

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: Before we jump to Ole Miss, I want to talk about some accolades and some things going on in the athletic department to make sure we get great coverage for our other teams. Basketball is getting ready to start. The women's soccer team, which I got to watch the semifinal match and parts of the final match, won the SEC tournament. So want to congratulate Keidane and his team, his staff. What a tremendous job. He has made a major impact on our soccer program really quickly, and they, hopefully, will be hosting a Friday match here in Athens, which should come out today.

But also I want to encourage everybody to come out for basketball. They've both got home openers this week. I think the women open tonight, 7 p.m., against North Carolina A&T, here at home, and then the men play Friday night at 7 also against Wake Forest. So with the excitement of our game, we should get a great turnout for both of the basketball teams, as well as the women's soccer. So encourage you guys to help promote that and get folks out for that.

Moving to Ole Miss, they've got a really good football team. They've improved. You watch them on tape and you watch the games throughout the year, they've improved with every game. They've played a tremendous schedule, some really tough teams they've played on their schedule. Lane does a great job with his program, with his team. They've got a great staff. They got really good players. He's done an incredible job.

The quarterback is playing at a high level; great backs. I think Pete on defense has brought unbelievable energy, and you see it the way they play and the way they attack the ball. I mean they come after the ball. They lead the SEC in, I'm pretty sure, turnover margin, but I know they have like the fewest fumbles and the most fumbles gotten. They do a great job of that. They attack that, and they really play hard. So we got a hell of a challenge. We got a great atmosphere. We need it to be as great an atmosphere in Sanford Stadium as it's ever been to help take care of our home field advantage that we need to have.

So looking forward to that. Looking forward to the preparation time, and that starts today.

**Q. Coach, I think you mentioned Saturday night having the answers when teams blitz you like they did. I'm curious if you could expound on what some of those answers might be. And then, additionally, continuing to Ole Miss, what have they done to pressure the quarterback so successfully? They're one of the best in the country as well.**

KIRBY SMART: Well, first off, Pete's always been that way. He's an aggressive nature, comes after people. They've got the players to do it. They got really good team speed on defense. They will come after you with different looks, multiple looks and try to confuse the quarterback and the offense. That's what good defenses do. He's been around good defenses his whole career. He does a great job defensively. So I'm sure they'll have a plan. They study what you do and they study what you've seen and given you problems. He'll have forms of that. They do a good job of that.

And then your answers to pressure and blitz is protection can beat pressure if you protect well. And then there's other answers. We all know what they are, you just gotta be able to execute them. And we pressure people with our defense. So they'll come after you, and they've done a good job doing that and being disruptive.

**Q. Kirby, how will you remember this senior class and Xavier saying he might have a little bit of a moist eye when he gives you that final hug at midfield?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I hugged him last year. So it's gotten to be the norm of, you know, guys, especially this COVID class, of guys that have multiple years. It's a little confusing who's a senior anymore. It's hard to go by that. But I'm certainly very appreciative for what all they've contributed because it's not really one class. It's fifth years, fourth years, sometimes third-year, fourth-year red shirts, things like that. It gets confusing who's in a class. But this class has been great. This group of leaders has been very impactful. I think it speaks for itself what they've



been able to accomplish thus far, and they still have goals ahead they want to achieve.

**Q. I wanted to see if there were any further update on Jamon and his injury, and with his expected absence, if you all were anticipating having Xavian Sorey back this week?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. We're expecting to have Sorey back, as well as Raylen, C.J., Smael, Jalon, Terrell. All those guys will be competing for those spots. As far as Pop, still not sure how long it'll be, how long his absence will be. He's going to try to find some innovative ways to get back and be able to play, but won't know the extent of that until a couple more days. But really excited to see those other guys get opportunities. We got other guys that have played, and thank goodness, at linebacker, we use that as a normal rotating position. We have guys that roll in and play. We've averaged playing four guys at that position each and every game.

**Q. Coach, you touched on the atmosphere. I mean fourth night game of the season after having none in Athens last year. How much do you think that contributes to possibly raising the atmosphere and getting the Georgia faithful really fired up for this one?**

KIRBY SMART: I don't know. I don't know that the night game impacts it. I mean, I think the 3:30s have been great. So I think the toughest is the 12:00 kick to get the atmosphere you want. But I don't know that I see a difference between the other two.

**Q. To follow up on the inside linebackers, one, how have you seen C.J. and Raylen kind of progress throughout the year, Raylen coming back from the injury? With young guys at that position, how tough is it for them to learn the communication part, the intangibles that go with playing inside linebacker?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, go back, they both were here midyear. So we do so many walk-throughs and so many practices and so many in between. They're both very intelligent kids. They pick up on things really well. They're both very conscientious. They both played more and more, Raylen more recently, C.J. throughout the whole year; and very pleased with where they are. And they're in a room where they're asked to learn a lot of information and be able to command the defense, and they do a good job of that. I got a lot of confidence in those two guys.

**Q. Coach, can you talk about the attributes of Jaxson Dart and how Lane is able to use him in this Ole Miss offense?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, I think Lane's quarterbacks take on a personality from him, and they have a lot of moxy. They have a lot of talent. They play really hard. They play with reckless abandon for their body. And he runs like a running back. He's taken some hits this year and shown his toughness. So he's not going to shy away from contact and toughness, and he's the extra element of run that gives them a competitive advantage over a lot of teams you play, because they have great backs, but he runs the ball like a back, and he throws the ball really well, too, which that's what makes him really hard to defend when you got a guy that can make all the throws, but can also take off and run, and he's proven the ability to do that.

**Q. Just quick question about Jamon. I guess after the game you had said maybe it was a fractured forearm. Is that exactly what it is?**

KIRBY SMART: I'd rather not speculate, to be honest with you. Just say what we said earlier.

**Q. Coach, ask you about Quinshon for Ole Miss. I mean, you look at his numbers. He's one of the top running backs as far as yards after contact goes. What's going to be the challenge for slowing down that guy?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, thick lowers. I mean, I'll tell you, I've been super impressed. I already knew about Quinshon and how good he was. I saw him last year and how they ran on people. The Bentley kid's incredible, too. They have two really good backs, and Quinshon bears probably more of that load, and he has really thick lowers. He runs through tackles. Extremely patient runner. Like he has an innate ability to navigate what's there and turn it into explosives and positive runs. I mean, he just sets up blockers really well. And really tough, physical runner, and does a great job. So they have two really capable, talented backs.

**Q. Kirby, how is Brock's rehab process going and any possible update on a possible return?**

KIRBY SMART: He's been great. He's done everything we've asked. He ran on Friday, did a good workout. Had Saturday off, obviously. And continues to work and is going to do all he can to try to get back as fast as he can.

**Q. Kirby, you've already faced three of the SEC's top five wide receivers. Now you got Tre Harris coming in, who had a heck of a game. How do you defend against him?**

KIRBY SMART: Hard. You can't -- it's hard to put two people on him because of all the issues we just talked

about before that. So you talk about the backs; you talk about the quarterback. They look for matchups. Lane looks for matchups, and he's looking for every opportunity he can to get a high-percentage matchup in his favor. And it's easier to do when you got big, good wideouts and a quarterback that can get them the ball, and your ability to run the ball does those things. So how do you do it? You do it like you do every week. You do your best to cover them and defend them, and you try to control the run game. It's the package of what they do, everything together, not one thing, that complements each other.

**Q. Kirby, obviously Lane is a guy whose sort of personality and reputation precedes him. Do you think having gone against him all those years in practice and everything else and those battles, is he under-appreciated as kind of like an offensive mind? And can you expound at all kind of on your relationship? Is he part of that famous group text?**

KIRBY SMART: He does a great job. He's extremely intelligent. He doesn't overthink things. He keeps it simple and doesn't think that -- you know, you don't have to overthink things sometimes as a coach. And probably doesn't get enough credit for that, because he wants to beat you with fundamentals. He wants to beat you with his players doing things within their system. It's just -- he does a great job. He looks for matchups. He looks for explosive opportunities. They've been one of the most explosive offenses, run and pass, in really the last ten years of the SEC. They have broken some numbers that are out there. They get lots of snaps because they go with pace, but they do a good job with the snaps they get. So, no, he probably doesn't get enough credit, but it's not like he's trying to be scheme of the week. He does what he does really well, and he knows what they do well, and he also knows what you don't do well, and he's looking for a matchup most of the game.

**Q. Coach, I think we talked about Kamari moving into the slot after the game Saturday, but Tykee mentioned it was a decision you all put in on Monday and that Tykee was even impressed for him to have learned the position from Monday to Saturday, or learned what it required to play. I'm just curious if you could expound further on what it required from Kamari not only to learn that position, but to go out and execute like he did on Saturday.**

KIRBY SMART: Well, if you remember, we talked about he played that position as a freshman, and he played that position in spring practice, and he played that position when we go out and do reps against the offense. It's something that we don't ever veer really far away from. He didn't learn it in three days. He didn't go out there and

never played it. There's concepts you learn when you're in a meeting room that don't revolve around your position. We go do drill circuits all off season to say, this is how you play this. Doesn't matter what position you play, you have to be able to play this. He did those things, and he's very bright; he's very conscientious. He didn't learn to play it within a week. That wouldn't be realistic. He only had to do so many things, and he's done those things in walk-throughs, and he was able to execute them in the game.

**Q. Coach, you touched on Lane, and I know you guys have a very good friendship, as you said prior. But we haven't seen as many tweets from him. I know you guys like to go back and forth a little bit. How much would a win, especially over someone that you're good friends with and maybe have a little bragging rights over, how much would a win mean against someone like Lane and Ole Miss?**

KIRBY SMART: Not any more than it would have last week. I mean, we're not going to build it up to be something it's not. I mean, every win in the SEC is critical. It's critical for them. You know, they're in the hunt. They're in the hunt for the West. They're in the hunt or playoffs. They're in the hunt for all the goals and aspirations they have. So it's not about he and I. It's really about the players and the guys that gotta go out on the field and make plays.

**Q. Kirby, when we talked to Tykee about Kamari playing some of the star, we talked to him earlier today, he was talking about putting the team before himself and just doing what was asked of him. What does that say to you about Tykee having that approach, and not only that, but then he goes out and has seven tackles, very productive in that game against Missouri.**

KIRBY SMART: He's unselfish. He understands his role on the team. He's been a really good special teams player for us. People don't give him enough credit. He's been elite at kickoff return. The job he has is one of the hardest jobs. He's been really good at punt return. He's played on kickoff. He'll play on punt if we ask him to. He plays the nickel star position really well. He does what's asked, and there's -- I think he has an appreciation for his role in what he does because he didn't have that role last year, and you have a greater appreciation when you don't have it, when you get the opportunity to earn it and keep it and do it. And he's appreciated that more this year.

**Q. Kirby, sorry, one more on Pop. You said looking for some innovative ways to get back. Is there any kind of expounding on that?**

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KIRBY SMART: Not really.

**Q. Yeah. With Smael Mondon, what have you seen from him this season and does anything, if at all, change with Jamon being out in terms of him being able to call the defense or being a more vocal leader in that room?**

KIRBY SMART: No. He's already a vocal leader. He does a great job. He calls the defenses when Pop's not in there anyway, and when Pop is in there, they share. So that's not a big concern, to be honest with you. The two freshmen, they don't practice and play like freshmen. They know the calls, and they do a great job. So Smael will do an awesome job of calling the stuff.

**Q. Kirby, how did your -- going back to looking at the tape, how did your offensive line grade out against Missouri? And with Amarius Mims getting closer to coming back, what is the process there? Do you just put him back in and move Truss back or do you let them fight it out? Kind of give us an insight, if you would.**

KIRBY SMART: No. Mimms practiced all last week, did a good job, wasn't quite 100 percent, but he took reps at his right tackle position, did a good job. Truss took reps at right and left tackle, which he continues to do, and probably still the same thing this week. That's not going to change in terms of those reps.

I think Mimms is much closer. He feels really comfortable. He could have probably played Saturday, had we needed him. So I think he's in a good place. I think he's much closer to being able to play like he wants to be able to play and go out there and compete, and looking forward to seeing him do that in practice so we can gain some more information.

**Q. And now the grade-out?**

KIRBY SMART: I mean, what's a grade?

**Q. Where were you at?**

KIRBY SMART: I mean, I'm very happy with the result. They played really hard. Could we play better? Yes, 100 percent. It always goes back to the same thing on the offensive line. You play against different teams, and sometimes you get your butt whooped. There's times we got our butt whooped Saturday, and I think our guys will be the first to admit that. The goal moving forward is to not let that happen again. And there's times that we won and times that we lost. And you want to win them all; and the

expectation, for our team apparently, is that you're going to win every play up front, and that's just not real in the SEC. You're going to face really good defenses and really good people, and you gotta keep chopping wood and keep coming back, and we did that, and we found ways to have success in the run game and ended up having a really nice run -- couple nice runs by Kendall and nice runs by Daijun.

**Q. I got a really hard-hitting question. Lane Kiffin's jog, Juice, is very visible. Do you have any pets, and did you have a dog growing up?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. I had a lot of birddogs growing up and had to go feed them all the time, didn't enjoy that. But that's one of my childhood memories is taking it out there in the cold weather to feed the dogs. We have a dog now, Bess, that my wife loves to death. But we don't bring her around the team. So she doesn't get to hang out with the team like Juice does.

**Q. Kirby, you mentioned earlier about the crowd. I know it's somewhat cliché for every coach to say that, but how strategic, how important is it? And can you tell when it's at a pitch that actually affects the game? I guess the Tennessee game last year is probably the best example.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, the Tennessee game was probably the most impactful game since I've been here. I felt like they impacted the game the most.

Can you tell? I don't know. I feel like our crowd is really good for all our games. I mean, I don't know -- if you separate it in ratings, I don't know where it fits. I definitely think it was very impactful at Tennessee, and I do think that we need that same impact for this game in terms of the way they go about things and how you can affect the game.

**Q. Kirby, do the DBs you have now give you more flexibility than usual in terms of being able to use them based on matchups because of their skill sets or is it typical for what you've had here?**

KIRBY SMART: We may have more depth. I don't know that we have more -- there's no possibilities that we have now that we didn't have before. But I feel good about the DBs we have now. I felt good about the DBs we had before. I don't really know what you're asking. We had a package last week, but that was not something about our DBs. It was more about something they did.

**Q. Kind of going off of that, I know in previous years it's been a little bit tough. You've talked about the cornerback depth. But to have a guy like Julian**

**Humphrey in the rotation and on the depth chart that you can run a package like that where you can have three different cornerbacks on the field, how much does that bring and how much does that add to a defense?**

KIRBY SMART: We got other guys that can play. We got other guys that are on the sideline that can play, too. He gets an opportunity to play because he's earned it in practice, but I have confidence in five or six guys that can go out there and play, because I get to watch them do it every day in practice. I got confidence in some DTs that don't play. I got a lot of confidence in two or three linebackers that are on the scout team that go every day. I got a lot of confidence in a lot of our players that can go out there and play, but you play the players that give you the best opportunity to win. You can't play everybody. You don't get a chance to do that. You can't even rep and prepare everybody. So we're constantly developing all our players so they have an opportunity when they get in the game to go out there and have success. Thanks.

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