

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

Auburn Tigers

Owen Pappoe

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with junior linebacker Owen Pappoe. As we head into the 2021 season, what you're looking forward to as the season gets under way.

OWEN PAPPOE: I'm excited for all the fans to be back in the stadium. COVID hitting last year, a lot of things changing, a lot of different restrictions, but everything's getting closer to getting back to normal. I'm really excited about this season.

Q. I just asked Bo about this, but Tony Fair's comment about taking the head off the elephant, what's your reaction to that? Bo said he liked the confidence in it.

OWEN PAPPOE: I love it. I love the confidence. It's the biggest rivalry in the country, in my opinion. It's just what comes with it.

Q. You played in the Iron Bowl before. You know how big that game is. Your coach, Bryan Harsin, isn't really from the southeast. Have you talked to him about how big that game is and just what he should expect about the Iron Bowl?

OWEN PAPPOE: I actually tried to talk to him but he actually stopped me. He said, Look, man, we're going to take things one at a time. Focus on going 1-0 every week, and when we get there, we're going to deal with it.

Q. You talked last season, and the coaches were kind of very transparent about when KJ went down, you and Zakoby had to take the load because the freshmen just weren't ready yet. What is it about you've seen from those guys, really that trio of guys, how they have improved from freshman season and getting ready for sophomore year, and what their roles could look like this season?

OWEN PAPPOE: They're going to be able to help out this season a lot more, specifically Wesley Snyder. Man, he's really stepped trying to just learn the plays, meeting with us

a lot. He watches a lot of extra film on his own, too. So I'm excited to see what he does.

Cam Riley and Desmond Tisdol, they've also been doing good as well too. Still coming along, still trying to learn the plays. Just getting better at ball too. They're going to be better this season and able to help us out in some ways.

Q. I want to ask you, in the spring you were really excited, talking about the new strength and conditioning plan, said that you guys were going to look like Marines in the fall. What do you feel like as far as the gains that you guys as a whole team have made and how this new strength and conditioning plan can help you guys this fall?

OWEN PAPPOE: I think we're one of the hardest working teams in the country. I love what Coach Pit has done with us. Everybody feels strong. Everybody feels healthy. We had testing not too long ago. People putting up freak numbers; had a little combine going.

It's really going to help us out this season. We're going to be feeling strong, feeling good all the way through.

Q. Harsin was telling us this morning that you were one of the first guys to get into his office once he got hired and introduce yourself to his family. How important was that relationship for you to start out with? How would you describe your relationship with him right now?

OWEN PAPPOE: Just a respect thing, man. He's going to be our new head coach. I wanted to go over there and personally meet him myself and let him know who I am. Me and Harsin, we've got a lot of respect for each other. Outside football he's a really good man, has a lot of knowledge.

In our team meetings we really talk about life a lot, not even necessarily football sometimes. We have a thing we do called Real Life Wednesdays where speakers come out and talk to us, or even he'll talk to us himself. Really sharp guy, man, and I've got a lot of respect for him.

Q. Can you explain what it's like for those of us who haven't done it yet to tackle Tank Bigsby?

OWEN PAPPOE: You've got to come with everything. You've got to try to wrap his hips up. Man, he's elusive. Probably try to juke you out of your shoes, but you've just got to get him before he gets going.

Q. Can you talk about the changes in the defense? What's going to look different to fans when they go to the Akron game compared to last year's style of play?

OWEN PAPPOE: We're going to be a three-four defense, so we're going to be in our three down stuff a lot more. We also do have some four down stuff too. It's going to be something similar. Even with the three-four stuff, as far as coverage goes, just a lot of similarities between his defense and Mason's defense and Steele's defense.

As far as transition goes, guys pick up on stuff really fast. It's not going to be too different, but there still is some differences.

Q. Going into your junior year, just how much more comfortable are you with what's expected of you and what it will take to play like you have in the past or even better?

OWEN PAPPOE: I actually was talking to my dad about this earlier this week. It's just finally found that confidence that I needed to go out there and make plays. I feel confidence is through the roof. I feel really it's a different energy coming in this off-season from preparation, film study, and all that.

I'm really excited to see what happens this season, and I feel really good about it.

Q. Newcomers, you've got several of them on defense. How important are the first couple of weeks of the preseason just to kind of get those guys prepared for what life is like in the SEC?

OWEN PAPPOE: It's really important, especially some of the freshmen coming in. I know Tar'varish Dawson, he's been doing a really good job for us this off-season. Also Jarquez Hunter, big old heart in the weight room. He's a freshman; already squats 600 pounds.

I think it's going to be big for them. The way we've been preparing this off-season, they're going to be ready for it. They're not going to get distracted in camp, so I don't think it's going to be too big of a transition for them.

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