

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Coach Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Start gearing up towards Florida. Did a little work last week in terms of introducing those guys on Thursday, and today we'll get back to work on these guys.

I know our guys will be excited to play in Jacksonville, an incredible stadium and atmosphere. I know our players love playing in the neutral site game. It's just kind of different in terms of start, the fans, the split crowd. It seems to be a momentum-flow type game, because the team that has momentum is really at home for that moment. Then it goes back and forth.

It's been a game of momentum swings. A lot of respect for Billy. Always have liked Billy a lot. He does a really good job as a football coach, as a man, as a person. Worked on staff with him. Admire him and the way he coaches and goes about things. Very detail oriented. No stone left unturned, and they play that way.

Got a lot of respect for the way they play and know a lot of guys on their staff. It'll be a physical game. It always is. I know our kids will be looking forward to it.

And with that I'll open it up.

Q. Coach, I was reading today I think since 2000 Georgia quarterbacks who are facing Florida for the first time in their career are 1-9. What about that matchup makes it difficult for guys going for it the first time?

KIRBY SMART: Couldn't tell you that. Don't know. Didn't know the stat. I think it's all about working and executing within your offense, which is what we'll ask Carson to do, is to play within the offense. He's a quarterback with a lot of experience under his belt, and I know he'll be excited to play in Jacksonville.

Q. Their wide receiver Pearsall has more yards receiving than the next three guys combined. What makes him so effective when he gets the ball? Is it yards after catch? Just explosive in space? What makes him so elite?

KIRBY SMART: I would say he's been available, healthy, and very consistent for them. They've got some other guys that -- when you just look at stats, sometimes can be misleading. They have guys that have missed games so therefore have missed opportunities to get stats.

He's been a very consistent, explosive playmaker. Tough. They move him around a lot. He's not just a sit-there-and-play guy. He's worked the slot. He had done double moves. He's been a vertical guy. He makes a lot of plays.

They have other weapons. Some of those guys have been injured. They lost a kid for a year. Lost couple guys for a couple games. So it's been a myriad of injuries that have led to the stats being that way.

Q. After Florida beat South Carolina, Billy talked about it was evident that the Florida team is growing up. Is that evident to you on what you have seen getting ready for this game, how they have improved as a team over the course of this year?

KIRBY SMART: Yes. They played their best football probably the last two weeks or so. You look at the statistics on their quarterback, he's probably -- I mean, maybe the No. 1 quarterback in the country for two games in terms of the way he has played. You can tell he's got a lot of confidence in their offense and their system. They're able to execute, do a lot of things with him. He handles it well. He makes a lot good run checks for them.

Has done a really nice job of not putting them harm's way in his decision making process. So they're playing at a really high level right now and doing a great job with it.

Q. Wondering what you've seen from Oscar Delp in these ten days of preparation, and has Brock been able to rejoin the team in any capacity so far physically?

KIRBY SMART: Delp has been fine. We are not asking Delp to do anything different than he's normally done, not anybody on the team.



Yeah, Brock has been at walk-throughs. He has been out there with the team, some of this last week, some of it different times.

Q. Are you expecting Roderick Robinson to be available Saturday? I don't know what his recovery is looking like. And Tate Ratledge dealing with an elbow of some sort?

KIRBY SMART: Tate had an elbow coming out of the Vanderbilt game, but he's been fine. He practiced all last week with that elbow.

And rod was able to go a lot of last week as well.

Q. Montgomery VanGorder has been in the program for about three, four years. What's been his impact and his rise as a coach and on the field in connection with the players?

KIRBY SMART: He does a great job. He's a coach's son. Grown up around football his entire life. Was a quarterback. Understands the game. He does a nice job of assisting our offensive staff with weekly things. Coach Bobo puts him in charge of things, he takes those things very serious and he'll be a good coach.

Q. How are things looking for Amarius Mims and Xavier Truss?

KIRBY SMART: Find out a lot more today. They both were able to do some different things last week in the off week and a lot of rehab, a lot of maintenance, a lot of getting back. But until I see them out there today I probably wouldn't be a good judge to be able to tell.

Q. I think couple weeks ago I asked you about Florida defensively. You said they were similar but not the same. When you have a defense that does kind of some stuff that you do, do you ever walk into Coach Bobo's office, this stresses us, or do you ever, I guess, have meetings of the minds?

KIRBY SMART: Well, we do that every week. I mean, there is some merit to watching what teams do defensively. We get to see the teams in our league on defense as we watch offenses, so you overlap some with teams.

You might bring an idea up here or there. A lot of times offensively they look at things through a different lens. They're trying to measure our strengths and their strengths against each other and our weakness and their weaknesses against each other and try to figure that out.

You can get too caught up in the scheme I think a lot of times. This game boils down to physicality, line of scrimmage, a team that can rush the ball, team that tackles well, team that doesn't turn it over, and those don't have to do with schemes.

Q. Hard not to notice the stats Graham Mertz has put up and the ways he's played lately. You counter that with he's been sacked a lot. I think 19 times on that team. What have you seen from Mertz, your comments on his game, and how do you defend this guy? Is it all about pressure?

KIRBY SMART: No, it's never all about pressure. It's about controlling the line of scrimmage, not giving up explosives. Who can not let somebody run the ball and not give up explosives. That's what you're looking for and that's what football has become. Teams are trying to find them. They throw the ball vertically down the field. Billy always has.

A team that runs the ball well, that's what they should do. They have a stable of backs that's as good a backs as we've faced. Eugene Wilson is an elite player. He's missed a couple games and is a weapon in that he breaks lots of tackles. They're creative in their ways of getting him the football.

I think Mertz knows that. He does a great job within Billy's system of knowing when to take the shot, the check down, when to put him in the right play. If you're just in the right play more often, you tend to have more success.

He's done a really good job of that for them.

Q. Obviously a rivalry game. What did you tell the young guys going into their first experience in this game?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, welcome to the SEC. Every game is gonna be a rivalry game in the SEC. They're all tough games. This one is unique because of where it's played. It'll be a new experience for some of our guys.

I think you forget about that after the whistle blows and you kick it off and you get out there and go play.

Q. Quick question on Brock. His work ethic is kind of legendary around here. Everybody always mentions it. How has he attacked his rehab thus far? Is he able to bear any weight yet?

KIRBY SMART: I'm not going to focus on that right now. I think that's all speculation. I'm not getting into the speculation part of it.

Most important thing is our guys and getting prepared for Florida.

Q. You were talking about the line of scrimmage. With your offensive line, how would you sum up the state of that group coming out of the bye week?

KIRBY SMART: I think it's important that we get more depth. We're an injury away from being down this guy, that guy. We're also trying to get guys back. You're always a balance of who you are. We tried really hard last week to work on fundamentals.

At the end of the day, you're not going to trick people in our league. They've seen every play. It's not like a new play is going to win you the game. What's going to win you the game is can you block better than the other team. Can you convert? Can you execute? Can you protect the ball? Can you convert third downs? Can you play well in the red area?

Those are the things we worked on. As an offensive group I'm very proud of the work ethic, the leadership, practices we have. We have an interesting group. We have a group that's played a lot of games and we have a group that has not played a lot of the games. So you have experience there and trying to balance out how you get the older group better without injury and how do you get the younger group more reps at the same time.

Q. Doing something on fourth downs. Coaches are taking more risky decisions these days, probably analytics, probably just a need to score more points. How much of it is that and how much has all that changed your thinking on those fourth down calls?

KIRBY SMART: I think it depends on the flow of the game. Depends on your defense and kicking game. You know, if you're not giving up a lot to take a smaller risk, then you're gaining a chance to score points.

At the end of the day, the ultimate goal is to score more points than the other team. I would say historically, teams have been probably overly conservative. Coaches have been overly conservative. Probably erring towards overly aggressive. I don't know. It's hard to say what's right or wrong. It only comes out right if it works and only comes out wrong if it doesn't.

I don't look at it that way. I just look at it as can you out-execute the other team and stop the other team and what do you think the point totals are going to be.

Q. How did Kendall Milton look last week?

Precautionary about his MCL. And then a couple weeks ago you said you watched every third and short and fourth and short around the SEC and kind of saw what all the teams were doing. What are your takeaways? How often are you converting those? You have a pretty good third down conversion yourself. What are your takeaways from that?

KIRBY SMART: Well, I'm talking about third and one and two and fourth and one and two, which we're not in those all the time. Those come up periodically in games. I think they're important to determine the outcome of games, is your ability to get a yard when you got to have a yard.

It's never been harder in all of college football to gain a yard when you have to gain a yard, because defenses play you differently now than they have in the past. There is no concession of a yard in our league. I just like watching it to see what's out there, what people are doing, how they're doing it.

Kendall was good last week. He pushed through. Did a good job. We'll see where he is today.

Q. This team obviously has won a bunch of games in a row. What do you do to alleviate the stress level heading into big games knowing they're part of a program that's had a lot of success?

KIRBY SMART: Don't think about it a lot. I mean, what consumes me is how we're going to gain a yard, what we're going to do in this situation, what we're going to do at practice. I can't speak for every kid on the team, but the focus is not on the wins and losses of the games.

Like I've said all the time, that's going to come to an end. I've been part of a lot of streaks. That's going to come to an end at some point, and when it does, we'll worry about the next game.

I don't think you can be consumed with that thought process or think that way. You got to think towards what you can do to help your team win.

Q. What's been the biggest point of emphasis that you've been preaching to your guys this week at practice during the bye week?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, focus is about us. That's all it was about last week. It's not about Florida or anybody we play. It's about us. This week it'll be about us again. Just be about us getting ready for Florida.

So last week was a work week, a chance for us to get better, and in some ways refuel to go restart. Refueling



looks different sometimes. It's not all rest and recovery. It's where can you get better and where can you create an advantage for yourself.

Q. With Oscar Delp and him getting a chance to see Brock and how competitive he is and how hard he works in practice, how much do your thing proximity to Brock has helped him in his development regardless of the last ten days or so?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think being around Darnell and Brock last year was a great learning tool for him, because from a side of being a Y and a physical blocker, he got to see Darnell and be and him, and he got to see Brock do the things he's done.

His growth has been good. I don't know that if he didn't have those two he would be where he is, because those two demanded that he do things right in order to get on the field.

He had to earn the right to play. He has earned that by how he's practiced and played.

Q. There was kind of, to us, open competition at that other corner back spot before the season started. Daylen Everette has been there. How would you assess his play through half the season?

KIRBY SMART: He's been good. Done good things. Starting to play with a little more confidence. Got to go out there and make some plays with his back to the ball. Had a couple big stops in games. Good physical tackler. Not afraid of contact.

Continues to work to get better. Julian as well. He's played a considerable amount of minutes. Got a lot of work with Kamari being up and down and having some injuries over there. He's got a lot of work in practice.

So the two of those guys, I look at them as co-starters and continue to improve and get better.

Q. Last seven plus years here has your philosophy of where the game is played changed, and would you be open to maybe a home-home and not a Jacksonville and Mercedes Benz kind of a rotation?

KIRBY SMART: Don't really think about it anymore. We are where we are. That really has not crossed my mind besides the off-season when I get asked about it. A lot more concerned with how we play than where we play.

Q. I think Carson got a UGA offer when James Coley came on as coordinator. Do you remember what as a

staff you looked at at that time?

KIRBY SMART: I don't remember the exact timing of it. I really don't. I would be misspeaking if I did.

I know that what we liked is his leadership. He won a state championship in the toughest classification of Florida in a school in Jacksonville that has not had many teams win that level of competition. Was very impressive what he was able to do there in terms of leadership and being a quarterback at a high level and playing against some really good high school football teams.

To me, that was that. And the demeanor and approach that he has to the game was something that attracted us to him. But in terms of when that went about, I don't really recall.

Q. You mentioned Carson being from Jacksonville. He's obviously pretty notoriously flatline. Have you noticed any difference in him going home this weekend?

KIRBY SMART: Nothing from last week. I thought he was good last week, and he continues to work on the things that are going to give us a chance to win. Him being accurate, him making good decisions, him putting us in right plays. He's a bright kid. Sees a lot of defense in the off-season and walk-throughs here. When you see a lot of defense you've been exposed to a lot of things. That gives him confidence.

He knows it's not all on him. He has people around him to help him.

Q. Earlier in the season Peyton Woodring missed a couple field goals and you stuck with him. All of a sudden he's hitting a lot. What changed?

KIRBY SMART: I don't know. I mean, it's like a hitter, man. You go out there, you can't get a base hit every single time. His mental approach has I think been better. I think creating a thought process of being a kicker. He was a position player in high school, so he never had the thought process of sitting on the sideline and wondering, when am I going to go in, when am I going to kick.

So there is a lot of thoughts that can go through your head at that time. Being a position player he never had those thoughts. These are his first football game of, when am I going out there, one shot, one opportunity, I got to go make the most of it.

I think he's grown more accustomed to having to do that. He has had some help from people here in our

organization, but he has had help from the kickers that kicked outside of our building that kicked here at one time to help him as well.

Q. Obviously few years ago Marcus suffered a pretty bad injury in this game. From that point on, what he has been able to do for you this season, how have you seen him grow, and what he brings to the offense and the team as a whole?

KIRBY SMART: The big thing is the leadership standpoint. When that happened he was a young kid coming on strong in a receiving corps that was very thin, and he helped us tremendously as a freshmen. Confident and good playmaker.

Fast forward to now, he's an emotional leader, toughness leader. Believes in doing things the right way. Sells the culture and value of the organization really well.

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