

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 16, 2019

Matt Luke

Ole Miss Rebels



COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Matt Luke, the head football coach at Ole Miss is entering his third season at his alma mater, served in a number of assistant coaching roles prior to being named head coach and in 2016 was a nominee for the Frank Broyles Award. He began his career in college football as a student-athlete, a walk-on student-athlete at Ole Miss and eventually became the team's captain and graduated as a three-year letter winner for the Rebels.

He's cousins with fellow Gulfport native Brett Favre. His father preceded him playing at Ole Miss as a defensive back and his brother Tom at quarterback at University of Mississippi. Ole Miss head football coach, Matt Luke.

MATT LUKE: Thank you, Commissioner. It's obviously an exciting time. Excited to be here. We came in last night because of the weather and pulled up to the hotel, and you see this huge SEC sign and all of the banners of all the different schools, and just after being a player and coach in this league for now 19 seasons, you realize how fortunate and how blessed you are to be part of one of the greatest conferences in college football.

So, very excited to be here. There's a lot of excitement in our building right now for a lot of different reasons. We've had a very productive and a very busy offseason. We were able to sign 31 guys in last year's class. That's a huge class. But it was a top 25 class, and most importantly, it gets us back to that full number of 85 for the first time since 2014.

You guys all know that depth is a huge, huge part of being in this league, and I'm -- even though the faces are going to be new and young, I'm excited to see those guys compete.

I thought -- I really liked what we did with our coaching staff in the offseason. We made changes on both sides of the ball, hiring Rich Rodriguez on offense and Mike MacIntyre on defense. I think when you hire two former National Coaches of the Year, I think that obviously brings a wealth of knowledge to your staff, but I think it also makes a statement. I think it makes a statement to our commitment to winning and about what we're trying to do at Ole Miss.

And then obviously we have an opportunity for the first time in two years to go back to the postseason. I think our fans excited about it. I know our players are excited about it. I'm excited about it. To have that opportunity to walk into a living room and not have a cloud hanging over your head, I think you're seeing an immediate impact on the recruiting trail because of that.

Offensively, you're going to see a bunch of new faces. We've got to replace three new offensive linemen, three receivers, a new quarterback. But I really like the direction we're heading. I think even though we're going to be young, I think we're going to be talented and fun to watch.

I was very, very impressed with Rich Rodriguez this spring, not only implementing his offense, but seeing the attitude and the toughness that he's instilling in that side of the ball. And I think that's going to be a dynamic unit. It's going to be fun to watch.

Defensively, you're going to see a huge change. We're going from four down to Mike MacIntyre's 3-4 system. Mike and I worked together for several years and knew he was a great teacher, but really enjoyed seeing the way this defense bought in to this system. We got a bunch of guys on that side of the ball that have played a lot. And quite frankly, they are tired of hearing about how bad they are.

So you really saw them playing with a chip on their shoulder this spring, and I think we take the field against Memphis. I think you're going to see a much-improved defense. Obviously we got to go out there and prove it on the field, but I'm really looking forward to that. I'm honored to be here and honored to be the head coach at Ole Miss, and at this time I'll open it up for any questions you may have.

Q. What did Ross Bjork mean to you and your career and how was he to work with?

MATT LUKE: Obviously, I have a lot of respect for Ross and gratitude. He hired me and gave me this opportunity. But really, really enjoyed my time with him. He does a great job of interacting with the coaches. He also did a bunch of things with our facilities and building new facilities. So, I think I got a lot of respect

for him. I think he'll do a great job.

Q. You touched on Rich Rod just a little bit. It's funny, how you think -- what do you think his philosophy is going to be on offense? We've seen offenses in the past. Is that what he's bringing to you?

MATT LUKE: I think the number one thing that comes to mind is that edge and that toughness, that swagger.

That's what immediately comes to mind, but to get a little bit more Xs and Os and scheme-wise, you have to be able to defend all 11 players. You have to be able to account for the quarterback, whether it's in a designed run or a zone read. So I think they would have to defend the whole field and defend all of the 11 players is something that comes to mind immediately.

Q. You brought Matt Corral, a young redshirt freshman, here to Media Days. Can you talk a little bit about his ability and what he's going to bring to your team this season?

MATT LUKE: A lot of people asked me about bringing a freshman to Media Day, but his competitive fire and his competitive spirit, the players gravitated toward him. I think he was thrust into a leadership role, and I really think he's done a great job of competing and carrying himself the right way.

As a former player, you want to be around guys that have that energy and that fire and that toughness, especially at that position.

Q. You mentioned being back to 85 full scholarships, where in the past that depth kind of showed where there were some struggles there that might shown this season that you have improved there?

MATT LUKE: Yeah. I think when you start looking at the end of October and November of last season, you know, in the fourth quarter, I think that's when that depth really starts showing up. I'm excited about some of this, even though there are going to be new faces and some of them are going to be freshman, there are going to be several competition battles going on in fall camp, and I'm really looking forward to seeing that depth show up especially towards the end of the season.

Q. Missouri is facing a postseason ban pending their appeal. Internally, what are some of the challenges when you don't have those normal incentives at the end of the season like the last two years?

MATT LUKE: I think the most important thing is just keeping everything in house, making sure your team stays together. Because they are dealing with a lot of

stuff on social media and hearing all of the negativity. But staying together and playing for each other. They get up and go to work just like everybody else and they put in their time. So playing for each other and playing together will be huge.

Q. Coach, how big of a statement was it for your program to get someone like Jerrion Ealy to bypass the Major League draft and become a dual-sport athlete and maybe have a huge impact on your football team at Ole Miss?

MATT LUKE: I think it's obviously big. He's from the state of Mississippi, one of the top players in the state of Mississippi. He was one of our first commitments for that class.

So to have him on our campus -- and I think he's got a lot of the fans excited. When you're out there watching him run in workouts, you're getting excited because he can do a lot of different things. He can line up in the backfield. He can line up at slot. He can catch the ball out of the backfield. I think he's going to bring a lot to the table and try to find a way to get him the ball in space.

Q. You brought up earlier about social media and how student-athletes are dealing with that all of the time. One of the big things Greg Sankey was talking about on Monday was about mental health. And how do you approach that as a head coach, dealing with a lot of student-athletes that are obviously dealing with a lot of different problems off the field and on the field?

MATT LUKE: Yeah. These guys have grown up on their cell phones, and there's a huge level of anxiety in guys getting their self-worth looking at that cell phone and how many likes they get and things like that. So I think developing the whole athlete and taking the steps to hire some extra people in the mental health area, I think is very important. It's important not only developing them as players but also off the field and developing the whole person.

Q. How is it that Matt won the starting quarterback job, and just would you describe what his strengths are, what his assets that he brings?

MATT LUKE: So, as far as -- we have four freshmen quarterbacks on our team. Matt was the beneficiary of that four-game redshirt rule. So he was able to get those four games under his belt, and you can really see that in the spring. It really separated himself from the other quarterbacks.

Matt's a very, very talented guy. He can make all of the throws. He can throw off platform. He's accurate from a bunch of different odd angles. He's got escapability in the pocket, and then all of the intangibles with the

toughness that we've already talked about. So I think the combination of all of that made him the choice.

Q. What is your goal for the program over the next few years and what are some critical things that need to happen in order to get there?

MATT LUKE: Absolutely. I think the immediate goal this year is getting back to the post season. I think that's a huge thing. It wasn't too long ago that this program was competing for championships. And I think, this young team, they got to go out there and compete, and they got to grow. That's what has to happen, but the immediate goal for this year is to get this team back to the post season and then start getting back into the hunt for winning championships.

Q. Coach, based on the performance last year of the defense, what gives you optimism this year? Expound on that, please.

MATT LUKE: Yeah. So I think we got a lot of players on that side of the ball that have played a bunch of football, and just really pleased in the spring to see them buy in to Mike MacIntyre's system. Mike is a great coach. I saw their confidence grow. I saw them play with that chip on their shoulder. Like you said, they've taken a lot of heat over the years.

I think when we take the field against Memphis, I think you'll see a fundamentally sound defense. They are lined up in the right spot. Their eyes are in the right spot. I think with Josiah Coatney, Benito Jones and Tariqious Tisdale and our front seven all coming back, a lot of experience in the secondary. A lot of experience in the secondary, I think you'll see a much, much better defense against Memphis.

Q. Matt, what is it about Qaadir Sheppard that makes you guys think he's a good fit as an outside linebacker in the 3-4?

MATT LUKE: Backing him away and letting him move in space, he's a very good athlete, so he doesn't look awkward. Sometimes we take a defensive end and move them in space, they look awkward. He's able to play out there in space and also come down and rush the passer. Freeing him up and getting him in a little bit more space, he seemed much more comfortable out there. He has ability to play coverage. That's the unique thing about this 3-4, is you never really know where the fourth rusher is coming from. I think you'll see him rush the passer some and dropping into coverage some, and I think that kind of fits his game.

Q. I mean, you guys had -- traditionally recruiting and the grad transfer rule kind of expanding and now the NCAA transfer portal, what all goes into roster building now and what are the strategies for that as a coach?

MATT LUKE: I think everybody's dealing with the new transfer portal, and it is -- I think it's still very, very new. So everybody is trying to kind of feel their way through it. You got guys leaving to go to the NFL, you have the transfer portal. It becomes a bigger challenge to try to manage that roster and keep that number at 85.

Q. Coach, you talked about technology and how players have kind of grown up around it. I've heard in NFL coaches and some teams will give like phone breaks or stuff during team meetings. Is there anything specifically you do to kind of address those sort of things?

MATT LUKE: I think them having iPads to take notes on, I think the days of walking in there with a notebook are over. They enjoy seeing stuff on the screen and seeing the plays happen. They have the pencils. They take the notes on the iPad. So I think as far as technology, I think the kids learn that way. And then obviously trying to take it from there to the walk-throughs where you're always trying to change and trying to figure out what's best for your players.

Q. So, you're going into your second full season, and, like you said, you don't have that dark cloud hanging over your head anymore. Is the approach any different going into the season knowing that dark cloud is not there and that you have another year under your belt?

MATT LUKE: I think there's a lot of energy and confidence in our building because of that. You see it in recruiting. It's fun to be able to walk into a living room of a recruit and not having to talk about any of that stuff. You have the opportunity to sell Ole Miss and Oxford for what it is and you don't have to worry about all of the other garbage.

I just think just the overall feel of normalcy, even coming here today and answering questions about football, has been refreshing.

Q. Your first four games really kind of run the gamut of different opponents, leveling of opponents from your SEC opener with Arkansas all the way to Cal which is a bowl team that knocked off USC in Washington. Do you think that will give you an accurate gauge of how far the team has progressed before you go into the key game against Alabama?

MATT LUKE: I think we'll have an accurate gauge after the first one. That's what my focus is right now, is on Memphis. We have a very young football team that we have to get together and we have to develop a cohesive team with a lot of young players. My focus right now is on Memphis. I think that will be a good litmus test for this football team.

Q. The way that the recruiting schedule has changed, the calendar, the month of June, is now kind of a non-stop month. What's your take at all of this, and do you like it or would you like to kind of see it go back to the way it was?

MATT LUKE: You really have to adjust and adapt. That month of June becomes very, very important as far as your camps and getting young men on campus, but with the signing day moving up to December, it's important because the recruiting cycle has moved up a few months. You got guys coming on official visits, but the biggest difference is what the month of June has become. It's a huge deal, and I thought you saw us -- you saw us take advantage of that this summer.

Q. I know you're focused on Memphis, but week two is a conference game, and it's changed positioning on the schedules. What is your take on playing Arkansas that early in season?

MATT LUKE: I think as a coach you'd like to have several games before you get into your first conference game especially with a young football team, but if you look at the flip side of that, you see guys that have a sense of urgency to get prepared. Like I said, my focus is on Memphis. I'm excited about having a night game in Hemingway early in the seasons for our fans. I think they'll enjoy that.

Q. How do you and the players feel about the use of powder blue in some of your uniforms versus the navy?

MATT LUKE: I think -- I personally like it. That was the helmet that I grew up watching and my brother wore. So I think it's a great change-up. So I think you'll see some powder blue this year.

Q. Coach, given the circumstances of Coach Rodriguez's departure from Arizona, what in your conversations with him did you hear that made you feel comfortable that you weren't recruiting a workplace issue to Oxford?

MATT LUKE: You know what, the more I spoke with Rich, the more I saw that we were aligned when he came in and spoke to me with a young offense. One of the things I've always noticed about his offenses was the fact that he got the most out of his players, and they always played with a toughness and an edge. And that's really what you need in this league to sustain a winner.

So I'm looking forward to see him. And you saw it in the spring and the guys compete like that. But to answer your question, the more we got around each other, the more I realized it was a fit.

Q. What was your assessment of the new crop of wide receivers? You were kind of spoiled with

Lodge and Metcalf, and Brown. What about Battle and Moore and those guys?

MATT LUKE: You know, obviously, Elijah Moore is where it starts. I thought he had a great freshman season. You got Braylon Sanders coming back. Miles Battle, very similar to Matt Corral, was able to play in four games, but retained his redshirt. So I think that has helped him. He has got bigger and stronger. I think we got a really good young crop of receivers, junior college player, Dontario Drummond, who is a talented player several.

Then we have several freshmen coming in, Jonathan Mingo, Dannis Jackson, all of those guys are very, very talented players. Looking back, Laquon Treadwell was not always Laquon Treadwell. He played as a freshman. The same way with DK and AJ, they worked their way into it, and I think you'll see something very similar with this young group.

Q. This time last year Tylan Knight was a guy you knew had a lot of talent and you wanted to get him on the field some way, but you weren't sure how. At this point now is there a guy like that where you know you want him on the field, but you don't exactly know where he's going to fit yet?

MATT LUKE: Absolutely. Tylan Knight was a young man that won the state championship in Mississippi, was the MVP of the Mississippi/Alabama All-Star game. He had that fire and that toughness. And I think he kind of settled into his role in the slot and running speed sweeps and lining up some at tailback. And I thought you really saw him show up in the spring game. So really excited about him showing up on the offensive side of the football.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Coach. Thank you very much for your time.

MATT LUKE: All right. Thanks, guys. Hotty Toddy.



2019 SEC Football Media Days Ole Miss Player Quotes Tuesday, July 16

Redshirt Freshman Quarterback Matt Corral

On choosing to attend the University of Mississippi ...

"It's different from where I came from in California, but it is a family oriented place. Southern hospitality is a real thing. I started to love Oxford when I first visited. ."

On ability to go to a bowl game...

"We are all coming in with that chip on our shoulders, because everyone is saying that we are young and inexperienced. I feel like we are going to surprise a lot of people this year."

On facing the other top quarterbacks in the SEC...

"I feel like you can't worry so much about your competition. You just have to worry about yourself. You have to stay on the straight line and do what you are supposed to do, be the last to leave and watch film when you're supposed to and be ready for what's to come."

On Assistant Coach/Offensive Coordinator Rich Rodriguez...

"Coach Rod is a very hands on coach, he is a perfectionist, and I respond well to that type of coaching as do most of the offense."



2019 SEC Football Media Days Ole Miss Player Quotes Tuesday, July 16

Senior Offensive Lineman Alex Givens

On expectations based on the spring ...

“It has been a really good spring. Coach Rich Rodriguez just came in with us this spring, so it has been awesome to just run his offense and get comfortable with it. The guys kind of adapted to it. A lot of conditioning goes into it, because we are a very high tempo run heavy offense, so it was a really good spring for us.”

On quarterback Matt Corral...

“I am really excited about Matt. He stepped up as a leader this spring. As you see, he is a very feisty player, which you love to see that as an offensive lineman. He fits in with Rich Rod’s offense. Very athletic. He can run and makes good decisions. He can throw the ball. We are super excited to have him in the huddle and be a voice for us and a leader at such a young age.”

On playing on the road in the SEC ...

“Noise is a big factor for offensive line. It is hard to hear the snap counts sometimes. That is a big challenge, but you work all week. You’ve got sound throughout practice blasting in your ear, so that kind of helps out. Everyone is against you. It is just you and your team out there, so practice helps out a lot through that.”

On being the team being younger ...

“I think it doesn’t really matter what year you are as long as you step up. We’ve got a lot of athletic people, and we have a lot of depth now. We have all of our scholarships back. They’ve done a really good job recruiting so we’re really excited about everyone.”

On his goals for his senior season ...

“Go out there and do the best I can every game. Focus. Study film harder than I ever have this season. Step up and be a leader for the team. I’ve had to do that in the past because we’ve got a lot of great offensive lineman leaders in the past. This year is going to be a big year for me.”

On being able to go to the post season ...

“Week in and week out, just going out there and grind it out. Do everything you can to win that week, and don’t focus too much on the future. That’s probably the biggest thing. Everything starts to come together when you do that and do the little things right.”



2019 SEC Football Media Days Ole Miss Player Quotes Tuesday, July 16

Junior Linebacker MoMo Sanogo

On how the previous defense has motivated the new defense

“The defense has been looked at as a weakness for Ole Miss, and this year, we are trying to move it into a strength and a positive. We are trying to prove everybody wrong and turn some heads.”

On what impresses him about Assistant Coach/Defensive Coordinator Mike MacIntyre....

“His knowledge for the game, the guy is a defensive genius. I’ve been excited to be under his wing and take advantage of that.”

On what the team has been doing this season to prepare compared to other seasons....

“I think our work ethic this summer has been exceptional. Especially compared to the last two summers I’ve been here. Everybody just has a different mindset, whether that has to do with just being tired of the current state or has to do with the bowl ban being lifted and now having that little extra thing to play for. It has definitely been a culture change shifting more towards hard work.”

On the importance of how his teammates being motivated to play in a bowl game.....

“There’s a lot of guys that haven’t been to a bowl game. The seniors this year, they have never been to a bowl game, and we can’t sit right with that. I can’t sit right with that. I want to be able to experience that. I want to be one of those top 25 teams in the country. What you want doesn’t get you anywhere, it is what you do to get what you want. So we are trying to put in the hard work to be where we want to be and where we see ourselves.”