

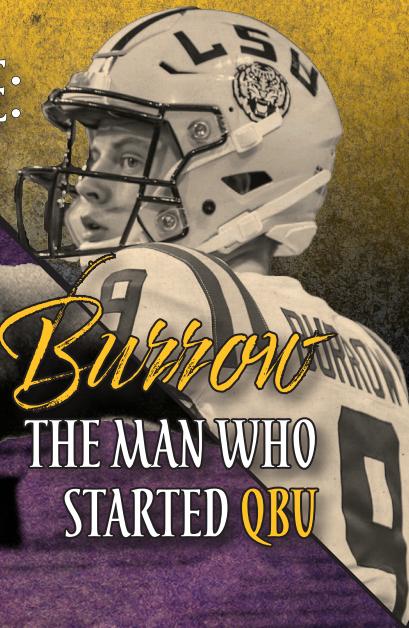


**Tiger**  
THE BIBLE

SEPTEMBER 2025

RAG.COM

INSIDE:



*Joe Burrow*  
THE MAN WHO  
STARTED **QBU**

THE *Legends* ISSUE

# ALEXANDER *The* GREAT

FABLED LSU RUNNING BACK  
*Charles Alexander*  
BECOMES 4TH TIGER TO HAVE JERSEY RETIRED





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COVER 2, PAGE 3

# *Tiger of the Month*

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Chris Hilton, Jr. Photo by Jonathan Mailhes

## CHRIS HILTON, JR.

Chris Hilton Jr., the speedy LSU wide receiver, is set to make his mark in his final 2025 season. Despite past injuries, he's determined to stay healthy and deliver a standout performance. His quick footwork and precise catches in practice showcase his readiness to become a key offensive player, eager to overcome previous setbacks.

### **2025 Season Goals:**

#### **Ambition:**

In his fifth year, Hilton aims to impress fans and coaches with his unique speed and leaping ability.

#### **Health Focus:**

After numerous injuries throughout his collegiate career, he's committed to staying healthy and playing every game.


#### **Offensive Role:**

Hilton's explosive vertical threat capabilities and sure hands position him as a vital part of LSU's offense, ready to challenge defenses with his deep-threat skills.

#### **Confidence and Belief:**

His belief in his talent and God's plan fuels his journey with hope.

#### **High Expectations:**

Hilton arrived at LSU as a top recruit, and despite injuries, his determination to succeed is unwavering. 



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*presented by*



## ON THE COVER:

At this time 47 years ago, LSU running back Charles Alexander was a top Heisman candidate and is the focus of this Legends issue that includes LSU's first QB Heisman winner - Joe Burrow.

Photo by: LSU Athletics



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Former LSU coach Ed Orgeron celebrates the 2019-20 National Championship. Part of his legacy is creating Quarterback U., (page 28).

Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes





**GLENN GUILBEAU**  
*Tiger Rag Editor*

The best news out of LSU's preseason camp in August was LSU coach Brian Kelly adjusting his offensive line depth chart with just over a week to go BEFORE the season opener.

Left tackle was set with sophomore Tyree Adams. So was center with junior Virginia Tech transfer Braelin Moore and right guard with senior Northwestern transfer Josh Thompson, even though Kelly called him Justin.

Hey, there is more turnover year to year in college football now than at any time in history with the perceived-instant-gratification NCAA Transfer Portal entering its fifth year without players having to sit out between transfers. So, it's hard to keep track of everyone's name and know who can play.

And Kelly went into the last week of practice before the season opener not knowing if left guard would be sophomore Paul Mubenga, redshirt freshman Coen Echols or sophomore DJ Chester and if right tackle would be redshirt freshman Weston Davis or true freshman Carius Curne.

Going into Clemson there was also a lot of competition in the secondary between talented returnees and a host of new transfers. The edge rushers and interior defensive linemen battles were intense as well.

Kelly and staff were sorting out all these players in August.

"We're seeing even more depth in the secondary. It is so competitive right now," Kelly said. "We really like the development of our end play."

He wasn't seeing that throughout the offensive line, so the change was made two weeks out of the opener.

"There wasn't enough competition there," Kelly said of moving Curne from right guard to right tackle and pushing redshirt freshman tackle Ory Williams out of the two-deep for the moment.

"We feel like Ory Williams is coming along, but he wasn't there yet," he said.

## THE KEY FOR BRIAN KELLY IN 2025 WILL BE FINDING OUT WHO HIS GUYS ARE WELL BEFORE OCTOBER

Better to make such a decision in August or early September than in the fourth week of the season, which was the case too deep into last season throughout the depth chart.

WBRZ Channel 2 Baton Rouge sports director Michael Cauble made a poignant comment about this during a recent Tiger Rag Radio appearance.

"My biggest criticism last year of the coaching staff was that in week four, Brian Kelly admitted that they were still figuring out their personnel," Cauble said. "To me, that was malpractice at the highest level, because you have million-dollar coordinators and a \$10 million dollar head coach."

After a challenging opener like Clemson, that week should be the last time the staff is still figuring out who can play.

"My biggest hope is they understand their personnel," Cauble said. "And how to get them on and off the field in a timely manner. And when to utilize them to play at their zenith. What you hope is that they don't fumble their own gifts and get in their own way."

Talent is everywhere for Kelly. He and his staff better have the talent to manage it. Or it could mean more comedy than cohesion.

Glenn Guilbeau is the editor of Tiger Rag and a columnist. A member of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, he previously was a national columnist at OutKick.com/FOX News and covered LSU for Gannett and the Baton Rouge Advocate. Reach him at [glenn@tigerrag.com](mailto:glenn@tigerrag.com).



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## MAILBAG

# LSU RB JT LINDSEY'S ARREST FOR HARBORING TWO MURDER SUSPECTS AT LSU DORM HOT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The Aug. 8 arrest of LSU freshman running back JT Lindsey of Alexandria drew much discussion on Facebook and Twitter. It was not your typical college athlete arrest, which tend to be DUIs, bar fights and sexual assault.

Lindsey turned himself into LSU Police and was arrested on felony charges of harboring two friends from Alexandria who were wanted for the shooting death of Corey Brooks, 17, of Alexandria on May 21.

According to the arrest report, Lindsey let Shernell Jacobs, 17, and Keldrick

Jordan, 18, stay in his apartment at the Riverbend Building of the Nicholson Gateway Apartments. Jacobs and Jordan were arrested on Aug. 4 by U.S. Marshals while in Lindsey's apartment.

Jacobs and Jordan were both seen with Lindsey entering and exiting the dorm apartment multiple times and using Lindsey's LSU identification card to access the building without Lindsey, according to the arrest report on Lindsey.

Authorities also found four assault weapons – two AR-15 rifles and two semi-automatic pistols – in Lindsey's

dorm, according to WAFB Channel 9 television investigative reporter Chris Nakamoto.

Lindsey was bailed out of jail in Baton Rouge on Aug. 8 and indefinitely suspended from the football team.

Ken Stickney commented on Facebook about Lindsey's situation.

"Did other teammates have access to the guns or knowledge of what was happening?" he asked. "This student (Lindsey) should never return to the LSU campus. His judgment is horrible."

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"If you don't win big, if you're Brian Kelly, this fan base is done. ... If they're on the outside looking in, in the playoffs, this fan base is going to turn quickly on Brian Kelly."

- @mspears96 on expectations for LSU this season



What if Brian Kelly & LSU miss CFP again?  
LSU: finished 9-4 (5-3 in SEC) in 2024 | Missed CFP for 5th strk



**WBZ News**  
@WBZ



"We're in an age where you know you've got to keep your circle really close."

LSU head coach Brian Kelly dismissed security concerns after freshman RB JT Lindsey was arrested last week for allegedly letting two murder suspects stay in his dorm.



**Zack Nagy**  
@zNagy20

News: #LSU quarterback Garrett Nussmeier did not suffer a "major injury," according to Brian Kelly.

Nussmeier is dealing with patellar tendinitis in his knee.

Kelly: "This is a chronic situation. It's tendinitis. It's like a bad ankle. He just planted the wrong way."



**WAFB**  
@WAFB

Former LSU head football coach Ed Orgeron is considering a return to the sidelines, nearly four years after his last game in Baton Rouge.



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Tulane head football coach Jon Sumrall  
Photo by: Tulane University Athletics



# GOOD NIGHT, JON BOY (SUMRALL)! AND DON'T LEAVE THE LIGHT ON

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Vice President / Executive Editor

**Y**ou've got to admire Tulane coach Jon Sumrall's chutzpah: he's publicly begging LSU to bring back the **Battle for the Rag**, a rivalry that's been sleeping since 2009. Trouble is, LSU could only lose—literally nothing to gain and everything to risk—while Tulane stands to win even in defeat.

Let's break it down. LSU is an SEC titan already squaring off annually against the sport's elite: Alabama, Texas A&M, Ole Miss, etc. Every conference game is an SOS booster; every loss a knockout blow to CFP hopes. In a newly expanded 12-team playoff world, LSU needs safe non-conference wins or marquee "power" matchups. A Group of Five

look-good but offer zero juice for your playoff résumé—and a stinging upset to a Tulane squad that's quietly emerging as an AAC threat would torpedo LSU's season faster than you can say "Yulman Stadium."

Tulane, meanwhile, has the best of all worlds. Win or lose, exposure on



Tiger-red Saturdays is a recruiting jackpot. Even a 60–3 loss yields headlines: “Green Wave Battles SEC Heavyweight,” “Tulane Proves Grit Against National Power.” Online buzz spikes, donors perk up, and next year’s safety commits suddenly see New Orleans as destination material. If Tulane somehow pulls off an unlikely upset? It’s national watercooler drama—memes, interviews, ESPN highlight reels.

So why would LSU bite? Historically, the Rubber Rag trophy (half-tiger, half-TU, all sewn into one satin flag) symbolized state bragging rights for decades. But that was before Joe Alleva, in 2009, called off a six-game extension because “it made no financial sense” to let Tulane host. Six years later, the only “final” New Orleans game still languishes unsigned.

In today’s arms-race budgets, home gates are gold: Tiger Stadium sells 102,000 seats at premium prices, and Baton Rouge keeps every dime. Tulane’s Yulman may draw 30,000—and the financial gap isn’t a chasm as much as a canyon. So LSU’s treatment of its annual “free win” non-conference slot has evolved: pay smaller foes \$2 million to show up, or schedule an Oregon or Clemson for smoke-and-mirrors respectability. Tulane fits neither model.

Still, Sumrall persists. He dreams of spring-break tours in Baton Rouge, of shouting whatever Greenies say? on national TV, of underdog lore. And fair play: Tulane is riding high—a 2022 Cotton Bowl win, back-to-back AAC title runs, real CFP murmurs. They’ve earned their shot at the big table.

But LSU? The Tigers are locked in a survival-of-the-fittest schedule, defending rivalries in an 8-game SEC gauntlet with zero wiggle room. Adding Tulane—a team that can’t boost their playoff case much but could derail it spectacularly—makes no strategic sense.

So here’s the bottom line: renewing the **Battle for the Rag** today is absurd. It’s like inviting a 10-hour drive to play Monopoly with a banker who refuses to give you any money but will collect rent on Boardwalk. Tulane can’t lose—except its dignity if LSU bruises them badly—and LSU stands to gain only a sentimental pat on the back. In a win-or-die CFP era, sports science has spoken: never schedule a game you don’t absolutely need. And that, my friends, is why the Rag will stay buried in the Andonie Museum—where it belongs—until both sides find a payoff worth the paper tickets.

## MARCUS THORNTON JOINS LSU BASKETBALL SUPPORT STAFF

Former LSU SEC Player of the Year, **Marcus Thornton**, has officially joined the LSU Basketball program’s support staff for the upcoming **2025-26 season**.

### Role and Responsibilities

In this off-court position, Thornton will:

- Provide mentorship to players
- Play a key role in their development

He will work under the guidance of Coach **Matt McMahon**.

### Thornton’s Achievements

Thornton’s standout season in **2008-09** earned him:

- SEC Player of the Year
- Consensus first-team All-America honors

*cont. next page*



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Former LSU basketball player  
Marcus Thornton  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



He was instrumental in leading the Tigers to a **Southeastern Conference championship** during Coach **Trent Johnson's** first season.

#### 2008-09 Season Highlights

That year, LSU finished with an impressive **27-8 record**, claiming a **13-3 league mark** and advancing to the second round of the SEC Tournament. Thornton averaged an eye-catching **21.1 points per game**, leading the SEC, while achieving:

- 78 three-pointers
- 75 assists
- 56 steals

#### Early Career

Before making his mark at LSU, Thornton played his first two years at **Kilgore College** in Texas. As a junior under Coach **John Brady**, he averaged **19.6 points**, ranking second in the SEC.

#### Career Stats at LSU

Thornton currently ranks sixth in career scoring average at LSU, maintaining an impressive **20.41 points per game**. Over two years, he tallied **1,347 points**, placing him **23rd on the all-time list**. His **168 career three-point shots** position him **10th in LSU history**.

#### Professional Career

At **38**, Thornton was selected in the second round of the **2009 NBA Draft** by the **Miami Heat**. Throughout his career, he played for **seven different NBA teams**, appearing in **483 games** and averaging **11.9 points per contest**.

#### Standout Seasons in the NBA

In **2010-11**, he enjoyed a standout season with Sacramento, averaging **21.3 points** after a midseason trade. He followed it up with **18.7 points** in **2011-12** during his first full season with the Kings.



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## LSU-TEXAS TECH BASKETBALL CONTEST IN FORT WORTH OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED

### Event Details

Dickies Arena in Fort Worth will host a men's college basketball doubleheader this season. The LSU Tigers will face Texas Tech in the opening game of the **USLBM Coast to Coast Challenge** on **Sunday, Dec. 7**.

### Game Schedule

The event will feature two exciting matchups:

- LSU vs. Texas Tech
- TCU vs. North Texas

Game times are still to be determined, but both games are expected to air on the **ESPN Networks**.

### Team Highlights

Texas Tech is coming off an **Elite Eight** season with a **28-9 overall record**. They will showcase the **Big 12 Player and Newcomer of the Year, JT Toppin**.

Historically, the teams have played nine times, with LSU winning three of those matchups.

### Quotes

"We are excited the USLBM Coast to Coast Challenge is returning to Dickies Arena with these great teams across AAC, SEC, and Big 12 conferences," said **Matt Homan**, General Manager at Dickies Arena. "This double-header matchup will continue to build this event into a fan favorite in Fort Worth."

### Ticket Information

Tickets for the **2025 USLBM Coast to Coast Challenge** will go on sale to the general public on **Thursday, August 21st at 10 am CST** via Ticketmaster.com.

### Upcoming Season

LSU is expected to open its **2025-26 basketball season** on **Nov. 5**.

## LSU BASKETBALL TEAMS TO PLAY IN SPECIAL NOLA DOUBLEHEADER ON DEC. 13

Get ready for an exciting event! The LSU Tigers men's and women's basketball teams will compete in a doubleheader at the Smoothie King Center in New Orleans on Dec. 13. This event is part of the Compete 4 Cause Classic.

### Women's Team Matchup

The women's team, led by Coach Kim Mulkey, will face her alma mater, Louisiana Tech.

### Men's Team Matchup

The men's team, under the guidance of Coach Matt McMahon, will take on the SMU Mustangs. This game is a rematch of last year's Classic.

### Game Details

- Game times and TV coverage will be announced later.
- Both games will air on the LSU Sports Radio Network and Eagle 98.1 FM. **TR**

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# CALENDAR SEPT 2025



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LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH  
**CURLEY HALLMAN**



**9/5**

HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH  
**PAUL DIETZEL**



**9/7**

HAPPY 74TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER  
**BERT JONES**



**9/9**

HAPPY 87TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER  
**JOHNNY ROBINSON**



**9/15**

HAPPY 67TH BIRTHDAY TO LSU  
FOOTBALL OFFENSIVE ANALYST  
**STEVE ENSMINGER**



**9/17**

HAPPY 71ST BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
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## COLD, FLU, AND COVID: HOW TO PREPARE THIS SEASON

RUBIN PATEL, MD | PATIENT PLUS URGENT CARE

As the weather changes and people spend more time indoors, we enter the peak season for respiratory illnesses - including the common cold, seasonal flu, and COVID-19. While symptoms can overlap, these viruses are caused by different pathogens and may require different care. The good news? With the right preparation and awareness, you can reduce your risk and feel more confident navigating this season.

### Know the Symptoms

While only testing can confirm certain illnesses, being familiar with common signs can help you decide when to seek care.

- **Cold:** Gradual onset, runny/stuffy nose, sneezing, mild sore throat. Fever is rare.
- **Flu:** Sudden onset, high fever, chills, body aches, extreme fatigue, cough, sore throat.
- **COVID-19:** Symptoms vary but may include fever, cough, fatigue, body aches, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, and congestion.

If you have a high fever, shortness of breath, or symptoms that worsen quickly, it's best to be evaluated promptly.

### Stock Your At-Home Care Kit

Having supplies ready can make a big difference if illness strikes. Consider keeping:

- Digital thermometer
- Fever reducers/pain relievers
- Tissues and hand sanitizer
- Electrolyte drinks for hydration
- OTC decongestants
- COVID-19 home test kits

### Practice Everyday Prevention

While you can't eliminate all risk, these habits lower your chances of catching or spreading illness:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or tissue
- Keep high-touch surfaces clean and disinfected

### Get Tested Early

Because flu, COVID-19, and even strep throat can share symptoms, testing is the best way to know for sure what's causing your illness. Early diagnoses can help you start treatment sooner, prevent spreading the illness to others, and give you clear guidance on how long to stay home. Patient Plus Urgent Care offers on-site rapid testing for flu, strep, and COVID-19, so you can get answers fast and get back on the road to recovery.

### Know When to Seek Medical Care

If you are experiencing a high fever lasting more than three days, trouble breathing or chest pain, severe sore throat or difficulty swallowing, dehydration, or worsening symptoms after initial improvement, Patient Plus Urgent Care is here to help you get the answers and treatment you need. By staying informed, keeping essential supplies on hand, and knowing where to go for testing and care, you can face the cold, flu, and COVID-19 season with confidence.

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Boston Red Sox third baseman **Alex Bregman**  
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

# WHAT A WHATABURGER HOMECOMING

FORMER TIGER AND FORMER ASTRO ALEX BREGMAN TAKES A BITE  
OUT OF HOUSTON ON RETURN TO HIS FORMER CITY

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Nothing beats a Whataburger for many Texans, such as Alex Bregman, a former LSU Baseball superstar who lived in Houston as an Astro star from 2016 through 2024.

Unless it's a home run, that is.

Bregman, an Albuquerque, New Mexico, native now playing third base for the Boston Red Sox, learned to love Wha-

taburger while in Houston as an Astro and in Baton Rouge as a Tiger.

So, he hit one as soon as he got to Houston late on Sunday night, Aug. 10, for



a No. 3 – a triple-meat burger – after his flight landed from a series in San Diego.

And the next night, he hit a two-run home run over the Crawford Boxes in left field at Daikin Park (formerly Minute Maid) in his first at-bat, in his first game at Houston as a member of Boston for a 2-0 lead in the first.

Houston came back to win, 7-6, but what a hearty night it was for the two-time Astro World Series champion (2017, '22).

"Every time you hit a home run, it's pretty special," Bregman said. "But to be able to do it first at-bat back here was a pretty cool moment I'll never forget."

Bregman signed with the Red Sox as a free agent after the 2024 season. He was the second overall pick in the 2015 Major League Baseball Draft from LSU, which he helped lead to the College World Series in 2013 and '15. A national and SEC Freshman of the Year in 2013, the 2015 All-American made his MLB debut as an Astro in 2016.

In a 14-1 win over Houston on Aug. 12, Bregman hit another two-run home run and finished 2-for-5. Bregman was hitting .303 with 16 home runs and 52 RBIs as of Aug. 16 and led the Red Sox with a .544 slugging percentage.

Bregman, 31, had a Whataburger on his mind as the Texas-born burger joint is in 16 states in the U.S., but not in Boston.

"Yes, way better," Bergman said when asked if his homecoming homer was better than his burger. "But Whataburger is pretty good."

## MLB DEBUTS, CALL-UPS

Several former LSU baseball players made their MLB debuts or were called up over the summer.

-Pitcher Paul Gervais (LSU in 2022) debuted with Tampa Bay on June 21, then was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers on July 31.


-Pitcher Cole Henry (2019, '20) debuted with Washington on April 13.

-Pitcher Cam Sanders (2018) was called up by Pittsburgh on Aug. 5.

Pitcher Grant Taylor (2022) made his debut on June 10 with the Chicago White Sox.

## JOSH PEARSON GRADUATES

Two-time national champion LSU outfielder Josh Pearson graduated on Aug. 15 with a degree in sports administration.

Pearson played for the Tigers from 2022-25 out of West Monroe High and was key to the 2023 and '25 national championship seasons. He hit .263 in his career with 27 home runs, 33 doubles and 129 RBIs. He had his best season in '25, hitting .289 with seven home runs and 33 RBIs, including a grand slam against West Virginia in the Super Regional opener against West Virginia. 

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Arch Manning entered this season as the starter  
Photo by: University of Texas Athletics



# ARCH IS FINALLY HERE

WILL 2025 BE WHAT SO MANY HAVE CRAVED IN THE SEC?  
ARCH MANNING TAKING OVER ... OR FALLING ON HIS FACE?

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Arch Manning is 6-foot-4, but one could barely see his mop of light brown hair above the wide and deep pocket of reporters surrounding him behind a podium at the Southeastern Conference Media Days over the summer.

“Got a new quarterback, Arch Manning, if you didn’t know,” Texas coach Steve Sarkisian deadpanned. “He’ll be replacing Quinn Ewers.”

Funny, while Ewers was being interviewed before Texas’ playoff game

against Washington in the Superdome in the 2023 season, he watched as reporters left him to crowd around Manning’s table. And everyone knew Manning was not going to play.



Finally, Manning will start and play most of the time – if not every down – in the 2025 season. No. 1 Texas, which was 25-5 the last two seasons and reached the College Football Playoff semifinal last season before a loss to eventual champion Ohio State, was scheduled to open the season against Ohio State on FOX on Aug. 30 in THE game of the early season.

The Longhorns host San Jose State on Sept. 6, then Texas-El Paso and Sam Houston before opening SEC play at Florida on Oct. 4. Texas won't play a nationally significant game until Nov. 15 at Georgia, which was ranked No. 5 in the A.P. preseason poll.

And that's it as far as elite teams on Texas' schedule. What a waste of the new SEC team one of the biggest last names in football history. The SEC should go to 10 games and make border schools Texas and LSU annual combatants. But the league is too wimpy.

Meanwhile, Manning is tired of waiting and watching, too. It's time to play.

"This is not a really big deal, but I played every year in high school," Arch said of his Newman High days in New Orleans, where his dad Cooper and uncles Peyton and Eli starred. "Sitting out and not playing was pretty tough."

Arch never considered the NCAA Transfer Portal, which is all the rage for virtually everyone else not playing, including those who shouldn't be playing regularly.

"No, that never really crossed my mind," he said. "I knew Texas was the place I wanted to be. It was the city I wanted to be in. A great education. I have friends there. I was still developing and growing as a football player and as a person. So, I never really wanted to leave. If there was somewhere else I wanted to be, I would have gone."

Sarkisian is glad Manning was not the norm.

"I think he learned a lot over time," he said. "For Arch, he grew up in this era of seeing high-level football. He's watched Super Bowls. He's watched gold jackets getting put on (Peyton Manning at the Pro Football Hall of Fame). He was recruited at the highest level as the No. 1 player in the country. He watched Quinn navigate the ups and downs of being the starting quarterback at the University of Texas."

It's time.

"I think the one thing you'll find out about Arch is he's very even keel," Sarkisian said. "Two, he's very quick witted. He's got a great sense of humor about himself."

That runs in the family.

"That's a great quality to have because, at the end of the day, there's going to be adversity that's going to strike this season," Sarkisian said. "And we all talk about re-

siliency and grit and all those things that are needed when adversity strikes, but some of that resiliency can come from calm and remaining calm. Arch definitely has that about him."

Sarkisian sounds like he can't wait for Arch as well.

"I think he's prepared for the moment," he said. "But now it's just time for him to go do it and enjoy doing it." **TR**

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This article originally appeared in the August 11, 2015 issue of Tiger Rag  
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



## KATRINA WAS ONE MORE OBSTACLE FOR LES MILES IN HIS FIRST YEAR AS LSU'S COACH IN 2005

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU football coach Les Miles had to stop talking.

He could not hear himself speak so he knew none of the reporters around him could either. He was in the sparkling new Football Operations Center - dubbed "Saban Land" after the LSU coach he had replaced eight months previously in January of 2005 when Saban left to become the Miami Dolphins coach.

But even indoors, the CH-47 military choppers sounded as if they were about to land on the roof.

The huge Chinooks — one after another — were dropping off Hurricane Katrina

survivors from the New Orleans area at LSU for days. The Bernie Moore Track Stadium on Nicholson Drive was the landing pad. The Pete Maravich Assembly Center was the field hospital. Yes, LSU was a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) unit.

"I was a brand new guy to this state and to the school," Miles said late Tuesday night after a scrimmage in Tiger Stadium 10 years post Katrina as he prepares his team for the 2015 opener against McNeese State on Sept. 5. "I thought that this must be the way summer always is here."

Miles saw his home debut game as LSU's coach — scheduled for Sept. 3, 2005,

against North Texas — postponed to Oct. 29 because Hurricane Katrina hit Buras at 6:10 a.m. on Monday, August 29, 2005, with 145 mph winds. It moved on to devastate New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, killing approximately 1,245 people and leaving thousands homeless.

Then Miles' next home opener — scheduled for Sept. 10 against Arizona State — was moved to Arizona State in Tempe, Arizona, because LSU's campus was simply too busy helping with the spiraling aftermath of Katrina for football.

LSU won that game, 35-31, and Miles' Tigers went on to an 11-1 regular season and won the Southeastern Conference West at



7-1 despite playing the last 10 games in less than 10 weeks — from Monday, Sept. 26, through Friday, Nov. 25.

“I thought to be very honest with you that it was one of the strongest moments in Louisiana history,” Miles said. “I was really fortunate to be here and witness it.”

LSU lost Miles’ home debut, 30-27 in overtime to Tennessee on the night of Monday, Sept. 26, as that game was postponed from Sept. 24 because Hurricane Rita was approaching and would hit the Louisiana-Texas line at Holly Beach and Sabine Pass at 2:30 a.m. that Saturday with 120 mph winds. In Texas, more than 4,500 homes were destroyed, and 113 deaths were reported.

It was a season of Twisted Sister storms that Miles will never forget.

“I remember the constant helicopter flight over top of the administration building, over top of our stadium when we were in there scrimmaging, landing people from New Orleans on the track to be in a triage unit in the PMAC,” he said. “I just want you to know that there’s no way that I or our team could’ve anticipated all that.”

LSU players from all sports, including basketball star Glen “Big Baby” Davis, volunteered their time with patients in the Assembly Center. Quarterback JaMarcus Russell, whose 39-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Early Doucet with 1:13 to play, won that Arizona State game, shared his apartment briefly with rock ‘n’ roll legend Fats Domino. Fats was the grandfather of Russell’s girlfriend and was rescued from the storm-ravaged lower 9th ward neighborhood in New Orleans and treated at the Assembly Center.

“I would go into the PMAC after a 10 o’clock meeting at night and see Big Baby,” Miles said. “Probably the most visual name tag that I saw was ‘Volunteer.’ It was a special time. I thought that the state showed great strength and commitment.”

So too did Miles’ players, many of whom housed dozens of evacuated family members in their dormitory rooms or apartments.

“Skyler Green, I can remember the fatigue in his face when his family was staying with him,” Miles said of the LSU star receiver from Westwego in the New Orleans area. “I can remember taking the field with the Tigers when they were

worn out because they weren’t sleeping at night. It was a very difficult time, and it was a great time.”

Miles recalls filling his car with gas on the Sunday night before Katrina, and something striking him.

“I didn’t know why, but everyone said, ‘You need to stop and get gas.’ So, I stopped and got gas,” he said. “The gas station was never open this late — after 10 p.m. I went by it 100 times on the way

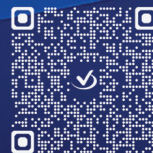
home. So, I stopped in. The guy taking care of the cash register said this, ‘I’m just going to pump this gas until there’s nobody in line, and then I’m going to go home at 2 or 3 in the morning.’”

That stuck with Miles.

“I really kind of felt that he was a guy that was doing his part,” he said, “And I felt like that there was a number of people like that.” **TR**

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Blake Baker  
Photo by: Royce Stewart

# PRESSURE IS ON TO PRODUCE A REAL LSU DEFENSE

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR BLAKE BAKER IS IN YEAR 2 OF HIS RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT, BUT HE CAN'T REMEMBER HAVING MORE FUN

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



The talent is there on defense, particularly with the additions from the NCAA Transfer Portal. And it is defensive coordinator Blake Baker's second season. So, will LSU fans finally get to see a defense that generations of LSU fans grew up depending on since the late 1950s?

After terrible to average defenses from 2020-24, will this finally be the year?

Baker sat down with reporters during August camp.

**QUESTION:** What is your assessment of the safety play, particularly transfers Tamarus Cooley and AJ Haulcy?

**BLAKE BAKER:** It's usually the burning question, and rightfully so. I've been really pleased. The additions of Tamarus Cooley and AJ Haulcy have been really good, especially AJ. He's played a lot of football. He's extremely instinctual, one of the most instinctual players I've been around. But when you look at the depth, we talk about Dashawn Spears, Javien Toviano, and Jardin Gilbert. It's a good problem to have. It's a good luxury. And that's going to be the recurring theme. I really feel good about our depth across the board, but especially at that position.

**Q:** What can Harold Perkins Jr. do this year?

**BAKER:** I felt really good about Harold Perkins last year. Unfortunately, he got hurt. I think the most encouraging thing that I've seen is it never looked like he's had knee surgery. He's moving around very fluid. He's just so dynamic. I think out there in space, when you see his ability to close, if there's a check down to the flat or obviously coming off the edge or even internally, he just has a sixth gear that not many guys in college football possess. He's very coachable, but I'm excited to see what he does this year.

**Q:** With all the new transfers, how will the pieces fit?

**BAKER:** Part of the job of a defensive coordinator is fitting the scheme to your players. From an athleticism standpoint, we've upgraded, and then also from an experience standpoint. We brought in guys who have played a lot.

**Q:** What's it like having all three Weeks brothers – Wes, Whit and Zach?

**BAKER:** It's a lot of fun. Zach's like a lot of freshmen - he's probably getting coached a lot meaner than the other two. But that just comes with it. They do everything the right way. They're the type of guys you want your daughter to marry, and I don't say that lightly. And how they carry themselves – there's not a lot of high maintenance with those three.

**Q:** What are your early impressions of freshman cornerback DJ Pickett?

**BAKER:** He has grown so much from the bowl practices to spring practice to now. The biggest improvement has been his physicality. He has done a really good job tackling. He's put on 20 pounds. He's always had coverage skills, and he's gotten better. But his physicality, he's turned it up a notch.

**Q:** What about transfer defensive tackle Bernard Gooden's emergence?

**BAKER:** I love it. That was a great pick-up. Bernard Gooden has [cont. next page](#)

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been a joy in every sense of the word to coach. He is high energy. You all probably hear him more than anyone on the field. The thing that he does really well, because he is so twitchy and has such good get-off, is his second foot is in the ground before the offensive lineman's. Even though he might be giving up 30 pounds (at 268 pounds), he's able to get leverage and power, and the offensive lineman doesn't have his second foot in the ground. We evaluated him hard against the run, and we really liked what we saw. And we really like what we see up to this point. He's done a great job creating havoc and holding point.

**Q:** How are the new players meshing with the veterans?

**BAKER:** We haven't lost a game yet, but this is one of the most fun defenses

I've ever coached. Coach (Brian) Kelly has built a tremendous culture, and those guys became one of us. It wasn't a mercenary here and a mercenary there. They all came together very quickly. It's an unselfish group.

**Q:** How is defensive tackle Dominick McKinley progressing?

**BAKER:** He's a lot more confident. He's making strides. He's improving every single day. If you were to ask about year two in the scheme, he's not thinking, 'What do I do on this call? What do I do on that call?' That allows him to play faster and more confidently. The weight room builds your confidence on the field, and that's starting to show up.

**Q:** How are the three lost for the season to injury last year – LB Harold

Perkins Jr., DT Jacobian Guillory and LB Whit Weeks - coming back?

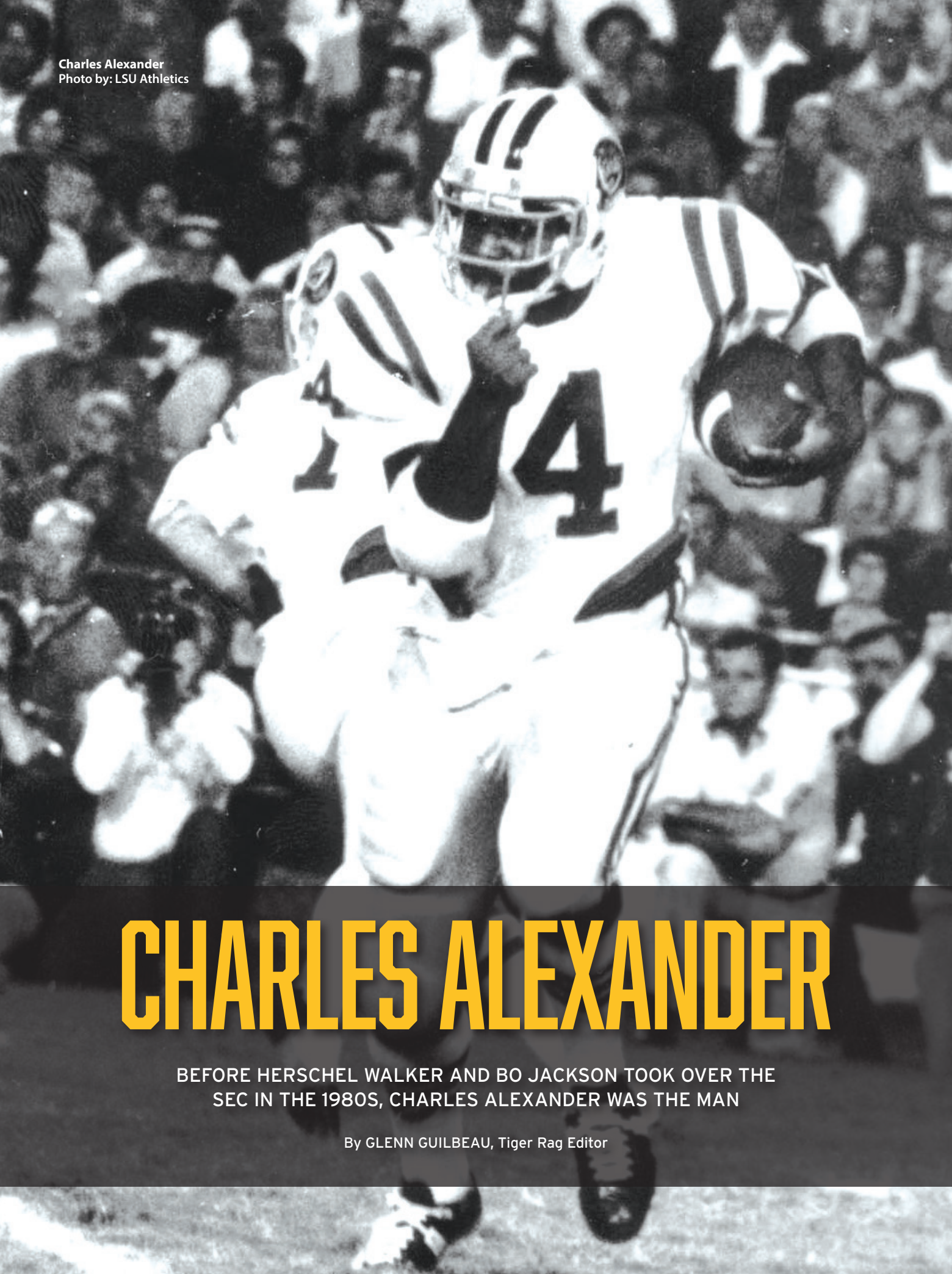
**BAKER:** All three look really good. We're being smart in how we manage their reps. We're listening to them. But they really haven't skipped a beat. Had you not known, you would not realize that any of the three had off-season surgery. Harold and I sat down, and I asked him, 'What position do you want to play?' He's like, 'Whatever you want me to play.' I said, 'No, Harold, what do you want to play?' And he said, 'Coach, I think I'll be best at Star. I do that a lot with guys, because if they believe that's their best position, they're probably going to be most comfortable there. He looks really comfortable. He can do it all. He can cover. He's got great range in zone. He's kind of tailor-made for that job. **TR**





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Charles Alexander  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

# CHARLES ALEXANDER

BEFORE HERSCHEL WALKER AND BO JACKSON TOOK OVER THE  
SEC IN THE 1980S, CHARLES ALEXANDER WAS THE MAN

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



When Tiger Rag Magazine dawned on Sept. 1, 1978, naturally Billy Cannon was on the cover in his No. 20 LSU jersey with his 1959 Heisman Trophy.

But there was someone else in the picture next to the Heisman in a No. 4 LSU jersey – Charles Alexander, who went into his senior season that year as a Heisman favorite.

Alexander, whom head coach Charles McClendon and running back coach Jerry Stovall signed out of Ball High in Galveston, Texas, instead of Texas A&M or Texas, was the second highest finishing junior for The Trophy in 1977 in ninth right behind Michigan quarterback Rick Leach. Texas' Earl Campbell won it that year.

In 1977, Alexander gained a Southeastern Conference record 1,686 yards (still No. 9 today) for the 8-4 Tigers on an SEC record 311 attempts (No. 7 today). He put up a school record 237 against Oregon and hit 100 yards in 10 games with a pair of 200-yard games.

He gained an incredible 1,110 yards in six of his last seven games alone with the 237 vs. Oregon, 110 against No. 2 Alabama, 136 vs. Mississippi State, 199 at Tulane, 231 against Wyoming and 197 against Stanford in the Sun Bowl.

With just a year as a starter after backing up Terry Robiskie in 1975 and '76, Alexander was already an LSU Legend.

"He's just as good as Earl Campbell," Wyoming coach Bill Lewis said at the time. "I coached against Campbell for three years (as an Arkansas assistant), and know all about him."

Alabama coach Bear Bryant was not used to opponents cracking 100 yards on him.

"I hope he wins the Heisman, because he deserves it. But not at the expense of running over Alabama," Bryant said before the 1978 season.

"Alexander is probably the greatest running back in the history of the SEC," Gainesville Sun sports editor Jack Hairston wrote at the time.

"He can be the best ever," Stovall, an LSU superstar running back like Cannon who finished second for the Heisman in 1962, said in that Tiger Rag. "He'll

keep improving. He's doing unbelievable things. If he has a 300-yard game, it shouldn't surprise anyone."

Alexander was a chiseled 6-foot-1 and 213 pounds going into the 1978 season. He ran over people and had track speed.

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**"HE WAS SO SPECIAL TO THE PROGRAM. HE CARRIED US, THE GUY WAS AMAZING. I MEAN HE WAS JUST UNLIKE ANYBODY. I ALWAYS THOUGHT BILLY CANNON, THEN CHARLES ALEXANDER. THEY WERE JUST THAT KIND OF TALENT."**

**- JOHN ED BRADLEY,  
FORMER LSU CENTER**

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"I remember a simple run up the middle in a game in 1977," said 1979 All-SEC first team center John Ed Bradley to Tiger Rag as the 2025 season approached.

"I went up on the nose guard and stood him up, and Charles just came and plowed and hit me from behind," Bradley said. "He hit the hole so hard, and he was gone. He just pulled past the linebackers like they were in cement. He was extraordinary. He was just in a different league."

Alexander could have ran track at LSU. NFL scouts noticed that at Pro Day at LSU in 1978 before Alexander's senior season.

"He ran two 40-yard dashes in 4.36," McClendon said in that 1978 Tiger Rag. "The pros couldn't believe it. So, they checked to make sure he was running 40 yards. I think Charlie surprised himself, being as big as he is, to run that fast. The yards Charlie gained last year is unbelievable because of the few long runs he had."

Alexander started the 1978 season on fire with 144 yards against Indiana, 123 vs. Wake Forest, 144 at Rice and 156 at Florida for his ninth straight 100-yard game in a 34-21 win as No. 11 LSU went to 4-0.

But Alexander was held to 81 yards or lower in four of his next five games that included losses to Georgia, No. 3 and eventual national champion Alabama and Mississippi State. And he fell out of the Heisman race as the Tigers dipped to 8-4. Alexander finished fifth in the voting behind Leach in third with Oklahoma tailback Billy Sims winning it with 1,762 yards on 231 carries (7.6-yard average) for the 11-1 Sooners.

Alexander finished with 1,305 yards on 305 carries (4.2 average).

"I thought he was the best in the SEC and the country," said Bradley, who went on to become a sportswriter for the Washington Post and Sports Illustrated and a very successful novelist and non-fiction writer.

"He was so special to the program. He carried us," Bradley said. "The guy was amazing. He was incredibly ripped. Just so impressive physically. It was just natural to him."

One could hear Alexander coming from a distance, like Cannon.

"I mean he was just unlike anybody," Bradley said. "I always thought Billy Cannon, then Charles Alexander. They were just that kind of talent."

Dave McCarty, who was LSU's offensive line coach from 1963-66 and from 1967-79, told Bradley he once watched Cannon at a track meet.

"He said he could hear his feet hitting the ground like thunder," Bradley said. "He said Charles was like that, too. They both had that kind of great – that generational great. You just know when they're among you."

**cont. next page**





LSU running back **Charles Alexander** (left) and LSU 1959 Heisman winner **Billy Cannon** posed with the trophy for the cover of the first Tiger Rag, published on September 1, 1978  
Tiger Rag File Photo

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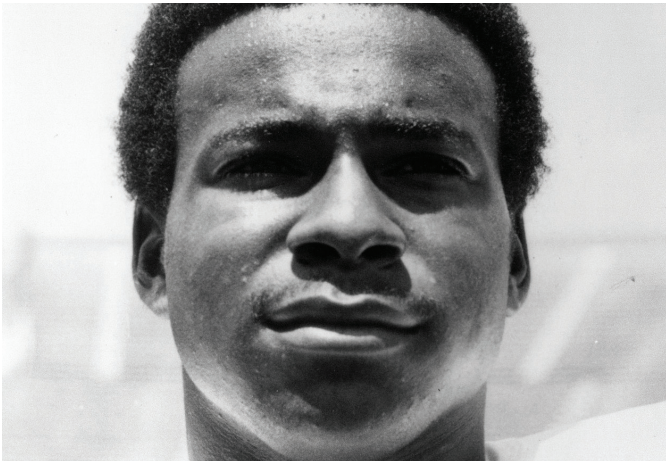


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**Charles Alexander** played at LSU from 1975-78.  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

Alexander was the first 4,000-yard rusher in SEC history as he reached 4,035, despite being a backup his first two seasons with 301 yards on 108 carries as a freshman in 1975 and 876 yards on 155 in 1976.

He stood atop the SEC in career yards and attempts (855) and held the SEC's season best rushing of 1,686 from 1977 until Herschel Walker hit Georgia from 1980-82.

Then Bo Jackson followed at Auburn from 1982-85. Each won the Heisman – Walker in 1982, Jackson in 1985. Georgia won the national championship in 1981 with Walker gaining 1,891 yards, which remains third in SEC history. And he is the SEC's only 5,000-yard rusher at 5,259 in four seasons as a starter.

Auburn went to the Cotton Bowl in the 1985 season as Jackson gained 1,786 yards, which remains eighth in SEC history. Jackson stands fifth in the SEC in career rushing with 4,303 yards in four seasons as a starter.

"Charlie was that kind of player, like Herschel and Bo," Bradley said. "It bothers me sometimes that he's not mentioned along with them as one of the top backs of that time, because he was definitely equal to those."

Alexander, who went in the first round as the 12th pick of the NFL Draft to Cincinnati in 1979 and played for seven seasons, played his last game at LSU 47 years ago. But he remains No. 3 in career rushing behind Kevin Faulk (4,557 from 1995-98) and Dalton Hilliard (4,050 from 1982-85).

And he will have his No. 4 retired at the Florida game on Sept. 13 (6:30 p.m., ABC). It will be next to Billy Cannon's No. 20, Jerry Stovall's 21 and defensive back Tommy Casanova's 37 on the south end zone façade at Tiger Stadium.

"I'm truly humbled by this," Alexander said last May when told of his honor. "Playing those four years, I never dreamed that one day my jersey would be retired and be on display in Tiger Stadium. To get that phone call that my jersey would be retired is something I will never forget. It's truly an honor and one of my proudest moments."

Bradley only wonders about one thing.

"Why didn't this happen many years before?," he asked. "But I'm glad they're doing this. It's important to remember those special ones like him." **TR**

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# JOE BURROW BROUGHT LSU INTO THE MODERN AGE OF OFFENSE

HOW THE TRANSFER OF ALL TRANSFERS AND FORMER COACH ED ORGERON TRANSFORMED LSU FROM QUARTERBACK JUNIOR HIGH TO QUARTERBACK U.

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

The revolution that turned one of the worst quarterback institutions at a major power in America into Quarterback U. was televised.

It really started on Sept. 7, 2019, on ABC during prime time from Austin, Texas, where the No. 6 Tigers exploded behind a slinging transfer quarterback named Joe Burrow.

The senior, who had transferred the previous season from Ohio State, completed 31 of 39 for 471 yards — second most in a game in LSU history at the time — and four touchdowns in a 45-38 win at No. 9 Texas.

This win started LSU on its greatest season in history — 15-0 national champions — and its first Heisman Trophy since 1959 for Burrow.

And the new LSU was off.

For the first time in LSU history, three wide receivers — Justin Jefferson, Ja'Marr Chase and Terrace Marshall Jr. — each had 100 yards receiving.

As Burrow waltzed into the Texas night, LSU exited from its old guard ways.

And nothing has been the same at LSU since.



LSU is now Quarterback U. as it produced another Heisman quarterback in Jayden Daniels in 2023. And senior Garrett Nussmeier is one of the top candidates to win the next one in 2025.

The Tigers had great quarterbacks in the past, but only here and there - Bert Jones from 1970-72, Alan Risher in 1982, Tommy Hodson from 1986-89, Rohan Davey in 2001, Matt Mauck in 2003, JaMarcus Russell from 2004-06 and Matt Flynn in 2007.

From 2008 through 2017, it was mostly miss.

"You're not used to that," Burrow said wryly after that Texas game, but he saw it coming.

"We're going to score a lot," Burrow said at the Manning Passing Academy that summer.

"I thought we'd be good in the passing game," then-LSU head coach Ed Orgeron said in 2019. "But not this good."

It was Orgeron who recruited and signed Burrow as a transfer from Ohio State before the 2018 season. Then he tapped little-known - including to Saints coach Sean Payton - assistant Joe Brady to be pass game coordinator before the '19 season.

Brady and veteran offensive coordinator/former LSU quarterback Steve Ensminger installed a real spread, no-huddle attack for the first time at LSU.

"It made a world of difference to see it on TV," Orgeron said in 2019. "Every time you turn on the TV, they're talking about LSU's offense."

From 2008 through 2017, they were usually making fun of it.

"During my time at LSU, the whole thing was to get that quarterback to lead our team," Orgeron said on Tiger Rag Radio on Aug. 19.

Orgeron, a defensive line coach/recruiting coordinator at LSU in 2015 and '16, knew what the missing link was before becoming interim coach, then head coach in 2016.

Throughout the most successful parts of his playing and coaching careers, he found himself surrounded by great quarterbacks - Bobby Hebert at state champion South Lafourche in 1977 and Northwestern State as a player, Gino Torretta at national champion Miami as an assistant coach in 1991 and Matt Leinart at national champion USC in 2003 and '04 as an assistant.

"At Miami, Jimmy Johnson's No. 1 thing was getting a smart, great quarterback to lead the team," Orgeron said. "At USC with Pete Carroll - get a smart, great quarterback. Once we got Joe at LSU, we felt we had that guy."

After a decent season in 2018, Burrow exploded.

In the 63-28 win over No. 4 Oklahoma in the CFP semifinal, Burrow completed 29 of 39 for 493 yards (12.6 yards an attempt) and an LSU record seven touchdowns that also tied the bowls' record.

As recently as 2010, LSU quarterback Jordan Jefferson threw seven touchdowns all season through 13 starts. And the Tigers averaged 23 passes a game that year as Jefferson threw for 1,411 yards.

As recently as 2011, Jefferson was 5-of-13 passing in a 42-10 win over Georgia in the SEC Championship Game (2.3 yards per attempt). Jefferson was 11-of-17 passing for 53 yards (3.1 an attempt) in a 21-0 loss to Alabama for the national title.

Just eight years later, Burrow completed 31 of 49 for 463 yards and six touchdowns

to beat Clemson, 42-25, in the national championship game in the same Superdome, finishing with an NCAA record and Ruthian 60 touchdown passes.

His 5,671 yards passing that season remains fourth best in major college history. His 202.0 passer rating and .763 completion percentage (402-527) that year each are No. 4 all-time. Cincinnati made him the No. 1 pick of the 2020 NFL Draft.

Jefferson threw 32 touchdown passes through four seasons in 34 starts. LSU's previous record holder for passing yards in a season was Davey with 3,347 in 2001.

After struggles with quarterbacks amid disappointing seasons in 2020 and '21, Orgeron was let go. New coach Brian Kelly signed Jayden Daniels as a transfer from Arizona State, and he directed one of the greatest offenses in LSU history in 2023, passing for 3,812 yards and rushing for 1,134.

Daniels finished as the only player in major college history to throw for more than 12,000 yards and rush for more than 3,000. Washington picked him second in the 2024 draft.

Burrow and Daniels continue to tear up the NFL.

Orgeron didn't sign Daniels, but if Burrow doesn't take over the game in 2019-20, does Daniels consider LSU as his Quarterback U?

And, Oh yeah, O also recruited LSU's potential next Heisman winner.

"I recruited Nuss' grandma from Lake Charles," he said.

And Quarterback U. continues to pass a good time on the bayou. **TR**

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Coach Nick Saban  
Photo by: Alabama Athletics

# THE GEAUXT

NICK SABAN LEFT THE TIGERS BEFORE BECOMING COLLEGE  
FOOTBALL'S GREATEST COACH, BUT HIS LEGEND BEGAN AT LSU

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



As throngs of LSU fans and Louisiana people cheered Nick Saban amid a record crowd of nearly 1,000 at the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony last July, it was hard to imagine that this same man was hung in effigy in Baton Rouge not long ago.

He was the scourge of the LSU Nation the world over. He was Nick Satan as Alabama's football coach from 2007-2023 after leaving LSU's coaching job for the Miami Dolphins following the 2004 season, then resurfacing at the Tigers' most hated rival in Tuscaloosa.

And Saban was the Red Elephant in the Room on this night, but the one-time LSU national champion coach and six-time national champion Crimson Tide coach stamped the Natchitoches Event Center with niceties and love as if he was Cajun born.

"I appreciate being recognized here," Saban, the 73-year-old Fairmont, West Virginia, native, said at the podium. "I'm really, really proud. Every time I'd see LSU all the time I coached at Alabama, I was always proud because I felt like we did something to raise the bar here. And the program has been outstanding ever since."

Saban won LSU's first national championship in football since 1958 in his fourth year with the Tigers in the 2003 season with a 21-14 win over Oklahoma on Jan. 4, 2004, in the Sugar Bowl at the Superdome in New Orleans. He left a year later after the 2004 season to coach the Dolphins, but not after leaving the No. 1 recruiting class in the nation in 2003 and No. 2 in 2004.

When his replacement, Les Miles, won the 2007 national title, he did it with more than 30 players signed and recruited by Saban, and most of those directly coached by him. Never has a coach left a program with more talent, as most coaches who leave on their own have done it after their glut of talent has left.

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**- NICK SABAN**

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"It actually set new horizons at LSU," Saban said. "After winning a championship here, it seemed like, 'OK, that's

the standard from now on.' Prior to that, they never really thought about winning the national championship. A lot of great players, a lot of great people, a lot of great friends still. We appreciate it."

In 2008, Saban returned to Tiger Stadium to coach against Miles and the defending national champions. Fans hung him in effigy around town before the game as he was persona non grata.

"I'd get booed quite a bit in Tiger Stadium," he said of his Alabama years. "But we always had a boatload of people come visit us at the hotel. They were truly friends."

One LSU friend who often stayed at Saban's home in Tuscaloosa when the Tigers played there was Baton Rouge-based construction magnet Lenny Lemoine.

"He's really enjoying this," Lemoine said in Natchitoches. "It's no secret that his time at LSU meant a lot to him."

Saban and the No. 1 Tide won that game in 2008, 27-21, in overtime and would go on to beat LSU in 13 of the next 17 meetings, including in the national championship at the dome in the 2011 season. Saban retired from coaching after the 2023 season.

Meanwhile, LSU won another national championship under coach Ed Orgeron in the 2019 season.

"If you've loved LSU Football this century, he's the first person to thank," Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame announcer Lyn Rollins said over the loudspeaker as Saban took the stage in Natchitoches. **cont. next page**

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Coach Nick Saban Photo by: LSU Athletics

“Breathing life into a struggling program all the way to two SEC titles and the 2003 national championship and laying the foundation for all of the success since,” Rollins said. “College football’s greatest coach – from LSU, Nick ... SABAN.”

LSU had losing seasons in eight of its 11 previous seasons before Saban left Michigan State for LSU after the 1999 season.

And Saban almost didn’t take the job, which would be one of the most high paying in college football at the time at \$1.2 million a year.

“I said I can’t take it because I’ve never been to LSU,” he said. “I don’t know what it’s like. And I can’t go for an interview, because if they find out at Michigan State, they’ll absolutely crucify me. So, I sent Miss Terry to interview.”

Laughter roared through the crowd, including from Saban’s wife Terry at his table.

“This is the God truth,” Saban said.

LSU chancellor Mark Emmert, who solely hired Saban and quickly secured the \$1.2 million salary, had his wife DeLaine showed Mrs. Saban around Baton Rouge in December of 1999 before the news broke.



"They saw billboards of everybody LSU wanted to hire. My name wasn't on there," Saban said. "So, I called and said, 'Well, what do you think?' And she said, 'Man, this place needs a lot of work.' She said the stadium's in bad shape. They have no academic facilities. They have no academic support center. The players are not doing well academically. But she went into the weight room and said, 'They got some damn good-looking players.'"

So, he took the job.

"But when I got there and I saw what she saw without seeing any players, I went in the corner and talked to her on the phone and said, 'Terry, this is not really what I thought it might be after our interview,'" Saban said.

And Mrs. Saban started coaching.

"She said, 'Put your big boy pants on, and get your ass in the press conference and go to work,'" Saban said. "So, that's what we did."

And more applause broke out.

"It's really the first job that I ever had where everybody was all in on what we had to do to be successful – the administration, the Tiger Athletic Foundation, the fans," Saban said.

He soon got an academic center for athletes built and a new football facility.

"You can't get recognized into a Hall of Fame without thanking all the people who contributed to the success you had," he said. "And there probably was never a place where I was given an opportunity to be trusted by people who helped set the table, so that we could do it."

It was at LSU that Saban won his first championship as a coach – the 2001 Southeastern Conference crown. That was LSU's first SEC title since 1988. When LSU beat Illinois, 47-34, in the Sugar Bowl that season, the Tigers broke an 0-for-5 skid in New Year's Day bowls by winning their first since a 20-13 victory over Wyoming on Jan. 1, 1968, in the Sugar Bowl.

"Once you accomplish something, it sets a new standard," he said. "Then in 2003 when we won the national championship,

that set a new horizon. And I'm very proud that contributed to the iconic brand that LSU and the state of Louisiana have."

Saban thanked his athletic director at LSU from 2001 through 2004 – Skip Bertman.

"He had a lot to do with this. He and I went and raised \$15 million in three months to build an academic center so our players could graduate," Saban said amid more applause. "That was part of the commitment to success. Then all of a sudden, it becomes the standard."

Saban's last horizon at LSU set the sun up for many more at Alabama.

"There was no greater feeling in my life professionally to that point than when we won the national championship at LSU in New Orleans," Saban said. "And it made everybody in this state proud. And that was my best professional moment to that point in my career."


He was on his way.

And it happened in Louisiana and at LSU first. **TR**



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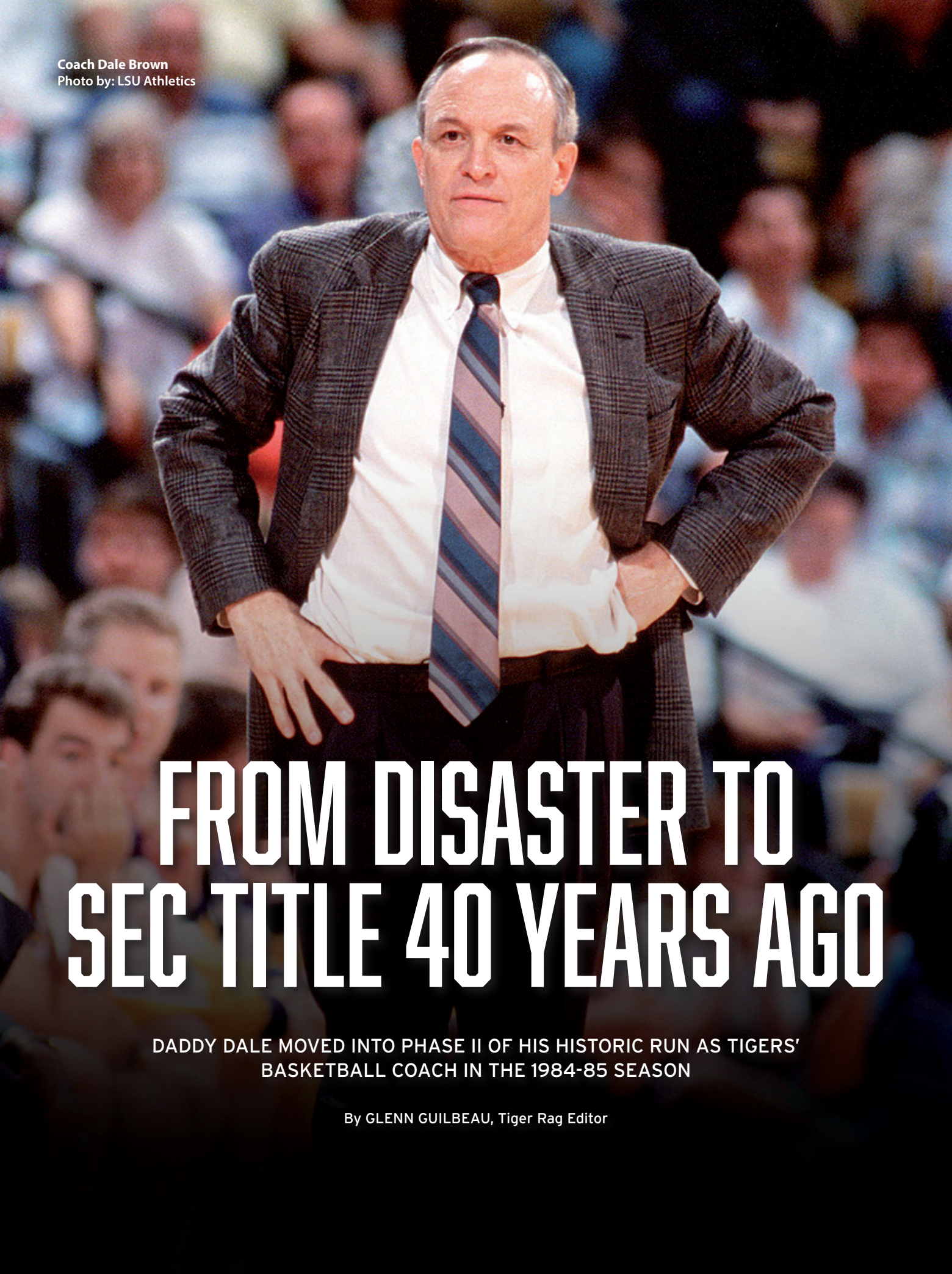
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A full-page photograph of Coach Dale Brown, a middle-aged man with thinning hair, wearing a dark patterned blazer over a white shirt and a striped tie. He stands with his hands on his hips, looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a basketball arena.

Coach Dale Brown  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

# FROM DISASTER TO SEC TITLE 40 YEARS AGO

DADDY DALE MOVED INTO PHASE II OF HIS HISTORIC RUN AS TIGERS'  
BASKETBALL COACH IN THE 1984-85 SEASON

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



One of the greatest mini-runs by any Southeastern Conference men's basketball coach in any era was by LSU's Dale Brown from the 1978-79 season through 1980-81.

Over this three-season span, Brown led the Tigers to their first SEC regular season title since 1954 in 1979 at 14-4 and another SEC crown in 1981 at 17-1, which remains one of the best all-time conference records in league history.

The 1978-79 team (23-6) was also the first LSU team to reach the NCAA Tournament since 1954. The 1979-80 Tigers (26-6) finished second in the SEC at 14-4, but won LSU's only SEC Tournament title. That team also became LSU's first to reach the Elite Eight since the 1952-53 Final Four Tigers.

Then the fabulous 1980-81 team, which set a school record for wins that remains at 31-5, became the second Final Four participant in LSU history.

Brown, then only 45 and in his ninth season at LSU, was one of the hottest coaches in America after inheriting a 10-16 and 6-12 program before his first season in 1972-73.

But suddenly, everything went South. The Tigers dropped to 14-14 and 11-7 in 1981-82 and 19-13 and 10-8 in 1982-83, losing two straight NIT opening games. LSU returned to the NCAA Tournament in 1983-84, but lost in the first round to Dayton, finishing 18-11 and 11-7.

Brown was not getting the elite talent he did in the late 1970s and early

1980s, like Al Green, DeWayne Scales, Jordy Hultberg, Rudy Macklin, Greg Cook, Ethan Martin, Howard Carter and Leonard Mitchell.

**"I REALLY THINK THE  
DIAMOND CONFUSED  
THEM. THEY NEVER  
REALLY FIGURED OUT  
WHAT WE WERE DOING."**

**- DALE BROWN AFTER CLINCHING  
1985 SEC REGULAR SEASON TITLE BY  
BEATING KENTUCKY**

Then, somehow, he ventured into Los Angeles and signed one of the most sought-after players in the nation in 6-foot-8, 240-pound power forward John Williams of Crenshaw High.

When Brian Allee-Walsh of the Times Picayune called Williams Brown's "Messiah" at a press conference before the 1984-85 season and asked if he felt any pressure "to bring LSU beyond a Dayton in the first round of the NCAA Tournament?," Brown bristled.

"Hold on now," he said. "How about the Final Four in 1981?"

But to many LSU fans, that Final Four was ancient history. And, in truth, Brown had moved on, too, considering the team he assembled for 1984-85 – capped by Williams.

Brown also signed a versatile guard-forward from Miami in 6-6 Ricky Blanton and a 6-9 Greg Cook-like center in Jose Vargas of La Romana, Dominican Republic.

They joined talented veterans from near and far – three juniors in point guard Derrick Taylor of Baton Rouge, 6-6 guard/forward Don Redden of Monroe, and 6-8 Jerry Reynolds of Brooklyn along with three sophomores in 6-8 forward/center Nikita Wilson of Leesville, guard Anthony Wilson of Plain Dealing, and 6-6 forward Oliver Brown of Baton Rouge.

And the Tigers had their best season since 1980-81, winning their first SEC regular season title at 13-5 since that season, clinching the crown with a 67-61 win over Kentucky and Kenny "Sky" Walker in the Assembly Center.

Williams scored 19 with nine rebounds, and Brown's Diamond-And-One defense with Reynolds as the One on Walker

[cont. next page](#)

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limited Sky to 16 points on 4-of-10 shooting just after he scored 33 in a 92-67 win over Tennessee.

"I really think the Diamond confused them," Brown said. "They never really figured out what we were doing."

"Any time you beat Kentucky, it's special," Redden said. "It doesn't matter if it's on Mars. Beating them for the championship is a little sweeter."

LSU finished at just 19-10, though, as it lost its fourth straight SEC Tournament opener and lost its fourth straight postseason tournament opener - 78-55 to Navy and center David Robinson.

They were now 0-10 in the postseason since the 1981 Final Four losses to Indiana and Virginia (last ever consolation game).

But Brown, Williams and the rest of the Tigers still had that SEC ring. And it was forged out of disaster - a 59-58 loss to Georgia on Feb. 2. LSU led 58-57 with a second left with Williams inbound from under the Georgia goal.

Williams threw a pass the length of the court to no one, thinking the last second would expire when the ball hit the floor. But time would not elapse until the ball touched a player. The ball bounced out of bounds untouched.

Georgia inbound from under its goal, and Cedric Henderson hit a short jumper for the 59-58 win.

"I made a stupid mistake," Williams said.

But the Tigers never lost another SEC game that regular season, winning six straight to win the title.

After the clinching win over Kentucky, Brown listed his greatest moments at LSU - beating Kentucky, 95-94, in overtime in 1978 despite five starters fouling out, defeating Alabama in 1979 for LSU's first SEC title in 25 years, and the 1981 Final Four.

"Not so sure that today didn't top those because of the hardships we had," Brown said. "The loss to Georgia won the SEC title for us. We became closer and more committed than ever."

When it was Georgia's turn to suffer a one-point loss, 86-85, later Saturday, it gave sole possession of the SEC regular season title to LSU. Brown won one more SEC title in 1991 with Shaquille O'Neal, but shared it with Mississippi State at 13-5. And Kentucky had the best record at 14-4, but was ineligible for the title because of NCAA probation.

For Daddy Dale, John Williams, Derrick Taylor, Ricky Blanton, Don Redden, Anthony Wilson, Nikita Wilson, Jose Vargas and others, the 1984-85 title set up their magical run in 1985-86 that included an even bigger win over Kentucky and another Final Four. An Elite Eight followed in the 1986-87 season.

Brown was back on top.

When John Williams returned to LSU in 2006 for a reunion of the '86 Final Four team, he lamented going to the NBA after that season.

"Coach Brown, I should've stayed another year," he said. "We could've won it all." **TR**

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Skip Bertman's grandson Ezra Pate, a pitcher at Bates College in Maine, lived with his grandfather over the summer while pitching for the Baton Rouge Rougarou Tiger Rag File Photo

# THE BERTMAN TOUCH HITS HOME

AFTER COACHING THOUSANDS OF ADOPTED SONS FOR DECADES AT MIAMI AND LSU,  
SKIP BERTMAN IS GUIDING HIS GRANDSON THE PITCHER

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

The Summer of 2025 in Baton Rouge was one to remember for Ezra Pate.

Pate is the grandson of five-time national champion LSU baseball coach

Skip Bertman and the son of Bertman's late daughter - Dr. Lisa Jo Pate.

Ezra Pate pitched for the Baton Rouge Rougarou summer college team after missing his true freshman season at

Division III Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, due to an injury.

His journey to Baton Rouge started in the winter of 2024 when he found Rougarou owner and former two-time



LSU national champion pitcher Ronnie Rantz's phone number.

"I wanted to play for the Rougarou after my freshman year at Bates, so I found Ronnie's number in my grandfather's phone and called him and ended up here," Pate said.

The rest is history.

Pate suited up for the Rougarou and was pitching for the Texas Collegiate League team through July. The 6-2, 200-pound right-hander made his return to the mound on June 6 – 420 days since throwing his last pitch.

Not only has Pate enjoyed the baseball side of Baton Rouge, but he is also cherishing every minute he spends with his grandfather.

"It's amazing," he said. "The G.O.A.T. is at my disposal, and it's awesome. I can talk to him not only about baseball, but life too."

Pate has been staying with his "Poppa" for the summer.

Bertman, 87, is enjoying Pate's company as it is the first time his grandson has lived with him for an extended period of time.

"We have a great bonus plan by having Ezra at the house. From cleaning house to getting food off the table, he earns his keep," Bertman cracked and chuckled.

Pate said his grandfather and him spend lots of time together, whether that is watching baseball games, movies, or taking spontaneous sweet treat trips.

"We're very close," Ezra said. "On my off days, we'll go out to eat or watch a movie. Every night, he has me sit next to him on the couch and we watch baseball together and talk about the game. It's like he's my friend."

Pate had a huge smile on his face as he said that.

"This is a very, very good thing for a grandpa because he's been with us for two months already, and he's going to be here to work the LSU baseball camps," Bertman said.

Bertman has always taught work ethic, whether it was to his four daughters, his players or his grandchildren.

But Pate said his grandfather loves to have fun, too. They go to Mike Anderson's restaurant near Bertman's home often.

The two are always down to trying new places as well. One of the biggest hits has been Andy's Frozen Custard. Pate says they review the places they frequent, giving the offerings a "yay" or a "boo."

Pate lists his favorite movie as "The Shawshank Redemption," which was made from a book by Maine's most famous native – author Stephen King of Portland. But he has been watching grandpa's favorites, which are westerns and action films.

Bertman was once asked if he was going to an LSU football game on an upcoming Saturday night. The Tigers were struggling at the time under coach Curley Hallman in the mid-1990s, and Bertman politely said, "No. Not Me. It's 'Walker, Texas Ranger' night."

Bertman also likes "Jeopardy," which Pate is growing to like.

In Pate's answers to a questionnaire for the Bates College media guide, his grandfather weighed heavily:

**Favorite Book?** "Everything Matters In Baseball: The Skip Bertman Story." ... Pate watched his grandfather sign copies of the book before a recent Rougaroo game.

**Most Influential Person In Your Life?** "Skip Bertman."

**Describe A Place You've Visited That Left A Lasting Impression On You?** "Alex Box Stadium."

**Favorite Quote Or Motto?** "Stay Ready, So You Don't Have To Get Ready." (NOTE: He got that one from grandpa.)

**If You Could Give Advice To Your Younger Self, What Would It Be?** "Be true." (NOTE: He may have gotten that from grandpa, too, because Bertman always is.)

Pate is the only grandchild of Skip to stick in baseball.

"It's wonderful. Never having a son, but to have your grandson play is amazing," Bertman said.

From his historical resume of winning five national championships, Skip is always watching the game analytically, especially from a pitching standpoint. Bertman is known for being a pitcher guru and is trying to mold Pate as he often gives him pitching pointers and tips.

"He's got some talent," Bertman said.

He would know. **TR**

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BY GLENN GUILBEAU

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A photograph of Bernard Gooden, a defensive tackle for LSU, in action during a game. He is wearing a purple jersey with white numbers, a yellow helmet with a black face mask, and yellow gloves. He is in a three-point stance, ready to engage. The background is a blurred green field and stadium lights.

Bernard Gooden  
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

# THE TALKER OF THE TIGERS

NEW DEFENSIVE TACKLE BERNARD GOODEN HAS MADE HIS PRESENCE KNOWN ... LOUD AND CLEAR

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

If new LSU defensive tackle Bernard Gooden can get under opposing quarterbacks' skin the way he did LSU quarterback Garrett Nussmeier's during a scrimmage before the season, the Tigers may be able to walk the walk.

Because Gooden, a fifth-year senior transfer from South Florida, can surely talk the talk.

"He is high energy," LSU defensive coordinator Blake Baker said. "You all probably hear him more than anyone on the field."

Nussmeier heard him loud and clear after the defense continually stuffed the offense during a preseason scrimmage.

"I thought this was the SEC," Gooden yelled at Nussmeier mockingly. "I thought this was the great SEC."



Gooden was more accustomed to the third tier American Athletic Conference, which South Florida was a member of when he played there. The league recently renamed itself the American Conference. And that's never a good sign. In 2021 and '22, Gooden was at Wake Forest in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Like everyone, he has heard a lot of SEC self-promotion, which it spends a lot of time doing. Gooden may be an SEC rookie this season, but his trash talking is already of SEC caliber.

"Just getting at another guy, trying to get in his head, throw him off his game, you know," Gooden said. "Just a couple of friendly words. I feel like I get better as I trash-talk."

Gooden is a consistent trash talker. So far, he has not rested his voice.

"When he first came in, I didn't know who he was," junior cornerback Ashton Stamps said.

But he got to know him – or at least hear him – quickly.

"He's really loud. You're going to know he's in the room," Stamps said. "He carries that with him each and every day. He doesn't change. Some are like that, but a couple of days later, they change. Not Gooden. He's like that every single day, and all of that energy spreads throughout the team. He brings everybody up every day."

Baker likes what he has heard and seen from Gooden, despite his smallish size for an interior defensive lineman at 6-foot-1 and 268 pounds.

"I love it. That was a great pickup," Baker said of another key NCAA portal

addition from coach Brian Kelly's No. 1-ranked transfer class.

"Bernard Gooden has been a joy in every sense of the word to coach," Baker said. "In today's game, a lot of real successful defensive tackles are going to be between 280 and 305 pounds."

Gooden overcomes the weight disadvantage with quickness. In 13 games and 11 starts last season at South Florida, he made 35 tackles with 10 for loss, two fumble recoveries, two passes broken up, two passes defended and 1.5 sacks.

"The thing that he does really well, because he is so twitchy and has such good get-off, is that his second foot is in the ground before the offensive lineman," Baker said. "So, even though he might be giving up 30 pounds, he's able to get leverage and get power. And the offensive lineman doesn't have his second foot in the ground."

Baker was initially concerned about Baker's lack of size.

"One of the things that we did through the evaluation process, obviously being an undersized guy, is really evaluate him hard against the run," he said. "And we really liked what we saw, and we really like what we see up to this point. He's done a great job creating havoc and holding point."

LSU had added other more traditional defensive tackle size in portal addition sophomore Sydir Mitchell (6-6, 355) of Texas in 2025 and junior Shone Washington (6-4, 295) in 2024 from East Mississippi Community College. So, Gooden's quickness and smaller frame was a planned addition.

"He's done a really nice job," Kelly said of Gooden. "We were specific in what we were looking for at that position. We had some big fellas. We wanted somebody that could move, that was athletic, and he fit that bill. He continued that in camp. Now, he's got to do it play in and play out in the SEC."

Kelly has heard Gooden, too, as has new defensive line coach Kyle Williams.

"He's been fun to coach," Kelly said. "He's bought in to us. He brings a lot of energy every single day. I know Kyle Williams enjoys coaching him, and he fits with what we want to do in certain situations in terms of the movement up front."

Gooden and Williams share something. Each have height challenges. Williams is also 6-1, and yet he played for 13 seasons in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills as a defensive tackle, making the Pro Bowl six times. Before that, he helped lead LSU to the 2003 national championship, was a first team All-SEC player in 2005.

"That is somebody you want to soak up everything from," Gooden said of Williams. "We both have similar size and skills. I can learn a lot from him. He's a real stud. He's got a lot of knowledge."

Gooden also models himself after former Los Angeles Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald, who is also 6-1. He retired after the 2023 season after winning three NFL Defensive Player of the Year awards (2017, '18, '20) and being named a first team All-Pro eight times.

"Everybody said he was undersized," Gooden said. "Look at [cont. next page](#)



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New defensive line coach **Kyle Williams** (left) works with defensive tackle **Bernard Gooden** Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

what he's done in the NFL. Size doesn't matter. It's what you can do."

Gooden is also a late bloomer. Last season was his first good one. He red-shirted in 2021 at Wake Forest after signing out of Park Crossing High in Montgomery, Alabama, as a three-star prospect and the No. 58 player in Alabama. He played as a reserve in 12 games in 2022, making seven tackles with half a sack.

After transferring to South Florida, he missed all but two games of the '23 season for academic issues.

"I've still got a long ways to go," he said. But his drive and passion are high performance.

"One thing I would say that sets me apart is my motor," he said. "That's one thing I try to do is not get tired, especially against the big boys. It's just my drive. I don't want to get tired. You love what you, you go hard."

And he makes the most of his lack of height, improving his all-important leverage against larger offensive linemen.

"That's one thing I'm grateful for," he said. "I'm not super tall, so it's not hard for me to stay low. I can get lower. And it's my quickness, using my hands. I know the offensive lineman is not going to be able to touch me. It all starts with your get-off. It just comes down to who's better, me or you?"

Gooden has a lot of confidence in his voice, too. And it has range.

When asked if he thought Nussmeier grew aggravated with his talk, Gooden's voice went up a couple of notches.

"He did a little bit," Gooden said and laughed. "That's how you know the trash talk is working."

It was just talk, though.

"That's my dog," he said. "Garrett's my buddy. I talk to Garrett every day. But that's how we compete, man, on the field. That's competition right there. That's all day – getting in his head." **TR**



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A photograph of two LSU football players. The player in the foreground is wearing a white jersey with the number 12 and an orange helmet with a tiger logo. He is smiling and looking towards the right. The player in the background is wearing a white jersey with the number 14 and an orange helmet, and is looking towards the camera. Both players are wearing white jerseys with blue and gold stripes on the sleeves and gold pants. The background is a blurred stadium setting.

Ju'Juan Johnson  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

# LSU'S SWISS ARMY KNIFE

JU'JUAN JOHNSON PLAYED DEFENSIVE BACK, QUARTERBACK,  
AND WIDE RECEIVER BEFORE FOCUSING ON RUNNING BACK

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Writer



The late, great Jimmy Buffett said it best in his “School Boy Heart” song:

*I suppose the need to focus never arose  
So, something like a Swiss Army knife,  
that’s my life*

For the most part, the LSU football coaching staff has not felt the need for sophomore running back/wide receiver/quarterback/defensive back/tight end Ju’Juan Johnson to focus on one position.

So, his practice life heading into the 2025 season was at quarterback, wide receiver and running back after starting out at defensive back last season. That after being listed as a tight end in the 2024 media guide.

Swiss Army knives are synonymous with multiple tasks. They contain several blades, multiple screwdrivers, tweezers, wire cutters and even a bottle opener. They provide endless possibilities.

That’s what Johnson is bringing to the Tigers.

A quarterback at Lafayette Christian Academy who amassed a state record 14,451 total yards with 171 touchdowns, Johnson signed with LSU as a defensive back in 2024 and worked in the secondary early last season. But after running back John Emery injured his knee and was lost for the season after one game, Johnson moved to running back.

Less than a week later, he caught three passes for 16 yards with a 4-yard touchdown against Nicholls State. He appeared in 13 games as a reserve back, rushing seven times for

14 yards and catching five passes for 22 yards.

With quarterback Colin Hurley missing last spring practice with injuries from a car crash, Johnson moved to quarterback and remained there through the first week of August practices.

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**“HE’S A DIFFERENT STYLE  
QUARTERBACK THAN THE OTHER  
GUYS. YOU HAVE TO RESPECT HIS  
FEET. YOU’VE SEEN HIS GROWTH  
AS A PASSER. IN TERMS OF  
PROGRESSIONS, HE’S DOING THE  
THINGS HE NEEDS TO DO. HE HAS  
GOOD FOOTWORK AND COMMAND  
OF THE HUDDLE, AND HE HAS GREAT  
LEADERSHIP SKILLS.”**

**- JOE SLOAN**

---

But with the recent suspension of reserve running back JT Lindsey, Johnson was given a look at running back again.

“When it comes to Ju’Juan, it’s how far do we go this year with him? Because we didn’t red-shirt him last year,” LSU coach Brian Kelly said before the

move. “I want to make sure his time is valuable and impactful.”

After just a few days of watching Johnson at running back, Kelly had made up his mind.

“We’re going to have a little party,” Kelly cracked when asked if Johnson is “officially back” at running back. “There’s going to be a party later. We’ll have balloons, and then he’ll jump out of the cake and say, ‘I’m a running back.’”

Kelly, though, is serious about Johnson at running back, and not just as a reserve behind Caden Durham, Kaleb Jackson and Harlem Berry.

“That will be his focus,” he said. For now, at least.

“He’ll be very involved,” Kelly said. “I think he’s going to be an important part of what we do.”

Offensive coordinator Joe Sloan particularly likes Johnson in the red zone, where LSU struggled last season.

“He’s electric with the ball in his hand,” he said. “He’s been fun to coach. He’s attentive, and he’s getting after it.”

But don’t rule out situational QB for Johnson. The Tigers have practiced with him there with Garrett Nussmeier going in motion.

Sloan sounds like he’s keeping Johnson in his back pocket.

“He’s a different style quarterback than the other guys,” he said. “You have to respect his feet. You’ve seen his growth as a passer. In terms of progressions, he’s doing the things he needs to do. He has good footwork and command of the huddle, and he has great leadership skills.” **TR**



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INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

# LSU'S EXIT INTERVIEW LATITUDE



## LSU ISN'T RECORDING COMPLAINTS FROM STUDENT ATHLETES IN MOST SPORTS

By PIPER HUTCHINSON, *Tiger Rag* Investigative Reporter

**L**SU is not documenting feedback from student athletes in most of its athletic programs, including football, raising concerns about the university's compliance with NCAA rules.

In a public records request, the Louisiana Illuminator and *Tiger Rag* asked for five years of player exit interviews, which all NCAA Division I schools are required to conduct with a sampling of athletes every year at the time they graduate or their eligibility expires.

The interviews are intended to give athletes an opportunity to provide critical feedback on their school's sports programs. But for most teams, LSU did not document a single interview during the five-year period.

LSU athletics spokesman Zach Greenwell said the university is complying with the NCAA's exit interview bylaw, but the interviews aren't always documented – which the NCAA does not require.

The NCAA gives schools immense latitude on how to conduct the interviews and what questions to ask. Its rules don't require that the questions are asked in person, allowing some schools to provide students with an online form. The NCAA did not respond to a request for comment asking whether there are penalties for institutions that don't comply or what value the bylaw holds if institutions don't have to prove compliance. [cont. next page](#)



SPORT	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
BASEBALL	3	1	0	0	0
MEN'S BASKETBALL	0	0	0	0	0
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL	0	1	0	0	0
BEACH VOLLEYBALL	0	1	0	0	0
CROSS COUNTRY	0	3	0	0	0
FOOTBALL	0	0	0	0	0
MEN'S GOLF	0	0	0	0	0
WOMEN'S GOLF	0	0	0	0	0
GYMNASTICS	0	0	0	0	0
SOCCER	1	5	0	0	0
SOFTBALL	1	0	0	0	0
SWIMMING & DIVING	0	6	11	8	10
MEN'S TENNIS	0	2	0	2	0
WOMEN'S TENNIS	0	2	0	2	0
TRACK & FIELD	0	0	0	0	0
VOLLEYBALL	0	0	3	3	0

The table above shows how many exit interviews were conducted by each sport in the corresponding years.

## NCAA BYLAW 8.3

The institution's director of athletics, senior woman administrator or designated representatives (excluding coaching staff members) shall conduct exit interviews in each sport with a sample of student-athletes (as determined by the institution) whose eligibility has expired. Interviews shall include questions regarding the value of the students' athletics experiences, the extent of the athletics time demands encountered by the student-athletes, proposed changes in intercollegiate athletics and concerns related to the administration of the student-athletes' specific sports.

For the five-year period, LSU did not document any interviews with the football, men's basketball, men's golf, women's golf, gymnastics or track and field programs. No LSU team had at least one interview documented annually, and most sports went multiple years without having any interviews documented, representing more than 1,000 student athletes who may have had their feedback ignored.

A review of the 64 athlete interview forms LSU provided in response to the public records requests revealed complaints about facilities and coaches — including multiple allegations of bullying and intimidation by swimming and diving coaches.

It is rare for exit interviews from a major college athletic program to be released. In 2019, the online news outlet The Intercollegiate submitted public records requests for the interviews from every public NCAA Division I program. Most universities denied the requests, including LSU and almost every other Southeastern Conference institution. The unavailability of these records makes it difficult to compare LSU's compliance with peer institutions.

Experts say not documenting student-athletes' feedback is a disservice to them, and it raises concerns about whether the university is actually conducting the interviews at all.

Molly Harry, a University of Florida sports management professor whose research has focused on NCAA exit interviews, said it is concerning LSU is not documenting its athletes' feedback.

"Athletes are gaining power economically, as we speak, with [revenue sharing] ... but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have the more procedural power in the athletics department," Harry said. "These exit interviews could potentially lead to changes in the future through that procedure."

Greenwell did not respond to follow-up questions about why LSU only documents interviews for certain sports, how many interviews LSU has conducted in each sport or how LSU is able to use information it gathers in the interviews if no notes are taken.

Harry said not recording interviews for men's sports could lead to gender inequities, as they tend to have worse academic and social experiences than women athletes. Football and basketball programs also tend to have more taxing travel



#### Senior SA / Exhausting Eligibility Exit Interview

SA Name: [REDACTED] Sport: Baseball Date: 6/10/22

- How was your overall experience at LSU? Did it meet your expectations?
  - Exceeded expectations. Didn't know much about LSU beforehand. Everyone was warm and welcoming. Parents talk about how nice people are in the south. All good.
  - Coaching change is what the school needed. On his side it was hard but proved himself at the beginning but others stepped in. Staff helped him.
- If you were recruited from high school today, would you choose LSU again?
  - LSU for sure.
- Why did you choose LSU originally? Was the recruiting process an accurate reflection of your experiences?
  - Didn't know much about LSU. The red carpet was rolled out compared to the other schools.
- Discuss your thought about the following service departments with LSU Athletics. Please state things you enjoyed as well as areas for improvement.
  - Strength & Conditioning Staff/Weight Room
    - Loved it. Travis was good but nice to work with. Adaptive well.
  - Athletic Trainers, LSU Doctors/ Athletic Training Room
    - Amazing. Don't think there is anyone better than Cory. All the students, etc.
  - Academic Advisor, Tutors/ Academic Center
    - Didn't utilize the tutors as much because of the classes. Taylor was great.
  - Sports Psychology Staff/ Mental Health Services
    - Seen Bruce. And was helpful for him. Was always there. Don't think a lot of guys do.
  - Performance Nutrition Staff
    - Got better each year he was here. Kayla was awesome this year.
  - Tiger Life Program/Staff
    - Don't think so.
- Do you regularly eat at the Athletics Performance Nutrition Center? What do you enjoy most? Any constructive feedback?
  - Enjoyed the steak nights. Can't complain about steak nights. Asian night was awesome. Food was always good.
- What advice would you give the Athletic Administration for better serving your sport?
  - Not sure. But guys are willing to take in what I have to say. Guys know what we have but sometimes need someone to push.
- What advice would you give your coaching staff that you believe would enhance future teams?
  - Maybe a bit more transparency up front. There are some more up front. Need to talk about issues more.
- How does the coaching staff motivate student-athletes?
  - Keeping that goal in mind. Each game is a playoff. Can't worry about the game ahead.
  - Old school vs. new school. You were shown how we fixed something. Not just yelled and conditioned.
  - Practices were enjoyable.
- What will you miss most about ending your sports career at LSU? Do you believe you are prepared to transition to life after sport?
  - The relationships. Nice to have that bond.
  - Am prepared for life.
- Any additional thoughts/feedback you would like to share? Nothing.

#### Senior SA / Exhausting Eligibility Exit Interview

SA Name: [REDACTED] Sport: MTF Date: 6/26/23

- How was your overall experience at LSU? Did it meet your expectations?
  - It was great and met his expectations.
- If you were recruited from high school today, would you choose LSU again?
  - Yes, because it is the balance of athletics and academics. The opportunities given at LSU to run and pursue in other passion projects.
- Why did you choose LSU originally? Was the recruiting process an accurate reflection of your experiences?
  - Thought running at LSU would be a great experience. Heavily considered LSU and then received the [REDACTED] merit scholarship through the [REDACTED]; received by top [REDACTED]. It covered all his off-campus living costs; research dollars are provided.
- Discuss your thought about the following service departments with LSU Athletics. Please state things you enjoyed as well as areas for improvement.
  - Strength & Conditioning Staff/Weight Room
    - Earl was a great coach; great attitude, great at encouraging people. Earl was amazing WR: cool looking but it could be larger to accommodate the size of the team. Equipment was in good condition.
  - Athletic Trainers, LSU Doctors/ Athletic Training Room
    - [REDACTED]
  - Academic Advisor, Tutors/ Academic Center
    - Pretty helpful in scheduling classes; didn't use tutors after Freshman year; should have an exemption for those SAs who truly did not require assistance
    - Cox: Too cold freshman year; very nice, clean, pretty space; enjoyed having food available, not always stocked, water/ice machine was broken; enjoyed collaborative area
  - Sports Psychology Staff/ Mental Health Services
    - [REDACTED]
  - Performance Nutrition Staff
    - They were great at scheduling DEXA scans; wanted results emailed as opposed to requiring an in-person meeting.
  - Tiger Life Program/Staff
    - Dr. Wein was positive and brought lot of energy; she modeled positive behaviors in interactions with others. Used other resources through the Honors College. Networking events were good

schedules, and not obtaining feedback from these teams leaves a significant gap in the data, she added.

"You're not getting the perspective of the high profile sports who might have found it pretty unmanageable," Harry said.

Allison Smith, a professor of sport management at Georgia State University, said allowing universities to self-police is a weakness in many NCAA bylaws.

"The NCAA needs to uphold what the member institutions are doing regarding their bylaws," Smith said.

LSU initially attempted to deny the Illuminator's public records request when it was made in 2023, arguing exit interviews were exempted from disclosure under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a federal law that protects students' personal information.

With the help of the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic, the Illuminator and Tiger Rag were able to obtain the 65 interviews that were recorded, though they were released with redactions. On each document, LSU redacted the student's name as well as their response to questions about team medical and mental health providers.

The interviews ask the following questions:

How was your overall experience at LSU? Did it meet your expectations?

If you were recruited from high school today, would you choose LSU again?

Why did you choose LSU originally? [cont. next page](#)

#### Senior SA / Exhausting Eligibility Exit Interview

SA Name: [REDACTED] Sport: Women's Soccer Date: 12/10/21

- How was your overall experience at LSU? Did it meet your expectations?
  - Everything met her expectations. Covid was tough
- If you were recruited from high school today, would you choose LSU again?
  -
- Why did you choose LSU originally? Was the recruiting process an accurate reflection of your experiences?
  - Wanted something different than the small team. Wanted to go to a big, power 5 school. Needed a change.
  - Slan was part of that.
  - What are thoughts on LA - Humidity is nuts. BR is LSU. Anytime your in and around campus you will have a good experience. People are really nice. Southern hospitality.
  - Neg about BR: grew up in a nice area. Lots of poverty and was new.
- Discuss your thought about the following service departments with LSU Athletics. Please state things you enjoyed as well as areas for improvement.
  - Strength & Conditioning Staff/Weight Room
    - Loved the program and Renee. Catering to people.
  - Athletic Trainers, LSU Doctors/ Athletic Training Room
    - [REDACTED]
  - Academic Advisor, Tutors/ Academic Center
    - Personally had a decent experience.
    - Communication was the biggest issue/timely communication
    - More check ins with the person. Only talked to Carole when signing up for classes.
  - Sports Psychology Staff/ Mental Health Services
    - [REDACTED]
  - Performance Nutrition Staff
    - Great meeting with them today. Do a great job. In touch with them a lot.
    - She communicates but you need to reach back if you want to use it.
  - Tiger Life Program/Staff
    - Follow social media but that's about it. Didn't do much with it. Went to one with free food.
- Do you regularly eat at the Athletics Performance Nutrition Center? What do you enjoy most? Any constructive feedback?
  - Love it. Enjoy it.
  - Other school would be open all day. Could sit in there and do homework. Could grab food and such.
  - Options were always good options

Thumbnail copy examples of actual exit interviews and questionnaires from LSU acquired via our FOI request.



### Senior SA / Exhausting Eligibility Exit Interview

SA Name \_\_\_\_\_ Sport \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. How was your overall experience at LSU? Did it meet your expectations?
2. If you were recruited from high school today, would you choose LSU again?
3. Why did you choose LSU originally? Was the recruiting process an accurate reflection of your experiences?
4. Discuss your thought about the following service departments with LSU Athletics. Please state things you enjoyed as well as areas for improvement.
  - a. Strength & Conditioning Staff/Weight Room
  - b. Athletic Trainers, LSU Doctors/ Athletic Training Room
  - c. Academic Advisor, Tutors/ Academic Center
  - d. Sports Psychology Staff/ Mental Health Services
  - e. Performance Nutrition Staff
  - f. Tiger Life Program/Staff
5. Do you regularly eat at the Athletics Performance Nutrition Center? What do you enjoy most? Any constructive feedback?

Was the recruiting process an accurate reflection of your experiences?

Discuss your thoughts about the following service departments with LSU athletics. Please state things you enjoyed as well as areas for improvement.

Strength & conditioning staff/weight room

Athletic trainers, LSU doctors/athletic training room

Academic advisor, tutors/academic center

Sports psychology staff/mental health services

Performance nutrition staff

Tiger Life program/staff

Do you regularly eat at the Athletics Performance Nutrition Center? What do you enjoy most? Any constructive feedback?

What advice would you give the Athletic Administration for better serving your sport?

What advice would you give your coaching staff that you believe would enhance future teams?

How does the coaching staff motivate student-athletes?

What will you miss most about ending your sports career at LSU? Do you believe you are prepared to transition to life after sport?

Any additional thoughts/feedback you would like to share?

If the athlete is an international athlete, they are also asked:

Were you prepared for your transition to LSU?

What challenges did you face?

Ideas about ways the athletics department can improve support? **TR**



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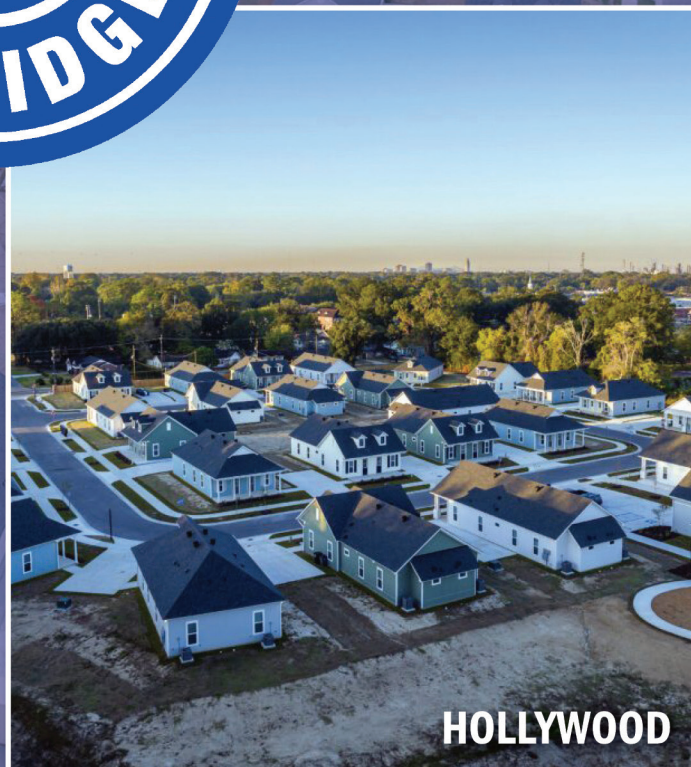
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# ‘MADE HER LIFE HELL’

LSU ATHLETES ALLEGE BULLYING, RACISM  
BY SWIMMING AND DIVING COACHES

By PIPER HUTCHINSON, Tiger Rag Investigative Reporter

LSU swimming and diving team members allege their coaches have engaged in bullying, racist comments and “toxic” behavior, according to the athletes’ exit interviews.

Student-athlete exit interviews the Louisiana Illuminator and Tiger Rag obtained in a public records request to LSU show multiple complaints from swimming and diving athletes over three

years. They center on head coach Rick Bishop and former associate head coach Leah Stancil, whose contract was not renewed when it expired earlier this year.





From left, LSU athletics spokesman **Zach Greenwell**, former associate head coach **Leah Stancil**, and head coach **Rick Bishop**  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

When asked whether Stancil's non-renewal was related to the complaints, LSU athletics spokesman Zach Greenwell said the university does not comment on specific personnel matters.

Bishop and Stancil did not respond to requests for comment. The swimming and diving team has one set of coaches for both men and women athletes.

In their interviews, the athletes allege the swimming and diving program was rife with bullying and motivation through fear. One athlete said the program broke them [cont. next page](#)



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“physically and mentally,” while another said the coaches didn’t respect injuries.

One student complained that Stancil “made her life hell,” the administrator who conducted the interview wrote, causing her to have a mental health crisis, and that the assistant coach ruined the sport for her. Multiple athletes said in their interviews that Stancil made fun of a Chinese student’s name, commented on athletes’ appearances and showed favoritism toward men on the team.

Other students reported that after a woman on the team complained about inappropriate behavior by male teammates, Bishop excused the men’s behavior in comments to the entire team, saying “boys are stupid and can make stupid decisions” while making direct eye contact with the woman who made the report. The interview records do not detail the nature of the inappropriate behavior.

One student complained that Bishop intimidated her when she attempted to raise concerns about Stancil’s behavior, alleging the head coach would not let her read a letter detailing Stancil’s actions without Stancil present.

“[It was] like asking you to report a bully while the bully is in the room with you,” the athlete wrote, adding she believed Bishop protected Stancil instead of her.

One student said they believed LSU’s athletic department administration was aware of the coaches’ behavior.

In a letter notifying Stancil her contract would not be renewed, LSU Athletics Director Scott Woodward thanked the coach for her contributions to the university.

“We appreciate your dedication and wish you the best in future endeavors,” Woodward said in the letter, which the Illuminator and Tiger Rag obtained through a public records request.

The Illuminator and Tiger Rag asked the university for copies of its student-athlete exit interviews from 2021-25. The NCAA requires all Division I schools to conduct interviews with a sampling of athletes every year once they graduate or after their eligibility expires, but the interviews do not have to be recorded. The process is intended to give athletes an opportunity to share feedback about their school’s sports programs.

The swimming and diving teams, by far, had the most interviews recorded, with 35 students giving feedback over four years based on the records provided. Although 10 athletes criticized Stancil and Bishop, almost everyone interviewed had some positive comment about their athletics experience, including one person who praised Bishop’s coaching.

After swimming and diving, the team with the most interviews recorded was the gymnastics team, with six interviews in two years.

Six of LSU’s 16 athletics teams did not record a single interview over the five-year period. Those that did recorded very few interviews, sometimes going multiple years without any student feedback reported. **TR**





**ANDRE CHAMPAGNE**

*Tiger Rag Staff Writer*

Growing up in Opelousas, Louisiana was nothing out of the ordinary for me. I have two loving parents, an older brother and a younger sister. My parents always encouraged us to go out and chase our dreams – and that’s just what I did.

I played sports for as long as I can remember. The competitive nature brought me joy while serving as an escape from everything else. I participated in any sport I could: football, basketball, baseball and even competitive swimming.

What some people don’t know is that I played on a football team with current Buffalo Bills receiver Keon Coleman in “Itty-Bitty” ball at South City Park. I also played against Coleman several times in middle school in his Opelousas Catholic days. At the time, I was a 4-foot-7 shooting guard and he sent just about every shot I took into the bleachers.

Football in the south really does just mean more. My family scheduled our falls around it.

Saturdays in the fall started with “College Gameday” on the TV at 8 a.m. with scrambled eggs and Pillsbury biscuits on the counter. Any errands had to wait until Lee Corso made his headgear pick. The 11 a.m. kickoffs were for yard work. By 2:30, everything around the house was finished so we could watch the SEC game of the week on CBS. My

dad’s rice and gravy paired perfectly with the primetime matchups to end the night.

My first memories of watching sports came during LSU’s 2010-11 season. My dad took me to my first football game on November 6, 2010. LSU hosted Nick Saban’s No. 6 Alabama Crimson Tide. I will never forget that game. I remember hearing the crowd erupt after Reuben Randle caught a Jordan Jefferson pass over the middle of the field, taking it the distance for a touchdown to break a scoring drought for the Tigers. That 75-yard reception from Randle is when I fell in love with college football.

In my short 22 years being in Louisiana, I’ve been to a considerable number of sporting events. I attended some of the craziest games, but none of them compared to the fifth night of November in 2022. LSU sold out Tiger Stadium as it hosted Alabama in a high-stakes matchup during Brian Kelly’s first season in Baton Rouge. Jayden Daniels’ successful two-point conversion throw to Mason Taylor will go down as one of the most memorable moments that I witnessed in person. From the timid crowd response to Brian Kelly sending his players to line up for two to the field rush immediately after Taylor’s catch will forever be remembered by those in Baton Rouge that night.

I attended college at Louisiana State University where I later would receive my Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication with a focus in Broadcast Journalism. I never envisioned a

world where I left sports, so journalism became my way to stay close to them.

During my freshman year at LSU, I applied to be a sports reporter at KLSU Radio, which was the student-run radio station on campus. I ended up getting hired and I later became the Sports Director in 2023. The rest was history. KLSU will forever have a place in my heart. It was a place where I grew as both a reporter and a person.

I’ve been blessed to have covered so many unforgettable sports moments in the past four years at LSU. I covered the first LSU Women’s Basketball Championship win in Dallas, Texas in 2023. My favorite event that I have been able to cover is the 2023 Heisman Trophy Ceremony. From seeing real snow fall getting off the plane to witnessing Jayden Daniels become the third Heisman winner in LSU history, the New York City trip did not disappoint.

Covering athletes and teams will never get old for me because no story is ever the same. I am thrilled to join the Tiger Rag team, alongside Todd and Glenn. I look forward to bringing you all unique stories each day!

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**TODD HORNE**

*Vice President / Executive Editor*

Will the College Football Playoff soon look less like an elite postseason showcase and more like a Thanksgiving buffet line—where everybody gets a plate?

On paper, the Big Ten's latest pitch—to stretch the CFP to 24 or even 28 teams—reads like an early holiday wish for fans hungry for more November and December drama. Conference brass are salivating at the thought of extra “play-in” weekends, dubbing them TV gold.

Trouble is, beneath the sizzle reel lies a nagging question: when does adding more games start chipping away at what makes the Playoff premium?

Take Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti. Back when talk of a 16-team field was still campfire gossip, he quietly floated the idea of a preliminary “play-in weekend.” Four automatic berths for conference champions, marquee matchups slotted in prime time—Petitti told *The Joel Klatt Show* it'd be “a great weekend for college football.” Sure, a build-up of do-or-die clashes sounds exciting. But if every .500-plus team wakes up dreaming of postseason glory, hasn't the bar for making history just been lowered?

SMU's head coach Rhett Lashlee pushed the concept even further at ACC media days: picture every Power Four conference staging its own 3-versus-6 and 4-versus-5 play-ins, feeding a 16-team bracket “like March Madness Thursday and Friday.”

## THE FUTURE OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS: A BUFFET OR A SHOWCASE?

He called it “the best Saturday college football could ever manufacture.”

I'll give him credit for ambition.

Yet I can't help but wonder whether we're veering toward spectacle over sport. Will fans really tune in week after week, or will the novelty morph into fatigue faster than an over-matched blowout?

For the numbers nerds, Year 1 of the 12-team format was gospel: ESPN and TNT averaged 10.6 million viewers per first-round game, then saw that spike to 16.9 million for the quarterfinals on ESPN alone.

Suddenly, a 24- or 28-team field looks like an ATM.

But here's the rub: is interest stoked by genuine competition or by the scarcity of seeing only the nation's best? Overextend the bracket, and ‘must-see TV’ risks becoming ‘must-scroll-past TV.’

Throw in the fate of conference title games. Last season, only Georgia-Texas (16.6 million) and Oregon-Penn State (10.5 million) cleared 10 million viewers. You could argue scrapping some finales paves the way for more first-round thrillers. Yet tradition holds value, and crowning a champion on the last Saturday in November carries its own heft.

Proponents point to the FCS as proof of concept: a genuine 24-team playoff where the top eight seeds rest, higher seeds host until championship week, and on-campus atmosphere is king. When CFP games ventured onto

campus last year, the atmosphere crackled—and so did the bottom line. But FCS Saturday afternoons aren't the same draw as Saturday nights in the CFP. Skeptics warn that bloat invites lopsided blowouts and dilutes the field.

Right now, most observers seem comfortable bumping to 16 teams. But beyond that, trepidation grows. After all, the NCAA is already grappling with backlash over talk of stretching March Madness to 72 or even 76 squads. If basketball's postseason can ignite a revolt, why should college football be immune?

As the CFP steers toward a carnival of more and more games, decision-makers will face a delicate balance: more contests may boost eyeballs—until they sacrifice the prestige that turned this contest into must-watch TV in the first place.

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Todd Horne is the vice president and executive editor of *Tiger Rag* and started covering LSU sports in 1986. He is a graduate of LSU's Journalism School. Reach Todd at [todd@tigerrag.com](mailto:todd@tigerrag.com)

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**DALE BROWN**

*Tiger Rag Featured Columnist*

Each of us roams the earth with our own special uniqueness. We are all different but we all have a distinctive being for who we are, what we see and feel, and how we handle it. Yet, there are two common factors that we each possess. The first factor is that we will constantly be facing adversity. There will always be struggles to overcome. The second factor is that we have the ability to respond in any way that we fashion. There is always a solution and it takes brave souls to search for them. Adversity only visits the strong but stays forever with the weak. Each and every day we are faced with some form of challenge. However, our ability to respond to those challenges, no matter their size, lies directly in our ability to choose how we will respond.

## ADVERSITY ONLY VISITS THE STRONG, BUT IT LIVES WITH THE WEAK

Thinkers down through the centuries have disagreed on almost everything. There is only one point upon which they all agree and that is people that hold on to the image of life that they want that image will become true.

Do you have the courage to stand up to these gutless punks?

“Those who do not speak out against evil, command it to be done.” - Leonardo Da Vinci.

“Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all the others.” – Winston Churchill

What is your excuse for not standing up against evil? Excuses are like belly-buttons, everyone has one. Are you a coward or a person of courage?



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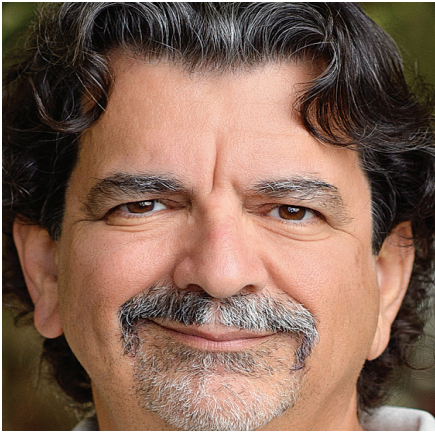
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**JIM KLEINPETER**  
*Tiger Rag Featured Columnist*

No one at LSU enters the 2025 football season with more pressure than Garrett Nussmeier, and yes, that includes head coach Brian Kelly.

Nussmeier is already carrying much of the blame for the late season fade in 2024, which included blowing a 17-7 halftime lead at Texas A&M and complete no show at home against Alabama.

He's entering his final season in the shadow of not only Jayden Daniels, who preceded him behind center and won the Heisman Trophy, but also another Heisman winner, Joe Burrow.

As soon as 2024 ended and Nussmeier said he was returning, fans began comparing it to 2018 when Burrow came off a good season and made the next one historic, the best in LSU history, with an undefeated national champion.

That's a lot to carry. Kelly certainly doesn't have to prove he's a better coach than Ed Orgeron or Les Miles. He's already Notre Dame's winningest coach and has more money than he would ever need, an amount that would skyrocket with a buyout even if his team stumbles and he is fired.

When fans talk about the 2019 title, they first remember Burrow, who turned out to be special. It's unlikely Nussmeier could reach that stratosphere and he doesn't have to. But he's got to get better.

## IF GARRETT NUSSMEIER CAN IMPROVE IN YEAR 2 AS JOE BURROW DID, GET READY FOR THE PLAYOFFS

NFL Draft analyst Mel Kiper excluded him from his recent cull of top five quarterbacks in the 2026 draft. That could easily change if Nussmeier has a good year and he doesn't have to reach Burrow's level.

To be fair, Nussmeier was plenty good most of the season and perhaps he was trying too hard when the stakes got higher as the season progressed. It was also his first season as a starter, just like Burrow's 2018 campaign. Burrow wasn't really on the radar for the Heisman during that transition.

If Nussmeier can mirror – not match – Burrow's improvement, it should be enough to get LSU into the 12-team playoff. In addition to Nussmeier, the team needs to get better.

In 2018 LSU benefitted from a host of players choosing to stick around for senior seasons, which contributed to the drop off in 2020. It would have been nice if LSU's two highly touted offensive tackles had stuck around but that was too much to ask this time and now Nussmeier has to hope a brand new offensive line can pull together.

But every other position smacks of 2019. With the NIL rules serving as a form of free agency/waiver wire, Kelly has been aggressive about building a strong roster. It's not that LSU needed a lot of new starters, but the team is packed with depth. Being able to play backups with little or no drop off was the success formula Alabama used under Nick Saban.

Depth isn't just about replacing injured players but rotating two or three players in some positions and, especially on defense, matching up

defensive personnel on a game-by-game basis. This is especially vital in the secondary, where the school that used to be nicknamed DBU tackled as poorly as I've ever seen. Thus, LSU gave up multiple explosive plays.

Like Burrow, Nussmeier has no shortage of offensive weapons around him. The wide receiver corps may be even deeper than the 2019 group.

One advantage Burrow had was a cupcake season opener against Northwestern State to warm up before winning a huge game at Texas, which ignited the championship run.

Nussmeier has no such luxury in facing a top 5 team in Clemson and won't even be the best quarterback on the field. That honor belongs to dual-threat QB Cade Klubnik, who is on Mel Kiper's top 5 list.

Nussmeier has plenty going for him. As a coach's son, he gets the concept of getting better, working on weaknesses and understanding the importance of rebounding from adversity. He also doesn't have to win a national championship for the season to be a success. Getting LSU into the 12-team playoff field is the first goal and it's one he's entirely capable of achieving, even if the Tigers can't go 1-0 in Week One.

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*Jim Kleinpeter is a graduate of the LSU School of Journalism. He has been a sportswriter for 37 years, including 33 at the Times-Picayune. Reach him at [jkleinpeter@gmail.com](mailto:jkleinpeter@gmail.com).*



**JIM ENGSTER***President, Tiger Rag Magazine*

LSU officials are embracing the prospect of a \$400 million arena to replace the PMAC. Athletic Director Scott Woodward says the facility will open in 2029 despite ample concerns about the selection process.

It has been revealed the leader of the Oak View Group was culpable in bid rigging on another project, and there has been no bidding process for the rights to the most expensive construction project in LSU history. Nonetheless, the Oak View Group remains the vendor of choice.

The price tag is double what the Smoothie King Center in New Orleans would cost to be built today. It opened in 1999 at a price tag of \$114 million.

A taxing district will be needed to fund the project, and there has been no assurance that student fees will not be used to foot the bill.

Information has been parsed on a paranoid basis as some players in the project stand to line their own pockets. The process is a breach of ethics at the highest order at a state university where transparency should be a necessity.

Most of the LSU officials involved in the project will be long gone when the arena opens. At its best, the venue could be a showcase for the university. Deliberations should be conducted in the open. And a plausible explanation for the arena is warranted with other buildings on campus having severe structural issues. There is a backlog of hundreds of millions of dollars in construction requirements at the Ole War Skule.

LSU is a world class university with a pathetic library. The PMAC is in much better shape than the former Middleton Library. In addition to the cost and secrecy envel-

## LSU ARENA PLAN LACKS SUNSHINE

oping the current plan, there is a legitimate concern about priorities.

LSU should strive to benefit its graduates and residents of the state with input from all sectors of the university and the community. Instead, decisions are being rendered in some cases by non-graduates of LSU. The environment appears to encourage contractors and lawyers salivating over their next big payday, not the people who will pay the freight.

### Shaq for Senate?

The intersection of sports and politics is likely to become more prevalent with the ascension to power of the man from Gotham City. The cult of celebrity contributed to two national victories for Donald Trump as president. The former star of *The Apprentice* won the World Series of politics twice. Trump has paved the path for other famous rascals and rogues to win high office.

Trump is charismatic but is not practicing girth control. He is built like the keyboard cowards who congregate on Tiger Drop-pings. These bombastic blowhards talk tough and log their days in anonymity and take shots at men in the arena as they vainly attempt to retrieve their manhood. The most famous LSU graduate is Shaquille O'Neal. He was one of his generation's greatest athletes and is primed to dominate the political ring if he chooses. There is a path for the Louisiana legend that could lead to the presidency.

Louisiana has a U.S. Senate primary in April of 2026 and none of the candidates appear to be fit enough to be make American great again. Incumbent Bill Cassidy and his challengers would be overwhelmed by a Shaq attack next year.

O'Neal is in fighting form and towers above the field. He could run either as a Republican or Democrat and likely win. O'Neal has received a doctoral degree, is a 15-time NBA All Star in a career highlighted with four league championships.

The Dale Brown pupil won the NBA MVP Award and has had his number retired by three teams, Orlando, Miami and the Lakers.

O'Neal is Herschel Walker with brains and personality. Shaq is one of the most famous people on the planet and could use the U.S. Senate seat as a springboard to the White House. He has the capacity to vanquish any rival on the debate stage and could become the first Black candidate to win a statewide election in Louisiana since Reconstruction.

### Auburn's Act of Blasphemy

Auburn is claiming the 1958 National Title in football 67 years later. The War Eagles were 9-0-1 in '58 while the real champion was 11-0 and won the SEC over Auburn.

No rewriting of the history books can revise LSU's 1958 unbeaten Tigers as the best team in the country that season. Auburn did not even go to a bowl game. Shug Jordan's War Eagles are pretenders and should be sanctioned by the SEC for making such an audacious claim.

LSU could make similar reaches for outstanding teams in 1961, 1969 and 2011. But the Tigers were not as good in those years as Alabama in '61 and '11 and Texas in '69.

There are times when lesser teams capture titles, but they generally do it on the field, not in a subjective fan world seven decades removed from the season.

### Remember Max Johnson?

Former LSU Quarterback Max Johnson is a six-year senior at North Carolina. At 24, he has the distinction of playing for three national champion coaches in Ed Orgeron, Jimbo Fisher and Mack Brown. Johnson is now playing for six-time Super Bowl winner Bill Belichick.

Johnson's career is even more remarkable when it is noted that there are only three current college coaches who have won national championships, Dabo Swinney, Ryan Day and Kirby Smart.

### Salute to Kent Lowe

This writer has known LSU Sports Information Superstar Kent Lowe for 45 years. Unlike most publicists, Kent has vast experience as a real journalist. Therefore, he is aware of the craft of journalism with its frequent deadlines and occasional friction with people we cover.

*ENGSTER COLUMN cont. page 60*



## WHAT THEY READ

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ENGSTER COLUMN cont. from page 59



### Emerson Stafford

What I'm reading -  
**Never Lie**

by Freida McFadden

A psychological thriller about newly weds looking for the perfect home. But what happens when they find it!



### Jane Mrsnik

What I'm reading -  
**Remarkably Bright Creatures**

by Shelby Van Pelt

Remarkably Bright Creatures

Highly recommend this beautiful story about a widow and her unlikely connection with a giant Pacific octopus after her husband's death.

For more than 35 years, Kent Lowe, who is the basketball SID, has run the press box at Tiger Stadium without fanfare. His job is to accommodate the media who report on the Tigers. He has accomplished that task without seeking fanfare from his colleagues or basking in facetime on the sidelines.

Clayton Kent Lowe is a true professional, and he has been at the top of his game since his work at The Reveille in 1980. Like his former radio sidekick, Tim Brando, Lowe is a survivor and has lots of gas left in the tank.

Kent has surrendered acclaim for integrity. He inspires those of us who have been in his orbit with his work ethic and commitment to excellence.

Talk Louisiana with Jim Engster is streamed statewide weekdays from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and is aired on WRKF Talk 89.3 FM in Baton Rouge as the flagship station. Jim is a graduate of the LSU School of Journalism. Reach him at: [jim@louisianaradionetwork.com](mailto:jim@louisianaradionetwork.com).



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