

SEC Football Media Days

Thursday, July 16, 2015

Coach Mark Richt

Georgia



KEVIN TRAINOR: Good morning. Welcome to day four of SEC Football Media Days. We're joined by Georgia head coach Mark Richt.

COACH RICHT: Thank you. First thing I'd like to do is start out by congratulating Commissioner Slive on the National Football Foundation Legacy Award that was just named, I think maybe yesterday or the day before, and also say that I've been here in this league really during the entire tenure of Commissioner Slive, and I was just so blessed to be a part of the league during this time. The job that he did was phenomenal. Now I'm really looking forward to Greg Sankey's leadership. Been knowing Greg a long time. Obviously, he's been with the league offices for quite some time now, and I really know that over time it will prove out that he's going to be a tremendous leader as well. So I want to start with that. Then I'll just move into Georgia football. First thing is I'm very excited about this team, this program. Our guys have been working extremely hard. The rules have changed a little bit where you can make some things mandatory throughout the summer. There's certain things that we can do now and view now that we weren't able to do in the past. Just I know that these guys have been paying the price for the ability to compete in the best league in America. Going into my 15th season here in Georgia, I know that this league is jam packed full of great coaches and great players and great venues. It's just an experience that a lot of people would love to be able to be a part of. I'm just thankful for my opportunity to do that and looking forward to this season. With that, I'll open it up. Have at it.

Q. Do you have any more clarity on who your starting quarterback might be to enter the season? Why didn't things work out with Jacob Park?

COACH RICHT: Okay, asking who I think will be the starter? Is that what you're saying? I have no idea who the starter is going to be. We are going to have a tremendous competition, continue that competition for that position. It's going to -- I think it's going to take a while. We have 29 practice opportunities before the first game, and we're going to get a rotation where we can see the guys that we want to see compete and then make a decision on who should be the starter. But right now, I don't know who that is. When we came out of spring, I think the guys made progress. I think the guys are able to function well in our system, but to

say who's the man to lead the job, to win the job right now, I don't have that answer. As far as Jacob, things don't always work out for a kid for a lot of different reasons. The main thing with him is I want to wish him the very best. He's a great kid. He's a very good competitor, very talented guy. I'm just hoping that he lands in a spot where he can really thrive and finish out his college career.

Q. Mark, Nick Chubb obviously is going to get a lot of Heisman Trophy hype. Is there an approach you take to helping him handle that? And was not bringing him today any effort on that, maybe to temper that attention a little bit?

COACH RICHT: Not at all. First of all, I normally try to bring seniors -- it used to be just two guys. I'd bring an offensive and defensive senior. Then one time it became a third young man to come. This year in particular, Commissioner Slive -- or Commissioner Sankey, I'm not sure which commissioner, wanted to have somebody who had a little bit of a story outside of just the football part. It happened to be Malcolm Mitchell for us this year. Now, Malcolm also happens to be a senior and happens to be a heck of a football player. But he's got a great story about his love for reading, his love for being in a book club, and he has now written a little children's book and things like that. So that's why the three that are here are here today. But as far as handling Nick, first of all, Nick is a very -- he's a pretty quiet, unassuming guy. He's a very hard worker. He's a great student. He's a great teammate. He's becoming a great leader for us. And he doesn't really like the hype. You can go back to his recruiting. He was very low key. He decided he wanted to be at Georgia, did it quietly, didn't have a big old press conference, and stuck to his decision, didn't do a bunch of stuff to bring attention to himself. He doesn't care about that. He cares about working hard, playing hard, and helping Georgia win. I really appreciate that about him. The other thing, as far as Heisman Trophy and all, I've been blessed to coach a couple of them in years past, and to me, that's as much of a team award as it is an individual award. Rarely does a guy win a Heisman if he's not on a team that's winning at a very high level. So the team is going to fight like mad to win, and if something like that happens, that would be wonderful.

Q. You mentioned the additional time you get with players this summer, and you have a quarterback

in Greyson Lambert who transferred in. How has that helped his transition, and what specifically are your impressions, and what does he need to work on this summer?

COACH RICHT: Greyson had some school to finish at Virginia in order to graduate. So he's really been in summer school at Virginia almost the entire summer.

Q. Coach, you touched a little bit on Malcolm Mitchell for Georgia. Without Michael Bennett, without Chris Conley, how important is it to keep Malcolm Mitchell healthy as he's one of the big threats on the outside to stretch the field?

COACH RICHT: No doubt, he's a very explosive player. He's got a lot of experience. He's made big plays in big games. If he's healthy, we'll be a lot better. But that wide receiver position, no matter how good an individual may be, you have to have a group of receivers that can make plays. You have to have a quarterback that can deliver the ball. You've got to have linemen that can protect. You've got to have a run game that people will respect that will allow you to get some coverages that are favorable to throw the football. So there's so many things that go into it, but when you do get the ball in the hands of somebody that can make a guy miss or have the speed to take it to the house, that's very valuable. When you have a guy with some experience to go along with it, it's important. So we want him to stay healthy. We want everybody to stay healthy. I'm glad he's doing well right now.

Q. First of all, I wanted to get your reaction to Justin Houston's contract. Obviously, with what he went through at the Combine, sliding to third, it was great to see what he's done. Why do you think the Chiefs tend to draft a couple of your guys every year?

COACH RICHT: I think we've got five players with the Chiefs right now. We're a team that has -- we're one of the top teams in America as far as having guys in the league overall. But Justin is a guy that I'm so very proud of. I remember meeting him in high school and just seeing this kid with these long arms and big hands and big feet and kind of not having grown into his frame yet a little bit and watched him grow as a player and as a person throughout the time he was at Georgia. And now to see him doing what he's doing in the league and being rewarded for the good things that he's done on the field and off as well, it's just a tremendous thing for him and for Georgia as well.

Q. Coach, how has the specific cost of attendance offered by your school impacted your recruiting and your program?

COACH RICHT: Well, I don't think it's really affected us much at all. It's not really come up as a big point of conversation. But we are very -- we feel very good

about our situation. We have certainly the cost of attendance numbers, but there's also some things that can be done in a creative way that is well within the rules that can get us in pretty good shape on that front. So we know Georgia can do just as well as anywhere in the country as far as taking care of our players, and we don't think it's going to have a negative effect at all.

Q. Coach, you lost a couple of quality players on both sides of the ball to the NFL this year. I just would like to know who will you be looking to be the leaders, the spiritual leaders in the locker room and on the field, on the offensive side and the defensive side this year?

COACH RICHT: It's hard to define exactly who's going to be the leader, but offensively, I've seen John Theus take charge of the offensive unit. Malcolm Mitchell has worked very diligently with the receiver group. You've got, defensively, Jordan Jenkins is a guy, a veteran, a senior. Leonard Floyd, just through his work ethic and how hard he plays in practices. So you've got guys like that. We're a little bit young still in the defensive backfield, but a guy that I like his work ethic on a daily basis is Dominick Sanders. Dominick Sanders, when I say he's the leader of the defense, I don't know if he's that, but if everybody worked as hard as he did, we'd be in pretty good shape.

Q. Coach, just a couple years ago, Keith Marshall was splitting some carries with Todd Gurley, and it looked like he was going to be a phenomenal player. He's had some injuries. I've read reports that he's doing better. Nick Chubb has really emerged as the guy right now. Are you expecting positive things from Keith Marshall? Where is he at right now?

COACH RICHT: Keith is very healthy, in my view. He's moving very well. He's decided to cut his weight down to closer to where he was earlier in his career. You show up as a freshman, about 210 pounds, and then you just get in the weight room, and you eat. You get the nutrition and training table, and before you know it, you weigh 225, 230, and still look like dynamite. But I think he feels more comfortable carrying a little less weight to help his quickness and speed. He's been a speed guy from the very beginning, so that will help him. But I think he's in great shape, great spirits, and he's been a guy that we're going to count on. He's been a guy we have counted on, and we expect to see a bunch from him.

Q. Can you talk about how your guys have adjusted to Coach Schottenheimer and what are the main differences between him and Bobo?

COACH RICHT: Coach Schottenheimer is a guy who -- in the process of replacing Mike Bobo, we were looking for someone similar in philosophy as to how you think

offensive football should be played. There's so many teams that are just spread. They're spread, and they're going fast. They have four receiver sets, sometimes five and all that. We'll get into the spread to some degree, but we still want to have a physical running game to complement a play action passing game and complement our ability to spread and do those kinds of things. So it's kind of hard to find those guys in the college ranks. Coach Schottenheimer, being an NFL coordinator for, I think, nine years, the last nine years, and watching the style of play, he was very similar to what we do. So the common fan may not see a whole lot different as far as the sets and the types of plays that we run, but I think the players have taken to him well. He's a very good teacher and communicator, and I think he's got a great personality for the college game as far as being able to recruit and being able to relate to young people.

Q. Can you describe the difference in Lorenzo Carter from this year, now having a full year under his belt and all of spring practice, and how much bigger an impact do you feel like he can have on the defense this year?

COACH RICHT: Lorenzo did have an impact for us as a freshman, and we thought the greatest value that he had was more of an edge rusher, a speed guy off the edge. That's kind of what his reputation was coming out of high school. But if you're going to play every down, you've got to play the run. You've got to be able to set the edge on some plays and be able to handle fullbacks coming at you on the power play and things of that nature. So he's becoming more and more physical, and he's learning more how to play the run game better. So he's just becoming more of a complete player. But he's just -- he's one of many guys in that position for us that are going to help us play well.

Q. Coach, how quickly last year did it become apparent to you that Nick Chubb could contribute as a freshman?

COACH RICHT: Well, when you watch the guys in preseason camp and you get into your first scrimmage type situations, and you just watch him. A guy like that, it doesn't take long to figure it out. We saw it in high school too, obviously. And the running back position is probably one that young guys can take to and make a contribution more so than maybe an offensive lineman. There's so much to learn as an offensive lineman. But not until he really had to start carrying the load did I realize how much stamina he could have in a game, in an SEC game, at times carrying it 25, 35 times in a game. That's pretty impressive. And that's not our goal for our back. I don't want a guy to carry 35 times a game his whole career all season long. We want to share the load, but we had some issues with injuries and all. So there wasn't a lot of depth at that position.

So he probably carried it more last year in certain games than he probably will this year.

Q. Do you think you are a perfect example of how hard this league is and that you've had so much success and you still get so much criticism?

COACH RICHT: I didn't know I got criticism. [Laughter]. I think the big thing -- I know when I first started coaching 32 years ago, whenever it was, with Coach Bowden and being in what we call hideaway and him talking about notes. A few things he talked about in the very beginning of those sessions, and one was criticism. He said, it's just the nature of the beast in the profession. If you can't take criticism, then you shouldn't coach. I think anybody who's in a leadership role is going to get critiqued. People are going to have opinions, even as a parent, if you say you've got to be in at 11:00 and everybody else gets to stay out until midnight, you might get criticized for that. You may hear grumbling and all that kind of thing. But the goal as a leader is to do what you think is in the best interest of the people that you're in charge of, the people that you're blessed to be in authority over, and focus on that. That's what I do on a daily basis. I don't worry about anything, whether it's good or bad. People have said some good things over the years too.

Q. So much focus on Nick Chubb, a lot of other play makers. What's the kind of -- it's a good problem to have, but what's the challenge of kind of making sure guys are getting involved otherwise?

COACH RICHT: There's no challenge really. It's just more of, like you say, it's a privilege. It's a blessing to have play makers, and the goal is to keep people fresh, keep them healthy, find what guys can do well and get them in position to do it. But, again, it takes everybody doing their job for anybody to have success. I mean, Nick Chubb had great success last year, when you look at the numbers. But he had a bunch of guys blocking for him -- fullbacks, tight ends, linemen, quarterbacks getting in the right play, receivers blocking downfield -- and then him being God gifted and doing his thing. So I think the more play makers you have, the merrier, and that's not too big of a challenge to try to figure out how to get it done. I'd rather have the problem of a bunch of them rather than trying to figure out do we have anybody who can make a play.

Q. Coach, obviously, you came so close a couple years ago to winning the SEC Championship. How frustrating has it been not being able to get back there, and what's got to happen this year for you all to be in that position again?

COACH RICHT: Obviously, you've got to win the East. That's all there is to it. We're going to play eight games in league play, and most of them within the Eastern

Division. Those head-to-head matchups are crucially important, but all the games count. So the goal is to get back to Atlanta. The goal is to get there and win it when you get there. Our focus is on the process again. Our focus isn't on getting there as much as what do we have to do on a daily basis to earn the right for victory? That's what the guys have been doing throughout the off-season, the spring and the summer workouts.

Q. I know you guys took care of business against the West last year against Arkansas and Auburn, but the West has won six straight titles and has been pretty successful against the East lately. What do you think is going on with that?

COACH RICHT: Oh, I don't know other than, when you get to the SEC Championship game, the East hasn't got it done, and we've been a part of that. The bottom line is the best team from each side is going to be there. There's going to be one game, and the winner is it. They're the SEC champion, obviously. So the bottom line is, like for Georgia, hey, let's find a way to get to Atlanta. Let's get the job done when we get there and move on to the playoff. That's what it's all about. That's what everybody's trying to do. Things go in cycles, and at this moment, the West has certainly taken care of business on that day.

Q. You mentioned this is your 15th year. How have you seen the league change overall on the field since you started in 2001, and where do you feel like it's going?

COACH RICHT: You said on the field?

Q. Yeah, on the field.

COACH RICHT: Gosh, there's just -- there was always great coaches, in my opinion. There's always great venues, in my opinion, going back 15 years. Things change as far as style of play. Things change as far as how recruiting works and social media and things change in that regard. But as far as the play, I'd say the style of play, there's a lot more spread than there was back when I first started. It was a little bit more of a defensive league, I would say, when I first got here, and I think it's still a defensive league, a great defensive league, but I think offenses are a little more willing to come out of the style of just hammering the ball at you in play action and all that type of thing. So those things are a little bit different. But for the most part, it's just tremendous competition at stadiums that are jam packed full of fans that love their teams and are willing to support them.

Q. Circling back to cost of attendance, how good do you think the understanding is with coaches around the league of where these figures come from and how they're arrived at for sums?

COACH RICHT: I don't have the answer to that. You'd

have to ask each coach. Each university has their way of doing it. This cost of attendance number has been around a long, long time. It's just all of a sudden become a big deal in our world because of how the players are able to get that cost of attendance figure. But I think everybody does it just a little bit different. There's not a rubber stamp that says, this is how everybody goes about it. It's a university decision and maybe sometimes a Board of Regents decision within a state university system. So it's just been around for a long time.

Q. Why do you think it was important to have the transfer rule regarding domestic violence to kind of draw that line in the sand? And do you think other offenses, there needs to be some standards for other offenses too?

COACH RICHT: Well, I think that one was pretty cut and dry, and I'm not the one who made the decision at all, but I certainly agree with that. That's a good thing to have as a stipulation for our league. The bottom line is it's hard to -- just even as a coach and being in charge of 125 young men year after year after year, if a guy makes a mistake, there's not a book you can open that says, if he does this, you do that. If he does that, you do this, and all of that type of thing. So there's judgment in everything. Even though you might have something that's the same offense, there may be different circumstances. Until you know all the circumstances, it's hard to make a wise decision. We're put in position to do the very best we can to make the best decision for the young man and for our programs and for our universities. Sometimes there are some things that are cut and dry, like a league policy or like a drug policy within the university system or within the athletic association, but there's a lot of things that are left up to the discretion of a coach to decide or an AD or a president to decide. That's where it can get challenging at times.

Q. Mark, you played Louisville in the Bowl game, and though they lost a lot of players to the NFL since then, what were your impressions of Louisville, and can you speak to their depth in particular?

COACH RICHT: Louisville, I'll tell you what, we knew they were good when we played them, and then when we watched the draft, I think they had 11 guys drafted, something like that. It was amazing what happened draft day for them. We knew going in it was going to be a game where we'd be evenly matched. We knew they had speed. We knew they had toughness. We knew they were well coached. And we just went in there battling our tails off. Thankfully, we came out with a victory. You got Hutson Mason hurt relatively early in the game, and our guys just kept battling on defense and making plays, and our offensive players kept

blocking and running and throwing and catching on occasion, and we got it done. But Louisville is an outstanding program.

Q. Coach, you're a member of the NCAA football Oversight Committee. Why did you want to join? Do you have any issue or issues you'd like to see addressed?

COACH RICHT: Well, I don't think this is the time and place to go over those types of things, but I'm honored to be on the committee. I was nominated to be on it, and having that opportunity means a lot to me. It's a very important committee. I am the only head coach representative of the group. We did have a session in person, got to know everybody a little bit, and just a quality group of people. We're very serious about the issues that are going to be coming through, and we're still finding out exactly how we're going to go about our business and the recommendations that we're going to make. But there's just so many things that are going to run through us, that we're not necessarily the final decision makers on, but people are going to want to know what we think about it, and we take that very seriously. Thank you.