

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Thursday, July 22, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

**Auburn Tigers**

**Coach Bryan Harsin**

Press Conference



COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Auburn University head football coach Bryan Harsin is our next for SEC Media Days. He enters his first season, as you all know. Directed his programs to bowl games each season since becoming an FBS head football coach. Led Boise State to five ten-win seasons, seven consecutive bowl appearances, and six Mountain West, Conference West Division championships. He led that team at his alma mater because he played quarterback for Boise State from 1995 through '99.

He also was the offensive coordinator for Boise State during their 2007 Fiesta Bowl win, the famous statue of Liberty play for a two-point conversion.

We were talking in the back hallway about his family's legacy, his father's legacy as a professional drag racer and his interest in drag racing, yet he's a football coach.

Bryan, I saw at your first game at Arkansas State, I believe was your first game. I was at that game.

Welcome to the podium, Bryan Harsin, head football coach at Auburn University.

BRYAN HARSIN: Good afternoon. Glad to be here and finally. It has been a long week for me. A lot of good lucks, a lot of hope you do well, and let me just say that I've been in some pretty big games, and I'm not sure I had this many people text me, call me, see me on the street and wish me good luck before some event. So a credit to you all and happy to be here.

Got two players with me, Bo Nix, quarterback, and Owen Pappoe. I just want to start off with talking about those two guys. The reason why they're here, we're going to have competition on our team at every position as we get into fall camp, and our guys know that. But those two players in particular have done a great job really since I've been there, and we've had the staff assembled of helping lead our football team and really sharing the message of what

we're trying to accomplish now with myself, our staff, and the things that we want to get done at Auburn University and with our football program.

So I know they're going to do a great job today. They'll answer your questions. They've been leading and doing a tremendous job this summer. Both guys are hard workers, and they deserve the opportunity to be here to represent their team.

We have a lot of players right now that are finishing up the summer workouts, and we'll get more into that, that have also done a great job, but these two in particular, I'm proud that they're here, and I'm looking forward to watching them and you all have a chance to speak with them today and how they handle themselves.

I'm proud to be here in the SEC. When you drive up here and it says it just means more, I really believe that. That was something from afar, being in the Mountain West and being at Boise State. And go back to this last season during COVID, when everyone was trying to figure out a way to play and how we were going to handle the situations with the pandemic, and the SEC kept forging ahead.

I think that has to do with the leadership, the medical folks, and just the importance of football and how they treat their student-athletes and what they want to accomplish in this league.

As I set back there as a coach at another program, I really felt that. The SEC's got it figured out. It does mean more. So I'm honored to be at Auburn University. I'm proud to be here in the SEC and to be a part of this conference and to represent our program.

The most important thing to me is my family. One of the things I've learned over the last seven months is just how awesome Auburn, the community, the university really is. Let me just say this. So my family, I've got two daughters, 21 and 19, Devin and Dane. I've got a son who's 15 that will be at Auburn High School. And my wife, Kes and I, are all from Boise. So we made this move, we came a couple thousand miles away to come to Auburn.



As a football coach, when you come into the facility you have 250 people at a place like this, and we're all charging towards one goal. We want to win championships. We want to get better every single day. All the things you hear from every single coach that's been up here and has talked.

But the people, the most important people in your lives, how are they going to be taken care of? I can say this: My family, the Auburn community, I can't thank them enough. My family loves it. My daughters, my son, they love living in Auburn. I've asked them and just said, Hey, tell me what it's like, and they love it. I'm like, Really? They're like, Yeah, we love it. This is unbelievable.

So the community, the university, the people, my wife and I, we couldn't be more appreciative to be in a place like Auburn. I want the people to know that because, for our coaches and their families and my family, in order for us to be elite at our jobs, we have to know the people that we care about most are taken care of and they live in a great place.

And our families definitely are getting that right now from the Auburn community and the Auburn family, so thank you for that and very much appreciated on my behalf and on the coaches' behalf.

Our focus right now is really finishing up. Our guys are in their last couple weeks of workouts. Today they had a chance to get up early. They're in the upper decks of the stadiums. They're running the stairs and they're going to get after it. They'll finish up tomorrow. We're all be together for that.

Then this next week, we'll have our crescendo for our train, and the guys will get a few days off before we start camp on August 5th, and we'll have the report day.

That's really the focus right now, is finishing up the summer, making sure all the work we put in to physically develop ourselves as a team, that continues, and we finish at a high level. And then we take all that hard work and effort and strain and all those tough situations we had to thrive in and we apply it to fall camp.

August 5th we're going to have our team meeting. We'll be on the practice field the next day. We'll have split practices for the first two, so we'll have young and old so we can focus on some of the new players and some of the guys that we brought in. Then we're all together day 3 and we're rolling.

We're going to have a chance to get the coaches and the

players all back together. One of the things that I was so proud of that we got a chance to do was have spring practice. Those 15 practices as a new staff, you can't put a value on that.

To put in a new system, to get around the players, to have a new staff out there installing systems, getting face to face, working on drills and the fundamentals and the techniques we all need to be successful at this game to play really good football, we had an opportunity to do that.

Our doctors, Dr. Goodlett, our medical staff, they allowed us to make that happen. We've tested our guys. We've been through the COVID protocols for the last five months. We've had no positives. Our guys are taking it seriously. That's really important to me because I know that they're sacrificing a lot to be out there and participating in the workouts and making sure that we have a chance to get started this August with our fall camp where everybody is available and ready to go out there and play.

Part of the protocols -- I know there's been a lot of conversations about the vaccinations, where teams are at. Our medical staff, they have those answers a lot better than I do. I think we're in that 60 percent range right now at this point. We're educating our players. We're making sure that they understand from our medical staff the pros and cons.

I think they've done a really good job of letting our guys make those individual decisions on what this means for our football team, what this means for this conference, what this means for competition in the future.

That's one of the things that we do. We're all teachers at this level. We're college football coaches, but we teach. We've got to give our players the information and educate them on, All right, here's what you need to know, and let them make decisions.

For a lot of them, this is deeply personal and I respect that. I respect that with our staff. I respect that for myself, our players, and understand that.

So our goal is to educate and give them information and then let our players make that decision. They understand the 85 percent. They've got a chance to hear and see and read all about those things, and I believe in our players. I believe in our medical staff. And I believe in the way that we've educated our players to make the right decisions and understand and respect their decisions and know that it's personal.

As far as NIL, man, there is a lot to learn on name, image, and likeness. Not many coaches can answer what does

that mean? You can go through the obvious. What does it mean when the star player is making more than the guys that are actually doing the work in front of them? What's that going to look like? I think it comes back to your team.

I think it comes back to the guys who are in that locker room, how they treat each other, and just know that there's not going to be the same deals for everybody on the football team.

How do you explain that and show that? Well, there's going to be examples that we're going to be given that we're going to have a chance to use over time to show our players, Hey, this is how they handled it. This is how they handled it. Here's how we can handle it.

So you're just going to need some more information, in my opinion, to make calculated and educated guesses on where we think this thing is going.

The one thing about it, football right now at this level, especially, if you want to be an elite player, one of the things it takes is tremendous focus and time. Tremendous focus and time. And so guys that are going to utilize this NIL -- and I think it's an awesome opportunity for guys to make some money, to be able to do some things from a business standpoint and really learn that lesson along the way.

And also, as we explained in our first meeting when we talked about it, a right to understand taxes, because not anybody in there really knew that. They're taking their amount of money, dividing it by 12, and they're like, Hold on a second, there are taxes. They're like, What's that?

So we explained that to them, so we're getting a chance to educate them on real life things. But the one thing as a coach, you want to surround your players with fantastic people, and the best people that you have in your program and on your coaching staff.

We've just opened this up. Now there's going to be more people in our players' lives. We have to understand that. We have to educate our players. We have to understand that our relationship with our guys, our environment we create every single day, it's got to be strong because there's going to be a lot of influencers. Not just our players, but people that are going to be involved with our players' lives now, and you still have to get up and be on time for your workout. You still have to follow the nutrition plan. You still have to make sure that you're where you need to be for class. You still have to show up on time for practice in that meeting room with your notebook and your pen and ready to take notes and be a student of the game.

And at the end of practice, the recovery time that you have and all the things you're asked to do in order to be an elite football player and a great student-athlete, that takes time.

So I think one thing that players are all going to have to really work through themselves is how much time do I have to devote to these things and still be elite in the areas that are most important to me? Don't know the answer to that yet. Don't know what that's going to look like right now.

But as coaches in this NIL, it's different everywhere you go. Some places you can help, some places you can't. But at the end of the day, you sit in those players' homes with their families, and they look to you to take care of their sons. So when something doesn't go right, we're going to be involved because players are going to come to us for advice, and that's just another area that, as coaches, we have to grow and develop ourselves to really have those kind of conversations.

I mean, you don't want to certainly on a Wednesday of a game week, but it's going to happen, and you're going to have to be prepared for it. So that's another layer for our coaching staff and people in our program that we've got to be ready for.

Third downs, yeah, but you know what, we also got a situation, all right, when one of our players are dealing with somebody that we have no control over. So those are the things that are coming down the road that we have to continue to stay focused on. Those are things that we're aware of.

Ultimately, as we get into practice, we've got 25. We're getting ready for September 4th against Akron. That is the focus at Auburn. I know the other games we play. I know the other teams on the schedule, but you've got to win the first one. You've got to go out there and put on the field your very best performance so we can evaluate that and learn from it. So that is our number one focus.

For me, the things I'm most excited about, I'm excited about Tiger Walk. I want to walk from South Donahue all the way down into Jordan-Hare Stadium, and I want to see all those people yelling, War Eagle.

I want to be in that stadium with 90,000 people going crazy, because I've heard nothing but how the environment is, and I got a chance to experience that in a bad way when I was at Arkansas State.

So I've got a little taste of that, and now those folks are going to be on our side. And I want to be able to be part of a program that, when you win, your fans go crazy and go downtown and we toilet paper trees. I mean, how



awesome is that? I've never been a part of that. I've been a part of great programs and I've been around great people, but you have all these things. For me, I'm looking forward to that.

That's why you come to Auburn. That's why you're in the SEC, because it does mean more, and opportunities like that, it's not like that at other places. So my family, myself, our coaching staff, we're all excited to be here. We're all proud to represent Auburn University. We love where we live, we love the people in our community, and we love the staff we put together.

We're looking forward to getting our players back together and really working every single day on just playing good football. Playing good football every day and being consistent, and if we can do that, we can be that 1-0 type team every single day. Then come Saturday September 4th, when we go play, we all should have a chance to see that.

Again, I want to thank you all for being here this entire week. I've got a chance to see some of the questions and conversations and some of the other coaches come up here and talk about their programs. No different for me. No different for me. I just want to thank you.

I know that the coverage of this sport, the coverage of this conference, it does matter, and coming from another conference not too long ago, we all pay attention to it.

So we'll do a great job of it today. With that, I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. You followed Gus Malzahn twice now, at Arkansas State and now at Auburn. Do you guys have any sort of relationship? Do you know him? Also, do you have a good grasp of the pressure cooker you're walking into at Auburn?**

BRYAN HARSIN: Let me go back here. Yes, I know Gus, and we have a relationship to a degree. I'll start back in 2007 Gus was at Tulsa, and I was the offensive coordinator and I wanted -- I read his book, his book that he wrote in high school about tempo. There was a lot of great things in there and he's a great offensive mind, so I wanted to go see him.

So Chris Peterson and I and our offensive line coach at the time, we went to Tulsa, and we got a chance to sit down for a couple days and talk football, talk about tempo, talk about how he does things. So we took a lot away from that, and that spring we installed some of that no-huddle and some of those ideas. So I've always admired Gus. I've always thought he's a great offensive mind.

Then it just happens to be, right, when he leaves Arkansas State, here I come. Then he's going on to Auburn. There was coaches on that staff, one that was here, Eliah Drinkwitz was one of them, that was a part of that transition that I kept and stayed on my staff during that time.

Then when this came up we had just -- in Boise we were good. We had just built a home and this was where we wanted to be, and our mindset was this is what we want -- this is where we want to be, where we want to stay, and this is what we're going to do.

When Allen Greene called me and said, Hey -- and I'd known Allen previous. He told the story about our time we met in the pool and it was all innocent and everything. So he said, Do you remember me? I said, Hell, yeah, I do, and he was at Auburn.

Right then and there, man, it piqued my interest more than any other place, and a lot because of him, a lot because of the creed, a lot because of this conference as well.

The obvious is Gus Malzahn is there, and that's one of the things that just personally you're like, Okay, this would be me following him again. Do we have a relationship right now? Do we talk every day? No, I don't. I know where he's at, at UCF. Terry Mohajir was the athletic director that hired me at Arkansas State. So we have this weird web of connection, Coach Malzahn and I do. I've got a lot of respect for him.

Then of all teams they play in the beginning, it's Boise State on a Thursday. The coaches I know at Boise State, they're like, I've seen a lot of Auburn. So there is just -- it doesn't really go away at this point. I wish him the best.

As far as what you're getting into, here's what I think. For me as a coach and as a competitor, everything I do, I want to win. So the preparation and all the things that go into that, it doesn't matter if I'm at Capitol High School or I'm at Auburn and coaching the football team there, it all matters.

So the importance of it, what surrounds it is definitely different. Definitely different. There's a lot more attention that goes into being the head coach at Auburn University.

As far as the importance of my job and how I view it, I've always felt like I've tried to prepare and find ways to win, and every little thing has mattered to me. I try to work that way and try to develop myself that way. So what we did today in our workouts, it matters. What we do tomorrow and so on. I'm going to continue that.

I know that the microscope is a lot different at Auburn, but



that was part of it too. As a competitor, and I said this, this is why you come to Auburn. This is why you want to be in the SEC. You want to play against the best. You've got the best talent, not just in football, but in any sport in the SEC. The best athletes in the world come to the SEC. You've got PGA, you've got NBA players, you've got Olympians, you've got NFL players. You've got the best. You've got the best coaches that are in the SEC.

If you want to be a part of that, understand what you're getting into and the level that all those coaches take each and every day with every one of those players. Do I understand that? Yes. Do you work every single day to be in that elite group? Yes.

The weirdness of Gus and Bryan Harsin, I can't explain that. I'm not sure there will be another one. I think we're the only two that have probably done that ever.

**Q. What do you remember about that game when you were at ASU and went to Auburn? Did you think, Wow, this would be a great place to be? Did you imagine you'd be back as coach? When you were at Boise at your alma mater, you guys had an .800 winning percentage. Was it hard to leave even for a job as good as Auburn?**

BRYAN HARSIN: Let me tell you the story about that game. Going into the Auburn game, the players when I was at Arkansas State, Coach Malzahn and the staff had great uniforms. They never got to wear them. So in that game I thought, you know what, this is going to be our opportunity. We're going to wear our gray uniforms in this game.

Kind of had it all clear with Coach Malzahn, because you'll get a penalty with that. It was all going to be good. Then he changed his mind and took the two 15-yard penalties. Put us behind in that game. We actually played well offensively. We had some really good players in that game.

But I remember going into that environment, and as you look up in the stands, you can't hear a thing. It's shaking on the field, and you're trying to get a play out to your quarterback. It was difficult. I thought our guys did play well in that game.

As far as leaving a program like Boise State, I'm an alum. I have a lot of pride in that program. I bleed Blue, always will. That's where I played, and I spent a lot of time, and I cut my teeth as a coach, and I worked for unbelievable people. It started with Dirk Koetter, and I had Dirk Koetter and Mark Helfrich, my last two seasons as a player. Dirk Koetter, a head coach on his own, Mark Helfrich was the

head coach at Oregon.

So I had two great coaches that taught me the game, which really gave me a love for football because I understood it better.

Then I had Dan Hawkins, who I worked with, and Dan gave me my first opportunity at 23 years old, 24 years old, to be the tight ends coach. Chris Peterson took over. Dan was a guy that was all about building culture and that connection with players.

And Chris Peterson took over, and Chris is about process and details and one of the most phenomenal coaches I've ever been around in my entire life.

So a lot of things that I take with me every single day into our program comes from what I learned at Boise State. And I got a chance to work with Mack Brown at Texas. Mack Brown is maybe the best human being really in the world, and I got to be around him and watch how he treats people and the way he does things and to watch his every day.

I was one of the coaches that was not afraid to walk in his office and just have a conversation with him and ask him how he's doing.

So I've had a lot of great experiences. Is it hard to leave those things? That's part of the progression. Like I told you before, being at Boise State is special, but this was different. There's been other opportunities, but not like this. And it's the leadership at Auburn, it's now what I've learned, even more so, the community at Auburn and the chance to be in the SEC and to play against the very best, and when you do and you do it at a high level, you have the chance to be the very best as well.

That really as a competitor was a big draw for me, and in the last seven months I didn't know how this whole thing would go, better than expected. We haven't played a game, but I'm proud to be at Auburn.

**Q. You talked in your opening statement about the Auburn family and the community and how important it is to everybody in Auburn. Talk about the culture for a second. Talk about how important that is and what type of culture you're bringing to Auburn and what this coaching staff is bringing to Auburn. Is it any different than what Auburn has seen in the past?**

BRYAN HARSIN: Let me just say this, and let me back up. Auburn's had a lot of success in the past. They've had a lot of great coaches. They've had a lot of great people come through their program. I've been fortunate enough to

get a chance to talk with some of that. We had Sammie Coates, Trovon Reed. I met Bo Jackson. I've had a chance to be around a lot of different players that have come through Auburn.

So we're building a new facility, right? We had one that was there for a long time. A lot of great players, Cam Newton, Heisman Trophy winners, and so on that came through that program. Is it different every staff? Absolutely.

The one thing for us as we come in right now, we've got to do a great job of connecting with our players. We've got to get to know them. Through COVID, that didn't help, right, getting to know their families and being on the road and being face to face. We had to do it via Zoom and other ways and being very creative.

But connecting with our players and letting them know, number one, we're here for you; number two, what are the expectations? The expectations for you are simple: Your personal best. Simple. Show up, care, and repeat. Every single day.

And you know how we're going to do that? You're going to do it to the very best of your ability every single day. That's the standard.

How do we do that? Discipline. Understand what discipline is. Not disciplining, not punishment. What is discipline? Self-regulation. You've got to be able to get up and do things over and over and over to build those habits to be successful.

Understand that you want to be great, here's what it takes. What comes with discipline? Toughness. If you're going to do that consistently, and in this game, you'd better be tough physically and mentally. You'd better be able to perform at your very best when the circumstances are against you.

I don't want you to survive. I want you to thrive in situations where things get really difficult and tough for you.

Then the last one is conviction. I want you to believe. And number one in yourself. Like you'd better believe you can win. You'd better believe you can make that weight. You'd better believe you can hit those 300s. You'd better believe you can run those decks. When you wake up, I want you believing in yourself, and I want you believing in what we're doing.

So when we go out there and play on September 4th, I want our fans and everybody that watches and tunes into our game, I want them to see a disciplined team, a tough

team, and a team that believes they can win every time they step on the field and every single practice.

Is that different from what the previous staff had? I have no idea. I didn't dive into what their core values were. I got a chance -- what I did when I took the job is I wanted to see it. I wanted to witness what this team was about. I wanted to see why guys show up late. I wanted to see why guys didn't finish. I wanted to see those things for myself with my own eyes and make my own determinations.

Maybe they don't know or maybe they don't care. Either way, that was a problem. So we've had to change that. You want to win, you want to be consistent, you want to be one of those teams that every single year, all right, you're in the hunt for an opportunity to play and win a championship, all right, well, you'd better bring your personal best every single day. You'd better be disciplined, you'd better be tough, and you'd better have conviction for what it is you're doing.

That's been my message with our guys, and we've simplified that more. We've talked about character, and we simplified it down to just being 1-0. There's things that come with that, but, hey, focus on the task at hand, the moments that you're in, because there's a lot of distractions, and let's just go 1-0.

Simplifying that every single day when you can win that day and you stack those days together, then come Saturdays, what do you do? Exactly what you want. You cut it loose. You know I've won Sunday through Friday, so what am I going to do on Saturday? I'm going to win. That's what everybody wants.

All right. You don't do that unless you know deep down inside you've done everything you can all those days to have yourself ready to go out there and play that way. If you're out there thinking and playing and going like, damn, should I have done more, that's not going to win games in this conference.

So your personal best every single day, that's the expectation. We have a plan for you and a blueprint that we shared with our guys. Then the discipline, toughness, and conviction every single day are the things that we've talked about in our program.

That's who we are, that's who we'll always be, and those are the things we strive for daily.

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