

# University of Georgia Football Media Conference

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## Kirby Smart

### Press Conference



KIRBY SMART: We got to get started a little bit yesterday on Alabama and knocked some -- putting to bed the last game out of the way and get a little bit of a head start on these guys for today. So we'll begin with them. And open it up for any questions.

**Q. Coach, I'm curious if you could explain the difference between -- or maybe the dichotomy or difference between a quarterback who might be a great scrambler, a guy who can extend with his legs versus an offense that incorporates a quarterback-designed run, what the difference might be between the two and where Milroe might land in this Alabama offense.**

KIRBY SMART: He has the ability to do both. He is a tremendous, tremendous football player. I mean, I didn't really know until I got further into the games and watching them last night how good he really is at what he does. And I think anytime you can scramble and extend plays, à la Stetson, really anybody, it makes it harder to defend. When you have the component of designed runs mixed in with that, it complicates it even more because he becomes an extra player, an extra guy to tackle, a physical guy to tackle, big, physical guy that has running back characteristics, but he has the ability to throw the ball, and he throws the ball well, especially off their play action game. He does a really good job of taking shots and throwing the ball down field. He sees it well, and they've got a massive offensive line to protect him with. So when you've got ability to run the ball as a designed run and then you also can run the ball in your scrambles, it just makes it harder to defend.

**Q. Kirby, from the perception you had of him to the reality of watching, is it the long ball success that's had, in your mind, that you've seen through the progression of the year, like, all right, now seeing it on tape, that's one thing I didn't know maybe that he had at the beginning of the year that you're focused on now?**

KIRBY SMART: No. You're focused on the whole package. I mean, you're trying to stop the entire unit, the

entire group, as well as, you know, they've got a really good defense and they've got tremendous special teams. There's no areas that you look at and go oh, that's a weakness, or oh, they're not very good at. They got really good football players. They're well coached. Their special teams units, you see it. It pops out on the screen. They got starters all over it. So when you go to offense and you see Milroe and the leaders they have there, they're really talented. They're really tough. They're sound. And he makes plays. He makes lots of plays, number one, with his athletic ability, but he makes them with his arm as well.

**Q. Kirby, what stands out to you about Alabama's defense, and are there characteristics with this defense that you're used to seeing with the Kevin Steele defense?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. Size, speed, toughness, aggressiveness, multiple coverages, players that can play multiple positions. The depth across the defensive line is one of the things that pops out of you. They roll guys, and they constantly have fresh guys in there striking, playing blocks, playing with great toughness; really good at the star position, very experienced. Got two corners that are going to be drafted that are good players; play with great safeties. I mean, they've got an all-around really good defense, but that's what you would expect. I mean, you would expect nothing less from this group.

**Q. Kirby, last time you played Alabama, we know what the win meant for the program. What did beating Alabama in particular mean after having come so close previously?**

KIRBY SMART: It meant that the University of Georgia got a National Championship. That's the significance of that.

**Q. Coach, understanding that your line play has been excellent in the run game, but with regard to Kendall Milton specifically, his runs have seemed more explosive. He seems to be doing just more with the ball in general, and he gets through those holes and such like that. What do you attribute -- is that just health? Is that just him being healthy?**



KIRBY SMART: Good run scheme, being in the right runs at the right time, understanding the leverages, a really good run plan and perimeter blocking, but he certainly is healthier than he's been. He's running with confidence. I feel like he's hitting the hole a lot harder because he's more confident, and being explosive is getting to the secondary. You're not going to be an explosive run offense if you don't get your backs to the secondary. And that's one thing we've been able to do is get him past that first level, and he's running through a lot of arm tackles, too, which is really important to be an explosive run team.

**Q. Yeah, is there any update on the status of Julian Humphrey and Jamon Dumas-Johnson? Are they still week to week with their injuries?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, still week to week with their injuries, trying to get both those guys back.

**Q. Kirby, I said this earlier today. How do you guys stay fresh when you've had to, I don't know, carry on this win streak, the week-to-week getting everybody's best punch, and he mentioned player accountability and the honest criticism that goes on. How do you balance that with the sort of praise to keep guys going? It seems like that would be a really delicate balance.**

KIRBY SMART: I mean, it's just we tell the truth. I mean, the truth is not always criticism. I mean, the truth is the truth. And we're very honest. When guys play well, we tell them, and when they don't, we tell them. And sometimes it's okay to not play well if the person whipped you and played better than you or -- we talk about the intangibles when we go through the game. We talk about the things we can control. We don't get outside of that, and we don't vary very far.

And we used the analogy earlier in the year that the Navy SEALs that we studied and visited with in the off season, one of the number one things they said if you're too sensitive for criticism, you can't be in our group, because their criticism is different. If you're sensitive to that, the guy next to you may die. And like we're not dealing with things that drastic. So it's really important that you understand you can't be sensitive and actually get better.

**Q. Kirby, what have you seen on film from Dallas Turner and Caleb Downs?**

KIRBY SMART: Both tremendous athletes, very instinctive. We recruited both those guys. They're passionate about the game of football. They love the game of football. They love to play the game of football, and those kind of kids are your favorite kind to coach.

They're in there every day with a bright eye. They're taking notes. They love to play the game, and you see that on tape out of both those guys, both very, very elite football players.

**Q. Coach, you guys have won as many SEC Championships as you have National Championships. Just how hard is it to win these games, and does it make you appreciate it even more?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah. I have a great appreciation for this game, because, you know, I grew up an SEC kid, an SEC footprint kid, an SEC player. I've coached most of my career in the SEC. So I have an appreciation for this game and how hard it is to win. I mean, it was no different my experience at Alabama, you know, we had a year that we won a National Championship that we didn't win an SEC Championship. So that's happened a couple of times in our conference. It's hard to find that in most conferences. I think it speaks to the depth of our conference. It speaks to the -- how hard it is just to get to the game. I mean, in some ways, I think Alabama and us have been spoiled, and I don't think some kids appreciate -- they think it's a rite of passage, and it's not. It's earned. And it's some of the greatest venues -- environments that I've been a part of to play in that game.

**Q. What does this Alabama receiving core do well and just what challenges do you feel like they're going to present on Saturday?**

KIRBY SMART: They're athletic. They're fast. They got speed all over the place. They've got some guys that really do well on the vertical balls. Obviously Milroe throws the deep ball really well. They've got intermediate routes. They got teams that play off of them, and they hit timing routes. They're able to throw and quick gain and RPOs. Do a really good job of that.

Their run after a catch has been good, and one of the key contributing factors to explosive plays for them has been if a play breaks down and the timing is not right, some quarterbacks have to throw it away. Some quarterbacks have to take off and run. They turn plays into massive explosive plays. So part of their plan, they know their quarterback is going to be able to extend plays. He has the longest time to throw in the entire NCAA. And they make plays out of those plays, and I think that's really a contribution that they've made as a receiving core to him is the ability to get open on plays that may not have been by design.

**Q. Kirby, your initial reaction to watching their game winner versus Auburn was?**

KIRBY SMART: I didn't see it until yesterday when I watched that game, went through the tape. It was crazy how it got to that point, like to be down there and be close and then be all the way back up, and then to come out on top with that play. I mean, it shows his arm talent, and most teams have a play-by-design that they play from certain yardage intervals, you know, maybe 15 to 25 is this play, 25 to 35 is this play. It's not just a Hail Mary play. It's a play to try to find a one-on-one, and they were able to find a one-on-one, which that gives you the best percentages you could have.

**Q. Kirby, what did the film review for you guys reveal about QB-run defense and what kind of corrections can help as you face the next challenge this week?**

KIRBY SMART: Similar to most things. Like when you look at tape, you're never as bad as you think and never as good as you think. There are some misfits in there, some guys maybe not keying what they're supposed to key and looking at what they're supposed to key. And then some of it is I actually thought that we struck blocks and played the blocks really well up front better than I thought coming out. It was not a matter of, oh, we just got whipped. It was a matter of some things we didn't fit well and we didn't knock back tackle, so instead of second and seven, it's second and four. It's a big difference, and the effort to finish and get more bodies on contact is really important because that manages what your down and distances are.

**Q. Kirby, to kind of continue the theme on stopping QB run, is the notion of spying the quarterback, is that something that maybe people think about too much? Does it get overplayed? Is it something that you can do on every play, or how effective is it when you try to say we're going to have this guy spy quarterbacking a game?**

KIRBY SMART: Two different things I think you're discussing there. I don't know if you're referencing spying the quarterback or if you're talking about stopping quarterback runs. Completely different worlds there, because if you're going to stop a quarterback run, you're not spying the quarterback, because I mean, some of his most explosive plays are drop-back passes that people are doing their job and he becomes the runner, and he takes off and runs, whereas, a QB-designed run, you usually know within the first one second or millisecond of the play whether it's a designed run or it's a drop-back pass.

So on a drop-back pass, if he takes off and he's the best athlete on the field, you've got maybe seven or eight guys that got a chance to tackle him because he's already passed the first ones, whereas, on a designed run, you know, it's meant and blocked for him to run the ball. You

can't put a spy on that. You gotta fit your gaps. You gotta do gap control. You gotta have fits. You gotta get knock-back. You gotta get off blocks.

So, yeah, people do try to spy him, and their spy can't get him on the ground. So everybody's had a different plan of action, and everybody's done it different ways, and we'll try to put together what our best plan of action is. But if you don't stop the quarterback runs, it never gets to the point he has to throw it. You don't have to throw it if they can run the ball every play.

**Q. Last time you guys played Alabama, you beat them. Does maybe the confidence that comes from that, does any of that carry over in this game or is that so long ago it's ancient history and there is not much you can take away from that game?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think the two teams are very different. I mean you look at who they were then and who we were then. I don't know that they could be the polar opposites in terms of what they do offensively, and even us from a standpoint and who we were defensively then. So I don't think the two -- not a lot -- in college football today, not a lot of players that played in that game are playing in this game. If they did, they were probably a minor role.

**Q. Kirby, a lot of history and tradition about this game. I think that's why so many people love it. So I'm going to ask you to maybe reflect, if you can remember -- a long time ago -- 2009 I think Chuck Dunlap told us that this is only the second time two teams have met undefeated in the league in the game. You were the defensive coordinator for Nick Saban, and I think you took down Florida. I think that led to a national title, your first one as an assistant. Can you reflect on that?**

And then, two, when you were talking about Milroe, are those like Tim Tebow characteristics with the size, the speed and the running ability?

KIRBY SMART: No offense to Tim Tebow, but this guy is different. Tim was -- I mean it was a different running style, very different running style in terms of what they did and how they did things. This guy is -- I mean it's like when I used to ask my sons who they were playing with on the Madden game, and they would say, I'm playing with the Ravens, and I would say, why are you playing with the Ravens? And they would say, I got Lamar Jackson and nobody can tackle him. Well, this guy's a bigger, physical version of that. He's playing in a different speed than everybody else when you watch it. And that's the way the Madden game was for him.

And, you know, people -- and the guy throws the ball really

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

well. So the comparison to 2009 -- I don't know if you're trying to compare that to that are you're just saying do I remember the game. Yeah, I remember the game. It was a game for us that we had lost the previous year and felt like we were really close to winning and felt like we were going to have to get over that hurdle. They were the dominant team in the country, I guess, at that time, and they had some really good football players and had a really good coaching staff. And we played a good game that game, and the players all played and believed in themselves, and it was a tremendous venue and game, sure.

**Q. What have you seen out of C.J. Allen and Raylen Wilson, especially since Jamon has gone down and they've taken on a more significant role in this defense?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, they've grown up. They had to grow up fast, man. I mean, you talk about getting thrown into the fire at the Ole Miss, Tennessee, Georgia Tech. They've had to play in three games that were really tough, physical games, and prep, each game was different in terms of style. It's not like they've gone this style, this style, this style. They went from Ole Miss to Tennessee to Georgia Tech and three completely different offenses to prepare for. And they're young guys. They make mistakes, but they also have a quiet confidence about them. They're good athletes, and they're well coached. So I'm really proud of what they've been able to do, and we need them to play well to get defensive stops.

And when you're playing with freshmen at that position, I think anybody in the country will tell you, it's a little like playing with the quarterback there. You just don't want to have to play with freshmen there, but they are the guys that are up, and they've done a good job.

**Q. Kirby, you mentioned the whole element of -- with Milroe, the you can do everything right, you can do most things right, and they still find a way to make big plays. How important does that make kind of your next play, your bad things are going to happen or reverse is going to strike stuff within the program and your process, how important does it make that element of it this week for this particular game?**

KIRBY SMART: Well, it's no more important than any other game. How could I sit here and say that it's any more important this week than ever? Every week, it's win the next moment. Certainly that applies to this game, but I would not sit here and say it didn't apply to any of the last 12 games. How you respond to it matters a lot more than what happened.

He is going to make plays. I mean that's a given. You watch every game he's played, he has made plays, and he has an uncanny ability to extend plays, and whether there's he knows he's getting ready to take off and he's setting you up; he pump fakes. He does a lot of things with the ball that make him hard to defend, but he's going to make plays, and we're going to make some plays. So you've gotta have confidence that you're going to make more than they're going to make.

**Q. Coach, a lot of talk about the maturation of Jalen Milroe. I'm curious your thoughts on what you've seen from Tommy Reese in his first year as offensive coordinator there at Alabama.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think he's adapting to what he has. You know, people always talk about this team and where they are now. They're playing as good of football as anybody in the country, and don't talk to me about playing at Auburn, because I know. So they have played really, really good football, and they've evolved from the start of the year to now. They're not the same team they were in the beginning of the year. Not many are. I mean, we had to figure out who we were and who we were identity wise and how you're going to use guys. Then guys are out of the offense; guys are in the offense, guys are out of the defense, in the defense. And you evolve. And they're a very talented, really well-coached, good football team that's playing its best football at the end of the year.

**Q. Regarding Dumas-Johnson Johnson, I just want to make sure I'm 100 percent clear on this. His injury, did it require surgical repair to get him back on the right track? And is there any realistic chance that he's able to come back for this game?**

KIRBY SMART: He's week to week. Thank you. Appreciate it, guys.

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