

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 16, 2019

## Jeremy Pruitt Tennessee Volunteers

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Jeremy Pruitt, the head coach at the University of Tennessee will be in his second season this fall leading the Volunteers, two-time nominee for the Broyles Award as an assistant coach of the year, two-time finalist actually for that award.

In the back, we were talking Jeremy used to drive by the Wynfrey when he was a football coach at Hoover High School. Probably never imagined being up here talking on the podium as one of the head coaches, but had that vision and that dream. He's the father of three sons. Welcome to the podium, University of Tennessee head football coach,

Jeremy Pruitt.

JEREMY PRUITT: Greg, I appreciate that introduction. And I just want to tell you that all of us coaches really appreciate what kind of job that you do for the SEC. You know, as assistant coach, you really don't have appreciation for it. You know you're kind of happy that the head coach is out of the office for the day. You might get an opportunity to go hit a golf ball a few times or something like that.

Now being a head coach, getting an opportunity to go to these meetings, you learn a lot, and you see all that goes into it. A big thank you to Greg, a big thank you to William King for keeping all of us coaches in this conference compliant and Steve Shaw with the officials. You know, in our conference, our guys do a fantastic job. This is a really tough game to call. There's so many different things and variables that happen in a game. And we had an opportunity this offseason to sit down and visit a little bit with the officials in this league. And the time and effort that they put into it speaks volumes to our league and why that we do such a really good job when it comes to calling the game.

You know, to the media, Greg mentioned, you know, being here as a coach at Hoover High School, this was one of my favorite times of the year. And it has been, you know, because you got up-to-date. It's time for football to start. And for the first time, you get a little information about what's going on with each team.



So I started to figure out, this has not been my favorite time as a head coach. It's not something that I exactly enjoy doing, but I appreciate the media and what you do for our game. You know, you sell the game of football. You sell the SEC, and we appreciate what you do.

The city of Hoover, you know, I was a young coach and started coaching here back in 2001, and had an opportunity to work with some really, really good people. In fact, there's five folks that were on the staff when I worked at Hoover High School. Myra Miles was my athletic director. She's now my personal assistant. Todd Watson was one of the defensive coordinators here before me. He's our football ops guy. Brandon Sheppard was our athletic trainer. He works in our operations. Danny Stiff played for us at Hoover High School. He works in our recruiting department. And Kevin Sherrer was one of our assistant coaches. All of us started our career at Hoover High School at some point in time, and Kevin coaches the linebackers and is our special teams coordinator.

You know, we've had a lot of changes in the first year that I've been at Tennessee. We've got a new president, Randy Boyd. I'm really looking forward to building a relationship with Randy, had lots of time to meet with him and talk. We're excited about the directions of our university. We have a new chancellor, Chancellor Plowman. I have yet to have a chance to meet with her, but we've talked. She just started last week. So with a new president, new chancellor, we're ready to get this kicked off and started.

Phillip Fulmer, our athletic director, has been a constant from day one that I've been there. Coach Fulmer, he's a VFL. You see this VFL, Vols for Life. Coach Fulmer is a true Vol for life, was player, assistant coach, head coach and now athlete director. And through his guidance, we started a program that's called Vols for Life. It's for our student-athletes to help them create opportunities beyond their playing days, and we're excited about that.

Facilities, I said last year, before we ever played a game, we redid the Anderson Center. We added two practice fields. We redid the weight room. We've already started a plan that we're going to start as soon as this season's over with. You know, redoing the

Anderson Center, adding on, doing some things from a dining facility, players' lounge, and Coach Fulmer has been there and kind of had our back from the get-go, and we're thankful that he's there.

You know, when you look at your staff, you know, right now, that's what we're selling at Tennessee, the vision that our staff has. And you look on offensive side, we had an opportunity to get Jim Chaney this offseason. Jim's a guy that, you know, he's a very good communicator. He's a great teacher. He's a good evaluator. He works well with people. Having a chance just to listen to him talk to our coaches and our players, he's very personable, really good teacher.

You know, he's done it in the SEC a bunch of different ways, whether it was the last few years at Georgia where they ran the ball a lot, or at Tennessee before where they had a lot of balance, or even when he was at Purdue when they threw the ball 50 or 60 times. Jim's a guy that figures out who his best players are and he finds a way to get him the ball. We're excited to have him. I know he's the guy that really helped me in the last six months, so I'm looking forward this season.

Tee Martin, here's a guy that was the offensive coordinator at USC. You can look at his track record as a wide receiver coach, had tremendous offenses at USC. He came back to the University of Tennessee to be our wide receiver coach, assistant head coach, and passing game coordinator. So, nobody can really visualize and sell Tennessee like Tee Martin can. He's lived it. He's seen it. He dreamed it. He's been there, he's done it. So excited he's there.

Will Friend will be back to coach the offensive line. David Johnson moved to wide receivers and will now coach running backs. David was a guy that was a high school coach at one time in Louisiana, so he's coached a bunch of different positions, and he's a guy that had no problem doing that.

Brian Niedermeyer is one of the young coaches on our staff that's under 30. Great recruiter and continues to do a good job as the tight ends coach.

Defensively, we had a couple of changes there. Derrick Ansley will now be the defensive coordinator. Derrick is a guy that I worked with for several years at Alabama. He was my graduate assistant, defensive back coach. He's a guy that if I start a sentence, he can finish it. Is one of the very bright minds in all of college football. Is coming from the Oakland Raiders.

Chris Rumph will continue to be our co-defensive coordinator and coach our outside linebackers; Tracy Rocker will coach the defensive line; and Kevin Sherrer will coach the linebackers, but Kevin will be moving to

special teams coordinator.

So one thing, I just wanted to name all of these guys, okay, because I'm excited about these guys. I think it's one of the best staffs if not the best staffs in the country when you just look at the track record. The men on this staff have been a part of 16 national championship staffs, okay, so we've seen greatness. We know what great looks like.

You know, I don't know how many number of conference championships or draft picks that we've coached, but we've been a part of winning a championship. And that's our plan, that's our goal at the University of Tennessee.

Eight of these guys started off as high school coaches, which I think is extremely important when you talk about teaching progression. You know, I -- at one time I was a high school coach, and a lot of people ask me, why did you get in that business? Well, for one reason: I wanted to have a positive impact on young people. And these guys kind of think the same way there.

But the most important thing about these guys is they're really good men. Good family men, good fathers, good husbands, and I'm excited about having all of these guy on our staff.

You know, we've had a tremendous offseason that starts with academics. We had 53 guys in the spring semester had a 3.0 or better. So that says a lot about academic staff.

If you checked, the incoming freshman at the University of Tennessee, they average a 27 on the ACT, so each class, so the academics there are really strong.

We have -- across our roster, there's 40 degrees represented within our roster. We have 12 seniors on our football team. By December, we will have 13 guys with degrees. In the last five years, 97 percent of seniors who have exhausted their eligibility at the University of Tennessee have graduated. So that says a lot about our academic support and the importance of academics at the University of Tennessee.

Like all football seasons, we had several surgeries. There were a few surgeries at the end of the year. But all of our guys participated in spring. Jeronimo Boche, Matt Rappe, and Dr. Chris Klenck, they're athletic training staff, they've done a fantastic job with our guys, getting them back to be on the field for spring ball and nobody missed.

Craig Fitzgerald is our strength and conditioning guy, him along with Rachel Pfister. They had a huge challenge for them this offseason. We had a lot of big,

long, skinny guys. So, we had several guys that weighed 260 pounds that went from 260 to 310 or 270 to 320 in the last eight months. So these guys are -- Craig and his staff, along with Rachel and her staff, have done a really nice job with our strength and conditioning, tying it together with nutrition.

And when you look at our football team, we've completely changed. I told somebody the other day, this time last year, we had two guys on the offensive line that weighed over 300 pounds; now we have 15. Does that make you a football player? No, it doesn't. But I can assure you this: In this league, when you start putting people up front, it helps to have large men. So, the guys who are on our team have worked really hard to continue to grow and develop. And that's important, because we have a young football team.

You know, spring practice, I've talked about this several times. We had 14 really good spring practices. We had one day that I think everybody in our program would like to get back. You know, for the first time, the first spring, we had several guys that we moved around. They might have been a corner one practice and a safety the next. Some of them went from corner to wide receiver or from tight end to running back. We didn't have any of that this spring.

After being there for a year, we know the players that we have. We know what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, and I think that's been extremely important in the development of our football team. Obviously, the longer you do something, the better you get at it. So guys are playing the same position they played last fall throughout the spring. So it has helped in the development of our team. The guys we recruited, we have 23 new signees.

We knew how we wanted to plug them in. So we recruited to the team that we had. So we've made lots of strides. I think it's important for us that for the first time we had enough bodies up front to practice the right way this spring. A lot of people say what do you mean practice the right way? Well, if you went to spring practice and saw folks getting after it, there's a lot of large men running around hitting everybody real hard. Okay?

So, our guys, we learned to practice the right way. We had enough bodies. I think the first spring we had six offensive linemen on scholarship that were there. So now we had lots of guys. And it's really helped the development of our team, because if you can't practice, how do you get better. Okay? How does the linebacker fit the runs if you don't have enough offensive linemen up there to practice the right way? How does a defensive lineman learn to fit blocks or pass rush or et cetera, and our running backs hit the

hole?

But we had 60 guys that attended May Mini-mester. Lots of times every time I coached, most everybody goes home in May. We had 60 guys that did not. They chose to be at the University of Tennessee to continue to work in the weight room, to take another class. I think that says a lot about the directions of our program.

If I look back from the year before, we had like 20. So we've tripled that in a year's time. So I think we'll see a little dividends this fall by the extra work that these guys have put in. You know, we've got three young men here today. This time last year when it came time to choose who was going to come with me to Media Days, I had no idea. I didn't know the football team.

And this time it was much harder to pick just three guys to come. We have several guys, in my opinion, that are deserving to come. The first guy that I'm going to mention is Jarrett Guarantano. Jarrett is our quarterback. He's a guy that I believe in, I have confidence in. He's from New Jersey. He's majoring in psychology. He'll have his degree in December. Jarrett is a guy that has lots of arm strength. He has talent with his feet. He can extend plays. He's a tough guy, and I think everybody in this room that's covered Tennessee football for the last three years knows and respects the fact that he has toughness.

The football game comes easy to him. He can handle a lot. He can change plays at the line of scrimmage, and he can get us in the right protections, but the most important thing is Jarrett has the respect of his teammates and his coaching staff. And he's been a fantastic leader for us over the last six months or eight months as we started this offseason and works out about his future.

Daniel Bituli, he's a linebacker out of Nashville via the Congo. Daniel is a very unique individual. One of the first times I met with him, we got to talking and talking about where he's from. He told me, Coach, I speak three languages. So one of them obviously is English and French and then the dialect from the village that he's from in the Congo. I told him -- I said, Daniel, I only need you to speak one language, and that's our football language. So we're kind of talking. After a year's time went by, I can see Daniel with his leadership and the work that he's put in with our football team. He now kind of speaks the same language that everybody on our defensive staff does.

Darrell Taylor is an outside linebacker. Darrell is from Virginia. He's a communications major. He'll get his degree in December also. Darrell is a guy that has worked extremely hard in the last 18 months that we've



been there. He was a guy that signed as a 4-3 defensive end that moved to a 3-4 outside linebacker even though there's not much difference in this, but Darryl did a good job. He changed his body, put on 20-25 pounds in the last 18 months. He's now big enough to me to be a football player in this league and be an effective football player. I think last year he had nine sacks in three games. That sounds really great.

And of the things that I'm sure that he will tell you the reason that he came back, is where did those other nine games go? So he's a guy that's worked extremely hard this offseason and provided great leadership. We've really had a lot of success in recruiting, and I'm going to tell you, a lot of people want to give coaches credit for recruiting. I'll tell you right now, the best recruiters we have are your football players. And the best recruiters we have on our campus is our football team right now. They believe in where we're going. They believe in what we're doing, and they are willing to do everything that they've got to do to help get guys come to the University of Tennessee because they're hungry to have success. They want to compete against the best players day in and day out, and our players have done a fantastic job doing that.

You know, when you talk about positions, I said a little bit about quarterback, the thing that I'm interested in this fall camp, is after Jarrett, we don't have a quarterback on our team that's ever took a college snap. So that's going to be important for us, and we only have three guys on campus. Most schools have four or five. We have three. So it's going to be important for us to establish a back-up quarterback in fall camp, and hopefully we'll be able to do that. But that's going to be an important part of our football team at running back.

I've said this before, I feel like we have several guys. They all have different type of abilities, different strengths, different weaknesses. But one thing about these guys, I like their competitive spirit. The guys compete really hard every day against the defense and against each other. And so we have five guys there that have worked really hard this offseason.

At tight end, you know, we have Dom Wood-Anderson who I think is one of the more talented guys in this league that's coming back. Last year was his first year in the league. He was a junior college guy. So he played mostly wide receiver in college, which talking about a guy that's 6'5", 270 pounds and runs a 4-6-40. The guy has lots of play-making ability. We need to find ways to get this guy the ball, but we got to create some depth. And we have some young guys there.

Wide receiver you would think would be a strength on our team. Like I said, we only have 12 seniors, but four

of them are wide receivers. I'm going to say that again. Four of them are wide receivers, so if I was a wide receiver in high school, Tennessee would be a great landing spot in the near future.

Marquez Callaway, Jauan Jennings, Tyler Byrd, Brandon Johnson, those guys have played a lot of ball along with Josh Palmer and Jordan Murphy. So we need these guys to make plays for us, and they have the ability to do that. I think there's no secret that our offense has got to start up front.

We've struggled last year at that position, and in my opinion, no fault of the kids. Some of the guys were not physically ready to play. They're plenty talented enough, but it's hard to play in this league when you weigh 265 pounds. We've added guys at that position. We have lots of competition now.

Like I said before, last year we had two guys that weighed 300 pounds. Now we have 15. So we have competition. And it's going to be important for us to figure out who those seven or eight guys are early on that can -- that are ready to play in this league and get these guys enough reps and get them ready to go because I feel like that we have really good pieces around them, and we got good guys up front. They just don't have a whole lot of experience.

You know, defensively, it starts up front in this league with a D line. We lost three seniors up front. So we have very little experience on the defensive line up front. We have one senior and one junior on our roster. Our guys have worked extremely hard to get their bodies, in my opinion, where they're ready to compete in this league. But until you've done it, you don't know. So, to me, it's a huge question mark because there's very little experience there.

Outside linebacker, we got some guys that returned, but one thing about our position at outside linebacker, we only have five guys on the team at that position on scholarship. And everywhere else I've ever been, we've carried eight or nine, what we call DPR, designated pass rushers. We only have five. We need to stay healthy at that position.

We have guys like Darrell Taylor, Deandre Johnson, Kivon Bennett, that have played and have experience, but it's a dangerously low number, and it's one of the big selling points for us, has been in recruiting. If you want to be able to rush the quarterback, there's an opportunity at Tennessee, okay, just by sheer numbers. So, after this year, we'll only have four guys back. Jordan Allen is another guy there that will contribute.

Inside linebacker is a place that we do have a little bit of experience at, in some young talent, so it will be

interesting how that shakes out there. And defensive backs, we have all of the return guys back in the defensive backfield. So we got a little bit of experience there.

Our kicking game, our kickers are all back, Paxton Brooks, Joe Doyle and Brent Cimaglia, Marquez Callaway and Bryce Thompson returned kicks last year, so with that, I'll take any questions.

**Q. The final non-conference game of the season against UAB, their story is one of the better comebacks in college football. How is the perception of that game changed concerning the success the past two years, winning 19 games and conference title? And the second part to that question, while you're an assistant here at Hoover High School, and you faced head coach Bill Clark from UAB in the 6A title game in 2004 and 2006, how do you prepare mentally, physically, emotionally for a Bill Clark-coached team?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Well, you kind of answered the question, when you start talking about UAB, I know all of those guys on that staff. Several of them I've coached with and coached against. I have a tremendous amount of respect for what Bill has done over the years. He was a fantastic coach.

A lot of the people don't know this. Bill was the first defensive coordinator at Hoover High School, but he never coached a game because a job came open at Prattville in the summertime. So, they've built that program up. I've not had a chance to really look that far down in the schedule. We play them later on in the year, and we have a couple of open dates. So I know last year's team, they had a lot of seniors. I know their offensive staff. They do a fantastic job with Bryant Vincent. So, you know, I think the last time UAB went to Knoxville, I think it went in overtime.

**Q. Hey, Jeremy, Tennessee obviously has a storied history, but the last dozen or so years have been a struggle. What's it going to take to get Tennessee back to winning consistently in a big way, and how close are you guys -- how close do you think you guys are to doing that?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Well, when you talk about comparing Tennessee now to like me and you know it at -- when I was growing up, Tennessee was one of the premier programs in the country, and that's still the expectations of the fans, the -- everybody associated with the athletic department, our coaching staff and our players.

You know, but what comes with that, a lot of it has to do with who you play. And this league is very competitive. We have very good coaches in this league. Probably,

it's more competitive now than it's ever been. There's good players.

You know, so we got to do our part. And we have a plan as a staff. You know, we've got to execute the plan. Our players, they believe in our vision and the kids that we're recruiting. And it takes a lot that goes into it, and we're continuing to work our plan.

**Q. How important is Brandon Kennedy going to be to the offensive line and his health? I know you're familiar with him having coached at Alabama. And second part of the question, when you decided to hire Derrick Ansley as your defensive coordinator, I know you coached with him at Alabama, what did you see in him that made you think that he's going to have a chance to take your defense to the next level?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Well, you know, the first part of it, Brandon Kennedy, Brandon is a guy that he started the first football game for us last year and unfortunately on Tuesday tore his ACL. And he's had several years there where he's unfortunately gotten hurt. Brandon's a guy that's worked extremely hard this offseason. We held him out of spring practice. He could have went during spring ball, but I felt like for him we needed to hold him out and make sure he's completely well before we put him out on the field.

Brandon's a leader in offensive line. Our players respect him. He's a guy that graduated, you know, in three years, has two years to play. So, we'll be happy to see him out there.

When you talk about Derrick Ansley, Derrick's a guy that, you know, I've worked with. I know what you're getting in him. And he's a guy that I believe in. And he's a great recruiter, really good teacher. He knows exactly what I want done.

**Q. Jeremy, you mentioned Myra Miles in your opening from your time at Hoover. How instrumental has she been in your development, and what was the reason behind asking her to join the staff at Tennessee?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Well, when we hired Myra, that was really my wife's idea. We were talking about, hey, let's put this together. Who do we believe in? Who do we trust? Who has the same vision that we do? And Myra's somebody that I worked alongside at Hoover High School. She happened to be retired and was available. And so, you know, it took one phone call, and she said she's in.

So, Myra's there every single day with me. You know, she helps me along the way, and she don't mind telling me if she thinks I'm out of line.

**Q. Coach, what about Jim Chaney and his time at Georgia that you liked that made you want to bring him on as offensive coordinator, and how has he been in that role this offseason?**

JEREMY PRUITT: I think if you look at Jim's time at Georgia, you can look at his time at Tennessee, and really wherever he's been he's had a lot of success, and he's done it a bunch of different ways.

I think it's important in this league that you know who you're going to go against. There's some really, really good defensive minds in this league, and it helps to have experience against him. Jim understands the University of Tennessee. He coached there before. So when it comes to hiring an offensive coordinator, I couldn't think of nobody else I'd rather hire than Jim Chaney.

**Q. You sort of answered the question I was asking, but I was wondering: Has Jim Chaney always been on your radar since taking the job with the Vols?**

JEREMY PRUITT: You know, Jim's a guy that we coached against when I was an assistant coach at Alabama and he was at Tennessee, and they gave us a lot of problems. Obviously when he went to Georgia, going against him. You know when the guys that you go against in this league who gives you problems, who don't, or vice versa. So, Jim's a guy that, in my opinion, is one of the best guys in the country.

**Q. Picking up Aubrey Solomon, NCAA transfer portal, I mean, just -- how does it affect the roster management now? And from personal experience from within your program, how you approach that when it might be across college football now?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Is the question about the transfer portal? Well, I have a unique view because I was a transfer myself. A lot of people say: Why did you transfer? I signed with Middle Tennessee. I played there for two years, was a starter. And I left, not because I was unhappy, just because I wanted to go fulfill a dream.

You know, these guys have tough decisions in making decisions where they are going to go to college, and sometimes they may not get it right. And to me it's about the mental wellness of the student-athlete. And I think everybody that's involved is definitely sensitive and really considers that, and I think that's one of the things that we have to put to the forefront when it comes to kids that want to transfer. We need to help them find their way.

As far as the rules or whatnot, as far as eligibility, I don't have enough information to really comment about that, but, you know, as a guy that has transferred

before myself, it worked out well for me.

**Q. Coach, you talked a little bit about Jarrett Guarantano, your quarterback. What strides, being able to coach him for a year, has he made? And looking forward towards this season, what do you think he should work on going in to try to be a successful quarterback here this year?**

JEREMY PRUITT: Well, the thing that's exciting me about Jarrett is you can stand out on the field and you can see his arm talent, you know that he's a good athlete. You know, me being in the meeting rooms, I know that football really comes easy to him. He picks it up really fast. He can handle a whole lot.

The thing that I see that excites me the most is the impact he's having on his teammates. I think that's a true mark of a leader, is having a positive impact on the people you're around. And I see him developing and doing that, and that's what excites me about him and the future of our program.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this afternoon.

JEREMY PRUITT: Thank you.



## 2019 SEC Football Media Days Tennessee Player Quotes Tuesday, July 16

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### **Senior Linebacker Daniel Bituli**

*On his hunger for success for his senior season ...*

"We are really excited. We're not too focused on last year or the last two seasons. We are all just going into this season with the right frame of mind. We are really confident in where we are, knowing that we are ahead of where we were last year. It is really fun, and we are really excited for this defense. We are really excited for the offense and the whole team."

*On the urgency to return to a bowl game this upcoming season...*

"We're not worried at all. We know that in order for us to get to a bowl game, we have to go out there and win each and every day. That is what we plan on doing. Coach Pruitt and his coaching staff have done a great job of communicating that with the team. If we want any results on the field, we have to dominate in the offseason. That is what we are focused on this year."

*On the bond between him and the rest of his senior class...*

"We are really close. We have gone through a lot, but that has just made our bond even tighter. All the time, we talk about the minor things that we could have cleaned up in the years prior to this year. It is those minor things that we are going to focus on this year in order for us to be successful."

*On the difficulty of changing the culture at Tennessee...*

"It has been really hard with the coaching changes and everything that hasn't been involved with football. We are really excited with where we are heading. Coach Pruitt and his staff have done a great job at communicating what needs to be done in order to win games. The guys in the locker room are focused on his leadership. We are just following his lead and he will take us there."



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### **Redshirt Junior Quarterback Jarrett Guarantano**

*On if the turning point of last season and overall was the win at Auburn...*

"I think that game meant a lot to us. I think we had not won an SEC West game in a long time. So being able to come out of the difficult setting meant a lot to us, and it was able to show us what we are able to do. It was definitely a boost for this year with being able to learn from what we went through in a big away game."

*On if he thinks the previous season affects the upcoming season...*

"I do think that is true, but I also think there was a lot of learning opportunities along the way. Being able to look back at the tape, being able to see different things you had success with and different things you want to change helps you become a better football player."

*On Offensive Coordinator Jim Chaney and how he has affected him...*

"Huge. We only had one spring together, but it has been very impactful and a very good spring for us. Throughout the spring, it had been a lot of different things with terminology and offense. I am starting to get the hang of it. We really mean a lot, just me and him, throughout the days. I am really happy he is here. He has a lot of success throughout his track record, and I am definitely excited about that. I am excited that he is also my offensive coordinator."

*On other differences he has seen from last year to this year with the offensive line...*

"I think those guys are taking on a bigger role, whether it is maturity or working harder. The older guys are helping the younger guys with the offense and welcoming them to college football, because the SEC is a difficult conference and everybody knows we are going to need as many lineman as we can get. I am really happy with the success they have had this off season."





## 2019 SEC Football Media Days Tennessee Player Quotes Tuesday, July 16

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### Senior Linebacker Darrell Taylor

*On how spring practice has been and how the team looks and the goals of the team ...*

"Our spring practice went really well. I think we improved a lot this spring, and I think the goals were being consistent, being relentless, and just making sure that we know things, studying, watching film, and just being consistent on and off the field."

*On how his relationship with Head Coach Jeremy Pruitt has evolved ...*

"I think he has been around us a lot more, and I think he has talked with players individually. As we leave, we do exit interviews, and he gets with players and gets to know them, spends like an hour with them just talking about football or just talking to them about life. I think we have built a better relationship than we had last year, and I think that has been helpful for a lot of our players."

*On if everything that had happened in the past year took a toll on the players in the last two games of the season ...*

"I think it was just us not doing what we were supposed to be doing. If we just stay the course and work on the things we need to work on, we will be successful for a whole season."

*On passing up leaving early for the NFL and what the reasons were for coming back ...*

"Well, the first reason is because I wanted to come back, get my degree and make sure I graduate and do those things to help myself be successful off the field. I wanted to have another shot to play football in college and with my teammates again, just to play at the University of Tennessee and get that one last experience."