

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Ed Orgeron

Press Conference

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: I am privileged to introduce the 2019 Coach of the Year, entering his sixth year as the head football coach at LSU, Ed Orgeron. Ed will be squaring off against one of his sons. In LSU's game with McNeese, his son Cody is the starting quarterback for the Cowboys. He also helped provide me some of my spring reading material with his book Flip the Script, looking back on the successful 2019 season and on the rest of his life.

LSU head football coach, Ed Orgeron.

ED ORGERON: First of all, I want to thank the commissioner for the job he and his offense did last year. Did a tremendous job of communicating with us, sometimes on a daily basis, and doing a terrific job of getting us through the season. What a tremendous job that I thought he did personally.

We're very proud to be here at SEC Media Days, representing the LSU Tigers. I brought two great guys today to represent us in Derek Stingley and Austin Deculus. We could have brought ten. We have a lot of guys coming back to our football team that are tremendous leaders.

Derek is one of the top corners in America, one of the top leaders coming back, and has become a tremendous leader for us. Austin Deculus is going to break the record for the most games played by any LSU football player this year, but he was instrumental in getting our whole offensive line to come back. I could have brought our whole offensive line back here. They're a tremendous group of young men.

Obviously, we're excited about this season. We have a lot of guys returning. We have an experienced team. We have a very good team. A very good coaching staff coming back, and I love the mindset of this football team and the leadership of the football team.

A couple of things on offense. We brought back Jake



Petz and DJ Mangas to run Joe Brady's offense of 2019, one of the most prolific offenses in the history of football, and that's what we're going to. I think those guys are going to do a tremendous job.

We're also excited about the acquisition of Brad Davis in the summer, one of the best offensive line coaches in the country, along with Kevin Faulk and Mickey Joseph. Those guys are going to do a tremendous job for us.

Obviously, on offense we've got a battle at quarterback. I think it's healthy for a football team. I believe in both quarterbacks. Myles Brennan and Max Johnson are two championship quarterbacks. Whoever wins is going to do a great job at LSU. It's going to be a tremendous battle, and we'll see what happens.

We have an offensive line coming back, Tyrion Davis and John Emery this time. Tyrion is in the best shape he's been. Kayshon Boutte coming in with some tremendous young wide receivers. We have a great offense coming back. I can't wait to see those guys play.

On defense, I'm very excited to be able to hire Daronte Jones. He's an expert on the back end. He comes from Mike Zimmer's system, one of the best cover guys in all of the world, along with Andre and along with Blake, I think those guys are going to do a great job with Corey Raymond on defense.

We decided to go to four-three defense, got our defensive line coming back, two of the best corners in America in Derek and Eli Ricks. Got some young safeties, one of the top safeties in the country, two top safeties in recruiting, got two tremendous young linebackers we acquired through the transfer portal.

We're excited about that. We're excited about Cade York coming back, Avery Atkins on special teams.

I know you guys have got a lot of questions, but I wanted to give you a little preview of our football team. Any questions?

Q. I know you made a lot of changes with your



coaching staff. Why did you pick the guys you did? How do you feel they're fitting in? And Brad Davis in particular from Arkansas, why do you zero in on him? What's he bring to you guys?

ED ORGERON: Great to see you, Bob. Brad Davis is a guy from Baton Rouge, a tremendous recruiter, up-and-coming offensive line coach. You always have a group of coaches on a list in case something happens. Something did happen and he became available, and we're very happy to have him. He's happy to be home in Baton Rouge.

One of the things -- and I talked about this before -- our coaches didn't know this, but when I was interviewing them, I was pretending I was one of our players, and I wanted to see how well they would communicate to our players. Coaches are going to know a lot of football, but it's how much that they can get to our players and how much our players will know, and every one of these coaches, they were 20 years, average 20 years younger than the coaches I had on the staff. Every one of these coaches made an A-plus in communication with our players.

Q. About what percentage of your team has been vaccinated for COVID?

ED ORGERON: I can't tell you that. I think most of our guys have been vaccinated for COVID, and obviously that's a personal choice. But hopefully, hopefully towards the season, most of our guys decide to get vaccinated.

Q. Ed, how would you describe the past 12 months for you and your program? In the tough season, in the off-the-field stuff, it seemed like the hits just kept on coming. There's one crisis after another. Could you describe how you got through that and how do you continue to get through it?

ED ORGERON: Obviously, you come off the 2019 season, you're feeling good, you had a great season, and all of a sudden, stuff hits. But you know that's life. You've got to be prepared. I think that some of the stuff we were prepared for, some of the stuff we weren't, but we stuff together. As an administrative staff, as a staff, we fought through it.

I think it shows, when you go to Florida and you're a 27-point underdog, your back's against the wall, you have a freshman quarterback, you beat them in The Swamp, you beat a great Ole Miss team, I think that was an outstanding team that Lane had, and then you have the No. 3 recruiting class, and 19 of your 22 starters decide to come back.

So that says something's going on in the locker room. Something's going on. Our players believe in each other. I think all those things at the end, we ended up being an ascending program.

Q. What are your feelings -- what is your approach to NIL and its implementation at LSU? Have you talked to your players about it? How do you feel about its impact across the landscape of college football?

ED ORGERON: First of all, I'm for it. Whatever we can give to our players legally, I think they deserve it. We hired an outside firm to give us some advice on how to handle this stuff. A lot of our guys have taken the business on their own and done a very good job.

I just know this, a lot of players, I think they're going to get a lot of stuff. Obviously, the real world's not like that. You have to go out and compete.

But I do hope that, when we get to the locker room, the focus is on football, and I think that's where we have to bring the focus back. When it's time to focus on NIL stuff, focus on NIL stuff. When it's time to focus on football and academics, focus on football and academics, and that's what I'm going to talk about.

Q. Ed, obviously you have a history with Lane Kiffin from your time at USC. You also have a history with Ole Miss. I'm curious, when he was in the process of taking that job, did he reach out to you? What sorts of information did you give to him? On a sort of similar note, obviously, we see Lane from afar. I'm curious what he's like when the cameras aren't around. What is he kind of like as just a regular guy?

ED ORGERON: First of all, I think Lane is one of the best offensive minds I've ever been around, noticed that the first day. Lane is a friend of mine. He's a great recruiter. He's a great competitor. I think he's doing a great job at Ole Miss.

He did not call me. I think his offenses are hard to stop. I studied his offenses against other teams, he's riddled other teams. He's probably the best game day caller I've been around. I think Ole Miss got them a great coach.

Q. You're talking about Daronte Jones and how he's going to be able to help your defensive backfield. Schematically, what are some of the things you all are going to improve on in order to get your defensive backfield better prepared this season? I know you've all got the talent for sure.

ED ORGERON: We have to eliminate explosive plays. Too many explosive plays, too many missed assignments. Too many busts. Too many receivers running down the field free, and we played a lot of man and a lot of combination of man, stuff like that. Some of it was simple. Some of it was too complicated.

We're going to simplify stuff. We want our players to have their cleats in the grass. We're going to play a lot more zone. They're not going to be switching off of this level, switching off of that level. We want our guys to play, keep the ball in front of us, and make plays.

Q. After a ten-game SEC schedule last year, any thoughts that you have about expanding the schedule to nine or maybe even ten in the future?

ED ORGERON: If they do it, I'm for it. I thought it was great. I'm excited to go play UCLA. I'm excited to go across the country and take the Tigers to Los Angeles. I'm excited to play my son. Both of us have some advantages.

One of the things as a coach, I don't worry about that stuff. It's not in my wheelhouse. If I have a vote, I'll vote, but wherever they tell me to play, I'm going to play.

Q. Talk about Neil Farrell on your defensive line. He came back last year, he opted out, came back to the team. He stayed and came back this year, one of those guys you're talking about. What are your expectations for him, and what kind of impact is Andre Carter going to have with him?

ED ORGERON: First of all, I'm so proud of Neil Farrell. I saw him down the hallway yesterday. I found out he just graduated from LSU, and I'm so happy for him and his mom and daddy. He's a great young man. He came back -- Neil makes a lot of plays. If you look at the stats last year, he's one of our most active defensive linemen.

He came back, got in great shape. I think he's going to have a phenomenal year for us. We're going to use a rotating defensive line. We have some young defensive linemen that are phenomenal, and probably the best recruiting class that we had on the defensive line coming in.

Andre Carter is a force. He's a great young man. Think about this, he had 80 1/2 sacks. His daddy is Rubin Carter. He comes from a great family, great stock. He's a great teacher, a great mentor, and a great recruiter. I just hope I can keep him around for a while. He's that good of a football coach.

Q. The 2022 class in Louisiana is especially stacked.

Can you speak to the job you guys are doing recruiting the state, and do you notice it being even more competitive this year than maybe in other years?

ED ORGERON: It's very competitive. It always is. Obviously, we have to start in the state. We're doing very well right now. We have a big jump. The guys that are committed in our class and become leaders and become recruiters and are recruiting the other guys in the state of Louisiana.

We expect some good news coming up soon. We're going to be in some battles till the very end for some of the top players, but I do expect us to get most of these players. I'm not saying we're going to get all of them. I do expect us to get most.

Q. In the past few months, LSU is a school, the athletic department, and you personally have been linked to serious sexual misconduct allegations. I know obviously there's some active lawsuits. I'm not so much asking you to comment on that specifically as curious if the past few months you've had any take-aways in terms of changed behaviors in how you're going to maybe act differently as a coach and handling such situations in the future.

ED ORGERON: That's something I'm not going to comment on. It's an ongoing investigation, and I'm not going to comment on any of that. Thanks for asking, though.

Q. Your first head coaching job was here in the SEC at Ole Miss. Shane Beamer is now a first time head coach in the SEC at South Carolina. I'm just curious if you know him personally and what advice you would give him as he begins his head coaching tenure in the SEC.

ED ORGERON: I know him a little bit. I saw him at the airport. Coach said South Carolina was here early. Yes, it's his first job. I'm excited for him. I think he's going to do a great job. When I was in Knoxville, I thought that in the Knoxville area you go to South Carolina, there's a tremendous amount of talent in South Carolina and North Carolina. I think that he's going to do a tremendous job. He's a great coach. I wish him the very best.

Q. You talked about the new coaches. What we're hearing is the chemistry really is good between the new coaches and the players, and nothing against last year's coaches, but the chemistry seemed to be off last year. Can you speak a little bit more to that, how these coaches are adapting to the players?

ED ORGERON: I'm glad they're saying that. That's the reason I hired those guys. And I did my research. I called people that knew them. I wanted to know how they interacted with the players. I called some of the ex-players that they coached, I said, Tell me how he is on a daily basis. Everybody can be one way in an interview, but I want to know how they're going to be every day.

I did my research on these guys, and they match everything that the ex-players told me, the ex-coaches told me, and the knowledge that they have.

The one thing that I'm very impressed with that I didn't really -- because they're young coaches, they've never been coordinators -- their ability to leave. Their tremendous leaders. They're in the office early in the morning. They're very well organized. Sometimes, when it's your first time, you don't know how well organized that you have to be or the work you have to put in. These guys are A-plus in that area.

Q. With the NIL and the transfer portal, you obviously have to manage your roster a bit with the latter. But with both of those, is there also -- do you have to manage team chemistry, like if one guy gets a big NIL deal, others getting jealous of him, things like that. Do you worry about that?

ED ORGERON: I think that's one of the biggest things to manage nowadays. Again, I'm going to turn 60 this summer. Football's changed, and I'm going to change with it. I want to coach for a long time, and if that's what I have to do, that's what I have to do. We have to realize the guys getting the NILs, getting an amount of money, and make sure we're managing guys that may not get the job, talk to them, make sure that doesn't bother them.

That's why we have about 50 people helping us. Not 50 people that can coach on the field, but for player services, for guiding people through academics. That's why we need all this help.

Q. You mentioned going back to the offense from two years ago, the Joey Burrow offense. The two quarterback candidates you have -- there may be more than two, but of the quarterbacks you have, are they equally adroit at running that? How has that worked out in practice for you?

ED ORGERON: I don't know if we're going to see another Joe Burrow. I hope we do. I can't wait to see him. I hope that Max, Myles, or Garrett becomes like that.

But the type of offense we're going to run, the style of offense of 2019, the type of checks that we had, the type of

protections, that's the stuff I'm talking about now.

Whether or not Max, Myles, or Garrett can run it like Joe, I'm not expecting that, but I want to see the same type of plays, I want to see the same type of adjustments that were so successful for us.

Now, that doesn't mean that's the only thing we're going to run. But that is going to be the basis of our offense, which is a spread offense, which we learned under Joe Brady.

Q. Did you think you guys had a chance to keep Arik Gilbert as you looked at his options? What do you see for him at Georgia as they're looking for a wide receiver?

ED ORGERON: We wish him the best. He's an outstanding young man. Mama is a great lady. I think he's going to be an All-Pro tight end, All-American, has a chance to be a first round draft choice.

Q. Mississippi State, your first SEC game this year. It's on the road. Obviously, that was a big upset last year. What kind of adjustments are you going to have to make for this game, and what kind of program is Mike running over there in Starkville?

ED ORGERON: We have to stop his offense. We didn't stop it one time. Obviously, he came in with the air raid for the first time. We had seen it before, obviously. But we didn't do a good job with it.

Then we saw the people did some good things against us. The more stuff you put on tape, the more we learn how to stop it. Obviously, going to play there, I think Mississippi State does a great job of playing there, the cowbells and all that noise.

It's our first SEC game. It's a game that we must win to get to where we want to go. This is the SEC. You've got to be ready every Saturday. But you know what, instead of -- when you asked me about that, instead of worrying about all that stuff, my focus is going to be on camp and this football team and getting them better starting August 6th.

Q. You talk about doing your homework and hiring the new coaches, and you kind of mentioned this on the Zoom call back in the spring, but maybe a clarification. The coaches you hired in 2020, did you interview all of them or part of them? I'm just trying to get -- you weren't clear when you talked about that.

ED ORGERON: There were some interviews that were not face to face. There were some hires that were made. I know the guy, he knows me, let's talk about it. Hey, this is

what we're going to run, stuff like that.

When I hired Boyd, it was not a formal interview. That's probably what you're asking. I believed in him, and it just didn't work. I said I would never do that again. Every one of these guys, I interviewed them in person. I had a long interview with them, specific questions that I asked, things that I maybe should have asked or shouldn't have.

If I'd have interviewed Bo Pelini face to face, I would have still hired him. There would have been no question about that because of his reputation and because of the guy I knew. There's no question about that.

Q. Dare Rosenthal, offensive tackle, going to Kentucky. What type of player is Mark Stoops getting? And what it's going to be like facing an intraconference transfer this year?

ED ORGERON: He's a tremendous player. I hate to lose him. I recruited him out of Ferriday High School. Defensive lineman, went to offensive line. He didn't want to leave. It was hard on him. I think they've got a potential first round draft choice there. And Dare knows he's got some stuff he needs to get better at, and I'm sure Kentucky's going to see that.

He's a great young man, a great team player. He's going to be wearing another helmet. He's going to be trying his best. I'm going to expect his best against us, and he's going to get our best. He expects that, and that's just the way it is.

Q. Ed, all the changes, coaching and players as well, how do you maintain the program as you want it going towards the future, going off of last year and trying -- I think you talk about LSU's standards and such, but all these things change.

ED ORGERON: That program has been set, and that program is set. The people that are around me have helped me build that program. I have pillars on my staff that are still there. I have pillars on my support staff that are still there. They understand the program that we put in place since I've been the head coach, and we started from scratch.

So there's some things, some philosophies that we're going to stay with, there's some changes that we have to make, but every one of these guys that I interviewed, I specifically told them what I wanted done, and they specifically agreed to that.

I think that those guys have done a good job since they've been hired. They understand the format. They understand

how we're going to practice. They understand what I want, and they've done a good job with it. So I see no problem for us continuing the LSU standard of performance. Now we've got to coach better, and we've got to play better.

Q. This is a two-part question. Kevin can help you remember the other part if you forget. He's used to me. The first part is both of your new coordinators had a connection to your previous coordinators. How important was that? How did that play into the recruiting process? How far was that McNeese game scheduled? It's kind of odd, a coach faces his son. You're going to be in game plans that week trying to figure out how to hit him and force turnovers and sack him and whatever. What's that going to be like?

ED ORGERON: First of all, me relying on former coordinators that I trust was very, very instrumental in me hiring both of our coordinators. In fact, that's about 80 percent of it, to be honest with you.

Playing Cody, Cody is a very competitive young man, and playing McNeese State, Frank Wilson is a good friend of mine. Frank is one of the best assistant coaches ever at LSU, a great recruiter. He's family. They're going to give us their best shot. My son is going to give me all I can get. And guess what? I'm going to give him all I can give him, and that's just the way it's going to be.

He's going to expect my best, and I'm going to expect his best. We're going to compete, but we'll shake hands and hug after the game. That's just the way it's going to be.

Q. Since your time at LSU coming in as interim head coach in 2016, then fast forward to one of the greatest college football teams ever in 2019, then a crazy year with the pandemic in 2020. Going into 2021, what is one of the biggest lessons you've learned, especially in these last three years, that you're going to take into this year as head coach? And also a message that you want your team to know this year.

ED ORGERON: Do it the way I want. That's it. If it's not done the way I want, I'm going to fix it. If I see something broke, I'm fixing it. LSU's standard of performance, the way we have done things, this reminds me a lot of the 2018 season. There's a lot of unknowns. There's a lot of noise out there. You've got to block out the noise, a lot of predictions on this and this. That stuff doesn't matter. It's about our football team. It's about me gelling this football team together, us playing together.

I think leadership, not letting any outside influences affect us, the way we play, the way we perform. I think that's going to be important for this football team. We've had

more team meals, and I've had more leadership committees. I told these guys, you've got to promise me, if anything is going wrong, let me know first. If I can fix it, I will. Let's communicate. If there's something that we need to be done better in our university that I can help, I will help. We're giving them all the means that we can to have an open line of communication, and I think that's going to help for this year.

Q. How much do you have to pay attention to what other programs around the country and around the conference are doing as far as NIL stuff is going and how that might anecdotally help them in recruiting? Is there anything you see out there that makes you kind of roll your eyes?

ED ORGERON: That's a good question. One of the things we did in the off-season is hire Austin Thomas back as our general manager. He's done a tremendous job of putting together a personnel department, putting together a department that pays attention to all that stuff. I don't. I don't have time about it, and I don't want to.

But if some of the schools are doing stuff because it's new and it's something that we're not doing and it's something that we can do, we have to use it to compete, we all learn from each other, just like watching film. If a coach at another school is running something on offense, we may steal it from them. They may steal it from us. I think that's going to be the same thing.

Q. There's a view that there are some schools in the SEC that have a recruiting advantage over other schools because there's no uniform drug policy in the Southeastern Conference, and some folks have spoken out about that. Would you like to see a uniform drug policy in the SEC?

ED ORGERON: That's a very delicate subject. LSU has its own drug policy that's run by the administration. I follow that policy. I don't know if a uniform drug policy would help or not. I haven't thought of that question to give you a great answer. I know that I hear some schools are different than others. I don't know that. I just know what our policy is, and we follow it.

Q. Given the number of super seniors this year and the number of seniors that were able to come back, how much will that affect the quality or sophistication of what you see in offenses that play LSU this year?

ED ORGERON: It should be great. You've got some returning guys. COVID helped us. We'd have lost our whole offensive line and our whole defensive line. It would have been tough to replace all those guys. But these

offenses are on fire right now, and I think what you're seeing is guys are coming back, running the same plays, doing the same thing, skill positions. The unskilled positions are loaded, just like other schools, seven-on-seven, there's no more fullbacks.

So all those things, I think you're going to see some explosive offenses. On defensive guys, we've got to catch up. We're a little behind.

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