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LSU'S BLOODY OCTOBER

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COVER 2, PAGE 3

Tiger of the Month

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Michael Van Buren, Jr.. Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes

MICHAEL VAN BUREN, JR.

Michael Van Buren Jr. made his first start for LSU in the annual Battle for the Boot, stepping in when Garrett Nussmeier aggravated an injury. His debut began shakily: LSU punted twice in their opening drives and surrendered an early Arkansas touchdown on a blocked punt. Despite completing only one of three first-quarter passes, Van Buren remained poised. As the second quarter unfolded, he orchestrated a 48-yard march, feeding running back Caden Durham on a 27-yard touchdown run before mixing in precise passes. By halftime, kicker Damian Ramos had split the uprights three times. Van Buren's mobility added 36 rushing yards, and he engineered a pivotal fourth-quarter, 92-yard drive capped by a 12-yard touchdown strike to tight end Bauer Sharp, giving LSU a 23-22 lead. Finishing 21-for-31 with 221 passing yards, Van Buren displayed resilience, composure and poise under intense pressure, making a compelling case to retain the starting quarterback role moving forward. 

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ON THE COVER:

In one of the most tumultuous periods in LSU history, football coach Brian Kelly and athletic director Scott Woodward were fired on Oct. 26 and Oct. 30, respectively, and Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin surfaced as the target of new athletic director Verge Ausberry by mid-November..



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BUSINESS OFFICE

10500 Coursey Blvd., Suite 104
Baton Rouge, LA 70806
Phone: (888) 32-TIGER
Fax: (225) 297-7539

TIGER RAG STAFF

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Photography

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Frank Wilson (center)
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



GLENN GUILBEAU

Tiger Rag Editor

The next best thing to Nick Saban that was available for LSU was Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin, and Saban was doing his best to make that happen.

If Kiffin instead took the Florida job over LSU, he will forever be the one that got away from LSU and Saban. If he chose LSU, you should forever praise Saban or blame him.

Saban, who took LSU to its first national championship in football since 1958 in 2003 before winning six more at Alabama and retiring after the 2023 season, tried to convince Kiffin that LSU was the best job for him and better than Florida should he leave Ole Miss, a source close to LSU told Tiger Rag on Nov. 17.

Kiffin, 50, is two years older now than Saban was when he left Michigan State after the 1999 season for LSU. Super sports agent Jimmy Sexton was Saban's agent then, throughout his coaching career and now with Saban as the star analyst at ESPN.

"Through Jimmy Sexton, Nick is telling Lane that LSU is the job for him if he wants to win a national championship," the source said. "And that it's better than Florida because of the recruiting base in Louisiana, and LSU is the only major program in the state."

But Kiffin could or could have won a national championship at Ole Miss this season. Right now, Ole Miss is a better program than LSU and Florida because of Kiffin – the Rebels' best coach since legend Johnny Vaught.

Florida's job opened on Oct. 19 when Billy Napier was fired. LSU's job opened on Oct. 26 when LSU athletic director Scott Woodward fired Brian Kelly, regardless of LSU trying to change that story for buyout purposes. Florida won two national titles under coach Urban Meyer in 2006 and '08 after Steve Spurrier won its first in the 1996 season. And Kiffin has strong ties to the state of Florida, having revitalized his head coaching career at Florida Atlantic in Boca Raton from 2017-19 before Ole Miss.

LSU won three national championships under three coaches from 2003-19.

BAYOU BACK STORY:

NICK SABAN WAS NEVER RETURNING TO LSU, BUT HE HAD A HEAVY HAND IN TRYING TO GET LANE KIFFIN HERE

LSU's recruiting advantage of not having to deal with another major football program in state was one of the main reasons Saban left Michigan State for LSU. That's what he and Sexton have pitched to Kiffin.

The source also gave the best reference for Kiffin out there.

"Since Nick retired, there's been no one who can inventory talent and use it appropriately better than Lane," he said.

Saban also talked Kiffin up to LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry, who was rising in the athletic department during Saban's time at LSU and has remained close to Saban.

"Nick says Lane has matured, and can handle the LSU job," the source said.

Kiffin respects Saban immensely. It was Saban who revitalized Kiffin's career by taking a chance on him and making him offensive coordinator at Alabama after USC fired him in 2013.

Saban gave Ausberry the names of three college head coaches to consider if LSU couldn't get Kiffin – Missouri's Eli Drinkwitz, Georgia Tech's Brent Key and Louisville's Jeff Brohm.

"But he told Verge," the source said, "Lane is the one."

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 USA Today Network and the Baton Rouge Advocate. Reach him at glenn@tigerrag.com.



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WHAT A WILD LATE OCTOBER AND FIRST HALF OF NOVEMBER IT WAS AT LSU, AND IT'S NOT OVER YET

First LSU football coach Brian Kelly got fired on Oct. 26, by athletic director Scott Woodward, who was axed four days later. Associate head coach Frank Wilson replaced Kelly, and deputy athletic director Verge Ausberry replaced Woodward.

Well, now the tsunami has turned into a double tsunami, washing out Woodward and making Ausberry AD.

"LSU is not broken," Ausberry said. No, Verge, it's just (messed) up, and it is you guys who did it.

And John Carmouche of the Board of Supervisors insisting Woodward's firing

was "mutual" is just ludicrous. I had respect for him when he addressed the Press Club recently. Not anymore.

Meanwhile, the Internet is seething with stories about the LSU/Kelly saga. This quote from Nicholas Rome of Saturday Blitz is among the better ones:

"Even if LSU believes they have reasons to fire Kelly for cause, these events are embarrassing for the program. LSU is hoping to land a big name coach, but entering a massive legal battle with their last coach won't be attractive with other open jobs."

The point that no top coach would go near LSU is a salient one.

I urge the Board to stop this nonsense before it causes irreparable damage to LSU's brand.

Bill Huey
scbhuey.com

And there was this tweet at Glenn Guilbeau's column last month on Lane Kiffin coming to LSU:

"This writer is the worst. Hates LSU. Like a local Pat Forde."

Rob Gosti
@robg1124



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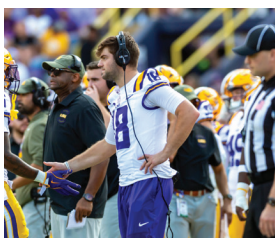


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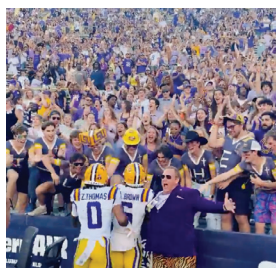
Have we seen the last of Garrett Nussmeier at LSU?

Where the focus should lie for Nussmeier and the Tigers finishing out the 2025 season.

"We'll continue to monitor him day by day, week by week to see his progress."



Zack Nagy
@znagy20



This is the #LSU culture that the program has been searching for.

Interim coach Frank Wilson has the swagger back in The Boot with the players bought in, energy up and culture shifting.

It's slowly coming back together for the Bayou Bengals.



Stuart Mandel
@slmandel

Ole Miss has told Lane Kiffin he needs to decide by the Nov. 28 Egg Bowl whether he's staying at Ole Miss or taking either the Florida/LSU job.



Lon Phillips Sullivan
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LSU HAS SPENT OVER \$43 MILLION ON ATHLETICS BUYOUTS OVER THE PAST DECADE

By TIGER RAG NEWS SERVICES

LSU has paid more than \$43 million to buy out the contracts of its coaches and athletics department leaders over the past decade and soon might be on the hook for more than \$53 million more.

Former football coach Brian Kelly is suing LSU to get his full buyout of nearly \$54 million, which would be

among the largest ever given to any college coach. Kelly's 10-year, \$100 million contract guaranteed him 90% of his remaining salary if LSU fired him without cause, which they did just four years into the deal.

That price tag was a big factor in former LSU Athletics Director Scott Woodward subsequently losing his job. Gov. Jeff

Landry, who also played a role in Kelly's firing, publicly blasted Woodward for the coach's contract.

Significant concern has been voiced recently at LSU over growing buyouts for college coaches.

At a September meeting of the LSU Board of Supervisors, Vice Chairman Lee Mallett, a Landry appointee and

major campaign donor, brought up the financial impact to the university of buying out poorly performing coaches. It cost \$17 million for the university to part ways with Ed Orgeron in the middle of the 2021 season. Mallet argued LSU should be the first to break the mold and drop the buyouts.

Kelly's buyout is a significant escalation in buyout spending.

The Louisiana Illuminator and **Tiger Rag** filed a public records request with LSU for information on how much the university has spent on athletics buyout payments. The documents provided show LSU paid more than \$43 million to sever ties with two head football coaches, one athletics director, one head swimming and diving coach and 32 assistant coaches from various sports from fiscal year 2015-16 to present. That sum is more than \$10 million less than what the university owes Kelly. See the full buyout data below.

It's a common misconception among fans that buyouts are paid by the Tiger Athletic Foundation, a private organization that raises money for LSU athletics. The university's athletics department made all of the buyout payments, spokesman Zach Greenwell said.

Greenwell was unable to provide specific details about the extent private funds, if any, were used in the buyouts.

"There's no direct line between private donations and the buyouts," Greenwell said in an emailed statement. "They are all paid directly by LSU Athletics, and obviously self-generated funds and associated private funds are encompassed in athletics' budget."

While not tax dollars, the athletics department's budget, primarily fueled with self-generated revenue, is still considered public money. All public universities in Louisiana are primarily funded with self-generated funds, such as tuition and fee revenue. The spending of that revenue requires legislative approval. Of the LSU System's \$1.2 billion budget for the current fiscal year, more than \$800 million comes from self-generated revenue.

Annual spending on athletics buyouts ranged from just over \$28,000 in 2015-16 to more than \$10 million in 2021-22, when LSU paid the bulk of former head football coach Ed Orgeron's exit incentive after he was fired midway through the 2021 season for poor performance.

Too many losses on the field are typically not considered a valid reason for a school to waive the buyout clause of a coach's contract.

Another \$4.47 million was paid to former head football coach Les Miles, who was fired in 2016. LSU previously announced the coach had agreed to settle for a lump sum of \$1.5 million instead of the full \$6.5 million he was owed.

While the bulk of LSU's buyouts went to football coaches, just under \$1.5 million went to coaches or assistants in other sports and former athletics director Joe Alleva.

Alleva received payments totalling \$840,000 spread over four years following his departure, after which he was appointed to a position advising then LSU President F. King Alexander. Though his departure was framed as a resignation, his contract did not guarantee any form of buyout unless he was fired without cause.

[cont. next page](#)



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Former men's basketball assistants Randy Livingston, Robert Kirby and Lauren Green collectively received buyout payments totaling more than \$401,000 during the ten-year period. Former women's basketball assistant Anthony Perotti received around \$28,000.

Former swimming and diving head coach Dave Geyer received payments from 2021-23 totalling \$203,500.

- *Piper Hutchinson*

PAUL SKENES BECOMES FIRST FORMER LSU PITCHER EVER TO WIN CY YOUNG AWARD

Pittsburgh Pirates ace right-hander Paul Skenes became the first former LSU pitcher to claim the Cy Young Award, winning it for the National League after compiling a 10-10 record with a Major League Baseball best 1.96 earned run average for a last place club.

Skenes had 216 strikeouts in 187 and two-thirds innings pitched for the Pirates, who finished fifth of five teams in the National League Central at 71-91. He heard his name as the Cy Young winner with his girlfriend Livvy Dunne, a former LSU gymnast, next to him.

Detroit Tigers left-hander Tarik Skubal (13-6, 2.12 ERA, 241 strikeouts in 195 and a third innings) won it for the American League.

Skenes, who helped lead LSU to the 2023 NCAA College World Series national title and was the CWS MVP, was the National League Rookie of the Year in 2024 after going 11-3 with a 1.96 ERA and 170 strikeouts in 133 innings.

A native of Lake Forest, Calif., Skenes was also a National League Cy Young Award finalist in 2024 and finished third in last season's voting.

The Pirates phenom's 216 strikeouts were tied for second in the National League.

Skenes is the third former LSU pitcher to become a Cy Young Award finalist,

joining Philadelphia right-hander Aaron Nola, who finished third in the 2018 National League Cy Young voting, and Toronto right-hander Kevin Gausman, who finished third in the 2023 American League Cy Young voting.

"I mean, I love Paul," LSU coach Jay Johnson said on Tiger Rag Radio the Tuesday night before the award was presented. "You talk about a life changing and program altering player, he's the definition of that. And he's such a good representative of himself, of his family, of LSU, of LSU Baseball that you want nothing but the very best for him. And it's so great that he's so awesome. I don't see how he doesn't win it. We're proud to be a part of that."

According to reports, Skenes has been desiring a trade to the New York Yankees as the Pirates have finished last two years in a row. They were 76-86 in 2024. The Pirates' management, though, is saying Skenes will still be a Pirate in 2026.

- *Glenn Guilbeau* **TR**

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COLD, FLU, AND COVID: HOW TO PREPARE THIS SEASON

RUBIN PATEL, MD | PATIENT PLUS URGENT CARE

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD) is one of the most common viral illnesses seen in urgent care - especially in young children. Although the name sounds intimidating, HFMD is typically a mild, self-limited infection that most children recover from quickly with supportive care. Knowing what to look for and when to seek medical attention can help your child recover smoothly and safely.

Recognize the Symptoms Early

HFMD has a very characteristic pattern, but children can show symptoms differently. Understanding what to expect helps parents catch it early and monitor for complications:

- A fever that may come on quickly and cause decreased appetite or irritability
- Painful mouth sores on the tongue, gums, or inner cheeks that make drinking and eating difficult
- Rash or blisters on the hands, feet, and around the mouth. Some children may also develop spots on the arms, legs, or buttocks
- General viral symptoms such as sore throat, runny nose, headache, or fatigue

Because the mouth sores can be especially painful, refusing to drink is one of the biggest concerns caregivers should watch for.

Understand How It Spreads

HFMD is highly contagious, especially in daycares, schools, and households. The virus spreads through:

- Respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing
- Saliva
- Close contact with fluid from blisters
- Diapers or stool
- Shared surfaces, toys, and objects

While you can't remove all risk, knowing how it spreads can help you take simple steps to protect your family.

Support and Recovery at Home

There is no cure for HFMD, but supportive care goes a long way in keeping children comfortable as they heal. At home, aim to:

- Encourage plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration
- Offer cool, soft foods that are gentle on sore mouths
- Use age-appropriate fever reducers and pain relievers
- Avoid spicy, acidic, or salty foods while mouth sores are present
- Let your child rest as needed

Most children begin improving within 3-5 days, and rashes typically clear within a week.

When to Seek Medical Care

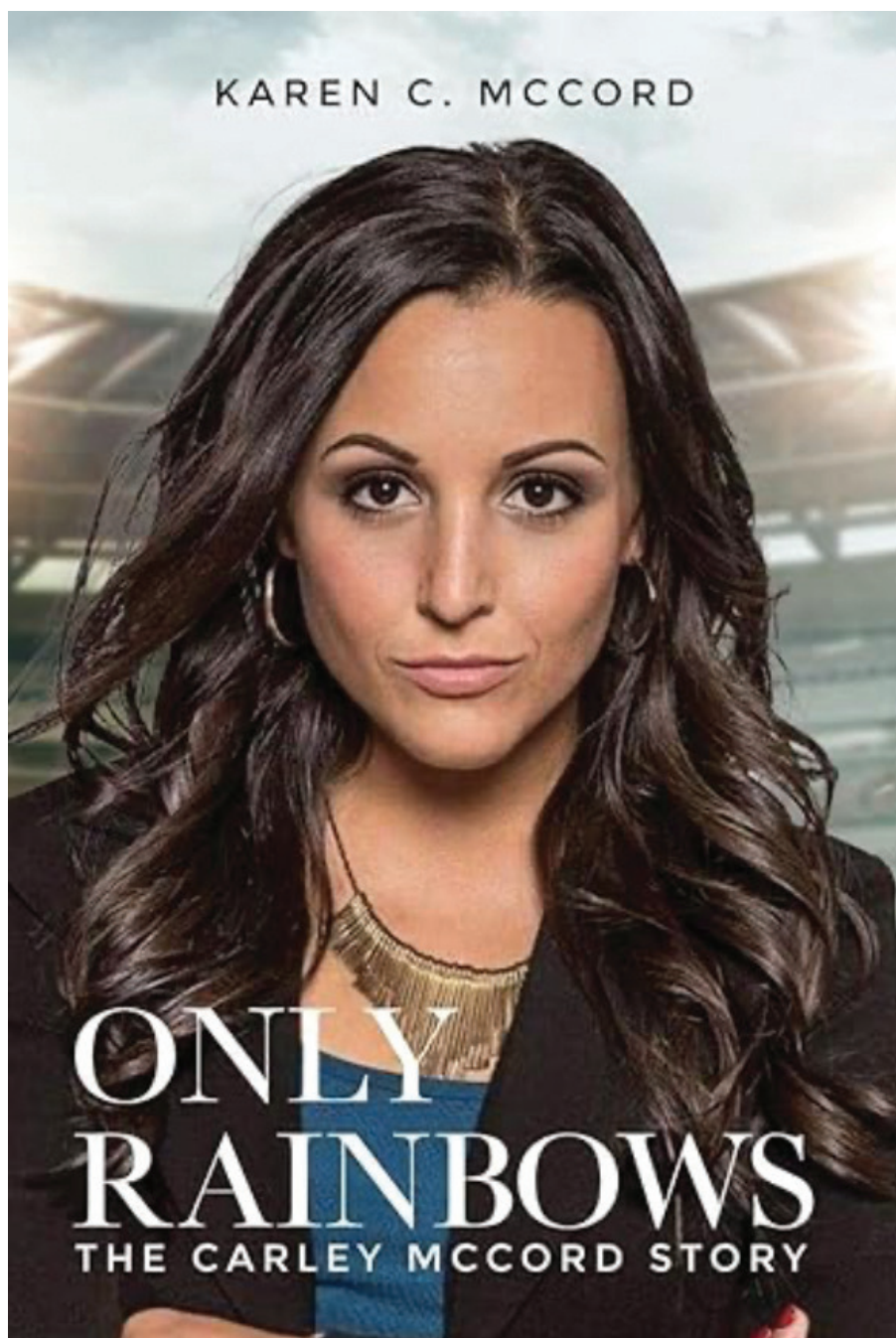
While HFMD is usually mild, certain symptoms mean it's time for a professional evaluation. It's time to seek medical care if your child has:

- Signs of dehydration (dry mouth, fewer wet diapers, no tears)
- Refusal to drink due to mouth pain
- Fever lasting more than three days
- Rapidly worsening or infected-looking rash
- Unusual fatigue or difficulty waking

Medical providers can confirm the diagnosis, assess hydration status, rule out look-alike conditions (such as strep or impetigo), and help manage discomfort.

The Bottom Line

HFMD can be uncomfortable, especially when mouth sores make eating and drinking difficult, but most children recover quickly with supportive care. Staying aware of the symptoms, practicing good hygiene, and knowing when to seek medical attention can help your child feel better faster. If you have concerns or need guidance, Patient Plus Urgent Care is here to help with quick evaluations and reliable care - seven days a week.



ONLY RAINBOWS THE CARLEY MCCORD STORY

BOOK WILL TAKE LSU FANS BACK TO THE TIGERS' WONDERFUL 2019
NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON ... BUT AMID TRAGEDY

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

The Christmas holidays can be hectic, which is why settling in with a good book can dial that down in a way.

Reading "Only Rainbows: The Carley McCord Story" will do that for LSU fans and non-fans.

McCord, 30, was a rising star in sports TV journalism who died in a plane crash with four others on Dec. 28, 2019, in Lafayette, on their way to the LSU-Oklahoma national semi-final College Football Playoff game in Atlanta.

The four others who died in the crash were pilot Ian Biggs, 51, Robert Vaughn Crisp II, 59, Gretchen D. Vincent, 51, and Michael Walker Vincent, 15.

The Tigers went on to win the national championship, but with a heavy heart as many within and around the program knew Carley, who was married to LSU offensive coordinator Steve Ensminger's son, Steven Ensminger Jr.

Carley's mother, Karen C. McCord, wrote the book that is available via Amazon.com and can be ordered at Barnes & Noble stores and via the publisher – PalmettoPublishing.com.

"In this poignant memoir, Karen C. McCord invites readers on an emotional journey through Carley's vibrant life," a release on the book says. "From her relentless pursuit of love and her dream career as a sportscaster to her work with iconic teams like the Saints, Pelicans, LSU and the Cleveland Browns, Carley's story is a tapestry woven with laughter, tears and inspiration."

McCord told Tiger Rag that her daughter "never worked a day in her life" because she loved and enjoyed working in sports TV so much.

"The book features heartfelt stories and interviews with over 100 influential figures, including Sean Payton and Shaquille O'Neal," the release says. "This memoir beautifully captures Carley's indomitable spirit and the profound impact she had on those around her. Discover how she revered trailblazing reporters such as Erin Andrews and Michelle Tafoya while forging her own path in a male-dominated industry, driven by unwavering faith and determination." **TR**



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PAUL BYRD

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HAPPY 63RD BIRTHDAY TO FORMER
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER

JEFF WICKERSHAM



12/10

HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY TO
FORMER LSU ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

CARL MADDOX

12/10

HAPPY 29TH BIRTHDAY TO
FORMER LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER

JOE BURROW



12/12

HAPPY 93RD BIRTHDAY TO FORMER
LSU BASKETBALL PLAYER

BOB PETTIT

12/18

HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER

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Paul Gervase
Photo by: MLB.com

FORMER LSU PITCHER PAUL GERVASE JOINED ELITE COMPANY WHEN HIS LOS ANGELES DODGERS WON THE FALL CLASSIC

19 FORMER TIGERS HAVE PLAYED ON, MANAGED,
OR COACHED MLB WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS

By BILL FRANQUES, LSU Sports Information Department
(Special To Tiger Rag Magazine)

Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Paul Gervase became the 19th former LSU Tiger to claim a World Series ring when the Dodgers defeated the Toronto Blue Jays, 5-4, in 11 innings on Nov. 1 to win the 2025 Fall Classic.

The Dodgers' title marks the fourth straight season in which a former Tiger has been part of a Major League Baseball World Series champion – infielder Alex Bregman (Houston Astros, 2022), infielder Josh Smith (Texas Rangers, 2023),

catcher Hunter Feduccia (Los Angeles Dodgers, 2024) and Gervase.

Nineteen former LSU Tigers have played for, managed, or coached World Series champions on 24 occasions,

beginning with Lake Charles infielder Alvin Dark of the New York Giants in 1954.

Since 1990, 45 former Tigers have been on MLB playoff teams, and 16 former players became World Series champions in that span (1990-2025).

Gervase, who made his MLB debut in June with the Tampa Bay Rays, was traded to the Dodgers on July 31 by Tampa. He made his first appearance with Los Angeles on August 20 against the Colorado Rockies.

A right-hander from Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina, Gervase was a 12th round pick of the New York Mets in 2022 before a trade to the Rays in 2024.

Gervase pitched at LSU in 2022 in coach Jay Johnson's first season. As a closer, he went 4-1 with six saves and a 1.85 ERA with 52 strikeouts and 15 walks. He earned a save and a win in the NCAA Regional in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with a 0.00 ERA.

LSU's MLB World Series champs:

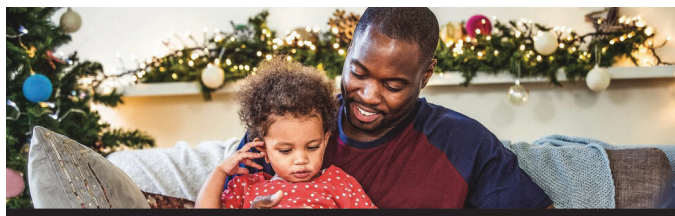
- INF Alvin Dark, New York Giants – 1954 (Player); Oakland Athletics – 1974 (Manager)
- 1B Joe Bill Adcock, Milwaukee Braves – 1957
- Third Base Coach Connie Ryan, Milwaukee Braves – 1957
- LHP Mark Guthrie, Minnesota Twins – 1991
- LHP Eddie Yarnall, New York Yankees – 1999 and 2000
- LHP Randy Keisler, New York Yankees – 2000
- RHP Russ Springer, Arizona Diamondbacks – 2001
- RHP Curtis Leskanic, Boston Red Sox – 2004
- RHP Brian Wilson, San Francisco Giants – 2010 and 2012
- INF Mike Fontenot, San Francisco Giants – 2010
- LHP Brian Tallet, St. Louis Cardinals – 2011
- INF Ryan Theriot, St. Louis Cardinals – 2011; San Francisco – 2012
- RHP Louis Coleman, Kansas City Royals – 2015
- 3B Alex Bregman, Houston Astros – 2017 and 2022
- RHP Will Harris, Houston Astros – 2017
- OF Andrew Stevenson, Washington Nationals – 2019
- INF Josh Smith, Texas Rangers – 2023
- C Hunter Feduccia, Los Angeles Dodgers – 2024
- RHP Paul Gervase, Los Angeles Dodgers – 2025

JAYDEN DANIELS INJURY

Former LSU Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jayden Daniels was not expected to play again until late in the season for Washington after dislocating his left elbow in a 38-14 loss to Seattle on Nov. 2.

The 2024 NFL Rookie of the Year had already missed three games with knee and hamstring injuries, yet Washington coach Dan Quinn had him playing late while down 38-7. Daniels scrambled and was injured.

"It'll knock him out for a while, sure," Quinn said. "That is 100 percent on me." **TR**



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HIGH FIVE? SEC ONE FIRING FROM RECORD

WITH SAM PITTMAN, BRIAN KELLY, HUGH FREEZE
AND BILLY NAPIER OUT IN 2025, WHO WILL BE NEXT?

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

On the eve of what was believed to be the first Interim Bowl in Southeastern Conference football history between LSU and Arkansas on Nov. 15, former LSU coach Ed Orgeron made an interesting point.

Since Orgeron is one of the greatest, big time interim coaches in college football history with a combined 12-4 record

at USC and LSU in 2013 and 2016, respectively, with a 10-3 conference record to boot in the Pac-12 (6-1) and SEC (4-2), he was the man to ask about the Interim Bowl.

"I don't believe I ever coached against another interim coach when I was an interim," Orgeron told Tiger Rag as LSU's Frank Wilson and Arkansas

Bobby Petrino prepared to meet in Tiger Stadium.

"But the way things are going, it may become normal," Orgeron said.

More and more in recent years, coaches are being fired during the season, which means more coaches are getting the interim title. So, it was bound to happen.

Wilson replaced fired LSU coach Brian Kelly on Oct. 26. Petrino replaced fired Arkansas coach Sam Pittman on Sept. 28.

"I didn't think about that," Wilson said when asked about being a part of odd history.

It was the first "bowl" game in Tiger Stadium since Western Kentucky beat New Hampshire, 14-3, on Dec. 6, 1975, in a Division II semifinal in the Grantland Rice Bowl. Wow, a bowl named after one of the greatest sports-writers ever.

Other in-season SEC firings this season happened at Florida, where former LSU assistant Billy Gonzales replaced Billy Napier, and at Auburn, where defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin replaced Hugh Freeze. There are no upcoming Interim Bowls on either's schedule at the moment, however.

If Kentucky coach Mark Stoops or South Carolina's Shane Beamer - both on the hot seat with losing records or close to it as the regular season grew late - get fired, the SEC will break its record of four firings in one season. The record of four firings has been set four times - 2025, 2020, 2019 and 2017.

Information is sketchy on previous Interim Bowls nationally and in the SEC, but surely they had to have happened at least once or twice over the last 100 or so years.

There was that Big Ten Baggage Bowl back in 2023 between Michigan and Michigan State, which was an almost Interim Bowl. Michigan had four interim coaches that season as then-head coach Jim Harbaugh was suspended for the first three games of the season for an NCAA violation, and Michigan used four interims for those three games, including one per half in one of the games.

And one of those three - Sherrone Moore - was interim for the last three regular season games as Harbaugh got suspended again for that scouting scandal. But when Michigan played Michigan State under interim Harlon Barnett, who had replaced the fired Mel Tucker (a former LSU assistant) over a sexual harassment case, Michigan had Harbaugh on the sidelines.

The SEC quickly said it wasn't looking anything up concerning previous Interim Bowls. "Nothing remotely we'd ever keep data on," a spokesman said.

Well, you're no fun, especially since the SEC has only been around since 1933. And, hey, this Interim Bowl is no less meaningful than the SEC Championship Game since the 12-team playoff started last year! Go look that up, pal!

And Interim Bowls could be a thing soon, as Coach O said.

Circle Nov. 29 on your schedule.

Florida State coach Mike Norvell was on the hot seat after a 4-5 (1-5 ACC) start this season. He was expected to be reevaluated after the season, but than can change before the Seminoles play at Florida on Nov. 29. That would be the second Interim Bowl in one season involving an SEC team.

And remember, the SEC just means more - as in firings and interims. **TR**

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Nick Saban. Tiger Rag File Photo

• DECEMBER 7, 1999 •

SUDDENLY SABAN

MICHIGAN STATE COACH LURED TO LSU FOR \$1.2 MILLION A YEAR

By FLYNN FOSTER AND GREG LAROSE

“For the past couple of weeks I have been asked what kind of coach we were looking for to lead LSU’s football program in the 21st century,” LSU chancellor Mark Emmert began at a press conference in the LSU athletic

administration building on Tuesday, Nov. 30, 1999.

“I have said on a number of occasions that we were only interested in a coach that brought us to a number of essential qualities, talents and personal attri-

butes,” Emmert continued. “We were looking for a coach who had been able to demonstrate success at the most competitive levels of football.

“Someone in the end that not just wanted to win games, but also build a program

that would sustain excellence over the years. In short, we've been searching for someone that all of Louisiana could turn to with great pride and great confidence. Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you the new coach of the LSU Tigers, Nick Saban."

With those words Emmert welcomed Nick Saban, to the podium as the 31st head coach of the LSU football program. It marked the culmination of a week-long whirlwind.

Between Thanksgiving and Nov. 30, Emmert and LSU administrators came to the table with a five-year, \$6.25 million package to lure Saban away from Michigan State.

LSU's hiring of Saban was unusual in that he was not a second-tier coach that the search committee had to fall back to, such as Curley Hallman and Gerry DiNardo when the A-list candidates fell by the wayside. In fact, he was the first candidate to receive an offer from Emmert.

So how did Saban arrive at LSU last week? Call it good timing.

With LSU officials putting out feelers for potential coaching candidates, Saban took a call from Gil Brandt, a former executive with the Dallas Cowboys who is a consultant in football circles. Back in 1990, it was Brandt who forwarded a hearty recommendation for Hallman to LSU athletic director Joe Dean. Despite Hallman's demise, LSU officials conferred with Brandt again.

Brandt actually called Saban to discuss the East-West Shrine Game, where Saban would be assisting Florida coach Steve Spurrier, and he mentioned the LSU job. Saban expressed an interest and contacted LSU officials through his agent, Jimmy Sexton of Memphis.

On Thanksgiving, Emmert and LSU representatives met with Saban and Sexton to discuss the job. LSU athletic director Joe Dean was not involved significantly at all.

The role Dean played can best be described as a facilitator. He took a back seat to Emmert, knowing Saban's tenure with LSU would outlast his own. Dean's status beyond the end of his contract in 2000 is up in the air.

Negotiations lasted through the weekend, but Saban had an offer to consider

by late Sunday when he headed back to East Lansing, Michigan. On Monday, Saban put his wife Terry on a plane to Baton Rouge, where she spent the day with Emmert's wife. Internet reports surfaced later that day labeling Saban as the leading candidate for the job. LSU officials were tight-lipped about their new coach, respecting his request to break the news to his staff and players before they heard it elsewhere.

Saban met with his players early Tuesday to confirm he was taking the LSU

job and was on a plane to Baton Rouge to formally accept the offer.

"I think the first thing that I would like to say to Tiger fans and supporters everywhere, to the players who have made the tradition of LSU football what it is today," Saban opened. "This is your program. This is your team and I am very happy to be your coach."

(For the complete story, go to the Tigerrag.com website.) **TR**

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Verge Ausberry
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

LSU ATHLETIC DIRECTOR
VERGE AUSBERRY
SPELLS OUT HIS PROCESS TO FIND
A NEW FOOTBALL COACH WITH TIGER RAG

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry appeared on statewide Tiger Rag Radio on Tuesday, Nov. 4, on the same day he was promoted from the interim position by incoming president Wade Rousse.

On Thursday, Oct. 30, Ausberry, 58, was named interim athletic director when LSU fired Scott Woodward. Woodward had fired LSU head football coach Brian Kelly on Oct. 26. It was Woodward who hired Kelly after the 2021 season from Notre Dame to a 10-year, \$100 million contract that has a \$52 million buyout. That figure has been under negotiation since Kelly's firing a day after falling out of playoff contention for the fourth year of his four years on the job.

Ausberry, a New Iberia native, played linebacker at LSU from 1986-89 and was part of two Southeastern Conference championship teams in '86 and '88. He began working in the athletic department in 1991 and moved up the ranks to key assistant and associate athletic director posts. In 2019, he was named executive deputy athletic director.

He worked closely with LSU's hierarchy during the last four football head coaching hires – Nick Saban in 1999 by LSU chancellor Mark Emmert and athletic director Joe Dean, Les Miles in 2005 by athletic director Skip Bertman, Ed Orgeron in 2015 by athletic director Joe Alleva and Kelly in 2021 by Woodward.

TIGER RAG: How does it feel being the leader of this athletic department, something you've known for most of your adult life?

VERGE AUSBERRY: It's an easy transition. Just making sure the people in our department are comfortable, and the department is stable. Moving forward positively, and making sure all of our constituents know what's going on. The first thing I need to do is get the football coach in here. We've been having great success with contacts, and people are talking to us. And there is a lot of interest in this position.

TR: What's your timeline for naming Brian Kelly's successor?

AUSBERRY: We really don't have a timeline. You let the process take its course, and we started that pretty much on that Sunday (Oct. 26). Now we have Dr. Wade Rousse here, our president, and that's perfect. We have our committee, and he's a part of that. So, excited to have him here, and I'll be working side by side

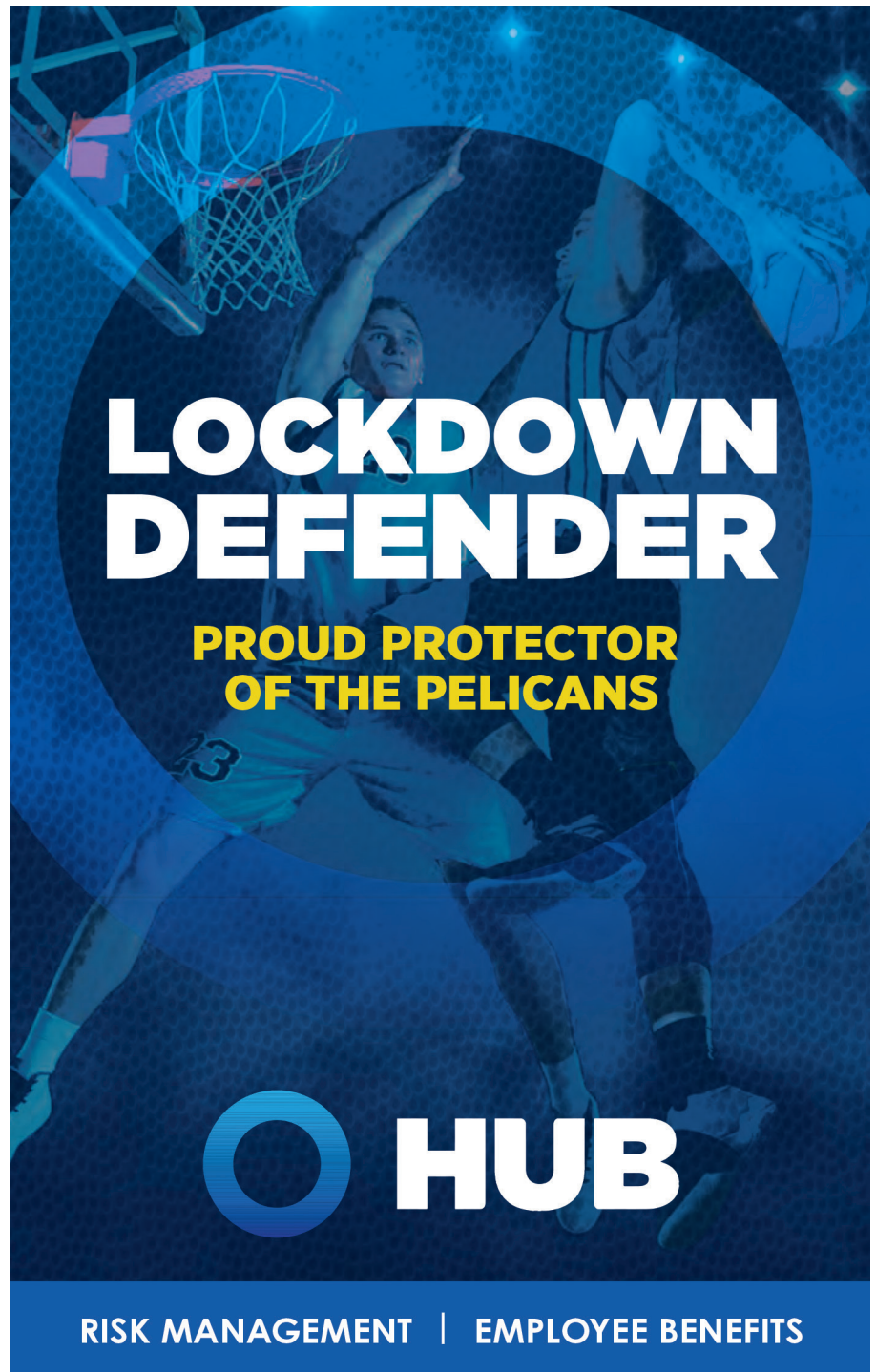
with him to get this done. We have Dr. James Dalton, the new chancellor. We have alignment as far as our process and timing. Now, we just have to go find the right person – the right coach to lead this great program. You have to find the right fit, and it just takes time.

TR: If you hire a coach who will be coaching his present team in the playoffs into January, do you feel confident that interim coach Frank Wilson can keep the recruiting class for 2026 together and go through the

early signing period (Dec. 3-5), the second signing day (Feb. 4) and the NCAA Transfer Portal window (Jan. 2-16)?

AUSBERRY: We're going to have something in place with Frank Wilson. Frank has done a great job holding this program together. You don't see any guys opting out or saying they're not going to play and sit out. You look at all our recruits (16 commitments in November for the No. 12-ranked class by 247sports.com) for the next class, and they're

[cont. next page](#)



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Verge Ausberry, Wade Rousse, Frank Wilson. Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

holding strong. That's important. So, Frank Wilson is a big part of this puzzle we're putting together. Then we're going to see how it plays out.

TR: What are you prioritizing as you look for a head coach?

AUSBERRY: A good fit, one that can relate to the players, can relate to the people, have a presence in Louisiana and in our area. A person who can lead the program, can hire staff. Our world has changed. We have NIL, we have agents, we have the portal. What we're trying to do is help the new coach when he comes in by having the mechanisms in place that make sure he's successful. That's the most important thing – how we set up. Are we doing everything it takes to help him be the best he needs to be?

And then, just a guy who fits with us, fits what we do out here, and good communication. We want the players to have fun. They need to enjoy themselves. And leadership. How does the coach manage the recruiting, the NIL deals? How does he manage the team, practices? Somebody who has a great command of the program, a leader of the program, where he has to be there day to day. He has to be the guy who

runs that program. That's the type of coach we're looking for.

And LSU needs to be in that conversation for the 12-team playoff. I'm not saying every year you need to win a national championship or win the SEC, but you've got to be consistent. LSU needs to be in that position, if we're going to move forward.

TR: You have always had a lot of respect for former LSU coach Nick Saban. Is he a guy you would call for advice on the coaches he thinks would be great at LSU, or have you called him?

AUSBERRY: Nick and I talk about every two weeks anyway. That's a standing conversation we have. The first thing I told him was, 'I'll come and pick you up to be the head coach.' He laughed. So, that's not part of the deal, and he says that Miss Terry (Saban's wife) is not going anywhere. Coach is a guy I talk to, and there are lots of others I talk to. But coach Saban has so much knowledge about the game. He's traveling, working for ESPN, so he can get the feel on a lot of things, gets to talk to a lot of coaches. He gets to observe a lot, and say like, 'This guy would be a fit.' That's one of the questions I always ask him, 'Coach Saban, what's it take to coach at LSU? What's it take to coach at Alabama?' And

he always says, 'LSU is a two-hands-on-an-18-wheeler-type job. You take your hands off the wheel, and you'll flip the truck over.' So, it's so important to get the right fit. How do you get your players to buy in? You look at the body language of players. That's important. Are they connected to the head coach? Anybody can teach, but are they learning what you teach? That's what we're looking for."

TR: This is not the first LSU coaching hire to be surrounded by controversy and politics. Will Governor Jeff Landry getting involved in the ouster of Scott Woodward and possibly other football matters in the future hurt your search for a coach?

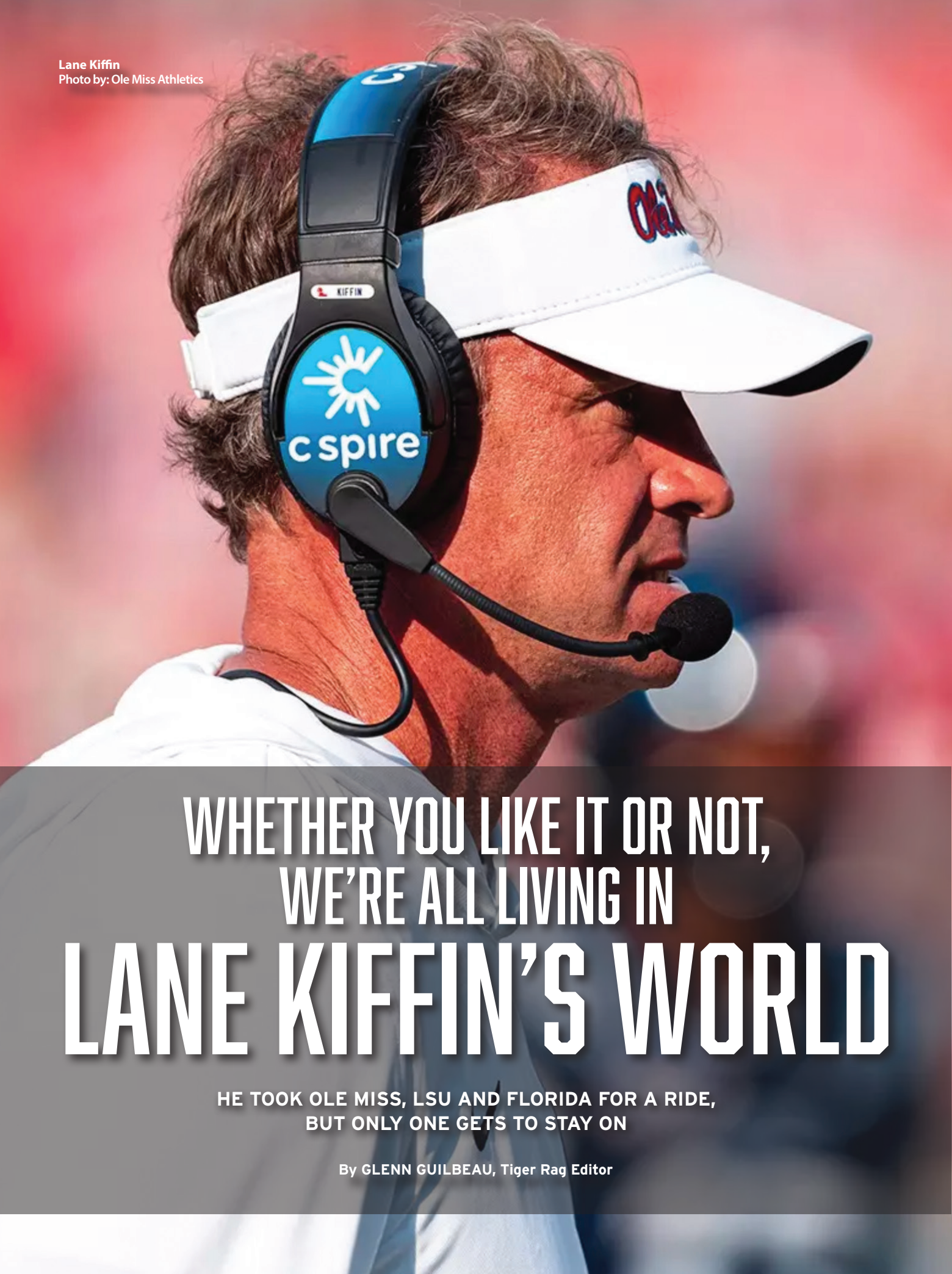
AUSBERRY: Football coaches coach. They have a job to do. If you win, there's no problem. If your teams play well, and you do what you're supposed to, then there's not going to be any politics involved. It's winning and losing. When we made the change with Brian Kelly, it wasn't about politics. It was about we saw the program needing a change and needed to be better than what we were seeing on Saturday nights. I don't think politics are involved with this here. **TR**



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Lane Kiffin
Photo by: Ole Miss Athletics



WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'RE ALL LIVING IN LANE KIFFIN'S WORLD

HE TOOK OLE MISS, LSU AND FLORIDA FOR A RIDE,
BUT ONLY ONE GETS TO STAY ON

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Well, at least Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin didn't pull a Nick Saban by insisting on repeating in interviews that he was going to stay at Ole Miss ... then leave for LSU or Florida after the season.

That's what Saban did late in the 2006 season when he was the Miami Dolphins coach as questions were repeatedly asked about his candidacy for the Alabama coaching job.

"I guess I have to say it," Saban said to yet another question about the Alabama job on Dec. 21, 2006, at a Dolphins press conference. "I'm not going to be the Alabama coach."

On Jan. 3, 2007, Saban became the Alabama coach. He later said he wanted to keep the fact that he was deciding upon the Alabama job out of the public so he wouldn't lose the Dolphins' locker room after a 9-7 season in his first year as coach in Miami after leaving LSU. Miami lost four of its last five anyway to finish 6-10.

At the Southeastern Conference Media Days in Hoover, Alabama, that next summer, he said he could've handled all that better.

Now, almost 20 years later, Saban was trying to convince Kiffin to take the LSU job in mid-November, as Kiffin was deciding if he would leave Ole Miss and go to either LSU or Florida.

Kiffin has been using a different strategy at Ole Miss than Saban's at Miami. He didn't spend time denying that was considering leaving Ole Miss after six seasons to be the coach at LSU

or Florida. He also didn't spend time confirming that he was considering leaving. He kind of just left virtually everything alone and went on his merry way as only the Lane Train can.

"Man, we're having a blast," he said on the Pat McAfee Show on ESPN on Nov. 18 amid his three-pronged decision process involving Ole Miss, LSU and Florida. "I love it here."

Ole Miss, which was 10-1 (6-1 in the SEC) and No. 5 in the nation as it headed into its regular season finale at Mississippi State (5-6, 1-6 SEC) on Nov. 28, should have been enjoying it all.

The Rebels were a cinch to reach their first College Football Playoff. So, considering much of Ole Miss' past, that is rare air, and that's how it's been at Ole Miss under Kiffin since 2021 for the most part.

How angry could Ole Miss fans legitimately be at Kiffin for making them sweat or for leaving?

"It just couldn't be better," Kiffin said as he pondered his decision. "You pray for things. Our fans prayed for this type of thing, and now we're in the middle of it. So, enjoy it. You're 10-1."

Even if Kiffin left or leaves, he left or will leave Ole Miss better.

And that was Kiffin's fourth season of 10 wins or more in the last five years of his six at Ole Miss. The Rebels have never had more to yell about. So, they can't be too mad if he is suddenly LSU's or Florida's coach.

The last time Ole Miss came close to bunching together so many dou-

ble-digit-win seasons was when legendary coach Johnny Vaught had four such seasons from 1955-62.

A source close to LSU told Tiger Rag that Kiffin should go to LSU if he wants to win a national championship. Really? With LSU's roster, when would that be? Probably 2028 at the earliest.

Kiffin built a national championship at Ole Miss for this season.

Kiffin did deny one report that circulated during his decision period.

"That's absolutely not true," Kiffin told McAfee when asked about reports that Ole Miss gave him a deadline of the Mississippi State game on Nov. 28 to decide. "There has been no ultimatum, anything like that at all. So, I don't know where that came from, like a lot of stuff that comes out."

Ole Miss didn't want a lame duck coach directing its team in the playoffs while preparing to coach another team. Would Kiffin be asking Ole Miss players to join him at his new job? Would he be recruiting for that job in between Rebel practices?

But Ole Miss couldn't give Kiffin a deadline. It may think it did or could, but it had no leverage.

Because it was always Lane Kiffin's world, and all of us – Ole Miss, LSU, Florida and anyone with a vested or emotional interest – were just passengers on the Lane Leverage Train, waiting to see how we would live after he decided how he would.

Nice work, if you can get it ... or leave it. **TR**



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FORMER LSU COACH BRIAN KELLY SUING LSU FOR COMPLETE BUYOUT

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Former LSU football coach Brian Kelly and his lead attorney Bennett Speyer of Toledo, Ohio, filed a lawsuit on Monday, Nov. 10, against LSU seeking Kelly's full, \$54 million buyout after his firing by then-LSU athletic director Scott Woodward on Oct. 26 in the fourth year of a 10-year, \$100 million contract.

The suit filed in the 19th Judicial District of East Baton Rouge Parish came after LSU attorneys let pass a 5 p.m. deadline that Monday submitted by Kelly and team requesting LSU confirm it will "fulfill its contractual obligation" to pay the entire buyout to Kelly.

Kelly previously turned down settlement offers of \$25 million, then \$30 million.

LSU not answering that request meant LSU doesn't wish to pay the full buyout, and is now saying it wants to fire Kelly with cause, which means it would not owe him the buyout. The original firing had all the traits of one without cause, which meant Kelly would get the full buyout, or close to it.

There had been media speculation via LSU's side that LSU expected to get Kelly's buyout down to \$27 million via negotiations because of a clause in Kelly's contract under the "Termination and Suspension" title.

The agreement may be terminated by LSU at any time for cause, which includes:

"Engaging in serious misconduct, which either displays a continual, serious disrespect or continual, serious disregard for the mission of LSU, brings employee into substantial public disrepute sufficient – at the discretion of LSU – in a manner sufficient to materially impair employee's ability to perform his obligations, or constitutes moral turpitude and breaches his high moral and ethical standards applicable to him as a visible representative of LSU."

The courts may have to decide a settlement if the parties do not. **TR**

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A DAGGER WILL DO YOU

LSU WENT ALL SHAKESPEAREAN IN A BLOODY FINAL WEEK OF OCTOBER THAT SAW BRIAN KELLY, JOE SLOAN AND SCOTT WOODWARD FIRED IN A COUP D' E'TAT FOR THE AGES

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Call LSU ... Louisiana ... Shakespearean ... University.

On the day after his 64th birthday, LSU football coach Brian Kelly got the proverbial knife on Sunday, Oct. 26,

by imperial LSU athletic director Scott Woodward, who fired him.

The next day, LSU offensive coordinator Joe Sloan was fired.

And Woodward, in turn, got the blade four days later on Thursday night from the LSU Board of Supervisors after a strong suggestion by Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry to finish Woodward

the previous Sunday in the Mansion to LSU officials.

And the coup d'etat was complete.

Landry had sharpened his blade for Woodward that Wednesday at a press conference at the State Capitol called to discuss the plight of SNAP – the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – because of President Donald Trump's government shutdown. But it quickly turned to football.

First, Landry called Woodward's \$100 million, 10-year contract for Kelly back in 2021 "terrible," mainly because of its \$52.3 million buyout owed to Kelly.

Then he was emphatic when asked if Woodward would hire the next coach.

"No, I can tell you right now, Scott Woodward will not be selecting the next coach. Hell, I'll let Donald Trump select him before I let him do it," Landry said.

And the writing was on the wall ... in blood.

Less than 24 hours later, Woodward was fired.

Such is LSU. And in a snap, Kelly and Woodward – two of the most powerful men at LSU – were gone.

The previous turning, or coup d'etat, happened over the ides of April, 2019. That's when Baton Rouge business magazine Richard Lipsey, a major LSU power broker since the 1980s who founded the Tiger Athletic Foundation to fund athletics, ousted athletic director Joe Alleva. Then he brought his old family friend, Scott Woodward, from the athletic director post at Texas A&M.

But just four months after Woodward celebrated the second baseball national championship won by his hire - coach Jay Johnson - and fourth national title overall by his hires, and Woodward was out.

Woodward rarely came into the office, rarely did interviews, and ruled with power and strength through athletic, university and political circles he had navigated throughout his professional life since the 1980s, all while basically answering to no one as LSU's AD ... until late October, that is.

Woodward's fatal flaw was the largesse of his contracts for football coaches – Jimbo Fisher at Texas A&M when he

was AD there and then Kelly at LSU. Both coaches failed miserably, but millions in buyout money waited for each.

Fisher was fired in 2023 - four years after Woodward left A&M - and walked away with a \$76 million buyout. Woodward was still in the books for approximately \$40 million of that because of his 10-year, \$75 million contract to Fisher in 2018.

**"NO, I CAN TELL YOU RIGHT NOW,
SCOTT WOODWARD WILL NOT BE
SELECTING THE NEXT COACH. HELL,
I'LL LET DONALD TRUMP SELECT HIM
BEFORE I LET HIM DO IT,"**

- GOVERNOR JEFF LANDRY

At least Fisher won a national title at Florida State before Woodward gave him a golden parachute. Kelly got a national championship contract from Woodward, without winning one, and never made the playoffs in four seasons. Even if LSU negotiates Kelly from a \$52.3 million buyout to its targeted \$27 million for Kelly's off-field behavior, that is still a huge chunk. The negotiation effort by LSU also illustrates that Woodward should have investigated Kelly's off-field behavior more before hiring him.

Verge Ausberry, an LSU athletic department veteran since 1991, replaced Woodward on an interim basis immediately after Woodward's firing. Ausberry has been qualified and has deserved to be LSU's AD for several years already. The former LSU linebacker from New Iberia knows the ins and outs of LSU's athletic department. You might say he knows where the bodies are buried, and may have buried one or two.

He joined the LSU athletic department in 1991 as an intern in the compliance office. Over 35 years, he served the Tigers in areas including academics, fundraising, corporate relations, marketing, game management, sport ad-

ministration, life skills, sports medicine and performance, equipment and alumni relations and football scheduling.

In 2019, he was promoted to the role of Executive Deputy Athletic Director, as well as Executive Director of External Relations. In the latter role, he assists the Office of the President in external and governmental relations.

In 2021, Ausberry was suspended from LSU for 30 days and ordered to take training on sexual misconduct and domestic violence for not reporting cases of LSU football players being accused of sexual assault. This was after an exhaustive investigation of LSU's questionable practices toward sexual assault accusations by female students against LSU athletes by the Husch Blackwell law firm that shook the campus.

Husch Blackwell uncovered police reports that detailed former LSU wide receiver Drake Davis texting Ausberry in 2018 and admitted to getting in a fight with his girlfriend and hitting her. Ausberry never reported the claim to police or to LSU's Title IX office. Husch Blackwell termed his lack of proper response "not credible."

Ausberry got off light for a serious mistake, but this was his only blemish through 35 years in the athletic department. Still, it leaves him vulnerable for another coup d'etat sooner or later.

LSU introduced a new incoming president as November opened in Wade Rouse, formerly the McNeese State president. He immediately took the interim tag off Ausberry. Such a move would help Ausberry's coach search because prospective coaches and their agents want to know the AD – not the interim AD.

Then Rouse strangely put the interim tag back on Ausberry by saying LSU would revisit his status after the coaching hire. Then he tried to correct that by saying Ausberry was "acting" athletic director, which means exactly the same thing as "interim" athletic director.

It has already been suggested that perhaps "interim" should be put before Rouse's name.

Which means, perhaps Rouse could be a victim when LSU's next Shakespearean play turns. **TR**

DEATH VALLEY

LSU'S HELL WEEK TIMELINE: OCTOBER 25TH-30TH AND EPILOGUE: NOV. 4TH-10TH

HOW 6 DAYS FROM A SATURDAY
NIGHT IN DEATH VALLEY TO
HALLOWEEN'S EVE, AND THEN
SOME, SHOOK LSU TO ITS CORE
LIKE NEVER BEFORE

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It is hauntingly fitting that LSU's version of the "Six Days of the Condor" novel started on a Saturday night in Death Valley.

What follows is a timeline of the events of LSU's Hell Week from the night of Saturday, October 25, when LSU lost, 49-25, at home to No. 3 Texas A&M, coach Brian Kelly's firing the next day by athletic director Scott Woodward, and on through the night of Thursday, Oct. 30, when Woodward was in turn fired.

And an epilogue that takes us up to Nov. 10 when Kelly sued LSU over his buyout.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

... TIGER STADIUM

Amazingly, LSU plays its best first half of football, considering the opponent, in taking an 18-14 lead over A&M by outscoring the Aggies, 11-0, in the second quarter.

Then all Hell breaks loose.

Texas A&M's Terry Bussey returns the second half kickoff 43 yards to the Aggies' 44. The Aggies move 56 yards through the heart of LSU for a touchdown. And it's 21-18.

After a three-and-out by LSU, A&M's K.C. Concepcion returns a punt 79 yards for a touchdown and 28-18 lead with 8:42 left in the third quarter.

And it's over.

Really over for Brian Kelly, who turns 64 on this day.

No. 20 LSU drops to 5-3 overall and 2-3 in the Southeastern Conference with its second straight loss and third in four games to knock the Tigers out of the playoffs for the fourth season of four under Kelly. And he came to LSU from Notre Dame for a \$100 million contract from Woodward for 10 years that more than whispered ... multiple playoffs ... national championships.

"Our fan base should be upset. They have every right to be," Kelly says in what only a few had an inkling would be his last press conference as LSU's coach.

The few being Woodward, deputy executive athletic director Verge Ausberry and a few others, including an LSU donor or two seen passing the proverbial hat in a Tiger Stadium suite to pay Kelly's \$54 million buyout during the fourth quarter.

10:45 P.M.

"That second half was unacceptable at any level," Kelly says prophetically. "I've got to figure out the ways we can get our team to play better consistently, not just in spurts, but for four quarters."

That's his last public sentence as LSU's coach. His fourth quarter and season were up.

11:15 P.M.

Kelly meets with Woodward and other LSU officials in his Tiger Stadium office just off the locker room.

Woodward asks Kelly what changes he would make, and reportedly they quarrel over a coach or two Kelly wants to fire, but Woodward disagrees, even though he hired Kelly to make such decisions. The meeting soon ends, and they agree to meet the next morning.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26

... FOOTBALL OPERATIONS BUILDING

9 A.M.

Kelly, Woodward, Ausberry and others meet at football ops. But Woodward has already decided that Kelly is done because he doesn't think he can turn things around, and he would not have the internal and financial support (NIL) to try to do so. And Woodward tells Kelly he is fired.

Shouting can be heard outside the meeting room as Woodward and Kelly argue over Kelly's \$54 million contract buyout. Woodward tells Kelly that LSU could fire him for cause because of breaches to the moral clause in the contract. But Woodward and LSU officials offer a \$25 million lump sum settlement payment to Kelly instead. Kelly refuses. LSU raises that offer later on this same day to \$30 million. Kelly refuses.

Kelly leaves the football facility.

News breaks nationally and locally that afternoon that Kelly has been fired.

"Brian Kelly accepted his fate, but he is insisting on his full buyout," a highly connected LSU source tells Tiger Rag that night.

5:43 P.M.

Kelly sends an email, likely written by an attorney, to Woodward. (It was received

several days later by WAFB-TV investigative reporter Chris Nakamoto via a public records request and reported on air on Nov. 5.)

The complete email to Woodward, Ausberry, athletic department chief operating officer Julie Cromer and senior associate athletic director for football Austin Thomas follows:

Scott and team,

Sending a quick note to confirm that following my termination during our meeting today, I will return all LSU materials in my possession as required by my contract. Let me know if it's better for me to clean out my office, or if you would prefer to pack everything up and send it to me. I assume HR (Human Resources) will be in touch regarding any other housekeeping matters out there, but let me know if you need anything else from me in the meantime.

As we discussed in our meeting, I'm open to your desire to reach a settlement of what's owed to me under the contract, although of course it would have to make sense financially.

Despite your decision to let me go today, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to lead this program over the last four years and wish you all the best going forward.

Best,
Brian

7:58 P.M.

Kelly arrives back at the football facility.

8 P.M.

LSU's players, coaches and staff attend their last ever meeting with Brian Kelly.

8:04 P.M.

Tiger Rag staff reporter Andre Champagne and other media members film Kelly leaving the football facility, getting in his car and driving away.

8:24 P.M.

LSU's athletic department releases a story under the headline, "LSU Athletics Announces Leadership Change In Football Program," that says, "Director of Athletics Scott Woodward has made the decision to separate with football head coach Brian Kelly effective immediately."

The release states that "terms of the separation are still being negotiated," as

Kelly's email above says there are still details to work out in "the settlement."

The words "fired with cause" or "fired without cause" do not appear in the release. But other Woodward comments in the release could be interpreted as describing a firing without cause, which could mean the complete \$54 million buyout for Kelly.

"When Coach Kelly arrived at LSU four years ago, we had high hopes that he would lead us to multiple SEC and national championships during his time in Baton Rouge," Woodward says in the LSU release.

"Ultimately, the success at the level that LSU demands simply did not materialize," Woodward continues, basically spelling out a firing without cause as he is obviously discussing not winning enough.

"And I made the decision to make a change after last night's game," Woodward says. "We wish coach Kelly and his family the very best in their future endeavors. We will continue to negotiate his separation and will work toward a path that is better for both parties."

Woodward names associate head coach/running backs coach Frank Wilson interim head coach.

Also on Sunday, Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry hosts a meeting with some LSU Board of Supervisors members and other LSU officials to discuss Kelly's firing and contract. At this meeting, Landry urges that Woodward be fired.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

LSU fires offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Joe Sloan. Running game coordinator Alex Atkins takes over as play caller. Offensive analyst and former Louisiana Tech/NFL quarterback Tim Rattay becomes quarterbacks coach. Neither Woodward nor Wilson name an offensive coordinator.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28

Interim coach Frank Wilson is introduced at a press conference.

"Sometimes in the midst of chaos, there is opportunity," Wilson says. "Amid a whirlwind of confusion, there is opportunity."

In that regard, he compares the coaching firings to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Sunday morning,

Dec. 7, 1941, that brought the United States into World War II.

"If you will, to use an analogy, we've been invaded," Wilson says.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29

At a press conference called to discuss how to fund SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) during President Donald Trump's record-long federal government shutdown, Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry is asked near the end about a Sunday meeting at the Mansion and the Kelly firing and buyout.

"I hosted a meeting at the Governor's Mansion to talk about the legalities of the contract," Landry says. "My role is about the fiscal effect of firing a coach under a terrible contract."

Tiger Rag asks Landry if Woodward would be searching for and hiring the next coach, too, in light of the "terrible" contract he gave Kelly.

"No, I can tell you right now, Scott Woodward will not be selecting the next coach," Landry says. "Hell, I'll let Donald Trump select him before I let him."

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30

The LSU Board of Supervisors fires LSU athletic director Scott Woodward a day after Landry stripped Woodward of one of his highest powers – hiring a football coach – and four days after Landry reportedly told LSU officials to fire Woodward.

LSU deputy executive athletic director Verge Ausberry replaces Woodward on an interim basis.

- EPILOGUE -

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

LSU named Wade Rousse, formerly McNeese State's president, its new president. He immediately told LSU officials he would remove the interim part of Ausberry's athletic director title, thus allowing Ausberry to assure coaching candidates and their agents just who will be the LSU athletic director - him.

cont. next page

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

But a day later, Rouse told Piper Hutchinson of the Louisiana Illuminator that he regretted deciding to remove the interim part of Ausberry's title eight hours into his job and essentially says he is still interim. Then Rouse tries to correct himself, but tells WWL Radio in New Orleans later that Ausberry would be "acting" athletic director, which is the same as interim. National and local media roast the new president. Welcome to LSU!

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Also on this day, former LSU coach Brian Kelly's attorneys sent a letter to LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry and LSU Board of Supervisors athletic committee chairman John Carmouche asking for written confirmation that LSU will "fulfill its contractual obligation" to pay all of the \$54 million buyout to Kelly for being fired without cause. The letter gives LSU a 5 p.m., Monday, Nov. 10, deadline to do this.

"Absent this written confirmation by that date, coach Kelly will pursue all available legal remedies," the letter said, but adds that Kelly remains "open to any additional (settlement) offers."

In the letter, Kelly's attorneys state that LSU fired Kelly without cause during that in-person meeting on Oct. 26 that featured Woodward, Ausberry, Carmouche, executive deputy athletic director Julie Cromer and LSU associate athletic director Austin Thomas.

The letter also stated that LSU officials confirmed Kelly was fired without cause during a phone call on Monday, Oct. 27 with Ausberry, Cromer and Kelly's representatives. The letter adds that any efforts by LSU to say it is firing Kelly with cause would be "entirely baseless."

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Finally, LSU campus communications director Todd Woodward, athletic department spokesman Zach Greenwell and Ausberry confirm that Rouse changed his story again and is now saying Ausberry is THE athletic director.

Also, Kelly posted a letter on social media:

Dear Tiger Fans,

Moving to Baton Rouge four years ago, my family and I were clear. There would be no halfway. We would be all-in for LSU and for Louisiana. This journey began with great expectations with my own vision of how to get there. Sometimes the journey does not end the way we hope. The journey may have ended, but it's a journey that will stay with me and my family forever.

Geaux Tigers

-Brian Kelly

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

LSU lost at No. 4 Alabama, 20-9, under interim coach Frank Wilson in much the same way Kelly lost his three games this season with major red zone problems by the offense. The Tigers do not score a touchdown for the first time since a 29-0 loss to No. 1 Alabama in Tiger Stadium in 2018.

"Meet The New Boss ... Same As The Old Boss," Tiger Rag says.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10

LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry and Board of Supervisors athletic committee chairman John Carmouche do not respond to Kelly's attorneys' 5 p.m. deadline for written confirmation that LSU will pay Kelly's full buyout of \$54 million. (This was spelled out in a letter to Ausberry and Carmouche above under the second Nov. 5 entry above.)

Instead, LSU responded in a call Monday by saying that it is now firing Kelly for cause because he was not "formally terminated" on Oct. 26 because then-athletic director Scott Woodward was not authorized to do so. This new cause firing would mean LSU would owe Kelly nothing from his buyout.

Shortly after this call, former LSU football coach Brian Kelly and his attorneys sued LSU for his full \$54 million buyout in East Baton Rouge Parish, saying that Kelly was fired without cause.

"LSU has never claimed that Coach Kelly was terminated for cause (which would mean no buyout), and before November 10 never asserted that he engaged in any conduct (in breach of the moral clause in the contract) that would warrant such a termination," the lawsuit stated. "To the contrary, LSU repeatedly confirmed, both publicly and to Coach Kelly, that the termination was due to the team's performance, not for cause."

Stay tuned as LSU considers releasing any reasons for cause it may have. **TR**



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MEET THE NEW BOSS... SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

HAD YOU NOT KNOWN LSU HAD A NEW HEAD COACH AT ALABAMA,
YOU MAY NOT HAVE REALIZED IT

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

TUSCALOOSA, Alabama – Meet the LSU football team under the new boss ... same as the old boss.

That's from The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again" classic song, but LSU was fooled again, losing at No. 4 Alabama,

20-9, at Bryant-Denny Stadium on Nov. 8. And nothing looked very new under new interim head coach Frank Wilson.

Wilson made his debut after replacing fired head coach Brian Kelly, and little changed.

LSU lost its third straight game to fall to 5-4 and 2-4 in the SEC at the time, and looked flat and uninspired for the most part, other than some spirited play early and solid defense at times.

Quarterback Garrett Nussmeier and the Tigers also again failed to convert in the red zone for touchdowns time and again, and backup quarterback Michael Van Buren replaced Nussmeier with 6:26 to play in the third quarter with LSU down 17-6. But he could not shake the same curse.

"I thought we played hard. I thought we competed, but it was not good enough," Wilson said, then repeated a phrase made infamous by another old boss – three coaches ago.

"So, we finished second," Wilson said as Les Miles used to after losses. Not a good choice.

"We have to score touchdowns, not just field goals," Wilson said. "We'll continue to try. We'll look at what we're doing in that area – again – to see what suits us best."

Wilson wearily said "again," because Kelly had spoken about red zone issues after most games this season.

Nussmeier finished 18 of 21 for 121 yards as LSU scored no touchdowns for the first time since a 29-0 loss to Alabama in 2018. Van Buren was 5-of-11 passing for 52 yards.

Wilson then opened up a quarterback competition that would last the rest of the season. That was different.

"I haven't put that kind of thought in it right now," Wilson said when asked who his starter would be. "Right now, I just want to be there for our players to let them know we're going to be all right, to pick their heads up and we're standing by you. We're in this thing together. Decisions of depth moving forward, we're not at that stage right now."

Wilson said later he would play both quarterbacks and did not exactly offer a ringing endorsement for Nussmeier.

"I don't know that it was something necessarily that he did so bad," Wilson said when asked about the change. "We just thought that it would be an advantage."

Regardless of which quarterback was playing, LSU's offense was a microcosm of its season.

-LSU drove to the Crimson Tide 13-yard line on its first drive ... but Damian Ramos had to try a 30-yard field goal, and he missed it.

-The Tigers reached the Alabama 27 in the second quarter ... but Ramos had to kick a 37-yard field goal for a 3-3 tie.

-LSU, trailing 17-3 at the half, took the third quarter kickoff to the Alabama 9 ... but Nussmeier and company went backwards and eventually faced a 4th-and-27 and settled for a 44-yard field goal by Ramos and a 17-6 deficit.

-Van Buren drove the Tigers to a 1st-and-Goal inside the 10. But like Nussmeier, Van Buren ran backwards under pressure and got sacked for a 10-yard loss. LSU settled again for a field goal and 17-9 deficit.

"You've got to execute when you get down there," LSU center Braelin Moore

said. "Teams have been changing their coverages and blitz packages when we get in the red zone. We've struggled to pick that up."

All season.

After Nussmeier's last red zone failure, he seemed to be doing most of the talking with Wilson on the sidelines. At one point, Wilson appeared to be chewing out Nussmeier, who was looking in the distance, similar to his exchange with Kelly against Texas A&M.

Nussmeier was also animated with Wilson and receivers coach Cortez Hankton during a timeout. Wilson listened to Nussmeier, then got on the headphones with running game coordinator Alex Atkins, who was calling plays for the first time since he was offensive coordinator at North Carolina-Charlotte in 2019. Maybe this was what Nussmeier was upset about.

Wilson said there were no issues with getting the plays onto the field. Nussmeier was not at the postgame interviews.

LSU did get off to a good start on defense, but as was the case in the previous eight games under the previous head coach and offensive coordinator Joe Sloan, the offense did not reciprocate.

LSU tied it 3-3 on a 37-yard field goal by Ramos with 12:27 to go before halftime after a 37-yard run by Harlem Berry to the Alabama 28, but once again the offense stalled.

Everything seemed so hauntingly familiar.

And it makes one wonder if Kelly and Sloan watched the game over beers at Kelly's LSU Lakes pad, telling one another, "I've seen this movie before." **TR**



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Garrett Nussmeier.
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

LSU CLEARLY NOT QUARTERBACK U.

MICHAEL VAN BUREN STEPPED IN FOR AN INJURED
GARRETT NUSSMEIER AGAINST ARKANSAS

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU senior starting quarterback Garrett Nussmeier did not dress out for LSU's win over Arkansas on Nov. 15 and is likely not to play again for the Tigers

with an injury-induced opt out as he re-injured his abdomen on Nov. 13.

Sophomore transfer backup Michael Van Buren started for Nussmeier and played

very well, completing 21 of 31 passes for 221 yards and the game-winning, 12-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bauer Sharp with 7:53 left for a 23-22 victory.

Van Buren, who was 1-7 as Mississippi State's starter over the last eight games of 2024, started roughly as LSU fell behind, 14-0, in the first quarter. But he finished the first half 12-of-19 passing for 120 yards as the Tigers took a 16-14 lead into halftime.

But the question in that game and as LSU finished off the regular season was, who is his backup should Nussmeier never return?

Remember talented redshirt freshman Colin Hurley? He was listed as LSU's No. 3 quarterback all season and remained on the roster through the end of the season. But he was given a leave of absence from the team's practices and games for personal reasons a few weeks ago, an LSU spokesman confirmed before the Arkansas game.

But the spokesman was unclear on, or didn't say, if Hurley went on leave under previous coach Brian Kelly or under interim coach Frank Wilson, who replaced the fired Kelly on Oct. 26.

So, had Van Buren gone down against Arkansas or in later games, the next LSU quarterback would have likely been sophomore running back Ju'Juan Johnson. He was a spectacular quarterback at Lafayette Christian Academy.

And Johnson did complete a 14-yard pass on a gadget play in the game-winning drive against Arkansas. And wide receiver Zavion Thomas also attempted a pass on a razzle-dazzle play in that series. Johnson rushed 30 times for 139 yards and two touchdowns with 12 catches for 62 yards nine games into the season

After Johnson? Try true freshman walk-on Emile Picarella of University High in Baton Rouge.

That's where LSU's quarterback position is exiting the 2025 season. And with the early high school recruiting signing date from Dec. 3-5, LSU's 12th-ranked Class of 2026 had exactly 16 commitments left by Kelly with zero quarterbacks. Thanks, Brian.

"I'm confident in our quarterback room holistically," Wilson said the Thursday before the Arkansas game after delivering the bombshell news that Nussmeier had re-injured his abdomen. He had played through that admirably with pain in the first five games of the season before recovering from it gradually after the open date on Oct. 4.

Holistically? Really. You were down to one quarterback with any legitimate college experience in Van Buren.

"I think our approach, and the things we have prescribed for them fits their skill set and what we're doing," Wilson said.

New LSU quarterbacks coach Tim Rattay, who replaced the fired offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Joe Sloan on Oct. 27, apparently did a hell of a job with Van Buren leading into the Arkansas game.

Rattay's work history, by the way, is better on paper than that of Sloan, whose promotion to OC before the 2024 season will go down as one of Kelly's biggest of many mistakes as LSU's coach. He should have never let Mike Denbrock – LSU's OC in 2022 and '23 – get away for starters.

Rattay, a former NFL and Louisiana Tech quarterback, was Oklahoma State's quarterbacks coach from 2020-24, and had that role with Washington in the NFL in 2019 and at Louisiana Tech from 2016-18.

The bottom line, though, is Wilson and new athletic director Verge Ausberry need to post a large HELP WANTED – QUARTERBACK sign somewhere. Hiring Ole Miss' Lane Kiffin as the new coach may solve that problem, if he brings sophomore Austin Simmons with him.

Or whomever LSU hires as head coach, they need to bring a quarterback with them. Even if Van Buren is the answer, and don't get your hopes up, another one or two is needed fast.

Don't blame Nussmeier for opting out or having this injury disguise that. If anyone deserves an opt out, it is him. The abdomen injury he suffered and has dealt with virtually all season is painful – as painful as playing for LSU throughout much of this season.

Don't forget he has had to try to perform under one of LSU's worst offensive lines in years. When Nussmeier had a decent offensive line in 2024 – at least for the passing game – he was one of the nation's top passers, became a Heisman favorite for 2025 and was projected as a high first round pick.

"Not quite sure," Wilson said when asked about Nussmeier's injury and/or opt out status as the season drew to a close.

Nussmeier would be wiser to focus on the Senior Bowl and the NFL Combine early next year and the April NFL Draft. **TR**

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NOT A QUALITY WIN, BUT LSU WILL TAKE IT AFTER HELLISH 3 WEEKS

INTERIM COACH FRANK WILSON AND INTERIM QB MICHAEL VAN BUREN
MAY BE ELSEWHERE NEXT YEAR, BUT THEY'LL ALWAYS HAVE ... ARKANSAS

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

In the classic 1942 movie “Casablanca,” Humphrey Bogart’s character Rick Blaine tells suddenly former lover Ilsa Lund, played by Ingrid Bergman, “We’ll always have Paris,” as he bids her goodbye.

LSU interim football coach Frank Wilson will likely not become the Tigers’ next head coach. He may not even be here next season.

And LSU interim starting sophomore transfer quarterback Michael Van Buren

may not be here next season either as he could transfer again.

But each of them will always have Arkansas.

LSU’s 23-22 win over the Razorbacks on Nov. 15 in Tiger Stadium was not an A List

classic, but the way the Tigers' 2025 season has gone on and off the field, it was a B Movie masterpiece.

For Wilson and Van Buren, they'll be "playing it, Sam" again in their minds ... as time goes by ... for the rest of their lives.

For Wilson, a New Orleans native who was an LSU assistant from 2010-15 and again from 2022-25, it was his first win as an LSU head coach.

"I couldn't be more overjoyed for our team," Wilson said. "Remarkable day for our university and our team – one that displayed resiliency and toughness. All the things that make us Tigers."

LSU erased a 14-0 early deficit and took a 16-14 lead by halftime. It fell behind in the third quarter, 22-16, but came back again and held on. Arkansas dropped to 2-8 (0-6 SEC), so it didn't exactly raise LSU's RPI.

But LSU improved to 6-4 (3-4 SEC) to secure a bowl and snapped a three-game skid. And it may have ended a hellish period for the program and university.

"To be in position to lead this team to victory after three weeks of agony is special," Wilson said.

His boss, head coach Brian Kelly was fired on Oct. 26. Kelly's boss, athletic director Scott Woodward, was fired on Oct. 30. In between, offensive coordinator Joe Sloan was fired on Oct. 27.

"I am so proud of this team and how they represented themselves and this university in a never-say-die spirit," Wilson said. "They kept on punching. I am proud to be in this position to lead them to victory."

And Van Buren went to 1-0 as LSU's starter after replacing re-injured Garrett Nussmeier (abdomen). He also won his first SEC start after an 0-7 league run as Mississippi State's starter in 2024.

"I'm 2-7 in the SEC," Van Buren told a writer, who reminded him his only win last season was over UMass.

"Oh, you're right," Van Buren said. "This is a hard league to get a win."

Van Buren started shaky, but finished on fire, completing 9 of his last 12 for 101 yards and 21 of 31 for 221 yards for the game. He put LSU ahead to stay at 23-22 with a 12-yard TD pass on the run to Bauer Sharp.

After Arkansas's Scott Starzyk missed a 48-yard field goal with 5:08 left, Victory Buren kept the ball away with a 35-yard scramble, and LSU ran out the clock.

"He started off a little slow, but he got going," Wilson said. "He played admirably."

Suddenly during the press conference, LSU running back Caden Durham broke through security.

"Please excuse me, I got something to say," he told the doorman and walked toward the podium. "Congratulations, coach, on your first win in Tiger Stadium."

Wilson and his team may have more to say. Could an upset at Oklahoma to end the regular season make Wilson a serious candidate in time?

"To me," LSU defensive tackle Jacobian Guillory said, "you can't even tell he's an interim coach. Coach Wilson has the mindset already." **TR**

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LSU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL IS OFF AND SCORING

KIM MULKEY MAY HAVE ONE OF HER BEST TEAMS
IN HER FIFTH SEASON WITH THE TIGERS

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

The LSU women's basketball team got off to a hot start in the 2025-26 season, including blowout wins over Houston Christian, Southeastern Louisiana, Georgia Southern, Charlotte and Tulane.

But what makes this season's opening different than all of LSU's previous starts under fifth-year head coach Kim Mulkey? Don't the Tigers run through their non-conference schedule every year?

Not like this season, though. The Tigers are lighting up the scoreboard, which is something that Mulkey's teams are not exactly known for. LSU has been ranked No. 1 in the country throughout the early season as it has averaged over 110 points a game.

The Tigers scored over 100 points in each of their first five games, which tied the Southeastern Conference record for consecutive 100-point games. The only other team to match the streak was Mulkey's 2022-23 Tigers who went on to claim LSU's first basketball national championship – men or women.

Four players have been averaging double-digit scoring - junior guard MiLaysia Fulwiley (17.6 points a game), senior guard Flau'Jae Johnson (17.2 points), junior guard Mikaylah Williams (14.2 points) and freshman forward ZaKiyah Johnson (13.6 points).

Three other Tigers are averaging just below 10 points - freshman forward Grace Knox (9.6), senior forward Amiya Joyner (9.4) and sophomore forward Kate Koval (9.4).

Mulkey's team has options and no weak spots on offense.

"We've got a lot of people that can score," Mulkey said. "We don't have a liability where you (another team) can try to not guard somebody. Everybody is able to score, and particularly from the three. All of them will let it go."

The Tigers are also getting production across their roster, which includes eight newcomers (five freshmen and three transfers). LSU's No. 1 recruiting class is matching its ranking with freshmen looking like veterans. Four of the five freshmen (Z. Johnson, Knox, Bella Hines and Divine Bourrage) are averaging over 10 minutes of playing time each game.

This year's freshmen group is so special that four-year veteran Flau'Jae Johnson wishes she could play with them for more than just a year.

"It's fun leading them," Johnson said. "They do listen, and I feel like they take in all the things that we try to tell them. I'm like, dang, I wish I could have spent all four years with this group. They're amazing."

Since starting out as an assistant coach at Louisiana Tech in 1985 to being the head coach at Baylor and winning three national championships and one at LSU, Mulkey said she has never had depth on her teams like this.

"I've been doing this for almost 40 years," she said. "I can't even think about if I've ever had balance like that. I probably have never confidently substituted like this,

even in non-conference. And what has dictated that is what goes on in practice every day. You show me in practice, because I think our practices are extremely tough. They're fighting for playing time. And I tell them, 'Don't worry about who's starting – make me play you.' Well, they're all making me play them."

South Carolina transfer MiLaysia Fulwiley has been everything she was made out to be since joining the Tigers. She has been one of LSU's top scorers and one of its best defenders. Fulwiley is averaging 4.8 steals a game for fourth in the nation and has 1.2 blocks per game.

"Chemistry wise, it's like she's been here for five years," associate head coach Bob Starkey said. "I mean, she's just a wonderful kid to be around. She's incredibly coachable. She's always knocking on my door to watch film or ask me a question or just talk basketball. She has an attitude of wanting to learn and wanting to grow."

It is not even Christmas yet, but it is hard not to dream of just how far Mulkey's deepest and most talented roster yet could take the Tigers. **TR**

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MILAYSIA FULWILEY FEELING RIGHT AT HOME IN BATON ROUGE

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

LSU junior guard MiLaysia Fulwiley has been everything she was made out to be since transferring from South Carolina to Baton Rouge.

Fulwiley was listed as ESPN's No. 5 transfer in the 2025 transfer portal window. At first, many questioned Fulwiley, who was mostly a wing player's fit in head coach Kim Mulkey's offensive system that's led by a traditional point guard.

But any doubts about her place in LSU's system have quickly faded.

Through the Tigers' first four games, the Columbia, South Carolina, native is averaging 17 points, 4.3 rebounds and 2 assists – all while doing it as the sixth woman. Fulwiley is still coming off the bench like she did at South Carolina, but make no mistake, she's not going to just be a "spark plug" for the starting Tigers.

"You know, I remember that word when I was a player, 'spark plug,' and I hated it because I came off the bench for two years," Mulkey said after the season opening win against Houston Christian. "Oh, she's a spark plug, well, okay, I'm a spark plug, but when am I going to be the engine? So, I'm very careful about how I use that with MiLaysia because her skill level and her talent is better than just a spark plug," Mulkey said. "It's our job, as she goes into her third year of college, to help her become a complete player, not one that does it in spurts or coming off the bench."

Fulwiley has been effective and efficient in her new role at LSU. She's shooting a career-best 60.9% from the field and 43.8% from three-point range, which are remarkable numbers for a player who wasn't known for her perimeter shooting at South Carolina.

"I'm a great driver, so I think that (3-pointers) opens up my shot and it's all about being confident," Fulwiley said. "I'm a very confident player and when it's going in, I'm going to keep just let it fly."

Defensively, Fulwiley is averaging four steals a game and 0.8 blocks per game

"Don't let them score, really, it's that simple. Just don't let your man score," Fulwiley said. "And just build pressure when you're on the ball. Pressure the ball so that it's hard for them to make passes."

Not only is Fulwiley statistically thriving at LSU, but she truly enjoys being in Baton Rouge. After two years of limited opportunity in Columbia, she's found freedom and is thriving in Mulkey's system.

"I feel confident," Fulwiley said. "I feel comfortable and I'm just glad that I'm here. I feel blessed."

Fulwiley's also impressed by how much LSU fans are invested in the games.

"I mean, when you can get the crowd going like that, it kind of motivates you to keep going, so just to hear how everybody was so excited for me, it just made me feel like I picked the right school and I was just happy," Fulwiley said. **TR**

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Milaysia Fulwiley.
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi



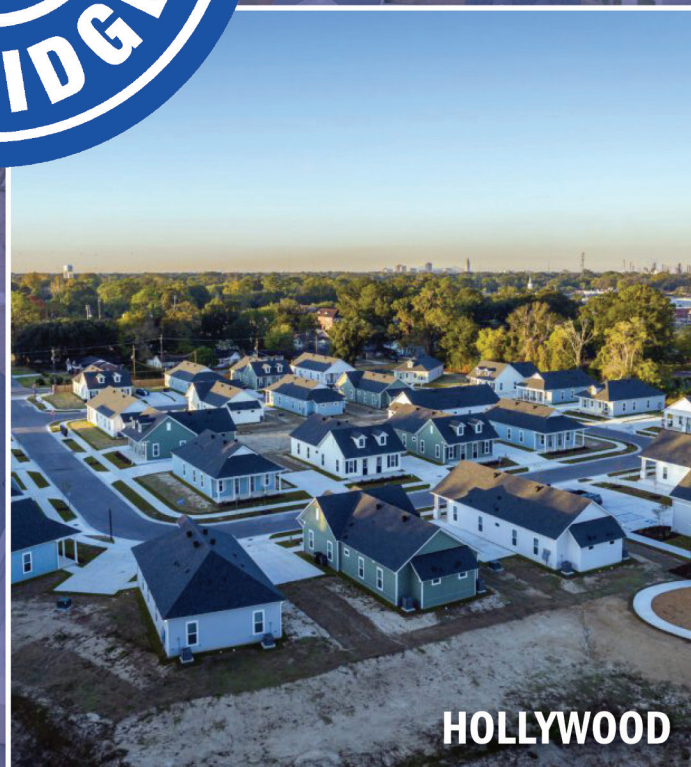
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INSIDE MOVES

NEW TRANSFER FORWARD/CENTER MIKE NWOKO HAS BEEN AN
EARLY SURPRISE FOR THE TIGERS' IMPROVED FRONT COURT

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It was only against Florida International and Alcorn State, but LSU junior transfer center Mike Nwoko took 36 shots in those two wins in November. And he made 30 of them.

That was 18 of 22 from the field and 12 of 14 from the line for 48 points. Against Alcorn State, he hit 12 of 15 from the field and 5 of 6 from the line for a career-high 29 points.

"He's a beast," Alcorn State coach Jake Morton said of Nwoko. "We couldn't keep him off the boards."

And that was just two games after scoring a then-career-high 22 on 9-of-

13 shooting and 4 of 5 from the line in a 93-58 win over UNO on Nov. 10.

Nwoko, a former Mississippi State player, has been averaging over 20 points and 6.0 rebounds a game. Last season, the Toronto, Canada, native averaged just 6.1 points a game. As a freshman reserve at Miami the previous season, he averaged just 2.7 a game.

"Mike has been fantastic on the offensive end," LSU coach Matt McMahon said. "He's more skilled in the post than we had anticipated. You see him scoring jump hooks with each hand. I've been really pleased with his skill level. He's worked hard in the player development program."

Nwoko, who is 6-foot-10 and 261 pounds, was what McMahon was looking for inside from the NCAA Transfer Portal. Last year, his team suffered with no beef in the paint after 6-10, 245-pound forward Jalen Reed went down with a knee injury in game eight and was done for the season.

"At that size, Mike is using his physicality in a great fashion," McMahon said.

And Reed looks as good as new after his knee surgery. He was averaging 11 points and 5.8 rebounds off the bench.

"That presence in the paint allows us to get to the free throw line," McMahon said.

In the Alcorn State win on Nov. 18, LSU made more free throws than Alcorn State attempted.

"We need that to be an identity of our team," McMahon said.

The competition will grow significantly more challenging when Southeastern Conference play begins on Jan. 3 at Texas A&M, but LSU has clearly improved inside.

"We've been able to pound the ball in the paint," McMahon said.

Three players in addition to Nwoko have been averaging 6.0 rebounds or better. Marquel Sutton, a 6-9, 225-pound transfer guard/forward, leads the team with 9.8 rebounds a game while also scoring 15.8 inside and out. Pablo Tamba, a 6-7, 206-pound senior transfer, is averaging 6.5 rebounds, and sophomore returnee Robert Miller III is just under 6.0 boards a game off the bench.

The defense is better inside, too.

"Pablo can guard every position on the floor," McMahon said.

Nwoko's size is why he leads the SEC in shooting percentage at .780.

"Baby food," Nwoko said after the Alcorn State game when he missed just three of 15 shots. "That's really about it. Really nothing to just turn and put the ball in the hoop, and they gave me the ball. I want to give a big shoutout to the guards."

Transfer junior point guard Dedan Thomas Jr. of UNLV leads the SEC in assists with 7.0 a game and is scoring 14 a game.

"The offense has been good, but we need to get better on defense," Thomas said. "We are nowhere near how good we are going to be."



Matt McMahon.
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

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LSU MEN'S BASKETBALL OFF TO A FAST START

MATT MCMAHON KEEPING HIS EYES ON THE WINDSHIELD,
NOT THE REARVIEW MIRROR AFTER LAST YEAR'S DISASTER

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

After LSU beat UNO, 93-58, on Nov. 10 in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center, coach Matt McMahon had a hilarious conversation with

former LSU coach John Brady-turned analyst on the LSU Radio Network postgame show.

Brady and the Voice of LSU Chris Blair had been discussing a wild statistic from 6-foot-9 transfer guard/forward Marquel Sutton, who had a +45 in the

+/- NCAA statistical category on the far right of the box score. There were only two other Tigers with scores as high as the 20s.

But all 13 who saw action had positive +/- scores as LSU led by 12-2 early and by double figures most of the game against a team that had just won at TCU.

Both Blair and Brady marveled at Sutton's +45. The +/- stat records the point differential by the two teams when each player is in the game.

Sutton started the game, and at the time he first left midway through the first half, LSU was up 26-13. So, his +/- was +13. His +/- clock would then re-start when he went back in, and so on. After a few more ins and outs, his total reached 45 by game's end as the Tigers built their large lead and final margin of 35 points.

In other words, while Sutton was scoring 15 points on 4-of-8 shooting from three-point range and 3 of 4 from the line with 15 boards in 31 minutes in all, his four teammates at various intervals were also playing well.

"I turned to the coaches and said, 'Yeah, we can't take him out at all,'" McMahon said.

"I remember last year, we had a lot of negatives in that," Brady told McMahon.

"Yeah, I don't remember last year, coach. I'm looking out that windshield, not the rearview," McMahon said.

"Yeah, I got you, baby," Brady said. "I understand."

LSU finished 14-18 overall and 3-15 in the Southeastern Conference last season for second to last. That was McMahon's second single-digit win season in the SEC as he was 14-19 and 2-16 in his first year with the Tigers in 2022-23 before going 17-16 and 9-9 and reaching the NIT in 2023-24.

Brady does understand. In and around his Final Four appearance in 2006, Sweet 16 in 2000 and two other NCAA Tournaments, he had a few single-digit-win SEC seasons.

But things could be turning up in the big picture +/- statistic – as in wins and losses – for McMahon. LSU is obviously improved with portal additions

such as Sutton, junior point guard Dedan Thomas Jr., 6-6 senior shooting guard Max Mackinnon and 6-10 junior forward/center Mike Nwoko, who had a career-high 22 points against UNO.

Through LSU's 3-0 start of the season, the Tigers showcased an excellent blend of versatility as Sutton averaged 14 points with 8.5 rebounds, Nwoko 16 with 6.5 boards, returning 6-10 junior forward Jalen Reed 13 points and 6.5 rebounds off the bench and Thomas 12.5 points and 8.0 assists.

"I thought we had a great advantage of physicality and size in the post," said McMahon, who could not say that last season after Reed's knee injury ended his season eight games in.

And Thomas has arrived as advertised at the point.

"As you've seen, Dedan will find you," McMahon said. "He's very unselfish and has phenomenal floor vision. He gets the floor properly spaced. We just let him operate."

As Brady said, "LSU looks like an SEC team again." **TR**

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LSU BASKETBALL 2025-26 SCHEDULES

- MEN -

Sun. Oct 26	AT UCF (EXH)	Orlando, Fla.	W, 75-68
Wed. Nov 5	VS. TARLETON STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 96-60
Mon. Nov 10	VS. NEW ORLEANS	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 93-58
Thu. Nov 13	VS. FLORIDA INT'L	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 98-81
Tue. Nov 18	VS. ALCORN STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 107-81
Fri. Nov 21	VS. OMAHA	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Fri. Nov 28	VS. DRAKE	Niceville, Fla.	8:30PM, CBSSN
Sat. Nov 29	VS. GEORGIA TECH OR DEPAUL	Niceville, Fla.	TBA, CBSSN
Wed. Dec 3	AT BOSTON COLLEGE	Chestnut Hill, Mass.	6:00PM, ACCN
Sun. Dec 7	VS. TEXAS TECH	Fort Worth, Texas	TBA, ESPN2
Sat. Dec 13	VS. SMU	New Orleans, La.	7:30PM, SECN
Fri. Dec 19	VS. SOUTHEASTERN LA	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Mon. Dec 22	VS. PRAIRIE VIEW	Baton Rouge, La.	6:00PM, SECN
Mon. Dec 29	VS. SOUTHERN MISS	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Sat. Jan 3	AT TEXAS A&M	Bryan-College Station, Texas	3:00PM, ESPNU
Jan 6 - Jan 7	VS. SOUTH CAROLINA	Baton Rouge, La.	6:00PM, ESPNU
Sat. Jan 10	AT VANDERBILT	Nashville, Tenn.	12:00PM, SECN
Jan 13 - Jan 14	VS. KENTUCKY	Baton Rouge, La.	6:00PM, SECN
Sat. Jan 17	VS. MISSOURI	Baton Rouge, La.	2:30PM, SECN
Jan 20 - Jan 21	AT FLORIDA	Gainesville, Fla.	6:00PM, ESPN2
Sat. Jan 24	AT ARKANSAS	Fayetteville, Ark.	7:30PM, SECN
Jan 27 - Jan 28	VS. MISSISSIPPI STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	6:00PM, SECN
Sat. Jan 31	AT SOUTH CAROLINA	Columbia, S.C.	5:00PM, SECN
Sat. Feb 7	VS. GEORGIA	Baton Rouge, La.	5:00PM, SECN
Feb 10 - Feb 11	VS. ARKANSAS	Baton Rouge, La.	8:00PM, SECN
Sat. Feb 14	AT TENNESSEE	Knoxville, Tenn.	5:00PM, SECN
Feb 17 - Feb 18	AT TEXAS	Austin, Texas	8:00PM, SECN
Sat. Feb 21	VS. ALABAMA	Baton Rouge, La.	5:00PM, SECN
Feb 24 - Feb 25	AT OLE MISS	Oxford, Miss.	8:00PM, SECN
Sat. Feb 28	VS. OKLAHOMA	Baton Rouge, La.	5:00PM, SECN
Mar 3 - Mar 4	AT AUBURN	Auburn, Ala.	9:00PM, SECN
Sat. Mar 7	VS. TEXAS A&M	Baton Rouge, La.	5:00PM, SECN
Mar 11 - Mar 15	SEC TOURNAMENT	Nashville, Tenn.	TBA, SECN
Mar 17 - Apr 6	NCAA TOURNAMENT	TBD	TBA

- WOMEN -

Thu. Oct 23	VS. MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE (EXH)	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 148-46
Thu. Oct 30	VS. LANGSTON (EXH)	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 121-41
Tue. Nov 4	VS. HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 108-55
Thu. Nov 6	VS. SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 115-26
Sun. Nov 9	AT GEORGIA SOUTHERN	Statesboro, Ga.	W, 118-70
Wed. Nov 12	VS. CHARLOTTE	Baton Rouge, La.	W, 117-59
Mon. Nov 17	AT TULANE	New Orleans, La.	W, 101-71
Thu. Nov 20	VS. ALCORN STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Fri. Nov 28	VS. MARIST	St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.	7:00PM, ESPN+
Sat. Nov 29	VS. MIAMI (OH) OR WASH. ST	St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.	TBA, ESPN+
Thu. Dec 4	AT DUKE	Durham, N.C.	8:00PM, ESPN
Sun. Dec 7	AT NEW ORLEANS	New Orleans, La.	3:00PM, ESPN+
Sat. Dec 13	VS. LOUISIANA TECH	New Orleans, La.	5:00PM, ESPNU
Tue. Dec 16	VS. MORGAN STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	11:00AM, SECN+
Sun. Dec 21	VS. TEXAS-ARLINGTON	Baton Rouge, La.	1:00PM, SECN
Sun. Dec 28	VS. ALABAMA STATE	Baton Rouge, La.	3:00PM, SECN
Thu. Jan 1	VS. KENTUCKY	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Sun. Jan 4	AT VANDERBILT	Nashville, Tenn.	4:00PM, ESPN
Thu. Jan 8	AT GEORGIA	Athens, Ga.	5:30PM, SECN+
Sun. Jan 11	VS. TEXAS	Baton Rouge, La.	2:00PM, ESPN
Sun. Jan 18	AT OKLAHOMA	Norman, Okla.	2:00PM, ESPN2
Thu. Jan 22	AT TEXAS A&M	Bryan-College Station, Texas	8:00PM, SECN
Mon. Jan 26	VS. FLORIDA	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN
Thu. Jan 29	VS. ARKANSAS	Baton Rouge, La.	7:00PM, SECN+
Sun. Feb 1	VS. ALABAMA	Baton Rouge, La.	11:00AM, SECN
Thu. Feb 5	AT TEXAS	Austin, Texas	8:00PM, ESPN
Sun. Feb 8	AT AUBURN	Auburn, Ala.	1:00PM, SECN
Sat. Feb 14	VS. SOUTH CAROLINA	Baton Rouge, La.	7:30PM, ABC
Thu. Feb 19	AT OLE MISS	Oxford, Miss.	8:00PM, ESPN
Sun. Feb 22	VS. MISSOURI	Baton Rouge, La.	3:00PM, SECN
Thu. Feb 26	VS. TENNESSEE	Baton Rouge, La.	5:00PM, ESPN
Sun. Mar 1	AT MISSISSIPPI STATE	Starkville, Miss.	3:00PM, SECN
Mar 4 - Mar 8	SEC TOURNAMENT	Greenville, S.C.	TBA, SECN
Mar 18 - Apr 5	NCAA TOURNAMENT	Campus Sites TBD	TBA

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Jay Johnson.
Photo by: LSU Athletics



NATIONAL CHAMPS ENJOY EVENTFUL AUTUMN

TIGERS SWEEP SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA AND SAMFORD
ON THE ROAD AFTER TRIP TO THE WHITE HOUSE

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU took two from Southeastern Louisiana, 7-2 and 2-1, on Nov. 9 in a doubleheader scrimmage at Alumni Field in Hammond to wrap fall ball scrimmages.

"I thought we pitched incredibly well, and we played winning baseball," LSU coach Jay Johnson said. "It was a very positive experience. We can certainly improve, and we feel like this is a team

that will have a clear identity and will know how to win. I think we saw a lot of that."

LSU begins defense of its 2025 national championship – Johnson's second in

three years as the Tigers' coach – on Friday, Feb. 13 against Milwaukee at Alex Box Stadium.

A solo homer by freshman catcher Omar Serna Jr. and an RBI double by junior designated hitter Edward Yamin IV highlighted the second game.

Meanwhile, LSU's pitching limited the Lions to one run on four hits as freshman Marcos Paz, sophomore William Schmidt, junior Santiago Garcia, freshman Reagan Ricken and sophomores Deven Sheerin and Ethan Plog combined to strike out 18. Schmidt and Garcia each logged four strikeouts in two innings.

A two-run homer by senior transfer first baseman Zach Yorke in the first inning in the opener gave LSU a 2-0 lead. Sophomore center fielder Derek Curiel singled to increase the advantage to 3-0 in the seventh. Sophomore catcher Cade Arrambide added a two-run double in the eighth.

LSU pitchers Casan Evans, Cooper Moore, Cooper Williams, Mavrick Rizey and Grant Fontenot combined to limit the Lions to two runs on six hits with 11 strikeouts in the first game.

Evans, a star freshman last season, started and fired two perfect innings with three strikeouts, and Fontenot closed with zeroes across in an inning and a third with two strikeouts.

LSU TAKES 2 FROM SAMFORD N BILOXI

LSU defeated Samford, 6-3 and 10-7 before a 4-4 tie in three seven-inning scrimmages on Nov. 2 at Keesler Federal Park in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Senior infielder transfer Brayden Simpson led the Tigers with two homers. He hit .389 (91-for-234) for High Point last season with 22 homers, 24 doubles, 78 RBIs, 75 runs scored and 14 stolen bases.

True freshman infielder Mason Braun hit a grand slam, and junior returning outfielder Jake Brown added a two-run home run.

Braun of South Bend, Indiana, was rated the No. 1 high school first baseman in the country by Perfect Game.

Brown batted a team-high .385 (5-for-13) in the College World Series last season for the national champion Tigers with four RBIs and two runs scored. He hit .324 (11-for-34) in LSU's 11 NCAA Tournament games with one double, one home run, nine RBIs and six runs scored.

True freshman catcher Omar Serna Jr. of Houston added a two-run home run. He was rated No. 15 on the 2026 Prep Baseball Report list of the Top 100 College Freshmen, and he was the nation's No. 4 high school catcher by Perfect Game.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN OPENED WHITE HOUSE FOR TIGERS

President Donald Trump's government shutdown of 43 days in October and November was the longest in United States history, but it freed up the national champion Tigers' trip to Washington D.C. on Monday Oct. 20.

"The shutdown was not a good thing, but for that one day, it was a cool thing," Johnson told Tiger Rag Radio on Nov. 11. "Like, we had the entire U.S. Capitol building to ourselves and got a chance to see all of that behind the scenes." **TR**



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LSU BASEBALL 2026 SCHEDULE

Fri., Feb 13
VS. MILWAUKEE
Baton Rouge, La.
2:00 PM CT

Sat., Feb 14
VS. MILWAUKEE
Baton Rouge, La.
1:00 PM CT

Sun., Feb 15
VS. MILWAUKEE
Baton Rouge, La.
12:00 PM CT

Mon., Feb 16
VS. KENT STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Wed., Feb 18
VS. NICHOLLS
Baton Rouge, La.
1:00 PM CT

Fri., Feb 20
VS. INDIANA
Jacksonville, Fla.
1:00 PM CT

Sat., Feb 21
VS. NOTRE DAME
Jacksonville, Fla.
11:00 AM CT

Sun., Feb 22
VS. CENTRAL FLORIDA
Jacksonville, Fla.
2:00 PM CT

Tue., Feb 24
VS. MCNEESE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Feb 27
VS. DARTMOUTH
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Sat., Feb 28
VS. NORTHEASTERN
Baton Rouge, La.
6:00 PM CT

Sun., Mar 1
VS. DARTMOUTH
Baton Rouge, La.
1:00 PM CT

Mon., Mar 2
VS. NORTHEASTERN
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Wed., Mar 4
AT UL-LAFAYETTE
Lafayette, La.
6:00 PM CT

Fri., Mar 6
VS. SACRAMENTO STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Sat., Mar 7
VS. SACRAMENTO STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:00 PM CT

Sun., Mar 8
VS. SACRAMENTO STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
1:00 PM CT

Tue., Mar 10
VS. CREIGHTON
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Mar 13
AT VANDERBILT
Nashville, Tenn.
TBA

Sat., Mar 14
AT VANDERBILT
Nashville, Tenn.
TBA

Sun., Mar 15
AT VANDERBILT
Nashville, Tenn.
TBA

Tue., Mar 17
VS. GRAMBLING STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Mar 20
VS. OKLAHOMA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sat., Mar 21
VS. OKLAHOMA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sun., Mar 22
VS. OKLAHOMA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Tue., Mar 24
VS. LOUISIANA TECH
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Mar 27
VS. KENTUCKY
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sat., Mar 28
VS. KENTUCKY
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sun., Mar 29
VS. KENTUCKY
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Tue., Mar 31
VS. SOUTHERN
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Apr 3
AT TENNESSEE
Knoxville, Tenn.
TBA

Sat., Apr 4
AT TENNESSEE
Knoxville, Tenn.
TBA

Sun., Apr 5
AT TENNESSEE
Knoxville, Tenn.
TBA

Tue., Apr 7
VS. BETHUNE-COOKMAN
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Apr 10
AT OLE MISS
Oxford, Miss.
TBA

Sat., Apr 11
AT OLE MISS
Oxford, Miss.
TBA

Sun., Apr 12
AT OLE MISS
Oxford, Miss.
TBA

Tue., Apr 14
VS. NORTHWESTERN STATE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Apr 17
VS. TEXAS A&M
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sat., Apr 18
VS. TEXAS A&M
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sun., Apr 19
VS. TEXAS A&M
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Tue., Apr 21
VS. NEW ORLEANS
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., Apr 24
AT MISSISSIPPI STATE
Starkville, Miss.
TBA

Sat., Apr 25
AT MISSISSIPPI STATE
Starkville, Miss.
TBA

Sun., Apr 26
AT MISSISSIPPI STATE
Starkville, Miss.
TBA

Tue., Apr 28
VS. SOUTHEASTERN LA
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., May 1
VS. SOUTH CAROLINA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sat., May 2
VS. SOUTH CAROLINA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sun., May 3
VS. SOUTH CAROLINA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Tue., May 5
VS. TULANE
Baton Rouge, La.
6:30 PM CT

Fri., May 8
AT GEORGIA
Athens, Ga.
TBA

Sat., May 9
AT GEORGIA
Athens, Ga.
TBA

Sun., May 10
AT GEORGIA
Athens, Ga.
TBA

Thu., May 14
VS. FLORIDA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Fri., May 15
VS. FLORIDA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

Sat., May 16
VS. FLORIDA
Baton Rouge, La.
TBA

May 19 - May 24
SEC TOURNAMENT
Hoover, Ala.
TBA

May 29 - Jun 1
NCAA REGIONALS
Campus Sites TBD
TBA

Jun 5 - Jun 8
NCAA SUPER REGIONALS
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ANDRE CHAMPAGNE

Tiger Rag Staff Writer

Whoever becomes the next head football coach at LSU will have to make some difficult decisions when he gets to Baton Rouge as it pertains to the coaching staff. The Tigers staff has a handful of coaches who need to be retained.

But LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry can't exactly put forth an edict of what coaches to keep. Ultimately, that is the new head coach's decision, and most want to bring in their own people.

First things first, it's no secret that interim head coach Frank Wilson has all the love in the world for LSU. In fact, he left McNeese State, where he was the head coach, to come back at a smaller role to coach on just-hired Brian Kelly's staff at LSU when Kelly left Notre Dame in December of 2021. Wilson, though, was not exactly tearing it up at McNeese State as he was 7-11 overall and 5-9 in the Southland Conference in two seasons.

Wilson's first two games as interim coach showed better, but similar issues that Kelly had.

It could be essential that the new coach keeps Wilson as recruiting coordinator. He is able to get everything out of his players and is a valuable motivator with relationships with many players on the roster.

Retaining just Wilson won't be enough to save the roster, but it's a start. Wilson holds the keys to the city of New Orleans when it comes to recruiting, which is an essential talent pipeline for the

WHAT LSU ASSISTANT FOOTBALL COACHES SHOULD BE RETAINED? HERE ARE FOUR.

Tigers. The former New Orleans high school head coach and assistant needs to stay put in Baton Rouge no matter who is hired.

The second coach that deserves a spot on the next coaching staff is second-year defensive coordinator Blake Baker. The Tigers' defense has not been perfect this season, but Baker has played a major role in rebuilding the mean, physical and tough unit that LSU has been known for at times after having to clean up the mess that was the 2023 defense.

In Baker's first season as the defensive coordinator in 2024, he began his transformation of the defense, a unit that shaved more than 50 yards per game from its average yards allowed in 2023. This season, his defense ranks No. 20 in scoring defense (19 points a game) and No. 38 in total defense (327.9 yards allowed a game).

Baker, similar to Wilson, is a coach that LSU players are willing to fight and play hard for on the field. Baker is a hands-on defensive coordinator as well. He wears cleats to practice and participates in drills with the team, which is something that the players love about him and his coaching style. He loved the fact that Wilson demanded more physical practices when taking over as interim coach.

Retaining Baker as the defensive coordinator would be a major win for LSU's new head coach as the former successful Missouri DC will be sought after around the country. If LSU hires Missouri's Eli Drinkwitz, Baker will love to stay.

The third coach that should be retained is hired is defensive backs coach Corey Raymond. Known for recruiting and coaching, he is a necessity. Raymond is one of the best recruiters in the country.

And he has helped produce some of the best defensive backs the program has seen – such as seven first team All-Americans in Eric Reid (2012), Jalen Mills (2015), Jamal Adams (2016), Tre'Davious White (2016), Greedy Williams (2018), Grant Delpit (2018 and 2019) and Derek Stingley (2019 and 2020).

He's also helped put many in the NFL, such as the above along with Tyrann Mathieu, Donte Jackson, Kristian Fulton and Jay Ward

The new coach doesn't need to make the same mistake Kelly when he took over and let Raymond get away to Florida.

Wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton should also get a chance to stay in Baton Rouge. But keeping more than two would be rare for an incoming coach.

Hankton, though, is a valuable recruiter and helped develop LSU first round receivers Malik Nabers and Brian Thomas, Jr. Each improved as their career went on at LSU.



TODD HORNE

Vice President / Executive Editor

When LSU stole Scott Woodward from Texas A&M in 2019, Tiger fans lost their minds.

The guy who raised three-quarters of a billion dollars in College Station and turned the 12th Man Foundation into a money cannon was finally coming home.

LSU was supposed to get the ultimate closer -- someone who could outspend the entire SEC and never look back.

He spent, all right. Good Lord, did he spend.

The 2024 Tiger Athletic Foundation audit hit harder than a fourth-quarter goal-line stand.

TAF shipped \$88.2 million straight to the athletic department last year -- more than double the \$36 million it sent in 2023.

That's Texas, Georgia, Ohio State territory. LSU blew past Alabama like they were riding tricycles. And the results showed up in the trophy case: baseball national titles in 2023 and 2025, women's basketball in 2023, gymnastics in 2024.

New football ops palace, gymnastics cathedral, baseball Taj Mahal, NIL collectives fat enough to choke a horse. Death Valley shook, the confetti flew, and for a minute nobody wanted to see the bar tab.

Then the next page of the audit showed up.

Cash reserves? Vaporized by \$24 million in one year.

THE \$88 MILLION HANGOVER: SCOTT WOODWARD THREW THE PARTY OF THE CENTURY... AND LEFT LSU HOLDING THE TAB

Operating cash flow? Sliced in half.

TAF closed 2024 with \$50.8 million in the bank and \$107 million in bonds still on the books, including a \$37 million bullet due between 2030 and 2034.

The band's still playing, but the lights are flickering.

And that's before the 2025 wrecking ball Woodward built even swings. Those 2024 numbers don't include the carnage coming this calendar year: Brian Kelly's \$54 million (or whatever it finally settles at) buyout, the assistant-coach severance parade, and the eight- or nine-figure contract for the next head coach.

Add the \$20-\$22 million revenue-sharing checks every SEC school started writing to players in 2025-26, and the next 18 months could easily burn another \$80-\$100 million that simply isn't there right now.

For most of the last decade TAF was the grown-up in the room—chipping debt down from \$282 million to \$118 million, building cash to a high-water mark of \$74.5 million, pushing a steady \$25-\$45 million a year to athletics without ever breaking a sweat.

Woodward walked in, looked at that machine, and red-lined it until the rods started knocking.

Texas just stuffed another \$48 million in fresh pledges under the mattress. Georgia and Alabama are sitting on cash mountains. LSU spent the mountain—and the coaching-change invoice hasn't even been printed.

Verge Ausberry inherited the shiniest trophy case in Baton Rouge and the emptiest bank account in years.



Scott Woodward.
Photo by: LSU Athletics

The next fundraising pitch out of TAF won't be about waterfall lockers or sleep-number recruiting suites. It's going to sound a lot more like "Help us pay off Brian Kelly, cover revenue sharing, and keep the bondholders from taking the keys in 2032."

Scott Woodward delivered four national championships and arguably the prettiest campus in the SEC.

He also made absolutely certain the bill for all of it lands on the next guy's desk.

It's kind of hard to blame Governor Jeff Landry for being upset with Scotty Boy and the financial state of things.

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



DALE BROWN
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

Throughout our lives we will eventually be faced with discouragement, failure, self-doubt, criticism, sickness, injury, heartbreak and many other burdens of life. The only way to get through these times is to cultivate the proper mental attitude and understand that the intended outcome of adversity is to develop complete dependency on God.

The hammer shatters glass, but also forges steel. Some people are like glass and the hammer of circumstances breaks them into pieces. Whereas, other people are like steel and when the hammer strikes, instead of breaking them, it forges them into new strength and determination. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tell us, "He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test He will give you way out of it so that you may be able to endure it." History is punctuated with instances where people became their strongest at their weakest point. We must learn not to expect instant responses to our prayers, but to go on loving and

A HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM COACH BROWN

trusting God knowing that in time, he will answer us. Adversity only visits the strong but stays forever with the weak.

Life can be quite confusing at times, which can lead to anxiety, depression, fear, hopelessness, suicide, and disappointments, but if we don't shut God out of our lives we will eventually find peace, love, happiness and true success. Coach John Wooden gave us the game plan to happiness when he said, "There is only one kind of like that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of our Savior and until that is done, we are on an aimless course that runs in circles and goes nowhere."

Now, to propel your dream forward, you must have intuition, imagination, determination, commitment, perseverance, and the boldness of faith. A weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them.

Happiness is our responsibility and if we expect others to make us happy we will always be disappointed. The key to happiness is the decision to be happy. People are as happy as they decide that they are going to be.

A wise person is composed and happy, whereas a fool is always worried, full of distress and waiting for someone else to make them happy. "Life is full of memories, some good, and some bad. Remember the ones that made you happy and learn from the ones that made you sad," Bo Bahnsen said.

On December 31, 1977, Pete Maravich wrote the following in his diary, "I pray that before I'm through with this entire life of mine, I will be happy, peaceful and my mind at ease about life and God. How can I be unhappy? It's very simple. There are millions of people who have not found a deep sense of purpose and meaning. I am one of them. With all the trophies, awards, and fame I am not at peace with myself."

Eight years later he said, "Ever since I was 7 years old, people had been telling me the way of the world was to get as much as you can. Get, get, get. Once you get all the money, once you get all the power you can now say, 'what a life, I did that, but I was miserable.'"

Prior to his death on January 5, 1988, the Pistol finally found his peace and said, "When I took God into my heart, it was the first true happiness I ever had. Seek pleasure and happiness will never find you. Have the wisdom to seek God and happiness will find you."

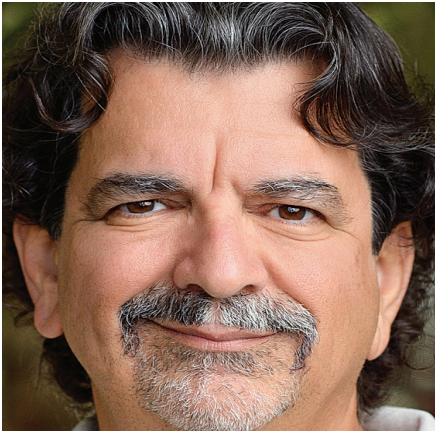


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JIM KLEINPETER

Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

LSU FOOTBALL WILL SURVIVE THESE FIRES

One of the standard and popular strong points of the LSU football program is that it has no hyper competitive in-state rival on its level.

With its historical success, fertile recruiting ground and a reasonably unified fan base from Plaquemines Parish to Caddo, it reduces obstacles and builds a perception of oneness many SEC schools can't match.

It also creates some clever, pithy marketing jingles. I especially like the one I've heard recently: One state, two colors, three letters.

While Alabama without Auburn wouldn't be near as much fun, those two are at each other's throats year-round and always willing to dish dirt on the other. That led to NCAA violations for both back in the 80s and 90s. That same holds true to a lesser degree between Ole Miss and Mississippi State, Clemson and South Carolina and so on.

But watching LSU's recent performance in the dismissal of Brian Kelly (or was he really fired?), another old timey quip comes to mind: 'We have met the enemy, and he is us' which is a line from the satirical comic strip 'Pogo.'

LSU doesn't need a rival when it unleashes its internal dysfunction for the whole nation to see. The Sunday after losing to Texas A&M, the idea, reportedly, was for Kelly to make some changes on the staff, and that started a dumpster fire which evolved into a nuclear chain reaction.

Gov. Jeff Landry, who apparently has a burning need to show who's in charge, hit the launch button and ran off athletic director Scott Woodward, blaming him for the \$54 million buyout LSU now has to manage. He didn't fire Woodward but undermined him in a way that would have drawn a flag on the football field.

When Landry said Woodward would not pick the next coach, it took away ostensibly the main job of an athletic director and Woodward had no choice but to leave the position he has publicly stated was his dream job as a Baton Rouge native and LSU graduate.

In his place is longtime assistant AD and former Tiger player Verge Ausberry, who has never been an AD or led a coaching search. He was also at the center of an embarrassing Title IX saga which at most places would have cost him his job.

Even that move couldn't come without an embarrassing blast of confusion. Incoming president Wade Rouse was mixed up on the difference between permanent and interim. And he's leading the state's flagship academic institution.

When this was happening, I glanced over at my LSU diploma to make sure it hadn't spontaneously vaporized.

Potential coaching hires – and their agents – are watching with a mixture of skepticism and glee. Some won't want their client mixed up in the craziness of a place where no one and everyone appears to be in charge.

They also know that very problem can easily up the ante for a contract's value in a sellers' market. Florida, Auburn and Arkansas are just the SEC teams looking for a new coach. There's also Penn State, Oklahoma State, Virginia Tech and UCLA.

Landry blasted Woodward for the 10-year \$10 million deal Kelly got with the large buyout, but sorry, that's where the market is in college football. On top of that, programs have to compete financially for players, too. This is certainly no time to get cheap if LSU backers want to get back into the nation's elite.

Every school LSU competes with for hiring a head coach is going to remind the candidate they want why it isn't a good idea to come to Baton Rouge.

At some point, the fires will burn out and LSU will survive. This is a place where three different head coaches have won national titles in the last 23 years. Ausberry will be given credit for conducting the search but there will be but it's highly doubtful he will be making the call on his own.

The committee will make a competitive offer, which I suppose will have to be run by the governor. They'll reassure their pick he can focus on football only, building a staff, recruiting and the transfer portal.

And he won't have to worry about competition from an in-state football program. He'll only have to watch his back.

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.

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

In the first quarter of the 21st century, 13 schools have won national football championships. Most of the titlists were coached by men who had not tasted victory at the highest level when they arrived on campus. . . Nick Saban at Alabama is the aberration of a coach who conquered the college field before migrating to Tuscaloosa.

Urban Meyer is the only other coach to have won national titles in this century at two schools—Florida in 2006 and 2008 and Ohio State in 2014.

This is the honor roll of coaches at national champion schools and the number of wins they accumulated before landing in the right spot at the right time.

Year/Champions/Coach/College Record at Hiring

2000/Oklahoma/Bob Stoops/0-0

2001/Miami of Fla./Larry Coker/0-0

2002/Ohio State/Jim Tressel/135-57-2 at Youngstown St.

2003/LSU/Nick Saban/43-26-1: Mich. St., Toledo

2004/USC/Pete Carroll/0-0

2005/Texas/Mack Brown/86-74-1at 3 schools

2006, 2008/Florida/Urban Meyer
39-8 at Bowling GN, Utah

2007/LSU/Les Miles/28-21 at Oklahoma State

2009, 2011, 2012/Alabama /Nick Saban
/91-42-1 at 3 schools

2015, 2017, 2020/Alabama /Nick Saban/
Mich. St., Toledo, LSU

2010/Auburn/Gene Chizik/5-19 at Iowa State

2013/Florida State/Jimbo Fisher/0-0

2014/Ohio State/Urban Meyer/94-23 at
3 schools

BIG NAME FOOTBALL HIRES CARRY HUGE RISKS

2016, 2018/Clemson/Dabo Swinney/0-0

2019/LSU/Ed Orgeron/16-27 at Ole Miss, USC

2021, 2022/Georgia/Kirby Smart/0-0

2023/Michigan/Jim Harbaugh/58-27 at
2 schools

2024/Ohio State/Ryan Day/0-0

It is notable that ten titles were claimed by those who had never served in a head coaching capacity before winning national honors at their schools. Two others, Gene Chizik and Ed Orgeron, had losing records when they arrived at their championship destinations. Nick Saban, Mack Brown, Jim Tressel, Jim Harbaugh and Les Miles compiled records less impressive by percentage at their previous destination than Brian Kelly's 34-14 LSU mark.

LSU produced Nick Saban, Les Miles and Ed Orgeron and employed Kirby Smart, Jimbo Fisher and Mack Brown as assistant coaches. Together, they have combined for 13 championships in 25 years. Six coaches with national titles this century logged at least one season on campus in Baton Rouge.

The hottest current names in the college ranks are Ryan Day of Ohio State and Kirby Smart of Georgia. They were assistants who led their teams to the pinnacle with no prior head coaching experience.

Successful coaches on the prowl for new destinations usually fail to exceed expectations. Most of the time they are past 55 years old and lack the vigor to reach the mountaintop again.

Orgeron was 55 when he was hired at LSU, Miles was 51, Saban was 49, Paul Dietzel was 30 and Charles McClendon was 38.

These are the ages at their hiring of coaches to win crowns in this century.

Bob Stoops: 39 at Oklahoma.

Larry Coker: 52 at Miami.

Jim Tressel: 48 at Ohio State.

Pete Carroll: 49 at USC.

Mack Brown: 46 at Texas.

Urban Meyer: 40 at Florida, 47 at Ohio State.

Nick Saban: 49 at LSU, 55 at Alabama.

Gene Chizik: 47 at Auburn.

Jimbo Fisher: 44 at Florida State.

Dabo Swinney: 38 at Clemson.

Kirby Smart: 40 at Georgia.

Jim Harbaugh: 51 at Michigan.

Ryan Day: 39 at Ohio State.

Ed Orgeron: 55 at LSU.

It was a colossal error in judgment for former LSU President Bill Tate to okay a 10-year, \$100-million contract to 60-year-old Brian Kelly in 2001. Historical trends reveal college powers are more likely to reach the ultimate goal when hiring assistant coaches in their 40s than plucking significantly older veteran head coaches.

Tate took a wish list from Kelly and presented the contract to the LSU board with no questions asked about an inordinate buyout and ridiculous bonus structure that featured a \$1 million yearly stipend for merely being in the office. When the legislative auditor caught a seven-figure overpayment to Kelly, the state's highest compensated public official was inexplicably allowed a payment schedule to return the spoils.

Old coaches have shelf lives on the sidelines, and as proved by LSU and Brian Kelly, they cost more to hire from other schools with buyouts making the price of failure a disaster.

SEC Moving to Unfair Football Schedule

LSU faces nine conference foes next season with Arkansas, Texas A&M and Ole Miss designated as yearly Tiger opponents.

The new format for the league has numerous holes. The most obvious is an unbalanced schedule with different levels of competition. The three annual foes for LSU have won a total of six SEC titles. Alabama has captured 30 league crowns on its own.

Another issue is that each year teams will not play the same number of home and away games. There is an unbalanced 5-4 set-up, creating an unfair advantage for schools with five home games and a substantial hurdle for teams with only four home dates.

The solution to many of these problems is to expand the conference to 18 members with eight division games and one conference game against a team in the other division. Champions from the SEC West and East would be determined by results in the division with the designated conference game used as a tiebreaker.

ENGSTER COLUMN cont. page 60

WHAT THEY READ

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Mary Frances Lemann

What I'm reading -
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
by J.K. Rowling

This is the first book of the series and I really enjoyed it! Harry Potter spent ten long years living with Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, an aunt and uncle who favored their awful son Dudley. But Harry got a scholarship to a unique boarding school called THE HOGWORTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY! It's a fun story!.

ENGSTER COLUMN *cont. from page 59*

Returning Tulane and Georgia Tech to the conference is the answer, adding the media markets of New Orleans and Atlanta, returning two members with more conference football titles than Texas, Oklahoma, Texas A&M, South Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi State, Arkansas and Vanderbilt combined. Those eight schools have won a total of three SEC football championships. Tulane and Georgia Tech boast eight conference championships and have not been members since 1966.

With the Greenies and Yellowjackets in the loop, the return to division play would be ideal. Here is how it would look.

SEC West/SEC East
LSU/Alabama
Tulane/Auburn
Texas/Georgia
Texas A&M/Georgia Tech
Arkansas/Tennessee
Missouri/Vanderbilt
Ole Miss/Florida
Mississippi State/South Carolina
Oklahoma/Kentucky

BK Departs BR Richer in Pay than in Play

Brian Kelly leaves LSU with just 48 games in his tenure. If his buyout holds, Kelly will have earned more than \$208,000 per game, \$52,000 per quarter, almost \$3,500 per minute.

Kelly produced some highlights. He secured a Heisman Trophy winner in Jayden Daniels and finished 20 games above .500. He is eighth in school victories.

Winningest LSU Football Coaches

1. Charles McClendon - 137 victories
2. Les Miles - 114 victories
3. Bernie Moore - 83 victories
4. Ed Orgeron - 51 victories
5. Nick Saban - 48 victories
6. Paul Dietzel - 46 victories
7. Gaynell Tinsley - 35 victories
8. Brian Kelly - 34 victories
9. Gerry DiNardo - 32 victories
10. Mike Archer - 27 victories

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.

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