

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Head Coach Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: All right, guys. We got a special guest and an announcement for you guys today. It should be a treat. And I can't wait to bring he and his family in. He's coming. We got Coach Richt and his family coming in for a special announcement. And he's going to come in and share with us a great event he's got going.

MARK RICHT: How's everybody today? I want to start with a congratulations to you, Coach, on a great, hard fought victory at Auburn. I know how hard it is to go to Auburn and beat those guys.

And the other thing, I know you've coached 101 now here. 86-15, that's. Better than 85 percent, two national championships. They're putting me in the Hall of Fame here in December, but you're already in. They just haven't announced it yet.

But, anyway, I just wanted to thank everybody for giving me a minute. Oh, and this young lady here is my granddaughter, Jaden. Just step up one bit so they can at least see you one time. Can you look to the right there?

So, anyway, Jaden is up here with me because Jaden has Crohn's disease. And I've got Parkinson's, as we've established a while back. So we want to find a cure for both Parkinson's and Crohn's. So that's why I'm here to announce the Chick-fil-A Dawg Bowl 2023.

So what is that? It's a VIP bowling tournament. It's a fundraiser. So each lane, Coach Smart is going to allow one of his players to be a celebrity bowler on each 1 of the 32 lanes. And it's kind of working like a golf tournament, when you have a foursome joining a celebrity.

That's what we're going to do at the bowling alley, 5 bowlers on a lane. All 32 lanes will be full. And it's be October 18th, the open date right after -- the Wednesday after Vanderbilt. It'll be around 6:30 at Show Time Bowling Alley. And it's a private event, only for the players and the sponsors, but on DawgNation. We're going to stream the thing live so the fan base can see it.

But I got to show you first everybody -- what everybody's fighting for. This -- if you remember the water girl, this is Katherine, my wife. Honey, you got it upside down.

All right. This thing says -- there's going to be five of these things, because there's five participants. Dawg Bowl 2023, to be the best, you got to beat the best. So that's what everybody's going to be fighting for at the event that night. Thank you, Honey.

KIRBY SMART: Do my players get any of those?

MARK RICHT: Yeah, a player gets one of them. Back in my day -- if they win, they're one of them. The five teammates all get one of those belts, including one of your players. Back in my day, they would have got thrown in NCAA jail for that.

KIRBY SMART: Very true.

MARK RICHT: Believe me, they would have had a two-game suspension for being honest and fessing up to it. So anyway.

KIRBY SMART: Very true.

MARK RICHT: If I had to go back and do that again, it would be lying to nine. Prove it. Prove it two years after your eligibility's up. Anyway, sorry about that. I didn't mean to digress.

Let's see. So far, we've already had over a half of a million dollars placed to the event. And we're -- so we're shooting -- we're going to shoot for at least 750 in total, maybe a million if it goes crazy. But what I want to do is talk a little bit about the goal. We're going to set the goal at 750. So there's going to be a giving link, okay, and I'm going to give you that here in just a second.

But in realtime, it'll show donations going in. But I want the Bulldog Nation to show in and get to 750, maybe a million. Who knows. But the good thing is this: All donations are tax deductible. They're all going to the University of Georgia Isakson Center for Neurological Disease research. So the Johnny Isakson chair that's been established at



Georgia, that's where the research is going to be done, right here on our campus. So I think the Bulldog fans will be excited about that.

And Dr. -- if you say it with conviction, it's true. He's been hired -- he's a world-renowned in neurological research. And so, he's going to be the guy heading that thing up, him and his wife.

So anyway, the giving link, if you don't mind, everybody, just -- it's R-i-c-h-t with an "S" -- not an apostrophe. But richtsdawgbowl.com. So r-i-c-h-t-sdawgbowl.com. And so, that's a giving link that if anybody makes a little story about this, you could maybe put it on your -- in your story to get the fan base.

And then Coach Smart has been nice enough to shoot out some social media posts. I'll be shooting out some social media posts to try to help generate interests in the giving. But -- so everybody re-tweet or whatever, re-X, I don't know what's -- re-Instagram it or whatever you do. But, anyway, Coach --

KIRBY SMART: We're going to get to the millions.

MARK RICHT: But, Coach, thank you for the opportunity.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you.

MARK RICHT: God bless and good luck the rest of the way.

KIRBY SMART: Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Katherine. Good job, Jaden.

What a grade cause. It means a lot to me when Coach Richt asked and reached out about doing that, we've been all on board. Obviously, letting our players participate. My grandfather had Parkinson's and I can remember as a child him going through that experience. So it's touched everybody's lives in some way, shape, or form. So anything we can do to give back to that.

It's during our offweek, so we're going to fill up that bowling alley with everybody we can. And the people that can't come, you can tune into DawgNation. And you can also give. So that's an opportunity to give back to a greater cause. So I certainly appreciate Coach Richt taking the time to do that.

With that, I also want to mention this week's game against Kentucky. Which is, obviously, a huge game at night. The team is going to be wearing the green decals, calling the attention to mental health week, which is going on this week. And we're in partnership with Hilinski's Hope. And

student-athlete mental health has become a huge issue and we deal with it day in and day out with our players.

And certainly think it's more prevalent now than it's ever been before. So we'll acknowledge that with those decals. They'll be part of the uniform Saturday night.

So with that: I'm going to open it up to questions. Looking forward to playing a really physical Stoops team. Every time we play these guys, they're physical. When Coach Richt was here, it was physical. Kentucky-Georgia is just a physical, physical football game. Because they brand their football behind that and so do we. So I got a lot of respect for Coach Stoops and the program he's built and the job they've done.

**Q. Coach, I think you mentioned it after the game. But just to have zero presnap penalties on the road and in an environment like that, apart from just pumping crowd noise during the week, what all goes into having success like that on the road?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, composure is a big part of it. I thought we would have some. And we simulated having some. And getting back upped and not letting it spiral. So I thought Coach Bobo and his offensive staff did an incredible job.

You take a quarterback who's never played on the road and start at Auburn and not have procedural penalties, you had good organization, good substitution patterns, you had good snap count variation, changing tempos. I thought they did a good job managing that. But that's not the issue now. I'm worried about Kentucky now. And they got a really good defense.

**Q. Kirby, over here to your left. About their offense: What did Davis do when you saw 280 yards and two touchdowns? How much of that was him and how much of that was his offensive line?**

KIRBY SMART: It's both. I mean, he's an exceptional back. As good a back I've seen in a long time. This guy's smooth, explosive. He pass protects really well. He protects the ball. He's aggressive in the way he runs. It reminds me of Swift. He's just a little bigger. But he has a lot of the same cuts. One-cut runner.

And they do a tremendous job, now, blocking for him. So it's not all him. I mean, he has a run game -- I mean, it seems like Kentucky's always had a back, right? They had Benny or whatever -- and he was unbelievable. And then they had a kid from Georgia the last couple of years. Their backs run really physical but they are committed to running the ball. And they do a great job at the point of attack.

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**Q. With that Kentucky defense, what stands out the most about how they attack and how they've been successful so far this year?**

KIRBY SMART: The variation they run. The defense they run is very unique. You don't play a lot of teams just like them. They have a lot of overhangs, what I call depth in the defense. They have people at the second level all over the place.

So there's not a lot of free yards out there. They make you earn everything you get. They're massive upfront. They have big people. They play three-four and four-three. And the teams that play odd front, as they call it, they do a really good job of stopping the run game. These guys are really good at stopping the run, they're really physical and they have a good scheme. It's not easy to mimic.

**Q. You referenced Carson starting his first SEC road game. There was always going to be an unknown factor about him until you got to the season. What have you learned about him that maybe you didn't know before?**

KIRBY SMART: You know, most quarterbacks that start for the first time, you maybe don't know enough. I feel like I had this relationship and I knew Carson. I don't feel like I've learned a lot because I knew a lot. He had been in the system.

Like, he had played -- not played in that environment, I'm not trying to change the experience. But I had been around the kid, he had been in the program, he had been in the offense. I've seen him have good days on third down against our defense, have bad days. I've seen him make good decisions with the ball. He was really efficient.

I guess the only thing that I've learned is that he does have natural composure. I already thought that because that's the way he practices. But he doesn't get flustered very easily.

**Q. Kirby, how would you describe your team's offensive identity and how much has that been affected by the running backs availability week to week?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, the offensive identity is do what it takes. That's essentially what it always comes down to, right? You'd love to have this defined, that we're going to bully you and run it through you. Nobody really does that. I don't know anybody that just does it.

Now, Kentucky did it last week against Florida, but they

haven't done it every single game. They've done it different ways. I don't think any team has -- if you have one identity, then that's probably what they're going to try to stop. I think that Kentucky's balanced.

When you look at the explosives in our league, they're probably, like, the only team that has -- I think they had the exact same number of explosive runs as they had explosive passes. So they have this balance.

Going back to us: I think our identity has been we've been up and down in the red area, we've been pretty dang good on third down. We got a lot of things that we can work on. But as far as whether it's about the backs or not, we don't cry over what we don't have. You figure out what you got and you figure out what you got -- what they can do. So I'm not going to sit up here and complain about -- with the help or safety or how many backs we've got. That's not -- we worry about what we do have and not what we don't.

**Q. Kirby, on the run defense, I know that QB run was so much of what Auburn was effective at, so it may not be applicable this week or in some weeks. How much of a concern is it, what they were able to do on the edges and how much do you all need to work to get better at that?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, we all need to do a better job. I actually felt better after I went and watched the tape. I think I was riding on the bus in a state of depression about our ability to stop the run. And you sometimes, as a coach -- and my dad always said it, It's never as good as it seems and it's never as bad as it seems.

So when I got up and actually watched it, we struck blockers and played the run well at times. We didn't fit some plays well that they did. And give them credit. And we probably didn't work some of those plays enough out of the formations they did it. They did a nice job scheming that up. So we got to do a better job of that, make no mistake about it. But we have good run defenders.

**Q. Coach, I've heard you allude to Carson being extremely calm. And did that carry over at all to the rest of the team? Did you feel a sense of calm on the road this week?**

KIRBY SMART: I did feel a sense of calm. But I don't know if it came from him. I mean, it came from the game plan. The game plan, when you go into a place like that, like Coach Richt mentioned, it's not easy there. Nobody understands that. I can't explain it. I've been there at LSU, Alabama, been there as a player, been there as assistant coach, it's hard. It's just hard on the road in the SEC. And it was hard Saturday. And the composure remained

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throughout the team and that was part of the game plan.

**Q. Kirby, early in camp, you let us all know that you hadn't -- the -- defensive front-wise you didn't have as many disrupters as you've had in the past. How is that coming along? And then also, how good a bowler are you?**

KIRBY SMART: Oh, man, let me answer that first. I don't have to put the little things on, the guardrails. If he puts those on, I'm taking that belt home. I can assure you that. But I don't get to do those. My son, Andrew, always wants to put those up because it just provides an easy way to success. But I'll probably practice up some before it, when I got some free time so I don't embarrass myself.

**Q. In the one hundreds or...**

KIRBY SMART: What's that?

**Q. Can you get in the hundreds?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know what the hundreds is. But I know Coach Richt can bowl because I've heard stories of scores. You know what's funny, our players started going bowling when Nick and Sony and those guys were there. They would have a bowling group that played and did it all the time. Our players liked to go on recruiting events. And as the players come back to letterman's event, they like bowling over golf. So more and more people enjoy it. So I know they'll be excited about it.

As far as the defensive line part, I never felt like we had -- we had a lot of the same defensive linemen this year that we had last year, outside of Jalen, who really didn't play most of the year. So we got plenty of D-linemen good enough to do things and execute. Just don't have disruptive people. So you got to find other ways to do things defensively to try to get people negative plays.

**Q. You got Ladd and Kendall back on Saturday. But from a health standpoint, how much are you still monitoring them and working their way back up to 100 percent?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, just that. I mean, we're really trying to get them in shape now. Because we feel like they're healthy. It's a matter of, Okay, can they get in shape without wearing down their legs?

You don't really get in shape in season. You're in shape or you're not. And those guys haven't had a chance to have the stamina in practice. So we try and do it in other ways, nonweight-bearing, underwater running. You do all things you can do. But we're trying to get them healthy and to the

game and maybe get them some more snaps.

**Q. Kirby, I asked Tate earlier. When you look at the Kentucky defensive line, you see big No. 0. You kind of get Jordan Davis vibes when you look at him.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, extremely athletic for a large man. They do more with him than we probably did with Jordan. They don't play him at the zero nose. They move him out to the five technique. They dropped him against Florida on the interception play. It's amazing, you'll see a human being at 6'6, 350 dropping. And they mix it up with the guy. He's a talented player. We recruited him here. He's gotten better. He's kind of a wrecking ball in there. You know, he knocks people back.

**Q. Kirby, when we talked to Tate a few minutes ago, he frustrated with the run blocking, for himself and really the whole offensive line. What are you seeing with the run blocking and the ways they need to improve going forward?**

KIRBY SMART: You got to help him. You got to help them in a lot of ways. There's nobody -- you can't tell me an offensive line right now that you say, Oh, man. They're just moving people and they're mashing people. Defensively linemen have leverage. They strike out of their hips, they come out.

You got to find ways to get double teams. You got to find ways to run it on the perimeter. Running the ball in the SEC is the hardest thing to do. And Kentucky just did an unbelievable job of doing it. But outside of that performance, it's just not easy.

And I can't pinpoint one thing that we can do better. But there's a lot of things that we got to do better. And that's not just an offensive line job. You know, there's perimeter blocks, there's tight-ends blocks, there's getting in the right run play and there's the running back reads where they got to do the right thing too. It's shared responsibility, starting with me.

**Q. Realize, Coach, this is a little bit of a sensitive subject. Ray Davis comes out of the transfer portal. You guys knew you were a little bit light in the running back. Did you guys ever have a discussion about Ray Davis or any other backs because of your situation at running back this year?**

KIRBY SMART: Not really. I don't remember anything on Ray. Somebody said something to me about they might have expressed interest. I never knew that. I never talked to Ray. I never had any conversation with him. And to be honest with you, we were in a situation where we had

some backs coming back. We felt really good about Branson, Daijun and the guys we had coming back.

I mean, you're always looking for a better player. But we weren't actively pursuing anyone. And like I told you before: Most of these kids, when they go in the portal, they probably have an idea where they're going.

**Q. Going back to the film from Saturday when you were looking at it on the bus, you see things you like, things you don't. Give me your evaluation of your guard play from this past Saturday.**

KIRBY SMART: Depends on what front they were in, right? I mean, they had different fronts. I mean, you have a covered guard and you have an uncovered guard. We had some mistakes in there on a couple pass pros. We had some good plays. I mean, Auburn's defensive line played extremely hard, like every one of them will. They played with really good pad level and leverage and didn't give up movement. Which every one of them will. So I think across the board, offensive line and our defensive line both have to play better. And that's, essentially, my assessment.

**Q. Kirby, you talked about the exceptional job Carson did. First start on the road. Talk a little bit about Peyton and those massive kicks he made and sort of what the last month has been like for him and to come up big like that.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, a lot of confidence in Peyton. I think he is wired the right way. He was a basketball player. He pitched. I mean, when you have these kids that did multiple sports and they've had pressure on them in multiple environments. I'm a big believer in having to sit on that mound and throw strikes. I've been out there. I know how hard it is to do that. And kicking in front of 93,000 people, and that's not easy.

And he's a true freshman. He did a good job going through his process, breathing, handling things well. I told him, he's got ten people out there with him and another 74 in the locker room that love him, regardless whether he makes it or not. It's unconditional love. And he has to know that and be able to relax and kick. And I was very proud of him, the way he handled it.

**Q. What does it look like for Roderick Robinson to get back on Saturday?**

KIRBY SMART: He's still dealing with an ankle surgery, so we'll see how he goes this week.

**Q. Smael was named SEC defensive player of the**

**week. Where has he grown the most?**

KIRBY SMART: Probably in his leadership. He's been an incredible athlete. And he came in as a really good space player. He's gotten tougher. He's grown as a blitzer. And he's a quality leader. He's not afraid to confront guys when they're not doing things right. Which, you know, you learn to appreciate as you coach longer, the guys that hold people to a standard so I don't have to.

**Q. Yeah, just having watched the tape, how would you assess how your inside linebacker played as a group and maybe not having a true disrupter role in the defensive line impacts that position this year?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't think the defensive line impacts the inside linebacker position by not having a disrupter. Because if you have people that strike blocks and occupy blocks, then it frees the linebackers up. Sometimes a disrupter's worse for an inside linebacker because the offensive line's free.

It's hot and cold. We've played good for a while. We've had a few mental busts. We miskeyed a few things they did that they did a nice job of QB run misdirection. I mean, that's what people do now in football. They pull a guy here, take a guy here and you got to figure out which way the guy's going. We did that well some and didn't do that well some. So we got to do a better job.

**Q. Kirby, concerning Ladd: How did he come out of the game Saturday? How did he feel after? And is that a situation with that injury -- I know he was fine and then he wasn't, then he couldn't go. Is that one of those things you hold your breath week to week, you know, for him to, you know, just hope it doesn't crop back up or do you guys feel like you have it under control a little bit now?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, no clue. We don't know if it's going to come back. I don't know. I just know the medical advice we got was to shut him down. We did that. He feels like he's recovered. He feels good. He had to progress last week to the point of full speed. Didn't bother him. So I was pleased with that part of it. He wants to be out there. The biggest thing for him now is the conditioning level and all.

**Q. You took Lawson Luckie Pearce Spurlin on the road with you. Could they have played?**

KIRBY SMART: Could they have played? Yeah, they could have played.

**Q. What happened?**



KIRBY SMART: Well, if they're better than Oscar and Brock -- I mean, I don't know what you want us to do. Ya'll want to take Brock Bowers out and put one of them in? Anyone voting on that? I mean, if you vote that, you're not a coach.

But, yeah, they're cleared. They're not where they need to be physically and mentally to play SEC play. They're trying to get there. But, I mean, guys, this is a grown man sport. To put a true freshman out there just because you guys had him as a four or five star=starter, that doesn't mean his ready.

I mean, it's physical out there and it's grown man football when you watch what's going on out there. And those guys, they're getting better, they're getting closer. But, you know, you don't -- how many freshmen did we play the other day? I don't know. A kicker, a linebacker. I can't think of many others.

**Q. Kirby, the end of the first half, can you elaborate on that first third and one and fourth and one? I think they were lined up in pistol in both of those. Did you anticipate that? And can you talk about the plays that your guys made? I mean, a lot's been made about the yards rushed for. But that run defense stop there seemed pretty pivotal at that moment.**

KIRBY SMART: It was a big moment. We do an intensive study on short goal line plays. I think they're deciding games more often because teams are going for it more often. And what I learned, I watched a reel every week that is every third and one in the SEC, and every fourth and one in the SEC. It is hard to get a yard.

You guys all think you got to be 100 percent. Go watch that reel. Go watch that reel and see how hard it is to get a yard. You know, talk about the guards, talk about the offensive line not getting pushed. Go watch every team in our league on third and one and fourth and one. It is hard to get a yard.

Because people are defending those down and distances different than they ever have. I mean, they're just treating them different. So I was proud of our defense for stopping those. It probably had to do with a little bit of us, a little to do with them.

They didn't get a great front they wanted. They had a little bit of trouble with the exchange on one of those. And Chaz got some knock-back and we cleaned it up well. But I don't want to be in third and one and fourth and one, to be honest with you.

**Q. We, obviously, know how Bowers is with the ball in**

**his hands. But I feel like every week I see him 12 yards down field burying somebody. Can you just talk about how good of a blocker he's become throughout his career?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, most underrated part of his game. Just turn off the catches and go watch this dude block. Because he tries to -- he tries to put them in the ground. He has an extreme amount of power in his core, in his -- and he centers. He gets his feet on people and runs his feet and he's a really powerful weapon as a blocker, too.

**Q. You talked about being physically and mentally prepared with the tight-end group. Oscar Delp makes a big mistake. How important was his composure and his bounce back from that moment?**

KIRBY SMART: I mean, it's everything. Like I said, it's not Oscar's fumble, it's our team. And our team went over there with 74 men on a mission. And we weren't going to be there for each other no matter what happened. And we weren't going to win the game without Oscar the rest of the way. So we got to protect the ball to get where we want to go. But we got to love each other regardless.

I want to thank, again, Coach Richt and Ms. Katherine for being here and they've done for the Athens the community and what they're doing with this event. Should make a lot of people proud of UGA and what it stands for. So thanks again and Go Dawgs.

