

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

Monday, December 1, 2025

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Scott Stricklin

Jon Sumrall

Press Conference



SCOTT STRICKLIN: This is an exciting day. Appreciate everyone being here. This is a big step forward for Florida Gator football, and excited to introduce you to Jon and recognize Dave and just talk about what we have going forward here.

Before I begin, I want to thank Billy Gonzales and the current staff for their leadership during this transition. It's not an easy thing to go through. They did a great job of keeping our players focused and unified, and really proud of what they did last Saturday night, getting the win against Florida State, so special thanks to them.

At the University of Florida, we measure ourselves by one thing, and that's winning. You go around this campus and you see any athletic facility, the only thing written outside a building is a number, and that number is the year we won a championship. So winning is pretty important at the University of Florida.

That was a priority as we went throughout this really comprehensive search for a new football coach. We talked about outstanding coaches across college and professional football. We studied all kind of leadership styles, program-building philosophies, recruiting strategies. Above all else, we were looking for someone who approaches winning the same way the University of Florida does, as a daily, non-negotiable requirement.

We were also looking for something that you can't fake. We wanted someone who wanted to be a Florida Gator, someone that being here in the orange and blue was really important too, someone who embraces the pressure and the expectations because they want to build a program to win championships.

From our very first conversation, Jon Sumrall stood out. His clarity, his urgency, his competitive mindset was unmistakable. He didn't just tiptoe around expectations, he leaned into them. He talked about winning a lot with a conviction that stood out.

His resume reflects that mentality. He's both played and coached here in the SEC. He's been a head coach for four years. His teams have reached the conference championship all four years. He's won two conference titles and Friday night has a chance to win another one.

His career winning percentage ranks among the very best in the country among active coaches. He took over one program that needed rebuilding from the ground up, and he did it quickly. He elevated another one that was already performing at a high level, and he did it by creating cultures where winning isn't just celebrated, it's demanded.

Jon is relentless in his pursuit of competitive excellence. He's tough minded. He's direct. He has a vision to build a Florida football team with an explosive, attacking offense, an outstanding defense, and that's a formula that's worked pretty well for the Gators in the past.

As part of this transition, we're also going to strengthen the structure around Gator football by reimagining the general manager position to ensure the operational, recruiting and personnel systems run with efficiency and alignment.

While conducting the coaching search, we also ran a separate rigorous search to ensure we found the right executive, someone with championship experience who can align with today's college football environment.

We're proud to welcome Dave Caldwell as our new general manager for Florida football. Dave served as an NFL general manager and recently helped build two Super Bowl winning teams with the Philadelphia Eagles.

He brings deep experience in roster construction, talent evaluation, analytics and long-term planning. This structure matters. It creates alignment. It creates clarity. But most importantly, it allows Jon and the staff he's going to build to focus fully on leading our players, developing our roster, and winning football games.

I want to thank President Landry and our board chair, Mori Hosseini, for their strong support throughout this process. Their leadership gave us great vision and the resources



required to compete for championships. We also had a subset of trustees who provided valuable insight during this process that I'd like to thank, our board vice chair Rahul Patel, our UAA board president Chris Corr, Fred Ridley, and Patrick Zalupski. All of them provided great insight.

Both senior associate AD Duke Werner and one of our Gator greats, Danny Wuerffel participated in every interview and discussion session related to both of these searches, both the head coach and general manager searches. Their insight and perspective were important to me personally throughout the processes.

I also want to recognize Amy Hass, our deputy AD, who kind of spearheaded our GM search while we had a lot of focus on the football search to make sure the GM search stayed on track. I'm grateful for all of these and so many others with UAA.

I also want to thank two people who I leaned on early and throughout the process who are here today, two great coaches, Coach Steve Spurrier and Coach Urban Meyer. Thanks to both of you men for being here. That's really special.

I'd like to offer thanks to our search consultants. We used search firms for both of these really for the first time, Chad Chatlose of TurnkeyZRG, Jake Rosenberg of the Athlete Group. Chad was on the coaching side, Jake was on the GM side. Their time and efforts in helping us identify a strong pool of candidates for these positions was invaluable and helped us land on great choices with both Jon and Dave.

So today is a new day. Jon's record is impressive, but what truly sets him apart is his mindset. He is wired to win. He builds teams that reflect his competitive identity, and he creates environments where players and staff understand what it takes to perform at a championship level every single day.

Jon is going to finish the season with Tulane, and we wish him and the Green Wave well this week and beyond. But beginning today, he is the head coach of the Florida Gators, and we could not be more excited about his willingness to lead this program.

To Jon, his beautiful wife Ginny, their children Sam, Sadie, Stella and Selah, welcome to Gainesville. We're so glad to have you guys here. Ladies and gentlemen, our new head football coach, Jon Sumrall.

(Applause.)

JON SUMRALL: Scott, thank you for that welcome. As I

start, I'd like to say going through the process of making decisions on jobs this time of year, maybe not being ideal coaching in the season. There's very few people that you can trust to maybe have that conversation about what it's like to go through this because it's unique.

I do want to be very direct on one thing, and you may or may not appreciate this, but Lane Kiffin and I have been going through the same thing. We've talked a lot. We were both in agreement that I was the right man for this job (laughter). He co-signed on that. Lane is a dear friend, and I have to poke a little fun at him.

In all seriousness, I'd like to thank President Landry, the board of trustees, Scott Stricklin and his staff, Chris LaFace, Gary Condon for getting me here today and all of the Florida Gator Nation that has made this possible for me and my family.

Before looking ahead to what is to come next, I'd like to reflect briefly on where I've been and what I've been doing, and I owe a couple thank-yous there.

I'd like to acknowledge Troy University for giving me the opportunity to be a first-time head coach four years ago. I was a linebacker coach, co-defensive coordinator, and then most people in America didn't really know my name unless you really loved studying football.

Dr. Jack Hawkins, the chancellor at Troy University, and athletic director Brent Jones gave me the opportunity to be a first-time head coach, and for that, I will be forever grateful. I'd like to thank Tulane, President Mike Fitts, Patrick Norton, athletic director David Harris, for giving me the honor and privilege to be the head football coach there in New Orleans where my oldest two kids were born and lead that program. Both opportunities have been special and have meant the world to me.

I'm also very grateful for Tulane for allowing me to finish the job. The job is not done, and I've got work to do. So today is going to be quick. It's going to be fast. It's been a little bit dizzying at times. But I've got to go back tonight because we're in pursuit of doing something special as a team, and I'd like to thank Tulane and Scott and Florida for allowing me to go back with my guys and finish that job the right way.

I'm also grateful for all those players I've had the opportunity to serve as a head coach at both institutions. The way we lead, the way we coach, man, I do life with the guys I coach, and those guys have afforded me this opportunity. I didn't get here on my own. We've won a lot of games over the years because the players that I've been privileged to coach. So I want to acknowledge those guys,



and I want to tell my guys back at Tulane that I was at practice with this morning, I can't wait to see you first thing tomorrow morning.

It's great to be a Florida Gator. It's great to be a Florida Gator. I am honored and humbled to be the head football coach of the University of Florida.

I'd like to talk about my family. My wife Ginny, my best friend. I'm going to try not to get emotional. We've known each other since we were in high school. My senior year prom -- I forget which dance. It was prom. I went with one of her best friends and she went with one of my best friends. We grew up about two miles apart. I've known her since I was a high school kid. But she's my best friend. She's been there every step of the way.

When we got married, I was the defensive coordinator at the University of San Diego, which is a 1-AA non-scholarship football. Not San Diego State, the University of San Diego, the Toreros. Pioneer League, PFL, baby.

We were sitting there, I think we were on Pacific Beach one night, and I was getting close to maybe thinking about asking her to marry me, and I said, Could you live in Pocatello, Idaho, and she said, Why would we do that. I said, That's where Idaho State is; I may have to coach there one day. She said, Jon, if you're there, I can go. I said, All right, I think this will work.

Ginny, I love you. I'm grateful for you. You've been there every step of the way. Thank you for letting me pursue my goals and dreams.

We had options. We had choices. My wife and I, we sat down and we chose Florida. We made that decision. Florida had to choose us, but we chose it back.

Our four kids that are here today, Sam, Sadie, 12-year-old twins, Stella, our nine-year-old daughter, and Selah, the caboose, our seven-year-old, the greatest privilege I have other than being your mom's husband is being y'all's dad.

When I shared with the kids and Ginny and I shared with the kids what we were about to do next, their responses were very fitting to their personalities. Sam's immediate reaction was, Do you think I'll get a chance to meet Tim Tebow? He's read his book. He also was fired up because we're Jordan brand. He's got his J's on right now.

Sadie, his twin sister, her first response was, Dad, the place that gets to play their games in The Swamp? I said, yeah, Sadie, The Swamp. She goes, tell Mom I'm not sitting in the suite area, I'm sitting in the stands, because it

seems like a lot of fun there. She knows more football than most of you men in the room, too. She can draw up power. I'm not sure if she's got counter down yet.

Stella, affectionally in our family, are known as -- what is she known as? Y'all say it. She's the rattlesnake. She'll bite you. She just wanted to know, when I told her we were going to be closer to Orlando, could we go to Disney every summer. I said, Mom might be able to make that work.

Then Selah, her name has the most significance of meaning in our family. Selah is the Psalms, at the end of Psalms, Selah means to stop, to pause, to reflect and to praise, and with Selah, our No. 4, we have stopped. (Laughter).

Her immediate response was, Dad, can we win a championship there? I said, you're damned right we can. She's the life of the party.

To my mom and dad, George and Sandra Sumrall, thank you for being there. They've been there every step of the way my whole life. Mom is a saint. Dad is stubborn. I love y'all. Thank you for everything you've done for me. It's an honor that you're here today. It means the world that y'all made it. Thank you.

My in-laws, the Nixons, thank you for allowing me to have a wife and it be your daughter and being the best in-laws in the world. I actually get to say that.

Then my brother Joe, my biggest fan, Joe, we can win or lose and Joe usually can find the positives. I think he might be related to Ted Lasso. We leave a game and my dad used to -- doesn't do it quite as much anymore, but used to question play calls we'd make. Now that's my son. My brother thinks all the play calls are great because I'm his brother and we're making them. But thank you for being my biggest fan and being there every step of the way to support me.

I can assure you, our family is going to be all into this university and all into this community. We will be connected. We will be engaged. We are excited to do life in Gainesville. We are excited to partner with everyone here. The only way we know how to do it is all in.

I also look forward to doing life and partnering with other head coaches here at the University of Florida. As we went through this process of making a decision of what we were going to do next with our future, I had the privilege of spending some time on the phone and visiting with Todd Golden. His wife Megan kind of helped recruit Ginny a little bit, too, and man, I'm excited to support the other sports

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here at the University of Florida. You're going to see us at basketball games.

That was one of the other questions the kids had is when can we watch Gator basketball, and I said, Soon. Tomorrow night against Duke. Not in person probably.

But Todd and Megan have been great. I can't wait to meet the others and partner with them and help bring championships to Gainesville.

To the Florida football family, it's got to start with Coach Spurrier and Urban Meyer. Are you kidding me? I get to stand in the same spot and do the same job as two absolute legends in the football community. And the fact that they're here today means the world to me. I'm kind of pinching myself.

I've come a long way to hold the job that they once held. It means the world that y'all are here.

To the former players, you're always welcome home. We want you to know, man, the doors are open. Please come back. Danny Wuerffel, I had a chance to spend time with Danny and visit with Danny and communicate with Danny and visit with Danny through the process. We want all of you back. We need all of you back. You're always home here.

To our fans and donors, we can only maximize our success and potential with your full support. It takes all of us working together to win championships. I love, love, love your passion and your enthusiasm. 18 straight sellouts here in The Swamp. That streak is not going to end anytime soon. We need to build upon that.

But that passion and enthusiasm, the fire, that's part of what attracted me here, because I'm wired the same way. The standard here is championships. That's why I came. I'm built for this job. I was made for this job. Winners win; I'm a winner; we're going to win.

Roster building. It starts with our current team. I just got the chance to meet with those guys. Retention in these days of the college football world is the most important thing to build a team. We need those guys to stay, and that's the first recruiting effort I have.

We also have signing day on Wednesday, which is vital. I believe that the lifeblood of your program is recruiting good high school players, and at Florida, elite high school football players.

It starts here at home. We're privileged to be in the state of Florida which has got just such a great hotbed for not just

high school football players but great coaches, and we don't have to go very far to find what we need to win championships.

We're also very privileged, though, to have a national brand where we can go all across the country and get the best of the best, the cream of the crop.

We will use the transfer portal. If you've studied my rosters the last couple years, I haven't had the resources to keep very many of my good players. They all end up getting poached. So I've had to embrace the transfer portal probably more than most, maybe even more than I'd like to at times, by necessity.

But we will use the portal to enhance our team and to supplement where there may be holes or deficiencies. We're going to run a player-driven program. My job as the head football coach here is to serve and to develop the players. It's not to be served, it's to serve.

If there were no players, there would be no coaches. If there weren't players on the football team, you wouldn't need me. Those players are going to get everything I've got to help them become their best.

I'm also excited to partner with the Gator Made program. The more I learned about that program, I've been really excited about partnering with them and what they do to equip our players and young men for life.

We're going to attract a championship-level staff here at the University of Florida. We're going to play with an edge, a blue-collar mindset, and a chip on our shoulder. We will be tough. We will have grit. We will not be outworked. We will play with passion and physicality. We will build our scheme in all three phases around our players and their strengths.

On offense, when I think of Florida football, I think of aggressive, I think of explosive, I think about mixing tempos, using it to your advantage, and dictating the game to the opponent.

I think about stretching the field and threatening every blade of grass. It all starts with the quarterback and the pieces around him. We'll get elite skill players here. We've got some already; we've got to keep them. Our O-line has to play with a demeanor that's nasty and that is a force to be reckoned with, and that'll happen.

I may be a defensive guy, but I want to be more of a defensive guy like somebody Coach Spurrier knows like Bob Stoops. I want the scoreboard to light up. The way we've played maybe where I've been has looked a little



different than how I want to play moving forward because your job everywhere you are is to figure out how you win for the place you're at. Here, I think we can score a lot of points, and that's what I want to do.

Defensively we will swarm, and we will attack. We will play with great pursuit of the football and relentless effort. We'll always be on the hunt because that's what Gators do. We're going to make our opponents uncomfortable. I want to be the most feared defense in the country.

On special teams we're going to play special. We're going to be detailed. We're going to be sound. We're going to win the hidden yardage. We're going to create an advantage in the kicking game. I've got a background in special teams. I've been a special teams coordinator. That will have my fingerprints on it.

Before I move on, I'd like to acknowledge we've got some players here in the back, and I can't wait to partner with y'all. I'm fired up y'all are here. It means the world that y'all are in here today. It's all about y'all.

In closing, I'll wrap up with, just like around here when we go to the fourth quarter, we sing, I won't back down. I won't back down. I will never back down. The Florida Gators, we will not back down. Go Gators!

(Applause.)

Q. Obviously you've got two Hall-of-Famers sitting back there and you alluded to it, but is it a daunting challenge or exhilarating challenge with those two guys, knowing what they've done here and trying to replicate that?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, it's a challenge I embrace. It's an exhilarating challenge. That's probably a better word.

I don't know that I can measure myself to Coach Spurrier or Coach Meyer anytime soon. I've got a long way to go. I look forward to leaning on them, asking their opinion and advice. I feel very privileged to have two great resources like them that are a phone call away.

I got a chance to speak with both of them before getting here, and as a coach, I admire coaches and really good ones. I've got two great ones here. For me, I feel like I'm the luckiest guy in the world to have a phone-a-friend in those two.

Q. Were you a little giddy when you first met them?

JON SUMRALL: It was kind of cool, yeah. It was kind of cool. I'm not going to do my Coach Spurrier

impersonation, but I'll give it to you at some point. Coach, you were good, man.

Q. Given your SEC playing and coaching experience, is it as simple as same game, more attention? Or do you have to make some philosophical adjustments to your approach?

JON SUMRALL: You're talking about just SEC versus where I've been as a head coach? Yeah, I think there's a couple things in there. I think every place is different. Troy was different than Tulane, as a school, what type of student-athlete I could attract. Who I could get in school was a little bit different, the type of kid that attracted. Like I said, Tulane is a really high academic institution like we have here. So both places were very different.

Year to year, your roster is so different in college football that I think you have to -- the trick as a head coach is trying to figure out how do we formulate each team's opportunity to have success. No two teams are alike. To be quite honest with you, no two games are alike.

Our league the last few years at Tulane, you may play Army one week and Navy the next, and those are option or wing-T teams. Then the next week you might play North Texas, which we're getting ready to play. We played them last year. We played South Florida last year, where it's like, they're just looking to go fast and don't always know what the play could look like but they're going to play fast. Then we'll play a pro-style team, which was like maybe Memphis.

The types of things you see are different. I think you have to always identify what is your team best at, and there's a formula for every team to give themselves the best chance to win games. I don't care what level you're at.

I do think this is a unique environment because I'm going to have an opportunity to recruit the best players in the country. Like there's no reason why we shouldn't attract the very top end of the talent coming out of high school. That excites me.

I've had great players. I shared with the guys in the team meeting some of the names they've never heard of that were no-star and two-star recruits that I've helped get to the NFL at Troy and Tulane. Man, what do I get to do with some nine-stars? Watch out. It's going to be a lot of fun.

So the SEC is a different league. It's the closest thing you get to the National Football League. That's why I wanted to come. I crave that challenge. It invigorates me. It gets me a little bit fired up.



I know what we're in for. Like I said earlier, I'm built for it. This is what I've wanted to do my entire life. When I was my son's age, this is what I dreamed about doing.

Q. Coach Rich Brooks, I had a chance to talk to him this morning, and Mark Stoops, what kind of influences were they for you, and in particular Coach Brooks through a difficult time when your playing career ended and how that shaped you?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, man, Rich Brooks is like an uncle to me. Coach Brooks, 2003, he came into the University of Kentucky, I was my third year in college, and 2004 -- I started 2003 a couple games for him at linebacker. 2004 I started every game for him at linebacker. I kid around with him all the time, having to start guys like me almost got him fired because I somehow tricked somebody into letting me play in the SEC. I don't know if my talent really met that threshold.

But Coach Brooks is who gave me a start in coaching. I had a career-ending neck injury my junior year. My junior year I led our team in tackles, 2004. Most of those tackles looked like trips. I was like swiping people's ankles because I wasn't fast enough to catch them. Coach Brooks immediately created a GA job for me, like, just a couple days after the news of my injury being what it was.

This is my 21st year of coaching college football, I'm wrapping that up. Next year will be 22. Coach Brooks gave me my start and really my foundation.

Then Coach Stoops, I worked only for offensive head coaches from Coach Brooks for the next 18, 19 years, whatever it was, to Coach Stoops. I worked for Coach Stoops again, and really, I thought I was ready to be a head coach when I was at Ole Miss. Looking back, I wasn't. I was probably still a little bit maybe unprepared in certain areas. I thought going to work for Coach Stoops gave me the refinement and the polish I needed to be prepared to take on a head coaching opportunity. But both guys have been very pivotal to where I'm at.

Q. You talked about recruiting a couple times. Signing day is in 40 hours. What's the approach to this first class?

JON SUMRALL: Man, I Zoomed with those guys last night. I'll pull back the curtain. I Zoomed with my signees or my commits at Tulane, and I told them to sign at Tulane because I'm not trying to poach their class. I want those guys to go play there.

I Zoomed with the guys that have been committed, and I can't reference names. I've got to be careful here. That's

always a challenge. But I Zoomed with those guys yesterday evening and their families. First I thanked them for -- there haven't been a whole lot of decommitments, which is really powerful. It speaks a lot about what this place is. It also speaks to a lot about a number of people that are still in the building, still here working day-to-day right now.

I asked them to -- first I thanked them for staying committed and not making a fast decision. I told them to give me an opportunity. I'd love to coach them all. They chose Florida for a reason that was bigger than maybe one person. Anytime there's uncertainty, I get that you may look around and figure out, hey, is this really right.

I think we've got a lot of great players, and I think we've really got high character in that class. I think the staff has done a good job. I'm going to fight like heck to hold on to them. I FaceTimed with as many of them as I could last night until I fell asleep. I'm going to FaceTime with the rest of them tonight and get them all knocked out and make sure they know, man, I can't wait to coach them. I'd love to coach them.

Q. First off, what are your impressions of this new structure with Dave coming in? How will that help you balance things the next couple of weeks? Also, did you have any previous crossings with Dave? Had you met him before this opportunity?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, Dave and I had never worked together for anything. I've got a lot of respect for Dave. He's obviously been an NFL general manager. It's a pretty big title, big role, impressive resume. Have several people that know Dave and have worked with Dave or encountered Dave professionally, and all of the feedback I got was off-the-charts good.

We got a chance to visit over a couple hours through this process of me deciding to do this, and I was really encouraged -- I think with the model we're in now, it's not going to be a deal where Dave just goes out and gets players and I hope it worked out that we got good players. I'm going to be very involved. We're going to be a partnership, and we're going to be in lockstep on how we put together our roster, but I also think the head football coach, you can get pulled a lot of different directions now.

My number one job, and I have this sign in my office at Tulane. It wasn't there when I got there. I had them put it up. I have a sign as I walk out -- I've got basically a show office and a real office in the back where I work, and the real office in the back when I walk out of that door, I have a sign up that says, Coach the team. My number one job is to coach the team.



So while maybe future Gators matter to me, current Gators matter more. I'm going to give more to the guys in the back of the room that are on our football team than I'm going to give anybody that could become on our team. So I'll recruit with my hair on fire. I'll recruit all the time. Like I said, I FaceTimed 10, 11 guys last night. I'm going to FaceTime the rest of them tonight. I'm constantly recruiting.

But at the same time, man, the lives I'll have the impact the most are the ones on our team. Having someone like Dave who's got his experience, his expertise, his knowledge, his skill set, man, it fires me up because it allows me to be the best I can be at my main job, which is coach the team.

Q. Kind of building off the current model, obviously it's worked out for you with someone like Lane going to LSU or even Eric Morris with Oklahoma State. Can you give us your thoughts on the way this model is currently set up? It's precedent setting for coaches to --

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I shared this with my team yesterday when I gave them the news I was coming here. The NFL, their rules kind of make sense. They do this thing called football season, okay. And then after football season, a coach can leave and take a job. They have free agency and the draft; that's player movement. Then they have OTAs and mini-camp and training camp, and then you know what they do then? They play football season. Then there's coach movement again and player movement again and they have contracts that are kind of binding. We have contracts that are, like -- I don't know what they are. It's just a piece of paper that you could probably put in a bonfire.

What I'm getting at is our model is not perfect, clearly. I'm trying to do the best I can. The way I explained it to my team yesterday is the decision I'm making is which team I'm going to coach in 2026, not in 2025. So I'm right now wearing two hats, but I will not coach Florida's football team at all in 2025. I'll start to develop relationships and get to know these guys' stories and what makes them who they are. But our calendar is definitely imperfect and could use some attention.

Q. Jon, I know you don't have a pulse on this program yet, but what do you feel like is wrong with Florida football, and how fast do you feel like you can win big here?

JON SUMRALL: That's a good question. I think there's a lot right. I've got to diagnose all of it. It'll take some time.

I'll say this: When I went to Troy, they had been 5-7, 5-6 and 5-7 for three straight years. I'm not saying this is Troy. I know it's different. That job was actually an easier rebuild because the players in the locker room, there was a bunch of good players.

We had Kimani Vidal who's the starting running back for the Chargers, Jake Andrews who's the starting center for the Houston Texans, Dell Pettus, who's on the Patriots -- I'm missing a couple more. Javon Solomon who's with the Buffalo Bills. I walked into a football team that had some good players. They just hadn't been winning.

There needed to be maybe some cultural things we needed to give some attention to, maybe some detail, maybe some toughness, maybe a little bit of edge, maybe a little bit of fire and passion.

That's what that needed. I went to Tulane and they had been winning, and I got in the house at Tulane, I turned the light switch on and it was like an abandoned house and there was cockroaches running everywhere. I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa, I need some players, like, hold on, don't leave. To win at Tulane actually from building a roster actually was harder, even though there was already success happening.

I think we got some good football players. I watched that game Saturday before I went and played Saturday, and I'm like, hey, can I give the ball to No. 13 ten more times because if an offensive coordinator doesn't know what to do, that's a pretty good choice.

We've got some good young receivers here. There's a lot of -- I watched the defense, man. We've got some dudes on defense. We've got some killers. So I'm fired up to coach those guys, and I think we're closer.

We're going to do everything we can to win fast. I have a plan for how we can win long-term, but I want to win tomorrow and today and every day. I already referenced my son. He's 12. When we play basketball in the backyard, he gets his butt kicked because I want to win. I'm not very patient.

I respect the Florida fan base is not patient. They want to win right now, too. You've got the right coach. I'm wired that way. I'm not comfortable having a plan to win in eight years. I want to win tomorrow.

Q. As you put your staff together, how do you strike a balance between having enough people that you can trust and not having too many friends on staff?

JON SUMRALL: Well, I don't hire my friends. Honestly,

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when I took my first head coaching job I lost some friends or maybe at least for a little while. They were like, I thought we were buddies. I'm like, we are; that doesn't mean you're the right fit here. My job, anytime I'm at a place -- I want to be at Florida for a really long time. I'd like to coach here forever. I took this job because man, this is the job I want to be at for a long time.

But I don't hire a staff off of who are my buddies. I hire a staff based upon what is the absolute best group of people we can put together to serve and develop our players and win championships at that place.

Every place is different. When I walk into a new place, the first thing I do is I assess what's there. There will be some folks that stay. Then I may bring a few that have been around me. There's going to be some people that haven't been here and haven't been with me that need to be added to help us get the best group of people together to win championships and serve our players.

Q. When you were discussing with the administration, what assurances or critical factors were you looking for to be able to take the Florida job and not some of the other jobs out there?

JON SUMRALL: I mean, alignment matters and them believing in my vision matters. I'm unapologetically who I am, and I want to be able to do things with my vision.

Now, I'm not saying I want them to just submit to every vision I have, but I want them to believe in my vision for how we're going to win, the processes we're going to put in place to win.

I felt very confident as I interacted with Scott and the rest of the people here that they believed in how I've done things. That doesn't mean we're going to do things the exact same as where I've been. There's certain things, like David, that are going to add, that they're going to make us better. So you're constantly evolving and adapting to how you can build the best program you can, but I felt a belief in my vision, and I had -- when I asked questions, they had answers that mattered to me to give me belief that I could be very comfortable in my own skin being the head football coach here.

Q. When I covered you in Lexington for those couple of years, you had always spoken so admirably about this program when you were on Kentucky's staff just saying, go into that place and use that passion for fuel. Now you're on the flipside of that. How special is this full-circle moment for you?

JON SUMRALL: Man, I've played in The Swamp. I've

coached against Florida. Man, 2021, I'm not trying to rip up any wounds, but at Kentucky we beat Florida and I was like, oh, my gosh, we just beat Florida. Like holy cow. Like what a big deal. It's the Florida freaking Gators, man.

Like, I've got one of the best jobs in the world. I'll get emotional because on the plane I'm thinking about this, I'm like, golly, I've got to pinch myself, like this is surreal. This has been a dream of mine.

To be able to be the head football coach here, man, it is special to me because this place loves football. It eats, sleeps, breathes, drinks football. So do I. We're yoked the right way together.

Q. A lot was made about the coaching search in general here. I think some fans were maybe even concerned about a Group of Five head coach coming in. What gives you maybe the conviction that you're the right guy for the job and your message for the fan base that you can win a championship here?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, no two people are the same, okay. Coach Meyer, you coached G5 football, right? Curt Cignetti coached G5, I think. I actually coached against Curt some.

No two people are the same. Just because you're a reporter, I may have had an interaction with another reporter and not liked it doesn't mean I'm going to judge you that way. Judge me for who I am. I'm a winner. We're going to win. Just give me a shot. Believe in me.

Here's the deal. I need everybody pulling the rope the same direction because if anybody is pulling the same direction, it doesn't make the job easier, it makes it harder. If we're all Gators and we all want to win, let's do this together. You want to go fast, go alone, you want to go far, go together. Let's go together.

Q. You've touched on this already a little bit, but specifically whenever you do get to come into the building, what's the first month going to have to look like for you? What are some of the main priorities from the start?

JON SUMRALL: It starts with people. I use a phrase a lot, "humans over hardware." Guys, I've got news for you. I walked into this weight room earlier. I've been sharing a weight room the last two years with like six other sports. I walked into this weight room, I'm like, man, this is nice. Who else uses this weight room? They're like, football only. I'm like, whoa, that's going to be cool. I can schedule lifting time anytime I want? Not knocking the last place I was; I loved the place. But there were hurdles there.



I think it's about getting the right people here. Not trying to be cliché, but like Jon Gordon talks about an energy bus. Get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off, right, and get the bus going the right direction. We've got to get the right people on the bus. I think we've got a lot of them here. I think we've got to get some new people here maybe, and we've got to get the bus going the right direction.

But it starts with the people. It starts with the people.

Q. I want you to take a look back to 2009 for a second. You played here in The Swamp. Do you remember that day, and did you ever think you'd be coaching here some day?

JON SUMRALL: '09 I played in The Swamp? I was at the University of San Diego. We didn't play here in '09. I played here twice in college. I coached here a couple times, but '09 I was at the University of San Diego. We might have played at Jacksonville University. The Dolphins, which do not have football right now, but Kerwin Bell was the head coach.

Q. I'll switch the question then.

JON SUMRALL: You're wrong. There's no maybe. You can drop the maybe, Cuz.

Q. What do you know about The Swamp, and how excited are you to get to coach here?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, man, it's electric. Man, I'm telling you when I've played here before, and I've used the "I won't back down" deal, but as an opponent that gave me chills. I was like, this is freaking awesome, this is so cool.

I remember the student section as a player, 2000 -- I don't know the exact year. It wasn't '09, but it was either '03 or '04 we were playing here, and the student section was right behind our bench. I felt like they were -- I could touch them almost, they were that close. So '04, I started that game here. They kicked the dogmas out of us. But I remember the students just going, "Gator bait, Gator bait, Gator bait." And I'm like, will these people just get away from me for a minute. Just the energy, man. This place is electric.

That's what I remember from my experiences in The Swamp, and I can't wait to create some better ones for me.

Q. Gator defense finished this year 69th. What is your philosophy on defense going into next season?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, you know, the most important stats

is wins and losses. I've been a part of some really good defenses. I've been a part of some not-so-good defenses. I haven't studied what was done here really intimately yet from a schematic or structure standpoint.

I've been a part of some top-25, top-20 defenses. That's the goal. Sometimes the statistics matter, but I think how you play on all three phases can affect your defense, too.

I think offense affects defense, kicking game affects both, defense affects offense. The stats, they are what they are. We'll work through how we improve pretty quickly. But I can't speak to great detail of what went on last year here.

Q. I want to take you back to a time in your life, this being a great day, which might have been your lowest point if I've read correctly, when you received the news about your spine, and you were basically without football, which I know must have been very depressing. Talk about where you were then, your journey to get here today, and who may have helped you along the way.

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, it's a great question. I guess it was April 2005 -- '04 I had just led the team in tackles at Kentucky. I was a really kind of self-made player. God gifted me with some things but elite physical talent wasn't the most gifted thing he gave me.

I had worked really hard to become a starter. Really, really hard. I could outwork people that were more talented than me. Led the team in tackles in '04. Was on several watch lists for awards. They were coming out that spring and summer.

Then that spring I got the diagnosis. My arms were going numb for like -- not like a couple plays or even a couple hours but started going numb like a couple days where I couldn't grab stuff, and I was in severe pain.

I had been dealing with it for a couple years and not said a whole lot about it because I was fearful they may tell me I had something more wrong with me than I wanted to hear. So the diagnosis was what I probably thought it was.

I was distraught, man. Like I've given this game everything I'd had to become the player I was, which was a pretty average player, but I'd made myself an average player. I was heartbroken because I'd invested so much into my own development.

Truthfully, we got done with spring ball that year, and Coach Brooks said, why don't you stay on as a student coach. We got done with the spring semester; I had graduated. I drove to Destin, Florida. I probably tried to



drink enough cold beer that I could not think about my injury for a couple days because I was just crushed.

Then Coach Brooks' football ops guy at the time, a guy named Steve Hellier -- I'm sitting on the beach. I have like a flip phone that none of us would recognize now, and Steve Hellier says, What are you doing. I said, I'm sitting on the beach drinking a beer, and he goes, Coach Brooks wants to know if you want to come back and be a GA.

I didn't immediately get in my car because I wasn't in any capacity to do so. But I went to the condo that night, packed my stuff up and left the next morning, got back to Lexington, Kentucky, and started coaching the next day, started coaching youth camp, and haven't looked back. It's been the greatest blessing of my life to be a college football coach.

Thank you. Go Gators!

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