

# SEC Football Media Days

Thursday, July 16, 2015

## Coach Les Miles

LSU



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by LSU head coach Les Miles. We'll ask Coach Miles to make an opening remark, and then we'll take your questions.

COACH MILES: Good morning. Nice to see you all. I'm told I'm in the last day of Media Days. It appears to me that some of the media have not shaved and have left their car running in the back parking lot, kind of ready to get off to fishing or wherever they're supposed to be off to. Scooter has way too much sun to be inside. I can tell you that, I did not bring tennis shoes. That is a product of a sports information director who knows that I have an attachment to those shoes. I'm wearing regular shoes and regular socks. [ Laughter ]. How about this one? It's my 11th year at LSU, doesn't get any better than that. The opportunity to take a young team, coach them a little bit, make them better, get us in the playoffs, and an opportunity to represent LSU, great college, great opportunities for our players. New Commissioner Greg Sankey, very high character guy, we've met with him every step of the way. We know who he is. He'll shoulder that responsibility well. I look forward to working with him. He will not miss a step there. Commissioner Mike Slive, a great vision, positioned the conference. Personally could argue with the guy and then really enjoy losing. It's a great league with great players and coaches. I like the competition, and I can't wait for the Tigers to report and the season gets under way. The summertime is over. I recognize that when I see you guys. But summer's been fun. I think it's important that the coach as well as the players kind of have a separation because we go every day. We see each other just about seven days a week starting here pretty quick. I had an adventure. This is at Boston with the Red Sox game, great city. My son went to a camp there and went in the Green Monster, signed up. Those kind of historic ballparks, I enjoy those. My oldest daughter, Smacker Miles, is chasing a personal time and a personal best at UT, having a great experience at Texas, and hopefully I can get her to come home this weekend after she swims. My eldest son, Manny, left for UNC. He's working hard and trying to become a Tar Heel in football. Ben, my sophomore to be junior, again, is getting ready for a junior year at Catholic in Baton Rouge. Big, strong, strapping guy, having a great summer. Macy, fast pitch softball player, watching my girl. I'm going to tell you something, here's what happens. When you were a young father or mother, here's what you did. You had a place in

your family that was your time with the kids, right? And then you realize, as this thing goes -- I mean, you pushed the buggy, you were at the practices, you did all those things. Then when this thing gets a little older, my youngest son is 16, and I have a difficult time corralling him. So I have now a 12-year-old. She just turned 12, fast-pitch softball player, and I'm going to make a rule that she cannot go to college nor really question whether or not we send her to high school so that we can keep her around and continue to be father, just like I've always been. I'll certainly have to change that direction, but I can tell you, it makes a difference. So that's the summer. Our team, eight wins, certainly not enough. We played some really good ball clubs in that eight-win season and played them very close, but our goal is the playoffs, our goal is the SEC championship. We're shy of our goals, and we want more. The things that we've done, I think we're in really good shape. 15 straight Bowl games, 8 victories for the record 15 straight years with eight or more. We returned 14 starters, 8 on offense, 6 on defense. Every specialist that we have, both returner and kick and punter are back. Core membership of this team has had a great summer. They have put it in in the weight room. I can tell you that I go in and work out, and I see a defensive back group working by themselves in the indoor, and I just marvel at how our kids work in the summer. So it would be my guess that this team will be fun to coach, and, again, I enjoy the fact that they'll report here pretty quickly. Young guys have had a good summer, some of the true freshmen. In the last three years, we've had 46 true freshmen play. In 2012, 15. 2013, we had 14. And in 2014, we had 17 true freshmen play. We expect that that will happen again. Program goals are, get your degree, and certainly we feel like our guys are getting that. What I think is happening is we're probably graduating somewhere in the 70 percentile over the last three, four years, but our guys are coming back after they leave as juniors and come back to Baton Rouge, we make sure they get their degree. So a number of guys that have already graduated and have already gone on to the NFL have come back and gotten their degree. The career after graduation, I feel like we're pursuing championships, and we're in a position to compete for a championship virtually every year. We've won 103 games in the last ten years, which is the -- for that period of time, the school that's won the most. So we look to improve and look forward to the season. Offensively, if we get an

improved throwing game, both the quarterbacks and wide receivers, which we would expect that that would happen -- we think we're mature there. We feel like we're stronger and faster. We feel like we will throw the football better. We've always been able to run it pretty good. Cameron is a great coach, doing a great job with these quarterbacks, and this offense, we'd expect that we'd be more productive there as well. We have a number of starters back on the offensive line. Hawkins, big left tackle. Vadal Alexander to the right side, Ethan Pocic. And we'll fill two spots with Josh Boutte, who may be the largest man that I've ever been around. And William Clapp, Andy Dodd, and K.J. Malone, a very talented, athletic left side there. Wide receivers, Tony Ball is a new hire. Just with our wide receivers, we're going to need a guy that understands the stance and starts and how to get into routes, route nuance, and to teach some of these young guys. We really think that he's been a great addition to our staff. Those guys at wide receiver, that will be key, D.J. Chark, Malachi Dupre, John Diarse, Trey Quinn, and a number of young guys that will be in a position to come in and compete. The running backs, Leonard Fournette, 1,000-yard rusher. He's one of those guys that's a hard worker. He's quiet, does not speak much. He truly is a leader of our team. He's a guy that does the work in the classroom, does the work in the weight room, and when we talk about what our team goals and the direction of this team, he's the guy that's integral to those thoughts. Darrel Williams has had a great summer, another, in my opinion, will be an elite back. And Derek, who's just kind of gone down, has had a very good summer to this point. We wish him the very best. He's undergoing tests in a Baton Rouge hospital right now. We do not know exactly what ailment it is. Again, as soon as I get off the plane today, I'm going to go see him. I think Brandon Harris has gotten most of the summer work. I think he has really improved. I think I'm confident in both guys, and I think competition will end up making the call there who will start. But, again, I think we're nothing but improved at the quarterback spot. Defensively, two new hires in Kevin Steele and Ed Orgeron. Kevin has had great success and understands football as well as there. Very knowledgeable and has success at really every level and knows our Western Division. One of the things that he's done is he's been in the conference for some time now and kind of feel like he's going to give us some advantages in this Western Division. Ed Orgeron bleeds purple and gold. He's a guy from the state. He signed initially with LSU and then left and went to another school and really has been trying to get back there since he left. He's a great technician. He's an elite defensive line coach, a guy that can coach in the NFL, can coach in college from one side of this nation to the next, very enthusiastic, a lot of energy. I think our players have really enjoyed working for him. Our defensive line, Davon Godchaux and Greg

Gilmore, Christian LaCouture, and a number of guys behind him inside I think will push the front very well. On the perimeter, Tashawn Bower and Lewis Neal and a host of other guys will really give us good position and speed on the perimeter there. Our linebackers may be the biggest, fastest that I've been around. Kendell Beckwith, who's with me today, is a great student, a great person, very bright, bright football player. Kind of emerged in last year to really become a leader and a player, a big-time player for us in the middle of our defense. 6'4"-1/2, 6'4", 255 pounds, and run legitimately a 4.55. Deion Jones, again, this is the group, 6'2", 220, runs legitimately under 4.50. Lamar Louis, a 4.60 40. Sam backer, Duke Riley, again, 6'2", 220. And a 4.60 linebacker. So as a group, we feel like this group is not only a very talented group of guys but have great speed. Secondary, Tre'Davious White, who's a shutdown corner and a guy who's been a three-year starter going into his third year. Then our punt return guy and A-B student, great person, leader in the secondary. One of those guys that just works all the time because that's just who he is. We'll have Kevin Toliver and Ed Paris. And may have a look at a young freshman in Donte Jackson, see how he might well perform at corner. Safeties, a lot of energy, very bright guys in our secondary at safety, Jamal Adams will be much improved, a very, very capable safety, if not one of the finest safeties in the conference. Jalen Mills also returns as a guy that's very experienced and understands secondary play. Behind him, behind those guys, Rickey Jefferson and Dwyane Thomas, pretty talented secondary group. Special teams, Colby Delahoussaye, two-year starter, kicked 24 field goals. Trent Domingue and Cam Gamble will both compete for who's kicking off, and both guys have strong, strong legs. Jamie Keehn was our punter and second team All-SEC last year. Our returners, Tre'Davious White and four net are back. I like my team. I like how they work. I think they'll compete like hell. If they stay healthy and improve, I don't care who we play. We look forward to playing them. In the season, we open with McNeese State in our state. They will fight like hell. We'll have to play well against them. And then Mississippi State and Auburn. So we start fast. We get the speed execution where we want it, get a nice start, we'll be right in it. Thank you. I'll take your questions.

**Q. Do you think last year's was a kind of a culmination of losing so many juniors to the draft and maybe kind of caught up with you guys a little bit?**

COACH MILES: I think we're in a spot there where maybe the youth at quarterback and some of the juniors that we lost may well have given us a little bit of -- gave us a difficult season. But I think those things, the loss of junior play is very significant. I don't know how you correct it. I've worked hard against it. If you

look at the junior class that you could return, you'd argue that you might not be the most talented team in the country. But what we've done and tried to do is we lose juniors, we're going to recruit to that void, and we've been pretty successful in the fact that we've brought some of those guys in and they've played and played well.

**Q. Les, you don't see many running backs in the Heisman conversation as much at the end of the year. The position has been devalued in the NFL draft. You have a really good one. Nick Chubb is a good one. Is the day of the featured back in college football just about over?**

COACH MILES: I think the Heisman Trophy winner is an exceptional guy. I think he's a guy that has leadership, comes from a great team. Understands team position. In other words, where he actually fits. And they have a really tremendous season. I think at some point in time there might be a number of guys on our team that should be worthy of conversation. Certainly, Leonard Fournette might well be worthy of what conversation. That's not my focus. Certainly, I hope it's not his focus because the whole piece is putting the team together and having him do his part. If he just does his part, he'll be in the mix.

**Q. Les, what's the status of your suspended players? Will they be available for preseason practice and the first game?**

COACH MILES: I don't know at this point. Some guys are no longer with the team, and that would be Tra Valentine and Trey Lealaimataf, whose name I can't pronounce. I've tried for a year, I swear. But those two guys are no longer with our team. But the other guys are going through a legal process, and that legal process will take time. When we get information, we'll make a decision then. I'm very optimistic that a number of those guys will return, only because I know the information. Again, that's not me. This is all about what's going on in the legal process.

**Q. Coach, do you still have an amicable relationship with John Chavis, and what kind of impact do you think he'll have at Texas A&M?**

COACH MILES: John has been a great guy for us, and I have great respect for him, just a tremendous person. You suspect that he will coach great defense at A&M.

**Q. Last season the quarterback play was probably not where you wanted it to be. What are some things that you have done, as well as your offensive coordinator Cam Cameron, of making sure the quarterback takes a step in the right direction to be more competitive this year?**

COACH MILES: Well, experience isn't something that you can just will on a guy. The good news is we have a

guy who's started eight games or so and we have a guy that's been around it now and played through two springs and been through a fall. So our quarterback play will be better, legitimately better. There's been some things that we've done to kind of script and hone to make their skills and abilities more evident. So I think we'll get really improved quarterback play.

**Q. Coach, since your tenure at LSU in 2005, you always seem to bring in at least one linebacker that's not just instinctive, but also a very intense player. Perry Riley, Landon Barrel, and, of course, Kwon Alexander, to name a few. You talk a bit about Kendell Beckwith. What are some of the qualities and the characteristics that he's got that some of the other guys had in your tenure?**

COACH MILES: Well, one, he's intellectual. He understands the flow of the game. He recognizes who he's supposed to relate to on the field. He's also a guy that has very good ball skills. If he has an opportunity to get his hands on the ball, he'll catch it and take it the other way. And he's a very physical player. If you watched his tackles the back half of that season, they were the tackles that were violent and you drove the ball back the other way. And he has real leadership ability. Our guys will enjoy playing with him in that huddle. I think that he fits right in with really the finest linebackers that we've had.

**Q. Obviously, Vadal Alexander has worked real hard over the last three years to become the player he's become, but can you describe in your own words and from your eyes how much he's grown into the role of the leadership role that he's had on the offensive line?**

COACH MILES: Vadal Alexander, in his -- I want to say in his junior year, maybe his sophomore year, had Guillain-Barré in his legs, a guy that's had to overcome a really significant sickness, illness. What he's done here is really improved and worked hard, tried to work hard on his body, and his contribution has been great. He's a leader. He's a guy that understands the right way and the right things to do, and he's going to be a very physical force for us on the offensive line. He was a starter since he was a true freshman and played guard, played guard on the left side, played right tackle, now he's going back to the right tackle spot. He's going to be key to the year.

**Q. Top recruits get more hype each and every year. You've certainly dealt with this over the years, certainly with Leonard Fournette and Malachi Dupre, how do you go about handling the noise around the true freshmen before they even play and do you have to treat them differently given all the attention they're receiving?**

COACH MILES: I don't know we need to treat them

any differently at all. This is a team concept, and the opinion and the issues are addressed in that building. So if he comes to -- and what I insisted he does is come to that building for his information and how he needs to see it, and I think we effectively push some of that distraction to the outside. I think he's a mature guy. I think he understands that I would never have brought him here in this instance if I didn't think it was something that he could handle. I think that he can handle the spotlight and understand it's really all about team and it's his contribution to that offense.

**Q. Coach Miles, you just talked about John Chavis and what a great job he did. Definitely has a storied career in the future in the SEC. He's moved often to A&M. You bring on Kevin Steele and also Ed Orgeron. Do you think your defense is in a better place now than it was under John Chavis?**

COACH MILES: I think better is speculative. I really don't know. I can tell you that we've had some really talented teams in the last seven years or so and guys that have gone on to the NFL and played great. The idea that, if you look at the number of guys that we've had on our defense that were drafted -- simply put, we had eight players drafted in the 2013 NFL draft, all coming from the first five rounds. It's the only time in modern day history that an NFL -- that one school had eight defensive players taken in the first five rounds. We've had 24 defensive players since 2010, which ties the most in the SEC during that span. We've had at least one defensive lineman taken in every NFL draft for the last 12 years. The five defensive players selected in the first round since NFL draft since 2010. So our talent pool has been pretty special. What I'm saying is that we would expect that that talent would continue and that we would have great defense, period.

**Q. With the pieces you have on this team this year, do you anticipate asking whoever emerges as a quarterback, the starting quarterback, to be more of a game manager, or will you kind of take the handcuffs off?**

COACH MILES: Every time that a quarterback steps under center, he is a game manager. The game manager has to handle the play called, has to get the ball to the right guy, has to make sure that this is not a -- we're not taking a chance to turn it over. We're not just slinging it around the yard. We're not just tossing it around the yard. We're doing those things that we've coached and expected, and should he do that, he will have a greater opportunity to be the starting quarterback at any school, certainly LSU.