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THE BIBLE OF LSU SPORTS

APRIL 2026 | VOLUME 49, ISSUE 4

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COVER 2, PAGE 3

Tiger of the Month

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LSU fabulous senior **Flau'jae Johnson** scored 24 points with 4 rebounds, 3 assists and 2 steals in the Tigers' 101-47 win over Texas Tech in her last game in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center on March 22 to lead the Tigers to the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 round.. Photo by: LSU Athletics

Flau'Jae Johnson

April is when legacies take shape, and Flau'jae Johnson—known as “Big 4”—has defined hers as the Super Chevy LSU Tiger of the Month through performance, presence and purpose. The senior guard entered postseason play as a two-time USBWA All-American, averaging 13.8 points, 4.2 rebounds and 2.7 assists while surpassing 2,000 career points—cementing her place among LSU's elite.

Her final game in Baton Rouge said everything. In an emotional NCAA Tournament night against Texas Tech, Big 4 delivered 24 points while leading LSU to a dominant win—closing the curtain on one of the most remarkable four-year careers in program history. It wasn't just production; it was presence, leadership and connection with a crowd that understood what it was witnessing.

Off the court, Johnson's impact remains just as powerful: 176 service hours, SEC Community Service Team honors and a \$25,000 cancer-screening grant through the Kay Yow Servant Leader Award.

Big 4 didn't just play at LSU—she left a legacy. 

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ON THE COVER:

The dance party starts on September 5, 2026...

And its Lane Kiffin's disco.



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Presented by East Baton Rouge
Parish Library

Spring Football opened on March 24, 2026. The Lane Kiffin Era is underway. Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi



Glenn Guilbeau
Tiger Rag Editor

The NCAA Tournament is either in its latter stages or over, depending on when you read this.

But another form of March Madness is still in full swing at the LSU Football practice fields as new coach Lane Kiffin figures out who can play now and who will play later amid the largest reconstruction project in the history of LSU football – by the numbers.

In other words, spring drills 2026 will continue to be the Super Bowl of Spring Football as far as LSU is concerned, even without a spring game.

Kiffin signed 41 players from the NCAA Transfer Portal for the No. 1-ranked portal class of all time – even though “all” is only since 2021-22 when no-sit-out transfers started. And all 41 were present at spring practice, which began on March 24 and lasts through April 24. That’s basically two normal portal classes.

There were approximately 53 players who returned from the 2025 LSU football team. And add another 11 early enrollees from Kiffin’s class of 18 signees in the traditional recruiting class of high school and junior college players.

That’s 105 players, and 52 of them are brand new to LSU.

It has been very cool just watching new players like No. 1 portal quarterback Sam Leavitt of Arizona State and No. 1 portal offensive tackle Jordan Seaton of Colorado walk on the field. That’s about \$8 million in NIL-revenue share salary right there.

“To be able to now look into next year and have all that set on the roster, whatever these roles are, really excites me,” Kiffin said before spring practice opened. “So, we have a really talented roster. Does that mean we’re going to win games? Not necessarily. Does that mean they’re going to be a great team? No. We have a lot of work to do. Now you’ve got to put all that aside. You’ve got to be able to work for the betterment of the program. So, that is a big challenge to say, ‘Okay, can we put them all together, so they play really well?’”

The offensive line and receiver positions have been completely revamped. It has been like watching an episode of the “Restoring Galveston” house flipping show.

Lane Kiffin Has Already Made History At LSU – Even Spring Football Is Interesting

“There will be a ton of work for a long time now in this offseason,” Kiffin said. “Offensively, we have all the new players and a new system to put in.”

With Leavitt nursing a foot injury, Kiffin has gotten a good look at his young transfer quarterbacks - redshirt freshman Husan Longstreet of USC and redshirt sophomore Landen Clark of Elon.

“It was really critical what we did at quarterback,” Kiffin said. “Our offense is very much pushed and driven by the quarterback, because of the tempo piece of it. A lot of change had to happen there.”

Change is in the air like never before with LSU Football.

Kiffin himself feels reborn as he is fresh off a six-year stint at Ole Miss. That tied his longest stay in coaching, which was as a USC assistant from 2001-06.

“It’s neat to redo things like this after six years,” he said.

Not quite an NCAA Tournament buzzer beater, but Lane Kiffin has actually made spring football an event at LSU for the first time.

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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Mailbag: Tiger Rag, Louisiana Illuminator, WAFB-TV Lawsuit Vs. LSU Angers LSU Fans, But Most Don't Get it

By Glenn Guilbeau, Tiger Rag Editor

Tiger Rag Magazine Executive Editor Todd Horne, Louisiana Illuminator/ Tiger Rag reporter Piper Hutchinson and WAFB-TV investigative reporter Chris Nakamoto sued LSU on March 12 to obtain – by state public records laws – the public records from Louisiana STATE University concerning its spending of public money to pay student-athletes.

The suit was filed by attorney Scott Sternberg - representing the journalists - with the 19th Judicial District Court in Baton Rouge and says the records should be public because the money LSU pays athletes from

revenue sharing is public money. Requests by the journalists for the records previously were denied.

What many LSU fans do not understand is that the journalists are only asking for figures from the \$20.5 million each school gets via revenue sharing, which is a fraction of what LSU athletes get from NIL-related funds. The suit does not request private NIL funds.

“Go follow another school,” tweeted @holdthattigah.

“Unsubscribed. Unfollowed,” tweeted @nursekort.

“(Expletive Deleted) you,” tweeted @TruckBon.

Many LSU fans also do not realize that such lawsuits by media entities concerning public records requests are extremely routine. Stay tuned.

Another hot Mailbag topic concerned LSU retaining or firing men's basketball coach Matt McMahon.

“If LSU cares anything about men's basketball, it will bring (former LSU coach) Will Wade back to finish this job. Matt is a great guy, but he's not SEC.” ... @BillyP62242.

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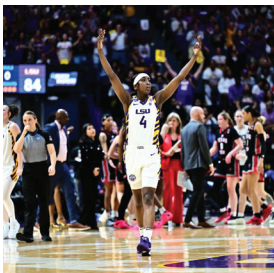


Harrison Valentine
@HValentineLSU

Flau'jae Johnson just checked out of her final game at the PMAC.

- 24 points
- 9-of-13 FG
- 4 rebounds
- 3 assists
- 2 steals

Legend status. Stamped.



Lane Kiffin
@LaneKiffin

@dmcallister26
@Saints



Gymnastics Now
@Gymnastics_Now

History repeating in Baton Rouge.

Kailin Chio scored three perfect 10s against Arkansas tonight – almost exactly three years after Haleigh Bryant accomplished the same feat against West Virginia on March 10, 2023.

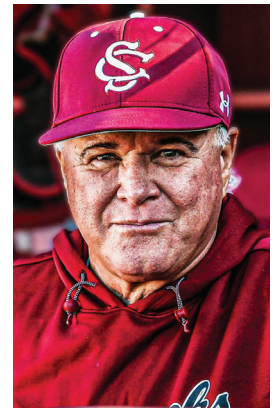
Two LSU greats. One rare accomplishment.



On3
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Paul Mainieri opens up after stepping down as South Carolina's head baseball coach:

"I'm not going to let one little 80-game era ruin my feelings about my career."



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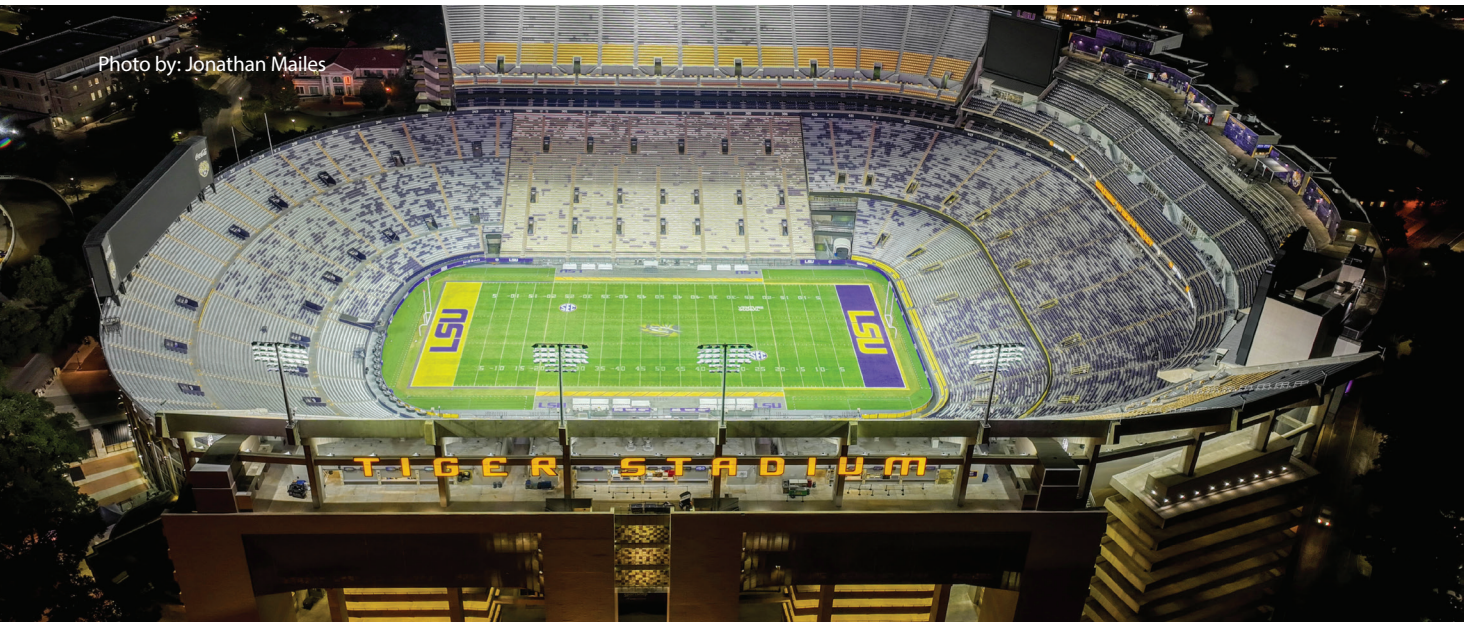


Photo by: Jonathan Mailes

The LSU Balance Sheet

Inside the New Economics of College Athletics –
and Why LSU Is Already Living in the Future

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Vice-President & Executive Editor

THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED

For years, LSU fans have been told a simple story.

Win games. Fill Tiger Stadium. Support the program.

And everything takes care of itself.

That version of reality doesn't exist anymore—if it ever did.

Because LSU athletics is no longer just a sports program. It is a \$223 million enterprise, operating inside a public institution with multiple revenue streams, fixed obligations, and increasing legal constraints.

This is not a subtle shift. It is structural.

What used to be driven primarily by wins and losses is now driven by economics, legal frameworks, and long-term financial commitments that extend far beyond the field. Decisions that once felt isolated to coaching or recruiting now carry ripple

effects across budgets, compliance, and institutional accountability.

And if you don't understand that, you don't understand what's happening.

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

The foundation of LSU athletics has shifted dramatically over the past decade.

It is no longer primarily driven by ticket sales or game-day revenue. Instead, it is powered by the SEC and the explosion of media rights.

LSU generates more than \$53 million annually in media-related revenue, largely tied to conference television contracts. That number continues to grow and represents one of the most stable revenue streams in the entire operation.

Ticket sales still matter. LSU generates more than \$53 million in ticket revenue, and demand remains strong. But ticket revenue is no longer the foundation of the system.

It is one part of a much larger structure.

Then there is the layer most fans don't fully see—contributions.

LSU reports more than \$65 million in total contributions, with the Tiger Athletic Foundation accounting for the majority. TAF also funds tens of millions in capital projects, from facilities to infrastructure improvements.

This is not a single-source model.

It is a layered system combining conference-driven revenue, ticket sales, donor support, and commercial partnerships.

Each of these operates differently. Each has its own rules, expectations, and constraints. And together, they form the financial engine of LSU athletics.

DEMAND MOVES IN REAL TIME

When LSU made a coaching change, the reaction wasn't just emotional.

It was economic.

Season ticket sales surged to 44,000, more than double the previous year.

That wasn't just excitement. It was demand moving in real time.

It showed how quickly perception can translate into revenue. Leadership matters. Direction matters. Momentum matters.

And in this system, those factors directly impact financial performance.

Revenue is no longer static.

It responds immediately to belief in the program and confidence in its future.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Revenue is rising.

But so are LSU's commitments—and those commitments are increasingly fixed.

Start with coaching.

LSU is paying a buyout to Brian Kelly estimated between \$800,000 and \$900,000 per month, while committing \$91 million over seven years to Lane Kiffin.

These are not short-term expenses.

They are long-term financial structures.

Layer in coaching salaries, support staff, facilities, recruiting, travel, and operations, and LSU's cost structure becomes clear.

It is not just large.

It is structured—and increasingly locked in.

This is the key shift.

LSU is not simply spending money.

It is committing future money.

THE NEW COST CENTER: REVENUE-SHARING

The most important change in college athletics is revenue-sharing.

LSU is now required to allocate approximately \$20.5 million annually to athletes.

And that number will rise to approximately \$22 million in its second year.

This is not optional.

It is not flexible.

It is a fixed and growing obligation.

For the first time, LSU has a major expense that is externally driven, increases automatically, and cannot be adjusted internally.

This fundamentally changes how the department operates.

It reduces flexibility.

It forces prioritization.

And it places additional pressure on every other financial decision.

NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

LSU operates close to financial balance.

Approximately \$223 million in revenue is matched by a similar level of expenses.

There is no significant surplus.

No large cushion.

That means LSU must operate with precision.

Every decision matters.

Every commitment carries long-term consequences.

Growth does not create freedom.

It creates responsibility.

NIL AND REVENUE-SHARING ARE NOT THE SAME

One of the biggest misunderstandings in college athletics is the relationship between NIL and revenue-sharing.

They are not the same.

Revenue-sharing is institutional. It is part of LSU's financial system.

NIL is private. It operates outside the university.

Under Louisiana law, NIL deals are not disclosed because they do not pass through LSU.

That means a significant portion of athlete compensation is already outside public view.

This distinction matters because it highlights a system that is already partially private.

THE TRANSPARENCY MYTH

There is a belief that transparency creates competitive disadvantage.

That if LSU's financial structure becomes visible, competitors will use that information against it.

That argument does not hold up.

Players, agents, and programs already understand the market.

They know compensation levels. They know expectations. They know how deals are structured.

That information moves constantly.

Transparency does not create exposure.

It reveals what already exists.

The real risk is inconsistency.

THE 50-STATE PROBLEM

College athletics is now operating across 50 different legal environments.

Each state has its own rules governing NIL, disclosure, and institutional control.

LSU operates under Louisiana law.

Other programs operate under different standards.

This creates an uneven playing field.

But it is the reality.

Programs are competing within different structures, and those differences influence strategy, decision-making, and risk.

WHO CONTROLS THE SYSTEM

There is no single authority in college athletics anymore.

The NCAA still exists, but its power has been reduced.

Conferences control revenue.

Courts define legal boundaries.

States shape the rules.

Control is distributed.

And LSU operates within all of it simultaneously.

WHAT LSU MUST GET RIGHT

Understanding the system is no longer enough.

Execution is everything.

LSU must define a clear revenue-sharing strategy.

It must align NIL and institutional compensation.

It must manage long-term commitments carefully.

It must operate with structure, discipline, and clarity.

Because in this system, discipline is the advantage.

Programs that succeed will not be the ones that spend the most, but the ones that allocate the best.

THE NEW REALITY

LSU is not behind.

But it is operating in a system that has fundamentally changed.

Revenue is rising.

Costs are fixed.

Obligations are growing.

Control is distributed.

This is not the old model.

And it is not going back.

The programs that succeed next will not just win games.

They will understand—and manage—the system they are operating in.



Olivia Dunne stars as highly enthusiastic junior lifeguard Grace in the 2026 reboot of Baywatch. Photo by: Olivia Dunne Instagram



From Baton Rouge to the Beach: Livy Dunne Joins a New Era of Baywatch

Former LSU gymnastics star Olivia “Livy” Dunne is taking her next step into the national spotlight—and this time, it’s on the sand.

Dunne, one of the most recognizable names in college athletics over the past four years, has joined a modern reboot of Baywatch, signaling a shift not only in her own career, but in how athletes transition into mainstream entertainment in today’s media landscape.

For Dunne, the move feels less like a departure and more like a natural extension of what she’s already built.

From Athlete to Brand

During her time at LSU, Dunne became more than just a standout gymnast. She became a brand.

With millions of followers across social media platforms, she helped redefine what it meant to be a college athlete in the NIL

era. Her presence extended far beyond competition, blending athletics, lifestyle, and media into a single, powerful identity.

Now, that identity is evolving again.

Joining Baywatch—a franchise historically associated with pop culture visibility, athleticism, and beachside drama—positions Dunne at the intersection of sport and entertainment in a way few athletes have successfully navigated.

Why Baywatch Fits

At first glance, the move might seem surprising.

But it makes sense.

Baywatch has always leaned into physical performance, visual presence, and personality-driven storytelling. In its modern form, the reboot is expected to emphasize character, digital relevance, and cultural connection—areas where Dunne already thrives.

She brings:

- elite athletic ability
- camera awareness
- and a built-in audience

That combination is rare.

And it’s exactly what modern productions are looking for.

The New Athlete Pipeline

Dunne’s move also highlights a broader trend.

College athletes—especially those who have built large NIL-driven platforms—are no longer limited to traditional post-sports careers. They are entering media, entertainment, and business with an advantage previous generations didn’t have: audience ownership.

Instead of starting from scratch, they arrive with:

- millions of followers

- established personal brands
- and experience performing in high-pressure environments

Dunne is one of the clearest examples of that shift.

Her transition to Baywatch is not just about acting.

It's about leveraging a platform that was built during her college career.

Timing Matters

The timing of this move is also significant.

Dunne's LSU career came during a period when NIL transformed college athletics. She was one of the first athletes to fully capitalize on that environment, building a presence that extended well beyond gymnastics.

Now, as her competitive career concludes, she is stepping into a space where that visibility can be monetized and expanded.

That's not accidental.

It's strategic.

A Different Kind of Spotlight

While Dunne's gymnastics career was built on precision, discipline, and perfor-

mance, this next phase will test a different set of skills.

Acting.

Brand integration.

Sustaining relevance outside of sport.

But if her trajectory so far is any indication, she understands how to operate in that environment.

She's been doing it for years—just on a different stage.

What Comes Next

The modern version of Baywatch is still taking shape, but one thing is clear:

It's not trying to recreate the past.

It's trying to redefine what the brand means in today's media landscape.

And Dunne fits that direction.

She represents:

- the athlete as influencer
- the competitor as content creator
- the student-athlete as business entity

That's the new model.

The Bigger Picture

Livvy Dunne's move to Baywatch isn't just a personal career step.

It's a signal.

A signal that the line between sports and entertainment continues to blur.

A signal that NIL has created a new kind of athlete—one who can transition seamlessly into media-driven roles.

And a signal that the next generation of stars may not be defined by a single arena, but by how well they navigate multiple ones.

Closing

Dunne left LSU as one of the most recognizable athletes in the country.

Now she's taking that recognition to a broader stage.

From the mat in Baton Rouge to the beaches of Baywatch, the setting may be different—but the trajectory remains the same:

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And increasingly, everywhere. **TR**

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FORMER LSU QUARTERBACK
ROHAN DAVEY



4/15

HAPPY 31ST BIRTHDAY TO
FORMER LSU RUNNING BACK
DARREL WILLIAMS



4/26

HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY TO
FORMER LSU ATHLETICS DIRECTOR
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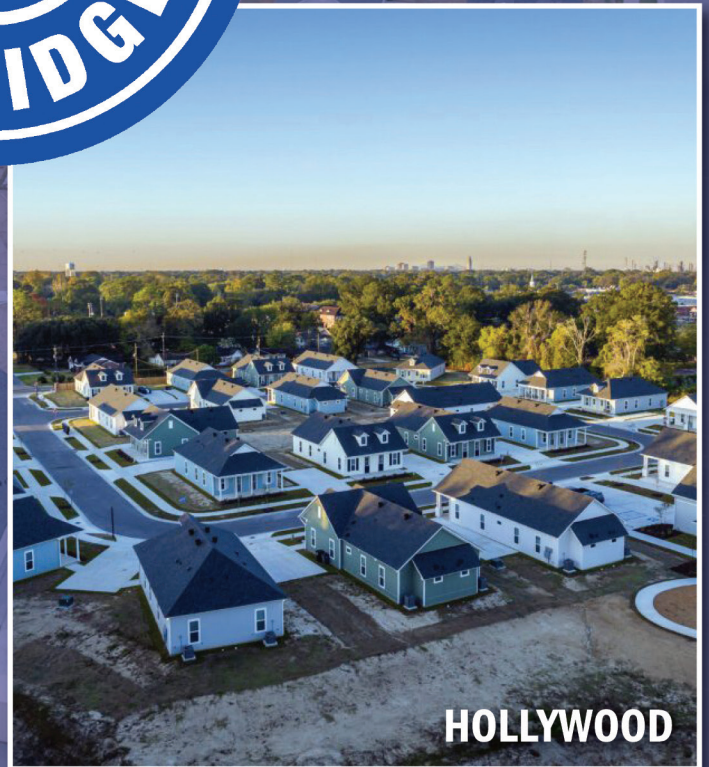
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HAPPY 85TH BIRTHDAY TO
FORMER LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH
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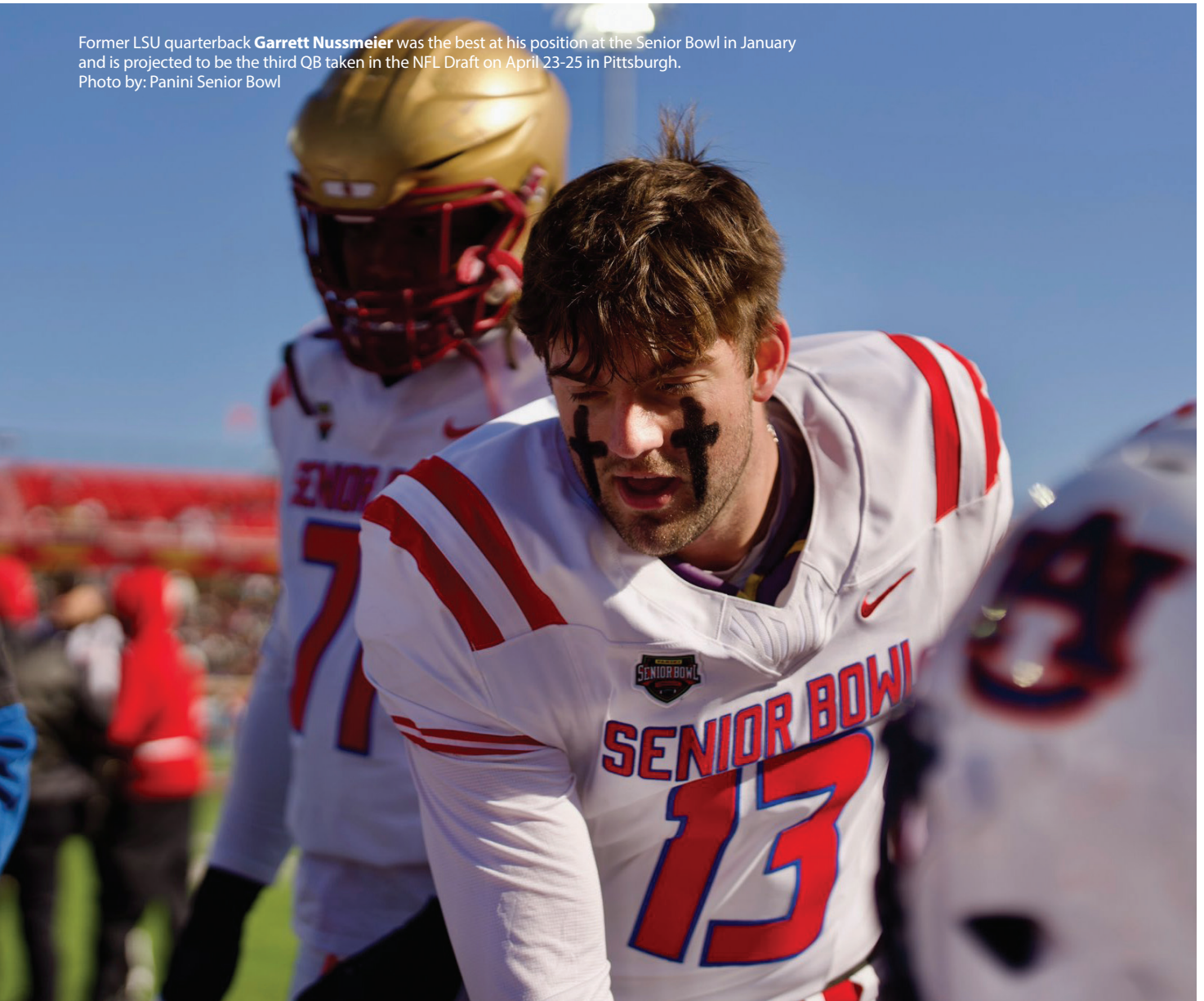
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Former LSU quarterback **Garrett Nussmeier** was the best at his position at the Senior Bowl in January and is projected to be the third QB taken in the NFL Draft on April 23-25 in Pittsburgh.
Photo by: Panini Senior Bowl



Garrett Nussmeier Has Improved His NFL Draft Stock

Former Tiger Expected To Be 3rd QB Taken, Perhaps In 2nd Round

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

What former LSU quarterback Garrett Nussmeier started in Mobile, Alabama, at the Senior Bowl in January, he continued at the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis in February.

And that was NFL Draft momentum as sharp as one of his tight spirals.

In Mobile, Nussmeier showed he was healthy and practically 100 percent from an abdomen injury suffered at August practices last year at LSU, and he likely impressed NFL personnel with his toughness for playing through the pain of it in nine games.

During Senior Bowl practices, he threw the longest pass at 51.5 yards and the fastest one at 74.9 miles per hour. Then he won the game MVP award by completing 5 of 8 passes for 57 yards and led the American team to two touchdown drives in a 17-9 win over the National team. He led his team on a 12-play, 68-yard drive to open the game.

And he kept the drive going at the Combine. Nick Shook of NFL.com selected Nussmeier as his Combine QB MVP over Alabama's Ty Simpson, who is projected as an early second round pick, as well as Miami's Carson Beck, Clemson's Cade Klubnik, Arkansas' Taylen Green, Kansas' Jalon Daniels, Georgia Tech's Haynes King, Texas Tech's Behren Morton, San Diego State's Cole Payton, Baylor's Sawyer Robertson, Illinois' Luke Altmyer, Connecticut's Joe Fagnano and Vanderbilt's Diego Pavia.

Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza, who is projected as the No. 1 pick of the draft by Las Vegas on April 23, did not work out at the Combine.

Shook has Nussmeier going third of the quarterbacks behind Mendoza and Simpson in the second round.

"I'm choosing Nussmeier (as Combine MVP) because he finished strong," Shook wrote. "He wasn't perfect in his accuracy, leaving some throws too far inside, though still in a catchable range, while slightly sailing a few others. But he also kept his car between the white lines throughout the workout and nailed deeper throws plus red-zone fades."

ESPN's Jordan Reed also has Nussmeier as the third quarterback taken in the second round.

"This is not a huge class, numbers and talent-wise at quarterback," WWL Radio's draft expert Mike Detillier told Tiger Rag. "Garrett had to prove that he's healthy, and we saw it at the Senior Bowl. He impressed throwing the football. And he looked close to being back completely from the injury. Everybody got a look at the abdominal injury at the Combine, and he came away good from that. It's supply and demand. He'll be the third quarterback taken, and I do not think he gets out of round two."

As far as LSU's other draft projections, Detillier sees wide receivers Barion Brown and Aaron Anderson going in the second and third rounds, respectively.

Detillier has former Tiger Mansoor Delane as the No. 1 cornerback taken in the first round, safety A.J. Haulcy likely in the second round and linebacker Harold Perkins Jr. in the third round.

Among LSU's middle-to-later round projections (fourth through seventh rounds), are wide receivers Chris Hilton and Zavion Thomas, tight end Bauer Sharp and edge rushers Patrick Payton and Jack Pyburn. **TR**



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Josh Heupel
Photo by: Tennessee Athletics



Which SEC Football Coaches Enter 2026 On Hot Seats?

With Record Number Of 6 New Coaches, Only 2 May Need A Breakthrough Season To Stay

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU's Lane Kiffin is at the head of the Class of 2026 of six new head coaches in the Southeastern Conference heading into spring football after a league record tying five firings during and after the 2025 season.

Let go were Florida's Billy Napier, LSU's Brian Kelly, Arkansas' Sam Pittman, Auburn's Hugh Freeze and Kentucky's Mark Stoops after five also in 2017.

Tulane's Jon Sumrall replaced Napier. Kiffin left Ole Miss to replace Kelly. Memphis' Ryan Silverfield took over for Pittman. South Florida's Alex Golesh replaced Freeze. Oregon offensive coordinator Will Stein took over

for Stoops. And Ole Miss defensive coordinator Pete Golding was promoted to replace Kiffin.

Eight returning head coaches are on solid ground – Georgia’s Kirby Smart, the longest tenured in the SEC heading into his 11th season and looking for a third national title, Texas’ Steve Sarkisian going into his sixth year after three straight double-digit win seasons and two College Football Playoff appearances in three years, Vanderbilt’s Clark Lea entering his sixth after a startling 10-3 season, the consistent Eli Drinkwitz of Missouri going into his seventh at a difficult place to win consistently, Oklahoma’s Brent Venables coming off a play-off appearance going into year five, third-year Texas A&M coach Mike Elko after an 11-2 season and CFP appearance, third-year Mississippi State coach Jeff Leiby after turning 2-10 into 5-8 and, yes, Alabama coach Kalen DeBoer entering year three.

DeBoer has not been Saban-like yet, but advanced in the CFP last year before finishing 11-4 and 7-1 after a so-so 9-4, 5-3 opening season.

That leaves two who could be in trouble.

**SHANE BEAMER,
SOUTH CAROLINA**

Beamer is entering his sixth season after two losing seasons out of his last three. He was 5-7 and 3-5 in 2023 before a 9-4 and 5-3 recovery, but he had his worst SEC season of his tenure last year at 1-7 with a 4-8 mark.

His SEC overall record is 16-24 for 40 percent. Beamer has won more than eight games just in '24. If he has a third losing season in four years, South Carolina may be looking for its third coach in just over a decade.

**JOSH HEUPEL,
TENNESSEE**

Most Tennessee fans think they have a great coach. In reality, he is just great compared to the cast of goofs Tennessee has had since Phillip Fulmer left after the 2008 season and Lane Kiffin after one solid year in 2009.

Derek Dooley had three straight losing seasons and was 5-19 in the league after Kiffin. Butch Jones finished above .500 in the SEC once in

five years. Jeremy Pruitt had one winning season while getting on NCAA probation in three years.

So Heupel at 45-20 (69 percent) and 24-16 in the SEC (60 percent) in five seasons looks great, right?

Well, Brian Kelly was better over four seasons and got fired – 34-14 (70 percent) and 19-10 (65 percent). Heupel did reach the CFP once in the 2024 season before a 42-17 loss to eventual national champion Ohio State. But

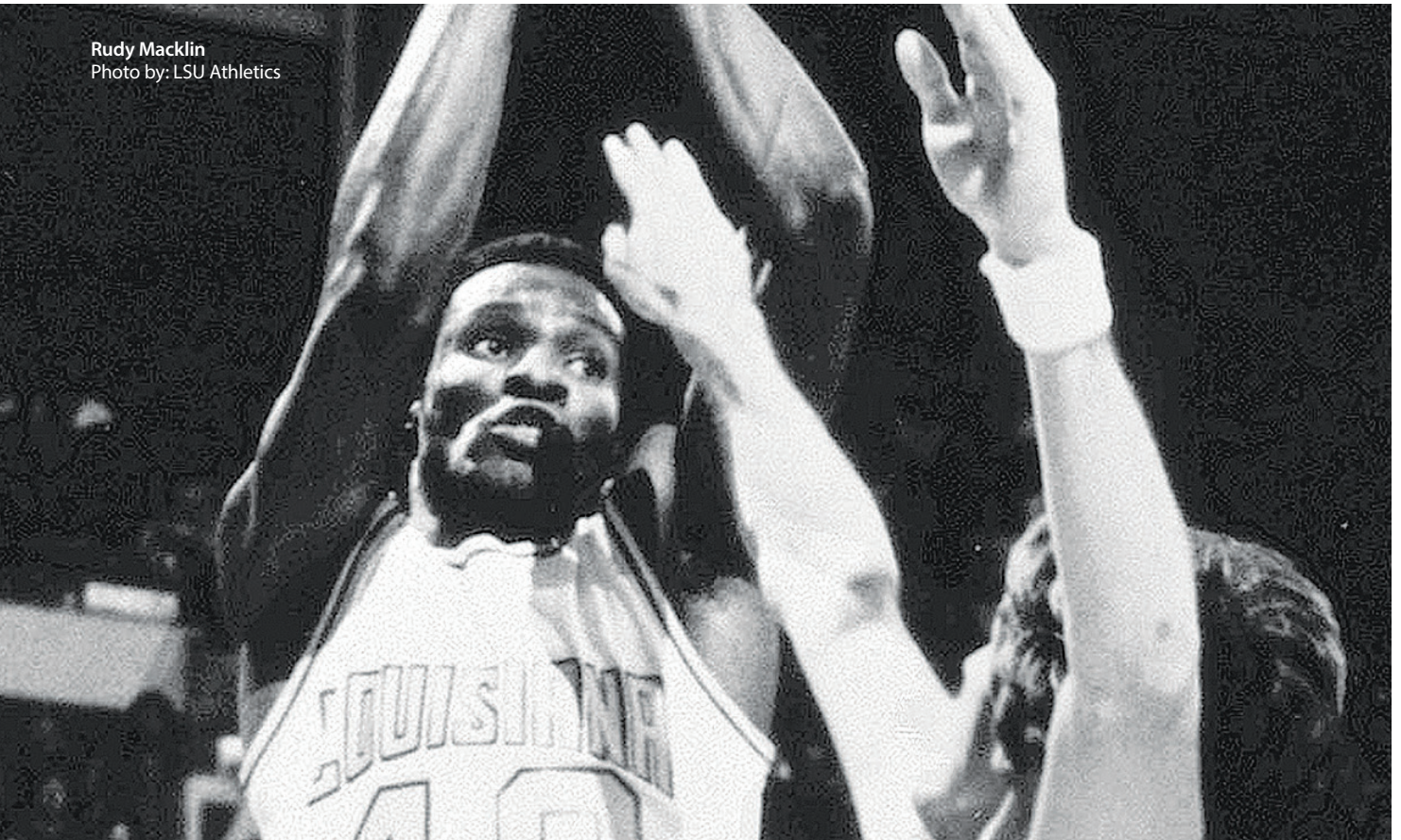
he fell to 8-5 and 4-4 last season, and can't attract quality quarterbacks lately, even though he is viewed as this great offensive coach.

Heupel has had some great offenses, but he tends to have weak defenses. He is 0-for-5 against Georgia with four losses by an average of three touchdowns, and he's 14-10 in the SEC since 2023.

Rocky Top needs to wake up and realize it's mediocre, as LSU did. **TR**



Rudy Macklin
Photo by: LSU Athletics



Tigers Looking For The Ultimate “Net Cutting”

LSU Beats Wichita State, 96-85, To Reach 1st Final Four Since 1953

(Reprinted from the March 28, 1981, Tiger Rag Magazine)

By STEVE TOWNSEND, Tiger Rag Editor

With scissors in hand, the LSU players took turns nipping at the nets of the basketball goals at the Superdome after Sunday's 96-85 Midwest Regional championship win over Wichita State.

Somehow, though, the enthusiasm of trimming the ribbons seemed to be a put-on by the players. Because there was already another place, another time on their minds: Philadelphia, site of the Final Four next weekend.

“You can look around here and see there is no champagne,” LSU freshman guard John Tudor said. “There was no talk before the game about what we'd do if we won. I was really kind of surprised that they got up there and cut the nets down. We've

been looking beyond that all year.”

LSU will play Indiana in a national semifinal Saturday, and North Carolina will meet Virginia in the other. The winners meet Monday night for the national championship.

“It’s exciting, but there are still two more games we’re looking forward to,” freshman forward Leonard Mitchell said. “I guess I’m saving my excitement for the end.”

As the lone repeater among the nation’s Elite Eight of a year ago, LSU was only doing the expected.

“We got this far last year, now let’s not get stopped again,” Tudor said of the LSU veterans’ approach to the Wichita State game.

They remembered all too well last season’s regional final loss to Louisville by 20 points in Houston after entering the game with supreme optimism.

“Some of the guys said last year they may have been a little overconfident,” Tudor said. “Today, we knew if we played our game, we could win by 15 or 20 points. We won by 11.”

LSU showed the awesome talent of this group of athletes assembled by coach Dale Brown.

Senior forward Rudy Macklin led LSU with 21 points on 9-of-11 shooting with 10 rebounds, and he left with 10 minutes to play after injuring his finger. He was named the Regional MVP. Macklin had 17 points and nine rebounds in the first half alone.

Mitchell added 17 points with six rebounds. Senior center Greg Cook scored 19 on 9-of-10 shooting with seven rebounds. Senior point guard Ethan Martin hit 5 of 8 shots from the field for 13 points and had 10 assists. Sophomore guard Howard Carter scored 11 with five assists.

LSU showed why it entered the NCAA Tournament a 3-to-1 favorite to take it all in the first half as it outscored the Shockers 19-2 over a five-minute span to take a 30-14 lead with 9:01 left before halftime.

The Tigers led 48-33 at the break.

“Coach told us at halftime we weren’t out of the woods yet,” Carter said.

“He said if we didn’t tighten up, we might not be going to Philadelphia after all.”

LSU soon built a 20-point lead late in the second half before Brown gave the crowd of 32,747 a final look at the “reinforcements.” Everybody on the roster got into the contest.

When it was over, Brown sprinted to the locker room, often leaving his feet entirely.

“That’s what it’s all about,” NBC’s Al McGuire said.

“But we’re still not satisfied,” Brown said. “We won’t be satisfied until we win the national championship. Now, we’ll just back off and charge the mountain again.”

The next charge will come in Philadelphia ... with scissors in hand. And the next net cutting won’t be a put-on. **TR**

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New LSU football coach Lane Kiffin speaks to reporters after the Tigers' first practice of spring drills on March 24. Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

“Grateful To Be Here”

By TIGER RAG NEWS SERVICES

LANE KIFFIN OPENING STATEMENT:
All right, excited to be out there today. A lot of work since we got here

has gone into obviously building the roster, but all the things around the program. And so, to go out there on

day one today and to finally be able to be out there in a practice format was great. Kinda had a moment before,

too, of just reminding myself of how grateful I am to be here. Appreciative, but also the responsibility level that I have coming here to LSU, to the people of Louisiana, and to the great players and coaches who have been here before. So, I don't not understand that. And that was pretty cool just thinking of that as I walked out onto the field today.

I thought our guys' energy level was high. I thought their excitement was there. Now, we have a lot of work to do now, that we're into practice format, and things don't happen overnight. It takes a lot of work to get a program up to an elite performing level. We're making some first steps, but there's a ton of work to do. We've assembled a good roster. But at the same time, there's a ton of work that goes into that to get a program back up to where everybody around here wants it to be and the reason that we came here. It was 7-6 last season, so within that comes change. Within that comes a lot of work, because that's a long jump to go to the level that I came here to get at, and all the people around the program want to be at.

It was good today. A lot of guys moving around out there. Different evals, but again we're at helmets, so we don't make major evaluations off of this because it's not everything that goes into evaluation and ranking our players. I think we've put together a good roster of some good talent at a number of positions, but that's a long ways away from being a really good team.

QUESTION: With so many new players on offense, what do you want implemented this spring to get everybody on the same page offensively?

KIFFIN: Now more than ever your roster turnover around the country for new programs is extremely high. Ours was really high, especially offensively – a new system coming in. And then a ton of movement from the previous roster with a number of good players that left. So we've got to come in, and we spend a lot of time.

You guys, don't mistake because you see me doing things around the community, or a parade, or Mardi Gras,

or a concert, that there isn't relentless pursuit of greatness here and effort in the way that we work and the amount of time that we spend in this office. In my opinion, that's the only way to do it. And it's especially the only way to do it nowadays, because you have to do so much so fast with so many new pieces.

QUESTION: What do you want to get out of the quarterbacks – Landen Clark (Elon transfer) and Husan Longstreet (USC transfer) and where Sam Leavitt (No. 1 transfer QB from Arizona State) is?

KIFFIN: I think they've done a good job of coming in – all being new again to a new system with no carryover. And they've done a really good job, including Sam, who's obviously been limited physically. But they spend a lot of time up here, a lot of extra time up here. And they've done a really good job. It's a lot on that position in our system, because they drive everything. Because we do go so fast. That's a lot on those guys. They're really like the point guard. If they don't know

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Lane Kiffin keeps an eye on everything at the Tigers' first practice of spring drills on March 24. Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

what they're doing really well, and they don't drive it, the system doesn't work as well as it has for a long time. Sam was able to throw some. He's moving around a little bit, but he can't do any team stuff. That was really his first time doing much throwing and moving of his lower body. So, we ex-

pect by the end of spring, he'll be able to do a lot more.

QUESTION: How physical do you want to be in this camp to get back that physicality versus the finesse that LSU's had at the line of scrimmage the last couple of years?

KIFFIN: That's a really good question, because nowadays you invest so much money in the players like in the NFL, and then your rosters aren't as deep. That's just the system that's been created by NIL and the transfer portal that you're no longer going to see the dynasty teams, because you

can't make a roster that deep. They're not going to stay, because there's money involved. And you can't collect in a signing class the amount of kids that coaches did (before NIL and the no-sit-out portal). We don't practice as much as we used to. I don't because of the depth issues.

We appear early to have really good front-line guys on our roster, but we're going to have some depth issues. All programs probably feel that way nowadays. So, you've just got to be really careful with how much contact you do, and you can't do the old school way, as much as I'd like to from a toughness standpoint. You've got to be somewhere in the middle.

QUESTION: Jordan Seaton (No. 1 transfer offensive tackle from Colorado) seems like he's changed his body (6-foot-5, 307 pounds) a lot since he got here. Is he where you want him to be physically?

KIFFIN: Jordan has done a phenomenal job since he got here. Good observation – his body changing. His work

ethic, his time. I'll come up here. It'll be Sunday at 9 p.m., and he'll be out there doing his own stuff, working out. And that's what we're trying to build here – that that becomes the norm, that mindset, and the way that you work. And we've got some players that are there that have that.

You build a culture that that's what it is, and then you're an outlier when you just check the box and you're normal. I'm happy that Jordan's there to lead by that, because if you can have your marquee name players that appear to be the best ones coming in, and that's what the other kids see as they come in, it's really important. We evaluate that a lot in the process of who we take. We don't just take just because their film is this way. There's a lot. We're more of the NFL model of the evaluation of the investment that we put into the player. Who are they? Not just what player are they, especially as you're trying to build a culture initially.

“THINGS DON'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. IT TAKES A LOT OF WORK TO GET A PROGRAM UP TO AN ELITE PERFORMING LEVEL. IT WAS 7-6 LAST SEASON, SO WITH THAT COMES CHANGE.”

- LANE KIFFIN



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Hope Truly Springs Eternal For LSU Football Program In 2026

Tigers Will Unveil The Most New Faces In Spring Football History

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

The LSU football team finished the 2025 season at 7-6 – the Tigers’ worst mark since the 6-7 season in 2021.

But there are some very talented players who left holes on the Tigers’ roster. On offense, gone are

quarterback Garrett Nussmeier and wide receivers Barion Brown, Aaron Anderson, Zavion Thomas and Chris Hilton along with tight end Bauer Sharp. Nussmeier may go in the second round of the NFL Draft, and Brown and Anderson could go in the second or third.



LSU loses probably the best cornerback in college football from 2025 in Mansoor Delane, who is projected to be the first taken at his position in the draft, and one of the very best safeties in A.J. Haulcy.

Also gone are linebacker Harold Perkins Jr. – once seen as a first rounder but closer to the third or second now – and middle-to-late-round selections in edge players Patrick Payton and Jack Pyburn.

New coach Lane Kiffin has replaced all those players and then some – on paper – with 41 Transfer Portal additions in what has been called the best class in the history of the immediate transfer era that began in 2022.

“To be able to now look into next year, whatever these roles are, really excites me,” Kiffin said. “So, we have a really talented roster. But does that mean we’re going to win games? Not necessarily. We have a lot of work to do now. Now you’ve got to put all that aside. You’ve got to be able to work for the betterment of the program. So, that is a big challenge to say, ‘Okay, can we put them all together, so they play really well?’”

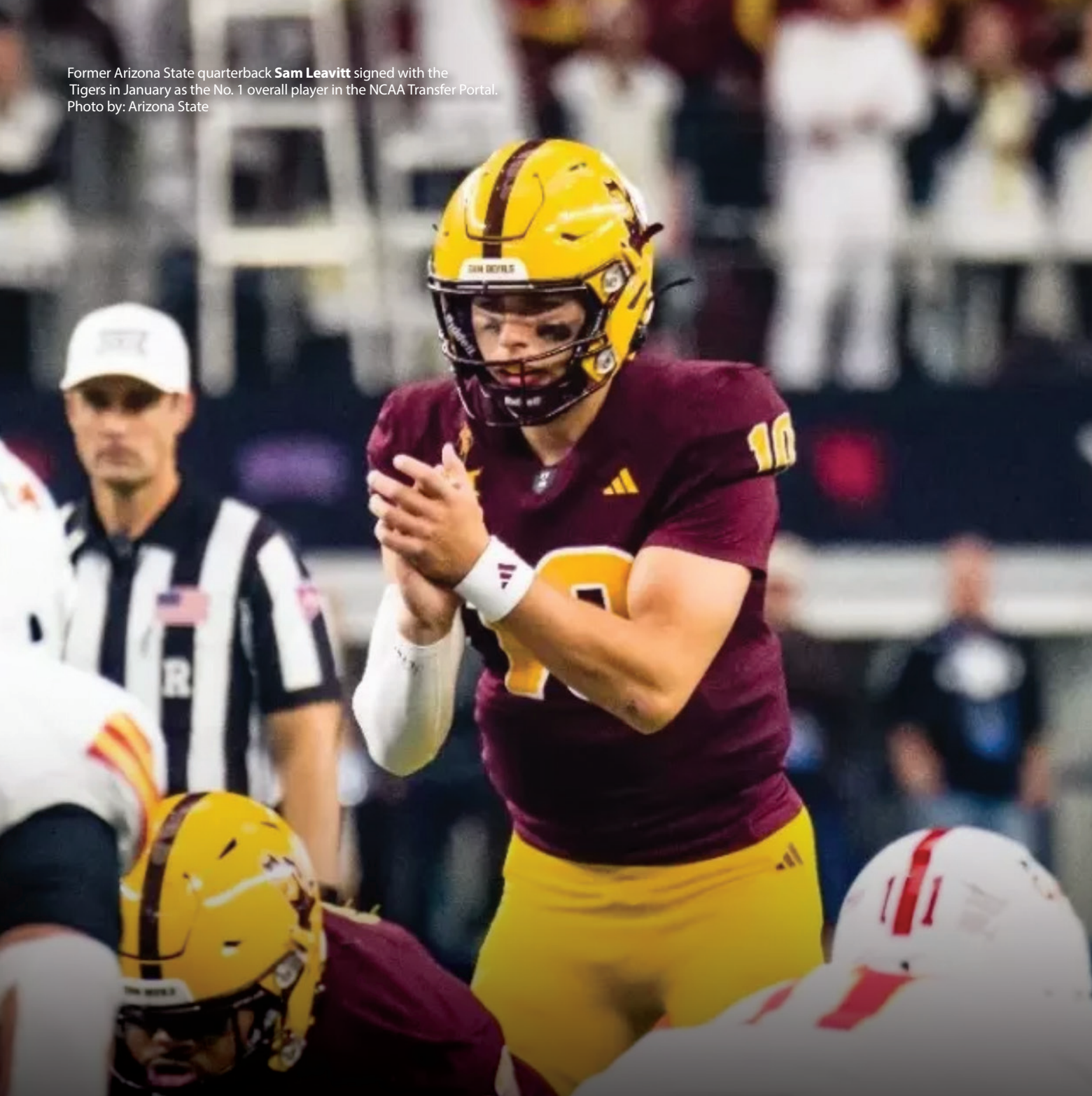
There are drastic additions on the offensive line with eight from the portal and two from the high school signing class and at wide receiver with nine from the portal and two from the prep class.

“There will be a ton of work for a long time now in this offseason,” Kiffin said. “Defensively, keeping most of the coaching staff (DC Blake Baker in particular) allows us schematically over there, not much change. Offensively, we have all the new players and a new system to put in. So, excited about the work ahead.”

All eyes will be on the No. 1 portal player and quarterback - redshirt junior Sam Leavitt of Arizona State. He will be limited because of a foot injury, so redshirt freshman Husan Longstreet of USC and redshirt sophomore Landen Clark of Elon will get valuable time.

“It was really critical what we did at quarterback,” Kiffin said. “Because that’s going to be a lot of how your spring ball goes, which is your first time of your team feeling an offense. Our offense is very much pushed and driven by the quarterback, because of the tempo piece of it. A lot of change had to happen there.”

Former Arizona State quarterback **Sam Leavitt** signed with the Tigers in January as the No. 1 overall player in the NCAA Transfer Portal. Photo by: Arizona State



Don't Worry If Sam Leavitt Misses Most Or All Of Spring Practice

LSU's New QB Is Used To Transferring, Adjusting And Thriving

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

L SU redshirt sophomore quarterback Sam Leavitt is at his sixth school in eight years, counting three colleges and three high schools – including one in non-consecutive years. So, he is used to adapting to new coaches, teams, towns and schools. And his new head coach – offensive genius and QB guru Lane Kiffin – also knows how to quickly adapt to new quarterbacks in accelerated fashion.

After Kiffin sort of stalked him through airports in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Atlanta, Leavitt (6-foot-2, 210 pounds) signed with LSU last January as the No. 1 quarterback and No. 1 overall prospect in the 2025-26 NCAA Transfer Portal. He will earn an estimated \$5 million in 2026 after choosing LSU over Miami, Tennessee, Oregon and Kentucky.

“One thing you’re going to find with Sam is he’s a fast processor,” said Jon Eagle, who was Leavitt’s coach his senior season at West Linn High in West Linn, Oregon, in 2022, to Tiger Rag.

“He’s a quick learner. You don’t have to say, ‘Run it again’ too many times, because Sam can pick things up well,” Eagle said. “And we would tweak things and change on the fly, and he never missed a beat.”

Leavitt was the Gatorade Player of the Year in Oregon in 2022 after throwing for 3,184 yards and 36 touchdowns in his only season at West Linn, leading the Lions to the 6A state title.

He played his freshman season at Westview High in the Portland, Oregon, area, 30 miles from West Linn in 2020. He played his sophomore year at Pleasant Grove High in Pleasant

Grove, Utah, near Brigham Young after his family moved there. Leavitt’s father Jared and brother Dallin played at BYU.

The family moved back to Oregon, and Leavitt played his junior season at Westview High before he finished at West Linn.

Leavitt considered following his family ties to BYU from the portal after the ’23 season, but he chose Arizona State.

“He’s super athletic,” BYU coach Kalani Sitake said before playing Arizona State in 2024. “He can run. He’s got an accurate arm. He’s got a great football IQ. He’s dangerous.”

Leavitt completed 216 of 350 passes (61.7 percent) for 2,885 yards and 24 touchdowns with six interceptions for the No. 23 passing efficiency rating in the nation at 150.2 in 13 starts in 2024. A dual threat, he rushed 110 times for 443 yards and five touchdowns.

“Sam’s going to play on Sundays,” then-Arizona State coach Kenny Dillingham said. “He’s really good.”

Leavitt injured ligaments in his right foot in 2025 and played in just seven games before Lisfranc surgery, which involves plates and screws realigning the foot with a six-month recovery.

He is expected to miss all or most of spring practice that ends April 24.

“Sam will be able to throw some and participate in seven-on-seven in the spring,” Kiffin said. “Probably not team stuff. Regardless, we would have done what we did.”

He doesn’t regret continuing to go after Leavitt through airports.

“I’m extremely competitive, and I don’t really do well with, ‘No,’” Kiffin said. “So that just makes me more competitive. Sometimes that happens in recruiting. But I think that’s my job. That’s my job at LSU.”

If Kiffin and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis Jr. don’t do most of their preparation with Leavitt until August because of the injury, it won’t be the first time.

Kiffin and Weis didn’t get Division II transfer quarterback Trinidad Chambliss until after spring practice at Ole Miss last year. And Chambliss led the Rebels to their greatest season, reaching the College Football Playoff semifinals and finishing 13-2.

Chambliss finished third in the nation with 3,937 passing yards and 16th in efficiency at 155.4 on 294-of-445 passing for 22 TDs with three interceptions while rushing for 527 yards and eight TDs.

“The previous place we were at, there’s a really good quarterback story,” Kiffin said. “He wasn’t even there this time a year ago. We find a quarterback who doesn’t come until the summer.”

Kiffin also added No. 7-ranked portal quarterback Husan Longstreet from USC as a redshirt freshman and No. 65 portal QB Landen Clark of Elon as a redshirt sophomore.

“That’s maybe the thing I’m most proud of from our general manager (Billy Glasscock of Ole Miss), being able to do that,” Kiffin said. “At quarterback, we have three guys who are really talented and different style players. It says a lot about them – to come to the same place. Nowadays, a lot of guys don’t want to do that. They want to go where, ‘Okay, I’m guaranteed I’m going to start.’ It says a lot about their competitiveness.” **TR**

Jordan Seaton
Photo by: Colorado Athletics



Suddenly, LSU Offensive Line Not A Weakness - On Paper

Top Portal Tackle Jordan Seaton And Host Of Other Additions
Make Tigers' Front Five A Potential Strength Of Team

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU coach Lane Kiffin already had the No. 1 Transfer Portal class in the nation before he signed No. 4 overall portal prospect and No. 1 offensive tackle Jordan Seaton from Colorado to cap the historic class off.

But Seaton (6-foot-5, 330 pounds), like No. 1 portal player and quarterback Sam Leavitt, comes to a position of major need for the Tigers. He will lead LSU's revamped offensive line at left tackle after choosing the Tigers over Miami, Mississippi State and Oregon.

Seaton was the 41st signee of the Tigers' portal class. He was named to the All-Big 12 second team after the 2025 season as he allowed only one sack and five quarterback pressures in 511 snaps.

He started the first nine games of the 2025 season before missing the final three games of the season with a lower leg/foot injury.

The addition of Seaton also put a bow on what recruiting websites called the greatest portal class in history, which only began with the first portal class in 2022. Kiffin has never signed more players in one portal class.

More importantly, Seaton and company could mean LSU will finally have a strong running game with backs for the first time since the 2019 national title season.

Seaton's Pro Football Focus blocking grade of 91.4 was the best in the country among FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) players.

In 2024, Seaton started all 13 games for the Buffaloes, allowing only three sacks in 612 pass blocking situations and earned freshman All-American honors.

A Washington, D.C. native, Seaton was the No. 1 offensive tackle and No. 13 prospect in the country in 2024 by 247sports.com from IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida. He was the No. 4 prospect in Florida.

At left tackle, Seaton will be one of three likely transfer starters for the Tigers in 2026, if not more.

Penciled in at left guard is sophomore Devin Harper (6-4, 315), the No. 3 interior offensive lineman in the portal from Ole Miss as the No. 79 transfer prospect. He was the No. 3 player in Louisiana, No. 7 interior offensive lineman and No. 131 overall prospect Calvary Baptist in Shreveport.

Another likely transfer starter is fifth-year senior Aliou Bah (6-6, 327) of Maryland at right guard. He was the No. 73 interior offensive lineman in the portal.

Contending at the two guard spots will be redshirt sophomore William Satterwhite (6-3, 305) of Tennessee and red-shirt junior transfer Sean Thompkins (6-5, 300) of Baylor. Satterwhite was the No. 22 interior offensive lineman in the portal, while Thompkins was at No. 50.

Returning redshirt sophomore Weston Davis (6-7, 317) could be the starter at right tackle opening spring drills, but he will get competition from redshirt freshman transfer Darrin Strey (6-7, 322) of Kentucky and possibly redshirt junior transfer Ja'Quan Sprinkle (6-3, 295) of North Carolina Central. Strey was the No. 37 offensive tackle in the portal, while Sprinkle is ranked No. 59 as an interior lineman, but could move to tackle.

Returning senior Braelin Moore should be the starting center again.

Another transfer is sophomore Ja'Mard Jones Jr. (6-4, 295) of Nicholls State. He was the No. 136 offensive tackle in the portal.

Other tackle depth will come from No. 125 junior college transfer tackle JaKolby Jones (6-4, 285) of Copiah-Lincoln Community College. He is categorized with LSU's high school signing class of 2026. Incoming freshman Brysten Martinez (6-5, 300), an early enrollee from East Ascension High could also be a factor. He was the No. 9 offensive tackle in the nation and No. 3 prospect in Louisiana.

Another early enrollee is guard Ryan Miret (6-4, 290), the No. 44 interior offensive lineman in the nation from Southridge High in Miami.

"We haven't got to coach them yet," Kiffin said of his portal linemen. "All these evaluations are just on paper, about how they look, and the evaluation on film of their previous places. There's a ton of work to do as a team. There's never more work anywhere than on the offensive line when you bring pieces, because they have to work together way better than any other position. So, that will be a big challenge. How do these guys develop, coming from all over the country to play together?"

Kiffin also signed two transfer coaches, so to speak, in offensive line coach Eric Wolford, formerly of Kentucky and Alabama, and run game specialist James Cregg, who was LSU's offensive line coach in the 2019 national championship season.

"Being able to bring James Cregg back is really neat for a place that he's done such an amazing job at before," Kiffin said. **TR**

LSU transfer wide receiver **Jackson Harris** caught 49 passes for 963 yards and 12 TDs last season at Hawaii.
Photo by: Hawaii Athletics



LSU's New Wide Receiver Room Is Full

From Hawaii to Ole Miss, Lane Kiffin Targeted Targets For His Passing Game

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

Hawaii redshirt sophomore transfer wide receiver Jackson Harris arrived at LSU on Jan. 2 for his official recruiting visit with big expectations.

And those expectations were quickly exceeded.

“What LSU has to offer is second to none in the country and I knew I was going to be impressed coming here,” Harris told Tiger Rag. “But I didn’t think I was going to be blown away like that. The resources they have from the sports performance people that work around the clock, and the way they scout and break down film and just allow guys to become professionals, it’s just really impressive.”

Harris, a native of Berkeley, California who played parts of two seasons at Stanford as a backup before blossoming at Hawaii in 2025, said Baton Rouge felt like home. So, he followed his heart and picked the Tigers, becoming new head coach Lane Kiffin’s first portal addition ever at LSU.

“Regardless of where I were to choose to go to school, I would have made the best of my opportunity,” said Harris, who was the No. 42-ranked wide receiver in the nation out of the portal.

“But I chose LSU because it’s Wide Receiver University,” he said. “It’s a great opportunity with coach Kiffin coming in. His offense has been the best in the country for years. And I’m just excited to be a part of it.”

Harris (6-foot-3, 205 pounds) caught 49 passes for 963 yards and 12 touchdowns last season at Hawaii. His 19.65 yards per reception was No. 8 in

the country. And he feels he can do so much more under Kiffin and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis Jr.

“They use receivers in different ways, and they all have very productive stats,” he said. “Everybody gets to shine in this offense, and everybody has a role and it’s an important role. Everybody has a chance to shine and make a big play.”

Harris sees himself blending in well.

“I’m just a smooth operator,” he said. “I know my job, and I do my job at a high level. But at the same time, I can extend plays. I can make small plays out of nothing. I’m going to take a hitch to the house. I’m running over the top of the defense. I’m very versatile. I’m a hard worker, and I want to be the best. You’re going to see that on the field.”

Jackson is one of nine receivers Kiffin added via the portal.

The others with 247sports.com position rankings are No. 13 redshirt junior Eugene “Tre” Wilson III (5-10, 194) of Florida, No. 26 senior Jayce Brown (6-0, 197) of Kansas State, No. 30 sophomore Winston Watkins (5-11, 185) of Ole Miss, No. 33 redshirt junior Tre’ Brown III (6-2, 180) of Old Dominion, No. 143 redshirt junior Malik Elzy (6-2, 215) of Illinois, No. 181 redshirt junior Tyree Holloway (6-0, 180) of West Florida, No. 232 Josh Jackson (6-2, 205) of McNeese State and No. 233 Roman Mothershed (6-4, 208) of Troy.

Wilson was rated as the No. 55 overall player in the portal. In his three years at Florida, he caught 107 passes for

1,043 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Brown was the No. 96 prospect in the portal. In his three seasons with the Wildcats, he caught 115 passes for 1,972 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Watkins is one of four Ole Miss players to follow Kiffin to Baton Rouge. The talented slot receiver caught 26 passes for 373 yards as a true freshman last season with one touchdown. His speed could earn him a spot on the special teams return or coverage units.

Brown was the No. 128 portal prospect after catching 38 passes for 762 yards and four touchdowns last season and was No. 7 in the nation in yards per catch at 20.5.

Elzy caught 16 passes for 213 yards and a touchdown in his three seasons at Illinois. Holloway caught 34 passes for 661 yards and eight touchdowns at West Florida.

Jackson caught 20 passes for 258 yards in six games for McNeese State last season. Mothershed started all 13 games for Troy and caught 25 passes for 259 yards with one touchdown.

Kiffin also signed two prep receivers – No. 31 Jabari Mack (6-1, 198) of Destrehan High in the New Orleans area and No. 81 Brayden Allen (6-2, 197) of Lafayette Christian Academy.

Mack is a four-star prospect and was the No. 11 overall player in Louisiana. He is also an early enrollee who will go through spring practice with the Tigers.

Allen is a three-star prospect and was the No. 19 overall player in Louisiana. **TR**



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LSU running back **Caden Durham** led the Tigers in rushing in 2024 and '25 despite injuries.
Photo by: LSU Athletics



On Second Thought, Caden Durham Is Still A Tiger

But He Will Have Talented Competition From
Harlem Berry And Wisconsin Transfer Dilin Jones

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Everyone knows LSU football coach Lane Kiffin can recruit the NCAA Transfer Portal. He had the No. 1 class while Ole Miss' head coach before the 2024 season. And he has the top class – perhaps the No. 1 edition in portal history that began in 2022 – now as LSU's coach with a whopping 41 players coming for the Tigers.

But what Kiffin can also do is recruit players back after apparently losing them. He did it with No. 1 quarterback and overall portal player Sam Leavitt in this portal class when it appeared he had lost him.

And he did it with LSU running back Caden Durham, who entered the portal last January after leading the Tigers in rushing in his first two seasons in 2024 and '25.

Kiffin was trying to get Ole Miss sophomore running back Kewan Lacy to come with him and former Ole Miss running backs coach Kevin Smith to LSU last January. So, Durham entered the portal as the No. 98 prospect overall and No. 8 running back for a possible reunion with his running backs coach at LSU – Frank Wilson. Kiffin did not retain Wilson, who caught on at Ole Miss in a coaching trade.

But Lacy decided to stay at Ole Miss, and then Durham went back into the LSU fold for a third season.

“Unfinished business,” Durham said on Twitter at the time of his return to LSU.

Durham (5-foot-9, 205 pounds) was LSU's leading rusher in 2025 as a sophomore with 505 yards on 111

carries and three touchdowns. He also caught 16 passes for 91 yards.

In 2024, Durham led the Tigers in rushing with 753 yards on 140 carries and six touchdowns while also catching 28 passes for 260 yards, including a 71-yard catch and run, and two touchdowns.

When he signed with LSU before the 2024 season from Duncanville High in Duncanville, Texas, Durham was the No. 6 running back in the country, No. 20 player in Texas and No. 124 prospect in the nation.

Also back will be sophomore Harlem Berry (5-11, 190), the No. 1 high school running back in the nation by 247sports.com in 2025 out of St. Martin's High in Metairie. He rushed for 491 yards on 104 carries last season with two touchdowns and caught eight passes for 32 yards.

Berry will give Durham a run for his money as the lead running back in 2026.

And look for Wisconsin sophomore transfer Dilin Jones to possibly do the same. Jones (6-0, 208) started the Badgers' first seven games last season, gaining 300 yards on 76 carries with two touchdowns and making nine catches for 21 yards.

A turf toe injury against Ohio State ended his season, which included 63 yards on 17 carries against Michigan and 69 on 16 rushes against Iowa. A four-star prospect out of Our Lady of Good Counsel High in Olney, Maryland, Jones was the No. 10 running back in the nation in the class of 2024 and No. 139 prospect overall. He was red-shirted in 2024 at Wisconsin.

As a portal prospect, Jones was the No. 73 running back.

Kiffin also signed redshirt freshman running back Raycine Guillory (5-9, 190) from Utah. He played in only one game at Utah, but he had an impressive career at Aledo High in Fort Worth, Texas.

In 2024, Guillory gained 1,299 yards on 161 carries with 24 touchdowns while catching 13 passes for 169 yards at Aledo. In 2023, he rushed for 1,236 yards and 17 touchdowns and gained 769 yards in 2022. He also ran track at Aledo.

Guillory was the No. 60 running back in the nation out of high school and the No. 117 prospect in Texas. He was the No. 99 running back in the portal.

Kiffin added two other transfer running backs – redshirt sophomore Stacy Gage (5-11, 210) of Central Florida and redshirt sophomore Rod Gainey Jr. (6-0, 175) of Charlotte.

Gage played briefly in 2025, gaining just 63 yards on 13 carries. He was the No. 125 running back in the portal. Out of St. Thomas Aquinas High in Tampa, he was the No. 30 running back in the nation and No. 55 prospect in Florida.

Gainey played in 11 games with two starts in 2025, gaining 260 yards on 74 carries. He was the No. 118 running back in the portal. Coming out of Tampa Bay Tech in Tampa, he was the No. 85 running back in the country and No. 151 prospect in Florida. **TR**

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LSU football coach **Lane Kiffin** at one of the many LSU women's basketball games he attended in the 2025-26 season.
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



Beyond The Portal:

Don't Forget The Early Enrollees From Lane Kiffin's 1st High School Signing Class

Some Of These Could Make An Impact Amid The Portal Stars

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

Back in the more innocent times of college football before Name, Image & Likeness laundered pay for play and an irresponsible, no-sit-out NCAA Transfer Portal with no limits, a key element of old-fashioned recruiting was the early enrollee.

If a program could sign a handful of high school seniors or more who had what it took to graduate in December instead of May, they could enroll at their new school in January. This would give them a jump on the rest of their class by going through spring football along with the off-season strength and conditioning programs.

It still goes on. The only problem is that these early bird freshmen get lost in the larger volume of new portal players. And most of those enroll in January. LSU, for example, has all 41 of its portal signees for its No. 1 class of 2026 enrolled and in spring drills.

But some of the early prep enrollees still can have a significant impact. For example, there is a very good chance incoming freshman five-star Richard Anderson of Edna Karr High in New Orleans could start for LSU this season, even new coach Lane Kiffin signed two defensive line starters as transfers from Auburn and Clemson – junior Malik Blocton and junior Stephylyan Green.

Anderson (6-foot-4, 360 pounds) signed with LSU in December as the No. 1 defensive lineman in the nation, No. 8 prospect in the nation and No. 2 player in Louisiana. He graduated early and will be at spring drills in March and April.

Anderson's signing particularly impressed Kiffin, who had barely settled into the job after his introductory press conference on Dec. 1.

“When people are like, ‘Oh, Lane Kiffin signed the number one player (defensive lineman) in the country,’ okay, LSU signed him,” Kiffin said. “I don’t know of any other school that could sign him (Anderson), when we don’t even have a defensive line coach at the time. And he still signs with LSU.”

There are 10 other early enrollees from Kiffin's 18-member, No. 13-ranked high school class by 247sports.com.

Two other linemen who could make immediate impacts in 2026 are No. 4 defensive lineman Deuce Geraldts (6-2, 275) of Collins Hill High in Suwanee, Georgia, and No. 9 offensive tackle Brysten Martinez (6-5, 300) of East Ascension High in Gonzales.

Geraldts signed with LSU as the No. 68 prospect in the nation and No. 7 player in Georgia. Martinez signed as the No. 84 over-all prospect and No. 3 player in Louisiana.

Kiffin signed nine wide receivers via the portal, but that doesn't mean No. 9-ranked prep wide receiver Corey Barber (6-0, 180) of Clay-Chalkville High in Pinson, Alabama, can't make noise as an early enrollee. He was the No. 5 player in Alabama and No. 61 prospect nationally.

LSU's seven other high school signees who enrolled in January are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| - No. 11 tight end
JC Anderson
(6-6, 240) of Mt. Zion High
in Mt. Zion, Illinois. | - No. 31 wide receiver
Jabari Mack
(6-0, 200) of Destrehan High
in Destrehan. |
| - No. 15 edge
Trenton Henderson
(6-4, 225) of Pine Forest High
in Pensacola, Florida. | - No. 44 interior offensive line-
man Ryan Miret
(6-4, 290) of Southridge High
in Miami. |
| - No. 17 safety
Aiden Hall
(6-1, 195) of Edna Karr High
in New Orleans. | - No. 71 safety
Isaiah Washington
(6-2, 170), of Haynesville High
in Haynesville. |
| - No. 29 cornerback
Havon Finney
of Sierra Canyon High in
Chatsworth, California. | |

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LSU FOOTBALL

SPRING 2026 ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Hgt.	Wgt.	Class	Exp.	Hometown/High School/Previous School
0	Tamarcus Cooley	S.	6-0	206	Redshirt Junior	1L	Knightsdale, N.C./Rolesville HS/NC State
1	Jayce Brown	WR.	5-11	175	Senior	TR	Fort Walton Beach, Fla./Choctawhatchee HS/Kansas State
1	Princewill Umanmielen	.DE.	6-4	244	Senior	TR	Austin, Texas/Manor HS/Ole Miss
2	Ty Benefield	.S.	6-3	208	Senior	TR	Altadena, Calif./Crean Lutheran HS/Boise State
2	Tre' Brown	.WR.	6-2	190	Redshirt Junior	TR	Savannah, Ga./Jenkins HS/Old Dominion
3	DJ Pickett	.CB.	6-4	189	Sophomore	1L	Zephyrhills, Fla./Zephyrhills HS
3	Eugene Wilson III	.WR.	5-11	190	Redshirt Junior	TR	Tampa, Fla./Gaither HS/Florida
4	Jackson Harris	.WR.	6-2	202	Redshirt Junior	TR	Berkeley, Calif./Berkeley HS/Hawai'i
6	TJ Dottery	.LB.	6-2	225	5th-year Senior	TR	Montgomery, Ala./Montgomery Catholic Preparatory/Ole Miss
6	Husan Longstreet	.QB.	6-1	195	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Corona, Calif./Centennial HS/USC
8	Ja'Keem Jackson	.CB.	6-0	188	Redshirt Junior	1L	Kissimmee, Fla./Osceola HS/Florida
8	Winston Watkins Jr.	.WR.	5-10	182	Sophomore	TR	Fort Myers, Fla./Venice HS/Ole Miss
10	Sam Leavitt	.QB.	6-2	216	Redshirt Junior	TR	West Linn, Ore./West Linn HS/Arizona State
10	Dashawn Spears	.S.	6-3	209	Junior	2L	Denham Springs, La./Denham Springs HS
11	Landen Clark	.QB.	6-0	195	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Radford, Va./Radford HS./Elon
11	PJ Woodland	.CB.	5-11	164	Junior	2L	Hattiesburg, Miss./Oak Grove HS
12	Malachi Thomas	.TE.	6-3	242	Junior	TR	Thomasville, Ga./Thomas County Central HS/Pittsburgh
13	Faheem Delane	.S.	6-2	213	Sophomore	TR	Good Hope, Md./Our Lady of Good Counsel HS/Ohio State
13	Dilin Jones	.RB.	5-11	211	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Laurel, Md./Our Lady Of Good Counsel HS/Wisconsin
14	Trey'Dez Green	.TE.	6-7	237	Junior	2L	Jackson, La./Zachary HS
15	Jaiden Braker	.LB.	6-3	223	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Snellville, Ga./South Gwinnett HS
15	Phillip Wright III	.WR.	6-0	171	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Shrewsbury, La./Destrehan HS
17	Damien Shanklin	.DE.	6-5	254	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Indianapolis, Ind./Warren Central HS
19	Emile Picarella III	.QB.	6-2	218	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Baton Rouge, La./University Lab HS
19	Gabriel Reliford	.DE.	6-3	270	Redshirt Sophomore	1L	Shreveport, La./Evangel Christian Academy
21	Michael Turner Jr.	.CB.	6-1	162	Redshirt Sophomore	2L	Kenner, La./John Curtis HS
22	Harlem Berry	.RB.	5-10	187	Sophomore	1L	New Orleans, La./St. Martin's Episcopal School
22	Havon Finney Jr.	.CB.	6-1	173	Freshman	HS	Carson, Calif./Sierra Canyon School
23	Aidan Anding	.CB.	5-11	170	Sophomore	1L	Grambling, La./Ruston HS
23	Stacy Gage	.RB.	5-10	206	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Tampa, Fla./St. Thomas Aquinas HS/Central Florida
24	Joseph Eburn	.RB.	5-11	191	Redshirt Junior	SQ	John's Creek, Ga./Chattahoochee HS
24	Tylen Singleton	.LB.	6-1	227	Redshirt Sophomore	2L	Many, La./Many HS
25	Rod Gainey Jr.	.RB.	5-9	183	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Tampa, Fla./Tampa Bay Tech HS/Charlotte
25	Aiden Hall	.S.	6-2	193	Freshman	HS	New Orleans, La./Edna Karr HS
26	Charles Ross II	.LB.	6-1	218	Sophomore	1L	Houston, Texas/North Shore Senior HS
27	Raycine Guillory Jr.	.RB.	5-10	179	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Fort Worth, Texas/Aledo HS/Utah
28	Jhase Thomas	.S.	6-1	175	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Destrehan, La./Destrehan HS
29	Caden Durham	.RB.	5-9	200	Junior	2L	Oklahoma City, Okla./Duncanville HS
29	Jordan Ross	.DE.	6-5	246	Junior	TR	Vestavia Hills, Ala./Vestavia Hills HS/Tennessee
30	Treylan James	.CB.	6-1	183	Redshirt Junior	TR	Baton Rouge, La./Madison Prep Academy/Southern
31	CJ Jimcoily	.LB.	6-3	218	Sophomore	1L	Nashville, Tenn./Lipscomb Academy
32	Gavin Higgins	.PKR	5-11	189	Freshman	HS	Baton Rouge, La./Parkview Baptist School
32	Keylan Moses	.LB.	6-2	212	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Baton Rouge, La./University Lab HS
34	Mason Dossett	.S.	6-0	187	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Missouri City, Texas/Ridge Point HS/Baylor
35	Zach Weeks	.LB.	6-3	230	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Oconee County, Ga./Oconee County HS
36	Aidan Corbello	.PKR	5-9	199	Redshirt Junior	SQ	New Orleans, La./Jesuit HS
36	Emari Peterson	.CB.	6-1	198	Freshman	HS	Orlando, Fla./Evans HS
37	Craig Walton Jr.	.CB.	5-11	174	Redshirt Junior	1L	Camden, N.J./Camden HS

39	Reid Chauvin	RB	5-8	204	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Baton Rouge, La./Episcopal HS
39	Mack Mulhern	LS	6-1	224	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Scottsdale, Ariz./Horizon HS/Florida
40	Whit Weeks	LB	6-3	223	Senior	3L	Watkinsville, Ga./Oconee County HS
42	Davhon Keys	LB	6-0	227	Junior	2L	Aledo, Texas/Aledo HS
43	Silas Hall	LS	6-3	216	Sophomore	1L	Baton Rouge, La./Episcopal HS
44	Zach Grace	TE	6-2	236	Redshirt Junior	TR	Kearney, Mo./Kearney HS/Oregon
45	Sean Perret	PKR	5-10	190	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Baton Rouge, La./Catholic HS
47	Malik Blocton	DT	6-3	286	Junior	TR	Pike Road, Ala./Pike Road HS/Auburn
47	JD LaFleur	TE	6-6	254	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Sulphur, La./Sulphur HS
48	Kolaj Cobbins	DE	6-3	234	Redshirt Sophomore	2L	St. Rose, La./Destrehan HS
49	Theo Grace	LB	6-2	231	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Kearney, Mo./Kearney HS/North Dakota
50	William Satterwhite II	OL	6-3	293	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Barberton, Ohio/Archbishop Hoban HS/Tennessee
51	Ryan Miret	OL	6-4	300	Freshman	HS	Miami, Fla./Southridge Sr. HS
52	Ja'Quan Sprinkle	OL	6-4	297	Redshirt Junior	TR	Orangeburg, S.C./Orangeburg-Wilkinson HS/NC Central
53	Hayes Fuqua	OL	6-6	281	Redshirt Freshman	RS	West Monroe, La./West Monroe HS
54	Ja'Mard Jones Jr.	OL	6-2	312	Sophomore	TR	Metairie, La./Archbishop Rummel HS/Nicholls
55	Aliou Bah	OL	6-5	327	5th-year Senior	TR	Memphis, Tenn./IMG Academy/Maryland
55	Jake Ibieta	LB	6-0	237	Redshirt Junior	SQ	Metairie, La./Country Day HS
57	JaKolby Jones	OT	6-5	298	Junior	JC	Many, La./Many HS/Copiah-Lincoln CC
61	Braelin Moore	OL	6-2	301	5th-year Senior	1L	Bethlehem, Pa./Freedom HS/Virginia Tech
65	Sean Thompkins Jr.	OT	6-5	308	Redshirt Junior	TR	Covington, Ga./Newton HS/Baylor
66	Solomon Thomas	OT	6-3	320	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Jacksonville, Fla./Raines HS
67	Bo Bordelon	OL	6-6	305	5th-year Senior	3L	Raceland, La./Isidore Newman School
68	Brett Bordelon	OL	6-4	276	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Raceland, La./Isidore Newman School
69	Darrin Strey	OT	6-7	314	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Paw Paw, Mich./Paw Paw HS/Kentucky
70	Devin Harper	OT	6-4	312	Sophomore	TR	Shreveport, La./Calvary Baptist Academy/Ole Miss
71	Brysten Martinez	OT	6-5	318	Freshman	HS	Gonzales, La./East Ascension HS
74	Braden Augustus	OT	6-1	313	Redshirt Junior	SQ	Baton Rouge, La./The Dunham School
75	Weston Davis	OT	6-6	315	Redshirt Sophomore	2L	Beaumont, Texas/Beaumont United HS
76	Christian Stamps	OL	6-0	326	Redshirt Junior	SQ	Metairie, La./Archbishop Rummel HS
77	Jordan Seaton	OT	6-5	307	Junior	TR	Washington, D.C./IMG Academy/Colorado
80	Scott Starzyk	PKR	5-9	175	Sophomore	TR	The Woodlands, Texas/The Woodlands HS/Arkansas
81	Landon Craig	TE	6-3	230	Redshirt Sophomore	SQ	New Orleans, La./Brother Martin HS
82	Roman Mothershed	WR	6-5	208	Redshirt Junior	TR	Montgomery, Ala./Pike Road HS/Troy
83	Corey Barber Jr.	WR	5-11	188	Freshman	HS	Trussville, Ala./Clay-Chalkville HS
84	Tyree Holloway	WR	5-10	174	Redshirt Junior	TR	Jacksonville, N.C./Northside HS/West Florida
85	Josh Jackson	WR	6-2	199	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	New Orleans, La./St. Augustine HS/McNeese
86	Jabari Mack	WR	6-0	195	Freshman	HS	Kenner, La./Destrehan HS
87	JC Anderson	TE	6-6	256	Freshman	HS	Mt. Zion, Ill./Mt. Zion HS
87	Joey August	DT	6-0	282	Redshirt Junior	SQ	New Orleans, La./The Willow School
88	Malik Elzy	WR	6-2	214	Redshirt Junior	TR	Chicago, Ill./Simeon HS/Illinois
90	Grant Chadwick	P	6-5	213	Junior	1L	Tullahoma, Tenn./Tullahoma HS/Middle Tennessee
90	Stephiylan Green	DT	6-3	296	Redshirt Junior	TR	Rome, Ga./Rome HS/Clemson
91	Trenton Henderson	DE	6-4	243	Freshman	HS	Pensacola, Fla./Pine Forest HS
92	Brandon Brown	DT	6-1	287	Redshirt Freshman	RS	Melbourne, Fla./Eau Gallie HS
93	Jaylen Brown	DE	6-6	270	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Madison, Ala./James Clemens HS/South Carolina
94	Richard Anderson	DT	6-3	339	Freshman	HS	New Orleans, La./Edna Karr HS
95	Shone Washington	DT	6-4	294	5th-year Senior	2L	Woodmere, La./Life of Christ Academy/East Mississippi CC
96	Dominick McKinley	DT	6-6	297	Junior	2L	Lafayette, La./Acadiana HS
97	Dylan Carpenter	DE	6-3	252	Redshirt Junior	2L	St. Amant, La./St. Amant HS
98	Achilles Woods	DT	6-3	292	Redshirt Sophomore	TR	Decatur, Ala./Austin HS/South Alabama
99	Hayden Craig	P	6-1	206	Redshirt Freshman	TR	Mercier, Quebec, Canada/Bridgton Academy/Florida
99	Deuce Geraldts	DT	6-0	279	Freshman	HS	Suwanee, Ga./Collins Hill HS
	Brayden Allen	WR	6-2	197	Freshman	HS	Lafayette, La./Lafayette Christian Academy
	Lamar Brown	DE	6-4	295	Freshman	HS	Erwinville, La./University Lab HS
	Dez Ellis	CB	6-2	180	Freshman	HS	Wisner, La./Franklin Parish HS
	Adrian Lamb	OL	6-5	290	Redshirt Sophomore	JC	Beaufort, S.C./Beaufort HS/Georgia Military College
	Isaiah Washington	S	6-2	175	Freshman	HS	Haynesville, La./Haynesville HS
	Jackson Williams	S	6-2	180	Freshman	HS	New Orleans, La./Archbishop Shaw HS

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OFFENSE

RUNNING BACK

#22 HARLEM BERRY
#29 CADEN DURHAM

TIGHT END

#14 TREYDEZ GREEN
#12 MALACHI THOMAS

QUARTERBACK

#10 SAM LEAVITT
#6 HUSAN LONGSTREET

WIDE RECEIVER 1

#3 TRE WILSON
#2 TRE BROWN

WIDE RECEIVER 2

#1 JAYCE BROWN
#4 JACKSON HARRIS

WIDE RECEIVER 3

#8 WINSTON WATKINS
#84 TYREE HOLLOWAY

LEFT TACKLE

#77 JORDAN SEATON
#65 SEAN THOMPkins JR.

LEFT GUARD

#70 DEVIN HARPER
#52 JA'QUAN SPRINKLE

CENTER

#61 BRAELIN MOORE
#50 WILLIAM SATTERWHITE II

RIGHT TACKLE

#75 WESTON DAVIS
#69 DARRIN STREY

RIGHT GUARD

#55 ALIOU BAH
#51 RYAN MIRET

DEFENSE

LINEBACKER 1

#40 WHIT WEEKS
#35 ZACH WEEKS

LINEBACKER 2

#6 TJ DOTTERY
#26 CHARLES ROSS

LINEBACKER 3

#42 DAHVON KEYS
#31 CJ JIMCOILY

EDGE RUSHER 1

#1 PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN
#17 DAMIEN SHANKLIN

EDGE RUSHER 2

#19 GABRIEL RELIFORD
LAMAR BROWN

STAR

#10 DASHAWN SPEARS
#13 FAHEEM DELANE

CORNERBACK 1

#3 DJ PICKETT
#21 MICHAEL TURNER, JR.

CORNERBACK 2

#11 PJ WOODLAND
#8 JA'KEEM JACKSON

FREE SAFETY

#2 TY BENEFIELD
#28 JHASE THOMAS

STRONG SAFETY

#0 TAMARCUS COOLEY
#25 AIDEN HALL

DEFENSIVE TACKLE 1

#96 DOMINICK MCKINLEY
#94 RICHARD ANDERSON

DEFENSIVE TACKLE 2

#47 MALIK BLOCTON
#90 STEPHIYLAN GREEN

SPECIAL TEAMS

PLACEKICKER

#80 SCOTT STARZYK
#36 AIDAN CORBELLO

LONGSNAPPER

#43 SILAS HALL
#39 MACK MULHERN

PUNTER

#90 GRANT CHADWICK
#99 HAYDEN CRAIG



Lane Kiffin Tweets ... About Just About Everything

Such As St. Patrick's Day, Boosie And Skip Bertman

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU's Lane Kiffin coaches the football team ... when he's not tweeting.

And he was busy on his Twitter leading up to the beginning of spring football practice in late March when he would have to turn his attention more to the gridiron through April 24.

On his last weekend before spring football, Kiffin dropped by Alex Box Stadium to see the Tigers beat Oklahoma, 7-1, on March 19. And he posed with former LSU baseball coach Skip Bertman in one of the suites.

"Honored to meet Coach," Kiffin tweeted.

Kiffin rode on a Raising Cane's float during the St. Patrick's Parade on March 14, then rocked "Under The Overpass" on Perkins Road.

After the parade, Kiffin joined Baton Rouge native Tarence Ivy Hatch Jr. - aka rap star Boosie, formerly Lil Boosie - for Boosie's concert under the Perkins Road Overpass.

This was Kiffin's second parade since leaving Ole Miss after the 2025 regular season to be LSU's coach. He was a Grand Marshall at the Endymion Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans on Feb. 14.

On March 6, Kiffin had a little fun on the Tiger Stadium field as the Tigers went through some conditioning.

"The sun has come up in the eastern sky," Kiffin tweeted while looking into the camera and imitating what former Tiger Stadium public address announcer Dan Borne' said and new P.A. announcer Dixon McMakin says before every home football game.

"It is now officially Friday morning in Baton Rouge, Louisiana," Kiffin said.

When Kiffin went to the LSU gymnastics team's win over Alabama on March 1, he bumped into former gymnast Livvy Dunne. And things went viral.


Dunne and former teammate Aleah Finnegan, who were each on the Tigers' 2024 national championship team, photo bombed Kiffin for quite a Twitter combo - Kiffin has 848,400 followers to Dunne's 99,300.

Kiffin later joked that he could help Dunne try to get more LSU eligibility.

Kiffin also had an interesting tweet that weekend featuring his late father - the NFL defensive coordinator genius Monte Kiffin - and the father of former LSU Heisman Trophy winning quarterback Joe Burrow - Jimmy Burrow. The elder Burrow played safety for defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin at Nebraska from 1972-75.

In the picture on X, Monte Kiffin is jumping into Burrow's arms after a play.

"Coach was the best," Burrow tweeted back to Kiffin. "One of the reasons I became a coach. I wanted to be just like him. I loved Coach Kiffin. 'Play Hard. Play Fast. Play Together.'" **TR**

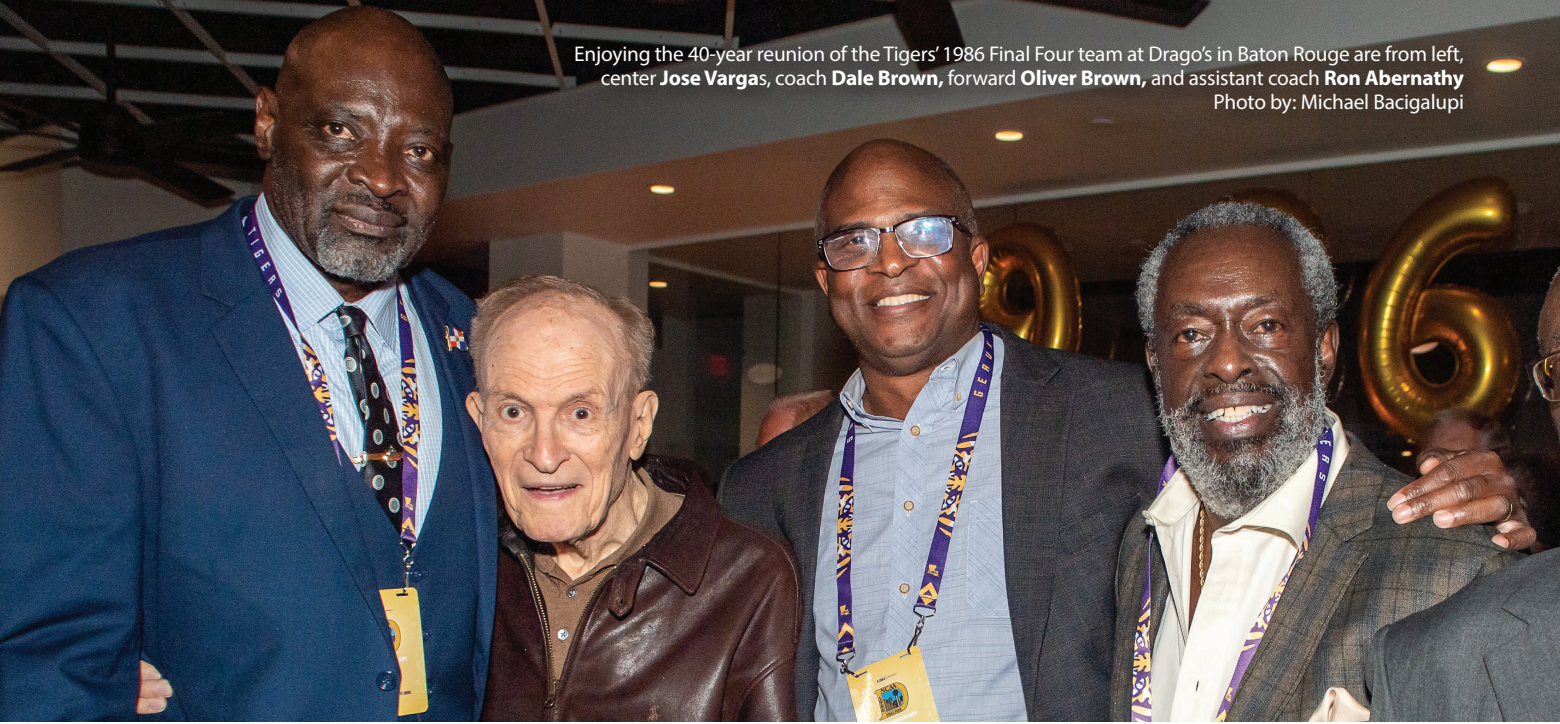
A photograph of two men, John Brady and Dale Brown, at a reunion. John Brady, on the left, is wearing a white zip-up jacket and holding a microphone. Dale Brown, on the right, is wearing a brown leather jacket. Both men appear emotional, with John Brady looking down and Dale Brown looking towards him. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and a festive atmosphere.

Former LSU basketball coach **John Brady** (left) got emotional with former LSU coach **Dale Brown** at the 40-year reunion of the Tigers' 1986 Final Four team at Drago's restaurant in Baton Rouge on Jan. 16.
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi

LSU's 1986 Final Four Team Share Laughs And Tears

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Enjoying the 40-year reunion of the Tigers' 1986 Final Four team at Drago's in Baton Rouge are from left, center **Jose Vargas**, coach **Dale Brown**, forward **Oliver Brown**, and assistant coach **Ron Abernathy**
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi



One thing about College Basketball Hall of Fame coach Dale Brown of LSU – his players still remember what he preached decades later.

And in the case of center Jose Vargas on the 1985-86 Final Four team that celebrated its 40th anniversary on January 16 at Drago's in Baton Rouge – maybe too well.

“None of us ever quit, because this guy taught us to never quit in life,” Vargas, a 6-foot-10 center whom Brown recruited from La Romana in the Dominican Republic, said pointing at Brown, now 90.

“That is important for all of us,” Vargas, who made the trip to town from Brazil, where he runs a Eucalyptus tree farm, a coffee business and raises cattle with his wife, with whom he raised six children.

“Every day, get up and fight,” he said. “Every day. Doesn't matter. Put up a fight. So, coach Brown, thank you so much for teaching me how to fight for life.”

And that included fighting Brown himself, in a way.

“Even though, when you told me, ‘Jose, don't shoot the ball,’” and the crowd of former players, their families and fans familiar with the story laughed loudly.

That was when the No. 17 Tigers were playing at Georgetown on Sunday, Feb. 2, 1986, on national television.

During a timeout with the score 72-72 in the final seconds, Brown gave his team

instructions, finishing with, “And Jose, don't shoot.”

Vargas was a sophomore backup, averaging just 3.0 points on 46 percent shooting. And Brown had such stars as John Williams, Don Redden, Rickey Blanton, Derrick Taylor and Anthony Wilson.

But Vargas remembered something else Brown had preached.

“He was trying to break me,” Vargas said 40 years later. “Well, ‘He ain't going to break me,’ I said. Because he said that to all of us – ‘Look, we're going to try every day to break you. And if you break, you're done for life.’”

So, Vargas mixed the message.

“The first ball that came to my hand in that game, I shot it,” Vargas said as laughter roared again. “And the worst part of it was, it was terrible.”

He missed a 10-foot jumper with :07 remaining, and Redden fouled Michael Jackson on the rebound. Jackson hit both free throws for a 74-72 win.

“But you know what? I'm still shooting the ball,” Vargas said. “That's what's important.”

That was the Tigers' fourth straight loss amid the last stages of a crazy chicken pox epidemic that had left Brown with a minimum of players.

But they didn't quit. The Tigers won two days later at Auburn, 63-61 – the first of five wins in seven games. They finished the

regular season 22-11, 9-9 in the SEC for a No. 11 NCAA Tournament seed.

And the Tigers made an historic run that to this day has not been surpassed. No team worse than an 11th seed has ever made the Final Four. They knocked off No. 6 seed Purdue, 94-87, in two overtimes and No. 3 seed Memphis State, 83-81, on a buzzer jumper by Anthony Wilson at LSU.

Then LSU beat No. 2 seed Georgia Tech in Atlanta, 70-64, and No. 1 seed Kentucky, 59-57, after losing three to the Wildcats during the season.

LSU's fairy tale ended against No. 2 seed Louisville, 88-77, at the Final Four in Dallas.

“They came from all countries,” Brown said at the reunion.

“Right, Zor?,” he said to 7-foot center Zoran Jovanovich, who journeyed from his hometown Belgrade, Yugoslavia, for the reunion.

“If anybody would like to draw a picture of what love is, what coaching is, what a team is – how about the love and compassion that you've shown tonight,” Brown said. “Thank you for coming. It was the highlight of my life.”

And that of Vargas.

“Coach told us, ‘If you make it here, you will make it through life,’” he said. “And that's why each one of us 40 years later, we're still here making it in life. So, to each one of you, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.” **TR**

Matt McMahon
Photo by: LSU Athletics



LSU Top Scorer Max Mackinnon Praises Matt McMahon On His Way Out

"Every Day, He Made Me A Better Player"

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU departing senior guard Max Mackinnon didn't say his basketball coach, Matt McMahon, should be retained or fired.

But after the Tigers' second straight ridiculously bad season ended on March 11 with an 87-82 loss to Kentucky at the Southeastern Conference Tournament in Nashville, Mackinnon made it clear how good a coach he feels McMahon is.

And he's got proof – his game. "I can't thank this man next to me enough," Mackinnon began at the podium after LSU finished 15-17 overall and 3-15 in the SEC following a 14-18 and 3-15 season last year and 14-19 and 2-16 in McMahon's first season three years ago.

If McMahon ends up losing his job at LSU this year or next, or already has by the time you read this, he should put Max Mackinnon down as a reference.

"I think everyone wants to say something on Twitter," Mackinnon, a transfer who is from Brisbane, Australia, said in his thick accent. "Everyone wants to say something. Everyone's got an opinion. But we lost our two best players at the start of the year."

The first one was 6-foot-10, 245-pound junior forward Jalen Reed, who was lost in November to an Achilles injury after missing most of the previous season with a knee injury.

Then just as the SEC season was about to start, electric junior transfer point guard Dedan Thomas Jr. from UNLV injured his foot. And Thomas was one of the best players in the SEC at the time, averaging a league-high 7.0 assists a game for ninth in the nation and scoring 16.2 a game. Thomas was the

most expensive NIL purchase by LSU at roughly \$3 million a year.

For a team with one of the cheapest roster budgets in the SEC at approximately \$8 million and naturally void of much depth, losing those two were daggers.

"WE FOUGHT, AND THIS GUY NEVER CHANGED. EVERY DAY, HE MADE ME A BETTER PLAYER."

- MAX MACKINNON

"We fought, and this guy never changed," Mackinnon said after scoring 28 on 11-of-17 shooting in his final LSU game. "Every day, he made me a better player. And that's going to help my future game. I just wanted to say that."

And there's no BS with Mackinnon. His answers are smart, quick and pointed, much like former golfer Greg Norman, also Australian. Mackinnon ridiculed social media folks during the season when they went after his teammates.

Mackinnon plays guard, and McMahon has the reputation as a guard specialist. It is partly why Thomas chose LSU over

national champion Florida and Kentucky and Syracuse.

McMahon, 47, played shooting guard at Appalachian State and coached elite guards while Murray State's coach and as an assistant – Ja Morant, Cameron Payne and Isaiah Caanan. Morant and Payne are in the NBA and were first round picks – Morant second overall by Memphis in 2019 and Payne 14th in 2015 by Oklahoma City. Caanan went in the second round in 2013 to Houston.

"I know his history with guards," Thomas told Tiger Rag before the season. "I'm very aware of his track record – Ja Morant, Payne. So, I felt like I could learn a lot with him."

Before Thomas' injury, LSU was 12-1 and 35th by NET (NCAA Evaluation Tool).

"He orchestrates the offense," McMahon said at the time. "He plays with relentless effort. Elite floor general, great vision, willing passer. Very impactful on defense with ability to disrupt and pressure."

Thomas tried to play on the injury, but he eventually was done after only three SEC games. Like Thomas, McMahon improved Mackinnon.

"He pushed me to limits I didn't think I could get to," Mackinnon said. "I never thought I could play at this level. So, I want to credit coach Mac. He's changed my basketball, and he's changed my future for opportunities ahead. So, I wanted to credit that."

Well said, Max.

Put that on Twitter. **TR**

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Izzy Besselman
Photo by: LSU Athletics



Battle-Tested Izzy Besselman

LSU Senior Guard From Baton Rouge Shows She
Knows How To Fight A Formidable Opponent

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

Izzy Besselman arrived at the LSU women's basketball facility for a light practice in the fall of 2024.

But she struggled from the moment she began stretching. She felt extreme fatigue and soon turned blue in the face, prompting trainers and the team doctor to send her to the hospital.

After several visits to multiple doctors and hospitals throughout the next 10 months, Besselman finally got answers in the summer of 2025 during a trip to the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.

"They gave me an echocardiogram, and they put me to sleep and did a scope of my heart – all those types of things just to kind of rule out there was nothing structurally wrong with my heart," Besselman told Tiger Rag.

Doctors diagnosed her with Inappropriate Sinus Tachycardia (IST), which causes the heart to beat rapidly without a clear reason. The condition falls under Dysautonomia, a nervous system disorder that can cause the heart rate to spike or drop unpredictably. Both are commonly associated with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS).

Baton Rouge Internal Medicine physician David Fontenot said POTS affects the body's ability to regulate blood flow when standing. When someone with POTS moves from sitting or lying down to standing, their heart rate can increase by 30 beats per minute or more without a significant drop in blood pressure.

Besselman said symptoms vary from day to day, and living with the condition is a constant challenge.

"It's so weird," Besselman said. "Some days I wake up and it feels like I'm in

quicksand, where I just can't move, where my body just cannot get going. I still have days where I feel just awful, and I have no energy. I'm tired no matter how much I sleep. It's like when you have the flu, and you just have that fog. That's something I deal with. You're just kind of moving in slow motion. And I still have the heart rate rises and the dizzy spells and numbness in my hands."

Although doctors didn't immediately rule out basketball, they warned her how difficult living with the condition could be. Besselman ultimately stepped away from the game to focus on her health.

The decision was heartbreaking. The 5-foot-10 shooting guard from Episcopal High in Baton Rouge was entering her senior season but wouldn't be able to play in games.

"It was very difficult, especially when I would have played a lot of minutes," she said. "I just watch them have so much fun, whether we're up by 40 or in a tight game. That was hard to watch."

Instead of stepping away from the team entirely, Besselman found other ways to contribute. She attends every shoot-around, film session and practice and contributes on game days.

"I'm keeping stats, and I'm holding the little play cards," she said. "And I'm seeing, 'Oh, we need to reverse the ball here. We need to run this,' and that is something I take very seriously. Any way that I can help, and I think that they value that."

Her experience still proves to be valuable. The coaching staff regularly asks for her input on game preparation and in-game decisions. She's an important voice on the team.

On senior night against Tennessee, Besselman surprised her family and the fan base by playing one last time.

"I talked to coach Mulkey before, and she was like, 'Can you go in for a little bit? I'm not going to put you in there for long. Just let the fans recognize you.' And I was like, 'Yeah,'" Besselman said.

"So, I put on my uniform, but I didn't tell my parents. I kind of wanted it to be a surprise," she said. "And they were. My dad was crying, my mom was crying, and coach Mulkey knew how much it meant to me and my family."

The moment meant more than just returning to the court. Besselman hopes it serves as a message to others facing adversity.

"I just want to be a good example for all the little girls and guys all over the world, but really in Baton Rouge – just that you can do that," she said. "You can dream, and you'll have obstacles. You'll have adversity, but to just stick through it. I think that that moment coming back to the court kind of showed people that things might not always go your way, but you've just got to keep fighting."

Even though she can no longer play basketball, Besselman has developed an interest in coaching after graduation – something she never imagined pursuing until after her diagnosis.

"I'm interested in staying around the sport, staying around sports in some capacity," she said. "I'm going to finish my master's, and I'll be here for another year, so definitely that's something in the future I wouldn't be opposed to." **TR**

SHE'S MAKING A STATEMENT

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Kailin Chio
Photo by: LSU Athletics



Sophomore Surge

LSU Gymnastics Superstar Kailin Chio Is The Perfect 10 Machine

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU sophomore gymnast Kailin Chio put together one of the best freshman seasons in program history last year.

She was named SEC Freshman of the Year and finished 2025 with a 39.513 all-around average, including career highs of 10.00 on vault, 9.950s on bars and beam and 9.975 on floor.

“The concern after a freshman year like that is that you kind of see it in sports all the time – they call them sophomore slumps,” LSU coach Jay Clark said. “Somebody comes back the second year and attempts to duplicate what they did or puts too much pressure on themselves and creates a greater level of expectation than is really humanly possible. And I think she’s doing a good job of managing that.”

While it is incredibly difficult to follow up the kind of season Chio put together as a freshman, she continues to outdo herself on a weekly basis. She is now ranked as the top gymnast in the country with a National Qualifying Score (NQS) of 39.760.

Chio also leads the nation with an incredible nine perfect 10s and counting.

She recently became one of just five NCAA

gymnasts – and the second in LSU history – to record three perfect 10s in a single meet.

So, what has allowed her to be so successful as a sophomore? While many might expect a complicated formula, that’s not the case for Chio. One of the biggest differences this season for her is very simple.

“I think pacing myself in the gym and kind of just not trying so hard in the beginning of the year,” Chio said. “Last year, I was just trying really hard to just be perfect, and I think that it took a lot more energy. This year, I feel so much better, even though I’ve done all-around at every meet and more than last year. I think that’s just because of pacing and being able to be more free every time I compete and doing my gymnastics to the best of my ability.”

She is also putting less pressure on herself.

“I think I’m just having more fun in the gym and not taking everything so serious,” Chio said. “I think freshman year, you kind of come in and you’re not sure really what to expect and how the rest of the season is going to go. But now you have a year under your belt. So, just trying to understand that this is supposed to be fun. This is the last three years of your career, so just trying to

enjoy every single moment and just be in the present every step of the way.”

Clark believes Chio has it all figured out in her head.

“She’s communicating with us about what she feels and what she needs and is just really maturing from a mental perspective even more,” he said. “It’s hard to believe that because she seemed to be such a mental rock since the day she got here. But I’m seeing a lot of growth in her, and it’s little things, intangibles. It’s not about the skills that she has. It’s about the approach that she takes and how she reacts to circumstances and how she’s communicating the routine.”

With the post season here, she’s showing no signs of slowing down. Chio is just one beam title away from tying Sarah Finnegan’s LSU single-season record of 11 beam titles.

And she already has 10 career perfect scores, the second-most in program history behind Haleigh Bryant’s 18.

Chio is not only shattering the myth of the sophomore slump.

She’s putting together one of the best seasons the sport has ever seen, regardless of class. **TR**



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LSU's much publicized offense was mired in a slump as the Southeastern Conference season opened.
Photo by: LSU Athletics



Jay Johnson Can't Fire His Offensive Coordinator

Because He Is His Offensive Coordinator

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

I thought Joe Sloan left LSU.

He's the new offensive coordinator at Kentucky, or so I've read and written.

But it feels like the former LSU offensive coordinator has been coordinating the LSU Baseball offense, which was 12th in the Southeastern Conference in hitting at .282 two weekends into league play. In losing the last two games of a three-game series at home to No. 7 Oklahoma by 4-2 and 4-3, LSU had 11 hits.

And this was at Alex Box Stadium, a place from which home runs fly out. And this was a beautiful, sunny Saturday with temperatures in the 70s after a beautiful, cool Friday night. More than 10,000 actual fans were at each game.

The place was ready to rock each time, but never quite could. The games were like rain delays in perfect weather. LSU's offense is the ultimate party pooper, or cops closing down a bar:

"OK, folks, move along. Nothing to see here. No runs. It's closing time."

And unranked LSU, once the No. 1 team in the nation riding a 16-0 winning streak – 8-0 this year and 8-0 to end last year with the national championship – suddenly had a very non-baseball dynasty mark of 16-9 and 2-4 in the SEC as April approached.

It took last year's team until April 26 to lose its ninth game. And the Tigers are already close to last year's 15-loss total.

"Well, we're going to move some things around," LSU coach Jay Johnson said, and he IS the offensive

coordinator. And he's been doing that a lot already.

"All that stuff's on the table," he said.

Look for freshman outfielder William Patrick of St. Fredrick High in Monroe to get a shot.

"He's the best athlete on the team," Johnson said. "He's the fastest player on the team. It would probably be a really good race between him and Chris Stanfield if they lined up for a 30-yard sprint."

Patrick (6-2, 209 pounds) was the No. 1 outfielder in Louisiana in the Class of 2026 by Perfect Game and No. 26 at his position nationally. He hit .472 at St. Fredrick in the 2025 season with a .607 on-base percentage and 27 stolen bases. He played wide receiver and safety and punted on the St. Fredrick football team.

Patrick also had only two at-bats at the time Johnson tapped him for play. But he doesn't care. Johnson's looking for something. This is why he inserted freshman Omar Serna Jr. in the lineup recently. He may be the permanent first baseman, unless he's the designated hitter. Original regular first baseman Zach Yorke, a much publicized senior transfer, struck out four times against Oklahoma in the Friday game with three looking. He was hitting .263 with four home runs and 12 RBIs in 24 starts.

Serna started off hitting .280 with three home runs and 17 RBIs in 12 starts.

"He's not coming out of the lineup," Johnson said of Serna.

Sophomore John Pearson is another recent new starter at third base. He was hitting .286 with three homers in nine starts.

"We've got to be able to do more things," Johnson said. "This offense, we have to walk, and we have to be able to hit doubles. And we're not doing that. If we're not doing that, there's not a whole lot else, like, that we are able to do. That makes it tough. It makes it really, really tough. Last year, we could score in a number of different ways. We've got to find a way to get back to that with this crew with what we have. It's about each guy getting three quality at-bats in a row. We've had some games where we've done that only one time."

It also makes it really tough when you only have two .300 hitters – Jake Brown and Derek Curiel – and 10 players who have started nine games or more who are hitting .292 and lower. And five of those are hitting .260 or less.

"We're giving a lot of guys a lot of chances is the tough part about this," Johnson said. "So, we're just going to keep working, keep pressing."

Stanfield, who returned just last week to the lineup in left field after missing most of the season with a hand injury, has brought some spark to the lineup defensively and offensively with his speed.

"I really think that we're going to be fine," Stanfield said. "It's not as bad as it seems. We've just got to play a little bit better, and we've got the time to do it. I still say that this is the most talented team I've ever played on." **TR**



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Tatum Clopton
Photo by: LSU Athletics



After Years Of Setbacks,
Tatum Clopton
Emerges As Key LSU Pitcher

"I Didn't Know If She'd Ever Take The Mound" ... Coach Beth Torina

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU fifth-year senior pitcher Tatum Clopton's path back to the circle has not been a straight line.

Clopton began her collegiate career at Oklahoma State in 2022, but a dislocated shoulder and torn labrum led to surgery that August. After entering the transfer portal in June of 2023, she arrived at LSU hoping for a fresh start. Instead, she faced another setback. In November 2023, severe pain during a routine bullpen workout led to the discovery of a piece of metal left in her shoulder from the previous surgery. This required another immediate procedure. And her future in softball was uncertain.

"I didn't know if she'd ever take the mound," LSU coach Beth Torina told Tiger Rag.

But Clopton attacked her recovery, beginning physical therapy just three days after surgery. Last season, she returned to the circle after missing 1,057 days. Now, she's one of LSU's weekend starters and pitching as well as she ever has.

"I think just having the benefit of time on my side," Clopton said. "I'm experienced, and I've learned a lot through my years.

I've seen a lot, and I've learned a lot. Even in those two years, I couldn't be doing anything physically. But I think having this full year to grow as a pitcher and be fully healthy has been huge.

"Like even last year, throwing in the spring, I wasn't healthy at all before that. So, having time on my side and just getting to continue to execute my pitches at a high level and continue to hit spots has been the biggest thing. And just continuing to take what I've learned from the past four years and apply it to this year."

As a veteran and the longest-tenured pitcher staff, Clopton has embraced a leadership role with LSU young pitchers.

"They are like my little geese, and it's been so cool to see a lot of them have success," she said. "And I think it's been cool. I almost get to relive my freshmen year through them a little bit and teach them some of the things I wish I knew going into college. So, it's been so cool to see them take that and then continue to have success, and I also think they are so talented.

"They work so hard, and they deserve everything that is coming to them. I can't wait to see them break through. And their time is coming. But they keep me young, and they keep me joyful as well. They keep me on my toes a little bit and so, man, it's just been awesome to have them embrace me as a leader."

Torina said Clopton's presence has been invaluable.

"It's like coaching an adult," she said. "Like somebody you can have a real conversation with, you know, heart to heart."

Torina knew Clopton's mother, Sarah, from their college playing days when the two competed against each other – Torina at Florida and Sarah at Kansas.

"It's really awesome watching Tatum become the same type of pitcher that her mom was," Torina said.

Clopton may not have the top statistics in the country, but that hardly matters. Her return to the circle after years of patience and hard work is a testament to the resilience and perseverance it took to get there. **TR**

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APRIL ALLERGIES IN SOUTH LOUISIANA

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If April in South Louisiana feels like a beautiful, pollen-filled haze - you're not imagining it. Spring is peak allergy season across Baton Rouge and surrounding areas, and for many, it brings more frustration than fresh air.

Why April is So Tough on Allergies Here

Our region's warm temperatures, high humidity, and long growing season create the perfect storm for allergens. In April, tree pollen begins to taper off while grass pollen ramps up, especially from Bermuda and ryegrass. Add in mold spores thriving from frequent rain and humidity, and it's no surprise symptoms can feel relentless. Even on days that look clear, pollen counts can be high enough to trigger symptoms within minutes of being outdoors.

Common Symptoms to Watch For

Seasonal allergies (also called allergic rhinitis) can show up in several ways:

- Sneezing and nasal congestion
- Runny nose or post-nasal drip
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Scratchy throat or coughing
- Sinus pressure or headaches

For some patients, allergies can worsen asthma symptoms or lead to secondary issues, such as sinus infections, if left untreated.

What Actually Helps (and What Doesn't)

A lot of people try to "wait it out," but April is not the month to just tough it out in South Louisiana. The earlier you manage symptoms, the better your outcomes.

Here's what tends to work best:

- **Start antihistamines early:** Daily medications like cetirizine (Zyrtec) or loratadine (Claritin) are most effective when taken consistently, not just when symptoms spike.

- **Use nasal sprays correctly:** Fluticasone (Flonase) or similar sprays can be very effective, but they need to be used daily and with proper technique.
- **Shower after being outside:** Pollen sticks to your skin, hair, and clothes. Rinsing off helps prevent it from being brought into your home.
- **Keep windows closed:** Especially in the early morning when pollen counts are highest.

What doesn't work as well? Relying only on occasional medication or waiting until symptoms are severe before starting treatment.

When to Seek Care

It can be difficult to tell the difference between allergies and something more serious, especially during a busy season. You should consider a healthcare visit if:

- Symptoms last more than 7-10 days without improvement
- You develop facial pain, thick nasal discharge, or fever
- Over-the-counter medications aren't helping
- You're unsure if it's allergies, a cold, or something else

A healthcare provider can help evaluate your symptoms, recommend targeted treatment, and get you relief faster - so you can actually enjoy spring!

April allergies are predictable, but they don't have to take over your life. With the right approach and early treatment, you can stay ahead of symptoms rather than react to them. If allergies are slowing you down this season, we're here to help! Patient Plus Urgent Care is open seven days a week from 9 AM - 9 PM, with convenient online check-in to save your spot.



LSU Spring Sports Nearing Pivotal Stretches For Postseason

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU's spring sports calendar is in full swing, and April marks a pivotal stretch across multiple programs as postseason races begin to take shape.

Here's a look at what's ahead for the Tigers this month.

Beach Volleyball

LSU beach volleyball team faces one of its busiest stretches of the season in April. The Tigers will host the Battle on the Bayou tournament on April 10-11 against Central Arkansas and Texas

A&M-Corpus Christi on the first day, followed by Texas A&M-Kingsville and Southeastern Louisiana on April 11.

The Tigers then head to Tampa for the April 17-18 Gulf Coast Invitational against Mercer, Florida State, South

Florida and Florida Gulf Coast. LSU will wrap up the month competing in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Championship from April 22-24 in Huntington Beach, California.

Men's Golf

The Tigers will compete in three tournaments during April, beginning with the Augusta Haskins Award Invitational at Forest Hills Golf Course in Augusta, Georgia, from April 4-5.

LSU will remain in Georgia the following week for The Ford Collegiate at the Ford Field and River Club in Richmond Hill on April 13-14. Then the Tigers will shift their focus to postseason play at the SEC Championships, held April 22-26 at Sea Island Golf Club on St. Simons Island in Georgia.

Women's Golf

The Tigers will have a singular focus in April – the SEC Championships at Belleair, Florida, at Pelican Golf Club from April 17-21. LSU will be after its first conference crown since 2022.

Softball

April is a crucial month for the LSU softball team. LSU opens with a home game against Central Arkansas on April 7 before hosting Arizona for a non-conference series from April 10-12.

The Tigers will play at Louisiana-Lafayette on April 14, looking to complete a regular season sweep of the Cajuns. LSU hosts Ole Miss from April 17-19 before heading to Mississippi State April 24-26.

LSU hosts McNeese on April 28 and plays at Auburn April 30-May 2.

Men's Tennis

The Tigers open the month at South Carolina on April 2, followed by another away match at Florida two days later. The Tigers will host Kentucky in their regular-season finale on April 10.

Postseason begins at the SEC Tournament from April 15-19 at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center in Bryan-College Station, Texas.

Women's Tennis

LSU women's tennis starts the month at home, hosting Alabama on April 2 and Mississippi State on April 4. The Tigers will travel to Kentucky on April 9 before closing out the regular season at Tennessee on April 11.

Then it is the SEC Tournament set for April 14-19 at the Headington Family Tennis Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

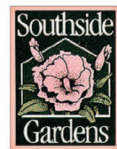
Track And Field

LSU will compete in five meets throughout April, including two at home. The Tigers open with the Battle on the Bayou at LSU from April 3-4, followed by the Baylor Invitational on April 10 in Waco, Texas.

LSU will send athletes to both the Bryan Clay Invitational in Azusa, California, on April 16-18 and the Tom Jones Invitational in Gainesville, Florida, on April 17-18 before concluding the month at home with the LSU Alumni Gold meet on April 25. **TR**



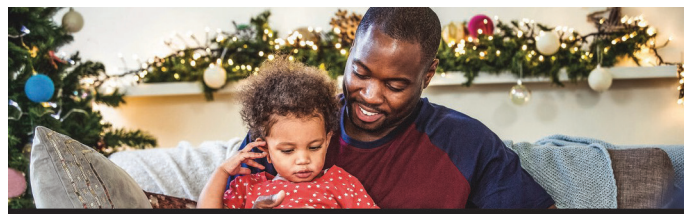
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Andre Champagne
Tiger Rag Staff Writer

No Fake Accent Here - Lane Kiffin Is The Real Thing

Lane Kiffin arrived at LSU at a time when the fan base needed him most. Fans had witnessed yet another year of mediocrity and were tired of the unusual culture that had been built by Brian Kelly. It never felt genuine. His passion for Louisiana never seemed as authentic as Nick Saban's Les Miles' or Ed Orgeron's.

It seemed like it was just a job and a paycheck for Kelly. And there are other such coaches. But not Kiffin.

From the moment he stepped on campus, Kiffin has embraced not only Baton Rouge, but the entire state of Louisiana. And he didn't try a fake southern accent.

No, Kiffin embodies the qualities many felt were missing at LSU – determination, willingness and authenticity. And he hasn't even called a play yet.

Yes. LSU fans ultimately just care about winning. If a coach produces results, they will be embraced. But it certainly helps when that coach is willing to connect with the unique culture of Louisiana and understand what comes with leading a program in Baton Rouge.

Kiffin shows up. He's not afraid to attack problems head-on. So, what does that look like?

He's willing to get on a plane and travel across the country for an entire week, if he has to in order to build a relationship with a prospect and sign him. He doesn't wait around. He just goes and does it. Kelly just chose not to work quite that hard.

Kelly never seemed to enjoy the recruiting aspect of college football. He didn't adapt to the evolving landscape of the sport with NIL and the no-sit-out Transfer Portal. He had three phones and was tired of answering agents and dealing with constant number-crunching – something he had never been accustomed to. Even Nick Saban struggled to keep up with those demands in his final years.

NIL remains in a frustrating place with virtually no real structure at all. Yet Kiffin continues to embrace it while often criticizing it. Kelly often seemed to ignore it and play golf.

In this era, it's adapt or fall behind.

And Lane Kiffin has adapted, big time.

Consider how quickly he has made his presence known. The last few months have shown just how relentless Kiffin's work ethic is. During the transfer portal window, he shared glimpses on social media of late nights leaving the facility and early mornings getting back to work.

Did it all need to be posted? Probably not. But it underscored his willingness to put in the effort to bring LSU back to national prominence.

Kiffin has also been highly visible around Baton Rouge since becoming head coach at LSU.

Whether it's attending a concert at the Texas Club or riding in a Mardi Gras or St. Patrick's parade, he's making a genuine effort to understand what matters to people in Louisiana. And he's enjoying it. That part is not a job.

From stops at Billy's Boudin to visits to the Colonel's Club restaurant, he's immersing himself in the local culture.

And if that's not enough for LSU fans, he's consistently shown support for other programs on campus. Kiffin has attended numerous LSU men's and women's basketball games, as well as baseball games – something fans didn't see nearly as often before with other football coaches.

Kiffin walked out with women's basketball coach Kim Mulkey at a game and visited Flau'jae Johnson before her final game in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center. He also met legendary former LSU baseball coach Skip Bertman. While other coaches kept their distance in the past, Kiffin has made it a point to be present and engaged.

Now that all of that is said, Kiffin still has to prove he can win – and do so in a timely fashion.

He's working with significant resources, and expectations will be high. But everywhere Kiffin has gone, winning has followed.

Kiffin hasn't coached a single game yet. But in just one off-season, it's clear that his actions speak louder than words.

And so far, he's given a fan base – one long accustomed to success – a reason to feel excited and hopeful about the hot, humid summer that will soon be here, but followed by a truly hotly anticipated football season.



Todd Horne
Vice President / Executive Editor

Four months in the offseason is not supposed to tell you everything.

But it tells you enough.

And four months into his tenure, Lane Kiffin has already shown that LSU didn't just make a hire—it made the right one at exactly the right time.

This is not about wins and losses. Not yet. It's about direction. It's about alignment. It's about whether the man in charge actually understands what this sport has become.

Kiffin does.

College football in 2026 is not built on patience. It is built on pressure. Pressure to acquire talent, pressure to retain it, pressure to operate like a front office as much as a coaching staff. The old model—sign, sit, develop, wait—is gone. What replaces it is faster, sharper, and far less forgiving.

Kiffin didn't walk into Baton Rouge trying to preserve anything. He walked in to accelerate it.

Start with the portal. LSU didn't just dip its toe into the transfer market—it dominated it. That doesn't happen because of brand alone. It happens because players believe in how they will be used, how quickly they will be featured, and how clearly the plan is laid out. That clarity is coming from the top.

And for the first time in a while, LSU looks like a program that knows exactly what it wants to be.

Right Man, Right Moment

There's urgency everywhere.

You see it in practice. Not just the pace of the offense, but the pace of everything. Periods move faster. Coaching points are sharper. There is no wasted time, no lull, no drift. Even the environment—music, tempo, constant movement—signals something different: this is a program that refuses to operate at yesterday's speed.

That's not style. That's survival.

Because in this league, if you are even slightly behind, you are finished.

Kiffin also understands the part of this job that too many still try to ignore—the business side of modern college football. Roster construction is no longer just recruiting rankings. It's cap management. It's valuation. It's knowing when to go get a player, when to keep one, and how to position both publicly and privately.

He has lived in that world.

And LSU needed someone who doesn't have to learn it on the fly.

But here's what stands out most, and it's something you don't need a stat sheet to see:

There is no hesitation.

Everything about this program right now feels intentional. Decisive. Clear. There is no guessing about identity. No mixed signals about philosophy. No sense that LSU is trying to figure itself out as it goes.

That matters more than any spring depth chart.

Because the programs that win in this era aren't the ones with the most talent—they're the ones with the least confusion.

For stretches over the past few years, LSU has had elite players without that clarity. You could feel it. At times, it felt like a program reacting to the moment instead of dictating it.

That has changed.

Kiffin dictates.

He dictates pace. He dictates messaging. He dictates how LSU operates in a landscape that has become as much about leverage and positioning as it is about football.

And that's why four months matters.

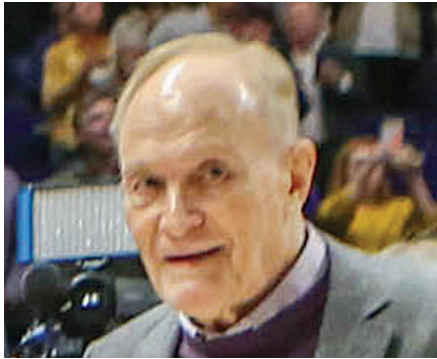
Not because it proves LSU will win big this fall. It doesn't.

But because it proves LSU is no longer guessing about how to compete in this version of college football.

It knows.

And more importantly, it has a head coach who knows too.

Todd Horne is the vice president and executive editor of Tiger Rag and started covering LSU sports in 1986. He is a graduate of the LSU Manship School of Journalism. Reach Todd at todd@tigerrag.com



Dale Brown
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

Moral courage made this the greatest country in the world. It enables us to stand up for what we know is right – even if it means standing alone and risking rejection or other negative consequences.

Whenever there is a lapse in moral courage, evil always perpetuates itself. When good and evil compromises, evil always wins.

Martin Luther King once asked a question that should stop us dead in our tracks:

“Why is it that the children of evil and darkness are always much more aggressive and vociferous than the children of light and goodness?”

The world can be a dangerous place to live, not only because of the people who do evil things, but because of all the people who don't do anything to counter that evil.

Courage sustains itself in the face of difficulty and finds the strength to preserve boldly to face danger, threats, uncertainty, fear and intimidation. Maya Angelou defined courage perfectly when she said:

“Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtues consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.”

It is easy to come up with a litany of excuses for not being courageous, but until we are fully committed there will always be hesitancy to act.

Standing Up To Evil Requires Courage

We are really free the moment that we stop looking outside for someone else to solve problems. We must be the change we wish to see. The idea of saviors has been built into our culture. We have learned to look to others, thus surrendering our own strength, demeaning our own ability, and causing us not to act.

Great social transformations such as the end of slavery, the women's and civil right' movements, and the end of colonial rule all began with public awareness and engagement. A small number of courageous and committed people led the way to freedoms we all enjoy today.

English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) warned us about apathy and inaction:

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Any system that is totally dysfunctional and evil can be cleansed only by courage and commitment to see goodness prevail.

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but triumph over it,” Nelson Mandela wrote.

So the question in our journey of life is not whether God can bring peace into the world and move us forward. The question is: Can we?

The answer is yes, if we are fully committed, disciplined, courageous, and possess a powerful faith. The boldness of faith is so powerful that nothing can stop it. It is the spinal cord to everything in our life, but we must have the courage to use it.

In each of us there are heroes. Speak to them and they will come forth and stand for justice and freedom.

“He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who

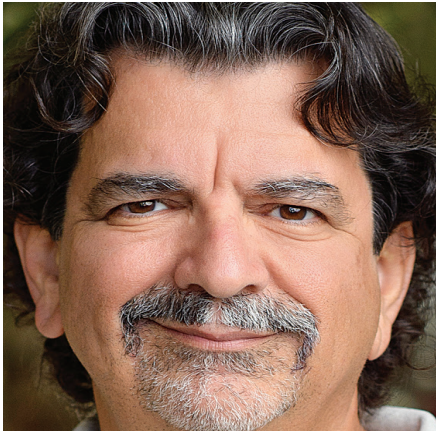
has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; ... who has accomplished his task and has left the world better than he found it.” – Bessie Anderson Stanley (1879-1952), American writer and poet

LSU Basketball Games From 1972-1997

We played a very difficult non-conference schedule home and away with powerhouse teams: UCLA, Duke, North Carolina, Louisville, Michigan, Arizona, UNLV, Georgetown, Illinois, Texas, Kansas, DePaul, Notre Dame, Houston, Georgia Tech, Memphis State, Villanova and Syracuse.

The 1972-1997 LSU basketball teams defeated the following Hall Of Fame Basketball Coaches because they believed that team means, Together Everyone Achieves More.

1. Rick Pitino
2. Mike Kryzewski
3. John Thompson
4. Jerry Tarkanian
5. Lute Olson
6. Rollie Massimino
7. Nolan Richardson
8. Ray Meyer
9. Don Haskins
10. Eddie Sutton
11. Gene Bartow
12. Joe Hall
13. Gene Keady
14. Lon Kruger
15. Hugh Durham
16. Tom Penders
17. John Chaney
18. Norm Stewart
19. Digger Phelps
20. C.M. Newton
21. Dave Whitney
22. Norm Sloan



Jim Kleinpeter
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

LSU football began another spring practice March 24 and once again equipment managers are passing out rosters and name tags along with jerseys and jockstraps.

Forty-three (that's 43 for text shorthand addicts) players arrive from all directions and make up more than half of the scholarship roster when you count 25 returning players and 16 incoming freshmen.

Four years ago, as Brian Kelly was preparing for his inaugural season, he brought in 12 transfers through the portal to try and revive a program that played its previous game with 39 rostered players. One of those incoming players was a 170-pound quarterback from Arizona State named Jayden Daniels, who, more than any other one player, was responsible for the 20 victories LSU scored in his two seasons.

That first season, which included an SEC West Division title, was the high point of the Kelly tenure. He didn't make it to the end of his fourth season, spectacularly imploding five months ago in a process that kept LSU as the No. 1 college football story for weeks.

So, Tiger fans, how are you feeling right about now?

At the time, Kelly wasn't a terrible hire, just one out of left field. A large segment of the LSU fan base didn't see it coming and never felt comfortable with him. His credentials as the winningest

So, Tiger fans, how are you feeling right about now?

coach in Notre Dame history were solid and his potential as a stabilizing force was a strong selling point for then athletic director Scott Woodworth.

Enter Lane Kiffin, whose career looks like a trail of destabilization. When he changes jobs, he goes out like Japan's Fukushima disaster – a great big nuclear mess that ripples fallout worldwide.

Son of accomplished NFL assistant Monte Kiffin and an offensive prodigy as a USC assistant, Kiffin was hired by Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis, who quickly soured on him after one year. In fairness to Kiffin, Davis forced him to draft LSU quarterback JaMarcus Russell with the No. 1 overall pick. Russell became perhaps the biggest draft bust in NFL history.

Onward Kiffin went to one year at Tennessee, leaving amidst a campus riot and burning couches; being fired on an airport tarmac from his next head coaching job at USC; being dismissed as Alabama's offensive coordinator by Nick Saban shortly before the 2017 championship game (I wonder how much Bama fans blame him for the Tide's title game loss to Clemson?).

Seldom is an offensive coordinator let go in that situation, but Kiffin talking about his upcoming new job at Florida Atlantic had become a distraction for Saban. Then came the quiet part of his career, three years and FAU and then six at Ole Miss. He won a lot of games and besides flinging a clipboard onto the field during a long touchdown run stayed out of the headlines.

So, here we are. Coach Chaos and his magnificent 43 will try to bring order to a program where any amount turbulence is accepted as long as it comes with winning football games. A guy

LSU fans were just beginning to enjoy hating is suddenly the new messiah proving once again they are immune to whiplash.

Now that Saban is two years out of coaching, LSU is the pariah program for college football - the anti-Indiana – after stealing another team's coach at the height of its greatest season ever. The nationwide loathing directed at LSU will be palpable in 2026.

I say bring it on (as a Houston Astros fan I can appreciate the benefits of resentment). I hope March 24 begins a long line of snarky tweets, media quotes that tweak, flying clipboards. . . burning couches, not so much.

I'm devastated that I'll not be in Oxford on Sept. 19 when Kiffin returns to face his previous team. If ESPN Gameday isn't there, then the network will have gone off the air. I wouldn't even need to have a ticket. The whole weekend will require media coverage, even the Sunday aftermath. Will The Grove survive?

With college football continuing to morph into the NFL model, college football needs stories like Kiffin to stay interesting. The NFL doesn't have this. It's a league of games played and coached by businessmen.

Grab your LSU roster today and start learning the names.

Jim Kleinpeter is a graduate of the LSU Manship School of Journalism. He has been a sportswriter for 45 years, including 33 at the Times-Picayune. Reach him at jkleinpeter@gmail.com.



Jim Engster
President, Tiger Rag Magazine

It was the nonagenarian crooner Willie Nelson who said, “Ninety-nine percent of the world’s lovers are not with their first choice. That’s what makes the jukebox play.”

The quote from the red-headed stranger applies to recent LSU Heisman trophy winning quarterbacks. Joe Burrow’s first choice was Ohio State where his talents were almost invisible. Then the kid from Ohio arrives in Louisiana, tosses 60 touchdowns in 2019 and leads the Tigers down the stretch like no champ before or since.

LSU pummeled No. 4 Georgia in the SEC Championship Game by a margin of 37-10. The Bengals encore in Atlanta was a demolition of No. 4 Oklahoma. The Sooners led by Jalen Hurts were humiliated in a 63-28 blasting as Burrow fired for a school record seven touchdowns. No. 3 Clemson was next as LSU blasted the Tigers from South Carolina in a Poydras Street mauling, 42-25. And LSU was king of the world.

The record of the final trio of opponents in the 2019 season entering their dates vs. LSU was 38-2. Burrow’s stat line in his final 12 quarters as a collegian showed 88 completions in 126 attempts (69.8 pct.) for 1305 yards, 16 touchdowns and no interceptions. The fabled football factory in the Ohio Capital was Burrow’s dream destination. A benching there produced two storybook seasons 966 miles away.

Jayden Daniels arrived in Baton Rouge in the summer of 2022 after tossing ten touchdowns against ten interceptions for 8-5 Arizona State in 2021. Two years later, Daniels won the Heisman balloting with 40 passing touchdowns coupled with 1134 yards rushing, ten touchdowns running with an average gain of 8.4 yards per carry.

Daniels found SEC competition more

LSU Championships and Transfer Quarterbacks

stimulating as he evolved from a player off the radar of NFL scouts to the second player selected in the 2024 NFL Draft. The ascension to greatness for Daniels occurred in a city located 1,762 miles from his high school in San Bernadino, California. The move from the Golden State to the Bayou State was not the preference of the lad from the west coast. Yet the bright lights of Tiger Stadium propelled Daniels to elite status.

Sam Leavitt is the heir to Burrow and Daniels as he starts his tenure at TigerTown, his third college choice. Leavitt first tried his luck in the Big Ten and played sparingly at Michigan State. He migrated to Arizona State and blossomed into a star in 2024 before a disappointing year three at Tempe. That brought him to LSU where Leavitt is the centerpiece to the offense under Lane Kiffin.

Leavitt has emerged as a Heisman contender as he prepares for an SEC adventure 2,500 miles from his home in West Linn, Oregon.

The parallels between Burrow, Daniels and Leavitt are curious. Burrow was born Dec. 10, 1996, while Daniels’ date of birth is Dec. 18, 2000. Four years and eight days removed from his Heisman predecessor at LSU.

Leavitt was born Dec. 20, 2004. Four years and two days after Daniels. Three prep phenoms born in December four years apart who share the sign of the Archer. Sagittarians are noted for exploration, travel, knowledge and optimism.

The transfer formula has worked twice before under two different coaches. Kiffin has a personality distinct from Ed Orgeron and Brian Kelly. Tiger fans are expecting a taller, younger mentor to generate similar results in production at quarterback.

Since the 15-0 2019 season, LSU is 47-29 in the not so roaring Twenties. Kiffin holds a 116-53 record as a coach at Tennessee, USC, Florida Atlantic and Ole Miss.

A decade ago, Les Miles was fired at LSU despite producing a superior record with the Tigers of 114-34. If Kiffin is to improve on the subpar LSU winning percentage of 61.8 over the past six seasons, Sam Leavitt’s performance will be critical.

Burrow Not at Top of This Chart

The passing yardage leader for LSU is not Joe Burrow, who finished his two-year blitz with

8,565 yards. It is Tom Hodson, who began his career as a starter 40 years ago this fall when he led the Tigers to their first SEC title in 16 years.

Hodson tossed for 9,115 yards in four years when the seasons were shorter and post-season games were not included in official statistics. His talent was immediately on display as Hodson led LSU to a 35-17 win over No. 7 Texas A&M in the season opener.

His is the evolution of the career passing yardage record for LSU quarterbacks since Y.A. Tittle was starring in WWII.

Evolution of LSU career Passing Yardage Leaders

Y.A. Tittle: 2,525 yards...1944-47.
Bert Jones: 3,255 yards...1970-72.
Alan Risher: 4,585 yards...1980-82.
Jeff Wickerham: 6,921 yards...1982-85.
Tom Hodson: 9,115 yards...1986-89.

These are the most intercepted quarterbacks in LSU history.

Jamie Howard: 47 from 1992-95.
Tom Hodson: 41 from 1986-89.
Jeff Wickerham: 39 from 1982-85.
Josh Booty: 34 from 1999-2000.
Alan Risher: 24 from 1980-82.
Garrett Nussmeier: 24 from 2021 to 2025.
Jarrett Lee: 21 from 2008-2011.
JaMarcus Russell: 21 from 2004-06.
Pat Lyons: 21 from 1975-77.

Best Touchdown to Interception Margin by LSU QBs

Joe Burrow: 76 touchdowns and 11 interceptions...+65.
Jayden Daniels: 57 touchdowns and 7 interceptions...+50.
JaMarcus Russell: 52 touchdowns and 21 interceptions...+31.
Max Johnson: 35 touchdowns and 7 interceptions...+28.
Garrett Nussmeier: 52 touchdowns and 24 interceptions...+28.
Tom Hodson: 69 touchdowns and 41 interceptions...+28.

Will LSU Capture SEC Glory?

Most LSU fans are anticipating no less than a SEC title for Lane Kiffin in 2026. LSU has captured the league title on twelve occasions in 1935, 1936, 1958, 1961, 1970, 1986, 1988,

ENGSTER COLUMN cont. page 60

What They Read

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Tara Brown

What I'm reading -
The Miracles Among Us
by Dr. Marc Siegel

Drawing from his extensive experience as a physician, Dr. Marc Siegel explores the profound and often mysterious intersection between faith and medicine. He shares riveting stories of patients who have experienced remarkable recoveries, challenging the boundaries of medical science



Kristin Stafford

What I'm reading -
A Gift From The Sea
by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

As a mother of five, the author talks of the trappings of modern life, the timesaving gadgets that complicate our lives and the overcommitments that take us away from our families. With great insight she describes the shifting shapes of relationships and marriage, presenting a vision of ever evolving partnerships.

ENGSTER COLUMN cont. from page 59

2001, 2003, 2007 and 2019.

The list of LSU coaches to lift conference football trophies is small.

Bernie Moore	1935, 1936
Paul Dietzel	1958, 1961
Nick Saban	2001, 2003
Les Miles	2007, 2019
Bill Arnsparger	1986
Charles McClendon	1970
Mike Archer	1988
Ed Orgeron	2019

In recent years, it is harder to win the SEC championship than national title in many sports. Kim Mulkey is 0 for 5 in the SEC, but she has a national title with LSU in 2023. Jay Johnson is without a conference crown, yet he won the College World Series in 2023 and 2025.

No LSU football coach has won a national title without winning the conference in the same season.

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 Manship School of Journalism. Reach him at: jim@louisianaradionetwork.com.

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