

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## Kentucky Wildcats

### Eli Cox

#### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Eli.

**Q. Talk about your transition from playing guard to center.**

ELI COX: It was interesting. Center is a little bit different, especially pre-snap, having to diagnose the defense and have an extra eye on the defense and also know what your offense is doing. You have to be able to see both sides of the ball and see the full picture.

It was an interesting adjustment. It was just good for me in the long run, to be able to understand defensive football and have a better knowledge of the game.

**Q. Your big rivalry, Louisville or Tennessee?**

ELI COX: Man, I think those are both great games. Tennessee is obviously a great football team. Any SEC East game is always a big one for us.

Just playing Louisville is also great. We get to play that game for a trophy, to be the flagship university for our state. It's important to us.

**Q. We've been talking a lot about strength of schedule. Y'all are hosting Tennessee and Alabama this season. How do you think that home-field advantage will affect your game play?**

ELI COX: It's exciting to have really good football teams come to town. Just any advantage you can get in those big games is great. Just having our fans be there supporting us is going to be awesome. Feeding off their energy, playing an exciting football game.

**Q. You mentioned the SEC East. Do you think sometimes it doesn't get the share of the attention the West seems to get?**

ELI COX: Yeah, I think the SEC East, the competition is



growing year in and year out. Georgia has become a very good football program that's consistently in the top five, winning national championships. Tennessee has obviously got a great football program. Florida, Vanderbilt, South Carolina. They're all good football teams. It's a deep field of competition.

**Q. Liam Coen comes back at offensive coordinator. What does he bring to the table?**

ELI COX: I think he brings an ability to get our play-makers the ball in good situations. He puts them in matches that they know they can win. He gives them the confidence that when the ball is in their hands, they'll do something special.

**Q. What's impressed you so far about Devin Leary?**

ELI COX: I think his confidence. He's a very even-keeled player. He doesn't get too high, doesn't get too low. He's a very composed player in the pocket and in the huddle.

**Q. What are some of the goals you and your team have set for this upcoming year?**

ELI COX: I think our goal is just to be a consistently dominant football team. Week in, week out, playing in the SEC, each game is tough. There's a lot of good football players. We have to be a consistent football team that looks to win every single game we play.

**Q. How close do you feel like you are getting back into the mix of contending in the East?**

ELI COX: I think we're close. I think this football team has a lot of talent that's flying under the radar. I think we have a lot of tools. Our defense, everyone knows how consistent they are. Coach White is one of the best defensive coordinators in the country, the SEC. That unit always produces. I think our offense is going to hold up its end of the bargain this year and score a lot of points.

**Q. On the offensive side, how dominant have you seen the Kentucky offensive line? Are there some older linemen that have moved on that you've learned from?**



ELI COX: Yeah, I think Drake Jackson was a perennial starter for Kentucky. Him being back as a GA, being on staff, coaching us, is huge. Someone who really understands the culture of what this offensive line was built on, through Coach Schlarman and the Big Blue wall, and he was like a founding member of that. Having him in the room as a constant reminder and coach, you can't put a value on that.

**Q. If you could break down last year, why the change on the O-line, massive change from last year? Did Coach Yenser not get the fair shake because you guys were playing out of position from what you normally had, so why go back to where you were two years ago?**

ELI COX: I think it's just to put our best five on the field, the places they can flourish the most. We're going to try Jager at center. I think that's a position he can play really well. I think having guys that can play all three interiors is very important to us. Last year we were hit with injury, and we don't want that to derail our season. We want guys to be able to play all five if they can.

No, I don't think Yenser got a fair shake last year. There was a lot of transition with guys in our offensive line, recruiting classes that didn't see a coach all the way through the recruiting class. We had Schlarman, another coach, another coach after that. Three years with three different coaches.

I think having that consistency in the recruiting aspect and development aspect for our offensive line is going to be important for us.

**Q. How have you and some of the returners meshed with the guys coming in from the transfer portal?**

ELI COX: I think we've welcomed all our guys from the portal with open arms. They're excited to be here. Just being able to get together off the field has kind of been the most important thing for us.

The offensive line has to be one of the tightest-knit groups on the team. We all five have to work to get just to get one job done. Spending time together off the field, building that continuity, those relationships with each other is critical for us.

**Q. When you look at Liam coming back, what is similar from two years ago, what has changed, how is everyone adapting to his return?**

ELI COX: I think his philosophy is something that hasn't

changed. His philosophy on offense is to be explosive, to be disciplined, do the little things right.

When you have a team that can do all those tiny little details correctly and well is when you have not just good offenses but great ones, when the details don't slip up.

That's something Coen always hammers home with us. Having him back has been awesome. The guys that were here in '21 were excited to have him back, just how many points we were able to score and the weapons he was able to use. The new guys are excited to find and carve out a role with him.

**Q. You haven't had to have a quarterback change in a while. How different or difficult is it to bring a new guy in and have that transition?**

ELI COX: Yeah, it's different, but it's a lot easier when the quarterback is really talented. Having Will and Devin, they're extremely talented quarterbacks. Devin is talented in his own way with his accuracy, his touch, his composure. He's a really talented football player. I think he's just really self-aware of his leadership role that he has to have as a quarterback.

I'm excited to have him in. He's fit in really well with the guys.

**Q. Justin Rogers transferring to Auburn. What can you tell us about the player Auburn is getting?**

ELI COX: Yeah, Auburn is getting a good football player. He's a good teammate to us. I blocked him every day in practice for years. I have a good relationship with Justin. He's a really good football player.

**Q. You have a degree already. You're working on an advanced degree. Both of them have a media background.**

ELI COX: Yeah, I mean, my dream job is to do sports broadcasting. I'd love to do play-by-play or color commenting on the sidelines. I've been trying to tailor my degrees from the University of Kentucky to do that in the future.

**Q. It was a couple years ago, Will Levis, his production was better than it was a year ago. Do you think that had to do with the change of scheme? Was he injured?**

ELI COX: I think there was a lot that played into that. There was a lot of pressure on Will. After having a really good season, the media surrounding him and the hype

surrounding him is he's got to do it all, he's got to be the guy, he has to be the first quarterback. I mean, all the pressure on him. Just new coaches. It was just a lot for him.

I think he handled it really well. He's just a really talented quarterback. I think there was a lot that went into that. I'm excited to see what he can do for the Titans.

**Q. How do you go about as a team of saying we need to turn the page and turn this into a better record for that first number being greater than the second number?**

ELI COX: Yeah, I think it just goes back to the consistency piece. The SEC top to bottom is a very talented league. You can't win a game without bringing your A game every week.

It's just focusing on that consistency to bring the energy, bring the focus, bring the discipline and the consistency to each game 'cause these teams aren't going to give you anything, especially on the defensive side of the ball.

There are some crazy good athletes we're playing week in, week out. They're not going to let you win. You have to go earn it. That's something we're going to be focusing on to do that.

**Q. What have you seen out of Ray Davis and the maturity that he brings, Leary, some of the other transfer portal guys?**

ELI COX: I think an emphasis for us out of the portal is to not just bring in new faces, but old faces. These guys have seen a ton of college football, seen everything you can imagine.

Having a veteran presence that's new to the team is really exciting. They're able to show the young guys what it's like playing college football. You can't put a price tag on that experience that they'll bring.

**Q. A lot of transfer portal players on the offensive line. With offensive line play, a big part of that is playing as a unit and cohesion. How have the young guys gelled with the offense?**

ELI COX: Yeah, definitely, I think they've gelled really well with the group. I mean, our emphasis, too, when we're bringing in guys, we brought in a lot of Power Five transfers, Marcus who played at Northern Illinois, played really good football there. We brought in guys that not just fit just what we need physically, but fit our culture as an offensive line.

I think that has ultimately made their transition in so much easier. When they have the same mentality as the rest of the guys in the room, it's easy to get along.

THE MODERATOR: Eli, thank you very much.

ELI COX: Thanks, guys.

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