're right, 7-3 they're up on Kentucky in the second. I watched the game and I am like, man, these guys are a really good team. We had watched them in the off-season because we wouldn't have but one game on them, and the young quarterback's playing really well. They do a good job mixing it up in terms of bringing the athletic quarterback

in.

They've had some tough injuries, but they have a really good football team.

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