

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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LSU Tigers Brian Kelly

Press Conference

BRIAN KELLY: Good afternoon, everyone. Pleasure to be here back talking football here at SEC Media Day. I'm getting used to this. As you know, for many years where I was we didn't have these opportunities. It gets you back into thinking about football, and certainly at LSU, all we can think about is championships after what Jay Johnson did in baseball and Kim Mulkey in basketball, our success in gymnastics.

I've got a big opportunity on my hands, as well, to continue the success of what was a very good first year. We have much to do. Progress needs to continue to be made in the best conference in all of college football. That will not be easy.

We're excited about what we've done in a very short period of time. The foundation of success is built in consistency. Alabama and Georgia continue to hold that mantle of consistency in terms of playing for championships, and that's what we'll be looking to be at LSU, is playing for championships consistently, year in and year out.

You don't do it by just being a one-and-done. You've got to be able to do that over a period of time, and that's really the transition from year one to year two. Where in year one I was learning the league. I was learning how to go on the road and play in the kind of environments. I was learning our roster and our strengths and weaknesses.

Going into year two, we have a lot of that knowledge and we understand a lot of those things necessary to be competitive and win games. Now it's how do you do it week in and week out. For us, that's what our team now has been focused on. The little details of how they do their work, what they do in the classroom has so much to do with what they do on the football field, how they live their lives, what their put in their bodies, how they train.

All of those things matter on a day-to-day basis when you're talking about consistency with your process.



Where we are in year two is that we have a football team that's coming. They're moving in the right direction. We still have some weaknesses that we're working on. We still have some roster development that still needs to take place.

I think the exciting part is keeping your staff together, and the continuity of our staff with our coordinators and leadership is in place. That will make for seamless communication as it relates to our day-to-day.

Going into this season, it certainly is going to be a great challenge for us as we open up against an outstanding Florida State team, which will challenge our football team, but it also motivates us on a day-to-day basis when we're out working in the cool breezes of Louisiana.

That was a joke. It's been as hot as I can ever remember training a football team, so we have to be very conscious in safety concerns relative to how we train and take care of our football team going into it.

But they're highly motivated because of that opener against Florida State.

Then we get a chance to play against an HBCU, the great team at Grambling and the great Eddie Robinson's program. We're excited about that opportunity, an in-state team for us.

Then on the road at Mississippi State, and we're off and running with SEC in 2023.

Again, on behalf of Scott Woodward, my athletic director, and our entire staff, we're excited to be here today. With that, I'll turn it over to our moderator.

Q. Last year I was the first to ask you about your offensive line who had some inexperience. That offensive line ended up No. 1 in stuff rate, No. 1 in line yards. This year you lose 60 percent of your pass breakups. Did the transfer portal, which was ranked No. 1, address that issues about losing guys in the secondary in the back seven?

BRIAN KELLY: Again, I think when we talk about areas within your program that you're coming, but you're not there yet. When you have to dip into the transfer portal -- and this is just my perspective -- but when you have to dip into the transfer portal and bring in that many guys on defense, that's an area of concern, because you really don't know what you have until you play against Florida State.

There are going to be a number of new players back there. We do have some returning players that we're excited about back there, Brooks and Burns in particular are two veteran players that are going to help us a lot back there.

Look, that was an area of concern. We're a team that needs to get off the field on 3rd down. We did not do a very good job of that last year. That's going to have to change, and it'll start in that particular area.

Q. How important is the running game going to be to your success this year? What are your expectations, and what effect would that have on your quarterback position?

BRIAN KELLY: So when we talk about a running game, what I've always wanted to do from an offensive structure is create physicality at the line of scrimmage. So we want to be a physical -- we do not want to be a finesse running team. We want physicality at the point of attack.

When we're talking about a running game -- look, if you're going to put eight guys on the line of scrimmage or nine guys on the line of scrimmage you're going to limit our opportunities. We're going to have to throw the ball really well, and in that particular game, we may not have a great running game. It doesn't mean we can't be physical at the point of attack and continue that physicality.

When we talk about offensive structures that I like to build, it's physicality up front, and I think we're going to have that this year with returning veteran players, with our strength training and conditioning program into its second season. I like where we sit in that position.

Q. You're really plugged in in NIL. Probably one of the reasons you came to LSU. Greg just got done talking about uniform national standard. A lot of these liberal NIL laws benefit not only Old State U, they're centralized in the SEC. Should there be a uniform standard when it helps LSU?

BRIAN KELLY: So I think whatever answer I give you there's going to be holes in it because there is not much regulation.

I think that the easiest answer to that question -- and I'm not going to be political up here -- we do want to control what we can control. But I would say that the thing that makes it difficult for us, all of us, is third-party involvement, and at what level does that third-party involvement influence the spirit of name, image, and likeness. I think that's where we're all at. If there are different laws, too, in each state, then the league is not balanced, either. To me, those would be the two kind of bullet points as it relates to NIL. I'm not here to fix it. I'm here to navigate it. If I can lend my experience in any shape or fashion, I will do that.

But I can tell you what we're living, and that's third-party involvement and different rules of engagement by different states.

Q. You talked about year two and the progression as a football program. I'm interested what the progression for Jayden Daniels has been like in year two, and what did you learn about his toughness quality from playing through injuries towards the end of the year, particularly against Georgia in that SEC Championship game?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, good questions, and I think they were all a part of our learning curve with him, quite frankly, because we knew Jayden as a person, but we really didn't know him much as a football player and how would he respond in really a new system of offense where he had to make really a 180 in terms of what he was asked to do.

So what does development look like for him? I think it would be the natural progression from the last game in which he played where he was aggressive but he was under control. He ran the ball when he needed to but yet stepped up in the pocket and made the tight window throws.

I think that was the progression.

From what we saw in the first week where a step up in the pocket meant step up and run or not making those tight-window throws. I think that's what we saw during the year was his natural progression of understanding the offense and being more confident.

We want to see that in year two. We want to see that confidence that we saw at the end of the year continue to show itself right through the first game against Florida State.

Q. I wanted to ask you on a larger scope in the aftermath of some of this Northwestern situation, how well are head coaches able to know what's going on within the locker room with so much going on in



there? And two, has this made you maybe think about something differently going forward, if there is anything you'd want to be aware of or look for in your program?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, look, it's a very difficult situation because I know Pat and I have the utmost respect for him as a person, as a family man, as a father. But the reality of it is coaches are the leaders of their program. When things are not going the way they should be, there's an accountability, and I don't think he's somebody that would walk away from accountability at any time, and I'm not here to speak for him, but I can tell you in my situation that a head coach is walking around those halls.

A head coach is in the locker room. A head coach is eating with his team. A head coach knows his leadership team. He also has many other support staff members that are in constant contact with his football team. The strength staff, your mental performance teams. You have so many different outlets to touch those players on a day-to-day basis.

That's how we operate within our program.

Q. There's been a lot of talk going on about the NCAA's ruling over Tennessee and Jeremy Pruitt. What are your thoughts and feelings over the ruling?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, I'm not privy to all of the information because I did not read it. I saw that there was some financial sanctions that were given, and I think Coach Pruitt was given some NCAA sanctions.

Again, I know it was adjudicated. I've been involved in those NCAA processes and they're painstakingly vetted. In other words, there are so many people that have put in incredible amount of time to get to the right conclusions.

It's hard for me sitting outside looking in to be a judge of this, other than we knew it was going to be adjudicated in some fashion.

Q. Coach Kelly, Coach Denbrock mentioned this spring your offense wanted to emphasize getting better at yards after the catch. I think that was an astute observation seeing that your offense was second last in the conference last year in that regard. Was that more honing your offense, like you said, learning what Jayden Daniels does better to maximize his skill sets, or do you still want to yearn for some more downfield verticality through your passing game?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I'm glad he wants more yards after

the catch, too. That's a good start. I think everybody is looking for explosiveness within their offense.

I think more than anything else, it starts with the ability to get the ball to your playmakers and give them the opportunity to make plays in space. It's that simple.

I don't know that we clearly could have done a better job at that last year, but we feel like this spring was an opportunity for us to really focus on those things, and we liked what we saw.

Without giving up state secrets here, we think that we really focused on giving our kids a chance to catch it and go because we think we have a number of receivers that can influence the game that way.

Q. Obviously Georgia is the standard in the conference right now. I'm just curious, how do you close the gap with what they've been doing, and do you feel your program is doing that?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, it's a measurement for everybody in here to see it on the field. That's how everybody measures is the gap closing. You know, what's the score of the game, what's the eye test tell me, what's the competitiveness of that game.

We'll only have that opportunity if we get into the championship game against Georgia.

I know that based upon how we've recruited and how we'll continue to recruit that we'll have a football roster that will be able to compete against Georgia. Is that right now? No, it's not. But if we continue to do what we're doing, we're going to have a roster that can compete against Georgia, and then it's just a matter of getting it done on the playing field so everybody then can assess they've closed the gap.

Q. Reading about Josh Williams, he's had a pretty interesting route to being a starting running back in the SEC at a program like LSU. What's your take on him and what got him to this point? What do you expect from him this season?

BRIAN KELLY: I think what we were looking for from him more than anything else and in that position was reliability, somebody that we could rely on on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd down, whether it's pass protection, whether it's catching the ball coming out of the backfield, running the ball, making the tough yards. He was able to fill that and do an incredible job on all three downs. He also brought great leadership. He's a guy that is respected by so many.

When you're transitioning a program, the things that have always caught my eye early on for playing time or you could say what are my favorites and who are my favorites. Guys that can stay on the field, guys that are reliable, guys that you can trust, and then can be productive when they get the chance. Josh was that, and he was a great leader off the field.

Q. In year one you guys were all over the place. You lost to a team that didn't make a bowl game in Texas A&M; you came one point from beating Alabama, but you still won the west. Given your comments about Jayden Daniels earlier, are you committing right now that he is your starter for Game 1? And also, have you worked on your recruiting accent for the 2024 cycle?

BRIAN KELLY: I think my accent is pretty good and has gotten better throughout the recruiting process. It depends on if I'm in northern Louisiana or southern Louisiana. Sometimes I get over to Lake Charles, it's got to change a little bit.

But Jayden is our starter. He'll start. But he'll have to continue to improve and progress, because Garrett is getting better every single day, as well.

You want to talk about great competition? It's about as good as a head coach could hope for at the quarterback position.

Jayden is the starter, but he's got to have a great camp. He's got to continue to progress. He's got to continue to work. He's got to continue to move forward, because the guy right there, as well, he wants to take his job, in the right way. They've got a great relationship, but he wants his job, too.

I think that that's a really positive situation.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the impact of a healthy Maason Smith at D-tackle, and your front seven, will Harold Perkins have more versatility in your packages this year?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so getting a guy like that back changes a lot of things because last year was a double fan situation. You could slide the center guard tackle to one side and really be three-on-two on one side to him. You could add a back to the other side because we really didn't have an inside guy that could win every single one-on-one match-up.

Maason will one those one-on-one match-ups.

If you're going to do that and protect the edges on every

play against what we feel are going to be some guys that can come off the edge, Harold Perkins in particular, you're going to leave him singular inside, and we think he could have an incredible year if that's the case.

Once you decide now that you're going to leave two guys on him inside, you get some singular match-ups on the outside. That's where he becomes a huge presence for us this year.

Q. You guys made a splash in the portal, landing Logan Diggs, the transfer running back. Talk about what he means for your offense, what you like about his game, and how he can assist Jayden Daniels in your offensive attack this year?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, his ability to catch the ball coming out of the backfield. We like his versatility. He played really well at Notre Dame when he was given the opportunity. He was a little bit, I think, limited with a hamstring last year. We saw how he played against South Carolina with the big run.

But he's a very talented player in all areas. Very smart, will be kind of what I talked about with Josh. He can play on all three downs. He's tough. He's physical. He's a big back with speed, vision.

It just adds to that room with experience, and that's kind of what we were looking for.

Q. What were your thoughts on the potential impact that AI could have on football game planning?

BRIAN KELLY: It's an intriguing opportunity. I think there's room for it. I think it has some intriguing opportunities in recruiting.

We spend a lot of time on profiles, recruiting profiles and the intangibles or the traits that we're looking for for particular players.

I think AI has an opportunity maybe to create that kind of model for us relative to who is that kind of player out there all over the country, without making a mistake.

So I think that there's going to be room for it, and I think it's exciting and something that we're about to venture into.

Q. Looking back, this is kind of off-the-cuff, but you've been successful everywhere you've ever been, independent at Notre Dame and now in the SEC. Can you just look back -- I know we're getting ready to start 2023, but can you look back, and if you could talk about the success you guys had right off the bat last

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

year, building upon that success. Where would you expect to go from there?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think last year, again, as I mentioned, what we were able to do was really give our players a clear vision and a clear plan as to what we wanted them to do on a day-to-day basis. Here are the standards. Here are the non-negotiables. Here's where you can't cross that line.

If you stick with these non-negotiables, that you have to do these things every single day and be accountable to them. We have a chance to build a relationship on a day-to-day basis that you'll see that will prepare you for success.

The real crossroads for us was when we got beat bad by Tennessee, because a lot of that trust can go right out the window in year one when you get beat that bad.

But our kids hung in there and they gave us the trust necessary to work through that, and they went back and they worked harder and they worked to the details that we told them we needed to, and then once we got past that Tennessee game, I think we had those guys bought in.

You're going to need some of those moments in year one where those young men go, we're in, we're going to stick with you. Sometimes it doesn't happen that way. In this instance, it did.

Q. I was just looking at your schedule, and week three SEC play starts, you're on the road at Mississippi State, a game against Arkansas at home that played you tough last year, at Ole Miss and at Missouri. I know you probably take a one-game-at-a-time approach, but given three of your first four SEC games are on the road, is there a different mindset or a different approach that you take with your team to kind of gear them up for that stretch?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, we're going to have to deal with how we want to handle that. Certainly three out of four on the SEC on the road is a difficult stretch.

But later in the season, we're going to have -- as you see, we're going to have five out of six at home. I think this is going to be much more about the right mindset earlier in the season, as we get through the month of September. Getting your guys thinking in such a short period of time where we just work this one week at a time and keep them short focused, I think that that's what we're going to have to do with the kind of tough schedule we have early on.

Q. When you were building your new staff when you came to LSU last year, what did you see in Matt House

that attracted you to hire him, and talk about the job he's done for you so far at LSU.

BRIAN KELLY: There's a number of things. I've known Matt for a long period of time. I knew him way back when I was at Central Michigan. But I got to know him better going up against him when I was at Notre Dame. He was at Pitt, he was at North Carolina State. I always hated going against his defenses. They were versatile. They were difficult to read. There was unpredictability in them, and they changed from week to week.

I wanted that in the SEC.

Again, when you're dealing with the NFL it's never easy to get somebody, and you never know whether you can get them released from their contract, but with a little bit of luck and the help of Andy Reid, we were able to get him to LSU, and couldn't be more excited because of that.

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