

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: I would start with kind of a congratulations for all the University of Georgia. For the 8th straight year, UGA was ranked in the Top 20 of all public universities in the I think it was U.S. News & World Report, which is pretty remarkable to do that for eight straight years. I think when you look and say how many schools have been able to do that, eight straight years being the Top 20 at public institutions is pretty incredible. That starts with great leadership. I think President Morehead has done an awesome job with that. We sell that in recruiting. Makes me proud, because I am an alumnus. I have my degree from here. So it makes it very worthy to be a University of Georgia grad, and proud of what we've been able to do from an academic standpoint I think is great.

Moving on into our team, Ron informed me that we have the longest injury list we've ever had since being here. So continues to grow, and I think that's a trend across college football. You very rarely hear me talk about our guys being injured or, you know, woe is me. I don't think it's something that you can control. We practice how we practice, and for a couple years we've been really fortunate to not have very many injuries, and I always hear about other teams, and this year it seems to be the theme across. I know Shane had a lot at South Carolina. There was a lot of them in the SEC opponents, but we certainly have more than we've ever had. So that becomes a hurdle. We gotta do a good job overcoming that, and we gotta be very resourceful as coaches in how we use the players we do have.

With that I'll open it up. Obviously UAB. We're moving on to UAB and I'm excited to play these guys. I've known Coach Dilfer for a while. I don't have a personal relationship with him, but I do think a lot of him as a coach, their staff, I know a lot of guys on their staff. Eddie, who was here with us for a long time, does an incredible job, and looking forward to playing those guys this week.

**Q. What have you seen out of UAB on film, if you've got any through their first two, three weeks of the season?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, they got some good football players.

They got really good athletes. I don't think the record indicates that, but they play and you watch them, and I'm like, man, defensively they do some four-down and some three-down. They've got really good backs, got good skill players, athletic quarterback who extends plays. They play really hard. They had a weird situation the other night with ULL, they had rain delay and different things in there, but they got a very talented football team, especially in their conference.

**Q. Speaking of rain, Coach, I think I saw you come out in pregame multiple times to check the weather. Walk me through all the processes and the things you have to consider when weather is an impact.**

KIRBY SMART: You consider which way to kick the ball, whether to take the ball, which way you're going to go, is it going to rain more later than earlier, because it impacts the game. It's not really an advantage for anybody because both teams gotta play in it, but you would rather have possessions not in the rain versus in the rain. And that's just to see the turf, how much of an effect the rain that had fallen had affected the field, but that's it.

**Q. Kirby, what more do you want to see out of Carson as he enters his fourth game as starter? What areas does he need to grow still?**

KIRBY SMART: It's different every game. I think we challenge him with different things. What I've been most proud of is his composure, number one, which I never doubted. He has a great demeanor about him that he handles positive and negative almost the same. As a matter of fact, there was a touchdown Saturday, I saw him celebrate for the first time, and that's really good. Like when you see that emotion, it was one of the touchdowns in the second half that he got a little emotional, excited. I think our guys kind of rally around him when he does that. You know, stepping up in the pocket, there was a couple times that he started losing a little confidence and he started stepping back. He's gotta be willing to step up, like they talk about race car drivers, when the smoke's there, you gotta go right through it. There's a lot of smoke in there sometimes, especially when people pressure you. You gotta be willing to step up and go through it and not

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always out and around it, because you can't always outrun it that way. So but I'm really pleased with the way he's playing, but there's certainly things he can continue to work on.

**Q. Kirby, kind of along that vein, going back and reviewing, can you see any commonalities on the red zone issues, and what would you like to see you guys do better down there going forward?**

KIRBY SMART: It really is both ways. It's red zone defense where we've been remarkable and elite. I think we were one in the country last year, and we had two red zone opportunities that we did not capitalize on defensively, which was really the difference in the first half. I mean at the end of the day, the difference in the first half was red area play both ways. Things we can improve on, you have to be able to run the ball in the red area, and you have to be able to stop the run. We did not -- we let somebody run the ball in on us on defense, which is a no-no at Georgia. And we didn't -- we didn't have positive 1st and 10 plays in the red area on offense, which that gets you in trouble, too, because you usually have four downs down there to go for it, but you can't do that if you're 4th and 10. If you're 4th and 1 or 2 or 3, you can. So we gotta have positive plays both ways to get better. We certainly have to improve in that area.

**Q. Yeah, you touched on injuries off the top there. Two of your offensive tackles, Amarius Mims and Austin Blaske. What's the update on them?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think we're going to get Blaske back today. I don't know if he's 100 percent, but he's going to be able to practice. Mims' ankle sprain was bad. He's going to have to have tight rope surgery, so he'll have surgery on that, similar to what Cash had done, similar to what Lawson Luckie had done. So we don't know how long that'll be, but he'll be back. It's just a matter of how long.

**Q. Kirby, when Aaron Rodgers went down in the NFL, there was a lot of talk about injuries happening on grass versus turf. When you've done your data, when you've had injuries in practice turf versus grass, have you seen any correlation between more injured players on one type of surface or the other and what you're dealing with now affected the artificial turf?**

KIRBY SMART: No. Most of the indicators we have outside of our practices suggest a little more on turf. I think that's what the NFL would probably argue, that more on turf and less on natural grass. We're on natural grass a lot more here than we are on turf. We keep independent studies of where ours happen. Ron and his staff report that, submit it so that you can follow it. We don't have any

indication that ours is more or less on turf than grass. It's actually almost exactly the same. And, ironically, most of ours this year have been in games. So that's where you'd rather your injuries happen in games, if they're going to happen at all. We don't want injuries to happen, but when they've happened in games this year, they've obviously been on grass.

**Q. Kirby, going back to Carson, what specifically did you learn about him in terms of handling adversity, going into the locker room with an 11-point halftime deficit and sort of rallying the offense to come back during the second half?**

KIRBY SMART: He didn't rally the offense to come back. I mean we had a 13- and-11-play drive in the first half that he came out to be three points. You know what I mean? So that's hard to do. If you look at it, like that's really hard. You can't have a 14-play drive and 11-play drive and get three points usually. You usually have turnovers. Right? And we didn't have that in those situations. So it wasn't a matter of -- that could happen, and you're going to get stopped at times. You're going to struggle at times, but we struggled less in the first half than we did against other opponents. So I thought he did a good job keeping his composure, though, and showed his resiliency.

**Q. I know you don't concern yourself too much with outside noise or fans, but in terms of the structure of your oversight of the offense, everybody wants to throw Mike Bobo under the bus anytime anything goes wrong, it seems like. Can you share how you game planned for that complementary football? I know earlier you said first game plan leaned a little bit more on the defense because they were experienced. Is there still some of that going into each game?**

KIRBY SMART: No. I would say the first game when I made that comment, it was more about Carson's first start and trying to protect him some. But the offense that we've played this year is the exact same offense as we've played for the last three years. Look at the plays. Anybody that knows football would tell you that the plays are the same. Our execution in the red area hadn't been great, and hadn't scored as many points. We haven't been as explosive and as dynamic, and some of that has to do with players being out, some of that has to do with executing, but very comfortable with where we are offensively.

**Q. Coach, the 3rd and 16. I believe you guys pressured right there. What went into the decision to pressure, and when you go back and coach it up, what was to be corrected?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, pressure is a good thing, and we

think that pressuring quarterbacks affect them. It, number one, doesn't give them all day to throw the ball. Number two, it's success against how the offense you're playing handles that. So what is their success rate when you pressure. And that's something you look at each game. You don't do anything 100 percent of the time. Right? You do something and you pitch. You throw fastball, curveball, changeup. Boom, you better have three pitches. That just came in the process of pitching, and last time I checked the pressure didn't cause a touchdown. You know what I mean? The three missed tackles and the poor angles probably resulted in the touchdown. So usually when somebody does something well, you probably didn't do something well. They did. They executed well. They hit a good play. But they didn't score because of the pressure. They scored because we missed two tackles.

**Q. Coach, you kind of talked about fixing those first half issues and figuring out the game plan stuff like that, just trying to work on that. You talked at the end of the game. What have the conversations kind of been like with your coordinators to try and relieve those first half issues and get the ball rolling a little bit faster?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I thought really our first half issues revolved around our defense first possession would be the biggest thing. I think you gotta start fast. I think historically, defensively, somebody can do the study, but we usually start pretty fast on defense. The Georgia Tech game I know that was the first possession of a game that we gave up a touchdown, last year. And that happened third game this year on a team that had -- did a good job, came in, got on rhythm. And there's still things we did, like are we talking about this if we tackle him on 3rd and 15? I don't know.

I'm really thinking about UAB, so I'm trying to keep you guys happy and appease you, but I'm very pleased with where things are. I'm not panicking in any kind of way, because South Carolina has a good team, and we're figuring out who we are. We're figuring out who we are with our identity, and I think our coaching staff and players and complete organization are doing a great job. You guys just aren't happy with the results. But I'm very happy with the way our guys fought back and came back and overcame.

**Q. Speaking of UAB going into this week, you're without Amarius Mims. Do you stick with Xavier Truss at right tackle and Dylan at left guard?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know that. I mean it's going to depend on the health of some of the other O linemen, where is Blaske's health, where do we get the best five

from. So a lot of that will play itself out over the next three or four days. But I do think Truss gives us that flexibility, and he did a nice job on the run the other day to be able to go do that.

**Q. Kirby, I wanted to ask you about Carson. Perception is not always reality, but it seems like his first three games, you know, first time he gets the chance to kind of take a shot down field he's successful with it. It's almost like there's a little bit of a kick-start there. Would you agree with that, and what do you think kind of goes into that for him? Is it something that maybe kind of maybe loosens him up a little bit?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't really understand what you're asking, to be honest. You want more shots down field? There's shots on a lot of plays that the look is not there. If it's middle field closed, you don't just take a shot. The quarterback has a read. If they're in quarters and the safety is deep, you don't just take a shot. Right. But what he's really good at is one of the best I've been around at seeing the coverage, knowing what it is and then knowing where to go with the ball.

We did have a little more pressure the other day than we're used to, and he did a nice job adjusting to that. They got hurt pressuring the play to Rara later in the game was pressure, and he hit the right guy on the right look. I don't know if that answers your question or not, because I don't know perception, and I really don't know your reality or anybody's reality, because I don't judge other people's perception. I only look at what happens in a game and what happens in practice, and I feel very good that Carson is doing a good job.

**Q. Are you prepared to travel next month after a comfortable four weeks at Sanford? And looking further down the line, with teams like Tennessee and Ole Miss, how is the team strengthening its game to get ready for those matchups?**

KIRBY SMART: I ain't even thought about Tennessee and Ole Miss, and I ain't thought about traveling. It hasn't even crossed my mind. So I'll respect the question as best I can, that I'm worried about UAB and figuring out how we can be more resourceful with the players we got that are healthy.

**Q. You talked about still learning this team's identity. How much did you learn from this past weekend as you move forward now?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I learned more than I did the other two games, I can assure you of that, because the quality of

opponent went up, and we responded to some adverse situations. You learn more about the truth, too. The truth is what you've done is who you are, and that's right now who we are is a 3 and 0 team that has played three imperfect games, and I'm still looking for the first perfect one.

**Q. Hey, Kirby. When you have a kicker who has a couple misses, as a coach how do you handle that? Do you talk to him? Do you encourage him? I know kicking can be so mental.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, you definitely talk to him. You try to find out the whys and how they're feeling, what's going on emotionally, especially when it's a freshmen. And you try to talk to him, and we've got guys on our team that he's close to. We've got guys that work with the kickers within our organization that do a good job, and you just try to get information, and you try to help them every way you can. The first thing that'll help him is scoring touchdowns, because extra points are easier than field goals.

**Q. What are your initial thoughts on Trent Dilfer's style of offense that he's coaching up in their quarterback, Zeno?**

KIRBY SMART: Really impressed. I mean his offensive coordinator, Alex Mortensen, was at Alabama forever, Chris Mortensen's son. He was at Alabama and behind all the offenses, worked with Bill O'Brien, worked with Sark, was there when I was there. I have a lot of respect for Alex. He waited his turn, and he got an opportunity to go be the coordinator there. So I see a lot of flavor in his offense of a lot of the offenses that have been there at Alabama, and I'm sure Trent imparts his knowledge on that as well.

**Q. Kirby, back to injuries, any update on Kendall and his situation? And it looked like Roderick Robinson also came off a little bit banged up?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. Roderick got a high ankle sprain. We'll find out how he is today. Kendall had an MCL that he's had before. He had one last year, but I don't know how significant it is, and find out where he is today as well.

**Q. Did you ever cross paths with Trent in any travels, any relationship with him at all, and any of your kids ever gone to one of his coaching camps back in the day?**

KIRBY SMART: No. I've only had conversations with Trent about quarterbacks that he trained during the recruiting process. You know, you might call and say, hey, what do you think of this kid, what do you think of this kid;

how was he out there at this camp, that kind of thing. But I've never -- I've talked to him on the phone, but I've never had a personal relationship with him.

**Q. Continuing on the theme of injuries, can you update us on Javon, McConkey and Spurlin?**

KIRBY SMART: Yep. Javon is day to day. Like I said after the game, I thought he might be close. Maybe closer this week. I think with the recovery he would be closer to being able to go, but I don't know. McConkey is more than likely out this week. We're resting him, trying to get him back, and we don't have a timeline on him because it's a very unique injury. So it's, you know, like everything else you say, well, what was the last high ankle sprain, what was the last MCL, what was the last shoulder. But it's different. So we don't have something to measure that by. And then the other one you asked about was Pearce. Don't know when we'll get Pearce back.

**Q. Kirby, I saw you were talking about how there would be a lot of these close games, and we have seen that this year in college football. Do you think the more liberal transfer rules have led to more parity? Do you think that's kind of what we're seeing right now?**

KIRBY SMART: No clue. I mean that's good speculation. I could see that. I try not to theorize those things. I don't know. I really just try to look at our team and say where are we relative to where we need to be. I can't even keep up with all the other games out there and how much, you know, parity there may be or may not be. It's still not what the NFL is. I mean the NFL is built to have parity, and maybe that's good for the college game that there is more parity, if in fact there is. But I don't have an explanation for why it is. I really don't.

**Q. Yeah. Rara Thomas had a big catch to start that second half on Saturday. How have you seen him continue to integrate himself in the offense, especially coming over as a transfer?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. He had his best practices last week. Thought he did a really good job in the practices leading up to the game. He is getting more and more confidence. Again, he was like a true freshman in terms of vocabulary of the offense, and that has gotten better. With every week he's getting so much more confident with every week, and thank goodness he is, because we need him. We need him to keep coming and need him to keep coming along.

**Q. Coach, you talked earlier about being pretty happy with where the offense is at and pretty happy with where Carson is at right now. So not to speak about**

**any other team specifically, but it's not always easy for some of these programs to move on from quarterbacks they've had for a while, and the transition hasn't been so smooth. So what do you think that you guys have done here to make that transition a lot smoother than maybe other programs may have experienced?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think retention is important. I want to clarify, I'm very -- Carson has done a good job. Again, I don't know what you guys write, read or hear, because you listen to a lot more of it than I do. I don't know. Like I go by his week of practice, his preparation, and his execution. And I'm very pleased with that. I mean he makes good decisions with the ball. Well, that happened the last two years when nobody was asking about him. Like nobody was asking about Carson Beck. Nobody asked about Carson Beck for two years, but he was out there doing the same thing he's doing now. He was getting better, And that allowed for a smooth transition. Like the fact that he was hearing the exact same plays, exact same calls -- and everybody thinks it's some kind of different offense. It's the exact same. It's not different. The results have not been the same. That's a statistical proof. But he's transitioned well because of the fact he's in the offense that he's been in. And his strengths are different than Stetson's. I mean the one thing he's really good at, he was a great baseball player. This guy catches the ball and gets it out of his hand and is very accurate. That's baseball. That's boom, boom, boom. He can do that. You know, he does that well, and been very pleased with what he's done, and we gotta get better results, that's for sure. But I'm certainly pleased with what both of them have done.

**Q. With Pearce and Lawson both out, how does that influence, if at all, your ability to go 12 personnel or just get the reps that you want from that position group in practice?**

KIRBY SMART: We did it all last week. We went 12 in the game. And we'll always carry 12 personnel.

**Q. You talked about Rara just a second ago, but on Dominic Lovett as well, another transfer coming in. What have you seen from his impact in the receiving game, and then also in those off shoot, in the run game as well?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. Most of his receptions so far have been run game receptions. And then some really critical third downs, he's made plays in the slot. So I've seen his confidence grow. He was probably further along than Rara in terms of learning the offense, understanding the offense, and he came from an offense that was somewhat similar, so he's had an easier transition as far as picking things up.

But he's been a great kid in practice. He's full of energy. He competes. We've tried to implement, tell him, hey, look, man, you gotta go strike people and block people to be an elite player. And he's trying his best to get better at that. But he's done well at the supplementary run plays, the perimeter run plays.

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