

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Jon Sumrall

Press Conference



JON SUMRALL: Appreciate you all being here to cover, I guess, what used to be signing day. It's not really signing day anymore. That's kind of gone and passed. Today is maybe sort of roster finalization day to some degree.

We kind of know who's on our team, especially now that there's no second portal window, which I'm probably in the minority there. I'd be okay with a second portal window being a first-year head coach because I think it gives you a chance to maybe assess who you are through the spring and maybe recalibrate if you've got some gaps within your roster.

Like where we're at in a lot of ways. Don't really know where we're at in a lot of ways, too. Added 50 new players, 30 transfers, 20 high school guys to the roster, so 50 total guys that are putting on gear for workouts here that weren't -- have never really done anything here. And then you have, I believe, it's 62 returners, so I think we're at 112 right now if I'm not mistaken, so roughly half the team is brand new.

So today is really not very active like it used to be. But it's been very active because we had a 6:00 a.m. team workout. Been around our guys a good bit, as much as you can be. The January recruiting period was really out and about a lot within the state of Florida primarily initially and then out of state to see some priority targets at the very end for myself, but spent the majority of my time here in the state of Florida because we're going to start everything at home.

Then have been able to last Wednesday and last Friday be around our team through our morning workouts, and all week this week it's been really fun.

I like recruiting. I love coaching. Recruiting, I enjoy it. I think it's the lifeline of your program. But to me, I live for coaching. That's what I'm passionate about, so it's fun getting around our guys and helping them understand how we're going to help them hopefully improve, grow, develop, and maximize who they can become.

With that, I will open it up to questions, and I'm sure I'll get plenty. Let it rip.

Q. Early returns on Rusty, what he's doing with the strength program so far? How are you seeing the players embrace him as the new strength coach?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I think I'm a firm believer that the culture of your program is established and reinforced in the weight room and in the training room, for that matter. Tough teams win. Tough people win in this game. That's what you're creating in the weight room. It's about clearly getting bigger, faster, stronger, but it's also about some shared sacrifice. That's why we had a 6:00 a.m. run this morning. It's about building confidence. It's about details, accountability. All those things are what wins.

Rusty is pivotal to what we do. I'm very fortunate that he's been with me my entirety as a head coach. I'm very confident in what he does and how he does it. He's got a great staff. I think maybe one of the things Rusty and I have kidded around a little bit is our resourcing here is different. The last place we shared a weight room with like six or seven other sports. I'm not having to book the weight room around sailing now; that's kind of fun.

But there's some stuff there that -- Whitt is a special human. He's served our country. He's a Green Beret. He became a Green Beret at the age of, I think, 33. I don't know many people that have an interest in becoming a Green Beret at the age of 23. So I think he's uniquely wired to help build a football team, and he's all about sacrifice and serving and developing. I just love what he's about. He's no-nonsense. He's very steady. He's very consistent. I think our guys can feel the approach already.

I think they're liking it. They're going to move weight down there. I lifted yesterday with the offensive group, and it's fun seeing the guys' energy in that room right now. I think that's really fun to watch, and it's cool to see.

Q. What did you develop that bond with them? When did you meet him?

JON SUMRALL: Rusty, yeah, that's a good question. I

coached against him a couple times. He was at Louisiana Lafayette with Mark Hudspeth and I was the assistant head coach, special teams coordinator and linebackers coach at Troy, and we played them, and we were in the same conference. Then when I was at Ole Miss he was Kliff Kingsbury's head strength coach at Texas Tech.

Then after Texas Tech went to Army and worked for Jeff Monken, who's a dear friend of mine. He was the head strength coach at Troy. He'd been on the job for about 18 months when I took the head job at Troy, and I fully intended on firing him. Like, he was not being retained.

I did my homework, and I'm like, okay, maybe this could work. I did more homework, and me and him had a bunch of one-on-one meetings, and I'm like, okay, this guy is probably part of the solution here, not the problem.

Now we're like brothers. He's very, very close to me. I have a lot of confidence in him. We can usually, like this morning in our workout, I can usually look at him and say two words and he knows exactly what I'm thinking and vice versa. He can look at me and sometimes just say a couple words. It's like that country song, you say it best when you say nothing at all; that's me and Will. We don't say anything, we just look at each other like, I got it. I can pick up what he's feeling, and we're very aligned.

But yeah, so I didn't really ever work with him until I was the head coach at Troy, and I came this close to letting him go, and then I pivoted and kept him. I probably wouldn't be the head coach at Florida if it wasn't for Rusty Whitt. I can tell you that.

Q. Where did the idea for the gauntlet come from for him, and what goes into that?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, it's sort of an Army deal, like Army West Point, not like United States military Army fully, but the Army West Point football deal. That's kind of Coach Monken, and Whitt was there for that and saw that and experienced that. That's where that really was created or established.

We've made our own and maybe made some modifications to it through the years, but that's where that was really founded is at Army.

Q. The process of hiring Buster, how did you go about that in terms of recommendations, or was it personal experiences, or what attracted you to him to be the offensive coordinator?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, same. Had not worked with him. Had coached against him. Buster and I had coached

against each other when we were in the Sun Belt. He was at Arkansas State my first stint at Troy as an assistant. He was there as the offensive coordinator. Had crossed paths professionally and just as people. We actually -- Buster and I vacation to the same beach every summer, so I see him most summers around the 4th of July.

But I had followed his career, had kept in great touch. We talked a lot at different points of the years the last several years.

I actually considered hiring him when I took the job at Troy before I hired Coach Craddock and then followed what he had done. I think what makes Buster unique, and I think great coaches do this, is you have to be adaptable, so I think you look at his background or his past, and more of a spread, air-raid, if you want to call it Mike Leach's type of offensive structure and system.

Then at Georgia was a part of more pro-style with Todd Monken when he was coaching the quarterbacks there.

Then when he went to Georgia Tech he had to evolve again with Haines, more of a cunning quarterback who could throw it but was very much a running quarterback, and had to evolve again.

I think anytime from a defensive perspective, which is what my background is, when you evaluate offensive coordinators, you're looking for people who can make the scheme fit the people. Everything is player driven.

I think you've seen Buster evolve and adapt to, okay, who's my quarterback, and what's our O-line do well, and then who are the skill people we want to distribute the football to. That's sort of how that went.

In full disclosure, my first couple of conversations with Buster about maybe being on my staff happened before I was the head coach at Florida. It was like, hey, if one of these happens one day, what do you think, maybe? But we've got a good relationship.

It's nice for Buster, too, to have Coach Craddock on staff because Joe has been with me so there's some familiarity where maybe if Buster has a question, I'm not right in the room, he can look over to his immediate right and go, hey, Joe, what's Coach think here, how does he see this.

Q. Speaking of skill players, can you talk us through the process of landing Eric Singleton? Obviously a bit unique going to the draft and then transferring, and also just what he brings to the table.

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, so Eric's first offer in high school



was Troy University and I was the head football coach. Then he hit some track times that spring that were, like, electric in the 100, and his recruitment picked up. He ended up going to Georgia Tech, and he played for Trent McKnight as a position coach and Buster as the coordinator. Then he left there and transferred to Auburn where he played and Marcus Davis was his position coach.

We had the luxury of having a lot of people on staff that already knew him. I knew him from it is, Buster and Trent knew him from Georgia Tech, and Marcus knew him from Auburn.

Early in the process, we knew we wanted to retain VB3 and Dallas. Those were priorities for us. We maybe wanted to try to add one more big-play threat on the perimeter, along with retaining the other guys outside of VB3 and Dallas, as I mentioned, but we felt like let's go get another guy that maybe has top-end juice.

So he declared for the draft, and we were like, well, that's not happening. Then when we got some rumblings back from some people -- he had been invited to the Senior Bowl. Drew Fabian actually runs the Senior Bowl, is a friend of a lot of ours on staff, and Drew and I communicated. He's like, hey, Eric may go back to college. Just want to give you a heads up. When I heard that, I'm like, if he does go back to college, we need to be ready.

He decided to return, entered the portal, came down to us and a couple other schools. I think familiarity helped. Anytime you can eliminate some of the variables or unknowns, it makes the decision-making process easier. So I think his familiarity with the staff helped. So that was huge.

What does he add? I think top-end speed. He's an Olympic fast-type runner. He can run-run. I think we're working on some change of direction stuff with him I think that's going to help him elevate his game, but he can take the top off of coverage, and he's a guy that you get the ball in his hands and see can a guy make a tackle in space versus him, it's hard.

Q. Building off of that, how crucial was Buster to the retention efforts of your offensive players?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, anytime -- those guys want to know what's the scheme going to look like, how am I going to get coached, how am I going to get developed. It's pivotal. I talk a lot about as a head coach, my job is to cast a vision of what the whole program is going to look like. But that comes to life in the locker room, not in my office.

Well, offensively it's the offensive coordinator's job to cast a vision for what the system is going to look like and how we're going to build this thing, and I think going back to Buster's adaptability and versatility, I think that helps because he's able to show guys, hey, I've done things in a lot of different ways and I've built it around who the players are, and I think secondly, I think Buster when you spend time around him, you find out he's real, he's authentic, he's genuine, he's a detail coach, he's passionate. Like I say, he's knowledgeable. He's fiery. He's got a little edge about him.

I think guys feel that, and they want to play around that. They want to be exposed to that.

Q. In your mind, what are some of the benefits of having two wide receivers coaches on staff? How do you think that can help the position?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, you know, that's how I structured things where I was last year. Doesn't mean it's necessarily the right thing to do all the time, but it's something I've kind of fallen in love with that model. There's a couple things that we do that are maybe unique and different. This has kind of become more normal to where you maybe in a position group have two what I would consider real coaches or top-end coaches that are in that room. Why? Well, one of them -- like in any formation, say we're in an offensive formation, it's 11 personnel where we have three receivers, or occasionally we're in 10 personnel where you have four receivers. Well, that's a lot for one coach to look at and go, Coach, two guys on the left, two guys on the right and have to see big picture that whole field.

I'm not saying we're going to play every snap in four wides. We will play some but not all. We're going to figure out who our best people are and get them on the field.

We will evolve with who our players are, and so if we've got seven great tight ends and two good receivers, we're going to play it more 12 personnel. If we've got eight great receivers and two good tight ends, we're going to play it more 11 and 10. We're going to constantly figure out who are our best people and get them on the field.

But I think you can't -- my least favorite thing about watching a football practice is when somebody takes a rep and they're not getting coached. I hate it. I just want guys to get coached all the time.

Then I think also those are the, quote-unquote, full-time guys, then you've got the support of analysts with Decker and other guys in that room that are going to add value to -- Chad Lucas has been helpful in recruiting, but he's also got receiver knowledge. So the way we're structuring

college football now is more like the NFL than ever, where there is no limit on who can coach anymore.

So five years ago, it was like, all right, are you one of the 10 coaches and GAs or are you not. You know who's a coach now? Everybody. If you walk on our practice field and you're not coaching, why are you there, unless you're there as a visitor.

I like having two receiver coaches that can make our guys better. It allows us to split some individual drills up so they can really be honed in on certain details that need to be taught to a position.

Q. Would you walk us through the decision to retain Coach Chatman and what factors went into that?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, so I had a relationship with Gerald. I took the job at Tulane, he originally went with Coach Fritz to Houston for a couple days and he called me and asked would I allow him to come back. I said, let me sleep on it.

I allowed him to come back. Five days later, I think, University of Florida called him and asked would he come be their D-line coach, and told him, hey, I'll go pack your office for you, bro. That's one you leave for.

I wasn't mad when he left. It was one of those conversations, I'm like, yeah, man, let's go. You need to take the Florida D-line job; why wouldn't you.

So when I took the job, that was somebody I had in mind for retaining, and anytime you walk in new, there may have been a couple other people, I'm not going to get into details, that you think maybe you are or you aren't going to retain, and that changes based upon conversations you have.

Gerald was one I thought I would retain on the front end that I did retain because I've got a history with him. I think also the D-line group respects him, likes being coached by him. I think he's a good relationship builder. I also think he's a good football coach. I think highly of him, and I'm excited he's still here. It's been fun partnering with him and watching him coach our guys already a little bit through just kind of the off-season stuff we're doing.

Q. When you look around college athletics, you've got a lot of eligibility challenges and things. Do you think maybe it's a matter of time before that happens in football, where somebody who went pro comes back, and do you have to open yourself up to the possibility of that might happen and create a space?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I wasn't planning on sharing this

today, but we're going to file a temporary restraining order and see if Tim Tebow can play short yardage and goal line, quarterback. I don't know what the hell is going on with all that. Like I don't understand it. I'm not smart enough to figure it out. I'm not going to make any statements that's going to be bulletin board other than Tebow probably here because I'm not smart enough to understand all this legal stuff.

To me, you're either in college or you're pro; which one are you. I don't know. But I don't understand all of it.

I think we've gotten to where it's like, hey, you can appeal tore a JuCo year, a COVID year, a sixth year, a ninth year, how many years -- the model has been five years to play four. The conversation around some people with five for five I don't think is going very far because litigation is what it sounds like to me. I don't know all that stuff. I don't understand all of it.

We're going to coach who they let us coach and recruit who they let us recruit. But the problem is I think that's such a moving target that you don't know who's allowed to play, and the rule may change tonight or tomorrow or whatever.

I don't know. But yeah, we'll see if Tebow gets his years I want back.

Q. Now that you've gone through it, what would you think an ideal calendar should look like from a college football standpoint?

JON SUMRALL: I would love for us to move the season up a week or two, like week zero. I think it's asinine that -- I get it, it's all for TV and all that money, but the college football championship game I believe next year is January 24th. That's absurd to me. That means the midpoint of the football season if you play in that game is like mid to late November.

The other part -- we could talk for an hour on this, right. There's some parts of this, too, we moved up the high school signing date to early December. Well, we did that to protect the high school kids from losing their spots to transfers. But then right after we did that, what did we do, we moved the transfer portal back, so then it's like, why did we move the high school signing day from the middle of December to the beginning. It's like we fix a problem and then we change the other part of it, and it just seems a little bit scattered.

I do think there's still this thing called school. Like these guys have to go to class, allegedly. The academic calendar and the football season is really not matched like

it used to, which I think for us archaic football coaches and how we think is a little bit messy and a little bit unclear.

But I think move the season up. I think start the playoffs earlier, end the playoffs earlier, make it match a little bit more closer to the old January 1st National Championship game. Maybe not the 1st, maybe it's the 4th or whatever. But I think that would be awesome.

I would say this, having been in the SEC head coaches' text, the one thing I think that the SEC head coaches feel like as a whole and probably unanimous on this is like -- I wasn't in this room when the nine-game conference schedule got talked about. I was not coaching in this league at that time.

I think they all felt like, hey, we're going to nine and we're going to expand the playoff to 16. I think a lot of those guys feel -- I wasn't in there so I don't necessarily have this feeling, but I see why they have this feeling. They feel like they got burned because it's like, all right, now we're playing nine conference games, a tenth Power Four game, and we're not expanding the playoff, and we play in arguably the toughest league, game in, game out. I'm not saying other leagues don't have great teams.

I would say there's some -- a lot of things are on the calendar, playoff model, that need to be evaluated still.

Q. Signing day back to -- could you have signing day back to today?

JON SUMRALL: I actually don't think so because every one of our high school signees was mid-year. I think now that we've moved the portal window to the beginning of January, we could do it like December 16, 17, 18, whatever that Wednesday is that falls there, we could move it back.

So now just having walked through this, I oversaw a signing class at Tulane and simultaneously tried to help be involved with overseeing a signing class at Florida at the same time.

Now, if it wasn't for Katie Doeker, previously Katie Turner around here, we would not have signed anybody. If it wasn't for Savannah Bailey and our GatorMade program because I asked all the parents and recruits, what made you choose Florida -- that's probably the coolest thing about this signing day press conference, if you will, is we lost two commitments, okay, two, with the coaching change. That has nothing to do with me. That has everything to do with Florida and the other people that were involved in those young men choosing Florida.

The University of Florida is a special place in every way

possible. I think you compound that with the Katies and the Savannahs and the people that were a part of the recruiting process. When I Zoomed and talked on the phone with all the committed families and prospects, they all were like, man, GatorMade is awesome. Katie has been awesome. Academic support here in our Hawkins Center, like, big time. They all voiced why did you choose Florida, then their last question was, hey, what's football going to look like. I'm like, we're going to win.

That part was real. But I do think the signing day stuff, I wouldn't be opposed to now that the transfer portal is moved back, why not move the December signing day back to where it was. That makes a ton of sense. So now when you have a coaching change the beginning of December, a kid is not -- those kids, they signed knowing me for 48 hours basically. Like interpersonally. That's a lot of faith, man, for what you're going to put your future in.

Q. Once you signed those high school guys and then you figured out who was leaving, what did you sense were the biggest needs roster-wise that you wanted to hit in the portal, and how do you feel like you guys did there?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, there was some that I think we answered more resoundingly than others. I still don't -- I'm not fully comfortable fully assessing our roster because I've been with them for a month-ish. I still am not -- I would always take more depth on the line of scrimmages. The offensive and defensive line I would have liked to have maybe gotten a couple more always.

So that would be one place I would start with, like, probably could have added another piece or two on the D-line in particular from a numbers standpoint.

I did feel like when you go to the portal, you're trying to answer maybe where you have a hole or a gap or a void, and I felt like for us, sometimes, man, it may be a front-line starter you're looking for or a certain spot. Sometimes it's a guy to compete for a job.

I can't fully say I know exactly where we are in regards to that. I think we know, but it's such a calculated risk when you're doing that.

Then two, the other component that people don't realize is there's a lot of guys in the portal I would love to add, but we do have some funds that are not, like, endless. There's a cap for us, at least at Florida. I don't know what everybody else's numbers look like, but we couldn't just say, hey, I like that player, let's go pay him X amount of dollars. You have to make the math work.



There's some players we couldn't -- we didn't go pursue because when you find out what it's going to cost, it's like, we're going to be over, and not just a little over but -- so you can't just keep adding all top end of the roster players maybe from a value standpoint on the financial side.

Q. On the retention piece, you've been at two schools where your roster got raided in the portal. What was it like to be on the other end of that and be able to keep your top players?

JON SUMRALL: It was more fun than losing everybody. Last year at Tulane, we started the season, and we had our left tackle and left guard that were starters back, and we had a D-lineman, a linebacker, and a safety, so five total. I'm like, I don't know how we're going to win seven games, much less what we did.

I'm comfortable in uncertain situations. Some people are probably like, how do you do this, I'm like, it'll be fine, it'll work out, just coach the guys. There will be a sign that gets put up in my office pretty soon that will say nothing but coach the team. That's all I'm really worried about is coach the team. We're going to lose players at times even at Florida. There's guys that left I would have left for them to have stayed, but they didn't feel like it was maybe the right fit or they needed a change of scenery or whatever, and it does feel nice to at least have some resourcing to go be competitive to retain guys in the open market, maybe go acquire guys or add guys.

You ask any coach, I think they'd tell you how much is enough. There's never enough. You always want more. I feel better with more good players.

Q. Do you feel there needs to be a salary cap and enforceable contracts for players nowadays? The game has changed so much. Used to be your scholarship was your contract, but it's changed.

JON SUMRALL: Yeah. Are we going to become the NFL and have collective bargaining and employment status? That's a whole different set of issues. I don't know what's enforced right now. I know there's been a hot topic the last couple weeks of, like, somebody tampered with this guy or this guy. Yeah, no kidding because nothing gets done. So who cares.

If you want to know is there tampering, yeah, everybody is tampered. Every player on our team got tampered with. They all did. 100 percent of them have been tampered with. I don't lose my mind about it because I'm like, yeah, it's just what happens. In the transfer portal, I know there's dates around it, it's always open. It's always open. Anybody that's freaking out like I can't believe they

tampered -- well, until there's any penalties for it, what's going to stop people from doing it.

I'm not doing it, okay. But there's always, like -- the back channel of communication of, hey, this guy may leave via an agent or a high school coach or whatever. There's no real -- I don't feel like there's a whole lot that really gets enforced.

Q. Would there be one of the ways to bring about enforcement, have a legitimate contract, A, B, C and D?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, we do. We have contracts with guys on their rev share and NIL deals and all that stuff, but I just don't know the enforcement side.

I still think we're so much in the early stages of this that that whole enterprise is still really very unsettled.

Q. How was that when you were a player? Would you have outlasted Darian Mensah? Would he have been stuck on the Kentucky roster and you could have left for another job if you'd have been the coach?

JON SUMRALL: If I'd have been the coach at Kentucky -- I'm confused. And Darian Mensah played --

Q. If you were there 20 years ago, would you have left before he could have?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, without him transferring out. I'm actually for the portal. I'm not against -- I like transfer portal. I like NIL. I like rev share. I like all that stuff. I think it's great our players get paid. I'm for all that. I love the portal. Love it.

Like I said, I'm one of the few coaches that's like, hey, I'd be cool with a second portal window still happening. Most of the guys are like, no, that's terrible. I'm like, well, I'd like to go through spring ball and go, hey, we're not good enough here, I want to add another player. But I don't get to do that.

I would have outlasted Darian if I was coaching him, yeah, but he ran away because he got a big bag, and I'm not even mad about that. I'm happy for Darian. I talk to Darian -- I probably could get in trouble for this. He calls me every now and then. We're still close.

Q. There was a couple cases the last couple years where players just unenrolled from the university and then enrolled elsewhere. Some could say that involved some tampering. Where do you think of that, and do you anticipate that being closed in a sense with

no spring portal?

JON SUMRALL: I don't think so. I don't think we'd get closed because there's still the student status. We were the beneficiary of that with Jake receipts laugh at Tulane last year. That was a pretty significant addition for us in late July. You can sit here and whine and complain about the way the rules are or you can just embrace them and try to adapt and make them work the best for you.

I don't think any of that's going to change because you can still withdraw, say I'm making an academic decision, and we all know it's not really that academic probably. I don't think anything is going to change on that probably.

Q. Emmanuel, what jumps out about him? We all saw the picture on Twitter. He looks like he's 315 with 5 percent body fat.

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, so he's 6'6" and a quarter, 305 pounds, and his body fat is under 10, I believe. I looked at the numbers, he is a special-looking dude. I came off the road late one night and I was getting a quick lift in the weight room. It was almost 9:00 and he's out there by himself doing pass rush drills, and he's got his shirt off. I'm like, man, that guy has got a chance to be special.

He's gifted. He's a great kid, awesome family. In the recruiting process on him, there were several other high-profile programs involved. I think the family component kind of went out there. I think Mom and Dad felt comfortable. We did a Zoom with them, and I don't know that anybody else did the Zoom with them. They're in Manchester, England, Nigerian descent but live in England, and we did a Zoom with them. Kind of crazy hours for -- we were trying to make it work to where we could all be on the Zoom.

But he's got a chance. He's very raw and young as a player. It's not like he's been playing an exceptionally long time. He's still a very young player, new player to the game, has great physical giftedness and traits, and I think is very passionate about learning, and he's a hard worker. I'm excited to see what he can do.

Q. When you look at this transfer portal class overall, Georgia Tech players, Penn State players, Kentucky players, connections with your staff, was that a little bit by design, or do you think that could translate on the field in terms of familiarity with the coaches and stuff like that?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I think there's always something to be said about familiarity. In any situation, player to coach, coach to player. A lot of times when guys go in the portal

and there's some knowns going back to earlier, when there's less variables at play, I think you have a better chance at getting a guy.

Georgia Tech guys, several of them wanted to follow Buster, that crew that came with Buster, and then obviously a couple of the Penn State O-linemen wanted to follow Phil.

I think that says a lot about them, too. I didn't bring a heavy number of Tulane guys. I told those guys that that was sort of probably going to be the likelihood. I told them all I'm not going to outbid to get you. We brought our kicker and our punter from Tulane. When you have some knowns, though, you like bringing guys that you may know.

Q. Building off what you said about Emmanuel, is there any other guy that has stood out to you this past month about workouts?

JON SUMRALL: Transfer guys?

Q. Or just recruits in general.

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I mean, Eric Singleton has stood out. Bailey Stockton is an extreme competitor. They've all flashed in certain ways. But Bailey Stockton, man, he's a complete competitor. In our morning workouts right now, he does not want to lose. He likes competing.

I'd be remiss to not say it, but several of the linemen look good to me. All four of the O-linemen I think have stood out. Emmanuel you mentioned, Cam Dooley has got great length and can run.

One that's probably been a pleasant surprise is Kanye Clark, UCLA DB. He's been electric in our running stuff right now, movement stuff.

I feel good about all of them we've added to this point. Nobody has done anything where I'm like, man, why did we do that. But we haven't put pads on yet, either.

Freshman-wise there's several guys. This Carr, he's from Ocala, but went to IMG, the offensive lineman. He's got a maturity about him that's very impressive. Several of the guys. We'll see.

Q. Spring ball is coming up. What are you looking to accomplish this spring?

JON SUMRALL: Just learn how we operate schematically within all three phases, individual player development, and compete. It's not real complicated. We've got to learn what to do, learn how to do it, and then improve



individually.

Q. The decision to bring in Aaron Philo as really your main quarterback, how much of that was your trust in Buster and his confidence in him?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, Buster is very confident in Philo and his readiness to be a high-level player. So that made me more confident because he saw him every day for the last couple years, so that was a huge part of that.

If Buster hadn't been with him, I probably would have had more questions. But when a guy has been around somebody that long and seen him since a younger age, you feel better about it.

Then I would also say, too, I think it also is probably an endorsement of how I feel about Tramell. I think Tramell has got a really high ceiling, too, so I'm excited about -- it's not just down to those two guys yet. My first year at Tulane, Darian Mensah was the third quarterback until two weeks before the first game. We're going to compete.

Everybody is going to get what they earn. There is no starting quarterback yet.

Q. Special teams, how involved are you there? I know you've talked about Urban and that relationship. I know the game has changed a lot, but his teams, it was like -- I think 17 blocked kicks on those two national title teams combined. How much do you involve yourself in that and emphasize that?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, I've got a background as a special teams coordinator when I was an assistant coach, so that part is still a passion of mine. Johnathan Galante will run our kicking game stuff.

I'm involved in all of it. I don't put any play calls in the game, but all the play calls that go in the game, I know exactly what we're doing. So I'm not, like, hey, call whatever you want. We ain't doing that.

But I also very rarely -- occasionally I interject and go, hey, I want to see this. Special teams probably a decent amount, defense here and there, offensively more conceptually. What I really do with the offense is I probably look at what the defense is doing and give them information, I think, that can be helpful about how we can attack them.

In the kicking game, I'm involved. I'm going to be in every special teams meeting. In practice I'm probably more engaged to the practice component of special teams than I am anything in regards to my focus because I think when

you're head coach and your whole staff -- you'll see a staff coach special teams, too, if you're not the offensive line, defensive line coach or one of the coordinators on special teams.

It'll be all hands on deck at practice. Everybody will be involved in the drill because I think that shows our team, hey, this is important. If all the coaches are involved, it feels important.

That's why I go in the weight room a lot because when I'm in the weight room a lot, I think our players go, man, it must be important to be in the weight room and be strong. If the head coach isn't involved in the kicking game, I think it diminishes what those guys think the kicking game can do for your individual opportunities in this game but also your team's success.

I'm very involved.

Q. In roster and transfer portal scouting, have you had a lot of time to really assess the signing class itself from what they did in high school?

JON SUMRALL: Yeah, so I crash course studied them right when I took the job. I tried to watch a little bit of all of them's tape immediately just so I at least had some familiarity. The nice thing is 100 percent of our signees are mid year, so I've seen them over the last few weeks.

But initially it was very much speed dating, if you will, where it was like, man, watching a few minutes of highlights, do a FaceTime with all of them, get to know who they are interpersonally, and then figure out just kind of what they were about.

Q. This is your third head coaching job, so obviously third brand new staff. How do you get a new staff to buy into everything and then translate that to all these new players, particularly with a culture that's constantly changing because of the portal?

JON SUMRALL: Do you have our building wired or something? That's what we've been doing the last two days. We talked about it again this morning as a staff after our workout when the staff met at 8:15.

We spent the last couple of days really being detailed and strategic about making sure there's alignment, an understanding of the standards. I'm huge on your role and your job description and responsibility being very clear. I hate ambiguity. So each person has things they're responsible for. But we're all responsible for being great teammates first, so we all have to be bought in.

Now, that doesn't mean just blindly trust whatever I say. I ask them all the time, like, challenge me. If you've got great ideas or feedback, bring it up. I haven't arrived. Nobody has.

I think you're constantly trying to get better. I told our staff when we started this process most recently when we got off the road to kind of do some alignment calibration work. I just talked to them about what's unique and challenging for me is my first head job at Troy, I had a staff of 18 people, so I was everybody's direct line of report. Then I went to Tulane and the staff size was roughly double. Then I walked in here and I'm like, there are a million people. That doesn't really work with me. I don't need it to be small, but it was a little bit maybe too robust for my liking because I think when you get too big, are you doing enough work, are you bored. I want to stay busy.

I don't want people around the building twiddling their thumbs trying to figure out, what do I do now. Well, if you have to think about what to do now, you probably don't have enough on your plate because I don't have any time to go, what should I do right now.

I want our guys to -- everyone in the building to be busy and occupied and working.

But I think cohesion is so important. There's a quote by GK Chesterton, "A true soldier doesn't fight for what's across from him but he fights for what's behind him." I want us to be connected and care about each other and fight for each other and bring it every day and have each other's back. We're going to be in the foxhole at times. It ain't always going to be good.

I hate to break it to you, I'm undefeated right now, we might lose a game here. But when it goes sideways, do you flinch? Are you so outcome driven that you don't weather that storm? We're going to weather storms here, and we're going to do it because we're aligned and we've got each other's back.

Q. What have you seen from Evan Pryor and the running back room overall?

JON SUMRALL: Evan Pryor can roll. He's got great speed, short area quickness. I think he adds a little bit different dimension from the running back room. Obviously I think it has to start with Jadan. Man, physicality, toughness, strong in the weight room, has a little bit of an edge to him. I've challenged him, hey, just because you're known now, don't lose your edge. You have to keep doing what's made you you. If you get a little bit complacent, then you get soft and then you get off the path of what's made you special.

That group it'll be interesting to see who steps up.

I think we all have a decent pulse of who Jadan is. There's a lot of opportunity around him, though, and we need to see who elevates as we go through spring practice and see what that room is going to look like.

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