

University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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Kirby Smart

Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: All right. Moving on to Missouri, Eliah has done a tremendous job with this team. We thought they were really good last year when we went to play them, and that proved to be true, and they've gotten better. Their quarterback is very experienced, which is the number one quality you look for in a quarterback is how many games has he played in, what experience has he had, has he played on the road in our conference. He's done all those things, and he's done them really well. They're using him and his legs and his ability to run really well. He's a competitor. He's fast on tape, and he's playing at a high level, and he's doing it with some weapons offensively.

They're really good, defensively extremely aggressive, one of the best defenses we've played against since we've been here. Even last year they were just dominant, and just love the style of play they have. They're aggressive and get after you, and they're doing the same things this year. So all in all, a very well-coached team. They do a great job. Probably could be very easily be undefeated. That game was back and forth with LSU, and coming off a week off, we'll need to get ourselves prepared for a battle at home.

Q. Coach, obviously Dom Lovett played there last year and had a big impact in that game against you guys. Have you had a discussion at all? Does there even need to be a discussion about? I'm sure he's going to be particularly fired up about this game and his old buddy, Luther Burden?

KIRBY SMART: I think he's fired up for every game. I mean Dom's a great kid. What a quality young man he is. He works really hard. He's busted his butt since he's been here, been very humble and bought into what we've asked him to do in being selfless. He's tried to improve his game as a blocker. That's one of the things he had to work on. But I'm not overly concerned about that. As much as it is a story for you guys, it's not for him. It's the next opponent.

Q. Missouri seems to be recruiting better than they have in years. Can you talk a little bit about going up against them on the recruiting trail? And what do you

remember from the Luther Burden recruitment?

KIRBY SMART: Luther is a great player. I mean, everybody in the country wanted Luther. It wasn't just us. I mean, everybody. And they've got very fertile recruiting ground. They've got some really good players in their state. Eliah does a really good job of taking that circle say in, say, a five-hour radius. Because of where they are geographically, they don't cross with a lot of the SEC schools like maybe we do with each other. So he comes into Georgia -- I think they got six or seven kids on their roster from Georgia, six or seven from Florida, and then they're able to get guys in that five-, six-hour radius, and Eliah has done a great job. You got a great program to sell when you create environments like we played in last year at their place. When you play on national TV and you play the style of play they played, they played really well, on the road against Kentucky. So he's got a product to put out there and sell to kids to come play there.

Q. Because of every other game, except the Missouri game, including LSU, was decided by more than double digits, the resiliency you always talk about, the Missouri game and how it helped you, do you think if at all, obviously against Ohio State, having gone through that, do you credit that the way you were able to bounce back against the Buckeyes, looking back against the Missouri one?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it helped. It helped being down in a game or not playing well maybe because of them playing well and you not playing well, it makes you question yourself. And that was a point in the game -- there's a lot of things they did to help us and a lot things that we did to help them, but at the end of the day, we didn't play very well until the fourth quarter, and a lot of that had to do with them. And give them credit for the way they played. But, yeah, last year's team, retrospect, it helped build the resiliency of that team.

Q. Yeah, Coach, I believe this is probably the third time you guys have prepared to play Brady Cook. How have you seen his game progress over these years?

KIRBY SMART: He's very bright, sharp, athletic, gets the



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ball out in something like 2.3 seconds, 2.2 seconds. I mean, he knows where he's going with the ball. He understands coverages. I mean, it's like all the quarterbacks you play that have experience. They make good decisions. They don't make many mistakes. He maybe broke a record for number of consecutive passes without interception or something. The guy doesn't make very many mistakes, and he's accurate; and he's athletic! So I don't know what else you can ask a quarterback to be than those things.

Q. You've talked about Carson Beck being smart from day one and his poise. So maybe he didn't have as far to go in terms of being a first-time full-time starter, but what have you seen? It looks like he's having confidence to throw into tight windows, maybe throwing more difficult passes when he might have easier options. So I see a lot of confidence. I'm wondering what you're seeing.

KIRBY SMART: He's bright. He understands the game. He's played a lot of snaps. He's more experienced than you give him credit for; a lot of the stuff he had when he got here. He didn't just develop it. I mean, he was a good quarterback. He had great demeanor coming out. He's got all the traits of a guy that can win games with his arm, his mind, and if he has to, his feet. And he's done a good job of doing that, and continuing to improve is the goal.

Q. Kirby, what did you see from Jalon Walker in that game Saturday and just how far along do you feel like he's come over the course of his second year in the program?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. You're starting to see some of the things we see in practice. He has some physical tools and traits that we've seen, and maybe he hasn't gotten to showcase in a game for whatever reason, and he's getting better. He's explosive, twitchy, can bend, has really good pass rush ability. But he also has the luxury of playing inside backer where he can stack off the ball and do things to help our defense be multiple. But you're not going to find a higher quality kid in any organization than Jalon. He is unbelievable in what he stands for and what he represents and how he works. So I was happy for him to have the success he had.

Q. Kirby, what stands out to you about Cody Schrader and just this Mizzou run game?

KIRBY SMART: Toughness. Just incredible toughness. He doesn't get tackled by the first guy. He's another guy that seems like he's been there forever. I feel like I've been seeing this kid playing forever and ever for them, and people bounce off of him when he hits them. He plays on

special teams. He embodies what a football player should be and what a committed-to-his-university football player. I mean, he's had games early in his career where he was the feature back, then he wasn't, then he was, then he wasn't. He stayed the course and extremely physical.

Q. Kirby, is Darris Smith back and available this week? And how is C.J. Allen?

KIRBY SMART: Darris is focusing on academics and working out, conditioning, doing some things, but he's not necessarily with us. And then C.J. is day to day. He felt a tweak in his hamstring, but I think he's going to be fine. Just we'll find out more today.

Q. Kirby, guys have faced some elite receivers over the last few years, Harrison last year, Williams at Alabama and some other guys. But how do you balance trying to stop those guys when those teams also have other guys that can beat you like Missouri also does?

KIRBY SMART: You know, you do the best you can to stop the things they do well. I mean, they are very explosive offensively. They have more than three weapons. People talk about three weapons. They got -- their quarterback's a weapon, and you throw the three receivers in there and then they got a big, physical tight end they use in the run game, and their backs are really good receiving the ball out of the back field, and a very unique run game that's kind of unmatched in the SEC the way they run the ball. They got some different runs that a lot of teams we don't see that type run. So when you add all that in, it's a recipe for being explosive and scoring points, which they've done. They've been very explosive and scored points. When you talk about how you stop them, I mean, you gotta be able to cover them. You gotta be able to rush the passer. You gotta be able to change things up. But they're not easy to stop when you have an accurate quarterback and explosive, athletic wideouts.

Q. Yeah, obviously Luther Burden is not the only one, but what specifically about him makes him such a dynamic weapon for what Missouri does?

KIRBY SMART: Size, speed. I mean, he's -- he looks like a running back. I mean, he's explosive, fast. He's different. They put him in the slot; they move him around. They do a great job using his skill set.

Q. This is kind of right on that alley, but obviously they use him in the slot a lot, Burden. Since Dom left, he seems to have absorbed that role. How do you feel like you guys are doing? A lot of times I guess Ty or your starter ends up on that slot, but it switches

around. How are you guys doing specifically on defending that slot position?

KIRBY SMART: I think it depends on the coverage. We got a lot of variance in our defense in terms of multiple ways to play the slot and do things, and they got multiple ways to move him around. They can make him the slot. They can make him a running back. They can make him the X, the Z. They're very unique in their ability to slide guys to spots. And they don't do it just based on plays. They ask guys to run multiple different routes from different positions. So in term of what they do, they're very varied, and so are we. So it should be a good matchup.

Q. Didn't see Dan on the trip on Saturday. What's his injury and availability for this week?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, he's dealing with a bursa. His knee has a bursa sac in there that's been bothering him. It actually got infected. In the Vanderbilt game, it happened while we were there and didn't find out until the morning. So we didn't get him in the Vanderbilt game the last minute, and then he was unable to go last week. And we're hopeful to get him back this week and give us some extra depth in the secondary. He's supposed to be able to do some stuff today for the first time. But we'll see how he does.

Q. What have they done defensively the last two games? It seems they've tightened things up since the LSU performance.

KIRBY SMART: Well, they're physical. They're fast. They're aggressive. They've played well. I mean, I think they're coming together with what they do. They've had some extra guys come in from last year, but they've got a lot of returning starters. So I don't think anybody's played real well defensively against LSU. So when you say tighten things up, they're all over -- LSU is all over the explosive sheet in terms of number of explosive passes and runs. So they're tough to defend altogether.

Q. Yeah, Coach. I think you mentioned the punt block Saturday after the football game. I went back and watched this morning. It looked like the players might have seen a look and checked it themselves. How much freedom -- are they looking for something specifically? Just speak to, I guess, what happened on that punt block, if you could.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, without getting into the particulars, we don't let our players check things themselves. The quarterback might, but nobody else is checking anything on themselves. If we start doing that, we could get in trouble, because they're not exactly the best decision

makers. But it was more of a recognition of what it was, and it was more of a correction to how we wanted to be aligned. It was not a check per se. It was, hey, you're supposed to be over here type deal.

Q. Kirby, what do you think makes Lad an effective wide receiver?

KIRBY SMART: Explosiveness, quickness. Separation is one of the number one qualities. And we talk about body quicks. You know, a guy can be straight-line fast, but he doesn't separate. Can you come in and out of breaks. And that was the first thing that we saw in Lad when we looked at him was he's quicker than he is fast, but he's fast. So when you're quick and fast is when you're good.

Q. Coach, what is it about Daijun's patience as a runner that kind of makes him stand out?

KIRBY SMART: He's got good offensive line blocking for him. He's got good vision. He's got great experience. I think he knows when to hit it and when to be patient. Some of that's based on the front they're in, the pressure they're in, the amount of space there is. So every back has their style, and I think his fits him well.

Q. I know after the game on Saturday you had said he was close to playing. What does Amarius have to show you at practice this week to get back onto the field for you guys?

KIRBY SMART: He's gotta be healthy enough to play and be the best available player to play. I mean, he's working his butt off. He did extra work Friday, extra work Saturday, extra work yesterday, and he's going out today to continue to work. But at the end of the day, he's gotta be confident to go out and play. And he's much closer to that today than he was last week is all I can tell you.

Q. Your updates on Lad, it's every single day, like it's just kind of like how is he doing today. How did he come out of that game the other night? And how has it been watching him go through everything that he's got to go through to get himself in the best position to play day in and day out?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, it's been frustrating for him. Not for me. But it's frustrating for him, I know, because all he wants to do is have a great year, and he came back to have a great year, and then to have something unexpected happen like that, it's been frustrating for him. But he came out of the game great. We've got a little routine we've done now in terms of what we do Sunday, what do we do Monday, what do we do Tuesday. And now that we've got that routine, it seems to be working, and we keep doing

what we're doing.

Q. I don't know exactly what Missouri was picked preseason, but I don't think they were too high. What are you seeing from Eliah in terms of how he has his program kind of contending for an SEC? What have they done there?

KIRBY SMART: I mean, Eliah will tell you it starts with good players. It starts with quarterback play. You look across the league and say, man, who's playing good in the country; they got good quarterbacks. And they got a good quarterback. When you got a good quarterback, you got a chance. He makes too many decisions throughout the game that if he is not making the right decision, you're not going to be in the game. And they've got a quarterback matched with great skill and a really aggressive, sound, tough defense. I mean, that's a recipe for winning. He's accumulated that talent. Whether through the portal or through high school, he's a talent evaluator and trying to get guys on the team to buy in. I mean, Eliah does a great job, and I have a lot of respect for him.

Q. Now that Ingram-Dawkins is back, what kind of impact can he have for the defensive line the rest of the year?

KIRBY SMART: Well, it's getting him back in the right shape, stamina, all the way back. He hasn't been able to practice very much and didn't do much last week until Thursday. And so he's at a position that he rolls over there with Mykel and Tramel, and hopefully he can take a load off those guys and keep them fresher and give us a little more size.

Q. Coach, you mentioned their run game, the uniqueness of it rather. One of the things also, I believe they cut on the back side. Last year you had a player go down in Jalon Carter due to one of these cuts back side. How do you coach in that this week, and is it something that is unique to them or do you see it across the sport?

KIRBY SMART: No. A lot of people use it. It's not unique to them. They're good at what they do. They have their run style, and the way they coach their guys to do it, they do a good job in the run game. So, again, we prepare for what every team does. It's just a different team this week.

Q. I just wonder, Eliah is known for being pretty outspoken, kind of pretty funny where we are anyway. I just wondered within the coaching community, is he a guy you've gotten to know and enjoy in the same kind of way?

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. Eliah has got his personality. I mean, he'll tell you, I don't think he's -- he doesn't seem to stress and worry about things a lot. He takes it as it comes and enjoys it, and I try to do the same myself when it comes to enjoying the moment. He says it all the time, that you better enjoy it or why did you get in it. And that's what you come to this big league to play, you play in these big games like this one.

Q. Kirby, you only had two penalties Saturday, and both of them were -- I guess you took on purpose, the delay of games. To come out of the Georgia-Florida game with no penalties, you're also the least penalized team in the SEC. Has that been a concentration for you this year?

KIRBY SMART: No. It's kind of like turnovers. We concentrate on that and it doesn't always happen. So it's like you don't control a lot of that circumstances. I do think we're a disciplined football team. We do what we're supposed to do and try not to get excessive things, but, you know, least penalized can be a bad thing; most penalized can be a bad thing. Maybe you should have more penalties means you're stretching the limits of it. We try to do it the right way, and sometimes it comes out that way.

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