

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Lane Kiffin

Press Conference

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Our last coach will be Lane Kiffin from Ole Miss. In the hallway visiting, Lane reminded me it's his second time as a head coach at Media Days, it's his second season going into Ole Miss, but he here for the University of Tennessee 12 years ago.

Beginning his second season, he will step into the year having finished with a victory in the Outback Bowl. His coaching career, pretty remarkable, he's been part of ten National Championships, eight bowl victories, worked with four Heisman Trophy winners.

As you may be aware, notes on here, he's active on Twitter. He has his son Knox with him. Just a shout out to Ryan McGee, if you buy or otherwise secure Ryan McGee's book, there's a story, we've been verified the accuracy, about a young Lane Kiffin at North Carolina State when his dad, Monte, coached there. It's my pleasure to introduce head coach of the Ole Miss Rebels, Lane Kiffin.

LANE KIFFIN: Hey, guys, good to be here. Commissioner actually reminded me, when he saw Knox, went up and said hi to Knox, you know, that Knox needs to earn his scholarship because the Commissioner's fine last year, I think I tweeted that Knox's college fund is gone, thanks to the fine there.

So it's good to see Commissioner, and it's good to be here. I guess it was 12 years ago, I barely remember it. A lot's happened since then, 12 years from being here and seeing everybody. And this has been a long, long year last year, ended well. We're excited the momentum that we built, and we feel it in the fan base, we feel it with our players. It's been good to have recruiting back open so that kids can come be around us, and I think we've created some momentum there.

We've got a lot of challenges. First off, defensively improving from last year. I do think signing a lot of kids in the off-season that were mid-years and really having our



first spring. I think, if you look around the country, first-year staffs really struggled, especially on defense. So we'll look to improve there.

Got a lot of good players coming back on offense, led by the quarterback. So a challenge to get him to play. I think he played as well as anybody in the country at times.

Last year, in the notes coming in, reading them, I guess he was first in the country in total offense per game last year, which I didn't even realize. So it shows the level he can play at. Now he's got to do it more consistent.

I saw in those stats too we were first in the conference in rushing a year ago, so we need to continue to build off of that regardless of the quarterback. Even though I know a lot of times people think we just throw the ball wherever we've been, we're at our best when we run the ball, and I think we've done that really well at times.

With that, questions.

Q. Lane, you mentioned that Matt played as well as anybody in the country at times. How do you and Jeff help him become more consistent?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that, again, having a spring finally with him, he's never had a second year of a system, I think has been good for him. I think that we were still trying to figure out ourselves too without having a spring, not just him, but our offense. We didn't even know if he was going to be the starting quarterback when we went into camp.

And it was the first year working with Coach Lebby. So putting that all together is a challenge, and I think where we've been a lot of times, we've seen sometimes as the year goes that help our players in the first year.

So he's done a great job from a leadership standpoint. He's a very confident kid. So we've got to get him to play more consistent because, like we said, he played great at times, and then he played really poorly at times.

I think a lot of people forget with that too that it was his first year as a starter. So we know what to build off, and we



know what it should look like.

Q. To follow up on Matt, obviously, that Arkansas game was very typical. Looking back on it, what do you think happened to him? Why did he have all of those interceptions, and how did he recover from that? Because a lot of guys, they have a game like that, maybe they lose all their confidence.

LANE KIFFIN: I think it says a lot about him that he was able to recover from that. I get asked all the time about why didn't we pull him? We've just always -- I've just always believed that you're really slow to do that because you get into pulling the quarterbacks and back and forth and their confidence is lost. It's not like another position. When you're the leader of it and you've got to take the ball every single snap, if your confidence is rattled and floating different guys in there. So I'm glad we stayed with him. He learned a lot from it.

Sometimes you've got to have obstacles. I've referenced obstacles in the way. That's as good as it gets right there. Throw the ball to the other team six times, that's a pretty good obstacle.

So he learned a lot from that, and that was coming off an Alabama game seven days before of playing extremely well. So it's a lesson for all of our players. You've got to go back to work and be humble.

Q. Lane, another quarterback question for you. At this event 12 years ago you brought your All SEC ballot to prove you voted for Tim Tebow as preseason All SEC quarterback. I was curious who would be your pick this year for preseason All SEC quarterback?

LANE KIFFIN: All right. I didn't even remember that 12 years ago, but now that you say that, because I believe there was something about someone didn't have Tebow at First Team All SEC. As usual, I was accused of that (laughter). So I brought my ballot to show everyone, to show Urban.

What was the second part of the question? You got me all off there. We're back to Urban Meyer and Tebow and singing Rocky Top in The Swamp all night long, that part.

Q. Who would be your vote for this year?

LANE KIFFIN: Who would be the vote? I would say our own quarterback in Matt. Statistically, he played as well as anybody in the country. Like I said in the stats, reading them in my notes from our SID, only four players, four quarterbacks ever have led, SEC quarterbacks have led the country in yards per game. So to me, that just shows

how good he can be if he's consistent.

Q. After last year's game against Alabama, how close do you feel like your team is to beating them? What would that mean to be the first assistant to beat Nick Saban, if it so happened?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, I don't look at it at all about being the first assistant or whatever that stat is. We were close, played really well on one side of the ball, but that doesn't matter now. The year before, I think we lost 66-3 or something like that. So every year is different. Every year has new challenges.

I said at some interview on the way in here, the discussion was about Alabama and Coach Saban and the parity in college football, and I said he's done it different than anyone's ever done it and better than anyone's ever done it. No disrespect to the coaches back before. There's not supposed to be parity with 85 scholarships and 25 a year.

My dad tells me the stories of coming in and having 75 freshmen in his class coming in. So to do what he's doing nowadays and every year, you guys say something that upsets him and gives him rat poison and makes him mad, and then we have to deal with that. So I don't know what the story line is this year. It will be something that you did about losing too many staff guys or the quarterback or whatever, but he just finds a way, and it starts with recruiting. He just does such a phenomenal job of recruiting.

So when you've got the best players and you've got to go against them, that's enough challenge, let alone before you even get into how great he is as a coach.

Q. You brought up Twitter. I'm just kind of curious, how did you kind of come to embrace social media? Do you genuinely enjoy the banter and all that kind of stuff?

LANE KIFFIN: Yeah, Twitter was not a plan like a long time ago. It really started -- I didn't know anything about it. It started a long time ago for recruiting, and then there was a time there where there was a rule which didn't make any sense that you could not text the kids or the parents, but you could direct message them on Twitter. So that's really how we had to learn to use Twitter or we're going to fall behind, even as an assistant coach at Alabama.

So it just kind of took off from there. I do enjoy the fan part. I think it's comical when I jump on there and read things and how people react to things or the rumors that people write. So it just gives people a platform to say and do whatever they want. I guess sometimes I do that too. So it

allows me to kind of be a normal person on there.

I do enjoy it. Just seeing it and seeing the interaction, especially in the SEC and the fans. And I'll point out something even to Knox like on the plane or something, say, okay, here's this tweet, and it only has 20 retweets. It will be something serious. Then here's something that isn't serious at all but has to do with the SEC, and here's hundreds of retweets. So there's a lot of passion here in this conference and the fan base. I enjoy it.

Q. You talked last year about analytics and using the book, when to go for it on fourth down, seven is greater than three. How much do you think that gives you an advantage over the competition? And as you progress in your career, are you leaning more into that?

LANE KIFFIN: I know that sounds, like he just said, seven's greater than three, and that's pretty basic, but that is a big part about analytics that, for whatever reason for years as coaches, like that didn't hit us. Because I think it was just the feeling of, oh, I kick a field goal, or I attempt -- it's not even that I'm going to make it. I'm going to attempt a field goal. It's like as a coach, I did everything I'm supposed to do. We got the ball close enough.

When you dive into the analytics, it obviously teaches you to play different. I think somebody said we were most fourth down attempts or something in the country. I know at FAU one year we were. That's not -- I think some people used to do that, just gunslinger mentality, I'm just going to go for it no matter what.

That is not that. That is all calculated. It's not easy to follow. I think that's why a lot of coaches struggle because it goes against how you were trained to coach and how you were trained to make decisions, especially when you watch the NFL, which until as of late, everybody just kicked.

So it is hard to follow at times. I'd like to think that we follow it really well, which is why we end up being so aggressive.

And then, remember, the analytics, my book's not the same as your book and your book. It's different based off of our offense or defense and our kicker. So if the kicker's doing well, that changes. If your kicker is struggling that season, that changes your book. Your book changes every week.

Then there is something to -- there's going to be some times where to me the book doesn't understand the feel of the game at that point. The book doesn't understand maybe it's 58 percent you should go for two right here, but

it doesn't understand the momentum and where the crowd's at with that and how hard you worked to get back to that point, so you may kick the extra point.

It doesn't understand exactly how you feel about your game plan either. You may feel really good in certain games in short yardage situations or goal line situations. Even though the stats say one way, you do different because of your feeling.

But I do think everyone -- not everybody. I do think a lot of people are catching up to it, so I don't -- if you think it's an advantage, like you referenced, I think it was, and I think people now, because it's more public and more people are doing it, are catching up with it.

Q. You've got a couple of young players from our area in Eli Acker and Luke Altmeyer. How do you think they're progressing so far?

LANE KIFFIN: Eli had a good spring, moved him around at guard and tackle, very athletic player for us. Luke just getting there for the spring, which is hard at any position to come in as a midyear player, but especially at quarterback, and have to lead your group. I think he did a really good job and has a bright future.

Q. Losing Jacquez to Kentucky, how has that kind of changes your approach to the defense entering fall camp? Did that kind of put an emphasis on getting those midseason enrollees and having that spring under their belt?

LANE KIFFIN: It's just the world we live in that free agency just happens. At least now there's somewhat of a calendar being put around it, but it's still -- it happens. We wish him the best of luck.

Everybody has their reasons, and fans, and I don't know if media does too, they all want to get mad at the kids. Or assistant coaches, "How can this kid leave?" And I look at the assistant coach and say, "You're the same guy who's going to leave when you get a deal somewhere else."

So I wish him the best of luck.

Q. When you look back on last season, what are some of the things that sticks out to you leading up to the postponement and cancellation of the A&M game, and what are your thoughts on the program getting to play them in year two?

LANE KIFFIN: I think the A&M game, initially it was the other way. They didn't have enough numbers, I believe, the first time. Then the second time, obviously, was us.

Jimbo's done a great job there, elite coach, recruiter, and elite program. So it will be challenging whenever we play them and look forward to it.

Q. This week you've got a week 4 matchup at Alabama. This year 111 combined points. Did you last year and do you this year have any tricks reserved in the bag offensively for Alabama?

LANE KIFFIN: Well, we used about all of them. That 111 points is a lot between the two teams. Obviously, that was a big game. Coaches say every game is the same. When you have an elite program you're playing against that you play every year that's in your division, it just means more.

So we had a chance. They did a great job. Sark did a great job on offense. It's kind of exhausting afterwards even as coaches, let alone being the players. That will be a big challenge going there.

And like I said before, I don't know that anyone's ever done it as well as Coach is now doing it for an extended amount of time, especially with scholarships as they are. Kids just keep going there. So they do a great job, and he keeps losing coaches, and he keeps replacing them.

Q. How were you kind of expecting Dontario to take a step forward this year, and how big of a role is he going to play in your offense?

LANE KIFFIN: I think that we can use him inside and outside. He made plays for us last year, very strong hands. He can play special teams. I think he'll be an elite special teams player at the next level. Unique ability to do that and strength.

So that's going to be a challenge for us with these receivers, who's playing where, moving them around. We have Plumlee in the mix to figure out what we're doing with him exactly, and that could be a number of things.

Q. Today Nick Saban has said that his quarterback has earned almost a million dollars so far in NIL deals. How do you see that play out with recruiting and the potential of other schools' brands to earn them some money?

LANE KIFFIN: That number just blew me away. You didn't prepare me for that. That's amazing. He made a million dollars and hasn't started a game yet? Wow, I don't even know what to respond to that, but great for him.

It is neat the players can make money now and profit off of their hard work and what basically everybody else in

America gets to do. So I'm excited about it. I think it's very challenging trying to figure out how these things happen and what's legal and what's not in all that. I was asked earlier about it. I said, I'm excited for it. I wouldn't want to be compliance departments, but a million dollars, whew.

Q. You're talking about point totals. The LSU game, 101 points. With the surge of successful offenses in the SEC, do you find that it's harder to find an advantage in the game, a leg up? How do you approach that?

LANE KIFFIN: I think part of that is analytics and just understanding how games are going. Again, when you follow it and then if you have a team, like we were, when we were a lot better on offense than defense a year ago, you've got to be really aggressive, and you're aggressive in your game plans.

It's not just fourth downs. It may be fakes, tricks, and taking more shots down the field, at times playing more aggressive on defense, knowing, hey, there's a good chance they're scoring, so let's actually may more aggressive to try to create a turnover versus let them move down the field.

It's not something you want to have. You obviously want to play really well on offense and play well on defense so you don't have to think that way. That's what we're looking to do.

Q. During the off-season, you accepted a challenge from Dabo Swinney to play him in one-on-one. I was wondering if a date was set and what your strategy would be going against Dabo in one-on-one -- ones and twos to 21.

LANE KIFFIN: I think our basketball coach said that. I don't know that I actually accepted it. I've seen video of Dabo. He does shoot the ball well, very quick. He did FaceTime me actually from Boca Grande, actually, a couple weeks ago, because he heard I was coming down there, when he was down there, where he and Coach Saban stay. But he was golfing, not playing basketball, with his son and the Raiders receiver.

We actually didn't talk about basketball, but I'm trying, man. I'm trying to lose some weight so I've got a chance against him.

Q. We could tell you were frustrated last year defensively with a lack of being able to get stops. In the off-season, now that you guys have had a spring, but take us kind of inside the staff room with you and D.J. Durkin and Chris Partridge, what was the game

plan to try to get better defensively so you guys can take a step up in the Western division?

LANE KIFFIN: I think we struggled in all areas on defense last year. Now, on a good thing, we did play well in the bowl game, so that's how we ended the year, and hopefully we take off from there. It was just challenging, whether it was injuries or other guys trying to learn a system and three-four and four-three.

Also, you're playing all SEC games, so you don't have any nonconference games. One helps statistically sometimes, but also to see early on in the year how guys play and being able to play your backups hopefully in a game like that. We didn't have that. Now you're playing SEC offenses every week, and it's also a year of great offenses, really elite players, so it was very challenging.

Q. It's my understanding that Jerrion Ealy had shoulder surgery. How is he coming back from that? What's his status?

LANE KIFFIN: I'm still blown away on this Bryce Young. The guy's made a million dollars already? That's good, man. He don't need to play next year against us, then. I mean, that's mind blowing.

Ealy's fine. He's been working out with the team, and we're excited to have a fall with him where, now that we know more about him, having a season that we could maybe move him around and do some different things.

Q. You seem to enjoy tweeting about Coach Saban especially. Do you know if he's seen your tweets or what his reactions have been?

LANE KIFFIN: He's certainly not on Twitter, we know that. Now, Linda, his assistant, is -- probably prints them out, especially the ones that he may not like. So he probably does see those.

But I think it's all in fun. I think you guys know, are around enough covering us, how much respect I have for him, how grateful I am for him hiring me and the three years together with him and what that did for my career.

But the respect -- like I said, nobody's done it like he's doing it ever. With the scholarships, just should be an asterisk to what was done before, no disrespect to other coaches.

Q. Lane, you said you're trying to lose some weight. Besides not maybe indulging in so much Mississippi food, I know you tweeted about that, what else have you done, and what have been the results so far?

LANE KIFFIN: Strange question to ask a guy but -- (laughter). You're being negative about Mississippi food. I'm being positive. It's a Mississippi diet. I came to Mississippi, I embraced the food, and just not a lot of it, and have some portion control. So that's not really what the diet was, but I'm going to be positive about the food in Mississippi.

Q. If it's okay, I was going to ask a two-parter, if that's okay. Lane, if you could talk about Matt. What are his real strengths? What do you expect for the next step for him this season? Is your dad going to be an analyst again? If so, what does that add? And how is your dad doing?

LANE KIFFIN: Did you say Matt? Yeah, we expect Matt to play better, be more consistent, limit turnovers, take care of the ball better.

My dad's doing well, thanks for asking. He just had a press conference, I think last week, going into the Bucs Ring of Honor, which is an awesome thing. Just watching that press conference, seeing the old clips of him coaching at Tampa and how the players -- Derrick Brooks, Ronde Barber, Sapp, Lynch -- how they talk about him. That's really neat. I texted him after that just to make sure he knew how much I respect him and appreciate him and love him and how unique that is.

He changed people's lives by how he coached them and how he cared about them. So it's awesome to have around. He's, I think, 81, and he's still there, first one in the office every day. Pretty cool. Pretty cool example for young coaches.

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