

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Lane Kiffin

Press Conference



GREG SANKEY: Lane Kiffin's coaching résumé include 10 conference championship, eight bowl victories, four Heisman winners and three national championships. Last year he led Ole Miss to a 10-win season, the University of Mississippi's second Sugar Bowl since 2015. He is the first Ole Miss coach to win his first two Egg Bowls since Billy Brewer did the same in 1983/'84.

As I was beside a lake in upstate New York on a phone, looking longingly at the ability to be on the water, Lane was texting me pictures of he and his son Knox fishing and he and his pet Lab, Juice, on a jet-ski. You maybe be aware that Deadspin has named Juice as the best Twitter account for the summer of 2022.

University of Mississippi head football coach, Lane Kiffin.

LANE KIFFIN: Thanks, Commissioner.

Excited to be here. I always think that this kind of reenergizes, refreshes you about the season coming up here in the middle of the summer as you see other players, other coaches, or even as the TV was on before, coming up here on SEC Network. Just kind of reminds you it's right around the corner.

Our job is I think really challenging this year because on paper we may look like we should be decent because we filled a lot of holes with transfer portals. That is a good system when you lose really good players and you haven't been somewhere long enough to develop a lot of classes of depth. So we are grateful for that.

At the same time with everything good, there are challenges as well. You have people coming from -- like I've said, kids coming from different parenting, and we have to put them all together as this blended family. That is challenging.

In fall camp, it won't just be about teaching X's and O's, like it always is. We have a lot of culture work to do that you

don't really have to do as much because it's already established because your best players normally have been in your program for a year or two.

Look forward to that challenge.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll take questions.

Q. Wondering your philosophy on-calling trick plays, when you do them? What do you remember about Nick Saban and his philosophy on that?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, Kirby Smart used to say sometimes you come up here and just talking about Alabama. So our first question somehow is about Nick Saban, so... That's pretty usual (smiling).

Trick plays? I don't know. I think kind of offense has evolved so much from where it used to be that in a way maybe you don't run as many because we're not quite the same as we used to be as far as setting things up as much because so much is about tempo and how we do things.

I would guess analytics on trick plays show maybe we don't do as many as we used to.

Coach kind of was with trick plays, kind of like fake kicks, like it had to be a discussion a lot of times right before. He would want to know that week what was in and why. A lot of times you'd run it by him before, so... If they worked, he was happy. If they didn't work, you got ass chewings.

Q. Your offenses have been well-regarded for a long time now. You just lost a quarterback in Matt Corral that you had a lot of praise for. When you look at Jaxson Dart, how do you think he's coming along learning your offense? In general, do you think your offense is a difficult one to master?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I think we've had a lot of really good offenses you referred to because we had really good players and really good coaches, assistant coaches. That's always changing.



I think we don't probably do a lot of things not as well as others. But I think one thing we do pretty well is change our offense to our players, to our skilled players. It's why people will say we look so different year to year. That's not necessarily off-season studies, that is more who our players are.

Now with the portal, we know less about that. I can't really tell you right now what it's going to look like. We're going to need training camp to figure that out.

As far as the quarterback, Jackson coming in, he's young, just like Luke. They just finished their freshman year. It was good to have those guys for spring. It's very competitive. We look forward to those guys battling it out and making them both the best that we can because a lot of times you need both.

Q. I know you had a lot of history with Charlie last year at Alabama. Talk about bringing him back to your staff at Ole Miss, the job he can do. Also, one of the portal additions, Michael Trigg, had a great spring. Talk about your expectations for him.

LANE KIFFIN: Okay. I'll start backwards.

Michael Trigg, very talented player. Again, another young one that just finished his true freshman year. Had really good spring game. Has done some good things. Has a really high ceiling.

With all these portal guys, especially the young ones, we have a lot of work to do to get them into our systems, not just offense, defense, special teams, but cultural-wise.

He has a really high ceiling. We're excited to have him.

First question was about Charlie Weis. As I mentioned before, we've been fortunate to have really good players and assistant coaches. Jeff Leiby did an unbelievable job for us. I'm sure he'll do a great job at his alma mater, Oklahoma.

Charlie has been with us two places before, have always thought he was way ahead of the game not just because he started young with his dad, but his mind is really unique and special. He can really memorize things like no other.

We're excited to have him in there and be able to work with him, put together a really exciting offense.

Q. What sort of benefit is there to having that Alabama game be so late in the season this year after early last season having to take that loss?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, no disrespect to Alabama. I couldn't tell you what number on the schedule they were because we got a lot of things to figure out, to work on before we get to game one.

I'm not concerned about the schedule. I had a question earlier, Do you like that? Supposedly it's easier up front. You don't know that. At the end of the year, you guys, us included, think these teams are going to be better than these. You don't know.

We just got to work one day at a time, integrate all these players in, play the best we can.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the things Matt did for you off the field last year, leadership, other characteristics, and where your candidates are in those areas?

LANE KIFFIN: Matthew is a special player, as you guys know, but a special leader. He just led by example. He'd go run in the off-season with the receivers and beat all them, including Mingo, who is here, will tell you the story about how hard he worked.

I think our defensive players, he won them by the style he played, running over linebackers. That's a challenge to replace. That won't just be quarterback. I think you got to have great leadership when you lose somebody like that and you have young quarterbacks coming in, regardless of who wins it, for other people around that position to step up.

Q. Before last season the record for fourth down attempts was 46. Ole Miss had 49 last year. Is there an expectation that that will be the current pace this year? Is it down and distance analytics, field position, or even more aggressive with Ole Miss football this year?

LANE KIFFIN: Thank you. I did not know we set a record. Now I know we have the most attempts in the history of football.

I used to coach for Pete Carroll. He said, Don't just do things really well, do them better than anybody's done them before. At least I know that stat.

I think that's an interesting stat, when you talk about recruiting and players, once they get there. We sell, too, that we believe in you. It's not just analytics. That's a huge part of it, but the players feel we believe in you, we put you in those situations, we play so aggressively.

So I can't predict what that's going to be like year to year



as far as fourth down attempts. It's not easy. Like anything, if everything was easy, everybody would do it. I get a lot of coaches don't follow the analytics because it's very hard for that press conference afterwards or that stadium to turn on you when it doesn't work.

The Alabama game, the last two years, perfect example. The first year we play them, we make a bunch of them, and everybody is saying, That's great. The next year we don't. Then you got to go to that press conference.

It's not easy to do. There's a reason why we do it. I mean, analytics are proof, and your players know that you believe in them.

Q. There's two big personalities in the state of Mississippi, you and Deion Sanders. How has Deion Sanders touching down in Mississippi affected your recruiting? Also, I see that you have Central Arkansas on your schedule. Is there any plan down the line to play at Jackson State University, and are you open to that?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, we've got another personality in Mike Leach. I would say there's three personalities in the state that are very unique and extremely different from each other (laughter).

It's nice to see Deion Sanders' success, Coach Sanders' success, how well he's done down there, how well he's done in recruiting. I don't know future plans on that, but that would be exciting.

Q. When you look at the magnitude of the rivalry with Mississippi State, whether it be on the field or when it comes to recruiting, how valuable do you think it would be for you to start 3-0 in your career in the Egg Bowl?

LANE KIFFIN: Again, we got a lot of work to do before we ever get to that game. It's been exciting to be fortunate to be 2-0 in that. That means a lot to us, but especially to the people of Mississippi obviously.

Until you get into those unique rivalries, you can watch 'em on TV like I used to on Thanksgiving, hear about 'em, but you really don't know until you get to a place like Mississippi and you see how much it means to the people.

They're not kidding when they say their next 364 days will be affected, when the common fan says that, they're serious. That has been neat to be able to give that to our fans. Hopefully we can continue that.

Q. There's been a lot made with USC and UCLA going

to the Big Ten, how that stretches the conference across the country. When you were the coach at USC, what kind of challenge would it have been to travel that much during a season?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, that would be a lot. When that schedule wasn't a lot of traveling in the Pac-12 or Pac-10 even before that, so the Notre Dame game was a big thing every year. You'd even go two days early.

There will be different challenges of that for a conference that's not used to traveling very far. But we got plenty of our own issues and problems to work on. They can deal with that in whatever, two years from now.

Q. Are you ready for another Nick Saban question?

LANE KIFFIN: Sure.

Q. There's been a lot of SEC coaches who came from that tree or worked for him at least with varying degrees of success. What aspect of the blueprint that so many are trying to implement is critical to have in your program? Like if there were one or two aspects...

LANE KIFFIN: I did an interview the other day that went more in-depth in this.

It really is amazing. You guys would know history better than me. I would doubt there's ever been a coach in any sport, college or professional, that has so many people under him that are at major jobs.

You're talking about top 25 jobs. I don't know that we counted five or six of them the other day when we counted all those guys that have been there or even were there for the three years that I was there that were assistant coaches.

It really is amazing not just for someone to produce coaches that people hire, but for those to have success and be at major places speaks volumes of how phenomenal coach is.

I think people take very different things from him. I think you see that. I kind of think there's a difference when you look at offensive and defensive coaches. I think when you look at the defensive coaches that leave there, usually like the Georgia blueprint, basically take everything and move it there because that's a big part about Alabama's program. Whatever year you were there, the defense is the same and it hasn't changed for the most part.

I think the offensive head coaches leave, whoever, Billy or Sark or Locks, and the program looks a little different



because they usually have their own offensive flair they end up running.

I'm sure everybody takes, I would think, his organization, his commitment to the program, try to model his discipline that he has within that.

Q. You mentioned off the top the importance of the transfer portal, filling some holes in your roster this year. In the last year, what changes have you seen in your discussions with potential transfers of the NIL? What do you think the coach's role should be in that whole discussion?

LANE KIFFIN: Hmm... Well, what should the coach's role be in that discussion? I mean, I think ideally, if we're going to be in an NIL world, somehow you're going to do it right, it's going to get capped so that there's some way of controlling it and keeping playing fields close to the same. Otherwise, you're just going to have these glaring differences within Division I football based off of what I've said before, their salary cap. I know it's not really the right word.

Ideally I would think that the coach should be part of managing that. That's how you'd want it done. But I don't know if it will be that way or whatever. So that's just how I would do it. That's based off of look what happens in professional sports. There's salary caps. The coach and the general manager/owner manage that.

The other thing about that, too, if it's not, say, Okay, why would you put it that way when coaches aren't supposed to be involved in that? You have a whole other set of problems. If you have boosters out there deciding who they're going to pay to come play, and the coach isn't involved in it, how does that work? They could go pick who they want, pay him however much. Are the boosters going to tell you who to play, too? When they don't play, how is that going to work out?

Again, this is not thought out at all, in my opinion, and has created a massive set of issues which I think when people really thought about it, from a coach's standpoint, could have predicted this was going to happen.

Q. I had a question for you a little bit about recruiting, how it has kind of changed to be more of a photo shoot or an experience. You've had Rolls-Royces on campus. You obviously have a very cute sidekick in Juice. Can you talk about why you've chosen to implement those things and lean into that aspect of college football even though it's very much nothing to do with what the actual product on the field is going to be?

LANE KIFFIN: Because I think for you guys that have been around me or listened to me, we don't sit around and complain how things are and how they should be.

Yeah, ideally you shouldn't be picking places out of what your photo shoot is or what car they're taking pictures in. There's a lot of things I wish were different. But it is what it is. Coach Saban wants rules changed about hurry-up offense. Well, he adapted.

We don't sit around and worry about that. We try to be creative. We kind of have a saying: We don't think outside the box, we just create a new box.

If that's what kids care about and look at, we don't do things the way they were done before. I think that's how we would operate anywhere, but especially at Ole Miss you need to be that way to have a chance.

Like the commissioner... I didn't wear a tie today. He's like, Man, I've always wanted to do that.

I'm like, Well, don't just do things the way they were done before.

He was like, I was waiting for someone to do it.

So maybe the commissioner won't have a tie next year. Because why are we supposed to wear a tie? Just because it was done before? Doesn't really matter.

Q. Kentucky is the cross-divisional game this year. What do you remember about that matchup a few years ago in 2020? What has impressed you with how much that program has changed?

LANE KIFFIN: One day I'm going to make you guys stand up because half the time I have no idea who is asking the question so I just look around.

So that was a great game at Kentucky. We were brand-new. That was the strange COVID year, so not only was it our first year, but we didn't have spring ball, all of a sudden we're playing games. What a crazy game to go down to the wire like that.

Coach Stoops has done an unbelievable job at a place that isn't traditionally winning eight, nine, ten games. I always think that's really cool and special when someone can do that.

Like I said before, doing things better than they've been done before. I would think he's probably in the best run of the school. We'll have a set of challenges there.

He's very good on defense, very complicated. I know they have really good success running the ball, are very creatively offensively watching some of their games last year, did a great job, especially with some NFL concepts involved.

Q. USC, UCLA, Texas, Oklahoma, four huge brands. Three of them not at the top of their game right now. Do you think all four know what they're in for joining these two power leagues, and do you think they'll struggle for a while?

LANE KIFFIN: You know, they've been playing in great conferences and against great opponents. I mean, I just say how it is. I don't know that there's a huge jump into the Big Ten. I think going to the SEC is a whole 'nother animal. I think the draft picks, national championships prove that coming out of the SEC.

I just said, it's a different world. Said it for a long time: the SEC just means more. And it does. It's different, it's ahead of the game. Now, over the last five, ten years, the players started coming that didn't used to come from the Northeast and West Coast very often at all. That transition I feel like started with Alabama especially, and now they're coming to the SEC.

That's a big challenge. I know everything obviously is about money nowadays or else teams wouldn't be going with playing all over the place, breaking up these awesome traditions.

The coaches got to deal with it and get ready for a different world.

Q. You were talking about the volatility with the realignment in college football. What is it like to be one of the people on the inside where there's all this volatility going around?

LANE KIFFIN: I haven't really thought about it that way. I've said, just like I mentioned, the SEC is the top of everything. So people are always trying to chase the SEC and figure it out.

I don't know the history behind the moves, but I'm sure it had something to do with the SEC starting the unique moves for that to happen, for traditional teams like USC and UCLA to move like that, so...

Not that my opinion matters on it, but I don't like that. I think there's so much tradition. When you go to places, you've been to USC, all these different places, you see how passionate fans are about certain things, what

matters, rivalries. For those to be dismantled for money is kind of a shame.

Q. I saw that you signed a mustard bottle earlier. Have you signed a lot of those in the last nine months?

LANE KIFFIN: I did sign a mustard bottle. That was the first guy to come up, which I think he had an Alabama shirt on, so I was a little confused there.

I have signed a lot of mustard bottles and golf balls, which normally I haven't. It's been a unique off-season. On the golf ball, which goes back to the first pitch I threw out for the Tennessee game, we got swept by Tennessee, didn't play well. Everybody thought it was my fault. I had a plan. I wanted our guys to stay humble, not play very well, then we'd go win the national championship in baseball. I'd like to say that was a plan. All the Tennessee fans that were all excited about sweeping us, there was a plan.

Q. Last year not only one of the best games y'all played in, but as far as the SEC in general, was against Arkansas. What are your thoughts about the rivalry with Arkansas and it becoming possibly one of the big marquee rivalries in the SEC?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, that was exciting, an exciting game. Again, just shows you can't predict year to year, week to week, you got no idea how games are going to go. That game was completely different than the game the year before with them, low-scoring game. That's an exciting rivalry, one that means a lot to fans as well.

Coach has done an unbelievable job there turning around a program, that we got there at the same time, had really struggled. It wasn't like Arkansas was losing most of their games close. So to see the turnaround that Coach Pittman did is really amazing.

Q. One year into NIL, what have you found works with NIL? What doesn't work? You say college football is all about money right now. How have you managed that in your program? You mentioned maybe there needs to be general managers. Have you kind of delegated that responsibility to someone already?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, the first question is the keys to NIL and how do you well with that. You have really good boosters. That's how you do well at it. I'll say what other people say, as you know.

It's like a payroll in baseball. What teams win over a long period of time? Teams that have high payrolls and can play players a lot. We're in a situation not any different than that.

I'm sure other people said it. I said day one, you legalize cheating, so get ready for the people that have the most money to get players. Now you have it. It is what it is.

As far as a general manager to manage that, we aren't allowed in the current system to manage what they make. We're not there yet. I don't know that we ever will be. That's just what I said it should be because that's what any other professional sport, which is what we are now, does.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, Coach Kiffin.

LANE KIFFIN: Thanks for coming, guys. Appreciate it.

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