

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

Monday, October 9, 2023

Athens, Georgia, USA

Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Thanks, Claude. For us, onto Vandy yesterday and got a start on these guys in terms of watching games and Clark Lea's team, got a lot of respect for Clark. He's been a good friend for a while, but really become a closer friend since being in our league. He's a very intellectual guy. He ran our meetings. He was the head of our meetings for the SEC meetings, and thought he did a tremendous job of leading the discussion about issues and things we come across in our conference. But he does a tremendous job. He's gotten more energy and had some big wins since arriving there. I know he's an alumnus, which takes a lot of pride in being from the school, as I know myself. And we're preparing to go up and play these guys in an early kick in Nashville, and we gotta prepare our guys the right way. So we'll start on that today.

Q. Coach, halfway through the season your quarterback is fourth in passing, you're averaging 40 points per game. I'm just curious, has the transition from Coach Monken and Stetson to Bobo and Beck been as smooth as even you thought it would be this off season?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. I made a quick decision there because I was really confident, and we had the luxury of having a quarterback coming back that really wasn't your typical first-time starter. When you have a guy that's been in the system as long as he has, I felt comfortable that he knew the system. I wanted to keep the system the same, and those guys have transitioned well together.

Q. You talked about being pretty good friends with Clark Lea. Sympathy and empathy is not big in football, but can you process what the challenges, the unique challenges a place like Vanderbilt has, but at the end of the day, they draw the same check as everybody else does in the SEC shares. So can you just talk a little bit about that dynamic, the uphill climb that program looks at every year?

KIRBY SMART: I don't think I can because I don't know. I don't know his issues and problems. I think we all have our

distinct institutional things that we deal with, and everybody's is different, whether it's geographically, academically, you know, financially. I mean, everybody's situation is completely different. So I can't draw a comparison to his, and he's not one to sit around and complain and cry about it. He's from there. He's proud of it. They've done a tremendous job.

I think he has the right approach. He knows the area. He knows that state. He knows the institution, which institutional knowledge is powerful information. So it's hard for me to draw a comparison. I have a lot of respect for him, and as you know, one of our coach's sons is committed there. So I know that Will has a lot of respect for their program and what Clark's done, and he went on an official visit there. So has a lot of respect for what they're doing.

Q. Kirby, Carson has three straight 300-yard passing games. What does he bring to the position that makes him well suited to operate this offense at a high level?

KIRBY SMART: Great mental processing. He's a great processor. I mean Carson is very intelligent, guys. You can say what you want about the quarterback position. You have to process information rapidly, and the more information you can handle, the more flexibility your offense has. And the flexibility of an offense is usually tied to what the quarterback can handle, and our quarterback, not only because he's smart, because he's also of age and been in the same system for multiple years, has been able to grow from that. It's very rare in college football or pro football for a quarterback to be in the same system more than three years, and I don't know how many years Carson has been in this system, but I think it's three or four. So it's like he understands it. He knows how to use it, and he's got good weapons around him to help him with it. So his intuition, along with ability, has helped him.

Q. Kirby, I saw this nugget from ESPN that said Carson became just the third quarterback in the last decade to throw four touchdown passes and complete 85 percent of the passes against the blitz. What's the most important thing a quarterback must do in preparing or dealing with a blitz?



KIRBY SMART: Understand his protection and understand his route structure. So Carson does a great job with that because he is very composed. I think, you know, a baseball background, I've learned, gives you the ability to handle pressure, because there's no greater pressure than you have to throw a strike. Nobody can help you throw that strike; no coach, no pitching coach. You gotta stand out there and throw a strike. And that pressure is not the same as a man running in your face, but it is pressure. And he does well under pressure, and he has ten good friends that are on the same page with him. We do a lot of pressure pickup in the off season, walk-throughs, preseason camp. I mean we spend a lot of time on blitz pickup to the point of ad nauseam. So I think that helps him. There's not a lot he hasn't seen, but he does a nice job of executing in those scenarios, and when you have a clean pocket and see him throw, it makes people want to pressure him more, because you don't want to have clean pockets.

Q. Coach, just to continue following up on Carson, you've mentioned his processing ability, I feel like even before the season. How do you go about testing the processing capabilities of a quarterback maybe even outside of practice, and when did you first know that Carson had that elite processing ability?

KIRBY SMART: Oh, he's had it since he's gotten here. I mean he hasn't been where he is, but I mean the guy has a lot of spring scrimmages, fall scrimmages. We scrimmaged three times in the spring, three times in the fall. That's six, times three years. 18. You're going defensive talent for 18 of those games, in my mind, that were really talented, and they're blitzing you, I mean, you get better. And he still has growth he can do and can get better in understanding things and decision making. There's times that he's averaged about two plays a game where he puts us at risk of just get out of a bad play, man. Just throw it away, take a sack, take off running and don't throw it into danger. So he has to continue to grow at that, but the guy's had a lot of practice. He's not your typical second-year sophomore starter.

Q. Kirby, two-part question. First, any clarification on the Miley Cyrus knowledge? Number two, on edge defense, Kentucky did get some. How much of that is just kind of pure edge defense, how much of that is reading misdirection?

KIRBY SMART: You gotta define edge defense for me.

Q. Run.

KIRBY SMART: So run defense on the edge, yeah, I think

you create edges different ways. Like I don't know if you mean like outside run, toss, sweep, or if you're talking about counter and pullers, gap schemes, because they can all end up on the edge, depending on how you play them. So everybody has a defensive philosophy on how they play football, and we don't like balls to run north-south. So if the ball is not running north-south, where is it running? East-west. If it's running east-west, where does it have to get to? The edge. So most of the runs we give up, by design, are on the edge, because we're not going to allow you to go north and south. And if you go north and south on us, we got bigger problems. If we can get it to go sideways, we tend to think that our speed runs it down. And that hasn't always been the case this year. Like we have not done an awesome job at running things down that we may go inside out. Some of that's been by scheme. Some of that's been by protecting the corners. I mean we've had different runs get out for different reasons. But I'm not sitting here concerned about our edges, if that's what you're asking. We can definitely do a better job run fitting things.

Q. To the layperson it looked like Carson Beck had a lot of time to throw. You talk about the blitz pickups. I mean he just looked like he had all day back there. When you went back and looked at the film, you always say it's not as good, it's not as bad. Tell me about how you thought your offensive line performed last week. And then your thoughts on Carson Beck being named a co-SEC offensive player of the week.

KIRBY SMART: Happy for Carson to get that award. I think he'd be the first to tell you it wasn't all him. It was protection, pass catchers catching the ball, route runners changing routes, the level of the routes. Some of the route structure we had in last week was different than previous weeks. So I mean those guys all played a part. He certainly had a big part in that, being able to read the coverage and make the decisions. So pleased for him in regards to that.

The time he had, some of that was protection. Some of that was the way Kentucky plays a defense sometimes where they rush three. They pressured. They brought three, they brought four, they brought five, they brought six. They changed it up, but when they do bring three and four, you're typically going to have time when you have a six-man protection. You should. So he had some time in there to be able to do that. You're not always going to have that week to week. A lot of that comes from, what I said after the game, if you're able to run the ball well, you will get play action shots and have time because there's more buy-in when you're running the play action if you're running the ball well.

Q. Kirby, we've seen Ty Ingram-Dawkins on the sideline and other things with the boot and the scooter. I know you guys are hopeful to get him back, but do you anticipate being able to get him back this year, or how soon do you think that could happen?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. As I talked about before, he's dealing with a foot injury. It's a significant injury. He's had a four-week shutdown. I think we'll be on five. He's going to start doing a little more next week, more being jogging and what I call weight bearing, not necessarily practice. So we have a plan, and we have stages, and he's hit all the markers. So, yeah, we're hopeful to get him back this year, but when that'll be, I don't know. We're going to do what the doctors say.

Q. To follow up on the defense, after the game the other night, you mentioned that after the Auburn game you showed them clips of good run defense. You reminded them they've been really good on third down. As a coach, how do you balance when to press that button and say, hey, you guys are maybe better than some of the things you've showed in games?

KIRBY SMART: You just go on gut feeling. I mean, where are they? How are they practicing? Do they buy into what you're believing or do they buy into what you guys are believing? They have to understand the truth is what's on the tape, and the tape says striking blocks, playing well against the run on certain plays. Not playing well against the run on certain plays, and some of that's by lack of repetition, we didn't practice it. Some of it's didn't play physical to our standard. And if you show that you can do it, we're going to show you that you can do it. And that's what we do. We don't try to like overthink it. We just show them what the truth is.

Q. Coach, we're starting to enter the season where it's going to be cold weather, and it looks like it's going to be in the 40s with rain at Vandy on Saturday. I was wondering what you guys do in practice to help with the centers, long snappers, quarterbacks with the conditions outside?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. We spray water on it, and then we practice in whatever elements we have that we can create. We haven't practiced in much cold, I can promise you that. But we can create some things for indoor, and we can create weather conditions with water and things like that. We have wet-ball practices. We kind of pick them and just say, hey, practice 6, 20, 28, we're going to do this, and if we get a chance to go out in it, we do it, but that's all you can really do.

Q. I want to ask you about two guys on the offensive

line. Sed leaves the game, obviously comes back in. How is he doing? And then obviously how is Amarius Mims progressing in his rehab from ankle surgery?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, Sed's great. He came back in, finished out the game, seems to be fine. Amarius is right where we think he should be. He's got the same protocol that Lawson Luckie's had, Cash has had, James Cook's had. We've had a lot of the tight rope surgery, and he's right on schedule.

Q. Kirby, I think you've got 16 former guys, 11 of them starting at other schools in the FBS ranks with the transferring in, and I know we've talked about that. Is there anything you do conscientiously different in terms of your retention with this being the new state of the college football rule?

KIRBY SMART: I don't really know what you're asking. I don't know what other people do. So I don't know -- I don't know how different what we do is. I mean do we think about it? Yeah. Do we talk to guys? Yeah. I think everybody does, you know. And you have to be smart, and evaluate your players, talk to your players, explain where they are. I think it's really important to have communication back home, have those things. But I don't know how different that is from everybody else because I don't know what everybody else does.

Q. Kirby, Vanderbilt's had some success the last few weeks throwing the football, and Ken Seals has been the quarterback in those moments. What sort of stands out to you about how they have done passing the ball, especially when Ken Seals was the quarterback?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. It stands out they have speed at receiver. They have really good wideouts. I didn't realize -- I was watching all the games yesterday -- how fast they are at wideout. And quarterback's done a great job getting them the ball. They've had some injuries up front and had some guys going in and out of the offensive line. But he buys more time. He's Mobile. He's able to highlight the players they have. They have really good wide receivers, and he buys time to make throws, off-platform throws, scramble throws. He's got a really good arm, and he's a good athlete. So when he extends a play, it brings what the strength of their team is up because it gives them more time to make plays.

Q. I want to follow two little questions. With Amarius, I don't know all that much about tight rope surgery other than what I've googled, right, and with Amarius, it seems like his timeline could possibly look at a comeback around Florida. Is that a goal to try to get

him back after that off week?

KIRBY SMART: No goal. No goal. It's really about where he is. The timeline, if we're lucky, would put him around there, but he may not be the exact same as Lawson. Lawson is a skill position that requires more cutting and things like that. We've ordered a special shoe for Amarius, and plan to use it. We used that with Andrew Thomas and several other kids on the offensive line that have had ankle injuries. But we don't put a timeline on it just for that reason. It could be before. It could be after. It's based on his progression of how he feels when he starts moving around and what he does.

Q. And following up on what Mike said, recently Adonai Mitchell rates as a first-round pick right now in what he's doing. Major Burn has a pick six and he clinches the game against Missouri. On the line of NIL retention, you obviously would like to keep all the players around, but is that part of the reason you lose them, really good players get -- you get out spent for them? You know what I'm saying?

KIRBY SMART: I wouldn't say that.

Q. Is that what we're coming down to now?

KIRBY SMART: I wouldn't say that. I don't talk much about the guys that aren't in our program. I love both those young men to death. They both chose to come here, and neither one really had the options that they wanted coming out, and we saw something in them to bring them here. But they chose to leave. Neither one of those kids were encouraged to leave, but why they left would be up to them, not for me to define or say. I don't think it's about NIL in either of those cases. Do I think it's about NIL in some cases? Absolutely. But I don't think it's about that in those two cases. That would probably be proximity to home in both those two cases. I just concern myself -- I don't think about that. I'm not even worried about that. It may be a story for you guys, but for me, it's about the men that are in that team meeting room right over there that are going to practice today and that are trying to beat Vanderbilt.

Q. Kirby, you don't have a special teams coach per say of your like on-field assistance. I'm curious with Peyton, who seems to have gotten on track, what does it look like in terms of getting him right from a coaching perspective? Who's responsible for helping him?

KIRBY SMART: Well, you don't coach kickers. I don't know if you've noticed that. There's nobody in the country that has somebody that specializes in the actual technical

process of kicking. You know what I mean? I think every team in the country that's got the financial stability, they have good psychological sports management, and they have all the people that can help him psychologically, which is more of it than anything. Mechanically, the kid's been good for a while. They all had their kicking coaches back home, and if they're not kicking good, they might use that kicking coach. But we use sources here that are more sports psychology path than what's wrong with your stroke. So we don't have to have a kicking coach as much as we have to have special teams background people to help coach the coaches.

Q. Kirby, Georgia passing the high school NIL rule last week, what would your advice to parents, kids, high school about the process and kind of the perception versus the reality of the NIL dollars, especially maybe in high school?

KIRBY SMART: I honestly don't know what I would tell them. I mean, it's all over the place. What does your son play, and what you see your son's net worth as may not be what Delta or Coke or Kodak or UPS sees your son's net worth at. So you have to be careful there what you believe and what you hear, because I don't honestly know what the impact will be, because you gotta go to those local communities and say, what are they willing to do with NIL when dollars are tight in a time in America that they may not want to spend money on a high school kid. Now, certainly that's going to happen at some positions, no different than it's going to happen in college football at some positions, but the overall impact, I think we'll have to wait and see what it is.

Q. Coach, to follow up on the kicking, I think I noticed when the ball was on the left hash, the 32-yarder, y'all kind of angled the snap. Had you all done that before? And if so, what went into the decision to kind of take that guy and put him off the left hash?

KIRBY SMART: Well, we have rules that I don't really prefer to divulge, but that has not changed. So there's no change in our kicking rules. Every field goal team in America has a rule they have for whether they're on the hash, they move it, whether they go tackle over, they don't go tackle over. I mean, those are things that you get into geometry about of how your kicker kicks the ball, what's the flight path, how high does it get, where's the block point, how hard do they rush. But we haven't changed ours since we've been here.

Q. Kirby, I heard a podcast with you last summer. You went about 40 minutes talking about changes you've made over the course of your career. I guess when you were talking about humility is one week away.

Obviously Vanderbilt obviously beat Georgia your first year. What would be, would you say, the biggest major change that you've made since your first season, and does that Vanderbilt game ever flash through your mind?

KIRBY SMART: It's so far back now, not really. I've had games in my career that you remember the losses more than the wins. But that one doesn't stick out for me as much as maybe some of the others do. I mean there was a lot of games that year that were really close. We won a lot of really close games, and we lost some really close games. The only common theme was there was a lot of close games. But as far as things I've changed, it's a lot. Too long to sit here and just talk about for five minutes. Thanks.

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